

# First Semester News Bulletin 2005



## *A word...*

*We take this opportunity to share the enthusiastic synergy taking place in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, carrying out 167 activities in the field, an orchestra of multiple actors and alternatives that the project must consolidate to forge a sustainable culture. In order to build the region's capital we continue to work with the local communities, developing new productive skills, infrastructure and equipment, new habits in health and sanitation, and to embrace the process by providing accompaniment in a timely and organized way, working closely with the 16,000 participants in the different programs.*

*As a social movement for conservation, Sierra Gorda seeks to crystalize incentives and compensation for extreme poverty property-owners through payments for the ecosystemic services, which bundled into the whole project will mean sustainability as a real living experience for the region.*



GLOBAL  
ENVIRONMENT  
FACILITY



COMISION NACIONAL DE  
ÁREAS NATURALES  
PROTEGIDAS

Biodiversity Conservation in the  
Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve

## *An Invitation*

*Join us for the outdoor gigantic photo exhibition by Fulvio Eccardi with 190 images on the Plaza Alameda, Queretaro City.*

*“Sierra Gorda, a green jewel in central Mexico”*

*September 8 – January 2006*

## Cultivation of blackberries

The **SIERRA GORDA BIOSPHERE RESERVE (SGBR)** is exploring the cultivation of blackberries as an additional productive alternative for residents of the Reserve. This fruit, which grows wild in the highlands of the Sierra, has become an important economic resource in other regions. The Reserve invited **ASHOKA** fellow Bernardo Rojas, president of the company **APROCAM** in Costa Rica, to visit the Sierra Gorda and conduct a technical assessment of the Reserve's potential for blackberry production. In Costa Rica, **APROCAM** has developed a successful project involving 800 rural producers that is commercializing a considerable volume of product both locally and internationally. Rojas' visit to the Sierra was supported by **ASHOKA** "Innovators for the Public", which stimulates exchanges among its fellows, thanks to a partnership established by Reserve Director

Pati Ruiz Corzo, who has been an **ASHOKA** fellow since 1996. Rojas visited the Reserve from March 29 to April 1 and met with property owners and blackberry producers as part of his evaluation. He is preparing a complete diagnosis and plan of action for the Sierra Gorda.

## Ecology murals

With the support of the **GONZALO RÍO ARRONTE FOUNDATION (FGRA)**, the **GRUPO ECOLÓGICO SIERRA GORDA IAP (GESG)** painted 19 murals during the first trimester of the year in key communities and other locations within the Sierra Gorda. The murals have themes of forest fire prevention and water conservation, which are of special importance during this season of high temperatures and water shortages.

## Energy Alternatives

With the support of the **MEXICAN FUND FOR NATURE CONSERVATION**, Heike Hoedt of **SOLAR HOUSEHOLD ENERGY**, an expert in alternative energy use, has been visiting local organizations in Mexico, including the **GESG**, to promote the use of “solar cooking pots.” These pots, which are solar energy collectors, are a practical alternative for conserving energy while cooking food. Residents of the Sierra are purchasing the pots because of their demonstrated effectiveness and because they conserve firewood and natural gas. The **GRUPO ECOLÓGICO** has become a distributor of this technology, which we hope, in the near future, will be commonly used in the Sierra Gorda and nearby areas.

## Workshop on Monitoring and Evaluation of GEG Projects

The *Third Workshop on Monitoring and Evaluation of GEF Projects* took place on January 14 in the city of San Jose, Costa Rica with the participation of **CENTRAL AMERICAN NON-GOVERNMENTAL ORGANIZATIONS (NGOs)** that are implementing projects supported by the **GLOBAL ENVIRONMENT FACILITY (GEF)**. The **GESG** was the only Mexican **NGO** participating in the event, which also included organizations from Guatemala, Honduras, Nicaragua, El Salvador, Costa Rica and Panama. Participants had the opportunity to exchange experiences and ideas in order to facilitate the implementation of these types of projects.

## Formation of a Culture of Sustainability in the Semi-Desert

After three years of development and implementation, the project *Formation of a Culture of Sustainability in Eleven Semi-Desert Communities in the Sierra Gorda* has concluded. This project was implemented in the municipality of Peñamiller with the support of the **JAPAN INTERNATIONAL COOPERATION AGENCY (JICA)**. The project included environmental education, the development of a culture for recycling and management of solid waste, community clean-up campaigns, and training for sustainable harvesting of non-wood resources such as oregano and damiana.

During this long process, it was gratifying to find the enthusiastic response of the beneficiaries, the great majority of whom assimilated and adopted new practices and a friendlier attitude towards the environment. We would like to recognize and give our most sincere appreciation to the government of Japan for its generous support of this project.

