

**TO DO! 2007  
Contest Socially Responsible Tourism**

**Award Winner**

**Haciendas del Mundo Maya**

represented by:

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Fundación Haciendas del Mundo Maya**

**Mérida**

**Isabel Peralta, President,  
Cooperativa del Centro Cultural y Artesanal Izamal**

**Izamal  
Mexico**

**Rationale for the Award**

by

**Angela Giraldo**

## **1. INTROCUCTION**

The contest application by HACIENDAS DEL MUNDO MAYA was checked from December 8th to 18th, 2007, on the Yucatán peninsula in Mexico. On behalf of the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V.) the statements on concept and objectives of the project could be verified without difficulty. The expert in charge recommends awarding HACIENDAS DEL MUNDO MAYA with the TO DO! 2007 at ITB 2008.

## **2. BACKGROUND**

The Yucatán was the main Mayan settlement area, and their descendants continue to live in the cities and villages of the peninsula. Located in the South East of the Republic of Mexico, the Yucatán comprises the Mexican states of Quintana Roo, Yucatán and Campeche as well as parts of Guatemala and Belize. Almost 60 percent of the population of Yucatán and nearly 90 percent of the population of Campeche are Mayas or belong to other indigenous groups.

Yucatán is one of Mexico's poorest states. Important archaeological sites such as Chichen-Itza, Uxmal and Etná are located here. The well-known tourist centre of Cancún lies at the northernmost tip of the peninsula in the state of Quintana Roo. Cancún has a capacity of 25,000 beds and receives about three million tourists per year, mainly from the US, Canada, and Germany.

Around 1900, the Yucatán peninsula experienced a boom in sisal production. Because of the huge export quantities and the high income associated with these exports, sisal was also called the "green gold". Sisal is being derived from a type of agave. The export of this fibre was the most important economic sector in the region. Haciendas (land holdings) producing sisal were the centres of the local economy: There was work, houses for the staff, a school, a hospital, a food store, etc. Every hacienda had its own currency.

Due to the sisal export business, the Yucatán peninsula had strong connections with Europe. But the invention of nylon and competitors in sisal production from Africa and Brazil as well as political decisions led to a rapid decline in the sisal industry on the Yucatán.

The great hacienda architecture was often designed by well-known European architects. Around 1920, there were 1,170 haciendas. Today, only 400 of them are left, most of them in ruins. The reason: in search of other sources of income the owners abandoned their haciendas one by one. As a consequence, many families who had for so many years been dependent on the "green gold" were left without jobs. For the generations that followed, the result was a high level of poverty and hardly any development opportunities.

## **3. A SOCIALLY RESPONSIBLE BUSINESS MODEL**

### **Grupo Plan**

Grupo Plan, a Mexican business group, bought and restored some of these hacienda ruins and converted them into hotels. The haciendas are to make an economic contribution to the local communities, offer jobs to the people who live there and initiate more economic projects related to tourism. The haciendas were to become engines of economic development in the region. The Mexican family behind Grupo Plan feels closely affiliated with Mayan culture. According to one of the family members, they would have found the business project "The Haciendas" unthinkable had it not taken into account the social and cultural development of the local population.

Grupo Plan have been working on the Yucatán peninsula for more than ten years. With "The Haciendas" ([www.thehaciendas.com](http://www.thehaciendas.com)) project, they have done pioneer work in maintaining the haciendas and in converting them into hotels or guest houses.

The hotels have created jobs for the communities in their neighbourhoods. First, workers were needed to restore the buildings. Later, the hotels were looking for workers, and suppliers of various products and services. Grupo Plan implemented a plan for capacity building, so that the haciendas now recruit close to 90 percent of their staff from the local Maya communities.

During the early years, the hotels were managed by the investor company and the owners of the haciendas, Grupo Plan, themselves. Since 2001, they are successfully marketed by Starwood Hotels and Resorts<sup>1</sup> under their “Luxury Collection” brand.

