

T5 Star Events School

December report

Headlines

December turned out to be yet another successful month for the school. Student numbers have now reached a record high -a total of 765, attending 38 daily classes. The publicity drive of previous months appears to have reaped dividends. One of the advantages of being situated on the main road is easy access for tocatoca drivers. At certain peak times the road immediately in front of the school has resembled a bus-station!

The school worked at full capacity during the most popular times (afternoon and evening) and progress was made in enrolling more students on the morning classes.

The school had a two- week break (Dec 20th to Jan 4th) at Christmas – an appropriate time to reflect on an astonishing year and to plan for further progress.

The Current National Context

It is now over two months since the academic year was officially declared “open” but the reality on the ground tells a more confused and depressing story.

Teachers (especially those in the increasingly powerful SINDEPROF union) continue to demonstrate against non-payment of salaries. Students continue to stage demonstrations against non-delivery of their education. The Ministry of Education appears to have no strategy to deal with the crisis although the bottom line here, as with so many things, is lack of funds.

T5 Supporters may wish to reflect on the political repercussions should such a scenario ever exist in the UK.

The existence of T5 Star Events School in this context is an educational lifeline for many.

Collective Management

The collective management at the school is proving to be a popular and efficient model for the school. With everyone's participation in the school management, T5 Star Events School is inching its way towards sustainability. The rigorous implementation of the "zero tolerance approach" to our fees debtors and the control of the school expenses have been particularly successful – a success undoubtedly attributable to the wider consultation and accountability afforded by the collective management model.

Incomes

Although Star Events Group continue to support us, we now find ourselves in the position of needing to pay 600,000xof (approximately £625) monthly on rent. We are continually looking for new streams of revenue and we are highly reliant on the quality and quantity of our courses.

❖ **English and French courses**

Despite the current national economic climate, which has taken its toll on many of our students, we are pleased that the pre-payment of fees policy has continued to be successful. These courses continue to be our bread and butter and -despite a minor rise in fees (500xof per month – approximately 55p) we continue to be the cheapest language school in Bissau. Nonetheless, it is clear that we can only make real progress by continuing to expand and diversify.

❖ **Teacher Training Courses**

We have felt for a long time that the teacher training expertise at the school has been under-exploited. In the new year we intend, therefore, to build on the success of the October and November TT courses and provide a programme of fee-paying teacher training courses aimed initially at trainees at the National Teacher Training College. We still await a response from the Ministry of Education concerning our

training proposals but it is perhaps fair to say that, at the moment, the Ministry has far more pressing concerns. The T5 training team remains poised and ready for action. Brad, our Accounts Manager, looks forward to the resulting fees income.

❖ **Teaching contracts**

Julio Imbula, our Contract Manager, reports some success in our search for outside revenue. We have had further negotiations with SNV, currently the largest international NGO in Bissau, and with Action Aid. Teaching contracts now appear highly likely in both cases. In addition, the umbrella organisation for all national NGOs (Placon) continue to show a lot of interest – but, unsurprisingly perhaps, very little cash!

Supporters may wish to take note that Julio Imbula's work requires an inordinate amount of time pounding the streets of Bissau, attending meetings in all corners of the city. A bicycle would enable him to perform his duties more efficiently.

Supporters may therefore wish to contribute to the JIB (Julio Imbula's Bicycle) Fund – all donations gratefully accepted.

Accounts

As reported in November, the financial success of the school allowed us to make

two share payments in December (November and December) and save money for the rent in January. As a result of our financial measures, by the end of November/ beginning of December we were able to collect 2,051,550xof (approximately £2,200) .Our capital expenditure, including the two months payment of Basic Minimum Shares (BMS) amounted to1,661,500xof (approximately £1,800). With the increased student numbers we feel that it remains possible that teachers could receive the Target Share (TS) next month.

January courses

In addition to maintaining the full programme of English and French Language Courses, our main aim for the start of 2007 is - as mentioned earlier – the development of our teacher training provision.

- **T5 Teacher Training and General Teacher Training**

Ercilio Evora, Freddy da Gama, Julio Imbula, Fernando Sa, Lembem Manga and Orlando Mendonça (Brad), the T5 Training Team, have held a series of planning meetings to discuss the academic and logistical framework for the Teacher Training Programme.

- **T5 Teacher Development**

Freddy da Gama and Orlando Mendonça will be supervising classes, as well as designing and leading methodology refresher sessions, in order to maintain and

improve the quality of teaching both at the school and on contract work.

Equal Opps

We welcome Ernestina Jose Fernandes, who joins our Equal Opportunities Programme as a French teacher.

Enrolment into the Equal Opportunities Programme suggests that the courses will prove highly popular. Anecdotally, it appears that the man on the street in Bissau, and more significantly, the woman on the street in Bissau, is becoming aware that something very female is going on at T5 Star Events School.

Belmira Oliveira (Equal Opportunities Manager) and Djelica Gomes (Equal Opportunities Advisor) are planning a local fundraising and awareness campaign which aims to spread the word even further and could open doors for future partnerships.

Teacher Profiles

The teachers are vital elements of the school's development and reputation. Many have been at T5 Star Events School from the start (ie working for free, convinced that better times lay ahead). Both French and English teachers are, we're pleased to report, now getting a regular income – and many of them are now thinking big!

Amadu Diao (French Programme Coordinator)

“There is gonna be a time when many people come from everywhere in Africa to study at T5 Star Events School”

Cecil Cabral (Human Resource Manager)

“In 2007 we are looking forward to travelling to The Gambia and Senegal or even more West African countries to develop partnerships with other Language Centres to exchange and share management experiences”

João Afonso Ferreira (Students Welfare Manager)

“There is gonna be a day when the school is going to be very full and we will not have space for any new students “

Student Profiles

Students are now more aware than ever of what benefits they can get from the school services – thanks due here to Joao (John) Ferreira, our Student Welfare Manager. The school is proud of the fact that students constantly refer to us as being a “very friendly school” – and we have attempted to be as open as possible about school policy. Our recent fees increase, for example, was made only after consultation with students.

The students have organised themselves into an association with representatives from each class. One possible development from this could be to have a student representative at all managers’ meetings.

Perhaps more significantly, plans are afoot to revive the T5 Star Events School football team. Given the recent success of our students in the G-B national women's team, we ask supporters for donations towards two sets of kit.

Needs

Cash. (As Always!). Despite the drive towards self-sustainability we are aware that our survival remains precarious. Compared to other NGOs we operate on a shoestring budget. It's interesting to note that the annual salary of a worker for an International Development Organisation in the UK could keep the school in business into 2008, pay over 20 staff for a year, enable us to provide free education for over 800 students and still have change to write a report about it.

Skills. Our management team is brimming with enthusiasm but lacking in experience. We need management advisors, looking for the experience of a lifetime, to share their skills with our team. (Contact Nick on 020 7265 1779).

Finally, to all our supporters – thanks for everything in 2006 – why not join us in Bissau in 2007?