

# Decent Work in the Rural Economy

Enterprises

Investments

Infrastructure  
& Services

Labour force



## Case Study



Greener jobs and better  
business for women and men  
in Southern Costa Rica

Álvaro Ramírez Bogantes, [ramirez-bogantes@ilo.org](mailto:ramirez-bogantes@ilo.org)  
ILO Country Office for Central America

Philippe Vanhuynegem, [vanhuynegem@ilo.org](mailto:vanhuynegem@ilo.org)  
ILO Office for Latin America and the Caribbean

## Including the excluded

The Brunca region, which is in Southern Costa Rica, is the country's richest in terms of biodiversity and natural resources, but also its poorest and most isolated region. With a population consisting mainly of indigenous peoples and farmers, history has not been kind to the women and men from Brunca, who have faced discrimination and exclusion. This also rings true for its economy. It is estimated that some 30 per cent of Brunca's population of almost 300,000 live below the poverty line (on less than USD 1.25 per day) and more people in Brunca are unemployed than the rest of the country. Access to State-run services is limited and most businesses are small with low productivity in Brunca. The region solely relies on three industries: agriculture, tourism and commerce. With some innovative thinking on how to give women and men greener and better jobs – by using indigenous and local strengths and resources to build and grow business – it has been shown that Brunca and its economy can flourish and inspire others.

## Inspiring business know-how and growth in Costa Rica

Between 2009 and 2013, six international organizations (the ILO, FAO, UNDP, UNIDO, UN-Habitat and the IOM) joined forces to make sure that women and men in the Brunca region have greener and better jobs, easier access to resources and that growth policies that work are developed.

This programme<sup>1</sup>, called in short the Brunca programme, has reached more than 4,000 people directly and has given 1,500 students and 300 teachers, skills to build and run a business, by using the ILO's tried and tested Know About Business (KAB) methodology. Now, more than 1,000 indigenous women and men have access to new ways of making a living and 400 farm workers have been able to take part in value chain development activities. Perhaps the most outstanding achievement of this programme is the creation of a Regional Competitiveness Model for the Brunca region, which, since 2014, has been used in other areas of Costa Rica, impacting the lives of hundreds of thousands of women and men in the country.

## Using cultural heritage and biodiversity as agents for lasting change

In the region, the Brunca programme surmounted many obstacles to produce results and ensure lasting human impact. The reluctance of private investors to get involved, limited innovative partnerships, few incentives to start businesses and the local Government's inability to bolster competitiveness have all led to a poor and disadvantaged population.

The objectives of the Brunca programme were clear: improve conditions for doing business; boost the competitiveness and productivity of micro- and small-sized enterprises; make sure that innovation can happen; and ensure women's economic empowerment.

By making the most of the region's rich biodiversity and cultural heritage, and by using a Local Economic Development approach, the Brunca region's competitiveness has much improved, leading to growth in the

1. Developing competitiveness for the Brunca Region in tourism and agro-industry sectors, with emphasis on the creation of green, decent employment for poverty reduction.



Enterprises



Wages



Child labour



Freedom of association



Social protection



Equality of opportunity and treatment



Employment policies



Indigenous

largest industries: micro and small agricultural business, and commercial and touristic business. A regional competitiveness model was built, local institutions were strengthened and a strategy was put in place to make sure that micro, small and medium-sized enterprises (MSMEs) could succeed.

## What is Local Economic Development (LED)?

“Local Economic Development (LED) is a participatory development process that encourages partnership arrangements among the main private and public stakeholders in a locality. The objective is to enable the joint design and implementation of a common development strategy, using local resources and competitive advantages in a global context. The ultimate goal of LED’s is to create decent jobs and stimulate economic activity.” (Livelihood And Employment Creation: Local economic development. ILO, 2005).

More specifically, an Economic Competitiveness Strategy was developed for the Brunca region, to create green and decent jobs in tourism and agro-industry as a public investment priority. This model was adopted by the Government to use in three other regions of the country (Limón Province, the Region of Huetar Norte and Guanacaste’s Zona Alta).

By giving technical assistance, putting in place public policies and supplying equipment, more businesses were able to survive and thrive. Perhaps more importantly, the steps and procedures to set up a company were simplified in six Brunca municipalities. The registration of a business became 40 per cent faster and the number of requirements was reduced by 55 per cent – making more women and men able to start up their own enterprise.

