Journal of Tourism Insights

Volume 3 | Issue 1 Article 5

7-17-2012

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Recommended Citation
Sasidharan, Vinod and Hall, Marilyn E. (2012) "Dominican Resort Tourism, Sustainability, and Millennium Development Goals," *Journal of Tourism Insights*: Vol. 3: Iss. 1, Article 5.
Available at: http://dx.doi.org/10.9707/2328-0824.1029

Available at: http://scholarworks.gvsu.edu/jti/vol3/iss1/5

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DOMINICAN RESORT TOURISM, SUSTAINABILITY, AND MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS

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ABSTRACT:

The tourism industry continues to be touted as the main income and employment generator for Caribbean nations. In the Dominican Republic (DR), international tourism has become one of the largest industries and is a major contributor to the country's economic growth. A recent trend in the DR is the development of luxurious residential resort complexes and private resort cities, mainly designed and created for foreign ownership. The Dominican government support for such projects has been very strong due to the economic propensity of these high-end resorts to assist the country in generating local opportunities for stable employment, creating basic infrastructure, alleviating poverty, and stimulating sustainable human development, i.e., achieving the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs). Considering the DR's continued focus on resort tourism development and ongoing foreign investment in such projects, it is important to examine whether or not resorts have the potential to assist the country in achieving its 2015 MDG targets. This paper presents the findings of a baseline assessment of four MDGs in a popular tourist resort region, in the eastern DR. The field-based study was conducted through a qualitative analysis of primary social, environmental, and economic data, relating to factors that were identified as appropriate for monitoring the region's progress towards the MDGs. Results of the analysis suggested that the tourist resort region's current initiatives were generally satisfactory in terms of meeting three of the four MDGs. Managerial implications and recommendations for future sustainable development of the resort region, towards meeting the MDGs by 2015, are provided.

INTRODUCTION

Historically, countries in the Caribbean have experienced steady tourism growth since the late 19th century (Wilkinson, 2009). Over the last three decades, most countries in the region have become extensively tourism-dependent, based on their tourism earnings as a proportion of gross domestic product (Scheyvens & Momsen, 2008). Nations in the Caribbean have increasingly turned to tourism as an economic development strategy, mainly due to the continued decline in the local production and export of agricultural goods (Ahmed, 2001). In the Dominican Republic (DR), international tourism has become one of the largest export industries. Tourism growth in the DR can be attributed to the country's domestic process of democratization since the late 1970s and employment of 'neo-liberal' political and economic reform policies (Mitchell, 2009) beginning in the early 1990s. Tourism in the DR generates an estimated five billion USD annually (Ocean Star Estates, 2012), thus making it a major contributor to the country's economic growth. While the economic indicators of tourism in the DR are somewhat clear, little evidence exists regarding the environmental and social impacts of the industry in the country.

The DR's commitment to the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs), identified in the 2000 UN Millennium Summit, has required it to implement prioritized, long-term actions, investments and economic strategies that result in sustainable human development opportunities (Gagain, 2006a). Considering the fact that tourism will continue to remain a major, strategic option for economic development in the DR, it is important to obtain a clear, comprehensive view of how the industry in the DR is responding to the UN Millennium Declaration as well as the nation's political and institutional dedication to the MDGs. As a first step towards conducting MDG assessments of resort regions, the DR's Presidential Commission on the Millennium Development Goals and Sustainable Development (COPDES), has identified the Puna Cana-Veron resort area as a case study region for conducting on-the-ground baseline assessments relating to the achievement of the MDGs, and progress made towards sustainable human development, in this popular tourist resort on the east coast of the DR. Based on COPDES' priority and direction, this study was conducted to examine the Punta Cana-Veron resort area's progress towards the achievement of four MDGs.

LITERATURE REVIEW

The tourism system is a critical component of the well being of all Caribbean states (Cabezas, 2008; Yaw, 2005). For the DR, tourism has been the primary strategy for economic development since its adoption of neo-liberal, trade

liberalization policies over the last 20 years (Cabezas, 2004). Following a 1995 Congressional approval to lift investment restrictions on foreign companies, thereby allowing international investors to repatriate profits, the country has experienced tremendous economic growth as a result of Foreign Direct Investment (FDI), making the DR one of the top trade liberalizers in the Caribbean (Santos-Paulino, 2010). Since then, foreign investment in the DR economy has continued to be dominated by multinational, tourism-related companies from Europe and North America. Of the total private-sector tourism investment in the DR, in 2007, 85 % came from foreign investors, mainly from Spain, followed by interests from Austria, Germany, Canada, U.S., and Russia (Miralles, 2007).

