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PROMOTING RURAL TOURISM

Final Report of the Morocco Rural Tourism Program

MARCH 2006

This publication was produced for review by the United States Agency for International Development. It was prepared by Chemonics International Inc.



The Roman site of Volubilis in the Meknès region is among the most well-preserved ruins in Morocco. Stretched out over 40 hectares, the site is located near Moulay Idriss, the country's most important Islamic city.

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USAID Contract No. PCE-I-00-99-00003-00 Task Order 814



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A Berber woman in Immuizer bakes bread in a traditional clay oven.

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FRONT COVER: (color photo) Talassemrane National Park, a key tourist attraction in the Chefchaouen PAT. The park is home to protected fir trees that stretch over 64,000 hectares.

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(black and white photo) Berber women in traditional attire. As many as three-quarters of present-day Moroccans are believed to be of Berber descent.

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TOP: Tents set up by tourists at an informal camp site in the Middle Atlas, home to large cedar and oak forests.

CENTER: Many rural accommodations, such as this one in the Immouzer region, are traditional Moroccan homes built around a central courtyard and transformed into guesthouses.

BOTTOM: Artisan at work in a souvenir shop in Ifrane. Wood carving is a popular revenue-generating activity for Morocco's rural populations.

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Despite a wealth of cultural and natural attractions, Morocco has yet to reach its full tourism potential. Most of the 5.5 million visitors¹ who travel to the Kingdom each year visit beach destinations or the imperial cities. Yet research shows that two out of three tourists would like to spend more time in the country's rural areas.

Developing tourism in the small villages and towns of Morocco holds the promise of higher incomes, more jobs, and greater diversification of a rural economy largely based on agriculture. In 2002, the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) launched a three-year program to help the country seize these opportunities. Initial funding was provided by the United States-North Africa Economic Partnership.

Strategy development. The program team worked with the Moroccan Ministry of Tourism to craft a rural tourism strategy based on a proven destination development model. Within this framework, we helped establish “tourism destination areas” in three regions with high tourism potential: Chefchaouen, Ifrane, and Immouzer Ida Outanane.

The model is based on sustainable tourism practices that seek to provide equitable economic benefits, conserve the natural heritage, respect socio-cultural traditions, and provide a meaningful experience for tourists. We worked with partners in each target area to foster public-private collaboration and investment in rural tourism development and promotion.

Tourists enjoy beverages outside the Casa Aladin restaurant in a Rif mountain village.



Product development. Consistent with the national strategy, we developed 18 new itineraries in the target areas, using a basic methodology that can be replicated in other regions. The approach retraces the steps a tour operator normally goes through before an itinerary is deemed ready to be published in a brochure.

The itineraries capitalize on the unique characteristics of each area and are designed to maximize interactions between tourists and host communities. A Group Tour Planner provides operational details for each itinerary, along with sophisticated GIS maps showcasing key attractions.

Promotion. The program then shifted its attention to promoting the itineraries based on a strategy aimed at attracting tourists to rural areas and encouraging longer stays there. Collaboration with Morocco's national tourism

promotion agency was at the core of our approach.

Working with the agency, the Ministry of Tourism, and other partners, we created a range of materials—from leaflets to Web sites—that helped establish a recognizable “brand” for rural tourism. We organized familiarization trips that acquainted 13 international tour operators and 6 Moroccan agents with the new itineraries. We forged alliances with local associations for support in promoting tourism in their area. And we sponsored the participation of three Moroccan operators at a leading alternative tourism fair in Germany.

These efforts contributed to building awareness of Morocco's rural tourism products within the travel trade and, to a lesser degree, among the traveling public in key European markets.

Capacity building. Knowledge, skills, and tools were transferred to national, regional, and local partners throughout implementation. By the end of the program, we had left behind a database of 500 tour operators, market survey methodologies, technical manuals drawing on international best practices, and a cadre of local stakeholders trained in various aspects of sustainable tourism development.

Through our training workshops, more than 220 tourism officials, private companies, and local associations learned about product development and promotion, tour planning and logistics, sales and marketing, interpretative and guide services, customer service and hospitality, and ways to attract investment in tourism infrastructure. Experts from the U.S. Department of the Interior helped Moroccan partners create action plans to enhance tourist sites, which were used as the basis for pilot projects in two rural areas.

Pilot projects. A series of pilot initiatives demonstrated practical ways to add value to the rural itineraries. They involved

marketing assistance to a women's cooperative, refurbishment of the world's largest apiary, and upgrades to a scenic trail, two rest areas, and a visitor center. The pilots served as catalysts for revitalizing local communities and provided sustainable development models that could be replicated on a wider scale.

Lessons learned. As the first USAID effort to develop rural tourism in Morocco, the program offers important lessons for the future. Chief among them is the need to promote public-private partnerships, strengthen the Rural Tourism Unit within the Ministry of Tourism, and replicate successful pilot approaches to other areas of Morocco. Other lessons learned include the need to increase promotional efforts, provide more training for service providers, attract investment in rural tourism development, and set realistic indicators for measuring success.

Despite the challenges it faced, the program contributed to raising the profile of rural Morocco as a competitive destination, setting a foundation for continued development of the sector.



Adil Hassouni (right), then head of rural tourism in the Ministry of Tourism, talks to Benhameda Hassan, owner of the Casa Hassan inn, during a visit to Chefchaouen.

CHAPTER I

CONTEXT AND CHALLENGES

Tourism is a major source of revenue and jobs for Morocco. The sector employs 540,000 people, accounting for 4.5 percent of the total labor market, and generates over 15 percent of direct export receipts, second only to money transfers from Moroccans living abroad.

Situated at a unique crossroad between Africa, Europe, and the Middle East, Morocco attracts 5.5 million visitors each year¹. Yet it lags far behind competing countries, ranking 9th among the 10 principal tourist destinations in the Mediterranean basin.

This is largely due to lack of diversification in the tourism “product.” Morocco offers two main travel experiences: beach stays in places like Agadir or tours of the imperial cities of Fès, Marrakech, Meknès, and Rabat. While they continue to attract visitors, these traditional attrac-

tions now face increasingly stiff competition from other destinations in the region.

MOROCCO’S RESPONSE TO INCREASED COMPETITION IN THE TOURISM SECTOR

Recognizing the need to improve its competitive position, the Moroccan government unveiled the Plan Azur in 2002, a national tourism strategy that seeks to attract 10 million visitors by 2010. Its primary focus is on developing a number of beach resorts, with related investments in golf courses, casinos, and other infrastructure.

Besides the conventional tourist, however, Morocco is well placed to draw higher numbers of visitors interested in ecotourism, adventure, and educational travel. Together, they may make up as much as one-third of the international tourism market.

¹ This figure includes visits by Moroccan nationals living abroad.

Tour operators are already taking advantage of the growing interest in alternative travel experiences. Many companies offer trekking tours, mostly in the Central and Eastern High Atlas, but also in the Anti Atlas and along the Atlantic coast. The country's desert regions have also grown in popularity, so much so that unfettered tourism there is increasing pressures on this fragile environment.

In addition to organized tours, many classic itineraries now offer a taste of adventure from the comfort of conventional accommodations. Adventure tourism is by no means limited to backpackers traveling on the cheap as visitors with high levels of disposable income increasingly choose this style of vacation. The age range is also expanding—from families with young children to enthusiastic trekkers well into their sixties.

More independent travelers are straying off the beaten track than ever before in search of genuine ethnic experiences. A 2002 visitor exit survey funded by USAID found that two out of three tourists want more contact with Morocco's small towns and villages. The number of *riads* (traditional houses used as hotels) appearing in key locations such as Marrakech and Fès is proof of the growing demand for authenticity.

Within this context, the characteristics that sell Morocco remain essentially the same. Proximity to Western Europe, rich layers of

culture and history blending Berber, Arab, Muslim, and French influences, an extraordinary wealth of handicrafts, the invariable friendliness of the Moroccan people, and excellent value for money are all valuable competitive assets.

Despite the push for new destinations, tourism development has been patchy and many areas of the country are still relatively untapped. With effective policies and management, rural tourism has the potential to reinforce the tourism sector's position as one of the largest foreign exchange earners over the next decade.

U.S. ASSISTANCE TO MOROCCO'S TOURISM SECTOR

To help Morocco fulfill its tourism potential, USAID launched a three-year program in 2002 to:

- Assist the Ministry of Tourism in developing an overall rural tourism strategy
- Build institutional capacity for rural tourism planning and development at the national, regional, and local levels
- Develop and promote new itineraries in rural areas with high tourism potential

Through a competitive bidding process, USAID selected Chemonics International, an international development consulting firm based in Washington, DC, to implement the \$2.5 million program.

USAID's Tourism Capacity Building and Rural Tourism Development Program—known as the Morocco Rural Tourism (MRT) program for short—provided an opportunity to contribute to the Kingdom's ambitious goal of attracting 10 million

tourists by 2010. In light of the recently signed Morocco-U.S. free trade agreement, it was also designed to help Morocco respond to the challenges of open trade by diversifying the rural economy.

SUMMARY OF MRT ACCOMPLISHMENTS

Rural Tourism Strategy:

- Helped the Ministry of Tourism design and implement a national rural tourism strategy
- Helped the ministry develop the concept of tourism destination areas, or *pays d'accueil touristiques* (PATs)
- Fostered partnerships and strategic alliances at the national, regional, and local levels to promote an integrated approach to rural tourism development and investments in tourism infrastructure

Product Development:

- Developed and published 18 rural tourism itineraries
- Developed GIS maps for each priority PAT and trained five Ministry of Tourism personnel in mapping techniques
- Published all itineraries, along with operational details, in a Group Tour Planner

Promotional Activities:

- Developed a three-year rural tourism marketing strategy in collaboration with public and private sector actors
- Created an overall rural tourism brand and a distinct identity for each of the three priority PATs
- Published leaflets for the three PATs in French, English, and Spanish
- Translated a French-language desert and mountain tourism guide into English and Spanish
- Produced promotional literature
- Designed a national Web portal on rural tourism
- Created a database of more than 500 international and Moroccan tour operators
- Organized two familiarization trips for international tour operators

- Built partnerships with incoming tour operators and local associations for joint promotion of rural tourism itineraries
- Supported Moroccan participation in an international tourism fair

Training and Capacity Building:

- Built Ministry of Tourism capacity to track rural tourism flows through a survey of over 1,400 international visitors to Morocco
- Organized workshops on rural tourism planning for 130 public and private sector stakeholders
- Organized workshops on visitor site development and tourist information for 50 regional tourism planners, environmental protection officers, and local development agents*
- Held the first national workshop on financing opportunities for rural tourism development for 40 microfinance professionals
- Created a comprehensive manual on design, management, and operation of rural accommodations

Pilot Projects:

- Helped a women's cooperative diversify its argan oil products, improve marketing, and establish an interpretative center*
- Restored an apiary as a heritage site*
- Upgraded two roadside pull-offs and a visitor center*
- Refurbished a scenic trail, along with car parking and rest areas*
- Launched an awareness-building campaign on responsible tourism and environmental protection of mountain areas

*In partnership with the U.S. Department of the Interior.



Colorful patio of a rural guesthouse in the Rif region of northern Morocco. Ethnic elements reflected in the architecture and décor appeal to tourists looking for an authentic experience.

