



**Mais Escola para Mim**  
Magude District, Maputo Province

Lurdes Mutola Foundation

Six Month Narrative Report

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URGENT

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## Overview

The Mais Escola Para Mim program has given 20 girls the chance to attend secondary school this year. From its start up phase to its present stage, the program has consistently overcome challenges to allow the girls it supports to receive quality education, both inside and outside of school.

This report details the program's activities, progress, and findings over the past 6 months. The first part of the report outlines the development and implementation of the program in chronological order. Later sections highlight specific topics such as after-school activities, the girls' nutrition, and renovations of the house. Lastly, the report outlines the next steps for Mais Escola para Mim.

Program Coordinator

*Sabina Sequeira*

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## 1. Program Start-up

The preparatory phase is an important stage for any program. To determine where the program would be best implemented, FLM worked with Ministry of Education and Culture (MEC) to select the district in Maputo province with the most need for the program. The district selected, Magude, spans more than 150km across its longest point, yet only has one secondary school.

FLM's Sabina Sequeira met with local Magude education and district officials in December to begin groundwork for the program. The MEC asked education official Alcidio Manjate to work with FLM and facilitate introductions to members of the community. After visiting the Secondary School, whose boarding area for girls consists of a single large room where dozens of girls live each year, FLM decided that creating a private dormitory for the girls would provide a much better learning environment for them.

The next step of the process involved designing terms of reference for local staff, as well as the application process for the girls who would apply to receive scholarships.

In January-after the Christmas holidays, Sabina Sequeira spent time in Magude to find the rental house that would serve as the girls' dormitory. Not many houses were available for rent in Magude. One house owner didn't want 10 girls living in his house, another was 5,000 per month and too expensive for its size. Only one reasonable option was available: a large house owned by the Catholic Church in Magude that was in need of renovation. Unfortunately, the Church insisted on charging the Foundation higher rent than normal for the house on account of its perception that Foundations always have money to spare.

While procuring the house, Sabina Sequeira also conducted interviews to find the social workers to lead, counsel, and take care of the girls. Ten different women were interviewed for positions. The quality of the candidate increased visibly with the level of education the candidates have. Fifth grade seemed to be the threshold for a decent candidate; however, many older women in Mozambique do not have that level of education.

The president of ACODES, Maria Luisa Jose Mahunguele, 41, and Mariana "Joia" Mario Manhiqui of MACALELO, 40, were both great candidates, but Mariana was the only one able to live with the girls, and was selected as the first social worker.

The second social worker was very difficult to find. The majority of women in Magude interested either did not have sufficient education, or had families and were thus unable to live with the girls. In the end, on the recommendation from Alcidio Manjate of the district education office and by Mariana, FLM hired Amelia Margarida Khetiwa, a 70 year old retired nun who appeared to have a lot of energy and moral conviction.

While this human resources process was ongoing, FLM prepared the girls dormitory, creating special kits with essential living items for the girls, contracting a carpenter to construct bunk beds for the girls, and procuring mattresses from a factory outlet. The church promised to have the house ready for FLM in two weeks, before the inauguration ceremony of the scholarship program.

## 2. Scholarship Selection

FLM worked with the adjunct director at the Magude Secondary School to identify the four primary schools within a 50km range of the school that send the fewest number of students to the secondary school. Sabina Sequeira visited primary schools in Bobe, Ungubana, Facazissa, and Motaze with Alcidio Manjate to distribute applications and gain community support for the program. The only way to access the schools was through poor dirt roads, so travel took more than two hours between some of the schools. This emphasized the need for the program's boarding school. Bobe, for example, is just 18km from the town of Magude, yet it takes over an hour to reach the village in a 4x4 car. Girls who can not afford the secondary school's boarding facilities do not continue to go to school.