Traditionally, pre-arranged travel packages (including hotel accommodations, restaurant/dining options, golf courses, excursions, etc.) have been the main attraction for the majority of international tourists visiting the DR. A more recent trend in the DR is the development of luxurious residential resort complexes and private resort cities, mainly designed and created for possession by foreign, non-residents – evidence of such developments can be seen in places such as Cap Cana, Puerto Plata, Punta Cana, Susúa, Bávaro, and Samaná (Miralles, 2007). These private, international resort communities are usually gated and tend to include luxury villas and hotels, upscale dining establishments, marinas and world-class golf courses (Pike, 2007), in addition to state-of-the-art shopping centers, entertainment venues, schools, hospitals and clinics, recreational facilities and other amenities exclusively for use by their residents and 'club' members. The Dominican government support for such projects has been very strong due to the economic propensity of these high-end resorts to generate stable employment opportunities for neighboring localities, stimulate basic infrastructure and human-services development, alleviate poverty, and improve the Quality of Life (QoL) of surrounding communities. In response to the potential socio-economic contribution of such projects, the DR government has invested upwards of nearly seven hundred million USD, towards improvement of 'infrastructure, security, and health' in and around these resort communities (Miralles, 2007).

While it may be argued that resort tourism can further enhance economic development in the DR, there is a significant need to document whether or not luxury resort developments and exclusive, private resort cities make balanced contributions toward the people, environment, and economy of local communities, i.e., sustainable development. As per the Declaration of Barbados, adopted at the 1994 UN-sponsored Global Conference on the Sustainable Development of Small Island Developing States (SIDS), "based on the principle of the right to development, small island developing States should, in accordance with their own priorities, endeavor to achieve the goals of sustainable

development by, inter alia, formulating and implementing policies, strategies and programs that take into account development, health and environmental goals, strengthening national institutions, and mobilizing all available resources, all of which are aimed at improving the quality of life" (United Nations Division for Sustainable Development, 1994, p. 5). Furthermore, the UN calls on the tourism industry 'to promote sustainable tourism development in order to increase the benefits from the tourism resources for the population in the host communities and maintain the cultural and environmental integrity of the host community; to encourage cooperation of major groups at all levels with a view to promoting linkages within the local economy in order that benefits may be more widely shared' (International Council on Local Environmental Initiatives, 1999, pp. 2–13). Sustainable tourism development is not only economically critical for the DR, due to its potential to alleviate poverty in rural areas, but politically, the need to overtly prioritize sustainable tourism initiatives has to be catapulted ahead because the country has pledged to the global community that it will commit itself towards identifying and implementing national-level policies and strategies that align with the United Nations' Millennium Development Goals (MDGs).

At the UN Millennium Summit in 2000, heads of state of 189 countries, including DR President Leonel Fernandez, signed the UN Millennium Declaration, thereby endorsing the MDGs and agreeing to ratify domestic plans to achieve the goals by 2015. Thereafter, Fernandez's administration established a Presidential Commission on the MDGs, in order to oversee national, regional, and local development projects and to ensure that they address and facilitate the achievement of the delineated targets corresponding to the MDGs. In 2004, the DR was selected as a UN Millennium Project pilot country, thereby prompting the nation to gear its political and economic growth agenda towards serving as a 'model' for other developing countries of the world (Gagain, 2006b). Since then, the country, under the leadership of the Fernandez administration, has strived to demonstrate its 'political, cross-sectoral, and institutional' (Gagain, 2006a, p. 241) commitment to the eight MDGs: 1) Eradicate extreme poverty and hunger, 2) Achieve universal primary education, 3) Promote gender equality and empower women, 4) Reduce child mortality, 5) Improve maternal health, 6) Combat HIV/AIDS, malaria, and other diseases, 7) Ensure environmental sustainability, and 8) Develop a global partnership for development (United Nations Development Programme, 2012).

PURPOSE OF THE STUDY

According to a recent report of the UN World Tourism Organization, "tourism…especially for developing countries, can play a significant role in the

achievement of MDG1, MDG3, MDG7 and MDG8...responsible and sustainable tourism allows destinations and companies to minimize the negative impacts of tourism on the environment and on cultural heritage while maximizing its economic and social benefits" (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2012, p. 4). From the perspective of the DR, the steady growth of its international tourism industry and resultant financial benefits could effectively support the pro-poor, 'Dominican Model' and the country's ongoing efforts towards sustainable human development of its citizens - achievement of the MDGs, advancement of poverty alleviation initiatives, and reduction of inequalities in access to economic opportunities and social services (León, 2007; Gagain, 2006a).

