



Organización
Internacional
del Trabajo

▶ Successful experiences in gender equality



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Study on gender in vocational training Central America and the Dominican Republic



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Introduction

As part of the Study on Gender Equality in Vocational Training in Central America and the Dominican Republic, undertaken between June and November 2020, vocational training institutes were asked to identify and describe good practices in ensuring women's equality in accessing, remaining in and completing the different education and training courses on offer.

The exercise was accompanied by a guide that provided a definition and seven criteria for use when identifying experiences:

- A **good practice** is an experience that has been effective in promoting women's equality in accessing, remaining in and completing education or training and/or in their labour market integration at the technical level. It has been tested and proven to be effective.

- **Selection criteria:**

Innovación o creatividad: características que hacen de especial interés esta práctica para otras personas o instituciones.

- Innovation and creativity:** characteristics that render the practice of particular interest to other persons or institutes.
- Effectiveness and impact:** it must have produced benefits, which must be documentable in some way.
- Replicability:** it may be applied to different contexts.
- Sustainability:** it will continue to be beneficial in the medium or long term.
- Relevance:** how the practice contributes to promoting gender equality in vocational training.
- Ethics and responsibility:** it reflects the interests and needs of the target population, is ethical and meets national and international standards.
- Efficiency and implementation:** resource use (human, financial and material) is targeted effectively to achieve the desired impact.

A total of seven practices were reported. They were also shared among all the institutions at virtual working sessions during the research process and are summarized below.



Foto Original: INFOP. Honduras.

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Costa Rica : National Institute for Learning (INA)

Experience:

Strategy to Prevent and Address Domestic Violence and Extra-Familial Sexual Abuse

Background

The Strategy began life in 2011 at the INA's Huetar Caribe Regional Office as a model for preventing and addressing domestic violence and extra-familial sexual abuse. However, its success led to its extension to three other regional offices in 2014: North Huetar, Brunca and Chorotega. Its long-term aim is to develop the installed capacity within each of the INA's nine regional offices to prevent and address violence against women.

The Strategy is led by the INA's Advisory Board on Gender Equality and Equity (APIEG) and counts on the coordinated efforts and resolve of various institutional actors, which draw on accumulated institutional experience in addressing the most vulnerable populations to promote a range of activities that contribute to retaining women in the INA's vocational education and training courses.

Overall objective

To boost the INA's institutional capacity to prevent and address domestic violence and extra-familial sexual abuse.

Specific objectives

- To promote activities within the INA's regional offices that prevent domestic violence and extra-familial sexual abuse.
- To ensure that women remain in vocational education and training through support that allows them to exercise their right to a life free from violence.
- To provide financial support to women suffering violence, where required, to ensure that they remain in vocational education and training.
- To strengthen links between the APIEG and the regional offices to enable the project to be undertaken sustainably.

Process

This Strategy is implemented in phases, and regional offices become involved based on their readiness and commitment to working towards gender equality and equity (for example, when an office participates in local anti-violence networks or undertakes specific activities to encourage women to remain in vocational education and training). An office's location in an area prioritized by the Government for action on problems such as unemployment, poverty and inequality is also taken into consideration.

Each regional office that implements the Strategy undertakes activities that are grouped under three components:

- ▶ 1. Strengthening the regional office's installed capacity to tackle domestic violence and extra-familial sexual abuse, using a sustainable perspective;
- ▶ 2. Preventing domestic violence and extra-familial sexual abuse by promoting the right to a life free from violence, with the aim of raising awareness and changing the socio-cultural patterns that foster and legitimize violence;
- ▶ 3. Providing financial support to women suffering violence to allow them to remain in vocational education and training.

In essence, the activities undertaken provide a comprehensive response to the situation faced by women who are victims or survivors of domestic violence, reflecting national and international policies on preventing and addressing violence against women. They are adapted to an individual's particular environment, and there is a support process that aims to empower women and address their practical needs. The Strategy is adjusted to meet the needs of women in the country's different geographical areas.

