

Salcedo, Dominican Republic: "The Coffee Trail," a cooperation project to promote sustainable agriculture and responsible tourism¹

Policy Name: The Coffee Trail

Start date: 2004

End date: 2008

CONTEXT

GOVERNMENT CONTEXT

City context

The Dominican Republic is divided into 3 macro-regions, 10 development regions and 31 provinces. Salcedo is one of the 31 provinces located in the centre/north of the country and its area of 440.4 km² makes it the smallest province in the Dominican Republic. With four other provinces (Duarte, Maria Trinidad Sánchez, Samaná and Sánchez Ramírez), it is part of the

¹ The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** is a space for analysis and reflection on local social inclusion policies. It contains over sixty case studies on innovative policies for community development, access to basic services, gender equality, environmental protection and the eradication of poverty, among others. The initiative has been developed with the scientific support of Prof. Yves Cabannes from the University College of London (15 case studies) and a team of researchers from the Centre for Social Studies (CES) at the University of Coimbra, which has worked under the supervision of Prof. Boaventura de Sousa Santos (50 study cases). This Observatory aims to identify and investigate successful experiences that might inspire other cities to design and implement their own social inclusion policies.

The **Inclusive Cities Observatory** has been created by the Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights of UCLG. United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) is the global platform that represents and defends the interests of local governments before the international community and works to give cities more political influence on global governance. The **Committee on Social Inclusion, Participatory Democracy and Human Rights** aims to contribute to building a common voice for the cities of UCLG in the areas of social inclusion, participatory democracy and human rights. It also aims to guide local governments in designing these policies and to that end, fosters political debates, the exchange of experiences and peer learning among cities around the world.

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region of Cibao Oriental (NSO 2002). The province was created in 1952 under the dictatorship of Rafael Leonidas Trujillo and was renamed Hermanas Mirabal province in 2007, in memory of the sisters Patria, Minerva and Maria Teresa Mirabal de Salcedo, who were outstanding opponents of Trujillo's tyranny, and who were persecuted and murdered on November 25, 1960.

The province's territory covers a mountainous area in the north of the country with a maximum altitude of 800 metres above sea level, commonly known as the *Loma*, and a flat area to the south. Its soil is considered among the most fertile in the country because of its morphology, and its tropical climate is suitable for crops, especially coffee and cocoa. Its economy is based mainly on agriculture and livestock farming, and the main crops are coffee, cocoa, bananas and other fruit.

Governmental decentralisation context

The Dominican Republic is a representative democracy located in the eastern two-thirds of the Caribbean island of Hispaniola, in the Greater Antilles. It has a population of around 10 million inhabitants and is considered by the World Bank to be an upper middle income economy (World Bank 2009). Nonetheless, the distribution of wealth is very unequal.

With a gross national product per capita of U.S.\$8,273, the country is below the average level for Latin America and the Caribbean. 48.5% of the population lives in conditions of overall poverty and 4.25% live in extreme poverty, i.e. with an average income of less than U.S.\$1.25 per day. A further 11% live in multidimensionally poor households, i.e. with more than U.S.\$1.25 per day, but facing many deprivations and limitations (UNDP 2010).

After 30 years of bloody dictatorship by Trujillo (1930-1961), followed by a period of political instability, in recent decades the Dominican Republic has established a democratic model based on free elections and independent institutions.

The political system is characterised by the centralisation of power in the president, who is granted extraordinary powers not by the constitution but by the procedural laws inherited from the dictatorship when there was an absolute concentration of power. This situation is not suitable for the new democratic model. The political system has been stable since the end of the Trujillo dictatorship and the establishment of democracy. Although there has not been a military government since Trujillo, there have in fact been 22 years of authoritarian rule and only 10 years of democratic government. The country's political stability has in reality been based on a very limited alternation of central power, with no real strengthening of democracy. The weaknesses of the institutions are the result of a system that has been unable to reduce social inequalities and to create strong institutions (UNDP 2008).

