



MISSION REPORT – Guinea-Bissau, Bissau

15 - 19 November 2021

- First mission to **Guinea-Bissau!**
- **11 orthopedic technicians** trained
- Restored mobility of **8 amputees**

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The mission

In November 2021 SwissLimbs' undertook its first training mission to Guinea-Bissau. The week-long workshop took place at the **Centro de Reabilitação Motora in Bissau**.

Guinea-Bissau is a small country in West Africa. It gained independence from Portugal in 1974, after an armed conflict that went almost unnoticed by the rest of the world. Following that, a brief civil war between 1998-99 all but destroyed its social structure, leaving its aftermath to this day.

The government is unstable, and its leaders seem uninterested in the development of their 2 million inhabitants. Although the land is fertile and there is no lack of natural resources, it is one of the poorest countries in the world, ranking 178 (out of 188) on the Human Development Index.

The nation's only rehabilitation centre is in the capital, Bissau. It has a physiotherapy department as well as orthopedic and pediatric services for the treatment of children with clubfoot.

The principle causes for amputation are caused by **landmines** (scattered by rebels during internal conflicts), **traffic accidents**, **poorly treated wounds**, **cardiovascular problems** and **snakebites**.

The two SwissLimbs representatives for the mission were the Executive Director, **Roberto Agosta**, and **Bernardo Gomes**, orthopedic technician and trainer of SwissLimbs from Guinea-Bissau. During the mission **11 orthopedic technicians** were trained, many of whom have no formal qualifications for the profession. Of the **8 patients** who were treated, three came from Ziguinchor, in neighbouring Senegal as they have no medical facilities for amputees there.

We thank the generosity of a Swiss couple who financed all the costs of this mission.



Left to right: Roberto Agosta, Bernardo Gomes, Inocêncio Lucas Pereira (specialized orthopedic technician and director of orthopedics in Bissau), Agostinho Domingos Nanque (assistant orthopedic technician) and Joaozinho Indi (orthopedic technician and employee of the ICRC - International Committee of the Red Cross).

Centro de Reabilitação Motora

The Centro de Reabilitação Motora (CRM) in Bissau is the **nation's only rehabilitation centre** servicing its, 2 million inhabitants. It had been destroyed during the civil war but has since been rehabilitated thanks to the intervention of the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC).

It consists of three physiotherapy rooms and a sector specializing in acupuncture. However, there is only one workshop dedicated to the manufacture of prostheses. Only 2 of the technicians in the workshop have qualified training and there is lack of materials for the manufacturing of prosthetics. Despite the various shortcomings of the centre, it still welcomes numerous patients even from neighbouring Senegal and Gambia.



The CRM is managed by Inocêncio Lucas Pereira, a young and dynamic orthopedic technician who trained in Togo. He is supported by Joaozinho Indi, Field Officer of the ICRC. Both are good at their jobs, but are overworked, as they are the only certified orthopedic technicians on location.

For this reason, the on-going training of the technicians is necessary in order to guarantee the effectiveness of the centre in the future. Some of the staff are made up of disabled people, who are trained by other technicians and assistants in the centre, for example Alberto, a mechanic for the assembly and maintenance of wheelchairs, and Mamadu, as an ortho-prosthetic aide.

Unfortunately, at the end of 2021, the Red Cross will complete its mandate and close the project, so the CRM will have to find other partners to guarantee a future for its beneficiaries. For this reason Bernardo Gomes made a personal commitment to bring SwissLimbs to his native country in his effort to keep CRM activities active with the introduction of new prosthetic technologies.

Services offered at the centre

Every Thursday is **clubfoot** day. Early in the morning 40-50 mothers arrive at the centre and wait patiently for their children, many of whom are newborns, to be assisted by Lucas and Gilberto who use the "Ponseti" method which uses plaster or bars to slowly adjust their growing bones.



Physiotherapy services are done on an individual or group level. The sessions attract a large number of patients, especially stroke victims, a brain damage very common in Guinea-Bissau of which surprisingly, many are quite young.

Training times

Here are some photos that best showcase the five days of training for orthopedic technicians in Guinea-Bissau.



At the end of the mission, the 6 orthopedic technicians and assistants obtained a certificate of completion of the training, while the 5 ortho-prosthesis aides received a certification attesting their participation in the SwissLimbs training week.



