

## **T5 STAR EVENTS SCHOOL**

### **July-August 2007**

**EXTRACT FROM BBC WORLD NEWS REPORT 9/7/07:**

**“Guinea-Bissau is the most glaring example of the increasing use of West Africa by Latin American cocaine traffickers to get their wares into Europe. The country is wracked by poverty, coups, political unrest and has a coastline full of uninhabited islands, creeks and swamps, providing the perfect cover for smugglers....The problems are illustrated by three incidents which would be hilarious, if they did not reveal how vulnerable poor states are to the quick hit of drug money. In April, an estimated 2.5 metric tons of cocaine was flown into a military air-strip in Guinea-Bissau. Two soldiers were arrested in cars packed with 635kg of the drug but the rest of the shipment got through, officials from the UN Office on Drugs and Crime (UNODC) believe, because the police did not have enough petrol in their cars to pursue the other traffickers.....In the second of Guinea-Bissau’s comedy of errors, 674kg of cocaine, worth about \$39m, or 13% of the country’s total annual income, was found in the capital, Bissau, after a gun battle last year. For safe-keeping, it was put in the treasury vaults, where it “disappeared”.....The third incident took place in 2005. Local fishermen in Quinhamel, 30km west of Bissau, discovered strange packets of white powder floating in the sea. With no idea of what the powder was, some used it to provide more flavour to their daily diet of rice and fish, while others thought it might help their crops grow and used it as fertilizer.”**

**and meanwhile, T5 Star Events School continues its daily**

**14 November Avenue, Missira,  
Tel: +245 664 53 54  
Email: t5ngo\_gw@yahoo.com.br**

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business....

## **The good, the bad and the ugly.....**

Recent reports from T5 Star Events School have tended to highlight and accentuate the positive: record student numbers, the opening of a new school, staff recruitment and development, balancing the books....Happily, we can again report further encouraging developments: highlights (see "News Round-up" later) include... "T5 goes nationwide", the inspection, Ercilio's trip to The Gambia to purchase materials, further digital developments, more curriculum developments and "a friend in a high places."

Despite these good news stories the future of T5 Star Events School remains worryingly precarious. Here's a selection of some of the worries:

**\*the national context again deteriorates and students**

14 November Avenue, Missira,  
Tel: +245 664 53 54  
Email: [t5ngo\\_gw@yahoo.com.br](mailto:t5ngo_gw@yahoo.com.br)

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become unable to afford school fees.

- \*the government, and its officials, decide to levy as yet unknown taxes on the school.
- \*there are no contingency funds available for unforeseen expenses.
- \*the chronic lack of educational materials will impact negatively on the work of the school.
- \*the school does not have the necessary management skills to keep pace with recent growth.
- \*international development organizations based in Bissau will (continue to) poach our best staff.
- \*many of the expenses incurred by the school (cash in hand) cannot be accounted for according to “western standards” and the school, in common with other national NGOs, will find difficulties in attracting external funding.
- \*Murphy’s Law. Whatever can go wrong will go wrong. This law has particular resonance in Guinea-Bissau. Witness the

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number of failed business enterprises, the continual struggle to operate within a weak infrastructure.

So, just as things move on, things could so easily fall apart.

It's a difficult environment in which to make long-term strategies.

If we consider the school in terms of debates in the West about whether Africa needs trade or aid, T5 Star Events School is currently treading a middle ground. The massive input of cash from Star Events Group has enabled the school to develop as a business. The school has now operated for well over six months without Star Events Group funding and – crucially – staff and rent are being paid without fail. Up to now. Who knows whether that pre-requisite for trade, potential “customers” having money, is, in the Guinean context, sustainable?

Increasingly in the West, the argument is moving towards trade, and, encouragingly, towards “fairtrade”. This hasn't

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really had an impact in Guinea-Bissau where 85% of exports are unprocessed cashew nuts with farmers receiving approximately 27pence per kilo. Many of these farmers are students at the school, paying fees. The price of cashews in Guinea-Bissau contrasts markedly with the prices for cocaine quoted in the BBC report. No-one is really sure about the extent of the narcotics trade in Guinea-Bissau. What is clear is that drugs money has entered the country.