Thanks largely to the work of NGOs and international organisations, some progress has been made towards decentralisation in the last 20 years, such as the transfer of a greater share of resources to municipalities (4% of ordinary income according to Law 17 of 1997) and the 1994 constitutional reform, which provides for a separation of the presidential, congressional and local elections (UNDP 2007). In addition, Law 176-07 provides for the promotion of citizens' participation through municipal participatory budgeting, based on the 1989 Porto Alegre model of municipal transparency, land management and strategic planning.

The Dominican Constitution provides for only two levels of government: central and municipal. The other demarcations are only subdivisions of the central level (regions, provinces and municipal districts) or the municipal level (sections and sites). The Municipality, the municipal governing body, is politically, fiscally, administratively and functionally autonomous, has its own assets and is responsible for managing the interests of the local community (UNDP 2008).

The first Fernández administration (1996-2000) supported decentralisation at provincial level, while the Mejía Government (2000-2004) supported a strategy of regional decentralisation, but did not provide it with the right tools. Operational structures were established in the 1990s, such as the Provincial Technical Offices (PTOs) and guidance and consultation bodies such as the Provincial Development Councils (PDCs), which established the provincial level as an intermediate management level between central and municipal level. In 2006, Regional Development Councils (RDCs) were established as structures for coordination at regional level. The situation is generally extremely confusing (Coletti 2008).

In 1991, on the initiative of local authorities, the Provincial Technical Office (PTO) was created in Salcedo to plan development in the region and the Provincial Development Council (PDC) was established in 1995. This body coordinates public agencies and social organisations in the province to implement a referendum on regional development issues. The Salcedo PTO was the first institution responsible for territorial development in the Dominican Republic, and is a model that has been replicated at the national level with the creation of 30 PTOs accountable to the Office of National Planning (ONAPLAN). Almost all the PTOs were abolished under the government of Hipólito Mejía. The Office in Salcedo is still active, although it is no longer a public body and has become a local NGO (Coletti 2008).

Institutional level of policy development: Provincial

SOCIAL CONTEXT

In the 1980s and 1990s, a number of factors such as the end of the railway service and the construction of the Duarte motorway; the development of other urban centres near Salcedo, such as La Vega, San Francisco de Macorís, Moca and Santiago; the creation of duty-free zones; and the falling prices of agricultural products led to the gradual isolation of the province, which has become an area with labour issues. Further factors in this situation were a decline of the coffee market and an increase in migration, which led to the neglect of the province and a progressive deterioration of the land. Nevertheless, the primary source of revenue for the province is still agriculture, although remittances from immigrant families are equally important (Coletti 2008).

The area hardest hit by the phenomenon of migration is the *Loma* in the municipality of Salcedo, a historic coffee-growing area. In the 1990s, the population of the province fell from 99,854 inhabitants (1993 census) to 96,356 inhabitants (NSO 2002) and in the same period the municipality of Salcedo lost 5,278 inhabitants (more than the provincial loss). The demographics of the municipality of Salcedo for the last 50 years are shown below:

	1960	1970	1981	1993	2002
Total Pop.:	36,240 inhab.	40,142 inhab.	44,718 inhab.	45,788 inhab.	40,510 inhab.
Urban Pop.:	6,818 inhab.	11,459 inhab.	10,828 inhab.	12,775 inhab.	11,994 inhab.
Rural Pop.:	29,430 inhab.	28,683 inhab.	33,890 inhab.	33,013 inhab.	28,516 inhab.

The municipality's total population, according to provincial data, obviously increased steadily from the 1960s until the late 1980s. However, there has been a slight decline in the rural population since the 1970s, which is partly due to migration to the municipality's urban area. The decline in the population has become sharper since the 1980s, particularly in rural areas, followed by the urban area (NCUA 1999 and NSO 2002).

