This paper outlines possibilities for achieving Sustainable Development Goal (SDG) 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) through the mass tourism sector, while also accomplishing related objectives in infrastructure (SDG 9), poverty reduction (SDG 1), urban development (SDG 11), and water and sanitation management (SDG 6). Though the proposed solutions are intended to have broad applicability, the paper focuses on a case study of Punta Cana, Dominican Republic.

While Punta Cana consisted of a handful of small hotels in the 1970s, today it is the Caribbean’s leading tourism destination, drawing most of the Dominican Republic’s annual 5.1 million visitors with its stock of 60,000 hotel rooms. The destination’s growth was driven almost entirely by the private sector; the lack of public investment in the Dominican Republic’s east and the dearth of zoning regulations means that hoteliers have provided their own utilities and built high-walled compounds that keep tourists in and locals off the beaches. With comparatively few free standing restaurants and other attractions, tourists have little reason to leave – and are warned against it because of “security concerns.” Most of Punta Cana's dispersed worker settlements lack basic services (electricity, safe drinking water, waste management, medical clinics) resulting in an abysmal standard of living, and the migratory nature of these communities poses challenges for community organizing. The influx of Haitian workers – some of whom secure better paid hotel jobs because of their language skills – creates additional social tensions.

I begin by tracing Punta Cana’s development, the relationship between the public sector, private sector, and local residents, and its persistent development challenges. I then provide a series of national-level policy recommendations, designed to extend the pro-poor tourism discourse from community-based tourism to mass tourism.

The emergence of Punta Cana
The name Punta Cana, while familiar to tourists around the world, is a trademark rather than a geographical location; in fact, the name has been copyrighted by Grupo Punta Cana. The far eastern tip of the Dominican Republic is home to a series of resort areas, including Cap Cana, Punta Cana, Bávaro, Cabeza de Toro, Uvero Alto and Macao – although they are collectively marketed as Punta Cana.

In 1967, the region now known as Punta Cana was home to former sugar lands which had remained undeveloped since sugar production slowed. There was virtually no local population and the closest town, Higüey, was about 30 miles away – reachable by poorly maintained roads. At the time, Dominican entrepreneur Frank Rainieri had a crop spraying business and was hired to translate for a group of Americans sent by President Johnson to secure land for a new Merchant Marine Academy. Later, at a party in Miami hosted by labor attorney Ted Kheel, photographs of the beaches on the Dominican east coast were circulated, and one of the guests pointed out that 15,000 acres was up for sale for $250,000. Kheel and another partygoer set out to purchase the land, using Rainieri’s translation skills and local knowledge. Rainieri became a
partner in the venture shortly thereafter. On October 24, 1971, the first beachfront cabins were inaugurated, with President Balaguer in attendance. The cabins were the start of Grupo Punta Cana.

When those in the industry speak of “Don Frank” today, they refer to him as a “visionary,” a “dreamer,” a “fighter,” a man who saw the region’s potential decades before anyone else. After building his cabins, Rainieri partnered with Club Med in 1977. To become a major tourism destination, he knew the area needed an airport, so he set about constructing one. Obtaining the necessary permissions required three presidential administrations, but in 1982 he succeeded; commercial operations began in 1984. The region was initially excluded from incentive laws, including Ley 153 and INFRATUR funding, and Rainieri’s early relations with the government were strained. As he noted in a press interview: “they said that if they would invest in the country it had to be done where the government said, not where Frank Rainieri wanted.”

The situation improved for Grupo Punta Cana in 1986; with Rainieri’s brother as tourism minister, a new incentives law included Punta Cana and the Grupo’s Punta Cana Beach Resort opened. Rainieri says:

My brother acted against me. He put clauses that they do not put on others. I was penalized enormously. So I have always objected that the incentives are not sectoral laws. They must include the entire country. The tourist destination is the Dominican Republic. Spain is Spain. It is not supposed to be Madrid, Mallorca or Asturias. We must stop these regionalisms.

