

Original article

## Impacts of the inclusion of rural women and young people in local sustainable tourism projects



**Impactos de la inclusión de mujeres y jóvenes rurales en proyectos de turismo local sostenible**

**Impactos da inclusão de mulheres e jovens rurais em projetos de turismo local sustentável**

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**Received:** 31/01/2025

**Accepted:** 12/08/2025

### ABSTRACT

Inclusion is an affirmative action aimed at the full insertion of subjects in society, without exclusion, however, rural areas have been a scenario where the asymmetry between inclusion and exclusion exists, particularly in women and youth. The objective of this study was to systematize the impacts of the inclusion of rural women and young people in local sustainable tourism projects. The type of research used was fundamentally qualitative, based on unstructured interviews, ethnographic research supported by participant observation and triangulation of the information obtained, as the empirical methods used. As a result, the research showed the good practices in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental impact of local sustainable tourism projects in rural areas and, as

a conclusion, its contribution to the development and implementation of social policies in scenarios prone to vulnerable situations, particularly among women and young people, is highlighted.

**Keywords:** equity; social justice; tourism center; rural tourism; sustainability; agrotourism; tourism resource; nature.

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## RESUMEN

La inclusión es una acción afirmativa encaminada a la inserción plena de los sujetos en la sociedad, sin exclusión, sin embargo, las zonas rurales han sido un escenario donde la asimetría entre inclusión y exclusión existe, en particular, en mujeres y jóvenes. El presente resultado se trazó como objetivo sistematizar los impactos de la inclusión de mujeres y jóvenes rurales en proyectos de turismo local sostenible. El tipo de investigación empleada fue en lo fundamental, cualitativa, sustentada en la entrevista no estructurada, el etnográfico apoyado en la observación participante y la triangulación de la información obtenida, como métodos empíricos utilizados. Como resultado alcanzado, la investigación mostró las buenas prácticas en materia de impacto económico, social, cultural y ambiental de los proyectos de turismo local sostenible en zonas rurales y como conclusión se resalta su contribución en el desarrollo e instrumentación de políticas sociales en escenarios proclives a situaciones vulnerables, en particular, en mujeres y jóvenes.

**Palabras clave:** equidad; justicia social; centro turístico; turismo rural; sostenibilidad; agroturismo; recurso turístico; naturaleza.

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## RESUMO

Inclusão é uma ação afirmativa que visa à plena integração dos indivíduos à sociedade, sem exclusão. No entanto, o meio rural tem sido um cenário onde existe a assimetria entre inclusão e exclusão, particularmente entre mulheres e jovens. Este estudo teve como objetivo sistematizar os impactos da inclusão de mulheres e jovens rurais em projetos de turismo local sustentável. O tipo de pesquisa empregado foi predominantemente qualitativo, baseado em entrevistas não estruturadas, pesquisa etnográfica apoiada pela observação participante e triangulação das informações obtidas como métodos empíricos. A pesquisa demonstrou boas práticas no impacto econômico, social, cultural e ambiental de projetos de turismo local sustentável em áreas rurais. Concluiu destacando sua

contribuição para o desenvolvimento e implementação de políticas sociais em cenários propensos a situações de vulnerabilidade, particularmente entre mulheres e jovens.

**Palavras-chave:** equidade; justiça social; centro turístico; turismo rural; sustentabilidade; agroturismo; recurso turístico; natureza.

## INTRODUCTION

The 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development of the United Nations Organization declares in its preamble, in relation to prosperity, the shared commitment to be "determined to ensure that all human beings can enjoy a prosperous and fulfilling life, and that economic, social and technological progress occurs in harmony with nature" (UN, 2015). However, the document itself illustrates in its description of the current context that, among the great disparities in terms of equal access to development opportunities, gender inequality remains one of the key challenges, particularly for women and young people.

There has been no shortage of attention paid to this issue in recent years. In particular, the United Nations has implemented several international projects, including, for example, on *Inclusion of women, young people and small farmer associations in the tourism value chain* in the Dominican Republic (Presidency of the Dominican Republic, 2022) and *Empowering young women: sustainable livelihoods through tourism*, in the Republic of Moldova (UN Tourism, 2024), both under the concept of so-called inclusive tourism, a modality that places both the receiving market and rural communities, especially those located in its area of influence, on an equal footing.

