

## PROJECTO OCEANO – JUNE 2012 REPORT



It's safe to say that the month of June kicked off with a bang on Ilha de Moçambique. The 1<sup>st</sup> of June was *Dia da Criança* (Children's Day), on which a big fuss is always made to make the children of Mozambique feel special. During the last week of May all the young girls on the island were spending hours having their hair done in new pretty styles, with shiny beads to show off, and on the day itself, everyone was dressed up in their best clothes and treated to special meals and other gifts from their parents. Projecto Oceano, in collaboration with the Portuguese NGOs WAY (We and You) and MOVE Microfinance, and thanks to the sponsorship of the Cooperação Portuguesa, decided to add the excitement by putting on an afternoon of fun in the old 16<sup>th</sup> Century Portuguese fort at the top of the island.

The day involved a host of games, music, food and films, and we opened the doors of the fort to over 350 excitable children. Perhaps astonishingly, but thanks to the heroic work of our project members and other students as 'monitors' for the day, no one got hurt, there were no tears and a lot of fun was had by all. There wasn't even a hungry mouth in sight; project member Shany's mum, quite valiantly, prepared an enormous batch of very tasty rice, beans and papaya salad for all and the Projecto Oceano capoeira group gave a stunning presentation just as the sun was setting behind the fort and before the film *Puss in Boots* was projected on the crumbling white walls. Big thanks go to the wonderful volunteers of WAY and MOVE for very courageous planning and efficient execution, resulting in 350 very smiley faces on the day.

Since then the month has seen a healthy balance of heads down to work, and pens down for some nice extra curricular distractions. As they've been approaching the end of the school term, the project members have been working hard to prepare for exams, and within the project we've also come to the end of our Level 1 language courses. I subjected my budding linguists to some gruelling tests which were attacked with vigour and I was pleased to be able to present the first ever Projecto Oceano certificates; hopefully the first of many. We also completed this month's *Voz Jovem* newsletter with articles by members Naiza and Levelinha about the Festival da ACUMIM and a section on malaria and cholera, two widespread diseases here on the island. You can read the newsletter [here](#).

I particularly enjoyed this month's social debate which was on the subject of *Medicina Tradicional* – Traditional Medicine, which is a hot topic in Mozambique, as traditional healers are prevalent and relied upon by over 80% of Mozambicans, both due to the perpetuation of traditional cultures and beliefs, but also because conventional medicine is often unattainable

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to a large segment of society. According to a recent survey conducted by the World Health Organisation, whilst there is only one doctor for every 50,000 people in Mozambique, there exists one *curandeiro* (traditional healer) for every 200 people. The government recently set up an official association of traditional healers, in an attempt to regulate the service and try to provide training and combine treatments that are more compatible with Western-style medicine. However, many unlicensed healers, as well as *profetas* (spirit mediums) and *feticeiros* (witch doctors) still exist and practice widely. During the debate our students argued the advantages and disadvantages of the practice of traditional medicine, whether it should be regulated or stamped out completely, the existence of corruption in the domain of traditional medicine as well as conventional medicine in Mozambique, and their own personal experiences of *curandeiros* and *feticeiros*. The general feeling among the group was one of non-belief in the healing powers of traditional medicine; however there was a strong sense of the benefit of its existence in the absence of any other option in a country where the conventional health service leaves a lot to be desired. Interestingly a significant number of the members and students linked to Projecto Oceano have ambitions to study medicine and contribute to the development of an improved health service in Mozambique. And so we will continue to do everything we can to empower them to realise these dreams!

We also kicked off a new course this month – a module in Academic Skills, with a view to preparing our members, the majority of whom we hope will be university-bound in the next couple of years, for the different study environments and demands that they will encounter, and to ensure that they are well equipped to make the most of the opportunity of further education. We were fortunate to be able to welcome back former project member and current university student, Mingos, to talk to the students about how he has found the transition from school to university, and also quite significantly the transition from island life to city life, which for natives of tiny, serene Ilha de Moçambique can be a huge culture shock, something I can partially relate to having experienced it in reverse, coming from London to Ilha!

And then there's been the fun stuff... we held a volleyball tournament one roasting Saturday morning on the beach, where Team Projecto Oceano just missed out on champion status and settled for runners-up. I'm sure star players Rauf and Zito are suitably fired up to rectify this next time around. And as if that wasn't enough for one weekend, the following day we embarked on a boat trip for the project members, some of whom, despite growing up on an island, had never set foot in a boat before. Although wary to begin with, they soon relaxed into it and we had a great day of snorkelling, football, more volleyball, and general mucking around. It was the perfect opportunity for team bonding as well as for me to show my appreciation for the work that the guys do in the project. They all have their fair share of responsibilities and an often heavy workload both inside and outside of the project, with school, family obligations and domestic duties to attend to, and yet these guys **are** the project; they are the teachers, they lead on all activities, and it's important to show our gratitude for their commitment to the cause.

As mentioned in last month's report, we are currently working to raise the funds to be able to send two of our top students to top universities next year. This is the natural and logical progression of AZLera's work on the Ilha de Moçambique, as we have for the last ten years been working to empower the island's talented youth to achieve above and beyond the norm, to be the best that they can be in order to help take the country forward and give back to their communities. Please do take a moment to [read more](#) about the rationale behind the scholarship fund and how donations can be made [here](#).