The rural population currently accounts for about 70% and the urban population about 30%. The population of the province is mostly young: 57% are people aged less than 29 years old, while 12% of the population is over 60 years of age. Women over 12 years old account for 73.4% of the female population and 37% of the provincial total, with an average of 2.76 live births per woman. Of a total of 87,005 people over 5 years old, 18% are illiterate. The highest rates of illiteracy are in rural areas of the province and mainly affect women. The inactive population amounts to 46% of those aged over 10 years old and the employed population also amounts to 46%, with a large gender difference, as there are twice as many employed men as employed women. The main activities providing employment are agriculture, fishing and livestock (39% of employment); handicraft activities (15%); trade (13%); and social, municipal and personal services (7%) (NSO 2002).

The policy presented below is an important initiative to support farming families and to reverse the trend of emigration from the Salcedo mountains within a framework for safeguarding and enhancing the value of the territory's resources and local identity.

COMPREHENSIVE NARRATIVE

Description of the policy

The policy consists of enhancing the value of the territory's potential and the production chains in order to prevent the depopulation of mountain areas and migration to large cities. This was achieved by projects to tap the territory's potential that arose in the context of decentralised cooperation between the province of Arezzo (Tuscany, Italy) and the province of Salcedo.

The depopulation that has affected the province of Salcedo since the 1980s, especially as a consequence of the coffee crisis, was similar to that suffered in the region of Tuscany in the early 1960s. Given the inability of the Tuscan agricultural sector to maintain some degree of competitiveness due to the small size of its farms and the high labour costs, the Tuscan institutions adopted a strategy focused on improving the quality of products such as olive oil and wine. This strategy led to the *Strada del Vino* experience, which yielded remarkable results in economic, environmental and cultural terms, by promoting sustainable development and enhancement of the territory's value and local identity.

This experience helped to improve the situation in another rural area – the mountain region of Salcedo. A process of decentralised cooperation between the two territories began in 1994 and a responsible tourism project similar to the *Strada del Vino* was developed in the small Dominican town in 2004, known as *The Coffee Trail*, which was closely related to initiatives in the coffee sector to improve product quality. The strategy is to regenerate the rural area by enhancing the value of the production and distribution chain, creating a direct link between producer and consumer. *The Coffee Trail* is a route for responsible tourism based on a programme to protect and value cultural identity and seeks to respond to the needs for diversification of income among the farming community, which is overly dependent on the vagaries of the international coffee market.

Background / Origins

Salcedo is outside the island's tourist circuit, while its dependence on coffee farming makes it very vulnerable to market dynamics. Due to the random nature of coffee prices and the collapse of prices because of the breakdown of international agreements, most of the coffee plantations have been turned into grazing areas. Indiscriminate deforestation had had catastrophic effects on the environment. The collapse in coffee prices has led to the gradual impoverishment of the farming community. These disparities have had profound social consequences, including high levels of migration from rural areas to the cities and coasts, the distortion of the agrarian core of the population and the loss of its cultural identity.

The extensive experience of decentralised cooperation between Arezzo and Salcedo took place in this context. It began in 1994 with health, environmental and anti-poverty programmes, which were funded by the Italian government and later extended to the sectors of education, agriculture and responsible tourism.

Policy objectives

The overall objective of *The Coffee Trail* project is to contain depopulation in the Salcedo mountains and migration to large cities, creating additional income sources for rural families based on a perspective of enhancing the value of the area's heritage. The initiative is aimed at safeguarding the territory of Salcedo, preserving its biological features, and promoting diversified economic livelihoods that protect it and are managed by local actors.

The goal of increasing family income is achieved by a rise in the prices of coffee, the improvement of the product's quality and the reinforcement of the organisational, productive and commercial skills of local agricultural producer associations. The diversification of household incomes has also been made possible by the creation of responsible tourism.

During the execution of the project, it became necessary to work on improving the planning and land management capabilities of the territory by local governments, and their role as promoters of economic and cultural development in the region in particular.

