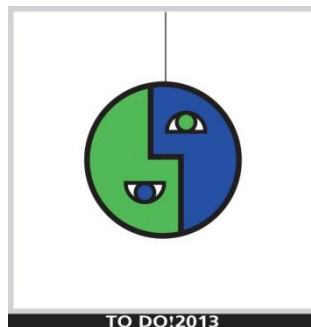


**TO DO! 2013**

**Contest Socially Responsible Tourism**



**Award Winner**

**GRUPO ECOLÓGICO SIERRA GORDA (GESG)**

represented by:

**Martha Isabel "Pati" Ruiz Corzo, Founder and Director of GESG and  
Laura Patricia Pérez-Arce Burke, GESG**

**Jalpan de Serra / Querétaro**

**Mexico**

**Award Rationale**

by

**Angela Giraldo**



Source map on top: <https://maps.google.de> Source other maps: Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda

### Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve

**SIMBOLOGÍA/ Legend**

- Bosque de coníferas / Conifer Forest
- Bosque de encino / Oak Forest
- Bosque mesófilo de montaña / Mountain Cloud Forest
- Selva mediana / Sub-Deciduous Forest
- Selva baja caducifolia / Dry Tropical Forest
- Matorral serrado / Xerophyllous Shrub
- Matorral submontano / Submontane Shrub
- Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda / Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve

**Carretera** / Highway

**Río** / River

**Asentamiento humano** / Human settlement

**Zona núcleo** / Core Protected Area

**Agricultura** / Agriculture

**Zona de amortiguamiento** / Buffer Zone

**División Municipal** / Municipal Division

**Edo. de Querétaro** / Querétaro State

**Destinos ecológicos de la ruta de la ecodiversidad**

- 1 Río Extoraz
- 2 Higuerrillas
- 3 Cuatro Palos
- 4 Misión Bucarelli
- 5 Río Escanela
- 6 Río Ayutla
- 7 Santa María de Cocos
- 8 Tancama
- 9 San Juan de los Durán
- 10 La Arenita
- 11 Río Blanco
- 12 Acatitlán
- 13 San Antonio Tancoyol
- 14 La Trinidad
- 15 Tilaco
- 16 Las Trancas

**NO DEJE RASTRO - LEAVE NO TRACE**

- Prepare y organice sus viajes con anticipación / Prepare ahead of time
- Plan ahead and prepare
- Acampe solo en áreas designadas para ello / Camp only in designated areas
- Camp and travel only in designated areas
- Camine en senderos existentes para minimizar impacto / Hike on existing trails to minimize impact
- Leave no garbage, take it with you
- No deje basura, llévesela / Don't leave trash, take it with you
- Disponga en forma apropiada de lo que no puede regresar con usted / Properly dispose of what you can't pack out
- Deje lo que encuentre / Leave what you find
- Fogatas permitidas solo en áreas designadas / Campfires permitted only in designated areas
- Respete la vida silvestre / Respect wildlife
- Evite disturbar con ruido a la vida silvestre / Avoid making loud noises near wildlife
- Sea considerado con otros visitantes / Be considerate of other visitors

**Oficinas Centrales de la Reserva de la Biosfera Sierra Gorda y del Centro Tierra Sierra Gorda**  
Central offices of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve and the Sierra Gorda Earth Center

**Tiempo de recorrido por carretera en auto**  
Travel times for cars on the highway

Querétaro - Jalpan 3 hrs. 30 min.  
Jalpan - Arroyo Seco 40 mins.  
Jalpan - San Juan de los Durán 2 hrs.  
Jalpan - Xilitla, S.L.P. 1 hr. 40 min.

# 1 INTRODUCTION

The application for the TO DO! 2013 was submitted by Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda, Mexico. The research related to the application was conducted by the author on behalf of the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V.) from 21st to 29th November, 2013, in the biosphere reserve Sierra Gorda in the state of Querétaro, Mexico.

The region, which is about the same size as the island of Mallorca (or the US-state Rhode Island), lies North of Mexico City, a bit more than 300 km from there, or about six hours by bus. The tourism project comprises 75 initiatives and micro entrepreneurs. The NGO "Grupo Ecológico" in Sierra Gorda wants to act as a bridge in order to ensure implementation of the concept of the biosphere reserve that seeks to align man and nature. It would not have been possible to visit the entire area in such a short time. However, Grupo Ecológico had developed a comprehensive visitors' programme which allowed for good insights into the tourism activities. The author thus had the opportunity to stay in different places and to visit several projects. In this way it was possible to also talk with representatives, "leaders" and people from different groups who are involved in the projects outside the "normal" visitors programme.