At the meetings, the directors of each primary school called parents and potential scholarship recipients to each school to introduce the program. They enjoyed the opportunity to ask FLM questions about the program before encouraging their children to apply. Alcidio Manjate's presence was key to acceptance of the program. In Bobe, in particular, it was important to meet with traditional community leaders to gain permission to a meeting of the parents to get their support

FLM's Gabriel Fossati-Bellani and Sabina Sequeira returned at the end of that week to collect and review applications, and conduct interviews on the spot. Most of the girls were extremely timid and shy, so FLM looked for girls who showed signs of the ability to handle leaving home and adapting to a new environment in the town of Magude. FLM got a sense of each applicant's abilities, dreams, and financial situations by asking questions about what they enjoy doing on a regular basis, what their family members do, and why they really would like to go to school.

FLM supplemented the information obtained during interviews with each girls' written application. Unfortunately, most of the girls copied their answers from one another, and most professors write carbon copy recommendations for all the girls. To overcome this problem, FLM asked the girls to rewrite their essays in an exam-type setting. This way, FLM was able to see each girls' ability to write in Portuguese, as well as read a little bit about each one's dreams and motivation to study.

Selecting the girls was extremely difficult. All the girls interviewed were in need of the scholarships, and making decisions based on qualitative data was tough since no one girl deserved to continue school more than the others. In the end, FLM made the decision by the following criteria: financial need, motivation, ability to communicate, average grades in 7th grade, and age. There was one girl, Hortencia who was more timid than the rest, had relatively poor grades, and lacked the ability to communicate well, but expressed a desperate desire to continue school. FLM gave her the chance to continue based on this strong desire despite her weaknesses in other areas.

A positive side-effect came out of the program. After FLM mobilized parents at these schools to stand behind the idea of education for their daughters, the district education office offered to pay the fees for all girls who applied and were not selected for the program to live in the boarding area of the secondary school.

### **3. Inauguration**

The inauguration of the program a week later was an extremely happy occasion for the girls and their parents. The parents applauded as FLM described the details of the program, and broke out into song at the end of the ceremony. FLM awarded a certificate of merit to each new scholar of the program as well as a flower, as the parents applauded. After the ceremony, FLM invited parents to a group lunch to begin to get to know one another and celebrate the inception of the program.

FLM successfully navigated through a small setback during this period. The church did not turn over the house as promised on time. As a result, FLM requested permission from the school for the students to bring their mattresses to the school dormitory and stay there for two weeks. The school was willing, and the setback had the silver lining of allowing the girls to get to know many students in their first two weeks in Magude. Classes began the second week, so the effect on the girls' grades appeared to be minimal.

### **4. The First Trimester**

The first trimester began relatively well for the girls, considering all of the new things to which they had to become accustomed. Many of the girls had never slept on a mattress before, they didn't have electricity in their homes, and they

had never been away from family for a significant period of time. Far away from family, some struggled with homesickness and others began to test out their newfound independence.

The girls were curious about the town of Magude, and became tempted to venture out into town without the head social worker's permission. FLM had to introduce house rules and disciplinary measures very early on to ensure that the girls knew what was and what wasn't permitted in the program. FLM also designed and had the head social worker teach the girls a leadership course session on dating relationships, and reasons to make academics one's primary focus while in secondary school.

The girls also had a tough time adjusting to the head social worker, who they called "Mama", and her parenting style. The head social worker, Mariana, also tried out different methods to try to figure out how best to manage a house full of 20 girls. Initially, when the girls disobeyed her, acting like normal adolescents, she tried things once in awhile like refusing to give the misbehaving girl dinner. FLM went over better ways with her to discipline the girls, using incentives rather than fear tactics of any sort.

When Gabriel Fossati-Bellani made a surprise overnight visit to the program, everything was fine at the project. The girls were busy studying, a few were watching TV, and a few were doing their chores. After this, FLM staff continued to make unannounced visits to the house once in awhile to gain extra insight into the girls' lives from day to day.

After two months in the program, two of the girls left for different reasons. The first, Ana, encountered family problems. Though her parents were supportive of her participating in the program, when her brothers who work in South Africa heard, they demanded that she return home. For them, it was unacceptable for her to live outside the home, even if it was to study. The second, Hortencia, was pregnant when she began the program, but did not yet know it. When she found out, she chose to leave the program, saying that she was very ill.