The 'Dominican Model' provides an opportunity for a case-study to examine the extent to which resort tourism development could contribute towards achievement of MDGs 1, 3, 7 and 8, respectively (United Nations World Tourism Organization, 2012). It is apparent that the DR is experiencing a rapid growth in the development of large-scale, luxury resort communities and cities, intended for foreign ownership. Based on this premise, the rationale for evaluating the contribution of private, resort communities and cities in the DR, towards materialization of the nation's 2015 MDGs target, is timely. This case-study attempts to document the findings of a baseline analysis of MDGs 1, 3, 7 and 8, respectively in a large resort community, and neighboring tourism-based region, located in the newly created Punta Cana-Bávaro-Veron-Macao municipal district in La Altagracia, an eastern province of the DR. This resort community, within close proximity to Punta Cana International Airport, was chosen for the study because of the official Corporate Social Responsibility (CSR) claims of the property and its location within the region "described as one of the most important real estate and tourism destinations in the Caribbean" (Pike, 2007, p. 35). (Owing to a 'confidentiality agreement,' signed by the main researcher, the name of the resort community and its exact location cannot be disclosed in this paper). Utilizing this resort community, and the surrounding region, as the study area, the following three research questions were identified:

1. What are the main factors/variables that need to be addressed in order to examine the resort destination's progress towards achievement of the MDGs 1, 3, 7 and 8?
2. Based on the identified variables, what is the destination's current status, towards achievement of MDGs 1, 3, 7 and 8?
3. To what extent is the resort destination likely to accomplish the 2015 targets for MDGs 1, 3, 7 and 8?

METHODOLOGY

The Punta Cana-Veron resort area of the La Altagracia province was selected for this study. This region is a major international tourism destination in the DR (and the Caribbean); the area continues to experience tremendous growth with respect to the ongoing development of exclusive, luxury resort tourism communities and gated cities. Data relating to factors that were identified as appropriate for monitoring the resort destination's progress towards achievement of the MDGs were collected, compiled, and analyzed by an interdisciplinary research team. Mostly qualitative data, and some quantitative data, relating to the MDGs were obtained through in-depth interviews, field observations, and available municipal records.

The respondents of the in-depth interviews comprised of a convenience and snowball sample of male and female, DR, Haitian, and international community members, including local small business owners, direct- and indirect-tourism employees, corporate tourism management representatives, education providers and administrators, parent-teacher association members, law enforcement officials, doctors and medical professionals, medical service providers, social service providers, biologists, conservationists, energy/waste management experts, environmental education professionals, and international non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives. A convenience and snowball sampling strategy was utilized because of the exploratory nature of the research and the cost-effectiveness of this method of sample selection. "This non-probability method is often used during preliminary research efforts to get a gross estimate of the results, without incurring the cost or time required to select a random sample" (StatPac, 2012). Field observations were conducted throughout the resort region, at places such as supermarkets/grocery stores, food service/dining facilities, hotels, resort grounds and facilities, private and public schools, private hospitals, government clinics, pharmacies, police stations, government records offices, ecological education centers, outdoor recreation zones, and conservation areas. The sites chosen for field observations were also selected using a convenience and snowball sampling technique. The study team did not assess the reliability and validity of the methodology and variables that were utilized for the interviews and field observations as they were based on pre-determined, measurement protocols established in the United Nation's 2010 Millennium Development Goals Report (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2010). A main item that requires clarification, within the context of the methodology used, is the question regarding investigator bias. Since the study population was selected using convenience and snowball sampling techniques, the chosen methodology had the potential to introduce investigator bias. For the purpose of addressing and overcoming this bias to the

best possible extent, data from the interviews and field observations were aggregated and triangulated with five non-governmental organization (NGO) representatives (Save the Children, Peace Corps, USAID, Reef Check Dominican Republic and the Hispaniola Ornithological Society) operating in the resort area in order to determine the resort's current status regarding progress made towards achievement of each of the four MDGs. After the review of findings, the five NGO representatives were asked to respond to the following question: "To what extent is the resort destination likely to accomplish the 2015 targets for MDGs 1, 3, 7 and 8?" A five-point scale (0-4; ranging from 0 = *Goal will not be met* to 4 = *Goal will be met*), was employed for response categories and the average score for each of the four MDGs was utilized to quantify the extent to which the tourism resort was likely to accomplish the respective 2015 targets.

RESULTS

The results of the investigation, including findings from interviews and documented observations, are presented and discussed in the following four major subsections:
(a) Millennium Development Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger,
(b) Millennium Development Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women,
(c) Millennium Development Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability, and
(d) Millennium Development Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

Millennium Development Goal 1: Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger
The main target established by the UN, towards accomplishment of MDG1 is: reducing the proportion of people suffering from malnutrition and extreme poverty by half (Nullis-Kapp, 2004). Specifically, the target is to ensure that, by 2015, the percentage of the population whose income is less than one dollar a day is cut in half; full and productive employment, with benefits, is available to all, regardless of gender or ethnic background, and; the number of people suffering from extreme hunger is cut in half.

The primary variable that was assessed for MDG1 in the Punta Cana-Veron resort destination was employment. This variable was chosen because it was necessary to evaluate the availability of jobs in the area in order to obtain a picture of the poverty level in this region. In assessing employment it was deemed necessary to determine information regarding work benefits, wages, working conditions, savings, and age qualifications. The secondary variable that was assessed fell under the larger category of nutrition. This variable was chosen

in order to assess the region's success in targeting people that suffer from hunger. In assessing nutrition observations were made regarding food costs, portion sizes, and availability to food, food quality, staple foods, and sanitation. The tertiary variable that was assessed included ethnic bias in employment and availability of resources.