Outcomes

A 2014 impact evaluation of this experience revealed very positive outcomes, noting:

- ▶ The importance of women's empowerment in encouraging them to remain in and complete vocational education and training;
- ▶ The significance of financial support as a determining factor in training for women given the violence they suffer, which includes property-related violence. This financial support promotes the autonomy of the target population;
- ▶ The critical nature of the support provided to the participants during the experience in terms of avoiding dropouts.

The Strategy has been implemented successfully in four of the INA's nine regional offices.

Sustainability

One of the Strategy's components is dedicated to sustainability. It includes activities to establish the installed capacity required by each regional office to tackle domestic violence and extra-familial sexual abuse, incorporating coordination mechanisms that consolidate suitable measures to address the

problem. It is designed to be implemented from the first stage of the project and constitute an ongoing platform for constructing subsequent stages.

Accordingly, clear institutional responsibilities are established for the different areas of action and various levels of authority, that is, regional office management, user services, training centre management, the student welfare team, teaching staff and the APIEG.

Institutional experience of supporting these women highlights the need for the INA to implement measures that allow them to receive professional care, along with temporary support that offsets their social disadvantages. The former includes:

- ▶ Physical spaces that afford privacy
- ▶ Coordination mechanisms to strengthen interdisciplinary work
- ▶ Trained staff specializing in care for persons affected by violence.

The temporary and affirmative measures adopted to encourage those affected to remain in vocational education and training include:

- ▶ Support for family responsibilities. The situation of women who are victims of violence is exacerbated because it affects their personal resources for dealing with the demands of family life and studying. Specific action is therefore required in that regard.
- ▶ Analysis of administrative and technical aspects, including quotas in some fields, measures to meet particular educational needs, procedures that facilitate participation in support processes and financial assistance.

Necessary conditions

The Strategy's methodology is based on three basic working premises:

- ▶ The gender approach
- ▶ The human rights approach
- ▶ The employability approach

The success of the project is thanks to the commitment of the APIEG and the different bodies involved within the regional offices, as well as the definition of mechanisms for coordination among them. Furthermore, the retention of the relevant staff is vital, as is sufficient time to undertake the assigned tasks.

If necessary, inter-agency coordination must take place to broaden the scope of the Strategy.

Experience: National Institute for Learning (INA), Costa Rica

Department for Sexual Harassment Prevention and Complaints

Antecedentes

In June 2011, new regulations to prevent, investigate and sanction sexual harassment were published in La Gaceta, the official newspaper. The new regulations aimed to close the gaps in previous legislation and bring together, in a single legal text, the investigative procedures for staff and for students who are the subject of complaints. In the same month, the INA's Board of Directors approved a new institutional policy by means of Agreement No. 086-JD-2011, with the purpose of "promoting an institutional environment that is free from all forms of violence and discrimination and improving safety to guarantee that sexual harassment is prevented, discouraged and sanctioned."

Therefore, in accordance with this legislation, and with the National Gender Equality and Equity Policy of the National Non-Violence Plan and its Third Plan of Action, the APIEG and the Legal Advisory Board, with the support of the Office of the Chief Executive, have worked to create an independent Department for Sexual Harassment Prevention and Complaints. The department, located within the APIEG, provides psychological and legal support to those lodging complaints and develops sexual harassment prevention plans within the INA.

Overall objective

To create a department within the APIEG to prevent, and address complaints of, sexual harassment at the INA.

Specific objectives

- ▶ To offer psychological and legal support to persons lodging complaints of sexual harassment at the INA;
- ▶ To provide psychological and legal protection to victims of harassment throughout proceedings, as well as the necessary follow-up once they are completed;
- ▶ To develop sexual harassment plans and preventive measures at the institutional level.

Process

The proposals for the creation of the department were informed by meetings and interviews, and forms were used to collect information and determine the need for the department and its scope.

The INA's Board of Directors approved the creation of the department by means of Agreement No. 012-2018-JD at ordinary session no. 4830 on 22 January 2018.

