



Ecotourism Attraction Combats Brain Drain

Just outside the city of Jarabacoa, Dominican Republic lies the town of Salto de Jimenoa I, home to 244 inhabitants of which 70% are youth. With the local education system functioning up until fourth grade, community members are forced out of the town at an early age and emigrate to other cities for education and job opportunities.

With support from local NGO Fundación PROGRESSIO, the community of Salto de Jimenoa I has flourished from a flicker of hope. Fundación PROGRESSIO envisions success of local family and community-owned micro-enterprises and the organizational and institutional strengthening of the Sustainable Development Association (SDA), which is comprised of 26 active members who manage the community ecotourism attraction.

With USAID-DSTA funding, Fundación PROGRESSIO, in collaboration with SDA, is in the process of constructing the Ojo de Agua restaurant, training community members in the culinary arts and customer service, training additional trail guides, constructing a bio-digester for wastewater treatment, and improving SDA's marketing plan.

PROGRESSIO is currently rehabilitating the nature trail descending to the captivating waterfall of Jimenoa I. "We were competing with other waterfalls in the area, and Salto I wasn't on the map. The waterfall wasn't easily accessible, and we had few tourists," says Secretary of SDA Veronica Espinol. "Now our trails are conditioned and more defined. We get over 200 visitors a month."

The realization of local ecotourism activities has started to stem the emigration of the young, educated, and motivated residents of Salto Jimenoa I and attracts them to engage in community enterprises.



Members of the Sustainable Development Association of Salto Jimenoa I: working together to improve their community and conserve the environment.

In addition to the improvements of the eco-tourism site of Salto Jimenoa I, community interests in local area conservation and environmental awareness have amplified. "Reforestation in our area has increased by 60-70 percent.

The area looks much cleaner, the community's conscience has been heightened," states Veronica. With the installment of a bio-digester, Jimenoa will also have a proper wastewater management system.

The people of Salto de Jimenoa I are witnessing a change in equality of opportunity and an increase in community participation among locals since the commencement of restaurant construction and recent training of future employees. "People had barely enough to survive. Now we're able to retain locals and counteract the community's inertia," explains Veronica.

This initiative provides direct employment to approximately 20 individuals and indirect employment to 15 additional community members, totaling 35 new job opportunities. In a community of 244, this project will provide a means of living for all employee families, representing 86% of the community population.