

T5 STAR EVENTS SCHOOL

APRIL 2007

The first few months of 2007 have been another extremely busy period for the school with a significant number of developments to report. The school is now working at full capacity remaining closed only for a lunch break from 1.30 pm to 3.30pm – the hottest part of the day. Inevitably, teachers and staff are working especially hard to respond to the phenomenal recent growth of the school.

Currently, a massive total of 1,233 students are attending 67 daily French and English classes with a further 253 students on the waiting list. As reported in the March update, one possible reason for such rapid expansion has been the closure of our major competitor's main school in Pefini but that fact in itself was doubtless partly due to the success of T5 Star Events School. Much of the good PR work of recent months is due to the tireless efforts of Namir ("Craig") and Julio Imbula who have been spreading the word in all corners of Bissau and beyond.

The really important news, however, is that finally we have a fridge which works. Cold water is now a welcome feature of life at the school and we

confidently predict that it will prove to be an invaluable aid to learning and teaching. Marciano, our electrician, has also been busy lighting up the front garden of the school with holophotes in each corner. The school is now well on its way to becoming a landmark of Bissau.

As reported last month the school finally has its own desktop computer –a Compaq XP Professional – already earning its purchase price in terms of database for the school administration and materials writing for staff. Sadly we don't yet have a printer so we appeal to all supporters for any financial assistance towards what is rapidly becoming a major priority.

Some very, very disappointing news to report: on March 12th during the school lunch-break, thieves entered the premises and stole our recently bought plastic chairs from the Students' Room as well as the school clock

The result of this has been a tightening of security with even Freddy, the School Director, wearing an ID tag. Currently the exec is considering employing overnight security but in the meantime both computer and generator are being stored overnight in a neighbouring house. The

unforeseen additional expenses seem particularly unfair on the school and again, we would appeal to supporters for any support they are able to

provide. Needless to say, the police were informed of the burglary but have

so far not even visited the scene of the crime.

NATIONAL CONTEXT

Supporters are advised to check out the UN news agency

(www.irinnews.org) for the latest news on what is a highly volatile political situation. Whether the current government will survive is still unclear.

Inevitably, the education system has been greatly affected with doubts as to whether the schools will have been open sufficiently to declare the academic year valid. Again state-school teachers are on strike and owed 6 months pay.

Other public workers are owed 4 months salary with the UNTG Union threatening mass demonstrations. With Parliament having won a no confidence vote in the government the situation appears to have reached a deadlock. The knock-on effect for the school has been serious. Students, with a great deal of justification, are telling us that their parents simply don't have money. The exec is having to maintain a fine balance between collecting fees to stay in business and responding with humanity towards students in desperate circumstances. The school will shortly be launching a "Sponsor a Student" scheme but, in the meantime all support will be gratefully received.

INCOMES

School fees continue to be our main income stream with a limited amount of revenue from teaching contacts. After the recent success of the zero tolerance approach we have had to adapt –temporarily, we all hope – to the current national crisis. In bold figures this means only 62% of all fees are being collected. This is clearly an undesirable situation but, we think, the only appropriate response to such miserable circumstances.

A stronger focus is now required on seeking out more lucrative contract work but in the prevailing economic uncertainty this will be a difficult task. On a happier note, the arrival of the fridge has enabled Maria Nhaure, our cleaner, to establish a small enterprise selling cool water and "sumo de cabacera" (a delicious natural fruit drink) to students.

ACCOUNTS

(NB 1GBP= approx. 900cfa)

January (i.e prior to the national crisis) proved to be a record month in terms of income – a whopping 3,345,000cfa.(£3,680). This was achieved largely due to the growth of student numbers and a still successful zero-tolerance approach..

Expenses of 1,833,800cfa (£2,020) - primarily 600,000cfa(£660) rent and

730,000cfa (£803) target share salaries- led to a rosy balance of

1,901,750cfa(£2,092) for the month.

In February, however, the school incurred a variety of major expenses. Most notable of these were the new hourly payment system for teachers – this has enabled the school to retain the high quality staff and helped to maintain the friendly and productive ambience of the school. Nonetheless, salaries amounted to 916,000 cfa(£1,007) for the month.

School painting and repairs amounted to 355,500cfa.(£392). Computer purchase and fridge repair amounted to 250,000cfa(£275) , rent 600,000cfa.(£660). In addition, the school's first anniversary celebrations, the Great T5 Star Events Football Competition, weekend conferences, and a "thankyou gift" for Bacar Sanha, our Resource Manager, currently on sabbatical in Lisbon accounted for a further 505,000cfa.(£556). Overall balance for the month: 491,000cfa.(£540).