Revitalising the haciendas has confronted the business group Grupo Plan with major social challenges. Due to the colonial heritage, historically deeply rooted paternalism and complete impoverishment of local communities, the Maya population suffered from a lack of self-esteem. The first social projects were therefore related to strengthening the Mayan cultural traditions and to supporting the people in producing handicraft. In order to implement these projects in a professional manner, Grupo Plan set up a foundation, the “Fundación Haciendas del Mundo Maya”.

### **The HACIENDAS DEL MUNDO MAYA**

The haciendas are buildings restored in their original style. The exposed wooden beams are of the characteristics, and so is the generously open interior architecture.

The haciendas offer holiday accommodation of the high-end luxury category. They have been conceptualised in such a way as to have a positive effects in the respective local communities. Details will be described in the sections on individual criteria.

The land belonging to the haciendas covers huge areas, but only a few guest rooms are offered. The rooms are generously and elegantly furnished in rural style, and lovingly decorated with flowers. Apart from the comfortable beds, there are nicely big hammocks available to the guests in each room.

Shampoo, conditioner, shower gel, and soap are produced by female artisans (*artesanas*). They work in co-operative societies and use natural products, mainly aloe vera. The containers are made of clay by the *artesanas*, with the respective logos for each hacienda. Every morning the beds are decorated with small fern leaves and even more blossoms. A plate with fresh fruits is made available to the guests every day.

There are many green spaces, tropical trees, and some haciendas also have botanical gardens. At some haciendas, a few of the buildings have been preserved as ruins, sometimes the big old machines can still be seen; in Uayamón the swimming pool is build amidst ruins. The former water reservoirs used for irrigation have been converted into swimming pools without giving up their style. As a protection and to seal bath tubs and swimming pools, no tiles are used, but an extract from the bark of a tree. This protection is very durable and also looks very nice.

The spa area is a typical feature of the haciendas. Here, guests can relax from day excursions, walks or bicycle tours. The massage therapists (Mayan ladies) live in the communities around the haciendas and come to the guests according to the guests' wishes. In most of the haciendas, there is a separate spa area, but the massage can be done in the room, in the open air in the garden or in a cave, according to the guests' wishes. The place will be decorated with many candles and flowers. Even before the massage, the beautiful atmosphere gives a feeling of inner peace and harmony. For the massage, only natural products are used, which have been produced by the *artesanas* from raw materials from the gardens belonging to the haciendas. The therapists are organised in a co-operative society and offer their services to the haciendas. The haciendas have got contracts with the co-operative society.

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<sup>1</sup> The Starwood business is concentrated on running hotels and resorts world wide, primarily in the high-end category of the hotel industry. Starwood is one of the biggest hotel companies world wide, appears under nine different brand names (e.g. Sheraton, Le Meridien) and employs about 145,000 people around the globe.

Currently, there are six haciendas in operation. In the state of Yucatán, there are:

1. *Hacienda Temozón Sur*: known since 1665 as the country house of a descendant of Conquistador Montejo. Temozón used to produce maize and concentrated on keeping live-stock. In the mid 19th century, production shifted to sisal. Temozón was one of the most important land holdings on the peninsula with 6,600 ha, 640 workers, and it had the largest industrial equipment of the region. In 1997, Temozón was opened as a hotel. It has 28 rooms and suites, 103 employees, 85 of them from the Temozón community which has a total of 190 families (684 inhabitants).
2. *Hacienda Santa Rosa*: was built in 1855 as a livestock farm. In 1998, the hacienda was opened as a hotel. It has 11 rooms and suites, 28 employees with 26 of them from the community (*comunidad*) of Santa Rosa de Lima. 240 families (887 persons) live in Santa Rosa.
3. *Hacienda San José*: was built in 1794 as a livestock farm. In 1999, it opened its gates as a hotel. Hacienda San José has 15 rooms and suites, and currently 38 employees with 36 of them from the neighbourhood.
4. *Hacienda Ochil*: was built in the 18th century as a livestock farm. In 1999, the hacienda was opened as a restaurant/rest stop offering space for 200 guests. At the moment, Ochil has 30 employees, with 29 of them from neighbouring communities.