With the airport and incentive structure finally in place, the region has grown steadily ever since the mid-1980s, with the support of Spanish chains like Meliá, Bahía Principe, and Barceló. Today, Punta Cana International Airport is the busiest private airport in the world, receiving more than four million passengers a year.

When designing his first hotel, Rainieri visited Cancún and South Florida and was disappointed by beachfront high-rise hotels; they are aesthetically unappealing, cast shadows on the beach, and caused beach erosion. He endeavored to build “nothing higher than a coconut tree” – and most other developers in the region have followed his lead. Grupo Punta Cana has encouraged the replication of other practices, as well, including the use of local vegetation to limit water use and installing water treatment facilities. In its early years the Grupo was strapped for cash, and decided to borrow from traditional Taino building techniques in the construction of the airport. The use of eucalyptus beams, thatched roofs, and open spaces made the structure less expensive to construct, cool, and maintain, and also added local character. These building techniques have since been adopted by most other hotels in the area. As Scarpaci et al. point out, “Ironically, despite its commitment to ecologically responsible development, Grupo Punta Cana’s success in establishing the Punta Cana International Airport has enabled the rapid and uncontrolled expansion of tourism in the region. It is unfortunate that only a few of the other resorts in the area share Grupo Punta Cana’s vision of sustainable tourism development.”

**Spanish hotel chains and public-private sector coordination**

While Grupo Punta Cana pioneered their namesake destination, the Rainieri family’s success in attracting foreign investors, especially Spanish hotel chains, has been essential for the region’s success. Today, 90% of hotels in the Dominican Republic are foreign-owned – and 70% of those are owned by Spanish chains. Other than Grupo Punta Cana, just one subsection of the Punta Cana region was developed by Dominican investors: and Cap Cana, owned by the

---

1 Suarez, “Frank Ranieri [sic]: From Translator to Owner in Punta Cana.”

2 Ibid.

Hazoury family. While I have met with multiple representatives from Grupo Puntacana and Cap Cana, including members of the Rainieri and Hazoury families, several aspects of their operations make it very difficult to secure interviews with resort managers in Spanish chains. First, “the hotels are like their own little castles.” As virtually self-contained operations, they have little motivation to interact with the local community, press, or other outsiders. Secondly, the corporate headquarters for many of these chains, including Barceló, Iberostar, and Meliá, are based in Mallorca, Spain and the chains have exported their highly successful business model from the Balearic Islands to the Spanish Caribbean. The managers cycle through various resorts within the chains, and therefore tend to have short tenures at Dominican properties and are kept on a “tight leash” by their corporate offices. Finally, as expressed in at least a dozen of my interviews, the Spanish hoteliers take an imperial attitude to the Dominican Republic. I expressed my frustration about being unable to secure interviews with the Spanish hoteliers to the director of a tourism management program, and she explained:

It’s because they’re always thinking that you’re going to obtain something that will affect their tax burden...And not all of the managers are [really] managers. They don’t even have the authority to make a statement, and if they say something wrong then they’ll be out of a job – they have to drink the boss’s KoolAid. And so there are lots of managers who comply, and truly don’t have the authority to say: “We’re doing this, this year we’re going to try that, we buy local products, the statistics are this, the average spending is that.” You don’t hear this kind of thing because they’re concerned about tax liability.

I asked a Grupo Puntacana executive about the relationship between the Spanish chains and the Grupo, and he pointed out that “we’re important to them because of the airport. The airport is the key mover of the entire area, with up to 400 flights per week.” Grupo Puntacana has carefully managed relationships with tour operators, airlines, and others – and ensuring well-managed operations with on-time performance is critical to the airport’s (and the region’s) success. Another industry insider noted that “Don Frank” is well respected by the Spanish hoteliers; they respect his vision and the airport creates a win-win situation for everyone. All are committed to keeping the zone safe and secure, and are typically on the same page on policy issues. One notable exception occurred in 2009, when Frank Rainieri was “blocked by industry peers” from becoming president of CONEP, the National Council on Private Enterprise.

