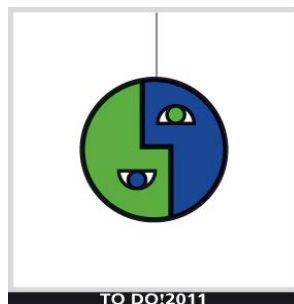


TO DO! 2011

Contest Socially Responsible Tourism



Award Winner

SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA ECO-LODGE

Represented by:

**Constantino Nay Rada,
Managing Director**

**Rurrenabaque, Beni
Bolivia**

Rationale for the Award

by

Dr. Christian Adler



Source: <http://maps.google.de>



1 INTRODUCTION

In November 2011, the author travelled to Rurrenabaque, Bolivia, on behalf of the Institute for Tourism and Development (Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung e.V.) in order to verify the information given in the application by SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA on location. Among other activities, he accompanied a group of tourists to the lodges of San Miguel, visited the community and participated in all the activities offered by local people there.

In line with the insights and findings thus gained, the author recommends awarding the community-based tourism project SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA a TODO! 2011 – in recognition of the project's objectives, working principles and activities.

2. BACKGROUND AND SETTING

With close to nine million inhabitants, Bolivia has a relatively low population density. The country's official capital is Sucre with about 300,000 inhabitants. The seat of the government, however, is in La Paz. The town thus has a political significance; it has a population of about 650,000 and is situated at an altitude of 3,200 to 4,100 metres. The town of Santa Cruz, situated in the lowlands, is the economic centre of Bolivia. With a population of far more than 1.5 million, it is the country's largest town.

The population of Bolivia mainly consists of three major groups. With about 70 percent, indigenous peoples have the largest share. They include the Quechua and Aymara in the highlands as well as the indigenous groups of the lowlands. About 28 percent of the inhabitants of Bolivia are Mestizos. The remaining small part of the Bolivian population consists of the white descendants of Spanish colonialists and Mennonites.

A large part of the population works in the agricultural sector of the Bolivian economy. About two thirds of the population live below the poverty line¹. Compared to other South American states, services and manufacturing do not constitute economic factors worth mentioning, as Bolivia has only a few urban centres and given the high poverty rate there is little demand. Being the country with the weakest export sector in South America, Bolivia has a nominal gross national product of only US\$ 1,153 per capita.

2.1. Tourism in Bolivia

The weak infrastructure in many regions makes individual travel difficult. Visitors to Bolivia therefore mainly stay in accessible areas with cultural and natural sights. The main tourist destinations of Bolivia are on Lake Titicaca (Isla del Sol), in the salt pan Salar de Uyuni, in the cities of Cochabamba and La Paz, in the glacial altitudes of more than six thousand metres (e.g. Huayna Potosi, Illimani) and in the lowland provinces with their dense primeval forests. Everywhere we find a large number of villages where people still live in line with their traditional values and preserve their old customs.²

In 2006, about 496,000 international tourists visited the country.³ Half of them came from Latin America, about one fourth from Europe. 70 percent of the arrivals are backpackers, the remaining 30 percent other individual travellers or tourists on package tours.

With an area of 648,101 km², the lowlands of Bolivia constitute about 59 percent of the total surface area (in comparison, Germany covers an area of 357,021 km²). Throughout the year, Bolivia has a

¹ The World Bank set the poverty line at one US dollar (US\$) a day; this amount is the basis here. In 2008, the limit increased to 1.25 US\$.

² Sources: <http://www.bolivia.com/noticias>, <http://bolivien.tourismus.de/>, <http://www.turismobolivia.bo>

³ Source: Viceministerio de Turismo, Políticas y Estrategias Turísticas; more recent data have not been published

tropical, moist and warm climate. Major rivers such as the Madre de Dios and the Rio Beni make their way through the forests towards the Amazon. This region is largely undeveloped and a paradise for anyone who loves nature.

Bolivia has several national parks. The most accessible and thus most frequently visited park is the Madidi National Park with an area of 18,000 km² (region of Wales/GB: 21,100 km²). The park is situated in the North West of the department (departamento) of La Paz and on the border to Peru. The large protected area stretches from the Cordillera Real up to the Amazon basin, from the highland forests and tropical rain forests to the lowland savannas, and it boasts of an enormous biological diversity. The Madidi National Park is considered to be one of the most biologically diverse national parks in the world.