The interviews with Punta Cana employees included a good mix of job positions and ages. The additional data that was collected includes place of origin, number of people supported by the employees' income, monthly salary, average hours worked per day, and number of subsidized meals at work (Table 1).

Table 1. Employment Details of Resort and Community Workers

Job Title	Age	Place of Origin	# People Supported	Monthly Salary (pesos)	Avg. Hours/ Day	# Sub. Meals
Gardener	19	Haiti	2	4000	9	3
Gardener	20	Haiti	3	4500	9	3
Waiter	21	Higüey	2	8000	8	1
Tour Guide	22	Haiti	3	8000	8	3
Waiter	24	La Romana	2	10000	8	2
Butcher	24	Santo Domingo	1	8000	16	2
Store Clerk	29	Punta Cana	3	8000	8	3
Security Guard	30	Santo Domingo	3	7200	12	3
Pharmacist	32	San Pedro	3	9000	8	0
Construction Cook	33	San Francisco	2	4000	5	0
Security Guard	39	Higüey	3	8500	12	2
Empanada Vendor	42	Monte Plata	7	4000	9	0
Bartender	48	Higüey	5	8500	8	2

Personnel from the resort's Human Resource Department were interviewed in order to obtain official information regarding benefits offered to the resort employees. Resort employees also received health insurance that included dental health. All levels of employees, by law, received a basic health plan and the purchase of more comprehensive coverage, was available, upon request. Some employees were needed by the company to live near or on the premises in case of an emergency. In these cases, the resort provided local

housing for these employees. If an employee was needed to live near the premises, but wanted family with him/her, a stipend was provided for nearby accommodation. Employees that lived in towns like Higüey, Veron, and Bávaro were provided free transportation to and from work. The resort also provided employees with life insurance. If an employee had children in need of education, the resort provided enrollment in the company's International School, with a pro-rated pay plan according to employee's salary. Longer tenured employees had the ability to receive recommendations from the resort company to obtain loans for cars, houses, etc. Lastly, the resort also offered educational programs for employees wishing to obtain their G.E.D or learn English.

In terms of minimum monthly salary, the lowest that the resort paid was 8,365 Dominican pesos, mainly to immigrant workers from Haiti. All employees were required to demonstrate some basic knowledge of English and, in one example; only seven out of 300 candidates were selected at a convention in Santiago. The minimum salary slightly contradicted the figures collected during employee interviews, but there may have been a significant portion of income lost to government taxes that were not considered. The highest monthly salary, which was called level 10, for the Managers, was 45,937 Dominican pesos. By law, these salaries were evaluated and modified after two years of employment and every two years subsequently, thereafter. All employees were allowed five sick days per year and fourteen days of paid vacation. After being employed at the resort for ten years, the number of paid vacation days increased to eighteen.

When examining food costs, the first step was to identify a list of staple foods that were part of the everyday diet for the average Dominican. The list of staple foods that were examined included rice, milk, chicken, beans, eggs, water, potatoes, tomatoes, and, beer. The aim of this examination was to compare food prices (Table 2) between the supermarket in the resort village and the one in the adjoining region of Veron.

Table 2. Comparison of Food Prices (in Dominican Pesos)

Food Commodity	**Resort Supermarket**	**Veron Supermarket**
Rice (10 lb. bag)	270	200
Milk (1 liter carton)	38	50
Chicken (per lb.)	162	163
Beans (2 lb. bag)	89	90
Eggs (30 count)	163	120
Water (12 oz. Bottle)	14	20
Potatoes (per lb.)	25	20
Tomatoes (per lb.)	30	25
Presidente beer (6-pack)	264	270

During the course of the study, none of the interviewees were living on an income of less than 1.25 USD a day, and accessibility to food did not appear to be an issue, especially for the people employed at the resort. Interviews were also conducted with Haitian immigrant workers currently employed in gardening and other areas of the resort. These workers had comparable incomes to their Dominican counterparts. Furthermore, interviews in the neighboring region of Veron, which consisted of a largely Haitian population, did not reveal any citizen living below the poverty line. Most people that were observed and interviewed in Veron were making sufficient wages to support themselves and their families.

While addressing the MDG1 target to eradicate extreme poverty and hunger by 2015, it appeared that the Punta Cana-Veron resort destination region was well on its way to meeting this goal (achieving 3 points out of 4 on the goal achievement scale).

