

T5 STAR EVENTS SCHOOL

November 2006 Report

HEADLINES

In February of this year we reported that the school had a total number of 50 students, with 5 teachers providing a total of 5 daily classes.

We are immensely proud to report that at the end of November we have a total number of 685 students, with 19 teachers providing a total of 38 daily classes.

This rapid growth has been the result of a combination of factors, not least the work of the teachers themselves. The school has received a great deal of support from donors in the UK and this has clearly had a huge impact. To all our supporters, we issue a big thankyou, and we would particularly wish to highlight the contribution made by Star Events Group, who effectively established the school and made provision for its recent development.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

We can report limited progress on attempts to begin the new academic year. Although contract teachers have still not been paid, the Ministry of Education seem to want to avoid the embarrassment of delaying into the new year. A handful of schools have re-opened with teachers being paid directly from enrolment fees and some training schools have opened on a half schedule. The recently established SINDAPROF Teachers' Union is currently in negotiations with the Ministry. It seems highly unlikely, however, that the Ministry is any position to pay the eighteen months salary owing. The nature and timing of a compromise solution is the hot topic at the moment.

RECENT GROWTH

It is difficult to estimate to what extent the school is actually benefiting from the chaotic national situation. Our recent publicity drive – and much credit

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here goes to Namir Lopez, our PR Manager – has resulted in greatly increased student numbers in our morning classes. It is some of these classes, however, which may be the most vulnerable if a national solution is found. We remain optimistic, however, that the impact will be negligible. The physical capacity of the school (10 classrooms) allows for further expansion of provision. Some time slots will always be unpopular due to the sheer heat of the day but we feel there is a lot of scope for providing weekend (especially Teacher Training) courses on a regular basis.

Much of the recent growth has been due to the continuing development of our French Language provision, co-ordinated by Amadu Diao. Of the 38 daily classes, 13 are now French classes. This doubtless reflects the facts that G-B is surrounded by francophone countries and most international organizations require either English or French.

Almost impossible to quantify is the general impact of the school on life in Bissau. It's pleasing to note, however, that tocatoca drivers know where to stop when you ask for T5.

CAPITAL EXPENDITURE

November has been quite an expensive month for us. Our overheads are now so high that any capital expenditure can be a body blow. Essential purchases included a new generator (Superpower SP6500 DXEL 5.5Hp – for those who know about these things) and 10 new chairs for the Students' Room. It is thanks to the dedication and expertise of our support staff Francelino “Frank” Sanca (carpenter) and Marciano Gomes (electrician) that running repairs have generally minimized most capital expenditure.

WELCOME

Some new faces at T5 Star Events School:

First, a big welcome to **Eric Morris**, who joins the school as Project Advisor. Eric is already well-known to many T5ers from his work with the SIMA Project (Science and Maths Teacher Training) throughout the regions of Guinea-Bissau. Eric's expertise in Education, Finance and Administration has already proved invaluable, particularly to our recently appointed managers. Eric aims to visit the school on a regular basis – when he's not busy fundraising in the UK, that is. It is perhaps not coincidental that the huge expansion of the school in November was during Eric's stay in Bissau.

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Second, we welcome 4 new teachers:

Mamadu Cande (English), **Carlos Djata** (English), **Dinis Mendonca** (English) and **Venancio Mendonca** (French).

Mamadu, Carlos and Dinis are all graduates of the T5 Teacher Training Course as well as being former trainees at The National Training College. Venancio is currently also teaching French at Agostinho Neto High School.

Finally, we welcome Jellica Gomes , as Equal Opportunities Advisor. She will be assisting Belmira Oliveira in promoting and implementing the school's Equal Opportunity initiatives.

COLLECTIVE MANAGEMENT

The major challenge facing the school is how to manage such rapid expansion in terms of personnel, finance and administration. The recent managerial appointments were, in retrospect, the first tentative steps towards a collective management structure. This month, a “bridge” between the managers and the Executive Committee was created with the appointments of Belmira Oliveira and Bacar Sanha as ‘Executive Managers’. Belmira and Bacar aim to ensure that all information regarding school policy and decision making is continually available to all managers and teachers and that Executive decisions are fully accountable. It remains to be seen how effective this new structure will prove to be. Clearly, however, the more involved teachers and managers are in the running of the school, the more motivated and successful they are likely to be.