The 11 participants



Inocêncio Lucas Pereira
27, specialized
orthopedic technician
and director of the centre



Joaozinho Indi
50, specialized
orthopedic technician
and ICRC field officer



Aua Mendes
40, nurse and assistant
orthopedic technician



**Agostinho Domingos
Nanque**
55, assistant orthopedic
technician



**Revelino dos Santos
Santiago Neto**
30, nurse and assistant
orthopedic technician



Zair Quintino Cá
29, assistant orthopedic
technician



Gilberto Kebaty
35, physiotherapist
and aide in ortho-
prosthesis



Suleimane Mandjam
65, machinery
manager and aide in
ortho-prosthesis



Alberto da Costa
26, wheelchair assembly
technician and aide in
ortho-prosthesis



**Edimilson Gomes
Darame**
35, physiotherapist and
aide in ortho-prosthesis



Mamadu Baldé
19, student and aide in
ortho-prosthesis

Mamadu Baldè's testimony

Aid in orto-prosthesis and born without lower limbs due to a congenital disease

Mamadu Baldé is 19 years old and currently studies and works as aid in ortho-prosthesis at the Centro de Reabilitação Motora in Bissau, Guinea-Bissau.

He was born in 2002 in Tabatò, a small village in the Bafatà region, 150 km from Bissau, the country's capital. His father abandoned him and his mom while he was young. Mamadu was born without legs and his hands are deformed. Early on his grandmother realised that Mamadu's would need to live closer to Bissau if he was to benefit from the medical help he could get there. And so, he and his mother went to live with a friend of his grandmother who became known to him as 'Ne Idiату' (mother). In fact, she was like a second mother to him, caring for his being and education. It was she who taught him that he is no different to any other child, nor do his deformities devalue him as a person. It is for this reason he has a strong sense of self-confidence.



As a child Mamadu would watch the other children play football. He was passionate about the game, his idol was Manuel Neuer, the goalkeeper on Germany's national team. One day his teammates invited him to be the goalkeeper and despite having no legs, did so without hesitation. When he was about 9 years old, he was noticed by the technicians of the Centro de Reabilitação Motora, who urged him to go to the centre for help. At first Mamadu feared they wanted to cut off what was left of his legs, but the technicians persisted with him and went to Mrs. Idiату, who in turn convinced him to go to the centre to be fitted for prosthetics. Né Idiату cried the first time she saw Mamadu standing with his prosthetics. She could hardly believe that the child she had always considered her own could walk. On the other hand, Mamadu's happiness was irrepressible!

In fact, from that moment on, his life changed radically: He took full advantage of his new legs and started to go out and have fun. Previously he felt house bound with his school studies as his sole activity.

At 15 he began playing wheelchair basketball, a sport he still practises every weekend. He plans to graduate high school in June 2022. In March 2021 Joaozinho Indi offered him a part time job at the rehabilitation centre. Mamadu feel honored to work at the centre and takes his salary home to Ne Idiату to help with the costs of the house and his schooling. He is positive, courageous and ambitious person and dreams of studying international relations and having a family.

The beneficiaries

Ibrahima Biaye, 36, transfemoral amputee from Ziguinchor, Senegal



Ibrahima is married with 2 children and supports his family by farming with some 500 chickens and 10 goats.

When he was a young boy, rebels from the Ziguinchor independence movement attacked his village, shooting indiscriminately they killed many of its inhabitants. As they retreated the rebels planted landmines along the footpaths. As he was grazing the cows, Ibrahima, who was 12 at the time, found himself on the ground after an explosion. "I don't remember anything anymore, my brother helped me and called soldiers who took me to the hospital." For Ibrahima, the cost of a new leg is equivalent to 9 months salary. For this he is very grateful to have benefited from a new prosthesis from SwissLimbs.

Sarani Diatta, 36, transtibial amputee from Ziguinchor, Senegal.



Sarani is a sociologist and president of the Ziguinchor Mine Victims Association. As an amputee himself, he regularly accompanies other amputees to Bissau to receive a prosthesis as a donation. He has been a transtibial amputee since he was 12, due to a landmine planted by the rebels in the schoolyard. "After the impact of the explosion, I didn't understand what was happening. I fell to the ground, but only when I tried to get up, did I realize my leg was gone. Then I passed out. In Senegal, getting a prosthesis is very difficult, they are very expensive and there is a lack of materials. The cheapest tibial prosthesis costs between US\$ 500 - 800.

This is why I decided to dedicate my life to helping other victims like me, and I trained in sociology, to give physical and moral support to those who suffer."

