

WAVES FOR DEVELOPMENT – A VERY DIFFERENT PROJECT

Some fifteen years ago, a number of very keen surfers discovered a new and exciting coastline to surf around a village in Northern Peru, not far from the border with Ecuador, known as Lobitos. They started to rent small wooden houses in the area – and a potential tourist industry was born.



Lobitos was once an oil production and military base, but that is all gone, and what is left is a somewhat dilapidated fishing village. Approximately 1500 people live in Lobitos, and the majority of the population is less than 18 years old. This is a small socio-economic time bomb, since these young people will need employment in the coming years. Apart from fishing, job offers are scarce. And young people have little access to financial resources and business knowledge.

A chance meeting of four surfers who discovered Lobitos – an Australian, an American, an Italian and a Swiss – led to the conception of WAVES for Development, Peru, a voluntary association of surfers who wish to give back to the area something of value. WAVES is based on the idea that surf travel should benefit the people and the communities where it happens. The organization links travelling to surf, volunteering, community-based tourism and grassroots initiatives.

They set up an outreach programme, offering surfers a chance to unite their favorite sport with a chance to interact with the local people by volunteering to share skills with them (voluntourism).

Since tourism is likely to be the largest source of future employment, WAVES organized groups of instructors to teach young people some of the skills which would be useful in the tourism industry. These included English speaking, photography, swimming and surfing; commercial training and micro-finance; and ecology and other workshops including construction, preparation of surf-boards, solar panels and creation of gardens. Every year groups of surfers now join in this initiative, contributing to the work of WAVES while enjoying their surfing holiday.

These activities are small-scale, but flourishing. The centre of the activity is at the Surf Shop, which was situated in a run-down shack, inadequate for all the initiatives which were undertaken there. Our Association was requested to finance the construction of larger and more solid building.



Our funding covered the bamboo, cement and other materials required to transform a shack into a substantial entity. The actual construction work was carried out by WAVES staff, with the help of volunteers and two professionals hired in Lobitos. They emptied the shack and set aside those wooden panels which were good enough for future use. They constructed bamboo walls flat on the ground, then erected them, roofed them and plastered them with concrete, as well as pouring a new concrete floor. They sanded, painted and varnished the walls. Windows and doors were placed, electricity was installed, and shelving was assembled.



In less than three months the Surf Shop/Meeting Centre for Visitors was completed.

Thanks inter alia to the help of FdE, the future for the young people in Lobitos just became a little brighter!



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Project Committee