Millennium Development Goal 3: Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women

The main issue highlighted by MDG3 is the imbalance in employment and educational status, when comparing these variables between males and females. This goal addresses the imbalanced ratio of females to males in schools, effects of poverty on education-based gender inequality in rural and urban areas, the unequal pay for men and women, lack of benefits and security for women, and the vulnerable forms of employment for women. The proposed target of MDG3 is to eliminate gender disparity in all levels of education and employment by 2015.

The primary factors considered while addressing gender equality and women's empowerment in the tourism destination and region were education, employment and economic stability. To assess these factors, the issues of school attendance by gender, the continuation of education, the gender of teachers at schools, and the salaries and employee benefits received by male versus female resort workers were observed. Additionally, gender ratios within the resort's workforce and sexual harassment policies for employees were documented to examine the gender equality variable. The examination of variables was conducted using both quantitative and qualitative data. A variety of respondents and sites (as explained in the Methodology section) were used to accumulate data in order to analyze the three factors that affect gender equality and women's empowerment. Quantitative data was gathered from the local police departments in the form of crime statistics on violence against women. School directors and human resources personnel, of four local schools, were interviewed to determine the gender rations of both students and teachers. The four schools in the region included two public schools, a resort-supported private school and a resort-funded vocational school. Qualitative data was recorded through interviews with

representatives from the resort's human resources department to determine the level of gender equality and programs offered to women within the company.

The data (Table 3) indicated that females comprised an overwhelming majority of the school student body. This trend was apparent at both the primary level and secondary level, showing that females were being offered the opportunity to complete more than just a primary education, which has historically been a problem in developing countries where males have traditionally been given preferential treatment to go to school, while females are expected to take care of household activities. The figures show that the Punta Cana-Veron tourism resort region had made efforts to negate the major gender-based social barriers that had prevented females from receiving primary and secondary education in the past.

Table 3. Comparison of Gender in Schools

Type of School	**Public 1**	**Public 2**	**Private**	**Vocational**
Total # Students	892	306	435	354
Total # Female Students	510	221	291	237
Total # Male Students	382	85	144	117
Total # Female Teachers	22	3	45	7
Total # Male Teachers	7	0	5	2

The pattern of higher proportion of females compared to males in education, however, was not seen in examining the gender ratio of employees of resort. There was a vast disparity between the number of men and women who worked for the resort corporation, with a ratio of three to one, men significantly outnumbering women. The cause of this imbalance may be attributed to the nature of the resort job. Many of the positions within the resort corporation were labor intensive, including gardening, construction, and cooking. Because of physical ability limitations, female employees were restricted to housekeeping, customer service, and management positions, which were less, labor intensive.

Women who worked for the resort received twelve weeks of maternity leave, as required by law in the DR. All resort employees also received five personal days a year to use in response to any personal, child, or other family issues that may arise. The insurance plans provided by the resort corporation covered provisions regarding women's health, including pap-smears, obstetrics

and gynecology. However, family planning costs (e.g., purchase of birth control pills and condoms) were not covered by the insurance.

The resort's human resources department had established procedures to deal with cases of sexual harassment between employees. Written protocols were in place to protect victims and enact changes to prevent any further sexual harassment by the accused individual. In the greater community, violence against women was fairly high. Interviews with local law enforcement personnel revealed that an average of eight physical domestic abuse cases and one mental abuse case per day were reported locally, but many go unreported. Due to lack of resources, rape victims were sent to medical facilities in the capital city of Higüey, making it very difficult for the subjects to obtain required protection and health-care services. It was evident that the resort had a successful record of accomplishing gender equality in education and employment, but there was clearly a struggle for women's empowerment within the neighboring community of Veron. There was a lack of options for women to feel safe, continue education or obtain employment. Additionally, young female students in neighboring communities, often, did not continue education past secondary-level, because there was little institutional encouragement for females to become economically independent.

The findings exhibited that, in the Punta Cana-Veron region, there was an overall lack of basic programs for women's advancement and protection from abuse. Without such programs, women were generally left to be dependent on their male counterparts for economic and social support. Furthermore, women were inevitably forced to stay in 'gender-unequal' and abusive-relationship situations due to the inadequacy of private- and public-support services for their social development. Based on the current situation, the tourism destination is likely to fall short (2 points out of 4) of achieving MDG3 by 2015.

Millennium Development Goal 7: Ensure Environmental Sustainability

MDG7 addresses the consequences of human-induced environmental change. In order to ensure environmental sustainability, it is necessary to integrate the principles of sustainable development into local policies and programs. A major requirement for the achievement of MDG7 is a demonstrated evidence of activities and policies aimed at the reversal of loss of environmental resources as well as the provision of equitable sustainable access to safe drinking water and basic sanitation.

Based on the MDG7 priorities established by the UN (United Nations Development Programme, 2012), the Punta Cana-Veron region's commitment towards improving environmental sustainability were examined by identifying existing efforts relating to water consumption and sanitation, waste management, energy efficiency and power consumption, environmental education, and wildlife

conservation. How the resort region currently approached these issues have the potential to impact the environmental quality of both the immediate region and surrounding communities. Irrigation methods, water quality management systems, water conservation activities, waste reduction practices, energy efficiency measures, in-house environmental education and community environmental outreach programs, and ecological protection projects were addressed by the research team in order to determine whether or not the region was progressing in an environmental sustainable manner.

