

## PROJECTO OCEANO – NOVEMBER 2012 REPORT



As I sit down to write November's report it feels a little bit like I'm experiencing the calm after the storm... but a storm of the most positive, energising, and inspiring sort imaginable. Let's call it a whirlwind. After a burst of visits to the island and the project I now find myself alone again but full of verve and well equipped to take on the next few months before my (dreaded) departure from the project and from Ilha.

First came my dear mother and father, who quickly became celebrities on the island and enjoyed getting involved in the project in between the inevitable seaside gin and tonics. A pair of journalists by trade, they brought with them the idea of simulating a TV programme with our young members, and after deliberating various ideas this ended up taking the form of a televised debate, with a presenter, 3 panellists and a studio audience, around the subject of the state of education in Mozambique today. With direction from my father, veteran TV presenter for the BBC, the kids put together a very professional and thought-provoking programme which we'll be publishing here on the website and on our YouTube channel very shortly, and which I hope will be the first of many.

As I escorted my parents to Nampula airport for their return flight, I met a fresh-faced Freddie Brunt straight off the plane from London via Nairobi, returning to his beloved Mozambique for his annual trip as coordinator for AZLera and Projecto Oceano in London. After some cosy welcome drinks with an excitable group of students, who have known Freddie since 2009 when he came as the first volunteer for Projecto Oceano, he and I got down to business, reviewing the past 7 months since my arrival and making plans for 2013 as well as the immediate future as we anticipated the arrival of AZLera founder, Wilbert Sanchez. Top of the agenda was to implement the application and selection process for the AZLera university scholarships which we are offering for the first time this year.

Talk about celebrity, or rather, legendary status on the island, Wilbert takes the biscuit as he has been visiting regularly since 2002 when he founded Projecto Oceano; but, having not had the chance to come last year, this year's visit was eagerly anticipated. Straight to work, we kicked off the scholarship selection process with a series of interviews for our 8 candidates, and right from the off it was clear that it was by no means going to be an easy decision. Despite never having been in a formal interview situation before, the kids excelled themselves

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under the circumstances, and showed us exactly why it has been worthwhile investing our efforts in the project over the years. Bursting with potential, inquisitiveness and drive, these kids stand out from their peers on the island, and dare we say it in Mozambique and even further afield. Further evidence of this manifested itself during an evening of presentations and debates after which we were all left feeling energised and optimistic for the future of Mozambique if these young people have anything to do with it. What we now need to ensure is that they have the opportunity to fulfil their academic aspirations in their chosen fields such as Architecture, Medicine, Law and Business Management, and can be in a position to be a real part of the country's burgeoning future.

Meanwhile, activities continued with film screenings and debates, IT classes and children's reading groups, and a highlight for all was an emotionally-charged and superbly motivating presentation from Mario Mendes Jr, impresario from São Paulo who travelled to Mozambique with Wilbert and brought with him 3 tablets for the project, along with buckets full of ideas, enthusiasm and inspiration – a heart-felt thank you goes out to Mario from all of us at the project for everything that he bestowed upon us during his 9 days on Ilha!

Another highlight, Fashion designer Priscilla, also from São Paulo, gave a wonderfully colourful class on the history of fashion and the influence of African culture in contemporary Western fashion, as well as getting stuck in with several of the island's tailors across a series of practical training sessions in technical design.

And all the while, Wilbert was out and about generating ideas, new projects and new collaborations, and making plans to take things to the next level in 2013, still managing to find time to teach Chinese to our kids. Plans are now afoot for a grand modernisation and professionalisation of the project space, led by our young budding architects and project managers; more community outreach work via the media of music and video; more short term volunteers à la Daniela Lima to come on a regular basis and give specific vocational and academic modules; and generally extending our educational reach as we look to start working at the pre-school level as well as supporting our older members into higher education.

In the midst of all of this we were forced to wave a very sad goodbye to Daniela as her 2-month placement here came to an end. Suffice to say she had a great impact on the students at the project, igniting amongst them a genuine interest in and practical knowledge of science and as an integral part of the family over the last couple of months she will be sorely missed. I'd like to take this opportunity to extend a huge PARABÉNS (congratulations!) from all of us here as, the day after returning to Portugal, Daniela completed her PHD in Biomedical Sciences with what was, by the sounds of things, a dazzling presentation of her thesis. Well done Dr. Dani, we're very proud!

All in all, this whirlwind few weeks showed us many things: how hard work pays off, how we are in a real position to support genuinely talented kids into genuinely promising futures, and how much we can achieve if we put our minds to it. We are very lucky to have such a passionate, innovative and capable bunch of people around us. Wilbert's dynamism is infective and his inspiration boundless; the kids are left feeling that they can achieve anything if they focus their energies in the right places.

A huge thank you goes out to Wilbert, Freddie, Daniela, Mario and Priscilla, from myself and all the students at the project, for all the knowledge, ideas, stimulation and encouragement that they imparted whilst here on Ilha, and continue to impart from various corners of the globe!