

Narrative Report of the Board

Business Machine 2011: Moving forward, slowly, but steadily

2011 was an important year for The Business Machine. Many might have preferred that we would have progressed faster and indeed, when looking at the current stage of the projects, we can see that still there is no guarantee, that they will one day be finished successfully. Even though we might be impatient we have to admit that crucial steps have been taken. The most important is probably the level of trust and cooperation that has been built up in the business groups. People left and new ones came. But this process of consolidation was important: Those who are still with us are the ones that are really motivated and interested in the long run in our initiative.

The most important step for the Business was without any doubt the establishment of an association that groups all European members. This structure gives us the possibility to start official activities, to do networking, ask for funds or other forms of support. Furthermore, the recognition by the canton of Bern as an association of public utility gives us legitimacy towards donors, members or partners.

Even though in charge since autumn, the board practically started to take up its duties from last December. In the last meetings, we were mainly occupied with organisational questions concerning the board, but also the further development of the whole association. The next steps will be to find new (passive and active) members, to promote the idea of The Business Machine, to clearly define the functions that the board should carry out regularly and have a list of competencies and duties of the different members.

However, the biggest challenge will probably be to raise the initial capital for the three projects and to find clear processes for institutional or private investors. This will be a big work and we cannot rely on past experiences. Therefore, we will need the help of all of our current members.

The board defines its function rather as a support structure. The main work is done in the three business groups. And there are some promising developments in most of them. The following three sub-reports give a short summary of past activities, current challenges and future plans of each of the group.

Annual report poultry group

The following report gives a short overview of the activities of the poultry group from January to December 2011.

Expert knowledge available in the team

Since the first idea, the poultry group has seen quite some changes concerning the people involved. From the initial Ethiopian team only Tagese Tagele remains, whereas Tsebaot and Tikku are not active any more. On the other hand, we managed to add one important member in Ethiopia: Dr. Aberra Melesse is a lecturer for poultry sciences at Awassa university and he has practical knowledge about poultry and many valuable contacts to institutions. On the European side, two more people joined the team. Andi Hodel works for prodavi, one of Switzerland's biggest players in poultry business. Daniel von Euw is working in a feeding mill and specialist in animal nutrition. Even though not officially in the group Stephan Brun was also quite involved in the activities, especially the redaction of the papers. During the last year, we were in contact with different Swiss experts in poultry, who all helped with their knowledge to make the project feasible.

Technical and ethical discussions

Quite some discussions about technical questions have been led during the last year. All experts involved agree on starting with a small project of 1000 layer chicken and to expand only, if the first pilot phase is successful. The question of the best system also was a hot issue. Even though most of current producers in Ethiopia use cage system, it is clear that we do not want to take this way. After some discussions, it was decided to try out a deep litter system and maybe to experiment later on with other systems. Improvements concerning animal welfare will remain a topic of discussions in the future.

Economic aspects and business plan

One of the biggest works were different analysis concerning the economic feasibility of the project. There was a market analysis carried out in Awassa, which included hotels, shops and coffees as well as individual households. The economic environment in Ethiopia was checked out in detail. It turns out that the biggest risk is the current high inflation and devaluation of the Birr (local currency). This makes it difficult for foreign investors to operate profitable. The business plan, which is a quite extensive document, is ready since a few months. According to our estimations, we need around 60'000 USD for the first year (including all constructions and investment).

The next steps

In order to obtain a first license and to apply for land, we need to show at least one third of the investment capital in an Ethiopian bank account (20'000 USD). Our plan is, to find donors (for example Rotary) that will give us non-refundable money. If we combine this with private investments, the non-refundable money can act as a insurance for capital losses due to macro-economic risks (for example high inflation).

Any ideas, where to get money from or also small or big personal contributions are very welcome at the moment.

Social tourism group (STG)

The story behind

The group started its work immediately after the first planning meeting of the Business Machine in March 2010. It was initially with 2 members from European side, and one from Ethiopia, but during the process of development of the social tourism concept the Ethiopian team member had to resign, which made us looking for more interest people in both – Europe and Ethiopia. As a result – we established quite a productive team, contained of 5 people from Europe and 2 from Ethiopia, all of them - very motivated!