The incorporation of new actors and competences in the project meant that it was possible to increase the potential of the project and include new objectives. Two examples are the participation of the Department for Land Protection, which helped improve local capacities to deal with hydrogeological problems and a collaboration with the Department of Urban Planning

at the University of Florence, which enabled valuation of the region's cultural resources with a view to the promotion of tourism, emphasizing historical and architectural features.

Chronological development and implementation of the practice

Three possible ways to promote responsible tourism were identified in collaboration with local partners in the project's first year (2004) – a coffee theme and two themes of major natural interest – and tourist reception facilities were created. The training of local tour operators began during this first phase with a mission to Italy that enabled them to learn about experiences of recovery and promotion of the territory that had proved very effective in Tuscany (Ucodep 2005).

In 2005, work began on signposting pathways, refurbishing houses for visitor accommodation and creating the Coffee Museum (Ucodep 2006).

Knowledge-sharing opportunities increased between local producers in Salcedo and producers in the *Strada del Vino* in Tuscany, and between tour operators on *The Coffee Trail* and natural operations of the national parks of the Dominican Republic.

Later, as a result of the presence of foreign tourists in the area, there would be a need for language training, of guides first, and then of the community more generally (Ucodep 2007).

Over the final year (2007), the project was consolidated by implementing crop diversification experiences and constructing and refurbishing structures for subsistence level poultry breeding by the inhabitants of the *Loma* (Ucodep 2008).

Agents involved

There are several institutions and organizations involved in the decentralised cooperation process between the two regions. In Tuscany there is the Comitato Aretino per la Cooperazione Decentrata con la República Dominicana, a non-profit organisation composed of associations, institutions (the provincial council, the municipality, etc.), organisations and businesses in the province of Arezzo that share the desire to promote exchange initiatives, local development and cooperation between Arezzo and the Dominican Republic. The Dominican partners include Provincial Technical Office (PTO) of Salcedo, the Coscafe Association, the Salcedo school district and the municipality of Salcedo.

The main driving force behind the project is the province of Arezzo. The main local partner is the PTO and work has taken place in collaboration with the rural communities of the *Loma*. Numerous actors have participated over the years in Arezzo. First, local government bodies and the most important NGO in Arezzo, Ucodep. Over time, the latter has assumed a greater leadership role by increasing its competences in the field of international cooperation.

Other bodies in the Arezzo territory region not connected with the network of associations have become involved over the years, such as the coffee roasting company Caffè River, responsible for marketing Jamao coffee, which is produced in the mountain of Salcedo. Regional institutions outside the province of Arezzo also became involved due to their expertise in specific sectors, including the Comunità Montana del Casentino, the University of Siena and the University of Florence. Finally, the Aretino Committee of the Dominican Association of Arezzo also

participated. Indeed, the presence of a large Dominican immigrant community in Arezzo was one of the reasons that encouraged the committee to launch a decentralised international cooperation pilot project with the Dominican Republic (Coletti 2008).

Beneficiaries

The entire Salcedo community is benefiting from this initiative through improved management of local resources and their evaluation, as well as improved prevention of risks. Among the direct beneficiaries of the project are the associations of coffee producers and workers within the coffee harvesting and processing cycle. Local guides and tour operators have also received training in courses on quality standards in tourist reception. This is in addition to the children in primary education who have greater awareness of environmental issues, families of artisans in the rural community and the families that host tourists, who have received grants to improve housing facilities and private services. The government employees and those of local institutions have increased their skills and professionalism through the exchange of knowledge with the province of Arezzo. Other beneficiaries include restaurants and other local business groups which have become part of *The Coffee Trail* network. The Arezzo teenagers participating in voluntary work camps and the entire Arezzo community in general have come into contact with conditions very different from their own, and this has led to a strong awareness of development issues in countries in the southern hemisphere (Ucodep 2005-2009).

Participation processes implemented

The experience of collaboration between Arezzo and Salcedo, with the participation of various institutional levels and civil society, is an interesting example of decentralised cooperation between regions based on a focus on community involvement during its implementation.