CHAPTER 2

CREATING A STRATEGY

With help from the MRT program and the United Nations Development Program, the Ministry of Tourism crafted a national strategy for rural tourism development in 2003—the first of its kind in Morocco. The strategy prioritized three regions for tourism development: Chefchaouen in the Rif mountains, Ifrane in the Middle Atlas region, and Immouzer Ida Outanane in the hinterland of Agadir. It called for creating “tourism destination areas”—or *pays d’accueil touristique* (PATs)—in each of these regions based on a destination development model that had proven successful in France.

The three priority PATs represent some of the best of Morocco’s rural tourism potential, encompassing many community development opportunities and a mix of coastal, desert, mountainous, and pastoral tourism resources. During the program, four other areas

were identified for development at a later stage—three in the High Atlas and one in the Desert region—based on lessons learned in the first three PATs.

THE PAT MODEL

A PAT is the totality of the visitor attractions, infrastructure, and tourism stakeholders in a particular area. Based on sustainable tourism practices, the concept seeks to balance the economic, environmental, and socio-cultural aspects of tourism development by providing economic benefits to host communities, making optimal use of environmental resources to conserve the natural heritage, and respecting cultural traditions and lifestyles—all while ensuring a meaningful experience for visitors.

According to the PAT model, a tourism destination area must have:

KEY ELEMENTS OF THE PAT CONCEPT

- Clearly defined geographic area
- Natural, cultural, and human attractions
- Specific identity
- Local stakeholders willing to work together
- Proximity to a generating market or gateway
- Tourism planning, infrastructure, and activities
- Visitor center (*maison d'accueil*)
- Quality charter and regional label
- PAT association

- *Clearly defined geographic boundaries.*
- *Natural, cultural, and human attractions*, with a focus on a few tourism products of good quality rather than a proliferation of low-quality products.
- *A specific identity:* Each PAT must be perceived as an entity in itself. To establish a position in the market, PATs must define and promote the differentiating elements of their area.
- *Local stakeholders willing to work together.* For an area to become a rural tourism destination, not just a stop off-point, structured networks and collaborative agreements between public and private sector actors are essential. Community involvement is a key part of the equation.
- *Proximity to a generating market or gateway.* Rural tourism destinations must be easily accessible to potential visitors through reliable transportation systems.
- *Tourism planning, infrastructure, and activities.* A PAT must operate within the framework of a regional tourism development

strategy consistent with overall national goals. This should include sound tourism development planning, investment in tourism-related infrastructure, and a range of activities to satisfy the diverse tastes of today's international visitor.

- *A visitor center.* A PAT must have a welcoming center where visitors can seek information on local attractions, activities, and accommodations, and ask questions of people who are knowledgeable about the area.
- *A quality charter and regional label.* Stakeholders in each PAT must agree to provide minimum levels of quality with regard to accommodations, transport, guide services, etc. Each PAT also needs to create a recognizable visual "brand" as a promotional tool that reinforces the overall rural tourism brand.
- *A PAT association.* Each PAT must be governed by a clear management structure that delineates roles and responsibilities for tourism development and marketing—two key functions that must be addressed simultaneously. Such a structure should



A small souvenir shop in Chefchaouen sells handmade rugs, lamps, pottery, and other handicrafts.

include public officials, community leaders, tourism businesses, and NGOs to ensure alignment between public and private sector objectives.

To guide implementation of the rural tourism strategy, the MRT program helped the Ministry of Tourism craft an action plan that entailed feasibility studies in each priority PAT, collaboration with local stakeholders to establish the PATs, and promotion of the destinations in conjunction with the Moroccan National Tourist Office—the country’s tourism promotion agency—and the private sector.

We then worked on multiple fronts to develop the PAT concept for each priority area, create and promote rural tourism itineraries for each PAT, foster part-

nerships and investment, build public and private sector capacity for rural tourism planning, and implement pilot projects to demonstrate the benefits of sustainable tourism practices.

PARTNERSHIPS AND STRATEGIC ALLIANCES

A participatory approach was essential to ensuring sustainable results. Cooperation with counterparts, partners, and stakeholders was built into all program activities. Major partners included:

- Regional and provincial offices of the Ministry of Tourism
- Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT), the quasi-autonomous agency responsible for promoting tourism in Morocco



Archways, intricate lanterns, and wrought-iron furniture are common elements in rural accommodations such as this one in Taroudant, an ancient city at the edge of the Immuouzer PAT.



Inside rural guesthouses, the rooms are decorated with a blend of Arab, Berber, and African accents.



- High Commission for Water, Forests, and Anti-Desertification, a government agency responsible for protected areas such as national parks and reserves
 - Social Development Agency, a semi-autonomous government agency that addresses social and development issues
 - Agency for the Development of Northern Provinces, a government agency that reports directly to the Prime Minister's office
 - Local stakeholders, including associations, NGOs, communes, and tourism enterprises
 - German Agency for Technical Cooperation (GTZ), which works in cooperation with the High Commission for Water and Forests to develop policies for the management of protected areas
- In the same vein, the MRT program encouraged cooperation between the public and private sectors, and between tour operators and local communities, in the planning and development of

rural tourism products. In each PAT, the program team played an instrumental role in brokering agreements between major institutional stakeholders. The agreements identified a list of targeted actions and allocated budgetary responsibilities for the development of a given PAT.

These efforts generated additional resources for the program. For example, they led the ONMT to earmark 1 million dirhams

(\$107,740) for rural tourism promotion. Marking another success for the program, the Italian NGO Movimondo provided 700,000 dirhams (\$75,419) in financing to upgrade inns and *gîtes* (rural guesthouses) in the Chefchaouen PAT, using a pilot version of the rural accommodation manual developed by the MRT program as a guide. The first group of beneficiaries includes seven rural tourism enterprises.



Foreign and local tour operators study an interpretative panel in the Talassemtane National Park.

CHAPTER 3

DEVELOPING RURAL TOURISM PRODUCTS

Within the framework of Morocco's rural tourism strategy, the MRT team created 18 new itineraries in the first two years of the program, shifting the focus to promotion and marketing in the final year. Building on the wealth of cultural and natural attractions rural Morocco has to offer, the itineraries provide operational details and illustrative costs so tour operators can easily incorporate them into their programs.

MARKET-READY ITINERARIES

To guide the development of rural tourism itineraries, we began by assessing natural and cultural resources, tourism infrastructure, and visitor services in the three target PATs. This helped identify infrastructure development needs—information that was later used to promote investment and launch pilot projects to upgrade tourist attractions.

Based on the findings of the assessment, we developed itineraries that capitalized on the unique characteristics, natural beauty, and cultural heritage of each PAT. In Chefchaouen, for example, the itineraries include mountain trails in the footsteps of the ancient Sufi mystics and a voyage of discovery from mountain to sea. Other itineraries include a trekking adventure in the great cedar forest of the Middle Atlas, escapades in the valleys and palm groves of the Atlas, and mountain biking in the countryside.

In crafting new itineraries, we used a basic methodology that formed the foundation for training in tour planning. Our approach focused on creating tourism products that could be marketed by local incoming operators and promoted directly to foreign tour operators or even the public. In the design phase, we

Swiss bikers enjoy the rural tourism experience in Morocco.



replicated the steps a tour operator would normally go through until the itineraries were deemed “market-ready”—i.e. ready to be published in a brochure.

The steps consisted of identifying points of interest, quality accommodations, transport links, services and activities, opportunities for interaction with host communities, and how all these elements could be combined in a coherent, cost-effective fashion—with a convenient start and end point—to produce a balanced itinerary. The ultimate goal was to create a marketable commodity with enough ‘hooks’ to attract sales in the target markets.

All itinerary planning and development involved extensive discussions with local associations and suppliers in each region. A panel including the Ministry of Tourism’s rural tourism team, USAID, and MRT staff evaluated each itinerary based on the following criteria:

- Consistency with the overall rural tourism strategy
- Proximity to an international gateway (major urban center or resort) and protected area (national park)
- Diversity of local tourism resources

“We were looking for a new experience, a complete change of scene, far from the stress of work and everyday life... we were delighted and ready to come back.”

**MORBIER RANDO,
MEMBER OF SWISS
BIKING CLUB**

- Distinctive features
- Existing infrastructure, primarily accommodations, but also restaurants, guides, and activities (e.g. trekking, mountain biking, horseback riding)
- Safety and security

All 18 itineraries were based on activities with the potential to generate visitors. Most contained some form of walking, a core ingredient in any rural tourism circuit. From easy day rambles to sustained treks, walking allows visitors to enjoy an area at their own pace. It also maximizes their interactions with local inhabitants and merchants, providing opportunities for them to purchase local goods and services.

Two itineraries were specifically designed for mountain bikers, a rapidly expanding market. A Swiss mountain biking club learned about them on the Internet and contacted our team to express interest in “testing” one of the itineraries. We referred the club to a Moroccan agent who organized a tour in the Ifrane PAT for 10 bikers in May 2004. “We were looking for a new experience, a complete change of scene, far from the stress of work and everyday life,” said biking club member Morbier Rando. “The itinerary appeared interesting, but we wanted to test it before recommending it to other club members. I must admit that we were delighted and ready to come back and to recommend the itinerary to other bikers.”

By the end of the trip, the bikers had spent \$7,355 in eight days on lodging, meals, guides, and entertainment, and an additional \$5,176 on handicrafts and souvenirs. More club members are expected to visit rural Morocco as a result of the connection established by the MRT program.

MAPPING THE PATs

As we developed rural tourism itineraries for the priority PATs, we also created detailed maps using ArcView, a sophisticated geographic information system. In parallel with these efforts, we trained five Ministry of Tourism staff in ArcView mapping techniques. Through a series of one-day workshops, the participants produced several maps that were reprinted in tourism brochures and other promotional materials.

GROUP TOUR PLANNER

Once the itineraries were completed and approved by the Ministry of Tourism and USAID, we published them in a Group Tour Planner for tour operators, along with maps showcasing major attractions in each target PAT. The manual provides all the operational details needed to run the tours, including day-by-day, activity-by-activity breakdowns for all tour components—from lodging and restaurants, to cultural and natural attractions, to transportation services.

Seasoned tour operators know their market and will generally adapt any off-the-shelf itinerary to fit their specific requirements with regard to accommodations, speed and style of travel, mode

of transport, and the balance between organized activities and free time. The details provided in the Group Tour Planner facilitate

their task, reducing much of the effort required to develop and market tourism products.



Detailed GIS map of the Immouzer PAT featuring accommodations, camping sites, biking trails, and other tourist attractions.

RURAL TOURISM ITINERARIES DEVELOPED BY MRT²

No.	PAT	Itinerary	GIS Map Produced	Operational Details Provided by MRT
1	Chefchaouen	Transverse of the Rif: From the Atlantic to the Mediterranean	x	x
2	Agadir/Immouzer Ida Outanane	Voyage through Tananis country	x	x
3	Middle Atlas	From Volubilis to the Valley of Rocks	x	x
4	Middle Atlas	Discovery of the Eastern Middle Atlas	x	x
5	Middle Atlas	Trekking in the great cedar forest of the Middle Atlas	x	x
6	Agadir/Essaouira	Discovery of the argan country		x
7	Ouarzazate	Voyage from the Mgoun massif to the 40 <i>kasbahs</i> of N'Koub		x
8	Middle Atlas	Mountain biking through the Aït Mguild tribal lands (professional circuit)	x	x
9	Middle Atlas	Mountain biking through the Aït Mguild tribal lands (amateur circuit)	x	x
10	Chefchaouen	A mystical voyage in the footsteps of the ancient Sufis (8 days)	x	x
11	Chefchaouen	Voyage to discover the mountain within mystic Sufis' country (12 days)	x	x
12	Chefchaouen	A novel voyage from mountain to sea (4 and 8 days)	x	x
13	Ouarzazate/Zagora	From Ouarzazate to Zagora (7 days)		
14	Agadir/Immouzer Ida Outanane	From the Anti Atlas to the High Atlas (8 days)	x	x
15	Agadir/Immouzer Ida Outanane	From the Atlantic to the Anti Atlas (10-12 days)	x	x
16	Agadir/Immouzer Ida Outanane	Valleys and palm groves of the Atlas (8 days)	x	x
17	Agadir/Immouzer Ida Outanane	Escapade between valleys (4 days)		x
18	Agadir/Immouzer Ida Outanane	Mountain biking in the honey country (8 days)	x	x

² See enclosed CD-ROM for details on all itineraries except No. 7 and 13. These were developed early in the life of the program and lie outside the regions later defined as priority PATs.