The author was accompanied by different persons from Grupo Ecológico and the tourism team. Ten places were visited which are exemplary for the whole range of tourism products and services (accommodation, catering, routes, products such as textiles, pottery, sustainable agriculture). The author thus had the possibility to get to know the tourism project in its holistic perspective. The author also got the chance to join a group of 30 guests from HSBC bank in their sight seeing programme. They had come for an environmental training programme with Grupo Ecológico. Furthermore, several discussions were held with the director of the organisation, Martha Isabel "Pati" Ruiz Corzo.

The author in charge recommends awarding **GRUPO ECOLÓGICO SIERRA GORDA** a **TODO! 2013**.

## 2 BACKGROUND AND SETTING

### 2.1 Mexico – Economic situation

According to the census of 2010, Mexico has about 112 million inhabitants and is about five times the size of Germany. With a population of 20 million, Mexico City, the capital, is one of the largest cities in Latin America, and the fifth largest city in the world.

The official language is Spanish. Since 2003, another 62 indigenous languages have been officially recognized as national languages.

The population is made up of 60 percent mestizos and 30 percent indigenous people (Maya, Nahuatl and Aztec), ten percent have European roots.

As the largest export nation in the region, Mexico ranks 16th in the global ranking list (as of 2012). The country's most important economic sectors are oil production and export, and the automobile industry. Manufacturing in so-called "maquilas" is also important. These "maquilas" have emerged in the free trade zones and rely on cheap labour. The main importer of these export products is the United States.

Remittances ("remesas") from Mexican migrant workers (mainly from the US) are of tremendous importance. After the export of oil, these "remesas" are the most important source of foreign exchange for Mexico.

Most of the Mexicans temporarily working in the US are occupied in the construction sector, in trade, or skilled crafts. Due to the economic crisis in the US, the number of these kinds of jobs has decreased dramatically, and consequently also the "remesas". For some regions in Mexico, this was the only source of income. In some regions, the declining "remesas" lead to increasing poverty. This also affects more than 20 million children.

Tourism is one of the most important economic activities in Mexico. With 23.4 million international tourist arrivals (among them 173.000 Germans), Mexico ranks 13th in the international ranking list and is the number one destination in Latin America. Due to the economic crisis, Mexico experienced a decline in international tourist arrivals between 2008 and 2010 (mainly from the US), which led to high unemployment in the sector. Natural disasters and increasing violence in Mexico due to the drug cartel are additional reasons for the decline in tourist arrivals.

In 2010, the Tourism Ministry launched an international campaign in order to improve Mexico's image. Several measures were initiated, e.g. investments in eco tourism, safety for tourists, or the cleaning of beaches. The campaign also had a positive influence on national tourism.

As a tourist destination, Mexico is mainly known for its beautiful beaches – above all for mass tourism (Cancún, Acapulco) – and for the archaeological sites on the Yucatán peninsula.

Bordering Mexico City to the North is the state of Querétaro with 1.7 million inhabitants and an area of 11,658 km<sup>2</sup> (the size of the Canary Islands plus Mallorca, or twice as large as Istanbul). The capital is Santiago de Querétaro.

In this state lies one of Mexico's biosphere reserves, the Sierra Gorda. The biosphere reserve has a size of 3,845 km<sup>2</sup>; which means that one third of the entire state is a protected area. In as early as 1997, the area was declared a biosphere region by the government, and in 2001 it was approved by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve.

According to the tourism authorities of the state of Querétaro, about 1.5 million guests visited the region in 2012. In the same year, almost 79,000 guests visited the Sierra Gorda. As compared to the previous year, the Sierra Gorda experienced an increase in visitor numbers by more than 75 percent.

In order to be able to better understand the links with the tourism activities, it is important to briefly explain the concept of the status of a biosphere reserve:

A biosphere reserve is a model region initiated by UNESCO in which sustainable development in its ecological, economic and social dimensions is to be realised in an exemplary manner. The "Man and the Biosphere Programme" (MAB programme) ensures that they are developed further and are evaluated and connected globally. The programme also researches the most important eco systems on a global scale.