This park can be accessed through the small town of Rurrenabaque (18,000 inhabitants), situated on the banks of the Rio Beni. The town lives almost exclusively off tourism. Three airlines serve the airport with its untarred runway. It is difficult to reach the town by road from La Paz and possible only on a very poorly constructed mountain road. Rurrenabaque has various hotels, 16 restaurants and an impressive number of 22 small-scale tour operators offering tours to the national park. In 2005, 40,000 guests visited Rurrenabaque (more recent figures were not obtainable)⁴.

2.2 SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA – History and Setting

Madidi National Park is situated in the territory of the indigenous *Tacana* who settle upstream on the banks of the rivers Beni and Tuichi. Traditionally, they used the area for shifting cultivation, hunting, and logging. When the national park was founded in 1995 by the Bolivian government, the Tacana all of a sudden lost their ancestral rights. Since then, any logging, hunting, and agricultural activities have been prohibited within the boundaries of the national park. However, the *indígenas* are still allowed to fish in the rivers for their own consumption.

All the indigenous communities' protests against the measures taken by the government remained futile. The communities who protested at that time also included the inhabitants of San Miguel. Their village is situated close to the current border of the national park. In that village, under the leadership of Constantino Nay, people reconsidered the new situation as an opportunity and thought about how to make use of it for the village economy.

It was evident that tourism, which already started in the 1980s, could be developed further to benefit the community. However, at the beginning the community neither had the financial means nor the necessary know-how. They therefore approached development and aid organisations such as UNDP (United Nations Development Programme), US AID, CARE Bolivia and other NGOs such as Conservation International and asked for material and technical support.

The support they got enabled the families to jointly set up two lodges: "San Miguel del Bala" and a smaller branch in the national park – "Caquihuara". The lodges were completed in 2005 and started operating. The German Development Service (DED) was also involved by providing solar power.

Since 2006, the members of the community, organised in a kind of cooperative, have been managing their lodge(s) themselves. 35 families out of a total of 43 families in the community are involved in the project.

⁴ Source: http://www.bolivialine.de/bolivia/reise_tiefland.htm

3 THE TOURISM PRODUCT

3.1 Accommodation and Infrastructure

As tourist accommodation, SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA has seven cottages built 20 metres from each other on the cliffs over the Rio Beni. Every cottage has two or three beds, a toilet and a shower. All windows and other openings of the cottage, even below the roof, are equipped with nets as a protection against insects. In addition, there is a mosquito net for every bed.

The cottages are built on poles and are palm-thatched. In the evenings, lighting is provided by a solar panel and energy-saving bulbs. There is an easy chair on the small terrace (altane) in front of the entrance. Upon request, hammocks are also available. The guests are provided with towels, beds are made every day and for the night, bottles of drinking water are provided. Furthermore, there is tea and coffee available for the visitors of the lodge, and various fruit juices are also offered free of charge.

In a radius of about five metres, the cottages are surrounded by a light, sandy yard, which is swept every day. Adjacent is the dense rain forest. The lodge hosts a maximum of 21 guests.

Spending the night here, you may feel completely alone in the jungle, but at the same time protected and secure. From all sides of the cottage, you can hear the sounds of nocturnal animals. It is a fascinating acoustic experience, especially for people who have never experienced something similar before.

A comfortable path leads from the cottages to the catering units situated at a distance of about 200 metres, close to the river bank: a large hut with a kitchen and dining room. Next to it, there is a building used as staff accommodation, and in a prominent location there is a large round building inviting guests to spend the day here or can be used for presentations, discussions and workshops. This round building resembles a bullet, thus the name "del Bala", the author was told.

On the walls of the room, there are large panels displaying the various types of river fish. A few hammocks invite guests to relax. A toilet building with showers is close by.

The smaller lodge Caquihuara in the national park is situated one and a half hours by boat up the Rio Tuichi, a tributary to the Rio Beni. It consists of a main building with a large altane and three large rooms that will host a maximum of ten persons. Next to it is a separate toilet building with showers. Furthermore, there is a hut for the kitchen and dining room. Another hut serves as staff accommodation.