On the other hand, Díaz Carrión (2021), Morales and Van Hemelryck (2022), Hernández Hernández et al. (2023), Ramírez Meda (2024), maintain that, although tourism is still in a post-pandemic take-off stage, this has not prevented the implementation of strategic actions for recovery from including as a priority the empowerment of women and young people in a position of economic and social disadvantage, specifically in the rural areas of the Latin American and Caribbean region.

In this regard, Cuba has implemented actions that are in line with the rest of the world. In the *Conceptualization of the Cuban economic and social model of socialist development* and the *Guidelines of the economic and social policy of the Party and the Revolution for the period 2021-2026*, approved at the 8th Congress of the Communist Party of Cuba, it is established the will of the

State to: Consolidate the employment policy and favor the incorporation of people in conditions to work, particularly women and young people, in correspondence with the needs of the economic and social development of the country and the territories, vocational training and labor insertion (PCC, 2021).

This responds to the proposal of actions of the Council of Ministers of Cuba to mitigate the current problems of rurality in Cuba, adopted in 2023, which calls to overcome:... the need to achieve stability in the workforce, that when young people leave the countryside to study, they return to it to apply their knowledge; develop housing plans, improve accessibility to communities, and many other aspects that demand prioritized attention and constant accompaniment from all the country's leadership structures (Marrero Cruz, 2023).

Based on this policy, several authors have addressed its implementation through various experiences in rural areas, where tourism has stimulated the creation of new sources of employment for women and young people, their training and consequent revaluation as social capital that makes it possible to strengthen the productive chains generated around the Local Development Projects (LDP). Hence, it is agreed with the authors Ramírez Pérez et al. (2020) that Local Sustainable Tourism (LST) is the activity practiced by individuals in a sustainable way in local destinations that allow maintaining a balance between the environmental, economic and socio-cultural dimensions, providing an optimal and responsible use of the local tourism heritage, respecting the traditional values through adequate relations with the host communities, ensuring a viable economic activity that provides socioeconomic benefits distributed in an equitable manner among the local stakeholders involved.

The cases of Martín Infierno in the municipality of Cumanayagua, in Cienfuegos, (Hernández Vilches et al., 2021) and in Niquero, Granma (Rosa et al., 2022), just to mention some of them, show at the level of territories, how to approach gender and generational aspects, present in the content of the aforementioned definition, where in terms of socioeconomic goods, equity includes as an active entity, among the actors involved, the community and in particular rural women and young people, which similarly occurs in other tourism modalities, whether in agrotourism, where in their role as farmers they are the main managers of this activity related to the agrarian world. Agro-tourism is a sub-modality of rural tourism, understood as: "a complex and multifaceted activity that is not only based on the recognition of work related to agriculture or livestock, but also includes other activities related to adventure tourism, ecotourism and nature tourism, among others (Duarte and Pereira cited by Cruz Coria et al., 2023).

Unlike the aforementioned modalities contained in rural tourism, the LST complements it by expanding the possibilities for sustainably promoting the potentials present in rural scenarios through the optimal use of economic, cultural and natural resources in harmony with the environment.

Although in the province of Pinar del Río, pilot experiences in LST projects are somewhat recent, according to Cardoso Carreño et al. (2019) and Rodríguez Basso et al. (2023), their economic, social, cultural and environmental impacts, from a gender and generational perspective, have been evident. However, they have not been sufficiently systematized, hence the objective of the present research is aimed at systematizing the impacts of the inclusion of rural women and youth in local sustainable tourism projects.

## MATERIALS AND METHODS

The materials and methods used were based on qualitative methodology. The empirical ones had as a starting point the corresponding analysis from the intersectional approach according to the variables gender, age, roles and rurality present in the subjects in each of the selected LST projects; the semi-structured interview was applied to a sample of 16 women and 12 young people aged between 20 and 35 years and who play roles as managers and workers; the ethnographic, with the help of participant observation, made it possible to describe and interpret in depth the transformations produced with the implementation of these ventures. The triangulation of the results obtained from the research tools applied made it possible to contrast the data obtained from the interviews with the field observation of the economic, social, environmental and cultural impacts.

For the study, an intentional probabilistic sample was selected, made up of four of the six tourism LDPs implemented in the province of Pinar del Río: the Local Tourist Centers (LTC) "Rocío del Sol" and "La Guacamaya", and the agro-tourist farms "Charrabascal" and "Los Mosegui". The agrotourism experience Quemado del Rubí de San Juan y Martínez and Tierra Brava de Los Palacios were not included, as they are more than 15 years old, concentrating on those not yet studied due to their recent creation and their adjustment to the principles of the LST, the inclusive nature of their management based on the participation of rural women and youth and their harmony with the values, knowledge and practices existing in the communities located in their area of influence.

## RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The purpose of achieving development with equity and social justice has one of its pillars in the LDPs. In the province of Pinar del Río, those related to rural tourism have had several impacts in the economic, social, environmental and cultural order on women and young people as the main beneficiaries, whose protagonism has guaranteed its inclusive character. Four of them have manifested it since their design and implementation: Local Development Project "Rocío del Sol" Tourist Center, Guane municipality; Local Development Project of Sustainable Local Tourism, "Charrabascal", La Palma; Local Development Project "La Guacamaya" Tourist Center, La Palma municipality; and Agrotourism Project, "Los Mosegui" farm, Viñales municipality.

### Local Development Project "Rocío del Sol" Tourist Center, municipality of Guane

The "Rocío del Sol" Local Tourist Center is a local development project that emerged at the end of the previous decade, as a result of the government-university-company alliance, the latter being the owner of the enclave. Owned by the Macurijes Agroforestry Company, the facilities of the tourist center, already in the preliminary phase of implementation at 72%, are located in an area of 2,700 hectares of forest in the Combate de las Tenerías Popular Council, Juan Gómez locality, Guane municipality.

One of its main attractions is the carnivorous plant that identifies the tourist center, the *Drosera capillaris*, identified by the name of Rocío del Sol. There have been several benefits derived from the project, mainly for the population of the adjacent community, Juan Gómez, whose environment makes it an ideal place for nature tourism, agro-tourism, health and meditation (Figures 1 and 2).





**Figure 1.** Workers of the LTC "Rocío del Sol" during the process of making the roofs for their facilities

Source: Image taken by the authors



**Figure 2.** Women and young workers of the LTC "Rocío del Sol"

Source: Image taken by the authors

### Local Sustainable Tourism Development Project "Charrabascal", municipality of La Palma

"Charrabascal" is a family farm, which emerged with the accompaniment of the Articulated Platform for Integral Territorial Development, the university and the government in the municipality La Palma. Located in the community of Puerto Escondido, in San Andrés, it is a LDP based on the nature tourism modality.

About this tourism modality, María Valido, an older adult and main manager of this initiative, comments on the insertion of this opportunity as part of her project: "With the participation of the university, I have had the possibility to develop the project, to turn it into a tourist destination based on the products that I obtain, many of them typical of this place".

Under the leadership of María Valido, a senior citizen and its main manager, the project involves members of her family and several women and young people from the community. Among the facilities where she works, there is a farmhouse with technology transferred by the aforementioned platform, where there are plantations whose yields have been sustained through agroecological practices (Figures 3 and 4).



**Figure 3.** María Valido, leader of the agro-tourist farm "Charrabascal"

Source: Image taken by the authors





**Figure 4.** Farmhouse, source of employment for local young people who apply agroecological techniques, "Charrabascal" agro-tourism farm

Source: Image taken by the authors

### **Local Development Project "La Guacamaya" Tourist Center, municipality of La Palma**

Located in the foothills of the Sierra La Guacamaya, in areas of the Agroforestry Company "La Palma", the project arises in an earlier period than its similar, "Rocío del Sol". Still in the construction phase, it takes advantage of the natural and historical resources of the place as attractions, the latter linked to sites of slave resistance.

With the possibility of generating income for the territory, another of its benefits, already underway, is the creation of new sources of employment with the consequent increase in the quality of life of the local inhabitants. The identification and empowerment of high-performance producers in animal husbandry and food cultivation have made it possible to create the basis for possible productive linkages with the agroforestry company.

In the first phase of construction, young people from the community participated in the development of several trails for observing the landscape and fauna; the viewpoint overlooking the Baria Valley and the first cabin, in harmony with the relief of the site and with a maximum use of timber resources from a circular economy concept (Figures 5 and 6).



**Figure 5.** Training workshop for women of the LTC "La Guacamaya", La Palma

Source: Image taken by the authors



**Figure 6.** Access trail to the viewpoint of La Baria Valley, La Palma

Source: Image taken by the authors



### **Agro-tourism Local Development Project, "Los Mosegui" farm, Viñales municipality**

This initiative is the result of the synergy between the Environmental Finance projects, the Biodiversity Finance Initiative of the United Nations Development Program, the University of Pinar del Río "Hermanos Saíz Montes de Oca", the Ecovalor project, the Directorate of Territorial Development and the Mosegui family. The latter, with an ancestral experience in tobacco cultivation, has diversified other productions by taking advantage of their agrarian traditions transmitted from generation to generation, particularly to young women with the purpose of overcoming patriarchal stereotypes. In this sense, Adel Cabrera Pérez, coordinator of the productive polygon located in this place, said: "In each of the polygon's farms we have a pulper and a veneer machine. We make tomato puree and mango, orange and lemon juices, although we have declined a little with citrus fruits. It is also an opportunity for women to work, contribute and manage their own economy".