In the state of Campeche, there are the following hotel haciendas:

5. *Hacienda Uayamon*: This livestock farm was founded in the last decade of the 16th century. In 2000, the hacienda was opened as a hotel. Uayamón has 12 rooms and suites, 33 employees with 29 of them from the community around the hacienda. 67 families live in Uayamón.
6. *Hacienda Puerta Campeche*: is the only hacienda which is not located in the countryside, but on the coast, in the colonial city of Campeche. The hacienda consists of a row of small colonial houses that have been modified and are now forming one unit. In 2004, this unit was opened as a hotel. Puerta Campeche offers 15 rooms and suites and has 39 employees, with 35 of them directly from the locality.

The room rates vary according to the season and room categories (Superior Room, Junior Suite, Deluxe Suites, Presidential Suite "Casa del Patron": former bed room of hacienda owner).

### **The Fundación Haciendas del Mundo Maya (FHMM)**

The foundation Haciendas del Mundo Maya was set up in 2002 by Grupo Plan in order to connect the hotel operations with projects and activities of the local population in the neighbourhood. FHMM is a non-profit organisation. Its objective is to improve the quality of life and opportunities for the advancement of rural Maya communities on the Yucatán peninsula while strengthening their cultural identity and respecting the environment. The foundation is based in Mérida, the capital of the state of Yucatán.

The foundation currently has 25 employees. The multidisciplinary team includes sociologists, social workers, doctors, engineers, graduates in business administration, political scientists, and farmers. For all projects, the foundation guarantees 50 percent of the project costs. Another 50 percent are financed by sponsors, public funds of the respective communities or state programmes as well as contributions by the communities themselves. The staff costs are fully financed by the foundation, i.e. the main sponsor of the foundation, Grupo Plan. The foundation accompanies projects by providing advice in the planning and implementation phase of measures. It sees itself in a moderating role. The foundation supports projects in the fields of health, education, construction, environment and setting up businesses.

#### 4. PROJECT APPRAISAL

The comparison of Haciendas del Mundo Maya's activities with the six TO DO! contest criteria and three additional questions leads to the following assessment:

##### Evaluation against the TO DO! contest criteria

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

The communities located around the haciendas directly participate in the respective projects through the job opportunities created. During the hacienda restoration, Grupo Plan had many people trained by qualified colleagues as bricklayers, electricians, plumbers, etc. When the hotel operations started, more skilled employees were needed in different fields. Therefore, skilled staff in turn trained people from the neighbourhood communities as gardeners, waiters or cleaners. 90 percent of the staff are from communities around the haciendas.

An annual anonymous staff survey on staff satisfaction is conducted at the haciendas by an external consulting firm. Furthermore, there are individual staff meetings on an annual basis and a personal career plan is set up. On these occasions, employees can voice their motivation and wishes, problems at work or at home. Personnel development is given high priority and whoever shows commitment can make progress. There are many examples for that:

Mily, who says she has been working at Hacienda Temozon for ten years, started in the vegetable garden of the hacienda. Her motivation to move ahead and learn new things as well as her commitment at work have made her become the head receptionist.

One employee at Hacienda Uayamón started as a gardener four years ago. He, too, wanted to advance his career and earn more money. He got the opportunity to be trained in the necessary service skills. For three years he has now been working as a waiter. He would like to communicate with the guests and offer better service, that's why he is now learning English, along with many other employees of the Hacienda. Classes are held at the Hacienda. The haciendas meet the high standards of a five star hotel mainly thanks to the highly motivated and qualified staff.

By developing social projects it is ensured that the interests and needs of the people who are not working in the hotels are taken into account (Examples are given under the individual criteria headings). The projects are being developed by using participatory methods. Employees of the Fundación moderate the process. Problem analyses, approaches to solutions and the necessary measures are developed in participatory workshops by people in the communities (*comunidades*). The time frame is set according to their own ideas. The relationship with the local population is based on mutual respect.

After the haciendas had been bought by Grupo Plan, ownership for the plots on which the Maya houses and gardens are situated, was transferred to the inhabitants. This happened despite the fact that the plots were not originally owned by the occupants.