A Moroccan artisan in Immouzer makes pottery using traditional techniques handed down through the generations.

CHAPTER 4

PROMOTING RURAL TOURISM ITINERARIES

In the last year of the program, the MRT team stepped up efforts to promote the 18 itineraries developed for the three priority PATs. Within the framework of a cohesive rural tourism marketing strategy, we designed various promotional tools aimed at attracting tourists to rural areas and encouraging longer stays there.

Efforts to publicize rural tourism products within the travel trade targeted tour operators selling adventure travel packages in key markets. They included familiarization trips to the PATs, partnerships with local companies and associations for joint promotion of rural tourism itineraries, and participation in an international travel fair to raise the visibility of rural Morocco.

MARKETING STRATEGY

In parallel with the development of tour itineraries, we worked with the Ministry of Tourism, the Moroccan National Tourist Office (ONMT), and the private sector to develop a strategy to promote the PATs. The strategy was used to set priorities and leverage funding from the ONMT. Its primary objective was to increase the number of visitors to the three priority PATs—and rural Morocco in general—by promoting rural tourism products to the travel trade, the press, and to a lesser degree directly to travel consumers. In line with Ministry of Tourism priorities, we targeted major European markets, namely France, Germany, Italy, Spain, and the United Kingdom.

Tourists take a donkey ride through a rural area in Immouzer.



Key components of the marketing strategy included:

- Creating a rural tourism “brand”
- Developing promotional materials
- Disseminating promotional materials through various channels, including ONMT offices abroad, mailings to tour operators, and the Internet
- Organizing familiarization trips for foreign tour operators
- Building partnerships with incoming tour operators and local associations to market rural tourism itineraries

- Launching a national rural tourism Web portal
- Participating in international travel fairs

Cooperation with the ONMT was essential for the success of these efforts. This quasi-autonomous institution has tourism promotion offices in 14 countries, a significant budget, and strong links with the private sector in major European markets, albeit with a focus on conventional tourism. Among the fruits of this association were two ONMT-funded familiarization trips for foreign tour operators, Web sites and leaflets for the three PATs, foreign-language editions of a mountain tourism guide, and participation in an alternative travel show in Germany.

RURAL TOURISM BRAND AND PROMOTIONAL LITERATURE

Visitors to areas off the beaten tourist track often complain about the virtual absence of literature and information on local attractions. This provided an opportunity for the MRT program to fill the void. To guide these efforts, we needed to create a strong visual identity for rural tourism in Morocco—a series of graphic elements that would be carried through all promotional materials to establish a consistent and recognizable rural tourism “brand.”

All marketing pieces—from brochures to Web sites—carried common elements reflecting the brand. To reinforce each PAT’s distinct identity, we designed an individual logo to reflect the unique characteristics of that destination within the framework of the overall rural tourism brand. The logos were then used across a broad range of products, including maps, information panels, posters, and leaflets.

We produced leaflets for each of the priority PATs featuring local attractions and activities. These were designed for distribution through tourist informa-

tion offices, tourism fairs, direct mailings to tour operators, and ONMT offices abroad. The leaflets essentially serve two key functions: (1) they seek to attract visitors to a particular destination before they decide to travel and (2) they provide useful information about the destination once tourists have arrived there.

All the leaflets were printed in English and French. The Chefchaouen leaflet was published in Spanish as well due to the high number of Spanish visitors to the area. We also translated a recently updated French-language guide to desert and mountain tourism into English and Spanish. The ONMT covered the cost of printing the guide and the PAT leaflets, while the USAID-funded contract paid for the translations.

In addition to targeting new arrivals, our promotional efforts sought to divert visitors already in Morocco into the PATs while encouraging longer stays there. Tourists are more likely to extend their stay in a rural area if they have detailed information about the various activities and attractions it has to offer. With this in mind, we installed a range of information displays and interpretive panels at various sites. Along



with the PAT leaflets, these materials explain the significance of key attractions so visitors can more fully appreciate their surroundings. They also provide an opportunity to promote other regions and the rural tourism brand as a whole.

NATIONAL WEB PORTAL

Due to the growing use of electronic media for travel purposes, we felt it was essential to develop a Web presence for rural tourism. We began by creating a program Web site (www.ruraltourism.ma) and an electronic newsletter to raise awareness of USAID efforts in the sector. The e-newsletter received more than 500 subscription requests.

We then turned our attention to designing a national Web portal for rural tourism, working closely with the Ministry of Tourism and a Moroccan IT firm on content and design.

The portal features the itineraries developed for the three priority PATs, key attractions and activities across Morocco, and information to help tourists plan their stay. Its architecture allows the Ministry of Tourism to continue adding other PATs as they are developed.

The site builds on promotional materials such as the PAT leaflets and logos, creating a cohesive image and reinforcing the rural tourism brand. A sophisticated search engine allows Web surfers to find accommodations based on regions and activities of interest.

The French version of the site was handed over to the Ministry of Tourism and was translated into English. The site currently resides at www.tourisme.gov.ma/rural, but will eventually be moved to www.tourismerural.ma upon its official launch.

TOUR OPERATOR DATABASE

To deepen understanding of the travel trade and facilitate promotional efforts, we developed a database of more than 500 international and Moroccan tour operators specializing in rural, adventure, and activity tourism, complete with contact information and a description of their products and areas of operation. The database was continually expanded over the course of the program with information gathered through Web searches, trade shows, and ONMT offices abroad. We also acquired a travel industry database that includes contacts in the scientific, academic, volunteer, and educational tourism markets. The databases were used to gauge interest in the rural itineraries and invite tour operators to test them through familiarization trips.

FAMILIARIZATION TRIPS

Famtrips are used the world over to acquaint tour operators with the products they are selling or introduce them to new ones. They allow participants to apply the knowledge gained during the trip to build sales or develop new product lines. By experiencing the destination first-hand, operators are better able to evaluate



Abdelkrim Akoudad (left), a regional Ministry of Tourism official, talks with Houcine Boufassi, IT manager of the MRT program, in the Ifrane visitor center renovated by the program. Interpretative panels highlighting the region's key attractions hang on the walls behind them.



Screen shot of the rural tourism Web portal developed by the MRT program, now part of the Ministry of Tourism's official site.

the merits of a particular destination and convey its advantages to potential travelers. Being able to say “I’ve been there” can have a strong influence on customers.

The MRT program organized two famtrips, both funded by the ONMT, that exposed a total of 13 foreign tour operators to the three PATs. For the first trip, held in May 2004, six international tour operators and two Moroccan agents visited the Ifrane and Chefchaouen PATs. The second trip, held in November 2004, brought seven international tour operators to the Immouzer PAT, along with four Moroc-

can agents. Royal Air Maroc, the national airline, covered the airline tickets of all foreign tour operators.

Over the course of the five-day trips, famtrip participants experienced various visitor attractions, accommodations, and restaurants along the itineraries developed by the MRT program. They received the Group Tour Planner featuring detailed information on the areas they had visited. In a questionnaire completed after the tour, all 13 international operators rated the manual as “useful” or “very useful.” They gave positive marks for the quality

of the food and the authenticity of the inns and guesthouses they had visited. The itineraries created by MRT were also well received. Most tour operators and incoming agents said they would consider including them in their brochures, mostly as part of longer itineraries.

Famtrip participants were also asked to project the annual number of visitors they envisaged bringing to Morocco if they published any of the tours in their brochures. They estimated it would be possible to bring a total of 1,440 visitors to the Ifrane PAT over a three-year period—480 in the first year and incrementally higher numbers in the following two years as the

itinerary gains visibility and an established client base.

The numbers were higher for the Chefchaouen PAT. There, the operators said they would expect to bring 950 tourists in the first year, and an additional 1,900 visitors the following two years. For the Immouzer PAT, they projected the possibility of bringing a total of 1,315 tourists over three years. As shown in the table below, this brings the total number of prospective visitors that could be generated by famtrip participants to more than 5,600 in three years.

Based on data from an MRT-sponsored rural tourism survey, the average tourist who visits a

FAMTRIP BUILDS INTEREST IN RURAL ITINERARIES

“I would like to thank the entire MRT team for a warm welcome to Morocco, along with the various people we interacted with, including local operators as well as the owners and managers of the hotels and *gîtes* we visited. This famtrip was as remarkable for being interesting as for its perfect organization, without any wasted time. With help from Sport Travel, our local operator, we will study the possibility of introducing a UCPA program in the Immouzer region for the winter of 2006, and are looking to reintroduce a program in the Rif mountains for the summer of 2006.”

JEAN-FRANÇOIS BOUVET, TOUR OPERATOR WITH THE FRENCH AGENCY UCPA, AND PARTICIPANT IN THE IMMOUZER FAMTRIP

rural area spends 476 dirhams (\$51) a day.³ This is a conservative estimate that only includes expenditure on meals, lodging, souvenirs, and other miscellaneous items, but excludes the price of airline tickets or tour packages. By contrast, the Swiss bikers who took part in an eight-day tour of the Ifrane PAT each spent an average of 1,448 dirhams (\$156) per day.

The rural tourism survey also found that the average tourist spends 12.5 days in Morocco, of which 5 days are in rural areas.⁴ This means that the average tourist to Morocco spends a total of 5,950 dirhams (\$641) during each stay, of which 2,380

dirhams (\$256) is spent in rural areas. Based on the estimates projected by famtrip participants, the famtrips alone have the potential to generate 4.2 million dirhams (\$452,513) in the first year, and more than 13.3 million dirhams (\$1.4 million) in three years. These figures are directly related to the two famtrips organized by MRT and do not capture the potential impact of other promotional efforts.

Though illustrative, these numbers point to the possibilities for generating greater tourism flows by educating tour operators in key markets about the range of attractions and activities that rural Morocco has to offer their

POTENTIAL NUMBER OF TOURISTS TO BE GENERATED BY FAMTRIP PARTICIPANTS

PAT	Projections	
	Year 1	Years 1-3
Ifrane	480 potential visitors	1,440 potential visitors
Chefchaouen	950 potential visitors	2,850 potential visitors
Immouzer	323 potential visitors	1,315 potential visitors
Total	1,753 potential visitors	5,605 potential visitors

³ "Market Survey on Rural Tourism in Morocco," Khalil Allali, September 2005.

⁴ Ibid.

clientele. One of the famtrip participants, French tour operator Club d'Aventure, has already seized the opportunity to expand its products in Morocco by publishing an eight-day itinerary in January 2005 that includes five days in the Chefchaouen PAT. The company expects to operate 5 such tours in the first year for groups of up to 15 tourists each.

Demonstrating the ripple effect of promotional efforts, incoming agent Dynamic Tours organized a March 2005 famtrip to Chefchaouen for the French press to help Club d'Aventure market the new itinerary. Press trips such as this greatly benefit foreign tour operators as media coverage of their products, especially new ones, helps capture the interest of the traveling public.