His previous leg was old and no longer fitted him properly. He is very happy to have received help from SwissLimbs for a new prosthesis.

Toussaint Raymond Coly, 27, transtibial amputee from Ziguinchor, Senegal



Toussaint is a dynamic young man who volunteers with the Ziguinchor Mine Victims Association. He lives with and cares for his parents, whom he provides for through subsistence farming. Toussaint has two dreams: To start his own agriculture and animal husbandry project with chickens and goats and get married, have kids and take care of his family.

At the age of 6 he was gathering cashew nuts in the forest with his friends to be sold to Indian traders. Unbeknownst to him, there were landmines about. "All I remember is a loud bang, then waking up in pain in the hospital with my leg already amputated. Since then, I have suffered a lot, both physically and morally. Once, I asked a girl on a date and she said, 'How can you expect me to go out with someone who has only one leg?' That hurt me a lot. But now I dedicate my life to helping other mine victims in Senegal, and I distribute information so that others, especially children, can recognize and avoid landmines."

Sumaila Sonco, 41, transfemoral amputee from Bissau, Guinea-Bissau



Sumaila has leprosy and did not realize that he had injured his foot until the infection had turned to gangrene, making it necessary for his leg to be amputated. Poverty is often compounded with a lack of attention to one's personal and sanitary health which was the case with Sumaila. By the time the problem became evident, amputation was the only solution.

He is very happy to have received a new femoral prosthesis because the old one no longer fitted him well, causing him to limp needlessly.

Migana Ntop, 50, transtibial amputee from Bissau, Guinea-Bissau



Migana is another person who lost his leg due to a landmine planted during the civil war of 1998/'99. At the time, he was 27 years old, and he and his wife had a 1-year-old son. After this incident, his immediate response was to worry how he was going to provide for his family. Depression set in and he contemplated suicide. "It was thanks to Joaozinho that I learned I could be fitted with a prosthetic. This gave me courage and the ability to resume my job in the fields again." Migana now has 8 children and receives a small state-pension but still works his own piece of land to provide for his family. His previous prosthesis was heavier so he will benefit from a new Monolimb prosthesis which is more robust and lighter. Ideal for working in the fields.

Gil Salò, 46, transtibial amputee from Bissau, Guinea-Bissau



Gil did not have an easy childhood. He was raised by his grandparents until he left home to join the army.

It was during the 1998/'99 civil war, while serving as a rifleman that he lost his leg by stepping on a landmine. He considers himself fortunate to have only lost a leg. As one who served on the front lines, many others lost a lot more.

Gil is not married and works as an aide in the military hospital. He is very grateful for his new leg donated by SwissLimbs as he finances the studies of his 3 younger brothers, aged 20, 18 and 17.

Paulo Celon Mendes, 42, transtibial amputee from Bissau, Guinea-Bissau



Paulo's leg was amputated in July 2021 because of complications from diabetes. In combination with the fitting of this, his first prosthetic Paulo was given sound nutritional and factual advise about his illness because in part, his leg had to be amputated after he had followed some unsound advice from a traditional healer.

He is employed in the customs office, is married and has 3 children, aged 15, 14 and 10, of whom he is very proud.

The wound has healed well, and he is happy to be walking again since his amputation 4 months previously.

Umo Cumba, 8, transtibial amputee from Ngoré, Guinea-Bissau



Umo is 8 years old, she is an only child and comes from Ngoré, 3 hours drive from Bissau. As a 3-year-old, she was coming back home after collecting cashewnuts with her aunt, when a minibus hit her. Her right leg was crushed, her left leg severely injured. Her right leg had to be amputated while her left leg was poorly treated, resulting in a permanent scar and muscle injury. Her knee has also healed badly, so in order to walk she will need to have other operations in the future.

The foot on her previous prosthetic had worn out so as a growing child that needs more frequent replacements of her prosthetics, she was glad to trade in her old one for a new SwissLimbs device.

Dispatch of walking devices by SwissLimbs

In the occasion of the training mission in Guinea-Bissau, SwissLimbs sent 300 aids and wheelchairs to the Centro de Reabilitação Motora in Bissau for the use of its beneficiaries. In the second and third photos you can see Francisca, 3 years old, during her daily gymnastics session.



The SwissLimbs team for the mission



Bernardo Gomes and Roberto Agosta during SwissLimbs first mission to Guinea-Bissau.