Outcomes

- Organization of informative talks on the law and regulations on sexual harassment. The total numbers of students and staff members who attended these talks are as follows:
 - 2018: 2,544 persons
 - 2019: 1,955 persons
 - 2020: 62 persons (year in progress);
- Psychological and/or legal support for victims of sexual harassment. The numbers of cases in which psychological and/or legal support was provided at the victim's request are as follows:
 - 2018: 6 cases
 - 2019: 28 cases
 - 2020: 8 cases (year in progress);
- Production and dissemination of information materials in simple formats;
- Follow-up to disciplinary proceedings;
- Training and advice for regional offices' student welfare teams (guidance, social work and psychology) on dealing with sexual harassment;
- Provision of documentation to be disseminated broadly to staff members via the INA's intranet.

Underway:

- Awareness-raising campaigns to combat sexual harassment. These do not focus exclusively on victims, as has happened in the past, but also address potential harassers with the aim of preventing such actions;
- A system to record cases of sexual harassment at the INA.



New regulations to prevent, investigate and sanction sexual harassment. Source: INA. Costa Rica.



INA has created an independent Department for Sexual Harassment Prevention and Complaints. Source: INA, Costa Rica.

Sustainability

Four factors ensure the department's sustainability:

- ▶ **Regulations:** the department's functions are established in the INA's Regulations to Prevent, Investigate and Sanction Sexual Harassment;
- ▶ **Human resources:** the department has a defined structure comprising full-time staff. The distribution of work within the team means that support may be offered to individuals and talks given on various topics;
- ▶ **Financial resources:** the department has its own budget with which to undertake the planned activities;
- ▶ **Institutional planning:** the department is included in the INA's Institutional Strategic Plan 2019-2025 and its Gender Equality Policy (Second Plan of Action 2019-2023).

Necessary conditions

- ▶ The definition in regulations of specific functions to address sexual harassment.
- ▶ The allocation of budgetary and human resources in line with the department's functions.

Source: Prepared by the author based on information from the INA and the APIEG, 2020.

Experience: National Institute for Learning (INA), Costa Rica

Rompiendo Moldes [Breaking Moulds]

Background

The INA's Gender Equality Policy 2013-2022 and its First Plan of Action 2013-2017 were created in 2013 and approved by Board of Directors Agreement No. 007-2013-JD of 21 January 2013. The Policy coordinates long-standing efforts with the aim of closing the gender gap in vocational training.

One of the Policy's strategic areas is the promotion of women and men's access to non-traditional fields of study. Another, closely related, area is the equal continuation and completion of studies by students at the INA. It is against that backdrop that the Rompiendo Moldes project was launched in 2017 with the resumption of an initiative to support female students at the National Electronics Centre (CENATE) that had been developed jointly by the APIEG and CENATE in 2009.

As part of actions in these strategic areas, women have been encouraged to enrol in programmes with typically low levels of female representation, and support has been provided to them during training to ensure their continued participation.

Overall objective

To integrate women who have completed INA programmes into the formal labour market in areas where women are under-represented.

Specific objectives

- To increase the number of women accessing vocational education and training services in subject areas in which they do not traditionally participate.
- To create the optimal conditions to allow women to remain in education and training.
- To forge links with the business sector to employ women who have completed INA programmes in non-traditional subject areas.

Process

The development of the Strategy comprised three stages:

- **Diagnosis:** visits were undertaken to the INA's nine regional offices in order to present the proposal and understand the situation in the regions in relation to aspects such as the range of training offered by the regional offices, particularly in areas with low levels of enrolment among women; the number of women participating in courses that are not traditionally accessed by them; and the needs of businesses in the regions.

- **Implementation:** activities to facilitate the implementation of the Gender Equality Policy were planned as part of this stage.
- **Evaluation:** an ongoing task, it is hoped that inputs will be available to facilitate the necessary corrections, improvements and changes to ensure the Strategy's relevance and success.



Outcomes

Noteworthy activities undertaken as part of this strategy include:

- Career exploration fairs for women where attendees gain an introduction to technical fields that are traditionally the preserve of men. The fairs feature interactive and exploratory activities to awaken vocational interest in these fields (the event will be virtual in 2020);
- Meetings where women are informed of the fields with the greatest demand for labour and lowest female participation;
- Follow-up of women enrolled in courses in fields where the demand for labour is highest.

