



# ASOTRY

*Building food security and community resilience*



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# TABLE OF CONTENTS



4-5 *Project summaries*

6 *Implementing areas*

7 *Country Director's message*

## 8 **Component I: Health and Nutrition**

9-10 *Nutrition specific activities*

11-12 *All the Colors of The Food Pyramid*

13 *Home garden and cooking demonstration*

14 *Growth Monitoring and Promotion*

15 *Care Group and households visits*

16-17 *Lead Parents Model Improved Health for Community*

18 *Community Health Volunteers*

19-20 *Health Messages Raise Awareness Among New Mothers*

21 *Water, Sanitation, Hygiene*

22-23 *Latrines Solve Health Crisis*

24 *Safe water points*

25-26 *A Village on a Mission*

## 27 **Component II: Agriculture and livelihoods**

28 *Farmers Field School*

29-30 *A New Home for Voahangy*

31 *Lead Farmers*

32-33 *Agricultural Training Gives School Dropout a Second Chance*

34 *Seeds producers groups*

34-35 *Seeds For Change*

36 *Farmers Business Association and Agricultural Collection Center*

37-38 *Grandmother Earns Security with Agricultural Collection Center*

39 *Livestock Marketing Groups and Community Livestock Workers*

40-41 *Cattle Breeding Saves Large Family in Lazarivo*

42 *Village Savings and Loans*  
43-44 *Village Savings and Loans Association Boosts Income in Belafika*  
45 *Literacy*  
45-46 *More Than Words*  
47 *Income-Generation Activity*  
47 *Village Chief Brings Cheese and Change*  
48 *Making Cheese With Maharo*

49 **Component III: Resilience and infrastructure**

50 *Resilience*  
51-52 *Cactus for Cattle*  
53-54 *Fighting Drought with Weeds*  
55 *Natural Resource Management*  
56-58 *This Land is Our Land*  
59-60 *The Money Trees of Bedia Analalava*  
61-63 *Infrastructure*  
64-65 *Villagers and Their Road*

66 **Cross-cutting**

67 *Gender*  
68-69 *A Village United*  
70 *Good governance and sustainability*

71 **Staff**







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The Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA) is pleased to present in this book an overview of ASOTRY, a five-year innovative and integrated food security program financed by USAID which has contributed to reduce food insecurity and vulnerability among food insecure households and communities in three regions of Madagascar. To implement this project, ADRA has partnered with Land O'Lakes (LOL) and Association Intercooperation Madagascar (AIM), both of which have extensive experience in Madagascar and expertise in food security. ADRA's proposed program, ASOTRY, meaning “harvest” in Malagasy, has resulted in substantial and tangible improvements in malnutrition, agricultural productivity and household and community resilience by addressing the major underlying causes of food security.

ADRA has designed ASOTRY to address the four major underlying causes that result in high levels of vulnerability, food insecurity, poverty and malnutrition affecting Madagascar: (1) poor health and nutrition practices, resulting in high levels of stunting; (2) low levels of productivity, where agricultural production often does not meet dietary requirements, and limits household income; (3) lack of access to food, as market access is limited by poor road conditions, limited production and high poverty; and (4) vulnerability to natural disasters, affecting yields and households food supplies. These align with the four pillars of food security: utilization, availability, access, and stability, so in order to improve food security, the activities of ASOTRY were design to bring improvement to these four pillars.

The goal of ASOTRY program was to reduce food insecurity among targeted communities in the Amoron'i Mania, Haute Matsiatra, and Atsimo Andrefana regions of Madagascar. It targeted a total of 264,380 beneficiaries of 50,000 households, in 408 communities, or fokontany in Malgache, forming 32 communes in 10 districts of the country. The beneficiaries and the communities were selected based on the analysis of data on malnutrition, food insecurity, poverty and vulnerability.



The strategic objectives of the program were:

Purpose 1: Improved health and nutrition status of 25,920 women of reproductive age and 61,637 children under five

Purpose 2: Increased Access to Food for 32,000 Vulnerable Households

Purpose 3: Improved disaster mitigation, preparedness, and response in 408 vulnerable communities.

ASOTRY included activities divided in three distinct components aligned with the three objectives mentioned above. The first component aimed to promote improved behavior, to increase knowledge and to improve access to resources in Health, Hygiene and Nutrition. This was achieved through a series of activities implemented through Community Health Volunteers and Leader Mothers trained by the project, and who are promoting the importance of having a balanced diet, regular health and weight control for children, increased use and availability of health services, improved water supply and water treatment, as well as improved hygiene and sanitation. ASOTRY also provided supplementary food rations for pregnant and lactating women, as well as children under two years old, in complement to its nutritional activities.