Other famtrip participants subsequently planned new programs in Morocco, though not all featured the areas targeted by the MRT-sponsored tours. "This illustrates the somewhat hit-and-miss aspect of tourism promotion," said MRT Chief of Party Brian Wood. "However, the opportunity cost of not engaging in such efforts is the loss of ground to countries that are more active in this regard—something Morocco cannot afford to do given fierce competition in this sector."

LOCAL PARTNERSHIPS

In addition to targeting foreign tour operators, the MRT program developed close relationships with private Moroccan agencies specializing in rural, adventure, and activity tourism. Since their commercial survival

depends on their ability to meet the needs of international tour operators, they understand market requirements and have well-established contacts with European counterparts.

We tapped into the practical experience and knowledge of incoming tour operators in developing the rural tourism itineraries, and signed letters of agreement with 10 operators who committed to marketing the itineraries developed by MRT. For example, two of them, Zayane Voyages and Oualili Voyages, now market three Ifrane itineraries.

We also forged alliances with local associations to enlist their support in promoting the rural itineraries. Some contacted their European counterparts, including a French-Swiss association of amateur mountain bikers and a French association that organizes educational stays abroad. These contacts drew groups of tourists for a total of 332 guest-nights in the Ifrane and Chefchaouen PATs.

Annex B lists the Moroccan agencies and local associations with which we collaborated.

INTERNATIONAL TRAVEL FAIRS

No amount of printed or electronic information can compete with the face-to-face interactions and personal contacts tour operators make at trade shows. Travel fairs allow exhibitors to market a new product and to get live, unfiltered feedback from potential customers. To help



Famtrip participants walk through one of the many grottos dotting the Immouzer landscape.

build awareness of Morocco's rural tourism offerings, the MRT program coordinated Moroccan participation in Reisepavillon, a major sustainable tourism fair in Germany.

Held in February 2005, the show attracted 17,000 visitors and featured 300 exhibitors from 30 countries. Travel operators, NGOs, and other tourism stakeholders converged on Hanover, Germany, to discuss socially responsible travel. The central theme was tourism to developing countries, marking a perfect opportunity to shine the spotlight on rural Morocco.

The MRT program sponsored three incoming tour operators who attended the three-day event and manned a booth showcasing Morocco's rural tourism offerings. This allowed them to interact with potential tourists,

network with European tour operators, and witness first-hand how other countries were developing and promoting tourism.

"I'm certain that in the numerous meetings and discussions, we motivated a lot of people to visit Morocco," said Mohammed Imharken of Ame d'Aventure, one of the MRT-sponsored agencies. "We were able to inspire confidence in them. From this point of view, contact between potential visitors and incoming operators is, in our opinion, very important."

The show ran parallel to Tourismus Forum International, a program organized by the German development agency GTZ. Attended by tourism companies, development agencies, and NGOs, the program included a marketing workshop, a business-to-business session, and a confer-

AFRICA TRAVEL ASSOCIATION CONFERENCE

Just a few weeks after its launch in late 2002, the MRT program put Morocco at center stage at the African travel industry's annual conference in Fès, with keynote addresses by ecotourism expert James MacGregor:

"An increasing number of travelers are interested in the rural tourism experience in Morocco," said MacGregor, who led the MRT program in its first two years of implementation. "Our goal is to help Morocco capitalize on its rural tourism assets to further economic growth."

The six-day conference, sponsored by the Africa Travel Association, showcased Morocco's offerings to more than 150 U.S. tour operators.

Chemonics environmental and ecotourism specialist David Gibson, who also participated in the conference, presented case studies on fostering community participation in tourism product development, drawing on USAID experiences in Botswana, Madagascar, and Uganda.

"These successes have depended on participatory approaches that create partnerships between communities and tour operators—a key to infrastructure financing," Gibson said. "Including rural communities in both the conception and development of tourism products is essential to guarantee sustainability."

ence at which 20 participants discussed their projects, products, and experience. Morocco was well represented through the participation of the Ministry of Tourism, ONMT, the High Commission for Water and Forests, and the three private tour operators sponsored by MRT.

In addition to raising the profile of rural Morocco to the outside world, the event gave members of Morocco's private and public sectors a rare opportunity to interact one-on-one on issues of common interest. "The fair was a great opportunity to show that cooperation between the public sector, private companies, and local associations is possible," said Jean Pierre Champert, managing director of Sport Travel, another MRT-sponsored participant. "I especially appreciated the collegial relationships among the private operators in attendance... I hope this had a positive impact

on potential travelers to Morocco and on travel professionals."

Ruth Beeler, a partner in Ame d'Aventure and director of a major Swiss trekking company, echoed this sentiment. "It was quite a special experience and I felt very comfortable in this big Moroccan family in Hanover," said Beeler, who attended part of the fair. "All the constructive conversations, the getting in touch with other tour operators, the exchange of ideas and discussions were very interesting."

The MRT program leveraged resources by sharing the cost of the Moroccan exhibition stand with GTZ. We also covered meals and accommodations for the Moroccan operators who in turn paid for their own airfare, demonstrating their commitment to making the most out of this learning experience.

“The fair was a great opportunity to show that cooperation between the public sector, private companies, and local associations is possible.”

**JEAN PIERRE CHAMPERT,
MANAGING DIRECTOR
OF SPORT TRAVEL**

Leading up to the event, MRT staff produced two portable exhibition roll-banner displays and other promotional materials that were used at the fair. Before the show began, the Moroccan tour operators attended a half-day workshop on effective marketing techniques led by a panel of international experts. After the fair, at least two German operators contacted the Moroccan incom-

ing agents for more information about their tour packages.

Despite the success of the initiative, the Ministry of Tourism subsequently asked the MRT program not to sponsor Moroccan private sector attendance at other travel fairs for fear of setting expectations of public sector funding for private sector participation.



Moroccan stand at the Reisepavillon tourism fair in Hanover, Germany.



Workshop participants learn about the development and promotion of tourism products that capitalize on Morocco's natural and cultural assets.

CHAPTER 5

CAPACITY BUILDING AND TRAINING

Capacity building was a major area of focus in the first two years of the MRT program. As we developed rural tourism products, we simultaneously transferred knowledge, skills, and tools to Moroccan partners so they could continue this work long after USAID assistance had ended. Some of these efforts were highlighted in previous chapters.

By the end of the program, we had left behind a range of market-ready rural tourism itineraries and promotional materials, a national Web portal, an extensive database of tour operators, market survey methodologies, technical manuals drawing on international best practices, and a cadre of national, regional, and local partners trained in various aspects of sustainable tourism development.

BUILDING SURVEY CAPACITY

Establishing a reference point on the number of visitors to rural areas is essential to track progress in rural tourism development. However, information about the sector was scant when the MRT program was launched, making it impossible to establish a baseline measurement. Government statistics, which were based on conventional tourism, were too broad to draw conclusions on rural tourism.

While the program was not in a position to carry out a comprehensive assessment of the rural tourism market, we worked with the Ministry of Tourism on a limited sector study to create a model for a larger-scale effort.

To that end, we engaged a local contractor to survey more than 1,400 foreign visitors to rural ar-

Moha Errich (right) of the Ministry of Tourism talks to tourism development expert Normand Hall during a training workshop in Mohammedia.



areas, focusing on the three priority PATs and three additional areas destined to become PATs due to their well-established tourism flows. These are the Central High Atlas, the Western High Atlas, and the Desert regions. Using a questionnaire designed with the Ministry of Tourism, a team of interviewers conducted the study across the six locations over a five-week period, starting in September 2005.

Despite its limited scope and relatively small sample size, information gleaned from the survey provides useful insights into the rural tourism sector. Based on survey findings, the MRT team prepared a detailed report and developed a database capturing the main characteristics of rural tourism demand: a socio-economic profile of visitors, their activities, the accommodations and transport they use, the problems they encounter, their

expenditures, and their opinions on various aspects of their stay.

The study was designed to serve as a model for the Ministry of Tourism so it could conduct similar surveys at regular intervals in the future. The ongoing collection, analysis, and exploitation of data on the sector is a valuable tool to understand trends, identify gaps and opportunities, and develop targeted strategies for rural tourism development. Survey results are useful to several entities, including:

- The Ministry of Tourism's Rural Tourism Unit: to evaluate performance and plan investment and support services
- The Moroccan National Tourist Office: to develop targeted promotional and marketing campaigns

- Local governments and authorities: to enhance understanding of the benefits of rural tourism to local communities
- Service providers: to assist with the orientation of new products and/or services and to improve understanding of client needs
- Tourism professionals: to improve knowledge of clients and their expectations, and to help target promotional and commercial initiatives

The MRT program transferred all relevant technical materials and methodologies to the

Ministry of Tourism to provide the foundation for a permanent system to monitor rural tourism development.

TRAINING IN RURAL TOURISM PLANNING AND DEVELOPMENT

In addition to building survey capacity, the MRT program transferred knowledge and skills in a more systematic way through a comprehensive training program that: (1) educated tourism officials about best practices in rural tourism planning and development, (2) taught tour operators how to improve and market their products, (3) encouraged local associations to promote tourism as a way to raise incomes in their communities, and (4) promoted

RURAL TOURISM SURVEY CONDUCTED BY THE MRT PROJECT: KEY FINDINGS

Number of foreign visitors surveyed	1,406 in six regions (Agadir, Desert-Oasis, Rif, Central High Atlas, Western High Atlas, and Middle Atlas)
Countries of origin	43 percent of the visitors came from France, followed by 21 percent from Spain and 9 percent from the United Kingdom.
Gender	Gender disaggregation was fairly even: 52 percent of those surveyed were men and 48 percent were women.
Age groups	The age range varied widely, with 52 percent between the ages of 26 and 45.
Number of visits to Morocco	56 percent of those surveyed had visited Morocco more than once.
Visits to rural areas	All had visited rural areas at least once. More than 65 percent spent up to four days in rural areas.
Motivation	The top reasons cited for visiting rural areas were: scenery, cultural heritage, interaction with rural populations, relaxation, historic sites, and outdoor sports.
Budget	Almost 30 percent of respondents said they expected to spend more than 600 dirhams per person each day. An equal number expected to spend 300 to 450 dirhams per day. Only 22 percent said they planned to spend less than that.
Purchase of local products	All visitors reported buying local products. Jewelry was the most popular at 32 percent, followed by traditional clothing/shoes at 26 percent, textile products at 22 percent, and pottery at 15 percent.

“The tradition of hospitality that is part of Moroccan culture is an exceptional asset, and makes visitors feel welcome right away.”

**SAM STOKES,
U.S DEPARTMENT OF
THE INTERIOR**

investment in tourism-related infrastructure development.

Our training program was a powerful tool for fusing the interests of all stakeholders and enlisting support for an integrated approach to rural tourism development. In all, we trained more than 220 participants in 6 locations—Agadir, Chefchaouen, Ifrane, Immouzer, Mohammedia, and Rabat. Our workshops covered various facets of rural tourism development and promotion from national, regional, and local perspectives.

Through a five-day workshop in Mohammedia, for example, 40 national and regional tourism officials learned about industry trends, sustainable tourism standards, quality management, visitor expectations, marketing and promotion, natural and cultural resource assessments, and tour product development. Representatives from each of the country's 16 regions attended the workshop, held in October 2003. On the last day, each regional delegation received a 1,000-page tourism policy and planning guide created by the World Tourism Organization and adapted to the Moroccan context by the University of Quebec in Montreal. The guide, provided on CD-ROM, is an important reference and training tool that draws on international best practices applicable to Morocco.

