

PROJECTO OCEANO – JUNE 2011 REPORT



Whilst not directly related to Projecto Oceano's work, the first week of June was a busy one for all on the island. With the arrival of the 1st of June we were treated to Mozambican celebrations of the *Dia Internacional das Crianças*. All primary school classes were cancelled, resulting in a much noisier island and an alarming (although brief) drop in attendance at Projecto Oceano's classrooms! Many of the older children, including many of our students, spent the afternoon taking their younger siblings to the variety of activities on offer to celebrate the day. The crowning achievement was by a fellow NGO on the island, MOVE Microfinance, whose volunteers organised a mini festival in the island's impressive colonial fortress. The day started with games for the kids, supplied them throughout the day with enough sweets to feed a small army, and ended with a projection of a Disney film in the evening.

The week became even more hectic the following day as the President of Mozambique paid a long-awaited visit to our fair shores. The purpose of his visit was the inauguration of the new *embarcadero* which has been built to allow larger tourist and cargo vessels to dock on the island. In addition, the bridge which connects the island to the mainland has been recently renovated, and was due to be formally inaugurated. As the President was to arrive at 6am sharp in a small village on the mainland, a hardy group of volunteers and schoolchildren made the early morning hitchhike to Lumbo to welcome the Presidential procession. We soon discovered that the Mozambican mantra of *vacane vacane* seems to apply to politicians as well as us laity, as Gubuzo finally arrived at about 9.30am. We did not have a boring wait however, as processions of ex-revolutionary soldiers and local businessmen lined up in the morning heat to welcome him. They were accompanied by hordes of schoolchildren, lines of *tufo* dancers wearing an astonishing variety of beautifully coloured *capulanas*, and a troop of smiling policeman to keep things in order. The mood was festive and cheerful, and the excitement was mostly spontaneous, although there were a few ringleaders who made sure to keep the crowds chanting! The President arrived in a fleet of 5 helicopters, surrounded by armed private guards, and received a rapturous welcome as he shook the hands of many hundreds of happy well-wishers, and even danced a little with the *tufo* groups. His visit to the island was slightly less public-

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friendly, as he was whisked to the *embarcadeiro* in an armed escort and left shortly afterwards, without so much as setting foot in Projecto Oceano HQ...

The excitement of the day quickly turned to shock as one of Projecto Oceano's students was injured in a motorbike accident on the way back from Lumbo village. After eventually arranging for an X-ray in the island's hospital he was transferred to a bigger local hospital in Nampula to be treated for a fractured skull. The fears raised during Projecto Oceano's debate about the failures of the public health system were in part rescinded as he has now returned to the island, and is expected to make a full recovery. The details of the story however, whilst not worth recounting here, are a stark reminder of the undeveloped nature of this continent. In terms of education (about personal safety, common sense and road use) and healthcare (it took insistence on James' part to get an X-ray approved), there remain major strides to be made here in Mozambique. The incident has given Projecto Oceano an opportunity to use this story, which has fortunately had a happy ending, as a means to provide guidance on how to avoid it in the future. In July / August we plan to raise the issue in a debate and as a topic for *Voz Jovem*, our community newsletter.

The second weekend of the month brought the completion of our much-needed renovation work in the Projecto Oceano classrooms. All Project members and users of our classes came for a couple of hours over the weekend, rolled up their sleeves and contributed to the work. Cleaning tables, blackboards, computers, polishing floors, making new curtains and repainting the walls...the team was kept extremely busy, and a constant mixture of Mozambican rap music and Elton John (English pop music is very popular here) ensured that spirits were high throughout. The end result of three days of hard work makes it worth every drop of sweat – we now have a fantastic new space, brightly coloured walls, and a real sense of pride and cleanliness about the Project. Given the involvement of the Project members, they will hopefully value the effort put in by all during the renovation and work to keep our space exemplarily clean! We have worked hard to reflect the logo of the Project in the colours used for our new space. White walls and light blue tablecloths and curtains not only make the Project seem bright, spacious and optimistic, but also help to provide an image of continuity of AZLera on the island, thereby increasing our standing in the community.

In terms of progress in the classroom, the Project continues to turn over an impressive number of new students. Our patient efforts to increase wider community involvement in our work are paying off slowly, as we have been approached by a couple of local people who want to contribute to our monthly newsletter. As we advertised this community reach-out in *Voz Jovem* in the first place, it is good to know that our efforts to ensure wider distribution and readership on the island are having the desired effect. We have pencilled in a first external contribution for August, potentially on the topic of tourism, and look forward to continued local interest in our work. The Project also hosted a revealing debate on domestic violence, an issue that in the Western world would receive outright condemnation. It was revealing that we had to spend the first twenty minutes defining what constituted domestic violence, and was shocking that a couple of male participants genuinely believed that male aggression at home is wholly justified in certain circumstances (namely infidelity on the part of the wife). When it was suggested to these participants that a wife should have the same right to physically abuse their husband if he is unfaithful, there was shock all round! Hopefully the words of the females present, along with James' vigorous arguments, have shown that domestic violence should be unacceptable regardless of the circumstances.

The end of June coincides with the arrival of some holiday time for James. Malawi beckons, with the allure of some steak (red meat is unavailable on the island) and the dulcet tones of the English language... Despite looking forward to discovering another country and seeing the "African version of the Yorkshire Dales" (Lonely Planet), Ilha de Mocambique and Projecto Oceano will remain at the forefront of his mind. As well as ensuring the continuity of the recent changes made to the Project curriculum, we still have much to implement here, including the establishment of Ilha's first rugby team...