Thanks to the diagnoses undertaken:

- Particular experiences in the country's different regions were defined so that specific actions for change could be promoted to bring about gender equality in vocational training.
- Good practices were identified and actions proposed to strengthen institutional capacity using a gender approach.



"Breaking Moulds" career fair, 2017. Source: INA, Costa Rica.

Sustainability

The initiative enjoys the support of INA senior management both in terms of the actions to be undertaken and with regard to budgetary allocations. It is implemented by means of joint and coordinated work between the APIEG and the regional offices.

Necessary conditions

- The commitment of the INA's senior management, regional offices and training departments to running the Rompiendo Moldes careers fairs;
- Inter-agency and intra-agency coordination in extending invitations to women;
- Budgetary allocations for activities and financial assistance for female students;

Fuente: Elaboración propia, a partir de información del Instituto Nacional de Aprendizaje, Asesoría para la Igualdad y Equidad de Género. 2020.



Source: INSAFORP. El Salvador.

El Salvador: Instituto Salvadoreño de Formación Profesional (INSAFORP)

Experience:

Pilot project to implement the Guide to the Prevention and Eradication of Discrimination against Women

Background

In 2014, the Salvadoran Vocational Training Institute (INSAFORP) launched a series of activities to promote gender equality and equity in vocational training. The process began with the approval of the First Institutional Gender Equality and Equity Plan and the creation of the Institutional Gender Commission. In 2016 a study was carried out into vocational training policy measures with a gender-based approach to promote women's participation in non-traditional courses within INSAFORP's Business-Centred Programme.

The study revealed that although the recruitment, selection and training procedures and practices used in vocational training courses do not discriminate directly against women wishing to access and train in fields where they are not traditionally represented, there are persistent customs within those processes that repeat and reinforce discriminatory and sexist stereotypes and practices.

Therefore, the decision was made in 2016 to develop a guide to the prevention and eradication of discrimination against women in static training centres where INSAFORP's ongoing vocational training programmes are delivered. In 2018 a pilot project was designed to implement the guide in three training centres that work with INSAFORP.

Overall objective

To contribute to improving women's ability and opportunities to access and remain in vocational training programmes, free from all forms of discrimination.

Specific objectives

To provide a tool that allows INSAFORP and its accredited partner centres to identify, understand, prevent, address and eradicate progressively any form of gender-based discrimination against women.

It is hoped that the tool will enable:

- Training centres to implement the measures necessary to prevent and eradicate gender-based discrimination against women in their teaching and learning.

- ▶ INSAFORP to strengthen its training programmes by including the tool as a requirement in the terms of invitations to tender, terms of reference and purchase orders for static vocational training centres that deliver its programmes.
- ▶ Both the training centres and INSAFORP to strengthen the gender equality capacities of staff delivering vocational training programmes and of INSAFORP staff in relation to the tool's development, execution and monitoring.

Process

The work was undertaken in six stages:

- ▶ **Study:** the first step was to identify, by means of a study, practices that discriminate directly and indirectly against women wishing to access and train in areas where they are not traditionally represented. Customs were identified that repeat or reinforce discriminatory and sexist stereotypes and practices during the training process.
- ▶ **Creation of the guide and tools:** based on the results of the study, the guide to the prevention and eradication of discrimination against women was created with the aim of closing the gaps identified. Annexed to the guide are four tools that provide support in addressing the issue:
 - ▶ a. Community manual
 - ▶ b. Guidelines for communication using non-sexist language
 - ▶ c. Protocol for addressing cases of bullying and sexual harassment
 - ▶ d. Methodological guide to the prevention and eradication of discrimination against women
- ▶ **Implementation of the pilot project at three vocational training centres:** with the support of the centres, a pilot was undertaken to identify the necessary improvements to the tools and to consider other aspects, for example in relation to context, limitations and challenges.
- ▶ **Corrections based on the pilot:** the information on implementation generated during the pilot project guided the adjustments necessary prior to its replication at the national level at all training centres.
- ▶ **Gradual implementation at the other training centres:** when contracting education and training services, INSAFORP's terms of reference will oblige training centres to implement the guide and tools in all training activities.
- ▶ **Monitoring and evaluation of the guide's results:** a study to measure the impact of the guide's implementation is planned for a later date.