This lodge, too, appears to be well-kept, the toilets are cleaned every day and the kitchen hygiene leaves nothing to be desired either.

The cooperative of SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA has three local long boats. Two of them have roofing as a protection from sun and rain. They are equipped with comfortable seats and powered by outboard engines. The third boat is a simple one mainly used to transport materials.

3.2 Programmes and Excursions

The guests are offered different durations of stay, one day or more – up to a five-day excursion in Madidi National Park. The price for such an excursion is 75 US\$ per person per day and includes – if there are at least two participants – all transport, accommodation, full board, excursions and guides. Individual travellers will need to pay more.

A minimum stay of at least three days and two nights is recommendable. Only then will you be able to make it to the small lodge in Madidi National Park and have the opportunity to get to know the highlights of the tours offered by SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA.

During the first days, visitors will be put up in the larger lodge outside the national park. They will be picked up from the airport in Rurrenabaque and will reach their destination in 35 minutes by boat.

From the lodge, one obvious thing to do is hiking, with good bird watching opportunities. Before the hike, the guide will inquire what the guests would like to see, and especially for how long they would like to be walking. Considering the guests' constitution, the guide will determine the route. The longest hike (with children) takes two and a half hours.

Walking slowly along the paths, guests learn about the various medicinal plants and their application. The traditional knowledge about the healing properties of endemic plants still seems to be completely intact here.

As indigenous people, the guides also have a different perception than most of the visitors. They see inconspicuous things in the undergrowth that we only see on closer inspection. Their power of observation is of great importance, as there are well-camouflaged poisonous snakes in the jungle.

For lunch, the group returns to the lodge and, after a siesta, sets off for the next destination on the itinerary: a visit to the village of San Miguel, which can be reached in a few minutes by boat, or in half an hour's walk. The villagers provide a friendly reception and the guides give information on the village and introduce some of the villagers. They guide the guests around the farms and through the plantations.

The indigenous villagers not only cultivate corn, manioc, sweet potatoes (*camote*), potatoes and beans, but even rice in dry cultivation. In addition, they have a huge variety of vegetables plus a whole range of well-known citrus fruits and tropical fruits. The Tacana also cultivate cocoa, sugarcane and coffee. In the lodges they serve hot chocolate and coffee from their own production.

The guests are shown crafts (e.g. basket weaving) or get the opportunity to see a dance. Different hikes are offered, e.g. to the "*Cañón del Bala*", a narrow gorge which the water has washed out from the rocks over millennia.

Visitors also get the opportunity to be taken to the lodge Caquihuara, which is situated within the national park. Here, there are even better chances of seeing some of the rainforest's wildlife: monkeys, tapirs, anteaters, armadillos, sloths, or capybaras (the largest rodents in the world). In the treetops one can observe toucans, parrots and many other colourful birds. Jaguar sightings are rare, though fresh tracks on the river bank provide clear evidence that you are in jaguar territory.

Furthermore, day and night hikes (with guides) are offered along seven different paths developed for this purpose. For example, the guests will get the opportunity to observe macaws at their nests without disturbing the birds. It is also possible to join the locals when they go fishing. On the last day, the visitors are taken back to Rurrenabaque on a three hours' journey by boat.

The good cooperation among the staff deserves special recognition, especially with regard to the smooth coordination of the tour. As a guest you will hardly notice how things are being organised. After a hike through the dense forest, the guests reach the river at some place that is hard to notice,

and there is already a boat waiting for them to pick them up. The special attention given to the guests is also impressive. If you sit on the altane to read a book, a friendly woman will soon appear to offer fruit juice or coffee.

Special mention needs to be made of the excellent quality of the food. The chefs serve a large variety of very delicious meals. With every meal, fresh fruit juice is served, partly from the fruit trees of the jungle, which provide new culinary impressions. They include the juice of the *cupuazú* tree, a cocoa species which originates from the Amazonas area.

4. ASSESSMENT

The comparison of the activities conducted by **SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA** with the **six TO DO! contest criteria and three additional questions** leads to the following assessment:

Evaluation against the TODO! contest criteria
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4.1 Taking into account the different interests and needs of the local people through participation

As mentioned at the beginning, the project SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA ECO-LODGE emerged from the jointly felt need of the inhabitants of an indigenous village to develop new and sustainable livelihoods for themselves. This happened after they had to surrender large parts of their ancestral territory to a national park and could no longer continue their traditional subsistence agriculture as they used to.

