



## SMALL GRANTS PROGRAMME

# Development of agro-ecotourism in the community of Guadalupe

**Beneficiary:** Amigos del Parque Internacional La Amistad (AMIPIILA)

**Location:** Community of Guadalupe, Cerro Punta, District of Bugaba, Chiriquí, Panamá

**Contribution PPD:** US\$ 28,463.00

**In-kind cofinancing:** US\$ 27,984.00

**Project Duration:** Oct 2012 – Mar 2014

**Number of people served:** 150

**Focal Area:** Biodiversity

## Context

Guadalupe is located in the buffer zone of two different protected areas of a significant importance regarding the whole country: Parque Internacional La Amistad (PILA) and Parque Nacional Volcán Barú, both belonging to the Biosphere Reserve La Amistad. The main economic activities in the area are agriculture and horticulture, which are depend directly on the soil and water resources. The intensive farming has raised worries about the vulnerability of the land and other environmental issues. AMIPILA is an environmental organization that has little by little become involved in community-based tourism through visits of farmers from other parts of the country, students and scientists. The organization was founded already in 1990 with the aim of educating the locals in improving environmental conditions and promoting the development

of sustainable productive activities. In 2001 they began building a small office with two rooms to accommodate casual visitors. The facilities are also used to hold reunions and other events. Nowadays they receive around 1,000 visitors each year with approximately 100 persons stay overnight in the premises. The organization has its own organic farm that produces organic fertilizers for the use of the members of the organization as well as for sale to others. Environmental education has been a central theme since the establishment of the organization.

Being located near the entry points of both National Parks, Guadalupe is attracting more tourists. The scenery and the cool climate attract visitors from all over the country as well as foreigners. Some of the community members are involved in touristic activities (flower gardens, production of handicrafts and local products, and accommodation facilities). The number of visitors in the community has increased during recent years but there is a lack of adequate information of the area (history, traditions etc.) as well as environmental education for the local people. AMIPILA wants to work in filling out this gap through this project presented to the SGP. AMIPILA received a planning grant of US\$ 2000.00 in 2012, which served as an antecedent of this project. Developing agro tourism in the community enables the promotion of sustainable production mechanisms and broadens the knowledge of the locals on these issues.





The organization is member of ADATA (Alianza para el Desarrollo Ambiental de Tierras Altas) and has worked with several donors such as the Embassy of Japan, Fundación Natura and FUNDICCEP (Fundación para el desarrollo integral, comunitario y conservación de los ecosistemas en Panamá).

## Project objectives and key activities

The overall objective of the project was to develop agro ecotourism as an alternative way of sustainable development in the community of Guadalupe, thus contributing to the improvement of environmental and socioeconomic conditions in the community. The aim is to strengthen agriculture and ecotourism activities developed by AMIPILA, to diversify the economic activities of community members and to enhance connections with past traditions in rural communities. Key activities include creating a local development board, organizing workshops on community-based tourism and customer care, developing a marketing program for rural tourism products, and improve the facilities of AMIPILA to be able to offer agro ecotourism packages. The goal has been to actively involve the whole community in every stage of the project.

## Environmental impact

By producing and promoting organic fertilizers the organization aims to minimize the use of harmful pesticides and other material damaging soil and the environment. This is especially important considering the location by two protected areas of a national importance. Environmental education of farmers, students and schools has led to concrete actions in the sustainable use of natural resources, littering reduction and recycling in the community. The agro ecotourism project impact on the environment is predicted to increase the number of visitors. It is important to keep a balanced ecotourism so that the essence of the place will not change as it has happened in some other places. In addition, this project has promoted the protection of 9 different species in the PILA.

## Socio-Economic Impact

Through the project activities it has been able not only to increase awareness on environmental issues but an overall development in the community. Well-managed and planned community-based tourism has provided alternative for sustainable development. The project has benefitted not only the members of the association but also the whole community by visitors supporting local services such as restaurants and shops. Especially the youth has been involved in the project. Workshops have improved various skills among the members of the community.





## Policy Impact, Replication and Scaling up

Similar projects may be replicated in other places taking into consideration that it should be designed from a community-perspective and local people must be involved in decision-making at all stages. In the future AMIPILA wants to further develop agro ecotourism for example by working on a tourist circuit together with other donors and organization in order to have a steady flow of income to pay for the basic needs of the organization. It would be necessary to include a bigger component of training farmers on good agricultural practices, creating new innovations regarding tourism and develop risk management since the area is vulnerable in terms of climate change.

## Lessons Learned

- It is vital to maintain a good communication between the organization and the community-members during the whole project as well as after the actual project has finished in order to gain long-term results and keep people motivated.
- Participation of the members of the organization needs to be strengthened and prioritized. It is important to have committed members in the organization in order for it to function efficiently also in the future.
- AMIPILA has gained a new kind of image being more organized and being able to offer more alternatives for people visiting the community of Guadalupe.