Despite the clout held by the Rainieri family, public-private coordination on sector issues remains weak. There is, for example, no tourism information booth at Punta Cana’s airport and road signage is inadequate. While the recent construction of the Coral Highway and Touristic Boulevard have improved the infrastructure, “the service infrastructure – or the superstructure that supports tourism and complementary offerings – is still a bit weak.” Without coherent benchmarking strategies, hoteliers might declare that the season has been a good one, yet “we can’t really see if the number of tourists who came to the country [this year] have generated greater benefits than those who came in the past.” This expert notes that the growth strategy has focused entirely on generating high occupancy rates through low room prices, which is the mark of a “surviving” sector rather than a “healthy” one.

The lack of information from Spanish hotel chains means that it is incredibly difficult to assess local value chains, as no information is available on sourcing. Industry experts speak in general

---

4 Interview, JK
5 Interview, CB
6 Interview, JK
7 Interview, PC
8 Suarez, “Frank Ranieri [sic]: From Translator to Owner in Punta Cana.”
9 Interview, CB
terms about sourcing – “they use intermediaries”\textsuperscript{10} – or state that the sector generates “strong linkages, especially to agriculture.” These multiplier effects justify the generous incentive structure, yet incredibly, no value chain analysis of the Dominican tourism sector exists and no sourcing data is available. No one seems to know where the Spanish chains purchase their consumable goods. By contrast, Grupo Puntacana is quite open about this information; Frank Elias Rainieri (son of Frank Rainieri) told me that 90\% of the Grupo’s food and beverage comes from within the country, and that USDA beef and alcoholic beverages are the only major imported items. The 90\% figure was also given in a 2006 report prepared by ASONAHORES, the Pro-Poor Tourism Partnership, and The Travel Foundation: “research carried out in 1997 through hotel surveys concluded that 90\% of Food and Beverage products were produced within the country.” The study is not cited and the figure is now outdated, but the report authors go on to say that most “domestic purchasing is...via wholesalers in the cities,” thereby limiting direct linkages between resorts and farmers.\textsuperscript{11} More research in this area – particularly in the quantification of value chains – is sorely needed.

**Local development and community organizing**

As noted, the east coast had little in the way of a local population, save a handful of charcoal-making communities, and all tourism sector workers are migrants. The first tourism sector employees for the Grupo Puntacana resort relocated from nearby Higüey, living in resort-provided housing and sending their children to the resort-owned school. However, the development of local communities – equipped with basic services – has utterly failed to keep pace with the massive expansion of tourism development. Riding on local transportation (guaguas) through the communities surrounding Bávaro-Punta Cana, I heard nearly as much Haitian Creole as Dominican Spanish. Residents transport produce, rice and other goods, while the guaguas bounce along potholed, semi-paved roads. A cobrador (collector) hangs out the door, calling the destination, loading packages, and collecting fares from passengers. Music – usually merengue or bachata – blares from the guagua’s speakers. Stops are made at the back entrances to most resorts, and in the local communities where workers live (Friusa, Verón, and also smaller settlements, like Villa Esperanza). In mid-afternoon, schoolchildren ride the guaguas home, and many pay their fare with a US dollar bill – presumably from the gratuities received by their resort-employed parents.\textsuperscript{12} Even the smaller communities are bustling and vibrant, with the assortment of local businesses found in most Dominican towns: banca de loteria (lottery stand), colmado (corner grocery), gomero (tire repair/mechanic), comedor (dining hall), salon de belleza (beauty parlor), and street vendors selling food, clothing, and other goods. Many of the local businesses are operated by Haitians.

