

Biodiversity Conservation in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve

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The Energy Globe Award 2007

On April 11, the presentation of the winners of the Energy Globe Award 2007 was presented at the European Parliament Hemicycle. The winning projects represented the categories Earth, Fire, Water, Air and Youth. The Award is the most prestigious award in the area of sustainability and environment on the globe, issued by the European Union, and has since the year 2000 granted the worlds leading projects in terms of environmental issues. This year, The Grupo Ecológico de Sierra Gorda, Querétaro, won the National Award and thus represented Mexico, and as such competed with three finalists in the Global Energy Award's "Special Category Youth", competing with 732 projects from 96 countries, with its "Program for Environmental Education": A program that during its 19 years has reached an average of 15,000 students and 170 local schools.

The Awards were presented by the President of the European Parliament, Mr. Hans-Gert Pöttering, and also present was celebrities such as Maneka Gandhi, both a politician and an environmentalist, Hollywood stars such as the actor Martin Sheen, the singer Robin Gibb (member of the Bee Gees) and the famous violinist Nigel Kennedy.

For the first time ever, the facilities of the European Parliament were the host of a television gala, which are to be broadcasted by the German Television next Sunday, the 15th, and will thus reach about 2.5 billion homes and television viewers around the world. For more information, consult the web page www.energyglobe.info.

UNDP Executive Committee visits Sierra Gorda

On the invitation from the Mexico office of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), the members of the executive committee who represent different countries in New York, came to the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve for a site visit.

They arrived to Sierra Gorda on the 30th of April and on May 1 came to the Sierra Gorda Earth Center for a presentation of the "Conservation of the Biodiversity in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve" project and its different lines of action as presented by the responsible staff members of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, the Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda and Bosque Sustentable.

It is worth mentioning that the UNDP is the institution that administers the Sierra Gorda Global Environment Facility project resources and plays an important role in the administrative management of the same. Before returning to Mexico, the visitors went into the field to see one example (in Epazotes Grandes community) of the activities taking place for the protection and regeneration of priority watersheds.

This was an enriching experience for all parties, in hopes of making an impact on the decisions taken in the design and implementation of international assistance programs. Their visit provided the opportunity to experience first-hand the reality of the rural communities in a developing country where conservation efforts benefit local communities and natural protected areas such as Sierra Gorda

The Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve celebrates its 10th Anniversary

Expo Sierra 2007, May 27th and the 28th, was a public event that took place in the heart of Queretaro City historic center in the Plaza de Armas. Queretaro State hosted this celebration of the 10th anniversary of the creation of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, which was decreed by Dr. Ernesto Zedillo during his term as president of Mexico. Expo Sierra was inaugurated by Mtra. Martha "Pati" Ruiz Corzo, Director of the Reserve, and Lic. Esther Carboney, Secretary of Tourism in Queretaro State. They talked about the important and valuable heritage that the Reserve constitutes and invited the audience to come visit and enjoy its attractive cultural and natural areas.

For two days tents were erected for each of the municipal governments in the Reserve as well as the Biosphere Reserve and partner organizations to reach out to the public and promote products and ecotours available in the region. The non-stop cultural presentations on stage ranged from the Musical Band of the State to educational theater presented by the Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda, and artists from around the state did traditional dances, and other artistic expressions. An estimated public of 5000 people participated in the day's celebration.

Social Venture Technology Group (SVT) collaborating with the Earth Center

Sierra Gorda Earth Center hosted a workshop facilitated by SVT with a group of social entrepreneurs from the Ashoka global fellowship to share their methodology which is designed to develop and apply social and environmental impact measurement tools based on the lessons learned from the Sierra Gorda case study. Ashoka Innovators for the Public made a generous contribution towards the Sierra Gorda initiative and workshop.

SVT is based in San Francisco, CA, and since 2001 has become a leader in the field of evaluating the social benefit of projects and measuring the social return on investment (SROI). Its clients are primarily from the private sector, recently recognized for its work in an article in Fast Company magazine. To date SVT has worked with important companies to measure the reach and social impact of companies in different fields.

The Grupo Ecologico contacted the Social Venture Technology Group in 2006 to help measure and establish a SROI for the conservation strategy taking place in the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve. The analysis took into account the complexity of the 160 lines of activities of the project (summed up as community environmental education and political and financial advocacy), becoming the most extensive SROI ever conducted according to SVT. The process took into account quantifying and evaluating the activities that have been developed since the year 2001 up to date, a task that was accomplished with the help of four volunteers from Catalunya and Canada as well as important investments by GESG and SVT.

The SROI workshop was attended by partner organizations such as the MIE (Integrated Ecosystem Management) and Peace Corps in Mexico as well as Ashoka social entrepreneurs from countries such as Great Britain, Uganda, Brazil, United States, Canada, and Mexico at the Sierra Gorda Earth Center, our most international endeavor to date with the help of professional translators. The introduction has sparked interest in adapting the methodology to social enterprise projects.

Volunteers provide their expertise for the next two years

Japanese International Cooperation Agency (JICA): On April 21, two Japanese volunteers were integrated in the work of the Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda I.A.P. Thanks to the joint work and long collaboration with the Agencia de Cooperación Internacional del Gobierno del Japón (JICA) they approved the assignment of two volunteers; the designer of wood products Tomoko Hayashi and the biologist Cheiko Azuma, experienced in environmental education, having obtained experience of marine biology and having worked in Australia as a volunteer. The volunteers are here to stay with us for a time period of two years, sharing their knowledge and experience with the region and its inhabitants.