Other training efforts targeted the private sector. Through a four-day workshop in Chefchaouen, held in December 2003,

some 40 tour operators learned how to improve current tourism products, design new ones, and market their offerings in the international marketplace. The curriculum covered hospitality and customer service, tour planning and logistics, interpretative and guide services, sales and marketing, and tourism operations and management. A similar workshop was held in Agadir for 50 participants.

To encourage investment, we also organized a workshop for 40 participants from microfinance institutions, banks, and development agencies. Held in Rabat in June 2004, this was the first national workshop on microfinance for rural tourism infrastructure development. The curriculum was based on an MRT-sponsored study of rural tourism financial needs and microfinance opportunities.

Local associations and cooperatives were invited to attend this and other workshops so they could learn about the financing options at their disposal, their role in promoting tourism in their area, and the economic benefits greater tourism flows can bring to their communities.

TECHNICAL ASSISTANCE FROM THE U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR

In the last year of the program, we shifted our capacity-building efforts to helping Moroccan counterparts design and manage visitor sites within the rural tourism itineraries that had been

developed for the three priority PATs. Through another USAID initiative, we partnered with the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI) for this purpose.

As the primary natural resource management and conservation agency in the United States, the DOI manages one-fifth of U.S. land and receives more than 500 million visitors per year in its national parks, wildlife refuges, and recreation areas. Through its International Technical Assistance Program, the DOI offers a wealth of expertise in tourism infrastructure development and interpretative services.

A team of DOI experts visited Morocco in March 2005 to look into possibilities for collaboration with the program. They were impressed with the country's tourism potential. "The flora, fauna, geology, scenery, folklore, local cuisine, including the production of argan oil and honey, are all attractions for visitors," said Sam Stokes, a DOI expert in land management for resource conservation and recreation. "Most importantly, the tradition of hospitality that is part of Moroccan culture is an exceptional asset, and makes visitors feel welcome right away."



Tourism officials and private sector representatives develop action plans to enhance tourist sites during a DOI workshop.

His colleague, LuVerne Grussing, an outdoor recreation planner, stressed the importance of managing tourism resources in a way that “minimizes socio-cultural and environmental impacts to maintain a high-quality visitor experience. This will enable the tourism to be sustainable.”

With funding from USAID, the DOI provided technical assistance to help Moroccan counterparts plan the development of rest areas, a visitor center, and a scenic trail in the Ifrane and Immouzer PATs. “We are happy to share our experience and the lessons learned in the U.S., and look forward to learning from our Moroccan counterparts as well,” said DOI team leader Karen Clark. “This will be a partnership, with a two-way exchange of skills and knowledge that benefits both countries.”

Through two workshops in June 2005, DOI trainers introduced close to 30 participants to best practices in visitor site planning, took them on field trips to potential development sites, and helped them craft action plans for the selected sites. The plans were used to implement pilot projects in the two target PATs (see Chapter 6 for a description of pilot activities).

In a third workshop, 20 participants learned effective ways to use text and images to inform tourists about the significance

of cultural and natural attractions. They designed information panels, brochures, and signs that were eventually installed at the pilot sites.

The MRT program identified program participants and sites, and arranged logistical support.

RURAL ACCOMMODATION MANUAL

As the appetite for ecotourism and adventure travel grows, rural areas are faced with the challenge of providing quality accommodations that satisfy the expectations of international tourists. To help meet that challenge, we produced a comprehensive manual on rural accommodation planning and operations. A Moroccan architect refined the manual before its publication, helping to adapt international best practices to the local context. One thousand copies were published in French for distribution by the Ministry of Tourism.

The manual targets existing or future *gîte* proprietors seeking to upgrade or build from scratch, potential investors in the sector, tourism planners and administrators, microfinance institutions, and those interested in operating small-scale visitor accommodations in a rural environment.

The document provides pragmatic solutions to common issues faced by anyone working in this sector. It covers topics as diverse

Manuel de conception de l'hébergement touristique rural



Ministère du Tourisme, de l'Artisanat
et de l'Économie Sociale
Département du Tourisme



A manual developed by the MRT program covers planning and operation of rural accommodations based on international best practices adapted to the Moroccan context.

as international visitor expectations, business plan development, architectural requirements, general management and record-keeping, health and hygiene, authenticity and the use of ethnic elements, and networking.

The Italian NGO Movimondo used an early pilot version of the

manual as a guide to upgrade seven rural accommodations in Chefchaouen. In the Middle Atlas, two local microfinance institutions (Zakoura and Solidarité Sans Frontières) are using the manual to help local entrepreneurs develop business plans for rural accommodations.



The argan tree bears a fruit used to extract argan oil, which is unique to Morocco. Inside the fruit is a nut with an extremely hard shell that contains one to three almond-shaped kernels. Each nut has to be cracked open to remove the kernels. It is said to take 16 hours of work and 100 kilograms of argan fruit to produce 1 liter of argan oil.

CHAPTER 6

PILOT PROJECTS

In the final months of the program, we built on the product development and promotional efforts of the previous years to launch a series of pilot initiatives in two rural areas: the Ifrane and Immouzer Ida Outanane PATs. The goal was to demonstrate simple, practical ways to add value to the rural itineraries, with a view to attracting more tourists, creating jobs, and raising incomes. Several of these pilot activities were based on plans developed with assistance from the U.S. Department of the Interior.

We implemented three projects in Immouzer, providing marketing assistance to a women's cooperative, repairing an apiary, and upgrading a scenic trail, and three projects in Ifrane, where we refurbished two rest areas and a visitor center. We also initiated

a campaign to raise awareness of the problem of waste in Morocco's mountain areas.

Pilot activities focused on enhancing visitor attractions, providing models of sustainable development, and transferring knowledge and skills from international experts to Moroccan counterparts. They also helped define methodologies that could be replicated on a wider scale in other rural areas.

For each pilot project, the MRT program helped the Ministry of Tourism broker partnership agreements with local governments, cooperatives, associations, and beneficiaries. The agreements ensured the participation of all relevant stakeholders and built a sense of ownership over pilot activities and results.

The Women of Doutama Reap the Benefits of Tourism, Doubling Sales of Argan Oil



© CHEMONICS / BRIAN WOOD

TOP: Aïcha Boumhati, president of the Doutama Agricultural Women's Cooperative, and coop member Aïcha Wakarim crack argan seeds.

MIDDLE: Antonia Hedrick (right) of the U.S. Department of the Interior tries it too as Wakarim looks on in amusement.

BOTTOM: Bottles of culinary and cosmetic argan oil after packaging improvements introduced by MRT.

Known as “Morocco’s liquid gold,” argan oil is a prized commodity for the Berber tribes in the country’s south. Rugged argan trees, which are unique to Morocco, dot the landscape there. Oil is extracted from the almond-shaped seed kernel of their fruit through a long, arduous process involving intensive manual labor.

Increasingly coveted by Parisian chefs, the highly aromatic oil is used as a seasoning and is said to have various medicinal properties. There is also growing international interest in its cosmetic uses.

The people of Tazarine and surrounding villages in the Immuouzer PAT live from the sale of argan oil, which is harvested by Berber women. In 2002, the women established a cooperative with help from USAID’s Watershed Protection and Management project implemented by Chemonics International. USAID funded construction of a traditional building and the installation of modern machinery for oil extraction. After the coop was formed, the women saw their revenues almost triple—from 60 dirhams (\$6.5) to 170 dirhams (\$18) per liter of argan oil.

As the oil has gained international fame, the MRT program saw an opportunity to use it as a magnet for tourists traveling through the Immuouzer PAT.

A lot had to be done to make this happen. First, the coop was virtually invisible due to lack of roadside signage. Second, the oil was poorly packaged in used water bottles. Third, prospective buyers had little information about the product. In addition to attracting visitors, better marketing offered the promise of even higher revenues for the women of Doutama.

The first priority was to improve packaging and diversify the product line. The MRT team educated coop members about the cosmetic uses of argan oil and encouraged them to introduce this new line as part of their regular offerings.

To jump-start the effort, we funded the initial purchase of attractive, cost-effective containers: plastic flasks for the cosmetic oil and glass bottles for the culinary oil. After studying the presentation of competing

products, we engaged a local firm to design a unique identity for Doutama. A label was affixed to each container describing its contents and establishing a recognizable brand. To further add value, we produced a booklet about the product and its various uses.

We now had to attract tourists and other potential buyers. A sign directing passers-by to the coop was installed along the main access road. In the building's courtyard, a large interpretative display tells visitors about the extraction process and daily life in the cooperative. A map of the area provides information about other attractions, encouraging visitors to extend their stay in the PAT.

As a result of these improvements, the argan oil now commands a higher selling price and a larger clientele. The numbers speak for themselves. From June 2005 to September 2005, coop sales more than doubled compared to the previous quarter. With the new bottles and labels, the price of the culinary oil went from 170 dirhams (\$18) to as much as 400 dirhams (\$43) per liter. The cosmetic oil, a brand new product for the coop, sells for 600 dirhams (\$65) per liter.

“With the coop, I feel my life is full. It has given me some direction.”

**AÏCHA BOUMHATI,
PRESIDENT OF THE
DOUTAMA WOMEN'S
COOPERATIVE**

USAID support has had a dramatic impact on the area, with economic benefits trickling down through the entire community. For example, honey produced by another coop is sold alongside argan oil, allowing both groups to capitalize on a common pool of prospective buyers.

The success of the cooperative has empowered its 44 members and given them the confidence to plan for the future. “With the coop, I feel my life is full,” said its president Aïcha Boumhati, 43. “It has given me some direction.” Echoing this sentiment, 56-year-old Moutawakil Rkouché said the money she has earned through the coop has helped her build a brighter future for her children.

The sense of community the coop has created for the women makes the sacrifice easier to bear. “The coop has taught me to earn money,” said Talibi Rkia, 52. “We work long hours here, but when we're talking to each other, the time passes quickly.”

The coop's strategic location near one of the two main gateways to the PAT makes it an ideal tourist spot. In a largely conservative society, the women of Doutama are not daunted by the prospect of higher volumes of tourists. “Before the coop, we were very shy and reserved, especially toward men and strangers,” said 65-year-old Aïcha Wakarim. “Now we're a lot more outgoing.” Her colleague Zahra Anzaid, 44, agreed: “It doesn't worry us if visitors take photos. The coop is like our home and we welcome visitors.”

World's Largest Beehive Gets a Facelift



© CHEMONICS / RACHID BOUABID

TOP: Inzerki beehive before refurbishment.

MIDDLE: Local workers repair the walls and chambers of the beehive.

BOTTOM: Inzerki beehive after the repairs.

The Immouzer PAT is home to the communal apiary of Taddart Ougueram, reputed to be the largest beehive in the world. Linking the past and the present, the apiary has been passed from one generation to the next since it was first constructed in the 19th century.

Despite its great potential as a cultural heritage site, the apiary was gradually abandoned as it fell into serious disrepair: It was last refurbished about 20 years ago and has since weathered two violent storms—one in 1990 and another six years later. Some 300 hives out of more than 1,000 were in use in 1980, although this number declined even further after the storms.

Located on the outskirts of Inzerki village, the apiary consists of several terraces along a hillside at approximately 980 meters of altitude. Each terrace has a long structure built from timber and pisé (mud mixed with straw) with open-fronted chambers. The chambers are designed to house a traditional beehive—a frame of woven reed or split cane covered with mud. The surrounding vegetation of argan, euphorbia, and thyme add to the location's charm and create an ideal environment for beekeeping.