Located in the Puerto Esperanza Popular Council, the project is basically a tobacco farm, which has diversified its production based on the sustainable management of water, soil and forest.

Identified as a productive polygon, its attractions structure an agro-tourist route for which a system of signage has been installed to facilitate visitors' interpretation of the productive traditions, agro-ecological techniques and biodiversity conservation of this farming family (Figures 7 and 8).



**Figure 7.** Placement of signage by young workers in cultivation areas, "Los Mosegui" farm, Viñales

Source: Image taken by the authors



**Figure 8.** Placement of signage by young workers in cultivation areas, "Los Mosegui" farm, Viñales  
Source: Image taken by the authors

### **Main impacts on rural women and young people**

Already in their design and partial implementation phase, these local sustainable tourism projects have had positive effects from an intersectional approach from the intersection of gender, age, roles and rurality variables, by benefiting women and young people with diverse sources of employment in the tourism activity, whose impacts contain a focus on equity and inclusion in the economic, social, environmental and cultural aspects, which are listed below:

#### **Economic**

- Achieved the incorporation of 70% of rural women and youth in all phases of design and implementation of LST projects with pilot experiences in the municipalities of Guane, La Palma and Viñales.

- Created new job offers for 16 women and 12 rural youth between 20 and 25 years of age in LST projects.
- Increased food production by more than 80% using agroecological techniques with the incorporation of rural women and young people, particularly in the two agro-tourism farms designed.
- Mobilized 100% of local productive potential with high participation of women producers in synergy with the LTCs.

### **Social**

- 100% of rural women's and young people's capacities in the management of tourism products have been created.
- High degree of involvement of rural women and youth in the project.
- Self-management participation encouraged with the involvement of women and young people to promote LST projects.
- Promoted social equity by ensuring equal opportunities for women and youth to access resources, opportunities and benefits derived from the initial results obtained in the LST projects.
- Ensured sustainability in the LST projects, with the development of social capacities in rural women and youth.
- Mitigated rural-to-urban migration flows of youth involved in LSTs.
- Empowered rural women and youth in the management of LST projects.

### **Environmental**

- Incorporated 60% of children and adolescents in environmental education actions in LST projects, with the participation of rural women and youth.
- Balanced the level of physical burden of the community on natural, heritage and cultural resources in the project environment, with the involvement of rural women and youth through educational activities.
- Reduced negative environmental impacts in communities adjacent to LST projects, with the involvement of women and young people through social prevention actions.



## Cultural

- Revalued the popular culture carried by rural women and young people as a function of the tourism project in a mutually beneficial relationship.
- Increased representativeness of historical and cultural values, with the participation of rural women and young people in the project's area of influence and their identification as a tourist attraction.
- Increased sense of belonging of women and youth to the communities where the LST are implemented.

The inclusion of rural women and young people in LST projects as an affirmative action aimed at the full insertion of the subjects in society, without exclusion, has been demonstrated from the experiences in the province of Pinar del Río, specifically, in the municipalities of Guane, La Palma and Viñales, mostly in several projects in the implementation phase, two of them as LTC and two agrotourism farms.

Several impacts reveal the reduction of inclusion gaps in women and young people through the creation of new sources of employment, capacity building, empowerment, full participation, deconstruction of gender and generational stereotypes, which has resulted in raising the quality of life of these subjects showing the good practices in terms of economic, social, cultural and environmental impact of LCT projects in rural areas, which highlights the contribution of this type of economic actor in the development and implementation of social policies in scenarios prone to vulnerable situations, particularly in women and young people.

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### Conflict of interest

Authors declare no conflict of interests.

### Authors' contribution

*Jorge Freddy Ramírez Pérez and Silfredo Rodríguez Basso* designed the study, analyzed the data and prepared the draft.

*Silfredo Rodríguez Basso* was involved in data collection, analysis and interpretation.

All the authors reviewed the writing of the manuscript and approve the version finally submitted.



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