



Newsletter No. 4

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What can be done in Guinea Bissau

Dear Friends,

I am writing in regard to my past visit in Guinea Bissau and what could be done over there.

The country is so beautiful, people are friendly and flora and fauna are rich, especially in fish. You can find some pictures of this first visit in Guinea in the gallery page.

Guinea Bissau could be a paradise for the type of tourism interested both in nature and in making contact with people not involved in twirled lives.

Local people could live easily by farming, fishing and collecting spontaneous fruits from the trees. Further, many of those products could be treated and sold abroad.

Instead, tourism is practically non-existent. There is just come fishing and hunting tourism. Main hotels in the capital are almost in too poor condition to visit. Agriculture is not enough to cover the food requirements of the country (today, rice is imported from Thailand; while in the past Guinea's production of rice was supporting all Portuguese's African colonies!). The fish industry does not exist (neither for export, nor for food: one day we had ordered 2 fish for dinner. We ended up eating goat stew, because they did not catch any fish all afternoon!).

Nevertheless, there is potential and a lot that could be done.

There are people qualified in various fields, such as hotel business, communication, professionals (engineers and architects), environmental preservation (natural park's directors and guides), crafts (electrical and electronic), public administration and also medical, although with lack of infrastructure.

I met one of these people on the plane and then in Bissau. We shared the same view on how to face their development: locals have to have the initiative and create the work within locals. We should bring our technical and organizational experience, working together, but without taking their place.

Beside the programme of building the hotel in Bissau, reason for which I was invited over there in the first place, we could contribute with our strengths to the following fields:

- Tourism (training people already involved in such area)
- Agriculture (palm oil, mango and caju)
- Timber (development and enlargement of existing small factory)
- Alternative energies (production by using solar panels and sale of related services)

In the future, with bigger investments, we would be able to contribute also to navigation for the islands.

Find attached what we would like to do in those fields. Among you, there are people that already contributed to similar projects. To them and all of you that would like to contribute, I would like to suggest meeting next Monday, the 6th, at 4:30pm, **at the LabMac of the Architecture Department.**

Ciao,

Pippo

POSSIBLE PROJECTS FOR GUINEA BISSAU

Find below a list of ideas applicable to the projects. Further, find a map of Guinea, where the areas discussed are indicated.

1. The reason why I was invited to Guinea is the **development of tourism.**

This project is possible. It should be implemented starting from what is available over there, without waiting for large infrastructures that would distort the actual situation. Indeed, we should favour the **networking** between existing small and medium hotel managers. Further, we should help the private structures that already operate in the transport of people around the country by 4x4 vehicles **to develop a relation with the tourism.**

A responsible tourism – ecological. It should be able to start by training people, without major investments.

2. Small and pleasant accommodation can be found around the country, but not in Bissau. August Tchuda, the local operator that asked for my support, started the **construction of a modern hotel** in Bissau.

Help is needed in **technical assistance and for the management programme**. At a later stage, this hotel could be inserted in tourist package holidays to Guinea and maybe finding **international partners**.

3. **Agriculture**. The enormous natural resources have a lot of potential, if only everyone would want to improve the current situation. Without thinking to solve the problem around the whole country, we could start from the **PIME mission** in Bor, 20 km from Bissau. Here, there are mangos, caju-cashew nuts, palms, avocados, passion fruits, bananas, oranges, aubergines, hibiscus flowers, mahogany and more. Some cultures are new and need time to grow, others are already producing.

P. Battisti assigned a young man to supervise the culture. Therefore, our help would be in supporting them with **techniques on products development**. We would start from the production of palm oil, suggesting also the optimal number of palms to be planted, adding to the existing 1000.

The project could then be expanded to the neighbouring area of Prabis. Here, the governor would like to create an agrarian school in a governmental estate, currently abandoned, but used by farmers with no authorisation.

4. **Small factories**.

I visited a small factory close to Bor that uses 12% of sugar cane to produce alcohol, wasting 88% of raw material. The owner thought to use the **waste for making chip board panels**. It would be necessary to know the technology, finding second-hand machinery and training the local people.

In Buba, south of the country, we found a sawmill, inactive for the last few years, but with functional machinery (according to the owner, presently running for the chairman of the board). Wood is very good in Guinea. I am currently waiting for quality and quantity data to face a study for the re-launching of this activity.

5. **Energy and communication**.

These areas are among the biggest problem in the country. There are no raw materials. The country does not exploit either the river's current or the tides. It has few electrical power stations, which are really just big generators (the city of Bafatá uses a generator of 150KWATT for 70,000 inhabitants). People that can afford not to stay in the dark all night long, have a small generator in their home. There are many solar panels, all imported and pricy.

The **Radio Sol Mansi** of Mansoa, managed by a very good local journalist on behalf of PIME, has its own very expensive generator (€ 3,000 per month). To pay this amount, he sells for little money messages to be transmitted by radio (at particular time of the day messages get transmitted and people are tuned in, since the radio is often the only communication system). Further, he sells some electrical energy. Therefore, we would like to study the possibility to apply solar panels to reduce petrol costs. Further, we should consider **other services to sell to approach an autonomy economy**.

6. **Ferries for the Bijagós islands**.

I mention this at the end and in italic because I think we should wait for different conditions for being able to programme it seriously. For this project to be considered, the local economy and the tourism should be developed further.

At present, this service is offered by a large boat that leaves Bissau on Friday and comes back from the last island on Monday, with 2-days trip in each direction. The service is reasonably cheap, but it is precarious. It seems there is no complains on the service. So, at present there is not sufficient need for a new service. Otherwise, there are private speedboats, which are very expensive (€ 200 per day for 8-10 people) but easy to rent, except during festivity.

All those projects will work only if there is an active contribution by the local people. We cannot achieve results only with European input (people and funding) and then give locals finish goods as a gift. The projects would not persist. Thousands of projects fell through after co-operations left them. Instead, it is mandatory to base the work on local entrepreneurs, training them and helping them with technology, to obtain results.

Augusto Tchuda is the soul of the hotel in Bissau, a big project out of our range. But also the other smaller projects are based on local people:

- The Radio Sol Mansi, directed by a journalist from Guinea.
- The school in Fanhé, built with Italian materials brought from the Italian association "Amici della Guinea Bissau", but built by local volunteers.
- The small factories.
- A very efficient auto carrier agency.
- Single drivers, driving buses, 4x4 and boats. They showed the importance of paying attention to the tourist they are escorting.

While a gift, in the form of an object, construction or plant, is sometimes underestimated because received at no cost, a **production achieved with own work and/or investment from locals**, has always been considered an own local achievement and so better respected and fostered with care and attention.

We are used to a constant economical support, but it is actually true that small projects, where only organizational and technical help is brought from abroad and **locals get into debts**, are more successful than big ones, funded entirely from abroad.

