

Providing a stable platform

By MANUEL OETTL

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MANUEL OETTL is an entrepreneur born in Austria, but he has lived in South Africa and Mozambique for most of his life. Oetzl spent the first 12 years of his business life working in the music industry then in late 2007 a chance encounter with the founder of Tutudesk, Shane Immelman, changed his career path forever.

Children using Tutudesks in Escola Primaria Tsalala, Zona Machava, Maputo

“In everything I have done, and what I experience and observe to be most important in the world, education remains the constant. Education, and specifically primary education, is the foundation for that which we as human beings need the most” Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu – Winner of the Nobel prize for peace 1984.

Literacy is the foundation of any education. In order to learn how to write you need a stable and dedicated surface to write on. Over 95 million school children in Sub Saharan Africa do not have the benefit of a classroom desk when attending school. Mozambique is included in these numbers, with nearly 5 million children, 80 per cent of the school population, lacking a classroom desk. This affects the development of the child’s literacy and academic performance, as well as their ability to concentrate in class.

“It is not uncommon that the most simple of solutions are able to meet our most pressing needs – The Tutudesk is undoubtedly one such solution.” – Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.

Tutudesk is a simple, portable and robust school desk that a child can place on their lap, whether they are sitting on the floor or on a chair. It creates a dedicated ‘work zone’ and stable writing platform. Made from proprietary child-safe, durable materials, Tutudesk is designed to last the lifetime of the child at school. The provision of Tutudesks is funded by sponsors, who have the opportunity to print their messaging on the desk. This is a great opportunity

for companies to engage with local communities, in both rural and urban settings.

Some companies provide the desks to communities that they are already connected to, for example Riversdale Mining provided the desks to communities that they needed to relocate following the opening of a mine in Tete province. Others use it as a way to build their brand in new communities. Mcel, Mozambique’s largest Telco, provided desks in the Gaza, Inhambane and Cabo Del Gado provinces as part of a strategy to increase footprint and garner the trust of the local communities in which they built infrastructure, which ultimately also led to the communities protecting these assets for the Mobile giant

Tutudesks have already been provided to more than a million children in 24 countries across Africa. The recently launched Tutudesk Campaign aims to provide a further 20 million children with their own Tutudesk by the end of 2015. To support this goal Tutudesk has already opened offices in Cape Town, London, Maputo and Monrovia. In addition, to ensure that Tutudesk can achieve this ambitious target a number of partnerships have been developed.

Tutudesk has been active in Mozambique since 2008. Following its inception, the organisation has run successful programmes in conjunction with many of the countries top NGO’S and private sector companies including World Vision, GIZ (formerly GTZ – the German Technical Development Agency), IBIS, Mcel, Riversdale Mining, Codecan / CIDE and AusAid.

Beyond this, after an initial 2 years of intense pilot and evaluation programmes with the above mentioned donors, Tutudesk now also enjoys the close personal, as well as official, support of the current Prime Minister Dr Aries Ali, the First Lady Maria Da Luz Guebuza and the Mozambican Minister of Education, Dr Zeferino Martins.

On the 6th of March 2012, the Education Ministry’s official 2015 Tutudesk support programme was publicly launched, for which the Mozambique target has been set at 820,000 Tutudesks by 2015. This is the only official, government-supported alternative to the current desk shortages facing children in Mozambican schools.

“I urge you to remember that the things we wish for our children depend on the platforms we create for them.” Archbishop Emeritus Desmond Tutu.



P&C Tutudesk, www.tutudesk.org