Despite clear signs of economic activity, the living conditions endured by local residents are often deplorable. According to a 2012 study carried out by Pan y Vida, a Spanish nonprofit, of two neighborhoods in Verón (La Gallera and Luna del Caribe), 23\% of births are unregistered (though the authors speculate that the number is likely much higher), and 15\% of all children are unvaccinated. The average household size is 5 people, and nearly all households include children. Fifty percent of homes measured less than 40 square meters, and more than a third have just one room. Eighty-one percent of homes lack a sink or washbasin, one in five homes lack a toilet, and one in three lack a kitchen. Eighty-five percent of those surveyed considered the conditions in Verón and access to healthcare to be worse than that in their communities of

\textsuperscript{10} Interview, CB


\textsuperscript{12} Elsewhere in the country, it is unusual for Dominicans to pay for things in anything other than Dominican pesos.
origin. A 2010 Virginia Tech report on water quality showed many samples taken from Verón households to be contaminated with E. coli, and local residents said they were dependent on bottled water for cooking and drinking.

The migrant nature of the community “weakens the social tissue,” as one observer pointed out, reducing social cohesion and possibilities for community organizing to remedy these development challenges. A 2008 UNDP study on Verón (and several other Dominican towns) found that nearly all residents had migrated from other parts of the country, drawn by the growing tourism sector and hopes of finding work. As a result, there is a great deal of “alienation and little sense of belonging, as residents feel no linkages to the local community beyond their search for sources of income.” The report also notes that because the community is seen as “temporary” by most of its inhabitants, they are disinterested in organizing to resolve its pressing, long-term problems. While the report correctly identifies the many development challenges facing Verón – including poor roads, lack of primary and secondary schools, absence of sewage or trash collection system, insecurity and mistrust, lack of latrines or bathrooms in some homes, high cost of living for basic necessities, few opportunities for home ownership, lack of parks or a cemetery, and the presence of prostitution – it places undue (and unfair) emphasis on the role of social and kinship networks to remedy these ills, while ignoring the role of the state and the private sector in generating these deficiencies. The workers’ communities in Punta Cana are certainly alienated, but they have been actively excluded from access to power – rather than estranged through their own choices. As one industry observer and activist notes, the hotels have actively destroyed local social networks by crippling hotel worker unions: “The hoteliers don’t want to know about workers unions because each year they oblige them to increase wages. So they [the hoteliers] have more or less destroyed the unions, which were a voice, but have been giving up.” Moreover, the tourism sector employees I spoke with all stated that “owning their own home” was one of their primary dreams for the future and so reluctance to put down roots in their adopted communities does not seem readily apparent.

Another contributing factor to the lack of social cohesion in the region is the heavy presence of Haitian migrants, which is so pronounced that there is a community near Juanillo known as Little Haiti (Haití Chiquito). As one local resident notes: “[The migration] is partly our fault – because if the Dominicans don’t want to be cutting cane, the Haitians will cut it. If the Dominicans don’t want to cement blocks, the Haitians want to do it. If the Dominicans want to hang out on a corner playing dominos and drinking, the Haitians are opening up all the colmados in Verón […] So why don’t the Dominicans get their act together?” While poorer Haitians open small businesses in worker settlements or do gardening and construction work, more educated Haitians (some who are US deportees) are often hired by resorts and tour operators because of their language skills. Many are trilingual – in French, English and Haitian Creole – and their French skills are in demand on excursions with Canadian and European tourists.

The Bávaro-Punta Cana region, due to its relatively short history, the transience of the local population, and its complete dependence on the all-inclusive tourism sector, lacks community organizations. Aside from the Punta Cana Ecological Foundation and Pan y Vida, there are just

---

15 Interview, PI
17 Interview, CB
18 Interview, PC
a handful of nonprofits active in the area: the Rotary Club, Pan y Vida and Save the Children (which had active programs in Verón until at least 2012). In fact, of the 35 registered nonprofits operating in the province of La Altagracia, all are located in Higüey or San Rafael de Yuma. As noted, the Foundation has had a partnership with the Peace Corps for the last several years; the third consecutive volunteer is now in the middle of her placement. Some of these other organizations have ties to Grupo Puntacana, as well – Fernando Rainieri, former Minister of Tourism and brother of Frank Rainieri – is the President of the Board of Trustees for Save the Children Dominican Republic. The Grupo also provides financial support to the Rotary Club.