Within the resort area, it was observed that the consumption of water was not yet close to being sustainable. For example, golf course sprinklers were left on during periods of rain, housekeeping employees kept showers running while cleaning other parts of guest rooms, and the use of bottled water was the norm for drinking purposes. On the other hand, the resort region's centralized laundry facility utilized well water for cleaning purposes, and recycled the water for future loads. The neighboring community, Veron, had numerous wells at different sites that all connected to the same aqueduct. However, due to poor sanitation regulations, these water sources were nowhere near safe for consumption. Interviews revealed that once a well had dried up, locals used this open pit as toilets. On top of this issue, interviews with local water-stakeholders (including residents, conservationists, and government officials) indicated that these wells were in close proximity to waste disposal areas which lacked lining, thus, contaminating the rest of the aqueduct with Escherichia coli.

With regards to the separation of trash and recyclables (including plastic, glass and cardboard), the research team noticed that the resort did not have a mechanism to conduct this activity onsite, but rather, it was performed at an external waste management center. The only evidence of in-house separation of trash was observed at cafeteria locations for employees (which was not strictly enforced). Interviews with resort managers indicated that the property conducted its operations with high levels of energy-efficiency, by enforcing energy saving techniques, increasing the use of energy saving products and implementation of programs aimed at reducing the amount of electricity used daily by resort facilities (e.g., turning off lights and equipment whenever they were not in use). Company policy also stated that all new projects were required to use a design criteria for maximum energy savings. Based on interviews with local residents, it became clear that there was a severe lack of regulations concerning waste disposal and management and energy-efficiency in the neighboring community of Veron.

After interviewing resort administrators regarding the environmental education of employees, it was concluded that in-house environmental training and education of employees was severely lacking. The employees who received some structured form of education on environmental issues (e.g., through workshops and seminars) were those in higher up positions; the most education all

other workers received were usually delivered through posters. When Veron's community members were asked if they knew any ways to save energy and its environmental importance, it was found that if energy was being saved, it was mainly for the purpose of saving money rather than being concerned about the environment. A problem that was stressed multiple times by local conservationists was the lack of environmental education in the region. For example, the fishermen did not realize the negative impact they had on the local fish population because they felt the source was plentiful - this lack of education had led to a direct decline of the local fish population, particularly lobster.

The resort company had allocated 1,500 acres of private reserve for scientific research, recreational activities for guests, and conservation of native and endangered species. Resort managers emphasized that wildlife conservation was a priority for the company, as it played a large role in the attracting tourism to the region. Furthermore, the resort workers' responses seemed to corroborate the regional significance of the resort's conservation efforts. Local conservationists indicated that the resort was a pioneer when it came to involving and educating workers and members of the community in biodiversity and conservation programs. Biodiversity programs conducted by the resort also included protection, reintroduction, and monitoring of the threatened terrestrial-, marine-, and avian-species, throughout the region.

Overall, the Punta Cana-Veron tourism destination was seen as making significant contributions towards the environmental sustainability of the region, owing mainly due to the ecologically-sensitive practices of the tourism resort. Although the resort was solely responsible for many of the positive environmental activities taking place in the area, deteriorating environmental conditions in the neighboring community of Veron will likely impact the future environmental sustainability of the region. Based on this assessment, and due consideration of the various environmental sustainability projects that the resort community had implemented over the years and continued to establish in the region, it was determined that the resort region of Punta Cana-Veron was very likely to achieve MDG7 by 2015 (3 points out of 4 on the goal achievement scale).

Millennium Development Goal 8: Develop a Global Partnership for Development

The main focus of MDG8 is the establishment of global partnerships for development, particularly in rural developing areas, where linkages with domestic and international entities are crucial for the materialization of long-term regional human sustainability. As a result of the current global economic recession, developing parts of the world continue to experience severe domestic cutbacks in critical services required for sustainable human development. MDG8 is achievable only when national and regional sustainable "development strategies,

policies and programs are supported by international development partners." (United Nations Department of Economic and Social Affairs, 2010, p. 3).

The Punta Cana-Veron resort community and the surrounding regions were assessed to determine how the tourism destination was currently cooperating with global development organizations and obtaining resources for the purpose of supporting the provision of much needed sustainability services in the area. Observations and interviews were primarily geared towards documenting the extent to which global development organizations were presently involved in assisting the destination to address its environmental, social and governance issues. The primary factors, examined in the region, included the presence (and types) of sustainability-related outreach programs and organizations and availability of aid assistance (in-kind and monetary support from foreign and local organizations committed to developing rural areas).