The house environment was also disturbed by the theft of a cell phone in the house. After this occurred, the few girls who had cell phones were instructed to keep their phones on their person, or to be within range of it when charging it. To respond to the theft, FLM created curriculum for a leadership course on integrity

and honesty. The girls discussed the importance of integrity, and how taking others belongings is a huge violation of that integrity. The mystery of the theft was more or less solved during the subsequent trimester, and it is likely that none of the girls stole the phone.

The girls faced academic challenges as well. Many of the schools professors did not show up on a regular basis. When FLM staff asked school officials about these absences, the school excused the absences citing why each teacher was busy. It was often that the teachers are very young and are still in school at the university level themselves. One challenge this poses is that the girls are required to take the exams sent by MEC, whether or not they have been taught the curriculum.

Another challenge was that not all of the necessary academic materials were readily available. Portuguese books in particular were not available throughout Maputo for weeks. This was a great concern for the girls as their Portuguese skills when they came to Magude were weak—the language they grew up speaking in their home towns was Shangaana. Most had hardly spoken Portuguese before, learning it only in the classroom. However, FLM was able to find the books before the girls second exams, and the girls were able to catch up on what they had missed.

The girls' grades are based on three exams each trimester. The girls' did reasonably well on their first exam, then much better than that on their second exams—some girls even scored 15 and 16. After the second exam, FLM staff visited the secondary school to make sure that the girls weren't being privileged with good grades, but were earning them, as their level of learning is what in the end counts. Unfortunately, their grades fell on the final exams of the trimester. These exams, the ACP's are tougher and more intimidating, so the school as a whole doesn't do nearly as well, and it was also the girls' first time taking ACP's at the Secondary School level.

Despite all these challenges, the girls' final grades (the average of the three exams) were still significantly above averages for the school. The average across all the girls was nearly 11.5 out of 20, whereas the school average was close to 10. To reward hard work, FLM began giving out prizes for the best grades of each term. The best girl in every subject received chocolate treats, and the best girl overall received a larger prize of chocolates and biscuits.

## 5. The Second Trimester

During the second trimester, the girls adjusted to life in Magude and seemed to be much happier. They began to sing spontaneously around the house, play goofy games like normal girls, and lost much of their shyness in front of FLM staff.

Part of this was due to a change in Mariana's management style. They said that Mariana had changed and was much nicer and more caring. Over the course of the first trimester, with some FLM guidance, Mariana had learned to be a more caring role model for the girls without losing her authority. One of the girls who rebelled the most in the group, Carolina, actually craved Mariana's attention and affection, and stopped acting up completely and became an example for the other girls once she started receiving that affection.

In May, Mariana proposed to have a small celebration for International Children's Day. FLM bought a small cake and gave the girls the presents that Cristina Fossati-Bellani of Friends of the Lurdes Mutola Foundation brought for the girls.

During the second trimester, the girls' grades also went up significantly. Carolina, for example, received a 19 on her second exam of the trimester in Biology! The girls who brought home these grades were extremely happy and were not shy to make references to the prizes to be offered at the end of the trimester with wry smiles. Mariana credited the upward trend to more strictly enforced and longer mandatory study periods, as well as the girls' adjustment to life in Magude. The girls did not seem to mind these study periods and seemed eager to study when they got home.

However, the girls continued to have a tough time in Chemistry, Physics, Math, and English. This was often because their professors didn't show up, and other times because what they taught in the classroom was completely different than what showed up on the standardized tests sent by the MEC. FLM worked with the girls to create a study buddy system during the first semester, where the best girls in each subject help the rest, and worked to better formalize this system during the second trimester.

During this trimester, Sabina Sequeira spent a week with the girls, staying overnight with them in the house. This trip served many purposes. First, it allowed her to become very close to the girls over the course of the week, making it easier to know exactly what was going on in each of their lives. It was a chance

to play games with the girls, show them how much the Foundation cares about them, and to help them work out specific issues.

