



CAPACITY BUILDING IN AFRICA

A West Africa Business Association case study

WABA, with the support of Voluntary Service Overseas (VSO), facilitated a successful assignment in Lagos in March 2007, aimed at raising customer service standards in the hospitality sector in Nigeria.

The need had been identified by Mrs Abimbola Bode Thomas, who runs the small, up-market Palmview Manor hotel in Lagos; she had picked up (and recognised as valid) complaints about the poor standard of customer service in bars, restaurants and hotels in Nigeria; having been sometime General Manager of the Eko Hotel, her views carry weight. The large hotels had in-house training programmes but the small and medium sized establishments didn't. If ever Nigeria was to cater properly for businessmen, it had to improve the standards of its hospitality industry. WABA felt that it might be possible to provide help through a VSO short-term assignment. VSO find experts in the UK for such assignments, who can tackle identified problems in developing countries on a voluntary, and hence inexpensive, yet thoroughly professional basis.

VSO identified an appropriately qualified and experienced trainer (Dale Lyons) who had carried out a number of comparable assignments in other developing countries.

Mrs Bode Thomas and Dale Lyons developed the scope and delivery of the assignment through email exchanges, whilst VSO in London arranged visas and flights. Guinness Nigeria PLC, a member of the Diageo drinks group, contributed generously to the on-shore costs of the exercise, whilst WABA Nigeria provided logistical support for the assignment.

Managers and operational staff from four hotels were brought into the interactive training workshops, with "Mystery Guest" research carried out at the Eko Hotel. A total of 113 people were trained in 19 two-hour sessions. Topics covered included bar operations, restaurant operations, customer care, effective selling, quality control, catering operations, motivational techniques and team building. The sessions used videos, gaming techniques, role play, modelling and case studies.

The overall satisfaction rating by the trainees was 89%.

Dale observed: *"The trainees were keenly interested and showed real desire and enjoyment in each of the topic areas"*.

A manager from the Eko Hotel told WABA that the knowledge he had gained during the sessions he attended dwarfed all he had learnt in school. *"It was a kind of eye-opening experience for me; for the first time, I saw how the hospitality industry*



functions from a global perspective ... now I see our guess as huge assets ... WABA should try to make this training workshop a yearly thing”.

Mrs Bode-Thomas’ opinion after week two of the three week exercise was: *“The workshops have been very successful so far and my staff are already looking for more!*

All in all, a very successful first outing for the capacity building initiative. I believe when you get the results from Dale you will see that it can be done on many other fronts in future. We have certainly enjoyed it and I know we have gained a lot from it.”

A job well done, and, WABA hopes, the first of many.