After they had decided to try tourism and to set up an eco lodge in order get a new source of income, it was (and still is) in everybody's interest to contribute to this venture and work to the best of their abilities in order to realise it and to make it successful on the long run.

SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA ECO-LODGE is the product of joint work by a community for the community. A total of 35 families are involved in it. They worked to build the lodge and to manage the company. According to their own estimate, they managed to construct the buildings at one quarter of the price that comparable lodges in the region would normally cost.

The manager of the eco lodge of SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA is Mr Constantino Nay Rada who also manages the office in Rurrenabaque. Several committees were set up in the community in order to decentralise responsibilities and to get new ideas from the various different perspectives of the members. There is a tourism committee (*comité de turismo*), a school committee (*junta escolar*), a committee in charge of water supply (*comité de agua*) and a women's committee (*club de madres*). The committees meet once every three months. Their spokespersons report on both success and pertaining problems. After discussion, decisions are jointly made.

Financial procedures, income, expenses, use of funds, etc. are also discussed. All the relevant data are documented in a transparent manner and are accessible to every member of the community (and the author).

4.2 Enhancing the awareness of the local people with regard to the chances and risks of tourism development in their everyday economic, social and cultural lives

Once the plan to set up a lodge had been made, various training programmes were organised in preparation. The community contacted local and national authorities and nature protection agencies. They negotiated with the national park administration and sent members to trade fairs and workshops. They wanted to learn more about the risks and opportunities of tourism development, and they wanted to acquire knowledge on product development and on sustainable product management.

The rural community agreed that their involvement in tourism must not happen at the cost of their authenticity as Tacana, and that their culture and especially the environment must not suffer any damage.

The community gives special attention to nature conservation. Acting in an ecologically responsible manner is regarded as a precondition for sustained business success of the eco lodge. The community is also actively involved in the activities and conferences organised by the management committees of Madidi National Park.

In order to prevent potentially negative impacts, guidelines (“code of conduct”) were adopted to stipulate who may or must not do something – differentiating between local people and guests (examples see below).

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

SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA ECO-LODGE is owned by the community, which means that every member of the community is also a co-owner of the company. Whoever wants to work in the lodges may do so after completing the respective training. He or she will earn an income benefitting his or her family in addition to their other sources of income. The employees are not tied to a long-term occupation in the lodges. They may also for some time exclusively engage in their own agricultural activities. Other community members will be there to take over from those who are taking a break from their work for the company.

Not only those who are directly employed by the lodge, but other community members, too, benefit from its operation. The local subsistence agriculture produces more than what can be marketed in nearby areas – and La Paz is too far away. In the lodges, however, there is a good demand for these products. According to the villagers, food is procured almost exclusively from members of the community. There are only a few products such as butter, milk powder, and meat, which are bought from Rurrenabaque.

From its income, SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA also contributes to social affairs. Teaching materials for the school can be made available. Among other things, five computers can be financed. When someone in the community falls ill, the cooperative takes care of the costs of transport and treatment. In 2010 alone, 9,200 US\$ were spent on this. This arrangement provides a certain degree of security for each member of the community in a remote region without any other social security mechanisms.

Furthermore, community members can get small loans in cases of emergency or for special purchases and can pay them off through their work later.

Finally, the income from the lodges is also used to finance their upkeep and the important maintenance of the village's water supply. Another part of the income is used as reserves and for planned investments.

The remaining surplus at the end of the year is equally distributed and paid out as a dividend to the families.

In another respect, positive change has occurred in the community since SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA ECO-LODGE was set up. Earlier, the author was told, "Gringos" were not popular. They used to walk around the village committing blunders, without finally leaving anything for the community. Today, guests are very welcome, as they vitally contribute to the prosperity of the community and respect the culture of the villagers and their rights to personal privacy. Now there are discussions and cultural exchange happening between tourists and hosts which benefit both sides. Volunteers get the opportunity to stay with a family, contributing 20 US\$ per day towards the cost of living, and to help out in the community school.