Tomoko Hayashi will participate in the local carpentry workshops, as they will benefit from new, innovative designs and technical improvements. Cheiko Azuma will support the work done in the environmental education project, which GESGIAP has operated for almost 20 years. She will be integrated in the work done at the local schools in the Reserve and will be encouraged to share with the participants her own experience and knowledge.

This is the second time that the Japanese Government, through the JICA, has supported the Sierra Gorda projects with volunteers. On the first occasion, Ms. Shihoko Chiku, a young Japanese ceramist collaborated with the women at Soledad de Guadalupe, working with their productive ceramics project. Upon returning to her homeland in June, she had developed great skills, professionalism and a flawless presentation of her products. Thanks to the quality of the work by Miss Chiku, Sierra Gorda was convinced that professionally skilled volunteers have great potential for Sierra Gorda.

A young couple of biologists will be cooperating voluntarily for two years in the Sierra Gorda Project.

With a long-standing tradition of service worldwide, the Pearce Corps in Mexico is formed by professionals that in an altruistically and voluntarily donate their time and work to projects of social, health and environmental character worldwide. This organization, with the support of the United States Government, has provided the collaboration of thousands of volunteers with a vocation of service in different countries around the globe for several decades, and only until recently in Mexico. This year a group of volunteers will be cooperating in different protected natural areas, thanks to an agreement with the SEMARNAT, which is why in Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve the couple formed by Buffy Alina Lenth and Benjamin Lenth have joined our team since June. Due to their accumulated experience, they will be cooperating with scientific research and monitoring work, particularly the hydro-climatological monitoring and the project of jaguar monitoring, besides working on translations to English, operation pertaining to the system of geographical information, elaboration of documents and data systematization. They will be valuable collaborators and will certainly gain important field experience.

The Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve Interpretation Center inaugurated

On April 18th, in a joint effort, the Historical Museum of the Sierra Gorda, the Secretary of Tourism of the State of Querétaro, and the Grupo Ecológico, formally inaugurated the Interpretation Center of the Biosphere Reserve, located in the Museum itself. The Hall's attractive museography is in close resemblance to the physical and biological reality of the Reserve and of the key role it plays in water production through its watersheds.

In the corridors, an exceptional photographic exposition displays the work of the Queretaro City based photographer Elena Baca, showing the beauty of the scenery and ecosystems in the area. The Interpretation Center will without a doubt be transformed into an attractive tourist attraction and a key point of reference for visitors.

Biodiversity Offsets – a methodology to assure “no net loss of biodiversity”

The Sierra Gorda Earth Center offered during June 25th and 26th the workshop Environmental Compensations, given by the Londoner Kerry Ten Kate and the Australian David Parkes, from Forest Trends. These global experts on the design of strategies and application of conservation plans that compensate the damage caused to biodiversity due to “development” projects such as dams, mines, highways, high tension lines and all types of infrastructure established in spaces with great natural wealth, destroying it forever. The first recommendation from the experts was that before thinking about compensating damage, we have to avoid harming the biodiversity. Personnel from several institutions attended the workshop, such as PEMEX, CFE, SEDARH, SEMARNAT, CONANP, SECTUR, CONAFOR, GESGIAP, Colegio de Biólogos de México, The University of Chapingo, among others. They had the opportunity to get acquainted with the methodology that these experts have developed, so as to avoid the net loss of biodiversity, contrary to the norm, through measures that compensate the ecosystem.

International outreach for valuing the Sierra Gorda’s environmental and social services

International Society for Social and Natural Resource Management (ISSRM 2007) invited Pati Ruiz Corzo to give the keynote address, “Biodiversity Conservation: A Social Strategy for Orchestrating the Participation of Multiple Stakeholders” at the inauguration of their annual conference, attended by 600 people in Park City, Utah on June 17. Landscape Continuity and Change - Social Science Perspectives and Interdisciplinary Conversations was the theme of the 2007 symposium. The following day Pati Ruiz Corzo participated in a session panel on Environmental Services with three other panelists, including Laura Perez-Arce of Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda, Elizabeth Schapiro of UC Berkeley and Belize. Thank you Douglas Jackson-Smith and Lorien Belton for inviting the Sierra Gorda to participate in ISSRM 2007.

Also in June, Social Venture Technology Group (SVT) coordinated a panel discussion “*Putting a price on people and the planet: The new voluntary market for poverty alleviation and environmental services*” which took place in San Francisco, California, on June 21st. SVT and Viva Sierra Gorda invited guests from the civil and private sectors to hear from Ricardo Bayon about environmental services and their markets as Director of the www.ecosystemmarketplace.com, Sara Olsen founder of SVT to share the social return on investment (SROI) methodology and applications; Pati Ruiz Corzo on behalf of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve presented the results of research to demonstrate the positive impact for the environment, the local and the global community; Michael Orr of Salesforce.com presented the business case for making carbon-offset or other socially and environmentally responsible investments. Thank you, Salesforce.com, for sharing your space to hold the panel and for taking part in the discussion.