



Cleaner Beaches Programme Report

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Preparation

My 'cleaner beaches' project was one of my first ideas when I arrived on Ilha for the simple reason that a number of beaches around the Ilha, especially on the east side of the Island along the 'Contra Costa' have accumulated a significant amount of rubbish, creating an eyesore, in a location that otherwise would be spectacular - with the backdrop of the Igreja Santo Antonio, the palm trees, the fishing boats and the green sea. Having put this idea of a beach clean-up to a number of people, there was a positive response, but also an awareness that such project would need to be sustainable, and that my 'follow-up' plan to install bins along the stretch of beach was vital if the cleanliness and quality of the beaches was to be sustained. Having written up a proposal in both English and Portuguese and having initially put the project to the Conselho Municipal, I began to research further the practicalities of the project, what was needed and how I would go about the implementation of the project.

I knew from the start that if this project was to be truly successful, it would need to be achieved by the community for their benefit. To this effect, all my promotion leading up to the event focused on the fact that 'they' - the community of the Ilha de Moçambique, have the responsibility to maintain the cleanliness of THEIR beaches, and that with a little effort from everyone, the situation can change and cleaner beaches will benefit all concerned! (This idea turned out to be a little idealistic!)

Having further researched the idea of installing bins, I encountered a number of barriers, including the fact that any material that would be of any use to the people on the island, such as wood for burning, anything that could be used to store water etc, would mean that the bins would be dismantled at the first opportunity and all parts stolen for personal use. This fact, combined with the cost of purchasing bins, finding the appropriate locations for their positioning, deciding on a process of waste collection with the Municipality, meant that I decided to postpone this part of the 'cleaner beaches' project till a later date, when I hope to have less 'uncertainties'.

I decided on Sunday 31st May 2009 as the date to implement the project and spent approximately 2 weeks preparing everything and obtaining permission from all parties concerned. Once again, getting hold of the of the President of the Conselho Municipal was harder than expected and involved 4 visits to his office and an explanation of my intentions to about 6 different people who worked for him. Eventually, on the Saturday afternoon, via a telephone conversation, I was given permission and he was very supportive and agreed to organise all the rubbish to be taken away once it had been collected.

The promotion around the Ilha was enjoyable and received a lot of attention and positive feedback. With the help from a number of guys at Projecto Oceano and a Portuguese volunteer working on the Island, we put posters up all around the Island and handed out about 200 leaflets, especially to those living around

the beach in which we would be cleaning. I had decided to include a small incentive for all those who participated in the clean up - with a book or a pen being given for every full bag of rubbish returned to designated collection points. I was aware that this had the potential of distracting from the real reasons for the clean-up, but I believed that even if some the kids were not fully aware of the importance of having a clean beach, their involvement would be beneficial and therefore the award of a pen or a book (2 things that are constantly asked for by all the kids on the Island) was worth the sum of their efforts. I was invited to speak about the project and the work of Projecto Oceano on the Island Radio Station and I felt optimistic that the clean up was to be a success. With 120 industrial black bins bags, 100 smaller plastic bags, 250 gloves, 130 pens and 100 books all purchased, I was ready for the 5.30am meet on the Sunday at the Igreja de Santo Antonio.

The Clean-Up

I woke up late due to alarm clock problems, but with some help, got everything I needed to the Igreja Santo Antonio, and by the time I was designating roles to my team of helpers and distributing bags, gloves, pens, books etc to be placed at the 5 'Pontos de Recolher' (Collection Points) situated along the 500 metre stretch of beach we were focusing on, there was quite a crowd, with early signs that the kids were very interested in the chance of receiving a book or a pen. We set up the collection points and I instructed that only 'full' bags should receive the reward. I decided to hold some bags, pens and books back just in case, for later in the morning.

Within about 10 minutes the first major problem had materialised. All the kids had gone off with their bags, and had just filled their bags with sand, seaweed, wood, stones etc, and very little rubbish. I had failed to fully explain what is defined as 'lixo' (rubbish) and therefore I was faced with a situation at nearly every collection point where there were swarms of kids with bags, at the point of ripping full of heavy sand and sea weed and the kids were being given pens and books in return. Within about half an hour the majority of the pens and books had been given out and there were more and more people arriving coming to the collection points with bags and other containers full of material, a lot of which was now rubbish as I had tried to explain that we only wanted bottles, cans, paper, clothes etc to be collected. However I was faced with a lot of people holding rubbish, crowding round the collection points, but due to limited supplies of pens and books it was very hard to fairly distribute the pens and books that we had left.