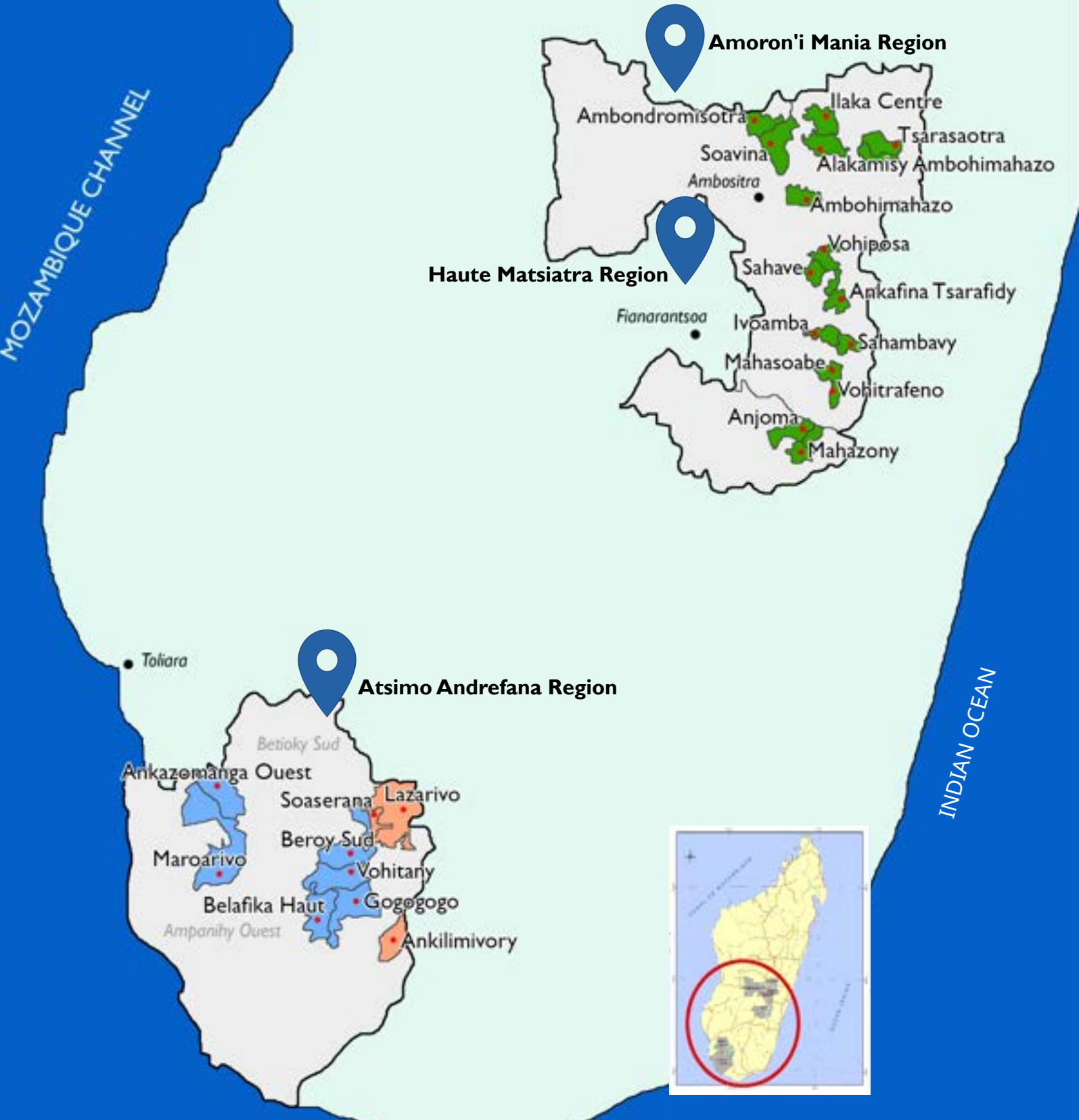
The second component contributed to increase production and availability of food commodities for consumption and for household income, by implementing activities encouraging adoption of improved agricultural and livestock techniques and crop diversification, while promoting links between farmers and markets, and providing means for the beneficiaries to improve management of income and create income generating activities.

The third component of ASOTRY contributed to increase resilience of target areas by empowering community groups in developing plans and implementing measures to prevent, prepare for, respond to, mitigate and recover from natural shocks affecting them. The intervention also included activities of infrastructure rehabilitation and maintenance, natural resources management and reforestation, for which some more food commodities were distributed in compensation for work done, contributing this way to reduced short term food insecurity.

ASOTRY finally included cross cutting activities found in all three components, namely the aspects of gender balance, good governance and sustainability. Coordination and collaboration between partners, government services and ASOTRY's key community volunteers played a major role in ensuring integration of the program's activities in the national policies and sustainability of impacts of the project on the beneficiaries.