Tourism researcher Pilar Constanzo attributes the lack of community organizing to the disparate nature of the settlements in Bávaro-Punta Cana. “The low concentration [of population] in just one location doesn’t give you the sense of territoriality…in a small country like ours, we’re accustomed to having everything be highly concentrated. Here [in Bávaro], nothing is – we have all these groups that are split up and people don’t come together.” The various communities of Uvero Alto, Cap Cana, Cabeza de Toro, and others see themselves as “independent republics” and it is therefore difficult to bring them together. Differences in power also come into play: “there is stagnation here, because the most powerful don’t take into account the [needs of] the weakest – and the most powerful are the hoteliers. They think that what they say is the word of God, and obviously there are lots of other groups that should have a voice.”

I asked a group of hotel employees whether they participated in decision-making related to the tourism sector through community meetings, referendums, or other means. One employee responded: “Well, our areas aren’t very connected, and they don’t meddle directly with [the tourism sector].” Unfortunately, we don’t have access to that” said one. “We have the opportunity to have an opinion,” said another, laughing. Another expressed embarrassment at the poor conditions in the area – está muy descuidada – and that tourists travel directly from their hotels to the Municipal Market and Basilica in Higüey and back again. (One mimicked tourists traveling with their hands over their eyes and the cameras around their necks, waiting for their guide to tell them when it was safe to look again.) I then asked how residents “get things done” in the community – if for, instance, road repairs are needed or there are other issues that the municipal authorities should resolve. The group agreed that unless it was presidential election season – in which case the local authorities would be “very obliging, very humanitarian” – “everything is based on strikes.” “We’re ‘free’ to go and ask for things, but in reality it’s not effective,” explains one. “No one listens to us,” says another. They described the process by which neighbors organize, put together a request for the local government, gather signatures, and then hand-deliver a document. The government verifies the request and the signatures, it is presented to the local officials, and then days and months go by when nothing happens – until the next election cycle. The community, which up to this point has received nothing from their local authorities, then “takes control, throwing rocks and sticks, making the streets impassible, and then the authorities comply.” “We burn tires,” notes another. One referred to the residents of Bávaro-Punta Cana as “orphans,” forgotten by the government; another notes that “La Altagracia, the province that is closest to here, is about 45 minutes away” – though technically, Bávaro-Punta Cana is part of La Altagracia province. Others noted that it was dangerous to engage in protests so close to the tourism zone: “We can’t sell that image to tourists.”

Politics of space
While there has been some work on the spatial and exclusionary dynamics of the formal and informal sector in Sosúa (Kermath and Thomas 1992; Cabezas 2008) and the impacts of

19 Interview, PC
enclave tourism on rural development in Luperón (Freitag 1994), the spatial separation of the resorts and local communities in Punta Cana – while readily apparent – remains unexplored. When tourists arrive at the airport, they are quickly loaded onto air-conditioned tourist-only taxis or shuttles, and travel down the newly paved Boulevard Turístico with curtains covering the windows. Unlike in Cancún, where the resorts are visible from main road through the Zona Hotelera, the Boulevard Turístico is surrounded by vegetation on either side, such that nothing – not even the beach – can be seen from the road. Each resort has a manned, gated entrance and only registered guests are permitted inside.

While there were urban planning initiatives in other tourist poles, such planning did not take place in Bávaro-Punta Cana, and elsewhere in the country plans are more reflective of the whims of particular presidential administrations than a long-term development strategy. For example, a public beach access point in Bávaro was removed while Felix Jimenez was Minister of Tourism, to make way for a condominium complex that his development company constructed. The lack of planning has meant that large resorts have snapped up acres of beachfront property, and “we have lost the potential to sell a second, third, and fourth line of beach at better prices, by making perpendicular access points to freely access the beach itself.”

