



*The women of Villas Padre Nuestro anticipate the completion of Arte Cuseco's new workshop.*

# Jewelry Workshop Provides Better Livelihoods for Women

The community of Villas Padre Nuestro lies in La Romana, a province in the Dominican Republic with a highly concentrated “sun and sand” tourism industry along the south-east coast of the Dominican Republic. Over the years, the cost of living has risen along with unemployment rates, forcing the 315 households in Villas Padre Nuestro to depend on pay from Romana-Bayahibe’s tourist destinations as a means of living.

On November 19, 1999 Villas Padre Nuestro celebrated the inauguration of Arte Cuseco, a community organization of women artisans that would bring hope and prospect to local women who have suffered financially and socially due to low-education levels, family troubles, and the region’s deficit of opportunity for women. By creating and operating a jewelry design and artisan workshop, Arte Cuseco strives to decrease high levels of unemployment among women and create a self-generating source of income for the community that is distinct from the hotel industry.

Arte Cuseco’s activities as a Fondo DESTINOS project began last fall. Since then, the women at Arte Cuseco have taken this opportunity to market new and diverse products in order attract international tour groups from the surrounding tourist areas to Villas Padre Nuestro. Arte Cuseco manages to cut costs and provide quality jewelry that is sought-out by domestic and international artisan markets by working with natural, recycled products such as coconut shells and native seeds.

With USAID-DSTA support, Arte Cuseco will turn one machine into fifteen and expand the group of seven artisan women into twenty-five. Funds are directed towards the construction of an

artisan workshop that includes suitable space for jewelry production and artisan trainings, the creation of a shop where visitors can design their own jewelry, and the equipment of a classroom for technical trainings and the daycare center for employees’ children.

The women of Arte Cuseco have pursued their aspirations head-on and dreams are becoming reality. Participation in sales excursions and artisan fairs has resulted in the sale of over 13,000 artisan pieces since project launch. The legalization of the organization as a commercial entity and the purchase of land for its new space are in the works and are complemented by recent capacity building workshops in the area of computer use, English, accounting and administrative skills, and customer service.

These ventures seek to maximize capacity, create careers for women, and promote collective sustainability within Villas Padre Nuestro. Benefits are extended to minimarkets, transportation services, and other micro-enterprises cooperating with Arte Cuseco.

Arte Cuseco continues to open doors to added income and community empowerment, while raising the standard of living and strengthening the role of women in Villas Padre Nuestro.