The MRT program saw an opportunity to preserve this remarkable monument and to guarantee the livelihood of honey producers in an area with few alternative sources of income. A feasibility study involving interviews with local residents, beekeepers, and a technical expert concluded that repairing the apiary would offer considerable benefits to the community and serve as a model for other heritage projects.

We engaged a local contractor to proceed with the refurbishment using traditional materials and construction methods to preserve the site's natural beauty and cultural legacy. Construction lasted over two months and involved some 15 local laborers.

The workers demolished the damaged parts of the existing structure and reconstructed them in stone. They built the pisé walls and horizontal shelving on timber frames, roofed each terrace to protect the structure from rainfall, and installed drainage channels to minimize any damage from rainwater. Properly maintained, the renovated structure is likely to last for decades to come.

“ Now that we have seen concrete results on the ground, we feel very motivated... the attention being given to our historic site is bringing new dynamism among our members. ”

SAID SOUAF, CHAIRMAN OF THE LOCAL ASSOCIATION OF BEEKEEPERS

The contractor also refurbished a building that now serves as a point of sale for honey produced in the village. Finally, our team designed and installed signage on the main Agadir-Marrakech highway and an interpretative panel at the apiary to explain its cultural, historic, and economic significance.

A major problem is that the site is only accessible by four-wheel drive and lies some 45 minutes off the main highway. As an outcome of the project, the municipality has announced plans to pave the track leading to the village—an initiative that promises to increase sales of honey and improve the quality of life for local residents.

“This is very promising as it will facilitate transport and will certainly encourage more tourists to come and visit our site,” said Said Souaf, chairman of the Taddart Association for Development and Cooperation, the local association of beekeepers.

Estimates of the annual revenues to be generated by the beehive range from 4 million to 18 million dirhams (\$431,000 to \$1.9 million), depending on the type of honey produced. A single hive yields 20 to 40 kilograms of honey per year. Mixed-flavor honey sells at about 125 dirhams (\$13.5) per kilogram, while thyme-blossom honey, prized for its medicinal properties, sells at 400 dirhams (\$43) per kilogram. These figures are all the more significant considering that sales of honey are the only source of income for many local families.

Buoyed by the rehabilitation of their apiary, the 600 beekeepers entitled to use the beehive plan to form a cooperative to better manage this vital resource passed down by their forefathers.

“I would like to acknowledge the efforts of USAID in helping with the rehabilitation of this site,” said Souaf. “In the beginning, we were not really sure what the project promised would be achieved. Now that we have seen concrete results on the ground, we feel very motivated.”

Souaf is hopeful the renovation will inject a sense of revival into the community. “Many of the beekeepers left the site after its degradation, and the association almost fell apart,” he said. “However, the attention being given to our historic site is bringing new dynamism among our members. We hope to revive the site not only for the beekeeping activity, but also for other local activities that will contribute to improving the income and wellbeing of the people.”

New Paradise Valley Trail Offers Heavenly Views



© U.S. DEPARTMENT OF THE INTERIOR / ANTONIA HEDRICK

Paradise Valley is a haven for Castorbean, a large shrub that grows in the wild, palm trees, and other plants with bold foliage, making it particularly attractive for trekkers. The valley's original name was Taghrat Ankrim. Tradition has it that a German couple overcame a serious illness after living there for six months. Upon returning home, they told everyone of this "paradise valley" that had cured them—a name that has stuck ever since.

Paradise Valley is a botanical heaven in the heart of Immouzer Ida Out-anane. A scenic trail winds across the hills overlooking the palm-filled gorge, inviting passers-by to stop and absorb the picturesque view.

Yet the ill-defined route made it one of the area's best-kept secrets, and conditions underfoot meant that only intrepid walkers could locate the trail and make the descent into the valley. Since there was no signage, visitors had to rely on local guides or their own intuition for directions. Finally, the lack of formal parking spaces forced motorists to pull off by the side of the road, eroding the surface of the hard shoulder.

A pilot initiative by the MRT program addressed all these issues, upgrading a three-kilometer stretch along the trail, constructing parking and rest areas at each end, and installing information panels for visitors to more fully appreciate the environment.

During a five-day workshop in partnership with the U.S. Department of the Interior, local technicians, planners, and administrators worked with a landscape architect and an engineer from the U.S. National Park Service to produce conceptual plans for the upgrade.

All the work was done by local laborers under the supervision of a Ministry of Tourism technician who had participated in the workshop. This alone provided employment for 22 people over a seven-week period in an area where jobs are scarce and income is minimal.

The workers diverted parts of the trail to avoid the steepest slopes and allow for an easier walk down a serpentine path. They graded the surface, removed obstructions, and completely refurbished the parking spots at each end.

Near the midpoint, they turned a rock outcrop into a natural belvedere and rest area. A short stairway was constructed into the rock so visitors could easily climb to the top. All around, the structure provides shade for resting walkers. Interpretative panels installed at each end of the trail feature information about Paradise Valley and the region as a whole.

Natural stone and other local materials were used throughout, keeping costs to a minimum and ensuring harmony with the surroundings. The result is a charming trail resembling a Spanish *camino real*.

The initiative effectively created a new visitor attraction in an area of great natural beauty and provides a model for developing other scenic trails across Morocco.

As a result of these improvements, three tour operators have informed the regional Ministry of Tourism representative of their intention to add the trail to their existing itineraries. In addition, the information panels produced by the program have come to serve as examples for other areas. Three representatives of the High Commission for Water and Forests, who had attended an MRT workshop on visitor information, subsequently requested and received assistance in improving information panels featuring other parts of the Ifrane PAT.



As part of upgrading the Paradise Valley trail, the MRT program turned a large rock into a natural belvedere that allows visitors to easily climb to the top and provides shade for resting trekkers.

Rest Area and Visitor Center Upgrades Raise Ifrane's Tourism Potential



© CHEMONICS / KATHLEEN SHERIDAN



© CHEMONICS / KAWTAR ZERHOJINI

TOP: Balcon d'Ito overlook in the Ifrane PAT.

BOTTOM: MRT staff enjoy the scenery at the Balcon d'Ito rest area renovated by the program.

Nestled in the Middle Atlas mountains, Ifrane stands close to one of Morocco's few developed ski centers. Its manicured lawns and European-style buildings make it akin to a Swiss alpine resort. Yet some of the area's visitor attractions were not exploited to their full potential. Two roadside pull-offs in particular—Balcon d'Ito and Moudmame—were ideal sites for visitors to stop and take in their surroundings, but were crying out for upgrades.

Moudmame is on a main crossroad in the world's largest cedar forest, a centerpiece of the Ifrane PAT. Although well traveled by tourists, the road lacked signage, an adequate rest area, and information about local attractions and activities.

Balcon d'Ito, another main road crossing through the Ifrane PAT, is mentioned in most tourist guides for its breathtaking panoramic views. Despite its popularity, the rest area lacked parking spaces, waste bins, and information for visitors.

As part of our partnership with the U.S. Department of the Interior (DOI), three experts in visitor site planning led a five-day workshop for local technicians, tourism planners, and administrators. By the end of the workshop, they had created action plans to develop the two sites.

Using the plans as a foundation, we engaged a Moroccan architect to refine the drawings and selected a contractor to carry out the work. This involved landscaping, installing picnic benches and waste bins, erecting signage, creating parking spaces, and other measures to improve the safety and appearance of the sites. Local wood and stone were used throughout to match the natural landscape.

In a second workshop, DOI experts worked with participants to design information panels informing visitors about local attractions and enticing them to spend more time in the area. The panels were installed at the two sites and elsewhere throughout the PAT.

In a related initiative, we renovated the building housing Ifrane's Tourism Delegation to create a visitor information center. This involved reconfiguring the space, painting the walls, refurbishing wooden structures and doors, and replacing lighting fixtures.

We also provided furniture to display promotional materials, installed signage to direct visitors to the center, and put up interpretative panels on the region's principal attractions, the nearby imperial cities of Fès and Meknès, and local handicrafts.

The outcome is a pleasant and airy space that provides visitors with the information they need to enjoy their stay to the fullest.

We enlisted support at all levels to ensure the success of these efforts—from the governor of the province to the vendors who earn their livelihood from selling souvenirs at the sites. The renovations have created more space for additional vendors to set up shop at the sites.



Balcon d'Ito work in progress.

“Nos Propres Montagnes” Initiative: Keeping Morocco’s Mountains Clean



© CHERONICS / OLIVIER ALLENBACH-HILLARE

The Anti Atlas mountains in the Agadir region attract hikers all year round.

From Jbel Toubkal, the highest peak in North Africa, to the green hills of the Rif, Morocco's mountains are as majestic as they are fragile. The thousands of trekkers who come looking for adventure each year leave behind piles of litter that threaten these precious natural resources, a problem compounded by inadequate disposal facilities.

Awareness of the problem is on the rise. Many tour operators already implement responsible waste policies and some have even organized clean-up treks. But more must be done to educate visitors about the effects of the rubbish blotting Morocco's landscape.

Working with the Ministry of Tourism, the MRT program organized a day of reflection on the problem of waste in sensitive mountain areas. The workshop, held in June 2005, brought together some 40 public and private sector actors, including trek operators, local government officials, and NGOs.

The participants met in Afourer, a mountain village in the Middle Atlas, to discuss the relationship between tourism development and protection of the environment.

They reached broad consensus on the need to encourage good behavior among tourists and to engage local residents in managing waste in their communities. Based on recommendations that came out of the workshop, the MRT program initiated a campaign to discourage visitors from littering. We created and printed 15,000 brochures calling on tour agencies to build environmental protection into their operations and urging tourists to act more responsibly toward their surroundings.

This was to mark the first step in a wider initiative designed to include clean-up activities with rural communities, an education program to sensitize schools to the problem of litter, and an advertising blitz in the local media. Although these efforts did not materialize due to a reduction in funding, the initial steps taken by the MRT program have stressed the urgency of the problem and set the stage for follow-up efforts to keep Morocco's mountains clean.



Sam Stokes of the U.S. Department of the Interior admires the snow-covered peaks of Mischliffen mountain in the Middle Atlas. Morocco is one of the few countries on the African continent that offers skiing in winter.

The Clean Mountains brochure produced by the MRT program contains a “responsible tourism code” urging tourists to be respectful toward the environment.



Some garbage outlives the people who leave it behind. A soda can, for example, can take 90 to 100 years to biodegrade.

CLEAN MOUNTAINS BROCHURE



Girls in Oum Rbia greet visitors, who come to this Middle Atlas village to enjoy water rafting and explore traditional Berber homes.

CHAPTER 7

LESSONS LEARNED AND THE WAY FORWARD

USAID support for rural tourism development through the MRT program was the first of its kind in Morocco. Consequently, the experience offers important lessons that can inform the future efforts of funding agencies as well as national, regional, and local tourism stakeholders.

LESSONS AND RECOMMENDATIONS

Promote public-private partnerships. There are many capable incoming tour operators in Morocco who know the country and the market well. Since their commercial survival depends on appropriate reactions to changes in the market, they are in a unique position to champion new products or areas. The public sector should harness their expertise by building on their understanding of what sells and involving them in the design of tourism products. Encouraging such public-private partnerships

should be a central element of future tourism development efforts to ensure government initiatives reflect business realities.

Strengthen the Rural Tourism Unit. The establishment of a dedicated rural tourism team within the Ministry of Tourism has created a sound basis for development of the sector. Strengthening the Rural Tourism Unit is key to consolidating the position of rural tourism.