March incomes so far have totalled 1,919,500cfa.(£2,112) including 30,000cfa (£33)training fees. Expenses have amounted to 1,100,125cfa (£1,210) including advance payment of rent. Current balance is 1,310,5000cfa (£1,442) – this figure does not include the "shares" (salaries) for March nor the revenue from fees collection during the second half of the month.

MANAGEMENT

The current total of staff at the school, including support staff, is 23. The

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vast majority qualified at the National Teacher Training College and almost all have undertaken further professional development courses.

Most of the school managers are still in their twenties and learning “on the job”. In this period of rapid expansion the role of manager is especially demanding. Despite this, notable successes have already been achieved with the Executive Committee steering through a collection of positive developments. The Exec are rightly proud of “keeping it all together” with regular liaison and meetings on all aspects of school management – academic, administrative and financial. Individual managers are clearly becoming more settled into their roles and developing expertise in their particular areas of responsibility. Craig, our PR Manager, is becoming a national star, appearing on TV and radio on behalf of T5Star Events School (a partnership deal with the national TV station is currently being negotiated.)

It would be naïve to suggest, however, that the step from teaching to management is an easy one. The need for some management expertise has been recognised and two London-based organisations have offered to send management consultant volunteers to Bissau on the basis that T5NGO foots the bill for flights and accommodation. Clearly this is currently way beyond

our means but we hope to hook up with commercial sponsors to provide the necessary funding.

EQUAL OPPORTUNITIES

The school's Gender Equality Programme has achieved its best results so far. 496 girls and women are attending daily classes – this figure is quite remarkable in the Guinean context. Much of the credit here goes to Belmira de Oliveira and Jelica Gomes who have campaigned and promoted the programme with energy and commitment.

Many of the girls have been affected by the recent public school strikes and nearly all have arrived with an extremely low level of English and French..

Belmira and Jelica are currently carrying out a survey to accurately pinpoint the reasons behind the relative under-achievement of girls at the public schools and they are also investigating the possibility of developing professional and vocational courses for our female students. Supporters with a particular interest in this programme may wish to contribute towards sponsoring these courses. As Belmira stated at the event to celebrate T5 Star Events School's first birthday, “ We want to do many things to train and empower the women but the main difficulty is finding a short-term and a long-term sponsor.

Everyone should remember that training a woman is training a society.”

TEACHER TRAINING

The school's Teacher Training Programme has been seriously affected by the beginning of the academic year (despite the subsequent disruptions) with many of the T5 trainees dispersed throughout the regions. The twice weekly course aimed at potential T5 Star Events School teachers has been delayed until – probably – the rainy season. Ercilio Evora and Fernando Sa from the training team are currently leading a course aimed at less experienced teachers and report very good progress with many of the trainees now putting into practice the lessons from input sessions.

Meanwhile, things have been moving with in-house Teacher Development sessions with Cecil Cabral and Fernando taking the lead. Clearly, the aim of these sessions is to maintain and develop the high quality of teaching at the school. The sessions also provide a forum for French and English teachers to share experiences and provide mutual support.

TEACHER VOICES

More from (some of) the teachers.....

"I think the school is growing fast and we should open another school to be able to meet everyone's needs. The (new) payment system is good".

(Fernando Sa)

"Things are looking very positive because the rent and salaries are being paid on time....but to achieve more success we need to work hard as a team and keep having regular meetings and workshops"

(Joao Afonso Ferreira – "John")

"I think the teachers are more responsible now – and motivated as well.

There are still some problems in terms of school management but we understand that , in some instances, we don't have the necessary skills.

Nonetheless, we are doing our best to overcome any problems.

(Julio Imbula)

FOOTBALL!

Sport has now become a part of the school's marketing activities – or, to put it another way, a good excuse for students and staff to have a bit of fun.

Ercilio Evora is leading/coaching/organising both boys and girls teams and

T5 Star Events teams have played in a variety of competitions. Freddy, the

School Director, reports that "results have somehow not been satisfactory"

but coach Ercilio looks at the situation differently: "we are a new team and

our players need to play together all the time so that they can get to know

each others' skills better"

At the end of last month the T5 Star Events (Boys) team entered a

tournament organised by the AJD youth association and managed to get to

T5_{ngo}
West Africa

fighting poverty promoting learning

the final.....a 5-2 defeat robbing us of our first silverware!

SUPPORTERS

You know who you are – thanks.

“Supporter of the Month” award for April goes to Gill Mann who has been regularly donating the proceeds of her talks on Fred Astaire (yes, really) to T5 funds.

Supporters are reminded that the T5 NGO bank account is at HSBC – Sort Code: 40-233 Account Number: 71493671.

Finally, Coach Ercilio has put out an urgent request for supporters with spare football kits, footballs etc. to contact him at ercilious@yahoo.com.

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