The MAB is not about classical nature conservation in a narrow sense, but about an interdisciplinary approach: In particular, man as part of the biosphere plays a central role. Social and economic challenges, e.g. income generation, problems of urbanisation and demographic development are part of the programme. The overall objectives are: to protect biological diversity and eco system functions, to farm and develop cultural landscapes in a participatory manner, to promote climate mitigation through land use and adaptation to climate change, and to further develop the social, economic and cultural conditions for ecological sustainability. Citizen's participation is one of the central aspects of the programme. Every biosphere reserve also serves conservation purposes, development purposes and research and educational purposes. A biosphere reserve is divided into three zones: a conservation oriented core zone, a buffer zone with a focus on landscape protection and a development zone with a socio-economic orientation.



The Sierra Gorda is the seventh largest "reserva" in Mexico and the one with the largest diversity. Here, cultural heritage merges with the flora and fauna. The Franciscan missions, which were declared UNESCO world cultural heritage, and the rich nature make the Sierra Gorda biosphere reserve one of the most important "reservas" in central Mexico.

Characteristics of Sierra Gorda: 70 percent of the area is private property, 27 percent is community property ("ejidos") and three percent belongs to the state. 95,000 people live in the biosphere reserve, in 638 communities and five municipalities. The topography of the Sierra Gorda shows major differences in elevations – between 300 m and 3,100 m above sea level, with elevations of 1,300 m to 2,400 m dominating.

## 2.2 Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (GESG)

Martha Isabel "Pati" Ruiz is the initiator and co-founder of GESG. 30 years ago she moved with her husband and two sons from the city of Querétaro, where she worked as a music teacher, to the Sierra Gorda, her husband's birth place. Her motivation: to dedicate herself to environmental protection and to offer her children a different life close to nature, away from all the aberrations of urban life and away from the comfortable but from her point of view superficial life of the middle class. This decision had far-reaching consequences on the way they lead their lives: For several years, they lived without electricity, became vegetarians, ate what they grew, and practised a very simple lifestyle. She taught both of her sons herself, as there was no school. Her passion for protecting the environment and her love for the people of the region contributed to the fact that "Pati" never regretted her decision and was able to pass her passion on to her children. Both sons, in the meantime grown-up men, are part of the big project of working to protect and develop the Sierra Gorda.

In the 1980s, the Sierra Gorda suffered from permanent environmental destruction by logging and deforestation. "Pati" began to talk to local communities who owned the land, with the objective of winning them for the protection of Sierra Gorda. Not an easy task, since it is a very poor region. In 1987, she founded Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (GESG) as a private non-profit foundation, with offices in Jalpan de Serra in the Sierra Gorda. She struggled a long time for the region to be approved as a biosphere reserve. From 1996 to 2009 "Pati" had resigned from GESG and worked for the federal government as the Federal Director of the Sierra Gorda Biosphere Reserve, of the National Commission of Natural Protected Areas, a branch of the Federal Ministry of Environment and Nature. In 1997 the region was approved by UNESCO as a biosphere reserve. Currently, "Pati" Ruiz is the director of GESG.

### The Alliance for the Protection of Sierra Gorda

With the objective of protecting people and nature in the spirit of the concept of a UNESCO biosphere reserve, an Alliance for the Protection of Sierra Gorda was launched under the roof of GESG and various projects were developed. "Departments" were founded, specialising on certain issues: Apart from two tourism related organisations (see below), there are initiatives on sustainable forestry and on awareness raising and environmental education.

The alliance unites an interdisciplinary team of 85 persons, who all have one thing in common: their love for the region. *"Whoever comes to the Sierra, won't want to leave again"*, employees of the organisation often said. In the Sierra Gorda, everything is extreme: the different elevations, the different eco systems, the temperatures (in summer they rise above 40° C, in winter, however, they fall to 5° C).

Only a small part of the donations and aid money raised go into administration (4.7 percent). In this way, it is ensured that the money almost completely reaches the people in the Sierra Gorda – and the director is proud of it. She is also proud of the fact that as an NGO they live directly with the target group and don't manage the project from a distant town. So they are always available as a contact for the communities, they are part of them.

Grupo Ecológico also runs the education centre "Centro Tierra". It offers educational programmes for various levels and on various subjects, based on real-life experiences since 1989. Classes are offered on location as well as online courses, e.g. on sustainable forest use, organic agriculture, environmental education, people and nature living together, land management, healthy food, institutional empowerment, biodiversity, and climate change.