On this theme, all managers are currently being trained up as Duty Managers – a role previously undertaken solely by members of the Executive Committee. It needs to be stressed, however, that Guinea-Bissau is not noted for its management culture and therefore “managing the school” is likely to be the major challenge of 2007.

SHARES

Successful management of the school includes ensuring that all school staff receive an income. In November staff received what is called a Basic Minimum Share. This amount varies according to responsibilities, hours worked etc. It's not a fortune but compares favourably to High School

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teacher salaries. In December – and assuming the generator doesn't pack up – we hope to be in a position to pay our Target Share (about 15% higher). Managers themselves have the responsibility of deciding what is affordable.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

We are currently putting a lot of energy into promoting the inclusion of females in the school. Belmira Oliveira and Jellica Gomes have developed a policy to ensure at least 50% of students are women. In addition, Belmira is taking over the teaching responsibilities for the specific Equal Opportunity classes.

TEACHER TRAINING AND DEVELOPMENT

All our Teacher Training and Development courses continued throughout November and are scheduled to continue into the new year. The T5 Teacher Training Course was particularly successful in terms of selecting new teachers for the school. In addition to the new appointments already made we expect to have more new arrivals in December.

Freddy Gama and Orlando “Brad” Mendonca will take over the Teacher Development (English) and Ercilio Evora will take over the Teacher Development (French) schedule.

It's interesting to note that approximately 60% of our English courses are at Beginner level (a sad reflection on the general state of English teaching in G-B?). Freddy will be concentrating specifically on this level while Brad will be introducing teachers to the challenges of the higher levels. Ercilio will be aiming to promote a more communicative approach to our French teaching. Fernando Sa, meanwhile, will continue to support the new teachers and provide guidance and training where necessary.

T5 STAR EVENTS SCHOOL AND THE MINISTRY

Our proposals regarding the Curriculum Project, Accredited Teacher Training and Public Examinations are in an advanced stage of ‘awaiting reply’. The inability of the Ministry to provide written responses, and indeed the inability of many senior officials to actually show up for work, has proved to be immensely frustrating. Freddy is demonstrating the patience of

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a saint in the ongoing negotiations. We can expect more movement on all this once the academic year finally starts.

THE FRENCH PROGRAMME

Sharp-eyed readers will have noticed that T5 Star Events School of English is now known (simply?) as T5 Star Events School. This obviously reflects our expansion into French Language provision. Amadu, Jean and Venancio are currently developing the French programme at all levels. Interpretation services are now a feature of all staff and managers' meetings and it is hoped that our French teaching staff will not feel too marginalized by the English majority!

PROFILES

Comments from some of the English Students:

On learning English:

"I want to go to the USA." Mario

"I'm a Member of Parliament." Herry

"I want to be a doctor and most instructions for tablets are written in English." Juliano

"I will do the Entrance Exam for English Teacher Training next year." Lenini

"I want to go to Nigeria." Mariama

"I want a job in South Africa." Eunice

On attending T5 Star Events School:

"More qualified teachers than other schools." Albino

"They have good methodology." Eviana

"...good relationship between teachers and students." Francelino

"T5 fees are affordable." Estevao

"Diligent, friendly and clever teachers." Lawrence

"It's the best school in Guinea-Bissau." Ricardo

Well said, Ricardo! Next month, comments from some of the French students.

Eric Morris interviewed a few of the T5 staff:



Belmira de Oliveira is the 29 year old Equal Opportunities Manager at the school. She graduated from Tchico Te, the teacher training college, in 2005, having studied from year 0 through to year 3. Her father died in 2004 and she is now the bread-winner of her mother's household, where she lives with her 4 brothers, 2 sisters and her 7 year old daughter, Valmira. Valmira is currently in her second year of primary school.

Belmira looks forward to the day when there are other women teachers at the school and the number of female students matches that of males. To this end she has proposed a reduction of fees for females attending morning classes, 1500 f CFA per month instead of the usual 2000. She is also investigating why the drop-out rates for female students at Tchico Te are so high in the hope that this may give some insights into alternative strategies that might be adopted at the School.