Sabina Sequeira also introduced the girls to their laptops during this visit. She brought two laptops to begin with, and held laptop workshops every day with groups of the girls. The girls were very motivated to finish their homework that week in order to learn more on the laptops. The girls learned how to use the laptops rapidly. Two of the girls had received IT workshops in school, so they took the lead, but many of the other girls quickly caught up in terms of their familiarity with basic computer software. By the end of several days, the girls were discovering functions of the computer on their own. Their favorite things to do are to write in Microsoft Word, record songs as a group with the computer microphone, and draw with Microsoft Paint.

Over the course of the trimester, the girls became more open and interested in meeting new people. Producers of a local TV Children’s show asked to visit the project and feature it on their show. So, during the month of April, FLM took the TV crew to Magude to film the project and interview the girls about their experience. The girls were excited to be on TV and to get the chance to thank Maria de Lurdes Mutola on TV as well. In addition, FLM has taken various members of the headquarters staff to the project to get to meet the girls. The girls have really enjoyed getting to know these staff members and always ask about staff members they have previously met, but are most anxious to meet Maria de Lurdes Mutola.

## **6. Daily Routines**

The girls have fairly simple daily routines with enough time to go to school, study, and play. They wake up in the mornings at 6am, dress, and either study or complete some morning chores before breakfast at 8am. Between breakfast and lunch, the girls study—it’s the first mandatory study period of the day. After lunch at 11am, the girls get dressed for school, which begins at 12:15pm each day. School is scheduled to end at 5:00pm, but often ends earlier for the girls when their teachers don’t show up. After school, the girls have a snack, rest, and play until dinner time around 6pm. After dinner, they have their second mandatory study period, and then get ready for bed and sleep by 9:15. One day a week, the girls have physical education class in the morning.

## **7. After-School Activities**

Because classes last for a maximum of 5 hours a day, the girls have a significant amount of time for after-school activities. Their favorite activities are singing together as a group, going to the park to play football, and cooking. FLM worked with the girls to create an arts group and a sports group among the girls. Each group has chosen leaders and schedules rehearsals.

The singing group has been a particularly rewarding experience for the girls. The majority of the girls love to sing, and participate in the group on an almost daily basis. The girls have taken the initiative to compose two original songs about the Foundation, and how lucky they feel to be scholars and to be connected with Maria de Lurdes Mutola.

Another important component of their after-school activities is their leadership course, with curriculum tailored to the challenges they are experiencing every two weeks. The girls have done leadership courses on defining a vision for one's life, recognizing good character traits such as the willingness to work hard, honesty and integrity, and sexual and reproductive health with an emphasis on abstinence while in school. FLM designed several courses based on the life-skills curriculum, "E Preciso Ter-Se Couragem". However, the leadership courses have to be oversimplified, and the girls' absorption and understand of some topics seems to be low.

Outside of more formal activities, the girls love washing and ironing their clothes, since this was a rare treat for them back in their home villages. Like any girls their age, they love to spend time doing each other's hair. Finally, as mentioned earlier, the girls love using the laptop computers after school. Now that the girls have become familiar with the computers through basic instruction and time to experiment with them, FLM plans to formalize their computer lessons with an emphasize on learning to type as well as learning to play educational computer games that require critical thinking.

## **8. Nutrition**

Each week, two girls cook for the rest. They generally make a curry or stew with chicken, meat, or fish, and vegetables, as well as a starch dish—either rice or chima. The girls cook sufficient quantities of food in the morning for both lunch

and dinner. All visitors to the project have always complimented the food, and the girls' ability to cook improved in their first few months in the program.

The girls' diet has become more varied over time as they have become accustomed to new types of vegetables and other foods. When FLM first brought carrots in bulk in the first trimester, many of the girls refused to try them because they had never seen carrots before and were afraid of eating them. Now, they have tried other unusual vegetables such as beet roots and are quickly learning the value of trying new things.

The food that the girls receive at home is much more nutritional than what is provided in the boarding area of the secondary school. The school can only provide a very tiny piece of meat and a helping of starch, either rice or chima, for each meal. Nutrition was thus an important reason the Foundation chose to create a separate dormitory for the girls.

