



Chocolate Tour Unites Community and Improves Local Economic Opportunities

The community of Vicentillo, Hato Mayor is located in the eastern region of the Dominican Republic where agriculture and tourism predominate and the local economy depends on the production and sale of cacao. For decades, Vicentillo and its surrounding area suffered from deforestation and soil degradation, affecting the local dependency on agriculture and the production and sale of cacao.

For the past twenty years, the Bloque de Asociaciones Productoras de Cacao de la Región Este (Bloque #3 de Cacao) has drawn from its wealth of natural resources to further develop the community's cacao industry. Residing in proximity to the highly-concentrated tourist area of Punta Cana, Bloque #3 de Cacao foresaw an opportunity to increase community revenue and improve standards of living through implementation of a community-participative, agro-tourism Ecological Chocolate Tour.

The Chocolate Tour has inspired solidarity and social cohesion among the community members, whose active participation and enthusiasm has risen with the opportunity to improve their socioeconomic conditions. By integrating existing community groups such as the Women's Association of Unified Hope, the Small Farmers Association, and the Youth Artisan Association into the Ecological Route the people of Vicentillo have become active players in the sustainable development of their community through activities complementary to cacao production.

"We've been able to incorporate the youth," says Project Coordinator Hector Romero. "And women now have an active lifestyle by means of creativity, production, and customer service."



The Women's Association of United Hope is one of the five associations benefiting from cacao production and route improvements.

Bloque #3 is focusing on the improvement of the existing Tour, which receives up to 700 visitors per week. The Tour takes tourists through the different stages of cacao production via excursion through vast plantations, drying stations, and a savory dining experience utilizing cacao products.

With USAID-DSTA support, Bloque #3 will increase capacity in the areas of personnel and guide training, marketing and promotion, and appropriate tour development. Funding is directed towards the improvement of cacao demonstrations, quality service of typical Dominican fare to visitors, and installation of clean bathrooms, adequate signage, and rest areas along the Ecological Route.

Project progress will not only continue to foster local motivation and enthusiasm for community development, but also encourage the growth and sustainability of micro-enterprises working along the Route. Bloque #3 affirms that a rise in environmental awareness and expansion of local biodiversity will result from conservation workshops and reforestation aligned with upkeep and proper resource management along the Ecological route.