Political and strategic decisions were taken and implemented on a joint basis by committees that included various actors and agents in the territory. Coordination was participatory, involving all stakeholders by means of a series of formulas (committees, coordination, etc.). The work on the ground was coordinated by the NGO Ucodep, with local partners and technicians/civil servants from local government bodies providing specific skills. Technical and scientific activities were entrusted to experts on the ground (universities, businesses, etc.).

In order to achieve maximum involvement by the Dominican partners, quarterly meetings with beneficiaries and bimonthly meetings with stakeholders were organised to jointly assess the implementation of the activities and how to improve their execution.

In the Province of Salcedo, the Provincial Technical Office showed a high degree of commitment to the activities, collaborating in organisational, technical and programming issues.

The decentralised cooperation relationship enabled the deployment of voluntary and cooperation activities among young Italians and young people in Salcedo.

An important activity was raising awareness among the children in two primary schools in Salcedo about protecting the environment and the local identity. The programme included a trip along "The Coffee Plantation" path, with guides and technical experts, and the organisation of an educational workshop for the children.

Institutionalization processes

An agreement was signed on decentralised cooperation in the areas of culture, tourism, agriculture and local development during the visit of a member of the Municipality of Salcedo to Arezzo in 1985.

On this basis, an initial rural development project was presented to the European Commission in 1998, which paved the way for a gradual involvement of various actors on the ground (such as 'Slow Food').

In 2004-2005, the marketing strategies of coffee were diversified by its introduction in fair trade channels (Coletti 2008).

At the same time, the Region of Tuscany funded the project *The Coffee Trail: Promoting Tourism in the Province of Salcedo* in order to create tourist routes in the province of Salcedo to promote traditional cultures and promote cultural heritage.

Financing

The Region of Tuscany supported *The Coffee Trail* project with a grant of 165,000 euros (Ucodep 2005). The project involved various actors and resources, ranging from the *Hermanas Mirabal* Foundation which is linked to the PTO and manages funds for micro credits, to access to the UNDP's Small Grants Programme funds.

The Coffee Trail project is one of a number of specific projects carried out in the coffee sector, financed since 1998 with funding from the European Union and the Tuscany Region. These projects are committed to enhancing organisational and productive capabilities in the coffee sector, improving its marketing and promotion networking between producers.

Key results and achievements

Among the main results of *The Coffee Trail* is the introduction of an innovative form of tourism to the region. Itineraries have been established along the *Trail* with signposting and improved safety on three paths and refurbished tourist accommodation infrastructure along the *Trail*.

The Coffee Trail is a journey including some of the least developed natural landscapes in the mountains, based on three routes:

the *Coffee Plantation* path, which passes through the shaded plantations typical of this region, showing part of the coffee production process, from cultivation to handling. The tour includes a small Coffee Museum containing photographic material and traditional tools.

the *Confluence* path (2.8 km), which takes its name from the convergence of two rivers: the Partido and the Jamao. It can be covered on foot, horseback or by riding a mule and provides a panoramic view of the northern Cordillera mountain range.

and the *Cave* path, in the rainforest, which crosses the mountain and includes a cave with huge stalactites and stalagmites.

The tourists stay in the beneficiaries' homes. The number of both foreign and Dominican visitors increases every year.

Along with other projects of inter-territorial cooperation, this process has contributed to the creation of social capital in the mountain community and to halting depopulation. The actions have significantly offset the exodus from the countryside to the city, improving the rural population's quality of life and promoting local development. In Arezzo, this experience has helped to reinforce the *Strada del Vino* project, giving it greater visibility and scope.

Main obstacles

The main weakness of *The Coffee Trail* experience lies in the fact that rural development initiatives take some time to bear fruit, which means that it is essential that there are local actors that are able to provide the policies with continuity. The institutional instability in the country does not make these long-term experiences easy, as Italian partners often become the stable benchmarks, thereby jeopardising the real sustainability of the projects.