**The two tourism related organisations are:**

**Productos y Servicios Turísticos Sierra Gorda, S.A. de C.V.**

This tourism enterprise was founded in 2006 upon initiative by GESG. Its objective is the development of a regional economy by selling tourism services and products which are offered in the different communities – mainly by women. These are small "travel packages", or pottery products, textiles or processed agricultural products like honey, jam, and cheese.

The profit is reinvested to finance measures for the support of small entrepreneurs. This includes training programmes to improve products, accounting, administration, and marketing support.

**Sierra Gorda Ecotours** is the official service provider in tourism and was founded in 2004 under the roof of GESG. Ecotours offers packages and adventure tours in the biosphere reserve. The tourism service providers are people from the local communities.

### **3 THE PROJECT**

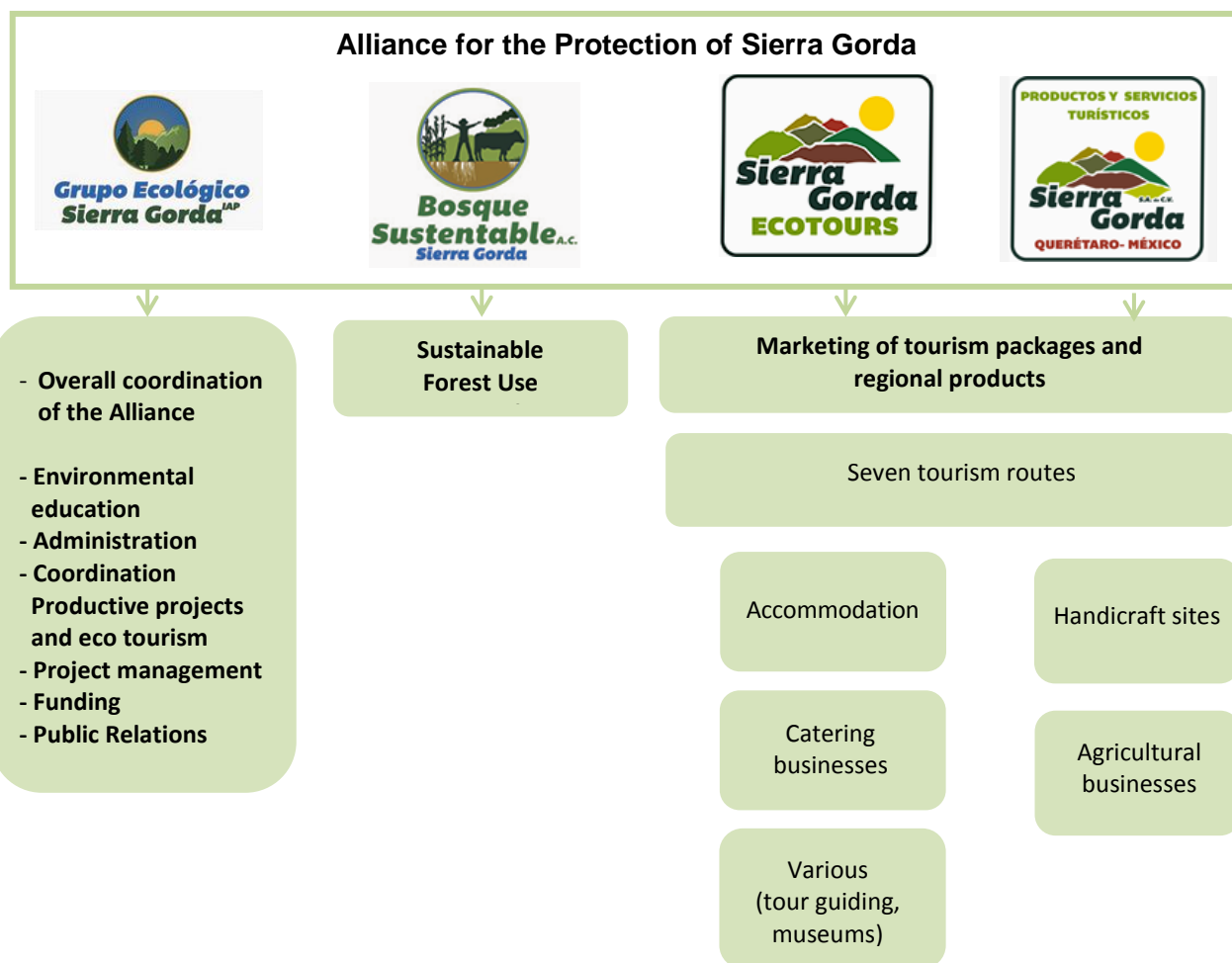
The Sierra Gorda Promotion Council (SGPC) is a cooperation of civil society with currently 75 initiatives and micro enterprises who have joined forces in order to develop tourism in the Sierra Gorda in a controlled manner and in order to protect the Sierra Gorda.