At times the situation became very close to getting out of hand, there were a lot of people, all holding rubbish, shouting to receive their pens and papers, kids were pushing each other, rubbish was being thrown on the road close to the beach and it was becoming hard to gain control. I decided to ask everyone to take all their rubbish down the beach to an open area near the Church, as the bags were continuing to break and the last thing I wanted was rubbish to be dispersed everywhere along the road. This plan worked, but did not halt the constant demand for pens and books from everyone involved. I began to realise at this point, that nearly all participants had come for the single reason of getting a pen or book, and when you have a severely limited number of supplies, whilst also having an unlimited amount of rubbish - you are going to have serious problems!

With the help of Beatrix and Maria and quite a few other people we managed to gain some sort of control at a couple of the stations, with the hope of rewarding those who had successfully filled their bags with rubbish. It took huge amount of perseverance to move people away and get those who had successfully and legitimately filled their bags into a line, and then come forward to receive their pen or book, in some sort of award ceremony style. The reason for this was that at any point I opened my bag which had the last few pens and books, the kids constantly swarming around me would go mad and try and grab anything they possibly could. Eventually we managed to award the 30 odd kids who had behaved and filled their bags and they received a book or a pen. At those stations where there had been complete pandemonium, the children were less fortunate and all I could say was that we were completely out of gifts, which by this time, we basically were!

I managed to get a little team together to pick up all the rubbish that was on the road or around the collection points and take it over the big pile by the Church and we achieved a bit of momentum with numerous journeys back and forth from the beach to the Church. By 9 am, after 3 hrs of collection and

quite a lot of stress, we had managed to collect quite a considerable amount of rubbish in a large pile. There were no pens, no books, no gloves and no bags left, there was still a lot of rubbish on the beach, and I still had a large group of kids following me everywhere, not believing that I had nothing in my bag.

There are a lot of lessons to be learnt about how these sorts of days should be run in the future - I hope I achieved something, maybe mostly around the promotion of the event where I spoke extensively about why such a project was needed. In reality, I'm not sure how much the kids that participated, actually learnt, in any case quite a few just seem to be angry at me that they did not receive a pen or book!!

Conclusion

It was enormously sad to see kids fighting and pushing, to witness elder teenagers taking books and pens off smaller children, (with the knowledge that they will be sold for the 3 Mts they can generate) to see kids throwing the rubbish back onto the beach when they did receive a pen or book. However, maybe I needed to gain a greater perspective and a greater awareness of the social situation here to understand the reasons why some of the problems during the project occurred. For me, a foreigner looking in from the outside, having a clean beach is important, but maybe for a large number of the locals, having enough money to survive and eat is a higher priority than looking out every morning on a beach without rubbish. Therefore, if an opportunity arises where a book or pen can be obtained and enough money can be generated from their sale to provide food for an evening, an explanation for the problems I witnessed can become clearer. However, this argument can go in circles, as there are ways to behave no matter what the situations are, and fighting and stealing and taking advantage of those weaker than you is never the answer! With hindsight, I know now that achieving cleaner beaches now and in the future require two completely different methodologies.

Now: - If I am to follow up this project and attempt to clean this area of beach again, then the most productive method would be to gather 20 or 30 volunteers, equip them with rakes, wheel barrows etc and spend a morning cleaning the beach as a team, with no incentive other than that of creating a cleaner environment for people to live.

Future: - For the situation to change, in terms of rubbish being left on the beaches, 2 social situations need to change. Firstly, bins and waste disposal needs to be made widely available, so there are viable alternatives to leaving the rubbish on the beach. Secondly, the mentality needs to change amongst the locals and users of the beach. There needs to be an education about the use of bins, maintaining the cleanliness of the Ilha, and how amazingly beautiful areas of natural beauty, such as the beach around the Igreja de Santo Antonio should be preserved and respected.



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