Training in survey techniques would enable the unit to track rural tourism statistics and trends more accurately. Survey findings could be used to expand and update the rural tourism database developed with MRT support, which could in turn form the basis for an annual report on rural tourism. By issuing such a report each year, the Ministry of Tourism would further raise the profile of the rural tourism sector

Hassan Aboutayeb (left) talks to a Berber man near Doutama as he leads famtrip participants across the Immouzer PAT. Aboutayeb, who is president of the Association of Agadir Guides, helped develop the Immouzer itineraries as a consultant to the MRT program.



as an important contributor to economic growth.

Build on product development work. Among its contributions, the MRT program has elaborated detailed itineraries that showcase Morocco's rural tourism offerings. As part of this process, we not only identified marketable itineraries, but also constraints that prevent them from reaching their full potential. MRT pilot projects demonstrated concrete ways to surmount these constraints.

Future efforts in the sector should build on this work by replicating successful approaches in other areas of Morocco. Additional pilot projects should also be considered to further add value to the itineraries. Promotional activities such as famtrips could be used to collect ideas from tour operators on ways to

make the itineraries more attractive to potential visitors.

Increase tourism promotion efforts. Promotion and product development are two sides of the same coin. Working on both fronts simultaneously is essential for success. For this reason, future tourism development programs should involve the ONMT as a direct partner—perhaps through a steering committee—to create synergies in the area of promotion.

Although the effects of tourism promotion are sometimes difficult to quantify, any country or region that does not engage in it risks losing competitive ground. As the ONMT is in the front line of promotion, it would be useful to raise the organization's awareness of rural tourism so it can promote it as one of Morocco's "brands" alongside beach,

golf, and cultural tourism. This requires the preparation of purpose-designed materials, possibly online for easy access by ONMT personnel both in Morocco and abroad.

Promotional activities could include participation in trade fairs, upgrading of the rural tourism Web site, and additional famtrips in target PATs. Systematic follow-up on promotional activities is important to demonstrate their effectiveness to tourism stakeholders. For famtrips, for example, this could include follow-up with participants six months after each trip to determine whether they have included Morocco in their marketing materials.

Target the domestic market. While the MRT program focused on promoting rural tourism to foreign markets, the Moroccan travel trade and domestic market offer great potential for growth. Despite the competitive pressure to find and develop new destinations and products, incoming tour operators rarely have the time to update their knowledge of areas in which they do not operate regularly, and only do this when specifically asked by a foreign tour operator.

An internal trade show held on an annual basis would allow PATs and rural tourism suppliers to promote themselves by making incoming operators aware of new developments and products. This would help develop competitive clusters and strengthen the domestic market. A low-key

activity of this kind would be relatively inexpensive, but would benefit from donor support.

In the same vein, there are opportunities to promote rural tourism to the domestic market, particularly Morocco's growing middle class. Related markets include schools (Moroccan and international), the expatriate and diplomatic communities, and Moroccans living abroad (mostly in Europe), who visit their home country each summer in large numbers. Development of these markets would contribute to the sustainability of rural tourism.

Train service providers. Promoting rural tourism is one thing. Once tourists arrive, they must have a positive experience for the effort to be successful in the long run. To that end, further training of service providers is needed, particularly in *gîte* development and management, rural amenities, business management, customer service, guiding in rural areas, and solid waste management. To maximize impact, training programs should address specific constraints identified during the development of tourism itineraries.

For a hands-on learning experience, *gîteurs* would benefit from study tours to areas where rural tourism is well-developed, such as the Ourika valley. To ensure their financial success, they and other service providers also need training on how to develop business plans and manage a small business.



Berber men entertain visitors in Ifrane with traditional songs to the music of their drums.

Surrounded by a mountain of pink granite, Tafraout in the Immuouzer PAT is known as Morocco's "magical pink town." The houses are made to blend with their surroundings, so much so that they are barely visible from a distance. As visitors approach the town, however, they are treated to an enchanting sight.



Tourist information centers should strive to exceed visitor expectations to help create a memorable experience. To that end, their staff must have the knowledge necessary to convey information about an area with credibility and enthusiasm. This requires recruiting candidates with the right aptitudes and personality, and providing training to deepen their knowledge of the area and their appreciation of visitor needs.

Attract investment. Investment is essential for continued development of the sector. Rural accom-

modations in particular must increasingly focus on quality as traditional *gîtes* with communal lodging and limited facilities appeal to fewer visitors. Most now want greater comfort and privacy, which of course requires greater investment.

Tourism is a risky business. Barriers to entry are high, uncontrollable external events can change the market, and sustainability is a major issue. This is why at this stage rural tourism needs support from the public sector. To that end, the government needs to create the right environment

for entrepreneurship to flourish. For investors to be willing to take risks, they must know they will be supported to some degree by the public sector and assisted with promotion.

As the promotional arm of the Ministry of Tourism, the ONMT is at the forefront of projecting Morocco as a tourism destination and an investment opportunity. The agency should therefore devote more resources and capacity-building efforts specifically to the rural tourism sector. At the same time, Moroccan banks must be encouraged to finance rural tourism development proj-

ects. Case studies demonstrating the potential returns on investment would be of great value in this effort.

Establish means of measuring success. Continued donor support for tourism development holds the promise of multiplying the gains made so far. But tourism development is a slow process. The production cycle of a tour operator's brochure alone means it can take anywhere from 18 months to 2 years for the first visitors to arrive from the time a new product is designed. Even then, many operators count on at least two years of exposure in a

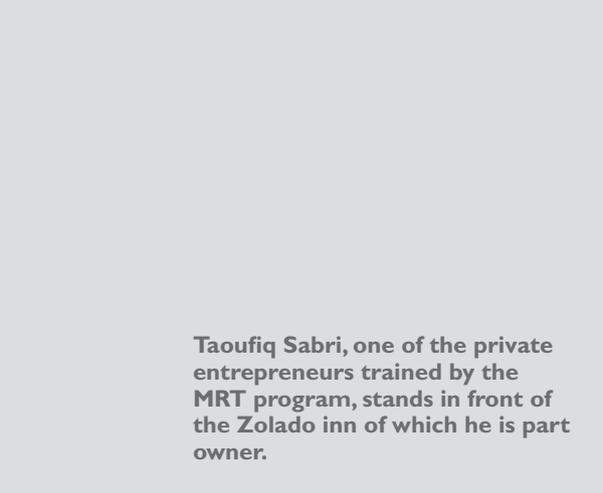
WHAT'S NEXT?

In light of lessons learned from the MRT program, we offer the following recommendations to further develop rural tourism in Morocco:

- Promote public-private partnerships.
- Continue to build the capacity of the Rural Tourism Unit.
- Update the rural tourism database and produce an annual report on rural tourism.
- Use the rest areas and visitor centers upgraded under MRT pilot projects as models for replication.
- Update and officially launch the rural tourism Web site developed with USAID support, making it a dynamic site where users can find pertinent, accurate, and timely information.
- Organize additional famtrips in target PATs. Collect suggestions from tour operators on how to create the conditions needed to attract more tourists and facilitate the development of marketable tours.
- Hold internal trade shows annually to allow the PATs and individual rural tourism suppliers to promote themselves by making incoming operators aware of new developments and products.
- Organize a study tour for *gîteurs* from northern, central, and southern Morocco to the Ourika valley, where rural tourism is well-developed.
- Organize workshops for rural tourism service providers on business plan development and small business management.
- Train staff of tourist information centers in customer service, visitor expectations, and area attractions.
- Organize a workshop with Moroccan banks on financing of rural tourism development projects. Develop case studies of potential returns on investment and payback periods.



Moroccan woman selling argan oil in a Taroudant women's cooperative.



Taoufiq Sabri, one of the private entrepreneurs trained by the MRT program, stands in front of the Zolado inn of which he is part owner.

Rural tourism has become “a major development focus” for Morocco.

**HASSAN KACIMI,
SECRETARY GENERAL
OF THE MINISTRY OF
TOURISM**

brochure for a new destination or product to establish itself.

In the field, however, development activities sometimes fuel high expectations. Local tourism stakeholders often have little grasp of the time required to generate concrete results in the short term, particularly in terms of visitor numbers and revenues. In light of these factors, future tourism development programs should make a concerted effort to elaborate realistic objectives and set clear indicators for measuring success, using a baseline from which to quantify progress.

Expected results and indicators should reflect the pace of change in the tourism sector.

To succeed, donor-funded initiatives should involve all the major stakeholders from the outset—for example, by establishing a steering committee comprising the Ministry of Tourism, ONMT, associations of *gîte* owners, and others. This will help build consensus around a program’s vision, expected results, and performance indicators. It would also lend greater legitimacy to donor-funded efforts and build a sense of owner-

ship over program activities and results among local stakeholders.

CONCLUDING REMARKS

Despite the short life of the MRT program, there has been a marked qualitative change in terms of greater understanding of the value of rural tourism. In the past several years, the sector has gone from relative obscurity to being a respected player in Morocco's growing travel industry. The Ministry of Tourism and the Rural Tourism Unit in particular have been working to raise the profile of rural Morocco as a promising alternative to conventional destinations.

Hassan Kacimi, secretary general of the Ministry of Tourism, made this clear in an October 2004 speech to the World Tourism

Organization, in which he stated that rural tourism had become “a major development focus,” adding that some tourism revenues would be used to “protect nature” in line with environmental standards.

This ‘awakening’ may be the chief legacy of the MRT program. A host of stakeholders—from tourism officials to village associations—are now more aware of the economic benefits sustainable tourism development can bring to rural Morocco. Building on this momentum will go a long way toward firmly establishing Morocco as a competitive destination that appeals to the increasingly adventurous international tourist.

ANNEX A

DELIVERABLES

In addition to annual work plans, end-of-year reports, and quarterly reports, the MRT team completed and submitted the following reports and deliverables over the course of the program.