There is "bling" in the form of Hummer vehicles on the street. Coke, ironically, has turned out to be a better fairtrade option than cashew nuts and maybe this trade, ugly though it may be, is helping sustain T5 Star Events School?

The "aid" argument can also lead to ugly consequences. In 2003, mainly thanks to the energetic work of Hilary Brooks, a VSO volunteer, an ELT Resource Centre was established at the National Teacher Training College for the benefit of all

ELT practitioners in the country. An aid appeal led to the donation of many useful materials, books and resources. Sadly, all these resources, and indeed the center itself, have “disappeared”. In 2006, repeated requests from T5 Star Events School to the Ministry of Education to investigate the matter elicited no response. Ironically, however, the disappearance will have no impact on the school - the erstwhile co-ordinator of the center, and, incidentally the “President’ of a rival English School, had already denied T5 Star Events staff access to the center. At its peak the center contained about 80% of the ELT materials in Guinea-Bissau.

Stories such as this may discourage supporters from giving aid in general, and to the school, in particular. Supporters thinking of expressing their support financially may worry that the school will use donations to “give presents” to government officials, to contribute to the backhander

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economy and, so, may ask themselves, “what’s the point?”

We, at T5 Star Events, would argue that we do what we have to do to make things work. Over twelve hundred students are getting better than average language courses and over thirty staff are maintaining families on a regular income.

Perhaps the bottom line here is that conditions in Bissau are so indescribably poor compared to in the West that the onus is not on our small NGO to be accountable to our (potential) supporters but viceversa.

## **News Round-up**

The academic year in Guinea-Bissau has drawn to a close and, finally, much later than usual, the rains have arrived.

The school, of course, continues throughout the holiday period and we currently have a total of seventy five daily

classes, of which forty are English Language and

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thirty five are French Language. The total number of students at our Missira school is now 1,205 with the much smaller Hafia school recently opening to an initial intake of 38 English Language students.

We're pleased to report that the government has now paid two of the five months' pay owed to public sector workers and this has enabled us to maintain a high (85%) level of fees collection.

The most important news in terms of development and strategy is the potential expansion of T5 Star Events nationwide. A delegation from Bissau will travel to meet Armando Crima (Regional Manager) and other T5 regional teachers to explore the possibilities of setting up T5 schools in other regions of Guinea-Bissau. This is an exciting development but fraught with logistical and economic challenges.

Clearly, if we can take our expertise out into the villages we

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may be able to make a huge impact where educational opportunities are scarce.

More news on this in the next report.

### **THE MEN FROM THE MINISTRY**

Finally, after a series of postponements, the Ministry of Education inspected the school on Tuesday July 10<sup>th</sup>. The result, we're pleased to report, was very positive and, consequently, the school has made its first step towards being plugged in to the state system. In the short term, this means that our courses will be accredited and therefore count towards national school grades for all our students. In the longer term, it will enable us to present our plans for curriculum development and teacher training from a much stronger position. The Exec have been in constant contact with the Ministry on these issues and the current administration does appear open to our proposals. A degree of patience may well be required, however. We are

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encouraged by the fact that one of our former students has recently been appointed as the Minister for Commerce in the new government and we trust that having a friend in such a high place can only be beneficial.

### STUDENTS

It is often said that "Guineans speak a language they don't write and write a language they don't speak." Recent estimates suggest that approximately 75% of the population speak Kriol and approximately 2% of the population speak Portuguese. The latter figure is especially alarming when we consider that the state school curriculum is delivered in Portuguese. A heavy emphasis is therefore placed on rote learning.