FLM has found that it is necessary to buy large quantities of food in Maputo city and transport it to the project when making field visits. This is because little horticulture is practiced in the town of Magude, so vegetables sold in the local market are imported from other markets in Maputo province, are expensive, and do not have much variety. In addition, staple goods such as rice, flour, and fish are also imported and are more expensive. As a result, to provide the girls with a better diet at a lower cost, FLM transports food to the project from bulk sellers, but does make purchases locally to contribute to the local economy in Magude when possible.

## **9. Girls' Growth and Well-Being**

To track the girl's growth and well-being, FLM staff made sure to have informal one-on-one interviews with each girl at least once a month. During the first trimester, the girls were shy and uncertain about the meetings. After some time, the girls became very enthusiastic about these meetings, getting into little scuffles with one another about who was next in line to converse with FLM staff. Now, the girls bring up any difficulty they are having right away, whether it is with Mariana, a professor in school, at home, or with another one of the girls. The conversations also provide a time for the girls to share their ideas about activities they would like to undertake, or how the program might be run better, and their reflections on life in Magude as a bursary student.

The size of the dormitory has allowed the girls to build a strong community amongst themselves and the local staff, helping those with homesickness to adjust. One of the girls marveled at the beauty of having 18 sisters. The girls are so grateful to have the scholarship that, amazingly, they don't fight with one another.

#### **10. Connections with Home**

To help the girls see their families on a regular basis, the Foundation has provided a transport subsidy to each of the girls of 50 meticais a month, enabling the girls to travel home one weekend a month. After every trimester, the girls have a two-week vacation, and the Foundation also subsidizes travel costs for these visits. This allows the girls to update their parents and families on their progress and to stay happy and connected to their families and communities while studying.

#### **11. Staff**

FLM has been both extremely lucky and unlucky with respect to the local personnel available to manage the project locally. Mariana, the head social worker, has grown tremendously over the past 6 months as a social worker, teacher, and leader. She now has the leadership potential to be the head local coordinator of the program as it expands to recruit a second class of 8th grade girls as this year's girls move on to the 9th grade. Mariana is able to track the girl's grades in excel, keeps an individual file for each girl about their challenges and growth, and is very competent at running the girls dormitory from day to day.

The other female local staff member who was more difficult to find turned out to be a liability for the Foundation. Margarida was recommended to the Foundation by the Education District because of her experience as a nun running dormitories, but was not a good example for the girls. Margarida chose not to do most of the duties in her contract because Mariana was able to do them, stole small quantities of food from the house, and was implicated in cell phone theft in the house. FLM spoke with her about the requirements of the job, and she chose to leave work rather than begin carrying out the duties stated in her contract.

FLM also hired a guard sent by the community police. He is a good grandpa figure for the girls, and loves to teach them sports informally. However, his health is

rather weak. Luckily, the presence of a person at the house, no matter their physical strength, tends to be most important in deterring thieves.

## **12. House Renovations**

The church's house, as mentioned, was in need of significant renovations when the girls first moved in. To improve the house's security, FLM immediately had iron bars installed on the windows. FLM also changed the locks, put new screens on the windows to keep out mosquitoes, and brought electricity to 2 new rooms in the house. These changes were not easy to make, as the church was resistant to spending money to renovate the house.

The final and most recent renovation to the house was bringing running water to the house. The district government of Magude had recently privatized the distribution of water, but the private company in charge was not yet up in running. As a result, the district government did nothing for weeks while the Foundation brought one formal request after another for authorization to move forward. Without running water at the house, the girls had to bring large containers of water back to the house from the town water tank that was thankfully just two blocks away.

After some time, FLM was able to get authorization as well as find state technicians to carry out the necessary excavation and connection work. The same week, FLM installed water in the house. The girls were extremely excited, grinning as they experimented with the water tank faucet.

## **13. Challenges/Lessons**

The Mais Escola Para Mim program has faced as well as overcome a number of challenges:

**Scholarship recipient selection** – The two girls who left the program has highlighted the challenge of finding the balance of giving the scholarship to the girls who most want the scholarship, and those who are most likely to succeed due to a range of factors. The two who left were already 16 years old and seemed less interested in school. The grades of the girls also show this trend: the younger girls have stronger grades. The process revealed that it is important to involve the family more closely in the application process, and to make age a stronger criterion. In addition, FLM learned that the selection process can be streamlined

to have school directors publicize the program, and then make one site visit to the primary schools to conduct interviews with girls as well as their teachers, and have the girls write their essays in a written exam type setting.