The cooperation was formalised in May 2013 in a project funded by the Inter-American Development Bank. These funds are managed by GESG. The SGPC supports training programmes, searches for funding of marketing measures, promotes sales and develops visitor packages.

Due to bad resource management in the area, the communities have cut down large areas of forest and used the land for agriculture. This depleted the soil, reduced the ground water and thus the sources of drinking water. One of the most serious consequences was large-scale migration from the rural areas. Especially, young people migrated to the large cities and to the US due to the lack of job opportunities. Women and children remained in the region. Their husbands sent money now and then.

In search of alternative sources of income for the region and in order to prevent out-migration, Grupo Ecológico (GESG) has for 15 years supported the construction of production sites for handicraft and of very simple eco-lodges in ten different places in the region. As the accommodation facilities and the production sites are mainly managed by women, they generate jobs, promote the local economy, family integration, and gender justice. The men work in agriculture, for example, or have migrated to the US or to the big cities. The handicraft produced and the services offered are now marketed with the support of GESG. That's why Sierra Gorda Ecotours was founded.

The individual (sub-)organisations are presented in the following overview.



## 4. EVALUATION AGAINST THE TODO! CONTEST CRITERIA

### 4.1 Taking into account the different interests and needs of the local people through participation

Participation is a concept lived by the people in all the areas of work of the foundation Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda (GESG). The approach of making the region a nature conservation zone was possible only through the participation of the village communities, as the largest part of the area is private property. GESG has for many years done awareness-raising to make it happen and to win people's support for the protection of the region. Without acceptance by the village community, the region would never have been declared a biosphere reserve.

That the region was approved as a biosphere reserve by UNESCO is thanks to all the people in the region. They are proud of the fact that everybody has contributed by stopping deforestation and by protecting the forests. They are proud of being able to protect nature and to show guests the wonderful flora and fauna.

Tourism development in the region is already being promoted by the state of Querétaro in the form of infrastructure measures or through beautification of public places. There is also tourism promotion by the government – but it has nothing to do with rural tourism and is not suitable for the region.

For tourism development not to bypass the rural population and as there was a need to diversify job opportunities, GESG developed a tourism project. The objective: to position the

Sierra Gorda as a nature destination with minimal adverse impact. "Pati", the director of GESG, emphasises: "This is possible only at the community level. A joint vision is needed in order to build a network among the different players".

"Tourism" service providers had already been there. However, they had so far worked in isolation and not in an organised manner. In many cases, they did not know about each other. The service quality was unprofessional: lack of entrepreneurial vision among the new micro entrepreneurs, poor quality of services, and low average expenditures per tourist. It was necessary to address these problems in order to develop good quality tourism products and services from within the region and to place it in the country's existing official marketing channels.

The role of GESG is that of a facilitator. The relationship between GESG and the people in the communities is based on mutual respect and appreciation. Many years of cooperation with the rural communities, which focussed on strengthening the women's self-confidence, empowered women in their initiatives and supported them both technically and financially.

From the 75 initiatives and small entrepreneurs emerged the cooperation Sierra Gorda Promotion Council (SGPC) as the "product" of a participatory approach. This association guarantees that tourism in the Sierra Gorda benefits the communities and private entrepreneurs.

Catering enterprises which have joined the cooperation got support from GESG for maintenance and improvement of infrastructure, and also for courses in hygiene, quality improvement, administration, price calculation or service. Together with the catering enterprises, the "Ruta del Sabor" (literally: the route of taste) was developed. The catering enterprises involved also received marketing support.

