

Chapter 21

Water Access in the Fight Against Poverty: Tourism or Multiple Use of Water Services?

Diego Azqueta
University of Alcalá, Spain

Álvaro Montoya
University of Alcalá, Spain

ABSTRACT

Rural poverty in underdeveloped countries is a critical issue. A fair amount of literature exists examining the conditions of pro-poor tourism development, as well as different ways to fight it. However, in some cases, and because of the existence of a limiting factor, a potential incompatibility between tourist development and other strategies can emerge, as well as the need to compare relative efficiency. An example of this potential conflict is the one posed by tourist development and the Multiple Use of Water Services strategy (MUS) to alleviate rural poverty. In this case, the limiting constraint is access to water. This paper analyses the impacts, direct and indirect, on poverty levels, of tourist development and MUS. The authors examine the Quindío Region in Colombia, where the MUS strategy is being implemented and where an ambitious tourist development plan may open social conflict regarding water supply. The results of this analysis shows that, even if the MUS strategy has a greater positive impact on poverty alleviation, in terms of income and employment generated per unit of water, its water footprint, contrary to expectations, is much higher than the one corresponding to the tourist sector. This may jeopardize its future development, calling for a more balanced approach.

DOI: 10.4018/978-1-4666-3613-2.ch021

1. INTRODUCTION

There have been different strategies recommended and implemented to fight rural poverty in under-developed countries. Tourist development has been identified recently as one of them. As it is usually the case in the realm of economic policy, a combination of different alternatives seems to be a more appropriate way to proceed, taking into account the complexity of the task.

The problem appears, however, when because of the existence of some constraint, the possibility of combining some of these alternatives is severely curtailed, and the analyst is forced to choose.

Water supply is a case in point. If access to water becomes a limiting factor, there is the need to decide which uses are the most efficient, directly and indirectly, in reducing poverty. Tourist development is undoubtedly one such possibility, but not the only one. The supply of water to poor families to help them develop small production facilities, the so-called *Multiple Use of Water Services* Strategy (MUS), is another. The purpose of this paper is to analyze which one is more effective in alleviating rural poverty with the help of a case study in Central Colombia. To do so, the remainder of the paper is structured as follows. Section 2 will introduce the case study: the tourist sector in the Quindío region of the Colombian Andes. Development of tourism will be described, as well as the situation regarding water supply. Section 3 will summarize the main economic impacts of tourist development in terms of income and employment generated, whereas Section 4 will briefly introduce the *Multiple Use of Water Services* strategy to fight rural poverty. Section 5 will compare the economic impact of these two alternative strategies, looking again at their multiplier effects on income and employment. Yet, as water supply may become a limiting factor for the further development of each strategy, their *water footprint* will be also considered in Section 6. Section 7, finally, concludes.

2. DEVELOPMENT OF TOURISM IN EL QUINDÍO

In this section both, the Colombian region of El Quindío, as well as the existing development plans for the tourist industry in the Colombian Coffee-Growers Axis (Coffee Axis) will be succinctly described.

2.1 The Quindío Region: Socioeconomic Characteristics

The Department of El Quindío is located in the Central-Western part of Colombia, in the Andean region (Figure 1). The Department, which covers 1.845 Km², belongs to the so-called Colombian Coffee-Growers Axis (Coffee Axis), and is situated along the Western slope of the Andes Central range, between the 04°04'41" and 04°43'18" latitude North and the 75°23'41" and 75°53'56" longitude West.

Figure 1. The Quindío region in central Colombia



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