



BIODIVERSITY CONSERVATION IN THE SIERRA GORDA BIOSPHERE RESERVE

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Thanks to the Japan Government's International Cooperation Agency (JICA) support, we now have the assistance of a young volunteer ceramics expert to train the group of local potters of the Soledad de Guadalupe community workshop (Jalpan de Serra municipality), over a two-year period. This will allow the potters to reach new quality standards in their products, develop new designs and modernize their equipment, in an effort to make the process more efficient. Once again, we thank JICA for its support to the communities and producers of the Sierra Gorda, channeling resources and experts who provide an important input towards the sustainability of the region.

- Similarly, two Catalan experts in ecotourism chose Sierra Gorda to provide their professional support as volunteers over a four month period. Oriol Sallent and Emma Casademunt, have come to share their experience and knowledge and learn the local conditions and needs, integrating a detailed diagnosis of each of the different projects in community-based ecotourism, in addition to providing suggestions in order to increase the level of attention and operation capabilities, whilst training and interacting with the communities, integrating routes that widen the offers for tourists. We take this opportunity to extend our gratitude for their professional assessment and good will towards the Sierra Gorda, which surely will translate into important benefits for the area.
- Five social entrepreneurs were selected and awarded the Second Edition of the UBS Social Entrepreneur *Visionaris* Awards which took place in the Four Seasons Hotel in Mexico City on September 27th, amongst them Martha Isabel Ruiz Corzo. UBS AG, is a Swiss finance institution of international prestige, whose main activities are estate

management and investment portfolios, with offices in 50 countries and 69,000 employees. In 2004, UBS decided to create and start a new project, the *Visionaris* UBS Award for the Social Entrepreneur, to support promotion of social development in Mexico in collaboration with the international organization Ashoka: Innovators for the Public.

- A new project comes to add to the group of micro-enterprises currently developing in the rural communities, improving the livelihood of the producers and relieving pressure on the ecosystems. "Needlework with Nature Motifs" takes advantage of the impressive abilities of the women in Sierra Gorda who for the first time are receiving praise and income for their embroideries. The beneficiaries and partners of said project are the inhabitants of two communities in the Pinal de Amoles municipality, who are producing, pillows, several sizes of bags, shirts and mats, all with birds, butterflies or orchids of the Sierra Gorda region, producing high quality products which are already on the market. This same project has a minimal investment, 30 beneficiaries and a wide potential to extend to other communities.
- UNESCO's World Heritage Centre included the Sótano del Barro, a core protected area of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, on the substantive list for nominated sites for Natural Heritage status. Pati Ruiz Corzo and Laura Pérez Arce visited the main UNESCO office to promote the proposal as well as to prioritize the region in various other programs. Ruiz Corzo made a formal presentation to the Division for the Promotion of Quality Education, leader of the Decade for Education for Sustainable Development in order to obtain official permission to translate to Spanish

and adapt to the region the didactic materials "Teaching and Learning for a Sustainable Future", developed by UNESCO and presented at the Earth Summit at Johannesburg. The Sierra Gorda initiative to develop a practical course based on the 18 years of local experience in addition to the UNESCO curriculum produced fortunate reactions, especially impressed by the national committee involved: the Environmental Ministry through its branch of the Sustainable Development Training Centers (CECADESU), the Public Education Ministry, CONANP, the Environmental Education Fund, IMAC, Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve and Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda. The visit also included a full presentation of the goals and achievements of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve to the director and upper management of the Man and Biosphere Office (MAB) of UNESCO.

- For the first time, Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda participated in the III World Environmental Education Congress which took place in Turín, Italy, in the patronage of the United Nations Decade of Education for Sustainable Development. A fortunate follow-up to the visit with UNESCO. Pati Ruiz Corzo and Laura Pérez Arce each gave presentations on two occasions and participated actively in the thematic sessions: Sustainable Education, Training the Trainer, Promoting Participation and Governance and Creating a Network, Paths to Sustainability and Emotional Involvements in Environmental Education. The Sierra Gorda Earth Center (currently under construction in Jalpan de Serra) was amply promoted and well received.
- "Creating, seeding and cultivating values and ideas to save the Earth and Humankind" was the title of the Fifth International Environment and Development Convention, which took place in La Havana, Cuba, July 4th to 8th. This convention was organized by the Environmental Science and Technology Ministry of Cuba and was attended by the Environmental Education Chief of the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda, Olivia Pérez Jiménez. Her participation included a lecture and poster regarding the outreach and civil participation activities of the environmental education program, promotion of the Sierra Gorda Earth Center, as well as functioning as secretary of the Health and Education Discussion Table. The experience generated great acceptance and interest in the exchange of ideas and experiences from Latin America and the Caribbean.
- A Public Hearing took place in Queretaro City on July 5th as part of the transparency process regarding the construction of the Extoraz dam, a project purported to supply the city of Querétaro with drinking water. The hearing was presided by state representatives of federal environmental authorities, the Querétaro State Water Commission (the project promoter), academicians, investigators, and most important, representatives of the communities

affected by the project. The local community rejected the project wholeheartedly, declaring the impact outweighs the potential benefits, destroying their way of life and sustenance. Scientists testified that the dam's location, in a basin where mercury mining was carried out decades ago, will contaminate the water, and demonstrated the high impact to the environment, the elevated operational costs and essential technical questions such as the potential life of the dam; putting into doubt the dam's viability.

- San Juan de los Durán's Ecotouristic lodge hosted the First NGO Regional Forum on September the 3rd, as part of the development activities of the project "Biodiversity Conservation in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve", in the buffer zones outside of the Biosphere Reserve. Four environmental civil society organizations from San Luis Potosí and Guanajuato states participated and shared their different trajectories and ranges of action. The purpose of the forum was to foster collaboration in building institutional capacity, to offer a general panorama of the Sierra Gorda project's development, to establish regional networks, and to join forces. One shared concern was expressed regarding development and deterioration in the El Tepozán zone, Cerritos municipality, S.L.P. There will be a subsequent meeting in January with the expectation of replicating activities that benefit the Sierra Gorda Bio-region, regardless of political borders.