The following story illustrates the effects of such a measure:

The *Fonda Doña Chole* is a tastefully and simply furnished restaurant, situated on the busy rural road to *Jalpan de Serra*. The *tortillas* (Mexican flat bread made of maize, which is eaten every day at every hour and is the main component of Mexican cuisine) are hand-made and taste delicious. *Doña Chole*, as the owner is called, narrates the history of her now well-frequented restaurant:

With five children and her husband's small income the family was not able to live. She wanted to offer her children more than what she herself had in life. Her children should go to school, further their education and enjoy better lives than she had. This was a major point of disagreement in the family, since women belong 'home' as soon as they are married. It is still very common in society, especially in rural areas, that a woman more or less becomes her husband's property. She may do things only with her husband's permission. Women working outside the house are unthinkable for many men. Women are increasingly reluctant to accept this. The financial dependency on their husbands disempowers them. *Doña Chole* resisted her husband's opinion. She felt she was strong enough to support her husband in providing for the family's livelihood. She got up early in the morning, made *tortillas*, and sold them on the roadside at dawn. Customers increasingly asked for other dishes. She quite soon understood that she could make more out of it. She decided to construct a stall where she could prepare breakfast for the workers. Her stall was very popular. She was able to send her children (both boys and girls) to school. Today, three of her children are studying. Her grandchildren sometimes help in the restaurant.

Without hesitation, she agreed to be part of the project "Ruta del Sabor". She wants to improve continuously. *Doña Chole* is over 70 years old and does not think of retiring. She gets up very early and goes to bed very late – she says she does not need much sleep. She is content with herself and her life and has achieved all that she had wanted to achieve. She is grateful for the support she got to develop her little stall into a restaurant. She got the construction materials, all from the area (bamboo, clay), as well as the tableware with the help of the project through GESG. She had to organise the workers herself. The author had the opportunity to have lunch at *Doña Chole's*. The restaurant offers space for about 40 guests and *Doña Chole* and her young helpers had a lot of work.

Along the *Ruta del Sabor* there are 20 other restaurants like *Doña Chole's*, which are visited by various tourist groups along the developed route. In addition, there are 29 accommodation facilities, five handicraft production sites, as well as five community museums.



## **4.2 Enhancing the awareness of the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development**

The basic idea of the tourism project is to avoid undesirable developments and heteronomy in the region – with the objective of "low impact".

Most of the visitors in the Sierra Gorda are from the nearby town of Querétaro. Earlier, the natural and cultural wealth of the region was almost unknown, to both hosts and guests. The consequence was that tourism activities such as excursions by motor bike or off-road tours had negative impacts on the environment and hardly brought any income for the service providers.

For several years, GESG has now been offering courses and training programmes for tourism service providers in the region, with the objective of promoting respect for the nature and culture of the region.

Furthermore, local monitoring criteria were developed with the local players. In the form of workshops, exchange of experiences, joint activities and accompanied by GESG, a quality label was developed ("Sello Sabino", after an endemic tree in the region, a kind of bald cypress). The objective is that all tourism service providers who are involved in the joint tourism project fulfil the criteria and get the label. The label is meant to guarantee a high standard and professional tourism products and services to the guests.

To achieve "low impact" in tourism there is a philosophy of holistic sustainable development:

In construction, mainly natural products such as bamboo and clay were used. People interested in construction were being trained in this old building technique, which was almost forgotten.

If possible, the kitchen uses products that were cultivated without chemical additives. This promotes organic agriculture.

In addition to the training programmes for tourism service providers, information materials are produced and information events as well as presentations are held for the guests. In this way, awareness for the region is meant to be raised among service providers, the local population, and the guests.

## **4.3 Participation of broad local population strata in the positive economic, social and cultural effects of tourism**

In the Sierra Gorda, ten communities are involved in the tourism project. 75 initiatives and micro enterprises have joined the project so far – others will follow. Currently, there are about 242 families active in the project. Especially in rural areas, the families are very large (between five and eight children), so that a considerable number of people benefit from the measures.

The Grupo Ecológico Sierra Gorda as the implementing agency of the project has no financial interests, but channels the money for the measures to be implemented. The beneficiaries are exclusively the initiatives and micro entrepreneurs directly involved, their family members, and the community.

The accommodation facilities available are organised by the community leaders, including the bookings. The management of the bungalows or rooms follows a rotational system; every family is being considered. The payment is based on a fixed hourly rate and is also paid out by the leader of the village community. The catering is organised by a group of women in a centralised manner. They also work on a rotational basis. In this way it is ensured that every family benefits from the income. A bit of money is kept aside for the maintenance of the bungalows and for measures by the community.

#### **4.4 Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism or of income opportunities for the local people**

The focus of the project is the qualification of tourism service providers, with the objectives of making jobs more attractive and to reduce or avoid out-migration from rural areas. In some places, it was the offer of tourism services in the first place that opened up sources of income.