**Selection Location** – The girls from Ungubana and Facazissa have more access to school since are within walking/biking distance from the secondary school. They ones from Facazissa were also in a better situation financially and less in need of the scholarships than the students from the other schools, in part because of their families’ proximity to the town of Magude and its opportunities. In the following year, FLM will take scholars from an additional primary school in Motaze, and work with the secondary school to chose a primary school that is more than is more than 50km away, to give more students who would have absolutely no chance of continuing their education that chance. In doing this, the program will create potential secondary school teachers for those regions, if students choose to return home upon graduation.

**Irresponsible teachers** – The quality of teachers at the school has proved to be an element that is very difficult to change. When they don’t show up, or teach poorly, it is difficult to pin down the material the girls missed without a copy of the curriculum only given to teachers. It has helped that the girls are in 6 different turmas, or course groups, and different teachers teach different groups. This way, girls who receive better instruction are able to teach the others. In some cases, such as English class, the school doesn’t have enough staff to provide a professor for the subject. FLM has learned that supplemental programs and materials are necessary to keep the girls on track to continue to be successful in the 9th grade.

**Text-book shortage** – The shortage of Portuguese textbooks in Maputo city highlighted the need for the Foundation to make special orders of textbooks well before the start of the school year.

**Local staff** – The situation with Margarida showed that finding trust-worthy local staff can be difficult. FLM plans to start this process for the following year months in advance to be able to investigate more fully the candidate’s experience and reputation in the community.

**Responsibility for Items** – As a result of the cell phone theft in the house, FLM implemented a system where the girls have the option of storing their valuables

in a lock box while they are away. The head social worker is responsible for these items while they are in the box. The laptop computers are also stored in this way, to prevent their disappearance without a responsible person. Girls must sign them out to use them, and are responsible for them while they have them signed out.

**Bureaucracy** – Working with the district government to make changes to the house or gain approval for activities has been a slow process with many steps. However, as the Foundation builds relationships with officials in the office, the process has become quicker.

#### **14. Next Steps: Future Events and Activities**

FLM is excited to move forward with the program's next steps to build on its successes, improve it based on lessons learned, and expand it to include more girls.

In the following months, FLM will begin constructing dormitories for the girls, to lower the long-term cost of the program. FLM worked with government officials in Magude during site visits to gain the land and necessary licenses to begin construction of the houses in the following weeks. The girls will move to a new dormitory at the beginning of the new school year in February 2009 along with 20 new 8th grade girls. As the local staffs' capacity to run the program increases, FLM will be able to reduce site visits from headquarters, decreasing transport costs while increasing the Magude community's involvement in the program.

The site that FLM has been given to construct the dormitories is 2km from the current secondary school, and will be 1 block away from the school once it relocates in the next few years. The area does not seem to have electricity has no water, though the river is nearby. This means that FLM will have to work closely and persistently with the Magude government to bring water and electricity to the area.

The Foundation has a range of plans for the girls in terms of activities, now that they have settled into the rhythm of life away from home in school. FLM plans to bring a girls volleyball team to Magude to inspire and train with the girls. To inspire the girls, FLM will bring a series of women leaders to come and talk to the girls, beginning with the Magude Secondary School Director, and potentially ending with Maria de Lurdes Mutola!

The Foundation also plans to introduce after-school activities that will help the girls to be able to generate income to keep studying, based on their interests. Many of them have expressed interest in learning to sew, and have requested a sewing machine at the house.

FLM staff will also spend time with the girls to help them create individual concrete plans for how they will reach their goals. The path to become a doctor, district administrator, teacher, or accountant, to list a few of their chosen goals for careers, is different, and the girls best be able to accomplish their dreams if they know each practical step involved. As the third trimester begins in a few weeks, FLM and the girls have an exciting time ahead.

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