4.4 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

In order to create jobs in tourism around SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA, people first needed to be trained. In view of the initial situation, this was not an easy task. The problem was solved by bringing qualified consultants and teachers to Rurrenabaque.

In 2006, a Danish consultant was employed for ten months. She developed a business plan and imparted basic tourism skills: product development, operational procedures in tourism, management and administrative tasks, the need for supervision and monitoring, etc. She defined the areas and measures for further training of community members. Programmes and work plans were developed. All this was done in continuous consultation with the community and their consent, as well as in agreement with the organisations that supported the community in the initial phase. After all, it was the intention of the cooperative to create acceptable products that would be marketable at a later stage.

15 women were then trained in catering by two professional chefs. One of them is the owner of a restaurant in Rurrenabaque, the other one a professor from La Paz. The training programmes were very successful. Furthermore, the families' food habits also improved, as their cooking is now more varied. Since so many women were trained, it is easy for them to take turns as chefs in the lodges without neglecting their families.

The guides were trained in the same professional manner. The applicants were expected to know the area very well. In addition, they were trained in botany and zoology. The syllabus also included subjects like interpretation of the natural history of the Amazon region, the culture and history of the Tacana, ecology and sustainable tourism development, hospitality, tourist expectations, group guiding and conflict resolution. The theoretical lectures were supplemented by practical exercises in the national park and by role plays.

The participants in the three months' course were 19 predominantly young members of the community aged between 20 and 30. Four of the eight guides were sent to La Paz for a two months' English crash course, sponsored by the community. The guides' achievements were evaluated and having passed their exams they got certificates as "licensed guide".

Other employees of the company were trained in sales and promotion strategies, in the use of computers and the Internet.

The office of SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA ECO-LODGE – located on the main road of Rurrenabaque – currently employs six members on a permanent basis. Their tasks relate to management, logistics, sales and accounting. In addition, there are two coordinators, one of them in charge of the big lodge, the other one in charge of the smaller one. Apart from the accountant, all the staff is from the

community. The office is well equipped with computers, including their necessary periphery and Internet access.

On the basis of a rotational principle, the office coordinates the temporary recruitment of employees in the lodges. This includes the guides, the boat drivers, the chefs, the cleaners and other helpers. Their remuneration is hierarchized, depending on the work they do. A guide receives 80 Bolivianos (Bs) per day, the chefs as well as the boat drivers 70 Bs, and the assistants 60 Bs (100 Bs equal 10.8 Euro oder 14.2 US\$). Other products and services provided by members of the community, for example the presentation of traditional techniques, laundry services, the maintenance of footpaths, or the supply of agricultural products are paid extra.

It needs to be mentioned that other lodges in the region pay their staff slightly better wages. In these cases, however, the employees are not co-owners and get no other benefits (e.g. support in case of illness, micro-loans, see above) and they don't get a share of the profit the company makes.

It has become clear that elder members of the community continue to see their occupation mainly in agriculture while the younger ones increasingly prefer to work in the lodges. They say they enjoy working for their company. Therefore, there is no visible tendency of migration of young members of the community from SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA to the big city.

4.5 Strengthening the local culture and the cultural identity of people living in tourism destination areas

The indigenous culture of the Tacana as hunters and gatherers in the tributary region of the Amazon has long been a matter of the past. Their current culture rather resembles the rural agricultural societies of the Bolivian or Peruvian highlands. In the community of SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA, Tacana is no longer spoken. Only a few elderly people still know their own language. The community speaks Spanish. The cultural self-image of the Tacana has changed as a consequence of gradual acculturation from foragers to cultivators. Nevertheless, they feel strong bonds with their old traditions.

Tourism, as it currently takes place in SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA, will not change the culture of the Tacana. All the programmes are centred around nature and the environment. The cultural component is restricted to a few presentations in the village and to the knowledge imparted by the guides. From their conversations with the visitors, however, the Tacana understand that the guests appreciate their home environment and might secretly even envy them for their simple lifestyle. Without doubt, this will strengthen their cultural identity.