The resort community had an ongoing partnership with Save the Children, an international organization, for the purpose of decreasing the levels of infant mortality and increasing family awareness of the need for proper child nutrition and education, in the region. The resort also worked with Peace Corps and the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) with the intent of addressing humanitarian issues such as 'shared economic prosperity, democracy and good governance, community health initiatives, food security, environmental sustainability and education, helping societies prevent and recover from conflicts, and providing humanitarian assistance in the wake of natural and man-made disasters' (United States Agency for International Development, 2012). The resort company maintained an ongoing relationship with universities, based in the US, to improve the capacities of the neighboring communities' health care services through clinical student internships and public-health outreach education programs. Additionally, the resort community received financial assistance from the Clinton Foundation/Clinton Global Initiative for implementing health projects for combating HIV/AIDS in the region.

The resort community had established training- and research-agreements with several international educations of higher learning, from the United States, Europe and the Caribbean, in community-based projects relating to business and social responsibility, marine and atmospheric research, and hospitality and tourism management. Furthermore, local partnerships were established with Reef Check Dominican Republic and the Hispaniola Ornithological Society to assess and combat the loss of marine- and bird-species, respectively, in the region. The resort company had also developed a partnership with La Altagracia Tourism Cluster to share sustainable best practices in the region with other local hotels, resorts, and businesses.

The Punta Cana-Veron tourism destination had implemented a substantial number of sustainable global partnerships for regional development. Global

program and initiatives were well integrated within the resort community and the surrounding regions. The global relations established by the resort community had a positive net effect on health care, educational facilities, urban development, water assessment, government involvement, species biodiversity and environmental conservation within the region. Considering the aforementioned ongoing efforts of the resort destination, it became evident that the Punta Cana-Veron region is very close to achieving MDG8 by 2015 (3.8 points out of 4 on the achievement scale).

CONCLUSIONS

Recent economic analyses of the DR's fiscal situation have indicated that national public debt of the DR is likely to increase in the coming years, and as a result, the country could experience further drying-up and reductions of spending in public service programs (Business Monitor International, 2009). In response to the sustainable human development challenges being faced by the DR, the country's political leadership, led by President Leonel Fernandez, has implemented several sustainability-focused "enlightened, progressive, and effective" (Holmes, 2010, p. 625) policies and austere, neoliberal reform measures (Morgan, Hartlyn, & Espinal, 2011) aimed at identifying and implementing international trade partnerships and domestic investments (Business Monitor International, 2010) that promote social, environmental, and economic stability in the nation. Furthermore, the DR's international commitment to the United Nations Millennium Declaration (Gagain, 2006a), and subsequent selection as a Millennium Project pilot country (Gagain, 2006b), has prompted the nation to address domestic sustainable human development issues by prioritizing the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) by 2015 (Achecar, 2010). The resultant 'Dominican Model,' proposed the creation, implementation and enforcement of MDGs-oriented performance targets (Bosman & Amen, 2006) for DR's main industry sectors, including tourism. In the next three to four years, the DR government is expected to invest approximately thirty two million USD to boost its international tourism sector (Business Monitor International, 2011). Considering the DR's continued focus on resort tourism development and ongoing foreign investment in such projects (Olijnyk, 2006), it is important to examine whether or not resorts have the potential to assist the country in achieving its MDG targets. According to the UN World Tourism Organization (2012), tourism can play a significant role in assisting countries realize their MDG targets, particularly those relating to MDGs 1, 3, 7 and 8. Based on this premise, a mixed methodology, baseline analysis of MDGs 1, 3, 7 and 8,

respectively was conducted in a major resort destination, located in the eastern DR.

Results from the assessment of MDG1, *Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger*, indicated that the resort destination was satisfactorily addressing extreme poverty and hunger issues in the region. Both resort employees and those employed in other sectors stated that they earned more than 1.25 USD per day and that their current employment provided sufficient wages to support themselves and their families, and obtain access to staple foods. Based on current trends, the region is very likely to achieve MDG1 targets, by 2015. Examination of MDG3, *Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women*, within the Punta Cana-Veron tourism destination revealed that while gender equality in education and employment was generally satisfactory within the resort community, there was a severe, distinguishable lack of basic support services for women's empowerment and physical security in the surrounding regions. Based on the analyses, it was determined that the resort tourism destination is not likely to achieve the 2015 targets for MDG3. In order to improve gender equality and women's empowerment in the region, 'intervention' programs (Gagain, 2006a) will need to be implemented to encourage women to become successful individuals in the community. Although the resort company has currently established educational programs for women's advancement, through a private school and vocational training institute, further efforts to empower women, in the surrounding communities, need to be escalated – counseling and women's health programs at local clinics and public schools and education programs focused on informing children and young adults on the importance of gender equality. Another problem facing the region was the prevalence of physical and psychological mistreatment of women. To alleviate this issue, collaborative public programs and services, involving local resort companies, public agencies, and non-governmental organizations (NGOs) are needed in order to establish local safe houses (that provide places of refuge) and medical-response facilities (for emergency and long-term care) for female victims of physical- and psychological- abuse. Furthermore, resort communities could initiate micro-lending programs, geared towards female residents of the Punta Cana-Veron tourism region, as a viable strategy to empower women by enabling them to start and manage small businesses in the area.

