



Community Finds Hope in Agro-Tourism Project

Ramon Taveras is a member of the Hoyo del Pino community in the Dominican Republic, situated just outside the town of Blanco along the Yuna River basin. The area relies heavily on agriculture production as a source of income, which has resulted in decades of deforestation, soil degradation, and a decline in coffee prices. For years, Ramon had to sacrifice his schooling for work in order to support his mother and three sisters. Unfortunately, Blanco provided few opportunities for employment, and chances for him to continue his education locally were slim.



Tour guide Ramon Taveras is one of the many who have benefited from new employment opportunities at Hoyo del Pino.

With the development of agro-tourism project Complejo Turistico Rio Blanco run by the active community NGO Federacion de Campesinos hacia el Progreso (FCHP), Ramon took on a job as a trail guide for Hoyo del Pino's attraction. He has participated in several workshops and training programs on biodiversity conservation, first aid, customer service, and has received basic education in four different languages. Not only has Ramon been able to support his family with a sustainable source of income, he has continued his education at the university level.

Ramon isn't the only one benefiting from FCHP's development at Hoyo del Pino. Women and youth who previously had little opportunity for advancement in neighboring communities are benefiting from the artisan and bamboo workshops supported by FCHP. With the sale of their products, roles in customer service, and participation in various trainings, community members are able to give back to the overall strengthening and growth of local micro-enterprises.

Guides, coffee plantation owners, families with properties containing natural attractions, local transportation services, and others involved in micro-enterprise sales will contribute to and benefit from the diversification and strengthening of local ecotourism activities in addition to the reduction of land degradation and environmental impacts, which will result in overall economic growth in the area.

In response to the growing and unmet demand for tourism, this project continues to increase the income of the community of Blanco through the promotion of the Yuna River basin's sustainable natural resources. With funding from USAID-DSTA, FCHP has been able to improve conditions at Hoyo del Pino in order to attract more visitors and generate a source for community investment.

Priorities include: rehabilitating the existing housing compound consisting of a cabin, dining room, dormitory for large groups and two meeting rooms, redefining and up-keeping two hiking trails in the community of Blanco, and creating a business and marketing plan.

Progress is underway and additional accomplishments lie in the execution of two theatre workshops, a workshop on climate change, building renovations, and strategic planning for future building improvements.

"There are strong prospects for our participants and the community," states Esteban Polanco, Manager of FCHP. "We've launched this project to wake the organizations and communities of Bonao and stimulate enthusiasm."