The participation of the population guarantees the success of the projects. As a procedure, it is new that the people with their problems and strengths are taken seriously, that they are being listened to and that they are protagonists of their own development. It has broken with the old, undemocratic, paternalistic and exploitative structures. Marginalised Maya communities act on their own authority and thus gain self-esteem.

## 2. Enhancing the awareness of the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural life

The best example for negative tourism development (to a large extent subject to external control) which should not be copied can be found in the eastern part of the Yucatán peninsula and is called Cancún.

As an alternative concept, the haciendas are catering to a target group which cannot be found in mass tourism. The travellers are guests interested in culture. The number of rooms offered by the haciendas does not allow for large numbers of tourists. This form of tourism also draws upon existing structures (by revitalising structural fabric, by giving an economic value to the landscape, etc.).

In the communities, positive forms of tourism are jointly lived and practiced. The most important aspect is to promote and strengthen the identity and self-esteem of the Maya population.

When developing the different projects, moderated by the foundation, opportunities and risks, strengths and weaknesses are analysed. The projects, such as handicraft workshops, co-operative societies of therapists, and the cultural centre in Izamal conduct these analyses (auch im Dt. nicht ganz klar). They improve the quality of the products and services offered by continued training. Their products and services are highly appreciated by the customers and guests.

The foundation's monitoring of the projects allows for a close-meshed analysis of the state of the projects and makes clear which ones are successful, what are the difficulties, what needs to be improved and what impact the measures have got.

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

By elegantly restoring and then using the haciendas for a new purpose, a number of projects have been initiated with support from the foundation, which benefit the whole community (*comunidad*). As mentioned at the beginning, only the hotels have made it possible to create new **jobs** for the local population. Almost 90 percent of the employees are from the communities around the haciendas. Even **elderly people** found jobs here. These are mostly men with little or no school education who are working as gardeners.

**Health centres** have been set up in every community which provide health services using **traditional natural medicines**. A doctor supports the project and prescribes medication – if necessary. He trains health promoters in natural medicines, who then help their people on a volunteer basis. By rediscovering and making use of this old tradition, the health situation and nutrition of the population have been improved. The return to natural medicines has been accompanied by educational seminars and workshops. The number of people who are making use of such medicines is increasing year by year and they are also planting their own herbs.

Doña Yoli, health promoter from Temozon Sur, is glad to have learned many things and to now pass on this knowledge: "People here used to get antibiotics even against every cold. Today, they come to me and we can alleviate their suffering with a few herbal plants without costs involved. Respiratory infections are the most common medical condition. With an infusion of lemon grass or avocado leaves we can very well help ourselves."

By **setting up libraries**, the precarious public educational system in rural areas is being supplemented. Reading skills are promoted as well as the revival of the Mayan culture and language. A mobile library is serving other villages which are located beyond the radius of hacienda activities. The libraries serve as community centres. They are meeting points for the young and old. Children

of different age groups come after school to work on the computers or to borrow books. During classes, teachers and their pupils also like to make use of these libraries. The library staff organise didactic games with the children, e.g. mathematics in a playful form, and they read aloud to the small children.

The libraries offer various classes, such as adult literacy classes. In this programme, the foundation cooperates with the governmental alphabetisation programme. Between 2003 and 2006, it had been possible to reduce the illiteracy rate from 50 to 39 percent. Another offer are the "schools for parents" ("escuelas para padres") aimed at reducing violence in the families, promoting family cohesion and supporting parents in educating and bringing up their children.

In 2002, hurricane "Isidoro" devastated large parts of the Yucatán peninsula. It brought down roofs and fully destroyed houses which had already been in a bad shape. Most of the victims of the hurricane belonged to the poorest of the poor. A fund raising campaign drawing on private and public resources made it possible to **reconstruct houses**. The inhabitants were given building materials. Reconstruction was done by the people themselves, with community members helping each other. They were and are being guided by engineers from the foundation. Depending on the hacienda's location, the houses are built in a certain style. People either live in the typical "palapas", Maya houses of oval shape with thatched roofs, or they live in houses made from cement with tin roofs. When reconstructing the houses, the respective styles were respected and maintained.

