

SAND DAMS

An innovative approach to alleviating droughts in the southern Madagascar



In July 2019, two CRS Madagascar technicians attended a workshop in Kenya organized by the African Sand Dam Foundation to determine if sand dams could be a sustainable solution to the droughts plaguing the southern regions of Madagascar. A month later, after a reconnaissance and feasibility study in which we worked hand-in-hand with village presidents and community leaders, the village of Maheny was identified as suitable for the construction of two pilot sites.

A sand dam is a reinforced concrete wall built across a seasonal sand river that harvests rainwater. As rain falls it is captured behind the dam, where it is filtered and stored by the sand. This captured water also spreads horizontally, increasing the water table and transforming the surrounding ecology.

In addition to being incredibly effective, sand dams are also the lowest cost form of rainwater harvesting, built to last over a half a century, have no operation costs, and require minimal to no maintenance.



It will take two rainy seasons for the riverbeds to be completely full of sand, but, once that milestone is accomplished, at least 184 households will benefit from improved access to water; even during the driest parts of the year.

Community members that currently have to walk up to two hours round trip two to three times a day to fetch water during drought periods will be able to make that journey in only ten minutes.

Sand dams like these are a completely new technological innovation in Madagascar, and, if our pilots are successful, CRS stands to become the go-to organization for future similar projects.

TABIRY

Emergency agricultural support in response to the real needs of the community



As part of our Tabiry project, CRS distributed \$2.5 million worth of seeds in the Androy and Atsimo Andrefana regions to enable households affected by the drought to maintain their agricultural production. However, just as important as the quantity of seeds, is their type and quality.

These were carefully selected according to the needs of the community and the climatic conditions of the area, the result of community consultations and analyses of survey data. With their ancestral experiences, the farmers themselves know best which seeds and techniques to employ.

For example, a sorghum farmer living in the village of Maheny named Alisoa Berthin noted through his experiences that piling up and maturing prematurely-cut stalks results in larger grains.



«Our ancestors have always grown sorghum. The Tabiry project has made it easier for us to access better quality seeds,» said Alisoa.

Access to seeds was provided through two approaches: Seed and Voucher Fairs (SVF) and Diversity for Nutrition and Enhanced Resilience (DiNER). Vouchers worth 100,000 ariary were distributed to the beneficiaries, which allowed them to purchase seeds from Private Input Suppliers (PISPs) who have set up local stores to sell quality seeds and other essential agricultural and livestock inputs.

SILC

Strengthening the financial education and services of local populations



CRS' "Savings and Internal Lending Communities" approach was designed to help communities become more financially resilient.

The SILC methodology aims to:

- Improve the income management capacity of participants via improved financial literacy
- Enable group members to save, borrow, and access emergency assistance
- Help the community establish a sustainable community financial system

In the village of Soamanitra, one SILC group composed of 21 women and 9 men was able to collect 14 million ariary of capital towards the end of its cycle; a testament to the dynamism of the group but also, and above all, to the mutual trust established by the members themselves.

« Thanks to the SILC group, I no longer have to go knock on doors in my neighborhood to borrow money,» reports Blandine, a mother of eight who works in the fishing, farming and livestock sector. During the 2021 and 2022 cycle, she was able to take out a loan of 1,237,000 ariary, which allowed her to initially acquire fishing equipment that she sells to the fishermen of her commune. «The sharing of funds in my first year as a member allowed me to build my house.»



As the SILC group's leader put it, "Members now feel reassured to know that they have an economy to ensure the start of school for their children; health expenses; but especially to be able to develop their activities."

YOUTH



Bolstering capacity building and employment opportunities for rural youth

In 2019, Perlette, a 28-year-old single mother of two, became a member of «Reny Mpitrika,» a CRS activity to promote the leadership and social impact of mothers in society. Over the course of three days, Perlette and her fellow participants were instructed on how they could build a better future by making positive changes in their lives and communities.

Driven by her ambition, she entered politics by becoming a candidate for «Chef Fokontany» in 2020 and ended up winning the election; a true feat in a community where men dominate. Now, she passionately advocates for the development of her community and waves the banner of female leadership high as she applies her vision.

For example, seeing the proximity to the national road as an unutilized economic opportunity...



Before Perlette, the fokontany didn't have a local market, or «bazary,» where one could find snacks, food, or clothing; to buy goods, the inhabitants had to travel 10 km to the neighboring fokontany, Ambahikily. So Perlette decided to create one.

To make her idea a reality, she called upon four groups of SILC youth, who began setting up wooden sales stands along the road. Now, one can find snacks, hot and cold drinks, as well as various goods. It has also become an economic opportunity for young entrepreneurs who want to open their own store or sell goods.



«The young people trusted me. I have the obligation to change things.»

Photo by RAZAFINDRAVAO Tolojanahary Olivia at the youth center in Ifanadiana (Vatovavy region), during an exchange with the CRS communication team. Photo by Sedera Ramanitra/CRS



EMERGENCY RESPONSE TO CYCLONE BATSIRAI

Catholic Relief Services released 280 million ariary to support the community in preventing the impact of cyclones and supporting victims

Immediately after Cyclone Batsirai hit the commune of Masomeloka, CRS and its partner, Organe du Développement du Diocèse de Toamasina (ODDIT), were on hand to provide unconditional multi-purpose cash transfers to 947 households, shelter kits to 750 households, and protection kits for important items to 600 households.

Meanwhile, in collaboration with the World Food Program (WFP), CRS provided two cash transfers to an average of 10,748 households in eight communes in the districts of Mananjary and Nosy Varika. Also with WFP and the International Organization for Migration (IOM), CRS distributed shelter kits to 383 displaced households and tarps to 233 households in Mananjary. In addition, CRS provided additional support to 5,000 households to recover agricultural losses and organized a cash-for-work program in five communes to clean up after the cyclone, providing a financial resource to 1,100 households.

CRS also played a major role in the response to the cyclone in the Vatovavy region. Working with the diocese, we supported the coordination efforts of the many organizations that flocked to the region. That meant everything from helping the Ministry of Population in mobilizing and coordinating protection actors to distributing dignity kits for nursing mothers and pregnant women displaced to shelter sites.

In addition, CRS and several other organizations, including Medair, Action contre la Faim (ACF), Médecin du Monde, Humanité et Inclusion (HI), and Care, have worked with the Start Network to create a mechanism to trigger funding as quickly as possible when a cyclone is headed toward Madagascar.

«Everything has been destroyed: the rice fields, bananas, cassava, and even cloves! We have almost nothing left,» said Vaviroa Lucie, a 66-year-old farmer who lives with two of her grandchildren in the village of Masomeloka. «But this money will allow me to help restore the destroyed crops and buy some wood to rebuild my house.»



KEY FACTS - Program Distribution

2019-2022

**Number of households who
received an unconditional
food ration**

11 199

**Number of households who
received a family protection
rations**

16 914

Number of beneficiaries of seeds

218 994

Disability funding program

Having a disability increases a person's vulnerability. Catholic Relief Services is pleased to lead a USAID-funded project together with Humanity and Inclusion to support young people and women with disabilities in Vatovavy and Atsinanana regions reach opportunities that are otherwise difficult. With one million USD for a three-year project, CRS and HI will provide economic opportunities to people with disabilities through training, professional internships and entrepreneurial internships. This project hopes to overcome barriers to financial empowerment by strengthening cultural beliefs and improving workplace policies to ensure the rights of people with disabilities to protect, support and promote their participation in the workplace