The assessment of MDG7, *Ensure Environmental Sustainability*, within the resort region provided encouraging results. Findings indicated that the resort community had an established track record of implementing significant environmental-sustainability projects in the region. Through observations and interviews, it became apparent that the resort community was the primary agent for improving the environmental quality of the region, however, the environmental conditions in some of the neighboring areas were deemed to be

detrimental to the environmental-sustainability of the region. Based on the analyses, it was determined that the tourism resort is likely to achieve MDG7 2015 targets, but the neighboring communities were unlikely to meet the required standards. Minimizing environmental deterioration and improving the ecological quality of neighboring communities should be of utmost priority to the region's resort industry, as poor water-quality, inadequate waste management systems, increasing energy consumption, lack of environmental education and loss of biodiversity in surrounding areas can potentially impact the tourism-appeal and, long-term, economic viability of the destination. Resort industry outreach in impacted communities, through public information sessions and technical workshops, focusing on the significance of environmental sustainability issues faced by the region as a whole, is recommended as a top-priority strategy for the successful achievement of MDG7 by the destination. Through the assessment of MDG8, *Develop a Global Partnership for Development*, it was noted that the resort community had contributed significantly towards linking the region to global development assistance partners, thereby garnering resources for sustaining human needs and basic rights in the region. In collaboration with regional, national, and international NGOs and development agencies, the resort community had established community programs and services to improve health care, environmental conservation, education, and the overall sustainability of the region. These documented efforts led to the study's conclusion that the Punta Cana-Veron destination was being well-supported by the resort tourism community, in terms of making significant progress towards achievement of the DR's 2015 MDG8 targets.

At present, there is a notable lacuna of clear methodology for the assessment of MDGs. This is the first study of its kind to conduct a formal assessment of (four) MDGS as they relate to a resort tourism destination's potential to assist a country in achieving its sustainable human development goals. The high prevalence of extreme poverty and inadequate availability of and access to services to support basic human needs and rights has been well documented within the DR context (Winters & Derrell, 2010). The overarching goal of the 'Dominican Model' was to identify sectors that would make significant contributions towards the DR's progress in reaching the 2015 MDG targets, and henceforth, prioritize investments in institutions that integrated with the nation's policies relating to "human welfare, equity, and poverty reduction" (Foster et al., 2010). The findings from this case-study indicate that continued investment in and favorable policies towards MDGs-grounded resort tourism development can, significantly boost the DR's efforts towards ensuring a sustainable future for its citizens.

LIMITATIONS

The findings of this case study are limited to the geographical region and subjects included in the research. The development policies currently being implemented in the Punta Cana-Veron tourism resort area do not necessarily reflect the larger 'Dominican Model,' which was proposed to address sustainable social development challenges facing the country. The resort community chosen for this study does not operate in isolation from the remainder of DR; tourism development and sustainability practices currently being adopted in the region are intertwined with broader social developmental forces influencing the entire country. Additionally, the economic activity being generated in the region, as a result of tourism development, is likely to create both income and employment multipliers in other parts of the DR. Progress made towards achievement of MDGs in other parts of the country is likely to contribute significantly to improvements in quality of life of all DR citizens, including those residing in the Punta Cana-Veron region.

While assessing the achievement of MDG1, *Eradicate Extreme Poverty and Hunger*, formal 'employment' was utilized as the primary variable in this study. The importance of informal economic activities (e.g., bartering, higglering, subsistence farming, remittances, etc.), in achieving MDG1, were not accounted for within the study due to data collection challenges associated with the tracking of this information. Gender ratio within the context of resort employment was identified as one of the primary variables in the examination of MDG3, *Promote Gender Equality and Empower Women*. It is important to acknowledge that gender differentials in informal sectors, although not included in the study, is another variable that needs to be addressed in order to obtain an accurate assessment of gender equality and regional achievement of MDG3. Although the assessment of MDG7, *Ensure Environmental Sustainability*, indicated that the resort community was making satisfactory progress in this area, a better understanding of the region's commitment to overall sustainability could be obtained through an integrated evaluation approach that addresses interrelated issues including education, development alternatives, and community engagement and well-being. For this study, the United Nation's 2010 Millennium Development Goals Report served as the only protocol for measuring MDGs 1, 3, 7, and 8. It is important to note that the study findings and conclusions are limited to the variables that were identified for the assessment. A better assessment of the MDGs requires the examination of additional, interrelated measurable parameters and factors that address sustainable human development from an integrated perspective.

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