**Environmental protection measures** are also implemented. Since 2003, public land is being reforested. The botanical garden at Hacienda Santa Rosa is worth visiting. Don Victor is the chief gardener. He knows every single plant, each and every tree, and every flower. The health promoters mentioned above like to use the medicinal plants, to Don Victor's great delight. What makes him even happier, however, is verbatim „if they don't come back, as that means they have recovered!“ School groups also visit the botanical garden and are guided by Don Victor.

Women get support to **start small-scale enterprises and productive projects, which they manage on their own**. The foundation provides technical and entrepreneurial guidance as well as marketing support. 28 workshops for the production of handicraft have already been set up, with 200 women actively working there. And: in such workshops, interested women receive training, guidance and advice.

As a rule, the workshops are located in the immediate proximity of the haciendas. The advantage is that the guests are able to observe the production process, and that they can buy the products, without any intermediaries. The workshops produce hammocks and various sisal products such as bags, hats, etc. as well as fine filigree silver jewellery, candles, ornaments from seeds and clothes embroidered by machine or by hand.

The different workshops are organised into seven co-operative societies. They are managed by the women themselves. The women take responsibility and learn step by step about the different production processes and workshop administration. The haciendas guarantee 60 percent of the income of these cooperatives by buying consumer goods (embroidery of bed sheets, table cloths and towels, cosmetics such as soap, shampoo, sisal products, advertising products, hammocks, items made from stone and horn, etc.). Every hacienda has its own "boutique" selling high-quality products from all these cooperatives. Contracts have been signed to sell products to other hotels.

The *artesanans* participate in seminars and workshops to improve quality and to develop new designs. A Panama hat costs between 1,500 and 2,000 Mexican Pesos, roughly 100 to 140 €. The products are being bought because of their high quality. From 2005 to 2006, turnover increased by 22 percent. In Mexico, the minimum wage is about 400 Mexican Pesos/week (approx. 28 € per week).

The main activity of women continues to be household work and looking after the children, so that occupations outside the house are in most cases restricted to four hours per day. Depending on

the community, the income of the *artesanías* in 2006 was between 600 and 2,500 Mexican Pesos (between 40 and 180 €) per month (for part time work!). The income depends on the production volume and on the number of members of the co-operative society.

Another group is made up of female **massage therapists**. They are equally organised in a co-operative society and offer their services at the haciendas. Currently, there are 19 women. The number of treatments has increased by twelve percent between 2005 and 2006. In haciendas with a spa area, the monthly income per therapist was between 1,300 and 2,500 Mexican Pesos (90 to 180 €). In many cases, these women are the main earners in their families.

The **cultural centre “Las Tres Culturas”** (“the three cultures”) is the most recently founded co-operative society. The centre is situated in Izamal, the oldest town on the Yucatán peninsula. The cultural centre comprises a museum, a shop to sell handicraft, a café with a beautiful patio as well as a small spa area. The co-operative society has 15 members, most of them aged between 20 and 24 years. The centre offers guided city tours and visits to artists by bicycle or horse cart. The tour guides have been trained to conduct such tours. In the meantime, the cultural centre has signed contracts with incoming agencies.

#### **4. Guarantee of the attractiveness of jobs in tourism for the local people by improving working conditions relative to payment, social security, working hours as well as education and training**

On average, a person working at one of the haciendas earns 5,200 Mexican Pesos (about 370 €) per month, more than three times the minimum wage. The employees are also getting all the social benefits such as health insurance, old age pension benefits, and a share of the turnover. The high quality standards of a 5-star hotel require continuous training of staff in service standards, safety and hygiene, loyalty among colleagues and language skills. Almost half of them have basic to medium English language skills. Language classes are offered to the staff at the haciendas free of charge. In addition, adult alphabetisation courses are offered at the haciendas.