4.6 Avoiding and minimising any social and cultural damage caused by tourism in tourism destination areas

To prevent tourism-related damage, there are large information boards both in the office in Rurrenabque and in each of the lodge. They cannot be overlooked and stipulate the most important rules of behaviour expected to be followed by the guests. In the same manner, there are rules of conduct that the company demands from the staff. They are as follows:

Code of Conduct for Tourists

You can help us by traveling responsibly in natural areas in order to both protect the environment and increase the wellbeing of the population. We ask you to please take note of the following guidelines:

- Do not bring any weapons, including machetes into the park hunting and cutting down trees are prohibited in all the tourist areas you will visit.
- Protect our wildlife: Do not bother, touch or feed any of the wild animals you encounter during your tour.
- Buy local products such as art or fruits to support the local economies of the communities and the towns you are visiting. Do not buy any products that are made from skins, bones or leathers of endangered animals.
- Keep trash a minimum at the lodges and make sure you place whatever garbage you do have in assigned places
- Respect the privacy of the local people by asking permission before taking pictures.
- Help us in our conservation efforts through the efficient use of resources, including electricity and water.
- Report activities carried out by any of our employees or guides which contradict any of these regulations.
- Maintain a low volume when doing your activities so as not to disturb wildlife.
- Pick up any litter you see and dispose it appropriately.

Code of Conduct for our Employees

Best practices are regulations that a business can promote to its staff to minimize environmental impacts, satisfy customer needs, and to improve the productivity of the business. We promise to hold our staff responsible for their actions and to ensure they are following the following code:

- The tourist is a guest in our home. As such we aim to treat our clients with the best service, respect and friendliness.
- We promise to provide objective, responsible and honest information about the sites visited, the conditions of the trip and the services our company provides.
- The private property and the moral integrity of the tourist will be respected at all times.
- Tourism is our way of life, for this reason we have committed to protecting and conserving the tourism resources that allow us to offer tours: the environment, wild animals and the forests we work in.
- Communities that we visit will always be aware of the tourists and their private lives will remain uninterrupted by tourism
- Our guides must set examples by respecting wildlife and watching it from a distance. We DO NOT touch or feed the animals.
- We will not leave trash in the areas we visit
- We are aware of and follow the regulations put forward by the protected area authorities. If we see any violations of these regulations, we will share this information with the protected area administrators.
- When inside protected areas, our guides will only use designated trails to avoid hurting fragile areas.
- We will ensure our clients are aware of both the codes of conduct for themselves and for our staff.
- We promise to continue the environmental education of our employees.

At the end of their stay, visitors are asked to fill in a form and to evaluate in detail the services rendered.

The lodge was set up at a relatively large distance to the community of SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA (35 minutes walk) in order to create a spatial distance between the company and the community. This minimizes the impacts on every day life in the village. During the entire length of their stay, the guests are looked after by the guides who also accompany them on a visit to the community. They make sure that the "Do's" and "Dont's" are respected.

Evaluation against the TODO! additional questions

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

The indigenous Tacana have always used their environment without causing major damage to it by overexploitation. The rain forest is their most valuable good which they want to protect by all means. Therefore, they are well-suited as volunteers to guard the national park and as vigilant observers of the changes happening to it.

In cooperation with the Wildlife Conservation Society, a monitoring programme was initiated to gather data on the population and the local occurrence of individual species. Every guest of the lodge is invited to contribute and to note his or her animal sightings in a flyer. This adds to the scientific data gathering in Madidi National Park that is carried out by professional organisations.

Even before you reach one of the lodges of SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA as a guest, you can see a large signboard on the river bank, with all kinds of waste fixed to it: a plastic bottle, an aluminium tin, a piece of styrofoam, a candy wrapper, etc. Underneath, you find the (high) number of years these materials take to decompose completely. There could hardly be a more impressive way of pointing out that waste should not be thrown into the forest.

The guides are taking the guests on different paths through the jungle, making them feel as if these were old hunting trails that emerged incidentally. This is an illusive impression: in reality, prepared paths are used for the hikes, on the one hand to avoid disturbance of the forest, on the other hand to provide as perfect a jungle experience as possible. Every path has a name pointing to its main attraction. Its length, the approximate time needed for the walk and the duration of the boat trips are also mentioned. The routes are marked in a map. It is an indication of the professional approach taken by the cooperative that they even thought of carved signs showing the way.