T5 Star Events School is a noisy environment with repetition drilling booming from most classrooms.....it is also an environment in which the two main learning and teaching

resources are the teacher and the blackboard. Coursebooks and worksheets do not feature prominently- or indeed at all- in 99% of lessons. Partly this is due to the fact that ELT materials do not sufficiently address the West African context – mainly, however, it’s because the school has not been able to afford to provide teachers, let alone students, with learning materials. Until now. Thanks to donations from supporters in the UK, the school is now in possession of valuable reference material. Ercilio nipped out to the local bookshop (crossing 3 countries) to stock up. Here’s his story:

### **ERCILIO’S TRIP TO THE GAMBIA**

“On June 28<sup>th</sup> I made a trip to The Gambia in order to buy some English and French teaching materials. When I arrived there I was well received by Marciano’s (T5 electrician) relatives who very kindly put me up. (Thank you to Marciano for warning his relatives a few days before I left Bissau). I contacted the “Timbooktoo” bookshop, checked their stock and was pleased to find at least some of the titles on the T5 Resource Center Checklist. The shop is pretty good for ELT materials, especially dictionaries, but it is hard to find French materials there.

**I went to Banjul to load the material onto the lorry because it is more secure than carrying it along the border; I still had time to admire many nice buildings in Banjul before the long journey home."**

## **CURRICULUM**

**Again we continue to focus on three curriculum areas.**

**Freddy Gama is leading the teacher development focus on teaching the higher levels. Fernando Sa has organized a of series model classes as a prelude to further teacher training initiatives and Belmira de Oliveira is working closely with Matilde Mendes to provide new impetus to the equal opportunities courses. The teacher training initiatives are partly in order to recruit teachers to work in the regions and, along with the weekend workshops, to maintain the T5 philosophy of continuing professional development.**

## **HAFIA**

**From tiny acorns etc.....the new school is now open with 38**

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students – a figure comparable to our main school eighteen months ago. Braima Balde, a former T5 trainee, has taken on the role of lead teacher, ably supported by the Exec and our indefatigable PR Manager.

### **RESOURCES**

As well as the fruits of the trip to The Gambia, we have now doubled our number of computers to two.(Belnea, Windows 2000). And we have a printer (Epsonstylus C43 UX). A major problem, tho', is the price of ink. Can any supporters help out here?

The school has now reached a point where it is simply too big not to have a photocopier. As it now looks as though we'll have a container traveling from London to Bissau in January this is clearly a good time for offloading any spare Canons.....

### **VISIT FROM STAR EVENTS GROUP**

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In October, Maddy Sheals, HR Manager of Star Events Group, will spend a few weeks in Bissau to assess how best to forward the partnership between Star Events and T5. A warm Bissau welcome can be assured.

Star Events Group, meanwhile, having provided the stage for “Live8” two years ago, continue to “think globally” and have very recently provided the stage for “Live Earth” in Shanghai.

### AND THE REST...

We continue our partnerships with two local radio stations – Radio Joven and Radio Quelele – and with four local NGOs working in the areas of youth development and AIDS prevention.

Another PR initiative: the lucky winner of the Miss “Jovens Exemplares” competition, to be held shortly at the Lenox restaurant, will have a prize to cherish: a scholarship at the school. T5 will be using the occasion to publicise the work of

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the school. Is this an appropriate way to recruit for our Equal Opportunities classes? You, the reader, decide.

The Supporter of the Month award goes to Nelson Moreira, head of Guinea-Bissau's inter-ministerial commission to fight drugs, who succinctly describes a very problematic situation:

(More from BBC News.....)

"After years of chronic instability and extreme poverty, some West African states hardly function. Judges in Guinea-Bissau complain that even if a drugs smuggler is captured, taken to court and convicted – already three rare events – they are often walking the streets again within days. After the only prison was destroyed in a civil war, there is nowhere to hold convicts. If a cell is found somewhere, top military officials often turn up and insist they are freed, judges say.

"There is total impunity", Nelson Moreira told the the BBC's Portuguese for Africa service.

**STOP PRESS....Thursday 12<sup>th</sup> July**

**Murphy's Law: the previous tenants of our Missira premises, newly returned from Lisbon, are threatening to remove all the furniture from the school. The Exec are holding emergency meetings to develop a strategy to deal with this**

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crisis. Our landlord, meanwhile is making a counter claim against the previous tenants for a huge amount of unpaid rent and has promised us his total support. Supporters will be updated on developments.

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