Outcomes

- ▶ Studies have been undertaken to identify actions that discriminate against women in vocational training and to inform the creation of guides and tools.
- ▶ Tools have been designed to enable training centres to take clear action to close the gaps identified in the studies.
- ▶ Those tools were the subject of consultation and validation with training centres, thereby including all actors in the vocational training system in their creation.
- ▶ The process may be replicated at the different training centres.

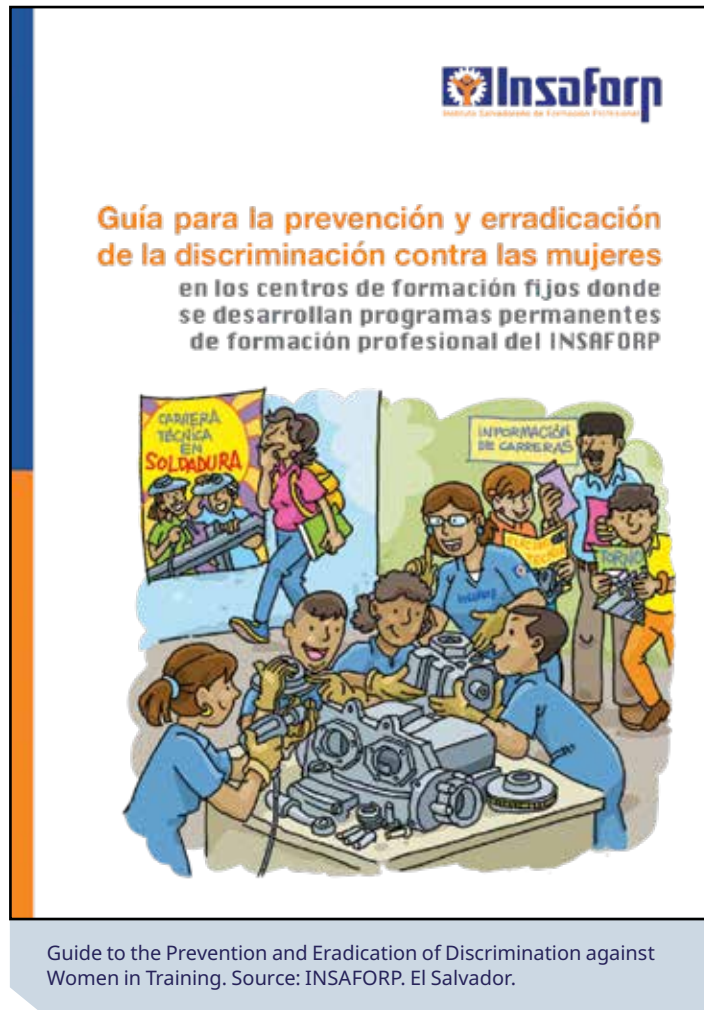
Sustainability

Three key factors in the initiative's sustainability have been identified:

- Involving training centres in creating tools that reduce discrimination and violence against women in training activities;
- Making participants key actors in the process, enabling them to provide opinions and feedback on activities, attitudes and actions that do not assist in reducing the gaps identified in training activities;
- Ongoing monitoring and evaluation of training activities to ensure that the tools are implemented totally and completely.

Necessary conditions

- The differences among the training centres involved must be taken into consideration, as well as each centre's programmes, courses and population type; although the tools are the same for all centres, these variables inform how they are addressed in each case.
- Communication campaigns must be carried out to raise awareness among training centres and course participants of the tools available and how they may be used.
- In all cases, an initial study or research is recommended to identify gaps and inform the design of the plan to be implemented in training centres.



Honduras: National Institute of Vocational Training (INFOP)

Experiencia:

Ciudad Mujer [Women's City] programme

Background

On 31 August 2016 a framework agreement was signed to facilitate inter-agency cooperation on the authorization, operation, regulation and sustainability of the President's Ciudad Mujer programme in Honduras. The programme provides comprehensive care services for Honduran women under one roof to help improve their living conditions. The role of the National Institute of Vocational Training (INFOP) in the programme is to provide technical vocational training to female participants, along with life skills, financial education and micro-enterprise training.