Even wealthy residents are segregated from their even wealthier counterparts. The developers of Cap Cana own the gated community of Las Canas, where the 50 resident families are well-to-do Dominican or expat professionals employed by the tourism sector. Entering Las Canas requires passing through several security checkpoints, but Las Canas residents are not permitted to access the beaches in Cap Cana proper. The owners of beachfront mansions have petitioned Cap Cana management to protect “their” beaches from any outsiders, including those who own property in other sections of Cap Cana. One local activist pointed out: “We all live in ghettos – rich ghettos and poor ghettos. It is like the feudal system – I joke that we have Lord Rainieri over there, Lord Hazoury over here, and then the hotels are another [lord]. They are all just buying land and closing it off.”

Another interviewee – tourism consultant Lisette Hill – also pointed out this dynamic: “they create tourist ghettos…each time with higher walls.”

While most of the land where hotels now stand was uninhabited, there is one notable exception. Years ago, just south of where the mansions now stand, was the town of Juanillo; the old beachfront road is now barely visible through the sand. When Cap Cana’s developers began construction, they “relocated” Juanillo’s residents to a purpose-built community several miles inland, aptly named “Nuevo Juanillo.” Two hotels are now slated for construction on that space, and once construction begins, residents (other than those who own beachfront property) will have no beach access whatsoever within Cap Cana. In the meantime, Cap Cana has constructed a jetty and a barrier of vegetation, preventing access to the beach in front of the mansions. This maneuver, while a successful deterrent to “interlopers” has interesting legal implications. Under the Dominican Constitution, the first sixty meters of beach is public property.

For residents of Juanillo, life has become progressively worse since construction began and forced their relocation in 2006. Local residents protested the resort as bulldozers destroyed their

---

20 Interview, LH
21 Interview, CR
22 Leavenworth (2002) cites an interview with Ted Kheel which discusses the resettlement of charcoal-making families into Grupo Puntacana-provided housing. Researcher Yolanda Leon, who has written extensively on relocations caused by tourism developments, sought out these original families when doing research in Bávaro-Punta Cana and was unable to locate them. It thus seems reasonable to conclude that the original community was very small, and has since moved out of the area or been absorbed into other settlements as the area’s population has exploded.
homes, businesses, and even the community cemetery. Reporters who attempted to cover the evictions "were subjected to verbal and physical aggression by a group of soldiers." Their cameras were broken and cassette tapes with video footage of the evictions were destroyed. Life in "el Proyecto de Juanillo," as some local residents derisively refer to it, is abysmal. Residents' social networks were fractured, they have no access to fishing grounds, and those who received financial compensation did not have the ability to use the funds to secure their financial futures. With inadequate levels of financial literacy and no access to financial institutions, lump sum payments are quickly gobbled up by daily necessities or emergency expenses; this leaves the families far worse off than prior to relocation. Cap Cana developers created a community of brightly colored tropical houses -- complete with a school, church, electricity, and a sewage system -- but when I visited it was clearly in dire need of maintenance. The access road through the jungle is in terrible condition, with potholes that would make travel by motorcycle treacherous. Other than Cap Cana's electric plant and warehousing space, there is nothing around Nuevo Juanillo, and very little economic activity occurring within it.

Opportunities for reform
Frustrated by Punta Cana's persistent inequalities -- the deplorable living conditions endured by hotel workers, the unchecked power of the hoteliers, the luxury enjoyed by oblivious foreign tourists, and the government officials who seemed more interested in lining their pockets and obfuscating than anything else -- I asked several local residents why there weren't more signs of activism and mobilization. One noted: "Dominicans are very happy people. We're not going to have a revolution...and I think the government is taking advantage of that, handing out money or buying people a round. I don't see a way out of all this."