Globally, six percent of work time is available for further training. In Mexico, this share is only four percent. At the haciendas, eight percent of the work time is used for further training. In 2007, 656,000 Mexican Pesos (around 47,000 €) were invested in capacity building at the haciendas. This means an average of 240 € per employee which is 44 percent more than in the previous year.<sup>2</sup>

As already mentioned under the participation criterion, staff satisfaction surveys are conducted by an external organisation on an annual basis. The results of these surveys feed into various measures such as capacity building. It is rather obvious that the hacienda employees are satisfied with their respective jobs. They radiate an atmosphere of loyalty, belonging and contentment. This is also clearly visible from their friendliness and honesty towards the guests. Superiors and workers are treating each other in a very friendly and respectful manner.

In 2006, the haciendas were no. 7 in the “Best Employers in Latin America” list in the category midsize enterprises.

#### **5. Strengthening the local culture and the cultural identity of people living in tourism destination areas**

The tourism project “The Haciendas” and all the projects of the foundation in the communities contribute to strengthening the local culture as well as the cultural identity of the Maya population. This is ensured through various measures and activities: Re-valorisation of traditional natural medicines, handicraft production, respect for their language and customs, revaluation of old traditions

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<sup>2</sup> According to the haciendas’ manager

such as Mayan massage, the “sobadoras” (“bone healers”), and the forming of traditional dance groups.

At the haciendas, mainly regional dishes are prepared, of course by local chefs. The cuisine of the Yucatán, “la cocina yucateca”, is very famous and highly appreciated in Mexico. At Hacienda San José, guests can experience how “tortillas” (flat bread made of maize) are prepared on the open fire for breakfast. Fresh, warm tortillas with beans, avocado and other delicious food items are a good preparation for the day.

The cultural centre set up in Izamal is another sign to strengthen cultural identity. Mainly young people work here, organised as cooperative society. They are proud of their culture. They guide guests through the museum, tell them about their history and the history of their parents and grandparents.

## **6. Avoiding and minimising any social and cultural damage caused by tourism in tourism destination areas**

Awareness raising among members of the communities (*comunidades*), mutual respect and self-respect are important pillars to avoid negative side effects of tourism. The way in which tourism is practiced here and the concept of the haciendas to a large extent prevent possible damage.

The haciendas regard it as a matter of concern to provide information for their guests. In every room, the guests can find information material describing the connection between the hotel operations and their responsibility towards the local population as well as all the social projects in the different communities. Every hacienda has got a kind of map that also shows the most important places in the community. The map (an A 4 sheet printed on both sides) is an invitation to experience two dimensions of the hacienda: The historical building on the one hand and the every day life of the local communities on the other hand.

### **Evaluation against the TO DO! additional questions**

#### **A) “Could you give some examples which document that your project/measure is in line with environmental compatibility?”**

Only local materials were used to restore the haciendas. The buildings were restored in such a way as to minimise the felling of trees. At Hacienda San José there is a ceiba tree in the middle of a bathroom. The bathroom was built around it. (These trees can grow up to 70 metres; the stem can be up to three metres in diameter).

At the haciendas, water is being used with care. Used water is recycled and reused to irrigate the gardens and fields. Upon the guest’s wish, towels and bed sheets can be used again.

By using refillable containers in the bathrooms (for shampoo, shower gel, body lotion, conditioner) and in the restaurant (self-made jam, butter, etc.) unnecessary waste is being avoided. Plastic bottles are available only for drinking water.

There are large green areas. Every day, several people come to collect the leaves. Leaves and other organic residuals are composted.

The haciendas increasingly offer bicycles which the guests are happy to use.

The projects in the communities are holistic projects with environmental components naturally integrated. The reforestation of public land, garbage collection campaigns, the organisation of waste segregation and the botanical garden are some of the examples.

Materials such as stone, sisal, seeds and aloe vera are from the region and are used by the artisans in the production of handicraft. In the workshops, they mainly work with natural materials.

**B) “Are there any examples in the framework of your project/measure which make clear that a just participation of women and men has been taken into account during the planning/implementation phase of your project/measure? Considering gender relation, can be found any improvement of the status/situation of women within your project/measure?”**

In the region, the traditional division of roles between men and women is still common practice. Women are responsible for the household and the children.

