



ECUADOR

THE MONTECRISTI HAT



Context

Toquilla straw hats are manufactured throughout Latin America but the ones with the best reputation come from the city of Montecristi, Manabi province, in Ecuador. Toquilla straw hats are very labor-intensive: it takes between 2 and 4 months to produce one hat, and between 3 and 6 months for the finest quality product.

However, because the artisans do not know how to valorize their product, they do not receive adequate revenues for their work, which in turn makes their trade less attractive to young people, who continue to leave the region because of a lack of employment opportunities and a continuous decrease in living conditions. Furthermore, there are no institutional structures in the region to support the hat makers, which would teach knitting and related skills.

Such structure could help foster the Montecristi hat, also by providing an additional tourist attraction where quality hats could be sold at a good price, ultimately contributing to an improved quality of life for the artisans and their families.

Strategies

- Inception of a Montecristi-based association of fine and extra fine Toquilla straw hats knitters that gathers all artisans from different communities
- Development of a school/workshop to help improve the knitters' performance and the quality of their hats as well as to provide insights into the legal requirements for their commercialization
- Undertake market research, cost analysis and technical support activities to further standardize specific value chain processes thus allowing for a more diverse product range
- Increase awareness of the knitting tradition in Montecristi through product promotion and information dissemination
- Emphasize the cultural attractiveness of the Toquilla hats to develop community tourism where handicraft is highly valued

Results

- A knitting association was formed in Pile district, Montecristi canton, to oversee the qualitative requirements to improve the manufacturing processes
- An inter-institutional convention was signed towards the construction of the Pile Craft Training Centre
- 30 persons trained in the ancestral knitting techniques for fine and extra fine Toquilla straw hats
- Increased revenues and related increased in the quality of life for the producers and their families

Impact/Outlook

- The inception of the Montecristi school-workshop will directly and indirectly generate employment, to the benefit of the entire region as the local economy will be stimulated
- The school-workshop will lead to a progressive improvement of the region's standards of living and could contribute to curbing unemployment-related migration to other countries

At a glance

Goal: to improve the living conditions of the stake holders of the Montecristi Hat value chain through coordinated actions between public national and local institutions, cooperation organisms and stake holders of the whole value chain, promoting its development.

Thematic area: Poverty Reduction through Productive Activities

Donor: Italian Institute of Foreign Trade

Partners: MIPRO (Ministry of Industry and Productivity), PRO Ecuador (Institute of Promotion, Exports and Investment) and IEPI (Ecuadorian Institute of the Intellectual Property).

Status: ongoing

Duration: 2011-2013