Author	Deliverable
2003	
David Gibson/James MacGregor	Africa Travel Association Fès Declaration
Pierre Villemaire	Report on Ministry of Tourism Management Structure
Olivier Allenbach-Illaire	<i>Montage des circuits régionaux: Nord, Moyen Atlas et Immouzer Ida Outanane</i>
Judd Buchanan	Tourism's Reengineering and Market Research Process; Meeting Morocco's Tourism Challenges to 2010
Zoubir Chattou	<i>Projets proposés dans le cadre du Fond de Développement rural (PL 480)</i>
Zoubir Chattou	<i>Projets proposés pour améliorer la qualité des cinq circuits</i>
Don Hawkins	Rural Tourism Training Roadmap
Don Hawkins	SAVE database
Hassan Aboutayeb	Tour Operator and Travel Agent Database
Hassan Aboutayeb	<i>Circuits du pays d'accueil touristique d'Immouzer Ida Outanane</i>
James MacGregor	Rural Tourism Marketing Strategy - Chefchaouen
Zoubir Chattou	<i>Projets pour supporter le développement des circuits</i>
2004	
Normand Hall	Training program impact and future training needs assessment
Normand Hall	<i>Atelier national de formation en tourisme rural durable</i>
James MacGregor	Sustainable Rural Tourism Workbook
James MacGregor	Sustainable Rural Tourism Workbook - Agadir
James MacGregor	Rural Tourism Marketing Strategy - Agadir
Robert Boyle	Rural Tourism Accommodation Manual - English
Robert Boyle	Rural Tourism Accommodation Manual - French
Sonia Pagliaro	Project Monitoring Evaluation Plan
LMS	<i>Evaluation des potentiels de l'encadrement</i>
LMS	<i>Plan de formation 2004-2006</i>
Abdelkrim Zakar	<i>Tourisme rural et repositionnement stratégique du secteur touristique de la région d'Agadir (seminar)</i>
El Mostafa Bikine	<i>Les professionnels du voyage entre l'offre et la demande : cas de la destination d'Agadir</i>
Fouzi Mourji	<i>Promotion du tourisme rural au Maroc : le rôle des services financiers de proximité</i>
George Reed	Three Chefchaouen itineraries
MRT	<i>Eductour 2004</i>
Sonia Pagliaro	<i>Eductour : évaluation finale</i>
Brian Wood	Famtrip report (Immouzer)
MRT	MRT Brochure - English
MRT	MRT Brochure - French

Author	Deliverable
2005	
MRT	Newsletters from Web site
MRT	16 Circuit Descriptions/Reports
MRT	Immouzer Brochure
MRT	Ifrane Brochure
MRT	Chefchaouen Brochure
MRT	National Portal: http://www.tourisme.gov.ma/v2005/index.htm
Sonia Pagliaro/Rachid Bouabid	Doutama Argan Promotional Material
Brian Wood/Sonia Pagliaro	<i>Nos Propres Montagnes</i> Materials
Rachid Bouabid	GIS Maps for Rural Tourism Pilot Projects
Khalil Allali	Rural Tourism Survey
MRT	Workshops
MRT	Presentations

ANNEX B

BENEFICIARIES

Company/Organization	Representative
International and Moroccan Tour Operators	
Voyageurs du Monde (France)	Jean François Rial, President and Tony Vidal, Morocco Director
Fédération française de la randonnée pédestre (France)	Jacques Lemaître, Vice President
Club Aventure (France)	Xavier Descamps, Director
Rencontre (France)	Annie Becquet, Director
Tirawa (France)	Christian Juni, CEO
UCPA (France)	Jean-François Buvet, Morocco Director
Anos Luz (Spain)	Francisco Toda, President
Trekking Y Aventura (Spain)	Aranzazu Masia
Viatges Touareg (Spain)	Jordi Vendrell, Director
Travelbag (UK)	Brian Wood, Travel Planner
Kasbah du Toubkal (UK)	Chris Mc Hugo, Executive Director
Explore Worldwide (UK)	Peter Eshelby, Director, Middle East and North Africa
KEL 12 (Italy)	Sara Teresa Casagrande, Africa Representative
NBTS Viaggi (Italy)	Roberto Bao, Sales Representative
Alpin Travel (Switzerland)	Roland Beeler, CEO
Dynamic Tours (Morocco)	Isabelle Bennani, CEO, and Eva Benrhamous, Executive Director
Kasbah Baha Baha (Morocco)	Brahim Ouarzazi, President
Hôtel Ramada/Almohades (Morocco)	Gilles Lefebvre, Director
Holiday Services (Morocco)	Marie-France Bensoussane, Executive Director
Sport Travel (Morocco)	Jean-Pierre Champert, CEO
Algeriatours (Morocco)	Ahmed Bensaidi, Executive Director
Ame d'Aventure (Morocco)	Mohamed Imharken
Aventure Berbère (Morocco)	Xavier de Gélibert, CEO
Sahara Tours (Morocco)	Doreen Ohayon, Executive Director
Small Businesses/Entrepreneurs	
Auberge Daradara (Chefchaouen)	Zdoudi Zineb
Tizi Randonnées - Travel agency (Chefchaouen)	Moius Brahim
Casa Hassan - Guesthouse (Chefchaouen)	Ben Hameda Hassan
Entrepreneur (Chefchaouen)	Boukdidi Mohamed
Hotel Cascades - Adventure and mountain tourism (Agadir)	Jamal Eddine Atbir
Explor-Action - Travel agency (Agadir)	El Mostfa Bikine
Soritours - Travel agency (Agadir)	El Mostafa El Moudni
S.T. Zagora (Agadir)	Abdelaziz Tahiri
La Medina d'Agadir (Agadir)	
Institut supérieur de technologie appliquée - Hospitality and tourism (Agadir)	Abdelkrim Zakar Bounnite Khadija

Company/Organization	Representative
Chez l'Habitant (Middle Atlas/Ifrane)	Zakaria Adnani
Gîte de Charme Ras Al Ma (Middle Atlas/Ifrane)	Mahdi Ait Belmadani and Aziza Naceur
Complexe touristique Collier d'Ambre (Imilchil)	Mohamed Daamti
Ferme d'Hôtes Tiourar (Immouzer Ida Outanane)	Philippe Cabrol
Local Associations	
Association ATP - GRIT (tourism professionals)	Abdelwahid Ahrazem
A.S.A.S.H.A (local development)	Mohamed Adiouban
Association guides de tourisme (guides)	Abdeslam Mouden
Association pour le développement local (local development, income generation)	Abdelmoghith Hasnaoui and Abdeslam Akariou
Movimondo (Italian local development NGO)	Ahmed Ennahli and Nasseb Terraz
Association Talassentane (environment and development)	Mofadal El Merzguioui
Association restauration et tourisme	Brahim El Bakkal
Association régionale des guides et accompagnateurs de tourisme	Hassan Aboutayeb, Abderrahman Bentahar, Abderrazak Abou-Nouadar, Hassane Quarouach
Association Aksmou Imssouan Tamri	Abdellah Ouchen
Association Taliouine	Lhoucine Afla
Association Timedarte	Lhoucine Achabak
Association Tizgui Chorafa	Mohamed El Omari
Helen Keller International	Mustapha Zahir
Association Al Amal	Mustapha Abdellaoui
Association Taghrat Ankrim (Vallée du Paradis)	Brahim Nait-Bouzid
Association IDALI Tiznit	Hammati Omar
Microfinance Associations/Projects	
Al Amana	Caroline Brandt, Fouad Abdelmoumni
Al Karama	Abdelaziz Abessi, Rachid Essahar
AMSSF	Khaddouj Gharbi
ATIL	Bouchra Lakhlah
Fédération Marocaine AMC	Rida Lamrini
Fondation Banque Populaire micro crédit	Abdelhamid Rouini
Fondation Crédit Agricole micro crédit	Malika Bodach, Fathia Raissi Akasbi
FONDEP	Jaouad Alami, Rachid Imad-eddine
INMAA	Mustapha Ouchrahou, Abdelkrim Aribri
Fondation Zakoura	Leila Akhmisse, Amina Miliani, Hicham Hirich
Movimondo	Marcello Goletti, Bouchra El Khabbaz
Planet Finance Maroc	Marie Olafsdottir, Richard Crayne
Projet Aires Protégées	

Company/Organization	Representative
Local Authorities	
Municipality of Chefchaouen	Nabil Nejjar
Regional Natural Parks Project - Bouhachem	Odile Guillard
Prefect Council	Said Bouzari, Mohamed Akherdid, Ahmed Atbir, Taia Abdellah, Jamal Dakkali
Agadir Ida Outanane Prefect	Allal Malouki
Wilaya of Agadir	Saadia Diaa, Mohamed Iziki
Wilaya of Souss-Massa-Draâ region	Khalil Hassouna, Lahcen Ait Hmaidouch
Commune rurale Aourir	Aderghal Hassan
Commune rurale Taghazout	Rachid Harach
Souss-Massa National Park	Abdallah El Hemaïd
Tourism Delegation - Azilal	Ain Rahba Abdellah
Tourism Delegation - Meknès	Aboulhassani Abdellah, El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Safi	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Fès	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Marrakech	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Laayoune	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Guelmim	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Tétouan/Chaouen	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Tétouan	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Nador	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Al Hoceïma	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Tanger	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Laayoune	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Azilal	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Oujda	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Ouarzazate	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Essaouira	El Azzaoui Mohammed
Tourism Delegation - Agadir	Mohamed Yechou, Fouad Benjelloun, Said Drif, Abdelaziz Fetouak, Chakib Lahlou
Tourism Delegation - Ifrane	
Ministry of Tourism - DEAT	Dine Fouad, Touria Aouzal
Ministry of Tourism - DAI/Niche market director	Hassouni Adil
Ministry of Tourism - DAI/Director, Rural Tourism Unit	Hachimi Abdellah
Ministry of Tourism - DAI	Adel Abdeslam, Frikhat Larbi
Ministry of Tourism - DAI/Chefchaouen PAT	Idrissi Abdelmalik
Ministry of Tourism - DAI/Ouarzazate PAT	Errich Moha
Ministry of Tourism - DAI/Immuzer PAT	Sirajeddine El Machrafi

Company/Organization**Others**

Inzerki Association of Beekeepers

Doutama Women's Cooperative

Local community (commune rurale) of Akesri

Local community of Tigrigra (Azrou region) and vendors for Ito site

Association of Immouzer Ida Outanane PAT

ANNEX C

BUDGET SUMMARY

Activity Name	Base Costs	% of Total	Indirect/ Operating Costs	Salaries	Total Costs
Rural Tourism Strategy					
Assistance to Ministry of Tourism on rural tourism strategy	\$50,000	8%	\$80,000	\$65,502	\$195,502
Web site for Ministry of Tourism	\$30,000	5%	\$48,000	\$39,301	\$117,301
Other capacity building	\$20,000	3%	\$32,000	\$26,201	\$78,201
Product Development					
Development of rural tourism itineraries	\$150,000	24%	\$240,000	\$196,506	\$586,506
GIS mapping	\$10,000	2%	\$16,000	\$13,100	\$39,100
Group tour planners	\$3,000	0%	\$4,800	\$3,930	\$11,730
Promotional Activities					
Familiarization trips (2)	\$12,000	2%	\$19,200	\$15,720	\$46,920
Travel fair (1)	\$6,000	1%	\$9,600	\$7,860	\$23,460
Web site for Morocco Rural Tourism	\$35,000	6%	\$56,000	\$45,851	\$136,851
Tour operator database	\$30,000	5%	\$48,000	\$39,301	\$117,301
Visitor information panels, Ifrane and Immouzer regions	\$30,000	5%	\$48,000	\$39,301	\$117,301
Promotional leaflets	\$15,000	2%	\$24,000	\$19,651	\$58,651
Other promotional activities	\$24,500	4%	\$39,200	\$32,096	\$95,796
Training and Capacity Building					
Rural tourist market study and database	\$25,000	4%	\$40,000	\$32,751	\$97,751
Training, seminars, and workshops	\$95,000	15%	\$152,000	\$124,454	\$371,454
Rural Accommodation Manual	\$3,000	0%	\$4,800	\$3,930	\$11,730
Pilot Projects					
Inzerki beehive rehabilitation	\$34,000	5%	\$54,400	\$44,541	\$132,941
Rest area upgrade at entrance to cedar forest, Ifrane region	\$17,000	3%	\$27,200	\$22,271	\$66,471
Scenic overlook upgrade at Pays d'Ito, Ifrane region	\$14,000	2%	\$22,400	\$18,341	\$54,741
Scenic trail upgrade, Immouzer PAT	\$10,000	2%	\$16,000	\$13,100	\$39,100
Nos Propres Montagnes	\$9,000	1%	\$14,400	\$11,790	\$35,190
Doutama Women's Agricultural Cooperative	\$5,000	1%	\$8,000	\$6,550	\$19,550
Refurbishing the tourism office in Ifrane	\$5,000	1%	\$8,000	\$6,550	\$19,550
TOTAL	\$632,500	100%	\$1,012,000	\$828,600	\$2,473,100

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