Overall objective

To contribute to the improvement of women's living conditions in Honduras in areas including economic empowerment, violence, sexual and reproductive health and community education via a network of services offered in an integrated manner by the competent public bodies.

Process

On 3 May 2016 the President's Ciudad Mujer programme was created by virtue of Executive Decree No. PCM-031/2016 of the Council of Ministers. The programme constitutes an effective mechanism for inter-agency coordination and integration, bringing under one roof care, prevention, protection and reparation services that meet the needs of women. The aim is to provide services that offer high levels of technical quality while ensuring continuity of care, making efficient use of the available resources, enabling social participation and defending and promoting rights. The services are provided through comprehensive care centres, known as Ciudad Mujer Centres, whose overall aim is to support women's empowerment, giving them opportunities to improve their and their families' living conditions and to contribute to the country's economic and social development.

Outcomes

INFOP plays an important role in promoting the autonomy and personal and collective empowerment of Honduran women. Since its creation, the Ciudad Mujer programme has provided technical vocational training, life skills, financial education and micro-enterprise training to more than 7,000 women.



INFOP plays an important role in promoting the autonomy and personal and collective empowerment of Honduran women. Source: INFOP, Honduras.

Sustainability

The Ciudad Mujer programme is linked to the targets set by the State under the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development. This constitutes a platform that coordinates the work undertaken by the agencies participating in the programme within the framework of the Sustainable Development Goals, which focus on improving equality as a means of meeting the needs of women, children and the most deprived and disadvantaged. It is strengthened by the implementation of results-, gender- and rights-based institutional strategic planning methodology.

Necessary conditions

INFOP uses part of its budget to deliver training to the women and also has staff employed exclusively to provide the necessary care as part of the programme. It should be noted that this is a joint effort by all government agencies, in that the care provided is comprehensive and ranges from psychological support, training and care for dependents to advice on entrepreneurship and entering the labour market.

Source: Prepared by the author based on information from INFOP, 2020.

Nicaragua: National Institute of Technology (INATEC)

Experience:

Methodological guide to including a gender approach and good practices in curriculum materials



INATEC prepared a methodological guide to include a gender approach and good practices in curricular materials. Source: INATEC. Nicaragua.

Background

As part of the National Human Development Plan, the Government of the Republic of Nicaragua is developing its activities in the area of the restoration of rights, key to which are technical education and vocational training. Improving access to, and the quality of, technical education and vocational training is a vital part of strengthening the skills and capacities that contribute to working lives and human development.

In 2018 the decision was made to produce a methodological guide to including a gender approach and good practices in curriculum materials, based on the Act on Equal Rights and Opportunities (2008) and the Handbook on Absolute Equality between Men and Women in Nicaragua (2010).

Overall objective

To integrate a gender approach into all curriculum materials of the National Institute of Technology (INATEC) to promote change in technical education and vocational training at that level.

Process

The guide is based on a conceptual framework that locates those who will be working on the matter, according to the following rationale: gender, equality, equality of rights and opportunities, stereotypes, gaps, equity and the gender approach.

The guide identifies actions to integrate the gender approach in three areas:

- 1. Training modules: for example, the knowledge, values and attitudes contained in a module are reviewed, and any elements that contain gender stereotypes or sexist or discriminatory language are corrected.
- 2. Teaching guides: activities are reviewed, observing whether they adhere to the principles of equality and equity; use inclusive, non-sexist and non-discriminatory language; promote activities that highlight the central role and leadership of women in every area; and focus on the wisdom of women as generators of knowledge.
- 3. Student manuals: it is ensured, for example, that male and female figures feature equally and that there is equity in bibliographies.

Outcomes

Staff responsible for developing and updating INATEC's curricula receive training. Changes have been made to curriculum materials in 12 technical courses, and a further 66 courses are under review.

Sustainability

The guide forms part of the Government's vision, is underpinned by the national equality framework and is being integrated into institutions by means of staff training, the validation of outputs at the methodological level and with the productive sector, and the updating of curriculum materials.