## Federal Legislators Visit the Biosphere Reserve

From January 19-22, we had the pleasure to receive a group of Mexican federal legislators and other distinguished visitors to the Sierra Gorda. Among them were senators Guillermo Herbert Pérez, Francisco Caballos Urueta and Micaela Aguilar González; deputy Leonardo Álvarez; the director of conservation management of the **NATIONAL COMMISSION OF NATURAL PROTECTED AREAS (CONANP)**, David Gutiérrez Carbonell; and Juan Bezaury Creel of **THE NATURE CONSERVANCY (TNC)**. They had the opportunity to see first-hand some of the activities of the **BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE SIERRA GORDA BIOSPHERE RESERVE PROJECT**, as well as to speak directly with beneficiaries and others involved in project activities. The visitors were very impressed with the project's beneficial economic impacts.

## World Economic Forum

In her role as a fellow of the **SCHWAB FOUNDATION FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS**, Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, director of the **SGBR**, was invited to participate in the *World Economic Forum* held in January in Davos, Switzerland. She took part in three sessions on climate change and participated in the *Mountain and Water Initiative* session with personalities such as the Prince of Holland and the presidents of corporations such as **NESTLE** and **COCA-COLA**.

Ruiz also met with Steve McCormick, executive president of **TNC**, one of the most prestigious and strongest conservation organizations in the world. In the private events of the Forum, she also had the opportunity to converse with Dr. Klaus Schwab and Dr. Ernesto Zedillo, former president of Mexico. Ruiz was interviewed by the television network **TELEVISA**, by the newspapers **EL NORTE** and **REFORMA** and by news commentator and Mexican radio personality Eduardo Ruiz Healy.

## Productive Diversification

The **BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE SIERRA GORDA BIOSPHERE RESERVE PROJECT**, coordinated by Reserve Director Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo, is capitalizing various community businesses in the Sierra Gorda through the provision of training and equipment. The **AUTONOMOUS UNIVERSITY OF QUERÉTARO (UAQ)**, private consultants, and the state representative of the **MINISTRY OF ENVIRONMENT AND NATURAL RESOURCES (SEMARNAT)** have provided important support.

Among the projects that have received assistance are beekeeping by indigenous residents in the region of

Tancoyol, fruit and vegetable dehydration by a group of women in Conca, the raising of collared peccary in Río Blanco, fish ponds in various localities, a hunting ranch in San Antonio Tancoyol, ecotourism projects, the production of oregano and the raising of goats in the semi-desert, as well as sustainable forestry in various locations.

## Sustainability Training Center

With the financial support of **NACIONAL MONTE DE PIEDAD**, the first phase of construction has started for the **SIERRA GORDA CECADESU ROBERTO RUIZ OBREGÓN (CECADESU)** (the initials in Spanish for the **SUSTAINABILITY TRAINING CENTER**). The construction will also receive financing from the **BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE SIERRA GORDA BIOSPHERE RESERVE PROJECT**, supported by the **GEF**. The Center is expected to be completed and ready to operate by the end of this year.

In addition, there has been a considerable advancement in the development of the curricula that will be utilized in the Center, which has been presented to work groups of the *Center for Environmental Education and Capacity Building for Sustainable Development*, the **CONANP** and the **UNITED NATIONS DEVELOPMENT PROGRAM (UNDP)**.

Also presented was the translated didactic material of “**Educating for a Sustainable Future**” of the **UNITED NATIONS EDUCATIONAL, SCIENTIFIC AND CULTURAL ORGANIZATION (UNESCO)**. The **SUSTAINABILITY TRAINING CENTER** will be an important option for training and education in Mexico through the provision of classes, workshops and certified courses.

## Social Benefits from Conservation Forum

With the full support and cooperation of the **UAQ** and the **CONANP**, the *First Forum on the Social Benefits of Conservation* was held at the university's campus from April 21-22. Universities, social organizations, other non-governmental organizations, government agencies, and representatives from the public and private sector were invited, resulting in a diverse and interesting group of participants and recognized speakers.

## International Forum on Forestry Investment and Payment for Environmental Services

The **GESG**, in coordination with **FOREST TRENDS** ([www.forest-trends.org](http://www.forest-trends.org)), and the **MEXICAN ENVIRONMENTAL MINISTRY** offices

of the **CONANP**, the **NATIONAL ECOLOGY INSTITUTE (INE)**, the **SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT TRAINING CENTER (CECADESU)** and the **NATIONAL FORESTRY COMMISSION (CONAFOR)**, along with the civil organizations **REFORESTAMOS MEXICO A.C.** ([www.reforestamosmexico.org/](http://www.reforestamosmexico.org/)) and **HOMBRE Y NATURALEZA A.C.** ([www.hombrenaturaleza.org.mx/](http://www.hombrenaturaleza.org.mx/)), are undertaking the organization and planning of the *International Forum on Forestry Investment and Payment for Environmental Services*, which will take place in Mexico City, themes will include landscape, carbon, biodiversity and water.

National and international experts from around the world will participate in the three day program to engage accumulated experience and local realities. Final details will be posted on the website in the near future.