Two innovative pilot initiatives were set up to find new ways to reach sustainable development. The first initiative focused on the planting of 25 hectares of Jatropha to produce bio fuel as an additional sources of income for farmers. The second initiative was related to ethnic tourism in indigenous communities – creating the first tourism areas of its kind in Boruca, Térraba, Rey Curré, Salitre, Cabarga and La Casona in Costa Rica. Also, the Federation of South Municipalities was strengthened so that they could develop and implement economic competitiveness policies.

## Partnering for business

The Competitiveness Model for the Brunca region brings together public and private partners to make sure that the business environment is what it should be. This model was created together with the Monterrey Institute of Technology and is a model that can inspire others, in Costa Rica and in other countries, because it is easy to replicate. This model looks at infrastructure, local development, human development, technology, information, access to markets and entrepreneurship.



Investments



Labour force



Indigenous and tribal peoples



Right to collective bargaining

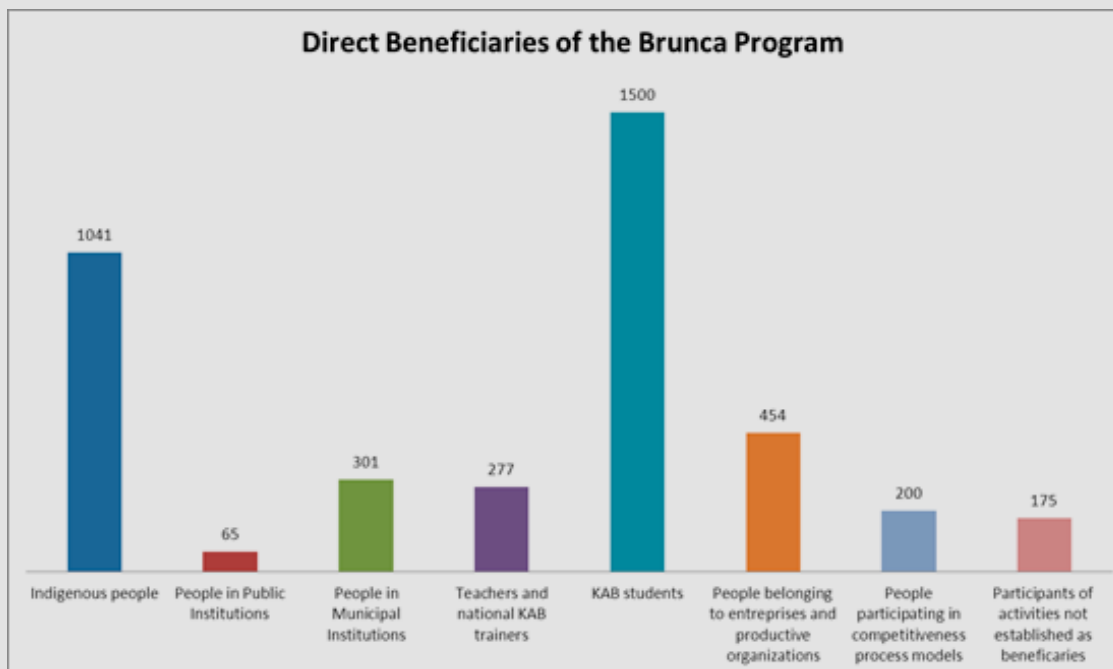


Occupational safety and health

Labour inspection

Forced labour

Migrant workers



## Making sure future generations know more about business

As a result of the innovative Brunca programme, more businesses now have a chance to grow and flourish as six support units were created by the Ministry of Economy and with the municipalities of Brunca. The ILO's Know About Business (KAB) methodology was piloted by the Ministry of Education in Brunca and later also placed in the national curriculum of vocational secondary education: so far more than 270 professors and 1,500 students have been trained with this methodology in the region.

Now, generations to come will be able to start, build and grow their own businesses and make the most of the richness that the Brunca region has to offer.

## What works to ensure more and better jobs in rural areas?

Almost half of the world's population, or 3 billion people, live and work in rural areas. Although the rural economy makes up a large share of jobs in many developing and emerging countries, there are significant challenges in giving rural women and men decent work.

The rural economies capacity building framework is an integrated framework that spells out what is needed for more and better jobs in the rural economy. To create more jobs, investment, nurtured enterprises, giving working women and men skills and possibilities, and adequate infrastructure and services is needed. The framework also looks at the prerequisites of decent work: creating jobs, which is essential for economies that thrive, as is promoting social dialogue, guaranteeing rights at work and extending social protection to all.

More information:

<http://www.itcilo.org/en/the-centre/programmes/enterprise-microfinance-and-local-development-emld>