In the hotels, there are both men and women working in the various departments. Women get the same career opportunities as their male colleagues. Young women are particularly motivated to improve their social situation. There are quite a few women in administrative and managerial positions.

In the projects with the local population, special attention was paid to women as a target group. The women want to learn, to develop their capacities, to contribute to the family income and above all they want to offer their children the opportunity for advancement. In the future, the children are to be better off than the women themselves. That’s why more and more women started to participate in the workshops offered by the foundation (cashier duties, bookkeeping, design, organisation of co-operative societies, English classes, marketing, etc.).

When developing the projects, one objective was to provide income opportunities for women, e.g. through productive projects such as the workshops mentioned above, and the spa areas at the haciendas, without ignoring the traditional roles of women. By now, more than 200 female artisans (*artesananas*) have organised themselves in seven self-administrated co-operative societies. One *artesana* recounts that in the meantime, her husband sometimes even helps to weave sisal at home when she has too many orders.

The women participate in training programmes and now and again discuss what other courses they would need. They increasingly want to be able to conduct their business activities independently. The women agree that it is very good for them to go to the workshops, so that they are able to talk to other *artesananas* and can be away from home for a few hours per day. These workshops are more than just “production sites“. They are also protected meeting points where the women share the good and the difficult aspects of their daily lives. They talk and laugh together, they are happy to go to work, they look forward to their orders, their customers and the recognition they are getting from outside. And then they also look forward to being with their families at home. As a result, their relationships with their husbands and children have improved considerably, says one *artesana*.

**C) “Through which measures/mechanisms is the economic and institutional sustainability of the project guaranteed? In the context of safeguarding the future of the project, where do you see problems and risks?”**

For ten years, the idea to build and run hacienda hotels has undergone a positive development, so that there are plans to renovate more haciendas. Since 2001, they are successfully marketed internationally by Starwood Hotels and Resorts under their “Luxury Collection” brand.

The social projects in the communities have been conceptualised in such a manner that they can be self-sustaining on the long run. They are on a good way, both financially and in administrative respects. The workshops produce on a regular basis and sell more and more. They are even getting an increasing number of orders from abroad. The security the co-operatives get from the fact that consumer items are bought by the respective hotels is an important financial pillar for them. The high product quality ensures that they are able to sell. The demand for massage treatments develops positively. The consolidation of the co-operative and the increasing professionalism of the therapists ensure that they will continue.

Going back to natural medicines and using them continues to improve the health conditions of the population. The people have free access to medicinal plants.

## **5. CONCLUSION**

Equal opportunities are the magic concept for development. At the HACIENDAS DEL MUNDO MAYA, people get opportunities – and they are successful! The encounters with Mayan culture are authentic. The socio-cultural colonial heritage of paternalism, alienation and a lack of self-esteem as well as the complete impoverishment of local communities are successfully being overcome. The six hacienda hotels create jobs in the local communities in a targeted manner. The working conditions meet high social standards and the contentment and continuous qualification of the staff are core objectives of the management.

The economic and socio-cultural impacts on the whole region of the Yucatán are sustainable and positive.

The foundation supports the independent development of the local population. Development starts from the needs and decisions in the communities. The participatory projects are successful because they are developed and implemented by the people concerned. People in the communities are motivated and qualified to develop new products and services related to tourism – which are at the same time anchored in their traditions. All of this happens with a high degree of respect for and appreciation of their culture.

With their “HACIENDAS DEL MUNDO MAYA”, Grupo Plan and Fundación Haciendas del Mundo Maya provide evidence on how corporate social responsibility can be put into practice. Beyond legal requirements, they have integrated social and ecological responsibility into their core business. Implementation in their daily operations shows how this responsibility can contribute to sustainable development.

*English translation: Christina Kamp*

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Websites: www.studienkreis.org  
www.to-do-contest.org  
www.tourador-contest.org  
www.sympathiemagazin.de

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