## JICA, three years of support

With the completion of the project *Formation of a Sustainable Culture in Eleven Semi-desert Communities*, made possible by **JICA** ([www.jica.go.jp/english/](http://www.jica.go.jp/english/)), Mr. Sato Ichiro, JICA's Deputy Director in Mexico and Mr. Ando Takayuki, Project Manager, made a field visit and office audit of the diverse project goals (Environmental Education, capacity-building and equipment for local producers, and Community Development (livelihood, public health and recycling)). The results of the audit, interviews and direct interaction with the beneficiaries were more than satisfactory to prolong the relationship.

## Group of Ashoka social entrepreneurs in the Sierra Gorda from Mexico and Latin America

It was an honor to receive in May two groups of colleagues from Mexico and from five countries across South America with the generous support and welcome accompaniment of **ASHOKA: Innovators for the Public** for an intense tour and work session.

In 2003 fifteen Latin American social entrepreneurs, fellows of **ASHOKA: Innovators for the Public** ([www.ashoka.org/](http://www.ashoka.org/)), **SCHWAB FOUNDATION FOR SOCIAL ENTREPRENEURS** of the *World Economic Forum* ([www.schwabfound.org](http://www.schwabfound.org/)) and **AVINA**, formed the **INTERNATIONAL SOCIAL ENTREPRENEUR ASSOCIATION (SEA)** (<http://www.seassoc.info/en/inicio.html>) a non-profit organization with headquarters in Nyon, Switzerland.

**SEA's** objectives include finding resources and promoting the initiatives, promoting cooperation, exchanges and common projects, influencing public policy and consulting services. This *3rd Members Assembly* took the first steps towards a group collaboration in the future.

## Gonzalo Río Arronte Foundation finances hydrologic studies

Research has begun in the **SGBR** to begin to evaluate hydrological services. **FGRA** sponsors the *Complete Watershed Restoration in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve* Project, which includes the installation of seven automatic hydro climatic monitoring stations in different sites within priority watersheds, gathering valuable data that will be incorporated in the diagnosis of hydrological services provided by the Reserve. Head investigator, Ph.D. Eusebio Ventura, is from the **UAQ**.

## United Nations establishes eight Millennium Development Goals

The **UNITED NATIONS MILLENNIUM DEVELOPMENT GOALS (MDG)** for 2015 were ratified by the 189 affiliate States of the **U.N.** to address urgent necessities for the development and welfare of humankind and our planet. As part of the review process, the **U.N.** held the *Community Commons* event at *FORDHAM UNIVERSITY*, New York, from June 16th to 18th, in which a participant of the **GESG**, joined 150 people from 45 countries, in a rich and interesting consultation process of civil organizations and community members which produced *The Community Voices Declaration*.

July 23rd and 24th the **U.N.** headquarters hosted the first *Interactive Hearings of the General Assembly* regarding the **MDG**, where Martha "Pati" Ruiz was invited as an active participant, the only voice speaking on behalf of the environment and *Mother Earth*.

## Development of a biodiversity offset

Today, on behalf of the **FEDERAL ELECTRICITY COMMISSION (CFE)**, there is a planned project to install a high voltage power line from Queretaro City to Jalpan de Serra, which, due to its characteristics would have severe environmental impact on the Biosphere Reserve.

**CFE** has yet to proceed with official authorization of the development plan, rather, they have approached the **SGBR** and the **NATIONAL ECOLOGY INSTITUTE** in order to work in conjunction on setting a precedent for a low impact project and a long-term strategy to compensate the impact with a **biodiversity offset**, based on a methodology for valuation of the ecosystemic services. It is one of three

pilot projects of biodiversity offsets undertaken throughout the world by **FOREST TRENDS**.

## Earth Festivals

*Earth Day* and *World Environment Day* were celebrated this year once again with a series of 25 *Fiestas de la Tierra (Earth Parties)* where 2,700 students, teachers and parents participated with competitions in preparing delicious traditional foods with local resources, ecological marathons regarding basic trivia on the Reserve, civic acts, poetry readings, student theater productions, etc.,..., all this is part of the project *Complete Watershed Restoration in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve*, of the **FGRA**. During the Fiestas, for the first time, parents from different communities requested Nature appreciation tours for adults.

## Substantial reduction in garbage

Solid waste management is a constant crisis and **SSEG** continues to push for progress. In the towns of Ahuacatlan de Guadalupe, Escanelilla and two neighborhoods of the county head in Jalpan de Serra, **GESG** has begun promoting clean-up campaigns and recycling programs with community meetings which have had highly satisfactory results and will significantly broaden the *Community Development Program*.

Ahuacatlan and Escanelilla will benefit from the full support of the honorable **City Hall of Pinal de Amoles**, and all the Sierra inhabitants will benefit from the great reduction in garbage generated on a local level.

## Community Tourism

**ECOTOURS SIERRA GORDA**, the official ecotourism service provider of the Biosphere Reserve, has taken off with growing demand by individual tourists as well as school field trips.

In April and May **ECOTOURS** managed stands in two expos of national and international significance leading to publications in **READER'S DIGEST SELECCIONES** and other tourism magazines. We hope this will soon translate in more customers for our partners in the community-based ecotourism circuit. »»»