In the last year were developed promotional materials for the Social tourism in Ethiopia; crucial for the start up documents; and a general concept. We applied for a start-up funding in front of one Foundation, but unfortunately – we received a negative answer, which only motivated us to continue further.

The achievements

In April 2011 two people from the Business Machine team went to Ethiopia to try out themselves the different options for activities, which can be offered to the tourists themselves. We managed to clarify different aspects of the future trips, together with the two Ethiopian team members.

As a result – a detailed and dynamic programme of the trip was created, and a concrete proposal for the first trip in autumn was given.

The STG decided to start with a bottom-up approach – to initiate a pilot trip in order to try out what is realistic as social activities in Ethiopia – what will work out and what needs to be modified, and then – to continue further with establishing of the business plan and finding partners/sponsors, etc.

The Pilot trip

From 6 to 18 November 10 people from Europe explored Ethiopia in a new and very interactive way. In general – the trip was successful and for the organisers left some valuable insights in how to carry out such trips in the future and what more should be improved. The group was aware that it's a pilot project therefore they were giving us constant feedbacks, which we plan to use for the further improvement of the future trips. The collected evaluation data will be used for the future – from the promotion of the trip, to the approach to potential partners/ donors.

The future steps

- We revised the programme for the next trip, and start planning it, but it takes more time for establishing a Private Limited Company in Ethiopia, with which we will conduct the future trips. After passing all the legal procedures, we might have the next trip in autumn.

- We on the other hand need to discuss our binding agreement with the company in Ethiopia (and to develop such) with a European legal advisor.
- Promotion and popularization of the Social Tourism (throughout the year);
- Establishment of a website – we are in contact with a local IT group, who is willing to contribute in this direction.

Ethiopian Table Games Project

Summary of Activities March 2011 – March 2012

A project was initiated at the Business Machine workshop in spring 2010 in Addis Abeba to create table games for adults (board games, card games or similar) based on Ethiopian legends and tales, and to sell them to Ethiopians living abroad or to anybody enjoying an Ethiopian board game. From the original team, Mesfin Aboneh on the Ethiopian side, Nadine Koch and Stefan Kappeler from the European side are still in the project.

The progress of the group during the last months was slow, so we decided to look for a team of a few creative people or a “creative director” to take the lead in game development. For this purpose, a mail was sent around to European trainers and several people were initially interested in the project. We prepared a short presentation of the project for this purpose. However it turned out, that the large geographical distance was an obstacle for effective team building and project development. So this team did not become effective. One person, Andreea Tudorache from Romania, is however further interested in the project.

Furthermore, we were asking German Ethnologists working on Ethiopian peoples to support the project with Ethiopian tales and legends. Due to the commercial nature of the project, these people were however not willing to support us. Therefore we contacted Gezahegn Teklesilassie, an Ethiopian journalist, to help us with that and he became a member of the team.

In April, Stephan Brun and Diana Gigova traveled to Ethiopia and met Mesfin Aboneh to discuss about the game project and to bring some board games as examples for a future game. Mesfin built up a group in Ethiopia to decide on a tale and develop a game idea. We sent them a book about game development. The Ethiopian team decided then to develop a game based on the history of Emperor Tewodros. This idea was generally welcomed, since the story is well accepted in Ethiopia and a sound basis for a board game. Stefan Kappeler met the team in August 2011, brought the game Pandemic as an example for a cooperation game and was impressed by the enthusiasm for the game idea, considering that board game development is not yet known in Ethiopia. Furthermore we started a Google Text & Tables page to share information between team members in Europe and Ethiopia. This page is working well and can be of help when game development starts. Stephan Brun and Diana Gigova traveled to Ethiopia again in November and discussed the game project with Mesfin.

A game workshop was prepared to find new people with interest in game development and discuss the Ethiopian game ideas. It was held on November 26 in Bern with five game experts and enthusiasts. Another person interested in the project is Patricia Pollinger, a game developer from Zurich. She could unfortunately not join the workshop but we could meet her in Zurich on October 30. Furthermore, we had several Skype chats to discuss current issues on the project (on March 19, March 27, June 21, July 3, July 18, August 3, September 7, September 22, October 23, January 24 and March 5).

We decided to organize a meeting and invite Patricia and the people from the last workshop to discuss the buildup of a game developer team and ask if someone of the group might take the lead in this project.