Between 2012 and 2013, eight one-day workshops on local gastronomy and service, tour guiding and community orientation were implemented.

Between July and October last year, parallel events for a total of 20 days were organised directly in the communities, focussing on quality improvement, house keeping, maintenance/beautification, and administration.

Part of the funding which was organised by Grupo Ecológico is meant for training programmes. GESG seeks funding or donations in order to be able to carry out this work.

#### **4.5 Strengthening local culture and cultural identity and avoiding/minimising any social and cultural damage caused by tourism**

The production sites where mainly women are occupied with pottery and embroidery works were an important aspect in the strengthening of identity. The educational measures with regard to the rich culture and biological diversity as well as the appreciation of these aspects by the guests have contributed to the fact that the people in the region are proud of their culture, which is also addressed in all training programmes.

Regional cuisine is in demand. For example, visitors come explicitly in order to eat "*zacahuil*", a traditional maize preparation from the region. The maize mixture, together with meat, cheese and other ingredients, is being wrapped in huge banana leaves and cooked. A single *zacahuil* can be up to five metres in size. A spicy sauce must go with every portion.

#### **4.6 Environmental compatibility**

The tourism activities take place in the UNESCO biosphere reserve. All the measures implemented are in harmony with nature. The main motivation of the tourism project is nature conservation as well as new sources of income for the local population, taking into account the natural setting.

Through tourism as an alternative job and income opportunity, it also prevents further deforestation.

The tourism activities include seven tours along different routes in the region: culture and tradition, several days' hiking tours, camping for students, bicycle tours, meditation and spirituality, sustainable agriculture and forest management as well as programmes for companies.

#### **4.7 Participation of women and men in planning and implementation processes – improvement of gender relations**

Mexican society is very male dominated, especially in rural areas. Women only pass on to their children what they know. From their early childhood, boys "enjoy" a special treatment; they can take whatever they want. Girls are from an early age pushed into their female role: They are being prepared to be good housewives and obey their husbands. Domestic violence is quite common.

Many women in the region are left alone with their children and cattle when their husbands migrate to the US in search of work and stay away for months. Some of the men don't come back at all and start new families elsewhere.

In some of the communities, Grupo Ecologico Sierra Gorda supported the work with women. The handicraft production sites emerged from this work. The handicraft items as such were a positive side effect. The main focus with the women was to work on their self-esteem and self-confidence. There was a dynamics that developed from this which could not be stopped any more. For the first time, the women experienced appreciation. They themselves produced something that they could sell. In that way, they could also contribute to their families' livelihoods. They learned and they managed to establish new rules in their family lives too. They took the privilege not to ask their husbands for permission when they went to the production sites. At the beginning, the men were annoyed. But it didn't take long until they also understood that their wives can do a lot more than "just" cook, look after the children and be available for them 24 hours a day – and that their wives go to the production sites in order to produce something and not in order to "have affairs". When the production sites were built, the men finally also came and supported the work.

More than 60 percent of the initiatives and micro-entrepreneurs are in the responsibility of women.

#### **4.8 Ensuring economic and institutional sustainability of the project**

The main investments have already been made with the help of external funding. The tourism service providers were the beneficiaries of all the measures and were trained in various aspects. Future sustainability lies in ensuring that the quality standards of the tourism service providers are maintained. They are their own bosses, all of them have got entrepreneurial spirit.

For 2014, there is a marketing plan which was developed with the support of a renowned US-American consulting firm. The measures are being implemented by Grupo Ecológico.

The tourism products and services are mainly targeting the national market and above all the population in nearby Querétaro. It must be noted that Querétaro has an enormous population growth. Motivated by the increasing violence in the North of Mexico as well as in Mexico City, many families migrate to the more peaceful region of Querétaro, where industry is growing rapidly. Traditional economic sectors are agriculture, livestock rearing, and trade. Since 2010, 100 new enterprises settled in Querétaro, especially in the automobile sector, aviation, food processing, and information technologies (IT).

## **5 CONCLUSION**

**GRUPO ECOLÓGICO SIERRA GORDA** deserves the TODO! 2013 in all respects, as here tourism development takes place together with the local population. Local service providers – most of them women – benefit fully and directly. At the same time, this development as a whole promotes environmental protection and nature conservation in an approved UNESCO biosphere reserve.

## Contact Award Winner:

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## Organizer of TO DO! 2013 – Contest Socially Responsible Tourism:

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