Replicability or adaptation of policy elsewhere

Similar experiences have occurred in other areas in the Dominican Republic, and are now providing interesting results in terms of increasing the value of territory, local awareness of environmental issues and support for rural families.

The key elements in the replicability of the policy are:

- qualitative improvement of local products;
- enhancement of local identities;
- exchange of best practices between different territories; and
- creation of a direct link between producers and consumers, and a route for responsible tourism, encouraging consumers to become responsible citizens.

The policy is an important force for local development. In this regard, the essential characteristics for replicability are:

- the presence of a potential local product;
- a strong landscape value in the area; and
- a conscious and active local community.

A new project funded by the European Union has begun in the town of Bonao in recent years. The problems in Bonao's *Loma* area are the same as in Salcedo, namely, the lack of economic opportunities and the consequent depopulation of the mountain.

The Salcedo initiative can be considered a pilot project, as well as an interesting example of cooperation between territories. Experiences in this field have yielded better results in the process where endogenous forces are strongest, i.e. when civil society and associations of coffee producers are most active. In this respect, citizen participation is essential for recognising local identity and the region's potential, and to envisage future scenarios for local development.

SUMMARY

'The Coffee Trail' policy consists of enhancing the value of the potential and productive chains in the territory in order to halt migration from the mountains towards large cities. This has been achieved by means of projects to enhance the value of the territory that arose in the context of decentralised cooperation between the province of Arezzo (Tuscany, Italy) and the province of Salcedo. The depopulation that affected the province of Salcedo from the 1980s as a result of the coffee crisis was similar to that suffered in the region of Tuscany in the 1960s. Given that it was impossible for the Tuscan agricultural sector to maintain some degree of competitiveness, the Tuscan institutions adopted a strategy focused on improving the quality of products such as oil and wine. This strategy, which was reflected in the experience of the *Strada del Vino*, yielded remarkable results in economic, environmental and cultural development terms by promoting the sustainable development of rural communities.

A process of decentralised cooperation began between the province of Arezzo and Salcedo in 1994, and a responsible tourism project similar to the *Strada del Vino*, known as *The Coffee Trail*, was developed in the Dominican town. *The Coffee Trail* aims, on one hand, to improve the quality of the product by regenerating productivity and by creating a direct link between producer and consumer; and on the other, to protect and enhance local cultural identity by raising community awareness of environmental protection, the promotion of local products and enhancement of the value of the territory's heritage. The policy was operational between 2004 and 2008.

The participation process included taking and implementing political and strategic decisions in conjunction with local institutions, NGOs and actors in the territory; and coordinating all the parties involved by means of committees, etc. The work on the ground was coordinated by the NGO Ucodep, with local partners providing specific skills. Technical and scientific activities were entrusted to specialised bodies such as universities, businesses, etc.

The Coffee Trail has had various results: the introduction of an innovative type of tourism to the region; the creation of social capital in the mountain community; and halting depopulation. In addition, this experience has helped to strengthen the *Strada del Vino* in Arezzo, giving it a higher international profile.

The main weakness of *The Coffee Trail* experience lies in the fact that rural development initiatives take some time to bear fruit, which means that it is essential that there are local actors that are able to provide the policies with continuity. The institutional instability in the country does not make these long-term experiences easy, as partners in the North often become the stable benchmarks, thereby jeopardising the real sustainability of the projects.

For more information:

Arch. Carmelita Breccione Mattucci
Urban and Regional Planning Department, University of Florence
Tel. +39 329 0828900
E-mail: carmelita.breccione@gmail.com

City website: <http://www.larutadelcafedominicano.org/>

**United Cities and Local Governments (UCLG) Committee on Social Inclusion,
Participatory Democracy and Human Rights:**

Tlf: +34 93 342 87 70

<http://www.uclg.org/cisdp/>

Acknowledgements / Credits

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