The very nature of the tourism sector may restrict organizing activities: as Hartlyn points out in his 1998 book on Dominican politics, "although difficult to prove, politicians and observers alike have argued that awareness by political leaders of tourism's sensitivity to political stability almost certainly has helped to constrain protest activities, especially by leading political actors." Local residents appreciate perhaps better than anyone that tourism is a sensitive industry and that their livelihoods depend on their silence. One activist noted: "Life here is really hard and people are just so tired. They just don't have the energy to fight for their rights. And who do you fight against? Your employer? The whole community is stuck in a Catch-22." She and I later trespassed onto a beach in Cap Cana (near Juanillo), climbing over shrubbery and dodging a guard hut to walk past mansions owned by millionaires from Venezuela, Mexico, England, and elsewhere. As guards chased after us and implored us to turn around, she pointed out that she had designed several of the swimming pools we were walking past. Her clients -- for whom she had built majestic, camera-ready pools, complete with lazy rivers and slides -- were now successfully restricting beach access for her and thousands of other local residents. When we headed back to public section of the beach, the guards caught up with us. After a heated debate over beach access, the activist said she understood the guard was just doing his job, but asked where he brought his children to the beach. He laughed ruefully: "We don't go to the beach." He told us of friends and family who used to live in Juanillo, where they had plots of land and were successful fisherfolk, but are now left with virtually nothing. His mother is working to organize the residents of Nuevo Juanillo.

23 Interview, YL
The power of the hotel lobby is seen more forcefully in Bávaro-Punta Cana than anywhere else in the country. When asked about how to remedy the area’s persistent inequalities, President of the Consejo de Desarrollo Económico y Social de Verón-Punta Cana, Crucito Báez Jiménez, declined to address specifics, noting that “more communication” between the municipal authorities, the central government, and the private sector would help. I asked about aspects of the current legal framework that should be reformed or strengthened, and he said: “Here, when they [the government] apply the law, apply the regulations, the fine points, they can carry it out. What happens is that lots of people don’t like it when they enforce the law. And there are lots of people that don’t like when they enforce regulations.” When I asked him to clarify who “didn’t like it,” he cackled with laughter and said, “Well, that’s what happens.” I asked him to elaborate on the relationship between local government and the private sector in promoting local development:

We have a town hall, a municipal district, municipal authorities, but I have also heard from some investors: “The resources that I pay in taxes to the town, the local population isn’t seeing it. So, the investors pick up on this and refuse to budge.” [They say,] “well – if what I’m paying doesn’t get invested back in the community, […] we’re not seeing the social responsibilities that the municipality has, so I’m not doing it.” So I know that there are lots of investors that maybe have those resources put aside [and] that are scared of investing it and handing it off to the municipal authorities because they don’t see that [the authorities] are responsible. So I know that this is the fear that lots of investors have.

Another also placed blame with the local government (ayuntamiento), noting that the independence of local governments in spending tax revenues “is a situation that we really have to resolve.” The dominance of the private sector in Punta Cana has left a painful legacy to overcome – the perception of tax payments as optional, the complete disconnect between local government and the population that elects them – if the region is to generate more inclusive growth and improved democratic governance.

Proposed solutions
To make serious progress towards SDG 8 (promote sustained, inclusive and sustainable economic growth, full and productive employment and decent work for all) through the mass tourism sector, while also accomplishing related objectives in infrastructure (Goal 9), poverty reduction (Goal 1), urban development (Goal 11), and water and sanitation management (Goal 6) requires strong public-private partnerships and participatory approaches. When local populations are disenfranchised and/or disorganized, getting the private sector to see inclusive growth as critical to its own strategic interests is essential for communities to obtain marked improvements in development outcomes. Recommendations to begin remedying these complex challenges include: 1) expand successful models of sustainability and participation provided by Dominican hoteliers, including Grupo Punta Cana’s Ecological Foundation and other social programming; 2) ensure public-private partnership on the development of touristic corridors, which will increase tourist spending, increase visit lengths, and force improvements in basic services and infrastructure within local communities; and 3) encourage nongovernmental organizations already present elsewhere in the Dominican Republic to expand their activities to the east coast, where the dearth of civil society actors exacerbates existing development challenges.