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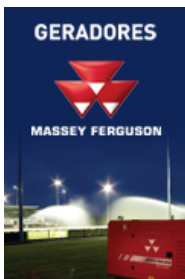


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Bitonga Divers - Inhambane's Blue Revolution



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(2012-08-04) There's a quiet revolution brewing in Tofo, a blue revolution! Bitonga Divers, a small organisation in Inhambane province, has been training Mozambicans from the Tofo area to dive and become diving instructors since 2007.

This is no small achievement in a country with one of Africa's longest coast lines, yet with very few people who are able to swim. Named after Bitonga, the local language of the Inhambane and Maxixe area, the primary aims of the organisation are to create opportunities for young Mozambicans from rural communities that live side by side with Inhambane's blossoming tourism industry, and to raise awareness in these communities about the importance to protect the local marine

environment. Bitonga Divers is the brain child of Carlos Macuacua, Mozambique's first black diving instructor.

Macuacua grew up 15km south of Tofo and had his first encounter with the underwater world as a young boy when he used to splash about in sand pools on the beach with his friends. When he was older he found work in a hotel on Tofo beach which meant he could go swimming in the sea in his spare time. In those days he was one of the only local boys to learn how to swim. Swimming is not regarded as part of Mozambican cultural tradition and the ocean is generally considered to be a hostile environment, filled with dangers and mysteries. At that time he was also one of only a few local boys to find work in the local tourism industry, with most jobs going to people recruited from outside the Tofo area, and sometimes even from outside the province.

He managed to find a job with a dive centre that agreed to train him in exchange for work. After 18 months of hard work he qualified as a dive master, and the dive centre offered him a paid job. As a diver, spending much of his time in the ocean, he learned more about the marine life of the area and came to appreciate that the ocean is special and must be protected to be preserved. He recognised that this knowledge needed to be shared with other people to make a difference, and the idea of Bitonga Divers was born and established with funding from the international NGO Ocean Revolution.

The marine environment of Tofo, and for that matter of the whole of the Mozambican coastline, is a precious but fragile resource and heritage for the communities living in close proximity and for Mozambican society in general. Mozambique's coastline is recognised as one of the world's 34 official biodiversity hotspots. It provides invaluable opportunities for those communities to participate in the growing tourism industry, which is still largely dominated by outsiders, and gain some economic benefits.

Through educational 'village talks' Bitonga Divers raise awareness about conservation issues as well as alternative means of making a living. "You cannot tell people to stop fishing for conservation reasons and not offer them alternatives," says Macuacua. It is important, particularly for young people, to realise the potential the tourism sector has to offer them. As a Tofo local himself, he is in a prime position to be a role model for young people from Mozambique's coastal communities. It is Macuacua's firm belief that education and alternative employment opportunities are the key to conservation of the marine environment.

In 2012 Macuacua presented the documentary, 'Shiver', which highlights the cruel and damaging trade in shark fins in Mozambique. It received international acclaim and was reviewed on the BBC.

Macuacua acknowledges that he has been fortunate to receiving support for his work from Ocean Revolution but generally it is not enough for young people in Mozambique to have their own initiative and good ideas as often they need some outside assistance and financial support to launch and sustain their

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| EUR | 33.29 | 33.97 |
| USD | 27,10 | 27,64 |
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286. Moleen Shaya

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285. keta

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practice, at least at the outset.

Bitonga Divers, in conjunction with Ocean Revolution, offer a professional programme for training divemasters, the first step towards becoming a professional diver, and a higher level diving instructor. To date they have trained 8 Mozambican instructors and 11 divemasters, among them the country’s first female divemaster, Anabela Muchunga. They have also provided training to University Eduardo Mondlane graduate students in Marine Biology and Costal Management and to the Inhambane Fire Department. While Macuacua aims at raising the number of dive professionals his organisation trains, he is not interested in rapid expansion of his project but instead wants to keep it sustainable and provide quality training to fewer trainees rather than turn out poorly qualified divers. "I want to be a small NGO with a big impact." says Macuacua. He is already working on a new project to teach swimming to local children and young people to train them as life guards and thereby contributing to the creation of further employment opportunities in the tourism sector.

To find out more about Bitonga Divers visit www.bitongadivers.org; details about the global work of Ocean Revolution can be found on www.oceanrevolution.org

By Antje Brauer-Maxaia
Club of Mozambique

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