Armando Imbique Crima is not sure of his age. Both his parents are illiterate and no record of the actual date on which he was born was kept. In consequence he has a guessed date of birth, 25 Aug 1979, on his identity card. That puts him at 27 now

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although he could be a year younger. He has an “unofficial” wife, and 4 children aged 2, 4, 6 and 8.

He was born in Martodingal, a small village between Joãolandim and Bula, not very far from Bissau, but was posted to Bafatá by the Ministry of Education when he graduated from teacher training at Tchico Te in 2004. His involvement in the interior made him the ideal choice for the post of Regional Manager at The T5 Star Events School of English. He has high hopes of starting some classes in Bafatá under the School’s banner when he returns at the beginning of the academic year.

He once cycled the 150 km from Bafatá to Bissau to attend a meeting at the School. He set off at 6.00 a.m. and arrived at 7.00 p.m. More recently he indulged Nick by accompanying him on some Sunday jaunts round and about Bissau to the parts that other brancos seldom reach.



Ercílio Benjamin Evorá, at 29, is the Sub-Director and Curriculum Manager of the School. He is single but loves children, as you can see from the picture taken with Ninha, a little girl at the shack where we used to eat lunch. Sadly the shack did not have planning consent and was pulled down while Nick and I were there, so Ercílio has now lost contact with the love of his life.

He lives about a kilometre from the School with his family. He graduated from high school in 1998 and because of problems with the teachers at the teacher training college ended up doing a building course at technical school. In 2000 he actually started his teacher training which he completed in 2003. He then had a spell of 6 months working in the VSO office before embarking on a degree in Social Communication and Marketing at a newly founded university. Admirably he continues to juggle his studies with his duties at the School. Last year

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he even managed to fit in an 8th level French course at the French Cultural Centre, giving him the added capacity to substitute in the case absent French teachers at the School. It is also invaluable experience for his planned programme of training for the French teachers to help bring their standards of teaching up to the communicative level of their English colleagues.

Finally, the Manager of the Month Award, should we ever inaugurate such a thing, would certainly go to Namir Lopez in November. When not producing fliers and business cards or sorting out contracts with local radio stations Namir (“Craig”) has been busy designing surveys and generally putting T5 on the map.

ACCOUNTS

November was considered as one of successful month in terms of our fees collections because of some financial measures taken by (Executive Committee) in order to meet our November challenges which was mainly to guarantee the BMS to all staff, teachers and support staff. Nonetheless it is important to emphasize the contribution of Eric Morris and Nick Barrett for that financial success.

In November we were able to collect 1.917.000 cfa cash from which we expended 1.121.250 cfa. Our major expenses were as above mentioned (see Capital Expenditure) and including the Basic Minimum Share.

Big challenges are going to be in January when hopefully we are going need some new teachers and the rent tough some financial measures are newly taken to face the new challenges such as decision of increasing 20% above our monthly fees and expenses reduction.

“SWOT ” ANALYSIS

At the T5ngo Annual General Meeting members brainstormed a “SWOT” analysis of the school. Results are as follows:

Strengths:

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Quality of teaching and training; excellent accommodation; good reputation; experienced teachers; organization; friendly atmosphere.

Weaknesses:

Huge financial burden; inexperienced managers; lack of professionalism; inadequate teaching materials.

Opportunities:

Contract work; recognition from Ministry of Education; expansion of activities into the regions; fundraising;

Threats:

Losing furniture (belongs to previous tenant); teacher availability; poor sanitation facilities; “sabotage” from main competitor, opportunities not realized;

Since the AGM much work has been done to tackle the huge financial burden. Largely through Brad’s good work, the problem of fees collection has now been addressed but any subsequent decrease in fees revenue could easily put the school in jeopardy.

NEEDS AND PRIORITIES

As the season of goodwill and festive cheer approaches many supporters may be getting anxious about the whole thing. The solution is simple: rather than buy stuff for people who already have stuff why not really make a difference this Christmas? Cash and teaching materials are our top priorities. A reminder that the T5 NGO account is at HSBC 400233 71493671.

SUPPORTERS

Many thanks to everyone who has contributed to the success of T5 Star Events School:

Ian Flitman, Eric Morris and Lynne Walder who are now all part of the T5 Team.

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