

Regeneration of the Maron forest trail to promote the natural and cultural heritage of the island of La Réunion

Island tourism project improves rural access and trains priority groups in the Indian Ocean..

EAFRD-funded projects

Location: Grand-Coude, La Réunion , France

Programming period: 2014-2020

Priority: P6 - Social inclusion & local development

Focus Area: Local development

Measures: M07 - Basic services & village renewal

Funding:	Total budget	769 540.00 (EUR)
	EAFRD	169 674.00 (EUR)
	National/Regional	56 558.00 (EUR)
	Private	523 823.00 (EUR)
	Other	19 485.00 (EUR)

Timeframe: 2018 to 2021

Project promoter: Pays touristique du Sud

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Summary

In 2021, the newly re-instated Maron forest trail on the island of La Réunion was launched to ease access and to support the development of tourism activities in the area. This work took place in the Natural Regional Park and needed special support from the National Forest Office to preserve the local flora and biodiversity. The multi-partner project led to the successful re-establishment of the seven km long hiking trail and thereby the improvement of access to sites of special interest (village of Grand-Coude, the volcano). By collaborating with other projects, such as the back-to-work employment initiative, an integrated development approach was implemented that effectively created jobs in tourism and the environment. CAP funding specifically supported the necessary expertise in engineering to supervise the demanding work. The grant funding further contributed to the purchase of all material needed for constructing the path and the exceptional transport requirements by helicopter.

Project results

The following results were achieved:

- One accessible, seven km long hiking path was regenerated.
- Eight people obtained permanent employment.
- From the trail's launch in January 2021 through to September 2021, a total of 12 000 hikers were counted.
- One capitalisation study with recommendations was produced to inform comparable work and projects in a similar natural context.

Key lessons and recommendations

- The project took a long time to develop due to the required validation processes from many stakeholders.
- Collaborating with other projects, such as the employment project, required good inter-project management skills and sufficient time for awareness raising regarding the specificities of the construction work.

Context

The Maron forest hiking trail is located on the island of La Réunion (France), leading to the secluded village of Grand Coude more than one km above sea level. The surrounding area is known for its spec-



tacular landscape of very steep volcanic mountain slopes and deep valleys as well as its cultural assets, including agriculture and crafts. However, over time, access to the trail had become very difficult due to overgrowing vegetation, making the beautiful trail as well as the village barely accessible.

This represented a missed opportunity as the trail was considered to have high potential to boost tourism and, if done effectively, this could be combined with environmental improvements and job creation for local people in an integrated and sustainable manner.

When, in 2011, the 'Sud Sauvage' touristic association of La Réunion identified this potential, it entered into a partnership with the National Forest Office and the Regional Natural Park to develop a suitable project outline. Since then, studies and many exchanges with local authorities and other important stakeholders followed to achieve a well-coordinated and integrated approach. Planning the work was challenging due to the demanding landscape conditions that required specific expertise and equipment and good coordination with other players. In 2018, the project plan was completed and a substantial funding package was put together, including CAP funding to support the regeneration of the trail and its development for touristic purposes.

Objectives

The overall aim of the project was to regenerate the Maron forest hiking trail to re-establish its accessibility, thereby promoting tourism. In line with an integrated development approach, the project had the following environmental, social and economic objectives:

- To manage invasive species infiltrating native forests and trails.
- To raise awareness about the benefits of preserving the natural environment.
- To monitor the development of the forest in relation to the regeneration of the hiking trail.
- To study the implementation of a biosecurity protocol in the national park.
- To improve the village's pedestrian access via the trail and to increase the number of tourists in the village.
- To work with unemployed people providing training and support for their re-integration into labour markets. This employment initiative worked in collaboration with the path regeneration project, facilitating training in land planning and forest site management.

Activities

The CAP funding was used for the following activities:

- Enabling regeneration of the trail with a particular focus on specific material. The funding helped to purchase equipment for the trail work, including building steps and fixing stakes.
- Transporting equipment including helicopter operations.
- Managing and coordinating the project. It was necessary to collaborate closely with the team from the National Forestry Office. For this task, an engineering position was funded to supervise this process throughout project implementation.
- Studying the work delivered, before, during and after the regeneration work of the trail. The study aimed to provide recommendations for any similar work that might be carried out elsewhere in future (capitalisation document).
- Developing 'biosecurity protocol' factsheets. These alert the public as well as any workers involved in the project about the natural specificities and risks associated with biodiversity.

Main results

The following results were achieved:

- One accessible, seven km long hiking path was regenerated.
- Eight people obtained permanent employment following training in land planning and forest site management.
- A substantial increase in the popularity of the Maron forest hiking trail was reported. Although no measurements were taken at the outset of the project, it was common knowledge that because of the difficulties in finding access to the path, its use was low. To monitor visitor numbers, the National Forest Office introduced an eco-meter counting users of the trail after the completion stage of the project. From the trail's launch in January 2021 through to September 2021, a total of 12 000 hikers were counted. This represents high popularity levels when compared to one of the most popular trails in La Réunion, Mafate, where a total of 16 000 counts were recorded over the same period of time.
- One capitalisation study with recommendations was produced to inform comparable work and projects in a similar natural context.



Key lessons and recommendations

- The project took a long time to develop (from 2011 to 2018). This was due to the required validation processes from many stakeholders (local municipalities and authorities, the National Forest Office, the Regional Park, etc.).
- It was necessary to select a workforce that was particularly suited to the specific working conditions of the trail.
- The work was carried out in collaboration with employees from the back-to-work employment project. This required good inter-project management and sufficient time to be allocated to awareness raising activities regarding the specificities and risks of the construction work.
- It was necessary not only to ensure the health and safety of the workers at the various building sites along the path, including the helicopter operations, but also to ensure that the local flora remained free from harm or any damage. This was demanding.

“This type of project needs the support of a large number of stakeholders, which makes it complicated and interesting at the same time. In 2018, as the result of this dialogue, we launched the project and all worked hand in hand to improve access to specific natural areas of La Réunion.”

Pays touristique du Sud Sauvage

Additional information:

n/a



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