Participants in the joint project by INFOTEP, the Tui Academy and hotels in Bávaro, Punta Cana. Source: INFOTEP. Dominican Republic.



República Dominicana: National Institute for Technical Vocational Training (INFOTEP)

Experience:

Joint project by the National Institute for Technical Vocational Training (INFOTEP), the Tui Academy and hotels in Bávaro, Punta Cana

Background

In order to address the conditions that render many young people vulnerable in the Dominican Republic, in 2018 a joint project was launched by INFOTEP, the Tui Academy and hotels in Bávaro, Punta Cana, to support them in their search for employment.

Overall objective

To provide technical vocational training to vulnerable young people, particularly women, and to create professional links through work experience in sponsor companies that allow participants to progress and improve their financial situations.

Process

The joint project focuses on the inclusion of young people, mainly single mothers and those who grew up without their parents, who must learn a profession in order to enter the labour market. The programme not only prepares participants for employment, but also provides psycho-emotional support to resolve family trauma and promote coexistence and teamwork, while raising awareness of the rights of children and adolescents.

The training process includes job seeking workshops that address subjects such as effective curricula vitae and job interview strategies. The accreditation from INFOTEP and work experience gained by participants enables them to find employment more easily.

Outcomes

Graduates of the joint project have been successfully placed in the hotel and tourism sector. Between 2018 and 2020 around 110 persons trained as:

- Housekeepers
- Waiters
- Baristas
- Bartenders

English classes were also provided.

Sustainability

The necessary conditions for participants to remain in and successfully complete the project have been created. From the initial interview, potential barriers are identified in areas such as transport, food, connectivity and care for dependents, which are then addressed by the programme. Work has also been done to adjust the programme to beneficiaries' profiles. These efforts are complemented by ongoing guidance and support from the Tui Academy and INFOTEP throughout the training process.

Necessary conditions

Any barriers affecting the target population must be addressed, such as a lack of money for transport or food, or of support in caring for dependents. These situations could cause participants to drop out of the training process. It is also important to work with employers to agree flexible schedules that allow training to be delivered.

Source: Prepared by the author based on information from INFOTEP, 2020.

Experience: INFOTEP, Dominican Republic

Training and technical assistance to strengthen the Chocolala women's group

Background

The municipality of Imbert in the province of Puerto Plata, Dominican Republic, is home to Chocolala, an artisanal chocolate factory that forms part of the Ana Idalia Navarro Mothers' Centre. The company comprises 22 female organic chocolate producers who have cultivated cacao for 28 years. In 2013, these visionary entrepreneurs opened their doors to the public as part of a community-based rural tourism initiative.

The group aims to be inclusive to women in order to improve their quality of life and contribute to the community's economic and social development.

They currently offer an interactive tour that includes chocolate and wine tasting, a cacao trail and a visit to the community factory. In 2018 the Ministry of Tourism recognized the effectiveness and quality of their tourist offering, together with those of three other organizations, as a productive endeavour participating in the Sustainable Community Tourism Project.

INFOTEP provided assistance to the women in 2013 and 2014 through a comprehensive plan that included advice, training and technical assistance defined and delivered specifically for Chocolala.



INFOTEP provided assistance through a comprehensive plan that included advice, training and technical assistance defined and delivered specifically for Chocolala. Source: INFOTEP, Dominican Republic.

Overall objective

To help increase business competitiveness through advice, training and technical assistance.

Process

The process begins by identifying a company's needs so that a plan for delivering advice, training and technical assistance may be defined. It should be noted that, to ensure that the knowledge and learning generated will be of use to the company, needs are identified and plans defined via a participative process facilitated by an INFOTEP business adviser.

The women from Chocolala therefore played a central role in defining and implementing strategies to improve the marketing and sale of their products, including tours of the cacao plantations on an ecotourism trail.

The activities undertaken with the support of INFOTEP include:

- ▶ Researching customers' needs
- ▶ Creating promotional material
- ▶ Creating signage for the trails
- ▶ Carrying out promotional visits to grocer's shops

Outcomes

Thanks to this technical guidance, sales revenue has increased significantly.