It is self-evident that waste disposal in the lodges is done in the most environmentally friendly manner possible, that there are no generators to produce electricity, and that solar panels are used to provide lighting.

In Beni province, there is a so-called "Green Action Certification Programme" – the only one of its kind in Bolivia. It assesses the environmental and general sustainability of a tourism enterprise's operations. SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA fulfils the criteria with a score of 92 percent.

B Are there any examples in the framework of the project 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?

Here, the division of labour rather results from the traditional gender roles. Men occupy the roles of boat drivers or guides, women the household-related occupations. They take care of the kitchen, the laundry, the production of baskets and other crafts. However, both men and women do the cleaning and jointly take care of the cultivations and the maintenance of the lodges.

There are no specific measures to achieve gender equality in SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA. At the same time, it is not considered peculiar that a woman works as a guide and or that another woman has an important leading position within the company: she is in charge of sales.

For the women in the community, the lodge means a welcome improvement of their situation. There would hardly be any other possibility for them to find employment. If they wanted to work, they would have to leave their families and would have to find a job in Rurrenabaque or La Paz. A normal family life would no longer be possible. Women therefore contribute to the living standard of their families without their occupation getting in conflict with their traditional family duties.

C Through which measures/mechanisms is the economic and institutional sustainability of the project guaranteed?

Since the lodge was opened, the number of guests increased from year to year. In 2006, only 116 visitors were recorded, in 2007 as many as 347, in 2010 already 498 guests, and in 2011 as many as 453 customers had been counted by the end of October. Most of the guests booked three days' programmes with two nights' stays.

SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA is in the black, but despite a steady growth in turnover, after deduction of expenses, makes only a moderate annual net profit. A reason for this is the increase in personnel costs, as with increasing visitor numbers more and more community members find employment. Furthermore, the cooperative plans ahead: The climatic conditions in the rain forest cause a rapid decrease in the value of buildings. Continuous maintenance can slow down decay, but cannot prevent it. That is one reason why it is so important to build up reserves.

Most of the guests learn about SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA by word of mouth recommendation (44 percent in 2009), 25 percent found the lodge through tips in guide books by Lonely Planet and Footprint. 19 percent were sent by local travel agents in La Paz and only seven percent arrived *en passant* through the office in Rurrenabaque. These figures improved a bit in 2010, as in the meantime customers for the lodge are also canvassed on the Internet. However, there have not been any connections with international tour operators worth mentioning.

In order to be more visible on the international market, a number of initiatives have been taken since 2011. They include a website in modern design, in connection with respective web marketing (Google Analytics, links, Facebook), as well as folders, post cards and last but not least the inclusion in "Undiscovered Travel Collection" – a collection of selected destinations targeting people who are interested in both special experiences in nature and cultural exchange with local people.

Furthermore, local travel agents in Bolivia are being approached. It might even be possible to convince an airline to market the lodge. Furthermore, if they can afford, the community members want to participate in trade fairs and send out advertising mails, in the hope to attract the attention of international tour operators.

These efforts are not mainly targeted at making profit and at expanding the business beyond capacity. The community wants to be content with a moderate future annual growth rate. The marketing plan reads: "According to its definition, SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA ECO-LODGE is a community-oriented enterprise. Its objectives are primarily social in nature."

5 SUMMARY AND CONCLUSION

The Tacana in San Miguel have proven that in case of external forces which can be life-changing, it is of some value not to act in a selfish manner, not to just run away from the problems or to offer futile resistance, but to think ahead and to act accordingly while standing together and starting something entirely new in a joint effort.

The 35 families managed without previous knowledge to launch a participatory tourism project and to establish a well-working hotel enterprise amidst the Bolivian jungle in which today all the members of the community participate and which offers future perspectives, especially to the youths, in their own environment.

SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA is a model for the success of synergetic cooperation, i.e. for achievements that are possible only through the cooperation of many people. SAN MIGUEL DEL BALA ECO-LODGE is also a model for the success of a sustainable, socially responsible and ecologically sustainable development concept.

Members of the Jury TO DO! 2011

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Verhaltensforscher

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Studienkreis für Tourismus und Entwicklung, Freier Journalist

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