Sustainability

The group of women behind Chocolala is a hard-working team with almost three decades' experience in growing cacao. Their empowerment and commitment to improving their living conditions are noteworthy. They have enjoyed constant growth and benefited from technical assistance and training from INFOTEP. They have also formed successful links with sustainable tourism projects supported by the Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) and receive advice from the Ministry of Tourism. All these factors ensure that the results are sustainable.

Necessary conditions

To replicate this experience, teaching materials and content must be suited to the characteristics of group members, who in general have low levels of education.

Furthermore, the success of a community project depends on a leadership structure able to coordinate activities. It must therefore be responsible for facilitating and monitoring adherence to the defined plans.

Experience: INFOTEP, República Dominicana

Designing the Secreto del Sonido [Secret of Sound] trail

Background

As part of the National Development Plan and in line with the Sustainable Development Goals, one of the Dominican Government's priorities is developing sustainable community-based tourism, local capacities and the use of resources to provide an alternative to traditional beach-based tourism.

It is under that framework that since 2016 the Sustainable Community Tourism project, sponsored by JICA, has been implemented in the country's northern provinces by INFOTEP, the Ministry of Tourism and the Ministry of Economy, Planning and Development.

Sonido del Yaque [Sound of the Yaque] is an ecotourism project in Los Calabazos, in the Jarabacoa municipality, La Vega province. Founded by community leader Esperanza Marte in 1997, it began life as a traditional restaurant hut offering creole food cooked in a wood-fired oven to tourists participating in water sports on the Yaque del Norte River. A group of women has developed the project, which today counts 10 rustic huts with a capacity of 60 persons. The project offers folk activities, trails and access to climbing routes up the El Mogote and Pico Duarte mountains. It is run by a community association, and the revenue is therefore distributed between the 35 families living in the community.

INFOTEP carried out the Sustainable Community Tourism Entrepreneur programme in early 2019, with 18 women from the project receiving certification.

Overall objective

To help increase business competitiveness through advice, training and technical assistance.

Process

The Sustainable Community Tourism project's training coordinators identified the need to strengthen the group as a productive endeavour and asked INFOTEP to provide a training adviser. In response to that request a facilitator specializing in sustainable tourism was engaged to deliver the Sustainable Community Tourism Entrepreneur programme, an 80-hour training programme that took a practical approach in its thematic content and methodology so as to actively involve the women, who have displayed determination and creativity in harnessing the available resources to implement what they learned.



Secreto of Sound trail. INFOTEP. Dominican Republic.

Based on the training, they designed the Secreto del Sonido trail, an additional attraction that allows visitors to delve into and understand daily life in the Los Calabazos community.



INFOTEP delivered the Sustainable Community Tourism Entrepreneur programme.
Source: ONG Turismo Comunitario Sostenible. Dominican Republic.

Outcomes

As a team, the group of women took the decision to apply the knowledge acquired during the training by designing and constructing the trail, which in turn has had the effect of:

- Increasing appreciation for their natural resources, including the river, mountains, flora, fresh air and vegetation;
- Enhancing their product, because as part of this project they requested, and received, a course on designing and producing ecotourism signage;
- Improving the appearance of the project's surroundings and understanding of the flora by the community and visitors;

- Improving the use of local and community resources to broaden the scope of the attractions offered to visitors. This has boosted the number of domestic and international tourists, thereby increasing the community's financial resources and quality of life.

Sustainability

The group has a clear interest in harnessing natural resources. The design of the Secreto del Sonido trail takes into consideration the location's appeal to tourists, which it boosts using the local flora while also encouraging visitors and the community to protect resources.

The group has recently requested training in gardening and fish farming so that it may continue to benefit from its wealth of resources and improve the sustainability of the project.

Necessary conditions

- It is important to work with a committed group that has a clear understanding of its needs and is willing to innovate and create.
- When replicating the experience of the trail itself, consideration should be given to the distance to be covered and the variety of the content to ensure a memorable experience for visitors.

Source: Prepared by the author based on information from INFOTEP, 2020.



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