# IMPLEMENTING AREAS



03

## Regions of intervention

Haute Matsiatra - Amoron'i Mania - Atsimo Andrefana

32

## Targeted communes

ADRA: 22  
Land O'Lakes: 7  
AIM: 3

491,169

## Population

264,380

## Beneficiaries



Adventist Development and Relief Agency (ADRA)



Land O'Lakes International Development (LOL)



Action Intercopération Madagascar (AIM)







Dear Reader,

This true narration, from the people of the High Plateau and South-Western Madagascar, are an unpleasant reality with an affirmative outcome. These stories are collected from real beneficiaries of the ASOTRY project, where Mother Child Health and Nutrition, Livelihoods and Resilience is the focus of the team. Their integrated approach provides for families who are vulnerable to the elements, and fall victim to the economic and physical circumstances of the region in which they live. Imagine the challenge of feeding your family for U\$1.75 or less a day? Could you do it? 90% of the population in this region of the red island experience this daily challenge.

ADRA in Madagascar sees these needs, feels the pain and holds a hand out, with empathy. In a region which is unjust, they reach out with a sense of justice, shown with compassion, and encourage sustainability in the future.

These are the loving testimonies from real people, on this tropical island, in a small corner of our world. Thank you for opening your heart to their stories.

Peter Delhove  
*Country Director - ADRA Madagascar*





**COMPONENT 1:**  
Health and Nutrition



# Nutrition specific activities



## Promotion of the "rainbow food" concept

ASOTRY’s activities in nutrition aim at promoting a varied and thus more complete nutrition, especially for pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five years old. The beneficiaries understand the concept of “Rainbow food”, i.e. having a varied diet, which is reflected through a colorful plate of food, thus providing a range of nutrients for the people eating “Rainbow food”.



## Promotion of nutrition during the “1,000 days period”

ASOTRY also promotes the concept of providing key nutrients from the time of conception of a child to the child reaching two years old. This period is known as the “1,000 days”, during which both the caregiver and the child need a rich diet to be well fed and healthy. In addition to its promotion activities, ASOTRY has been providing complementary nutrient rich food to caregivers and children in this age group.



## Tsikonina

Building on its experience and knowledge of community-led nutrition activities, the ASOTRY Health and Nutrition team developed an innovative approach to address the needs of children showing signs of moderate or light malnutrition. Well adapted to the context in rural areas, Tsikonina involved the participation of Community Health Volunteers, Lead Mothers and of mothers who can be considered models in how they cater for the needs of their young ones, to participate in sessions aimed at caregivers for children who show early signs of malnutrition. During these sessions, mothers and caregivers learn how to make nutritious recipes for children using locally available food.







*"Tsikonina" meaning kitchen play set is a session during which mothers learn to cook 'rainbow food'*

## *All the Colors of the Food Pyramid*

### ***Rainbow Food improves diets for children and mothers in Mahasoabe***

The hilltop village of Mahasoabe is a place of vibrant beauty; the grass is green from recent rains, flowers of red, yellow, and purple dot the landscape, and clothes of all colors hang out to dry.

It is fitting that the USAID-funded ASOTRY project has brought Tsikonina to this community. Tsikonina is a maternal and child health and nutrition program that encourages, among other components, the concept of Rainbow Food—that one's diet should be as colorful as this scenery.

“The mothers didn’t always know about diversifying the diet. They kept giving the same food to their children every day,” said Community Health Volunteer (CHV) Thérèse Marguerite. “The food is not suitable for a child. The child does not get enough nutrients or vitamins.”

“Rainbow Food has nutrients and vitamins that make children grow well,” she added.

In this fertile region, Rainbow Food consists of the many naturally occurring foods available, including cassava, rice, sweet potatoes, taro, green leaves, lettuce, cabbage, carrots, tomatoes, onions, beans, groundnuts, peanuts, and fish.

“I help mothers learn that they should give better food to their children,” Thérèse said. “I teach them to make nutritious recipes for children using locally available food.”

Hélène Tahianjanahary is one such mother. The 32-year-old single mother of two has struggled to provide for the dietary needs of her children, especially her youngest, who is only two-years-old.



“After my son was born, my husband chased me away,” she said. “Both my parents are already dead, so I am the only one left to look after my kids. I don’t have any support to meet the needs of my children. Many times, I am struggling to find food for them.”

When ASOTRY field agents came to the village, they began with weighing babies under the age of two. At the time, H  l  ne’s son was 14 months old, and weighed only 19 pounds.

“I have regularly weighed my child since ASOTRY,” she said. “In the beginning, his weight was not stable—sometimes he was very underweight. When I did growth monitoring with the project, they found the child needed to be taken to Tsikonina to follow the program. I accepted and was willing to participate.”

Tsikonina sessions last at least 12 days—six in hands-on group sessions and six at home with support from the Community Health Volunteer.

Within those 12 days of learning how to use improved cooking techniques using diversified ingredients, Th  r  se noticed a difference in her son.

“After six days, my son weighed 21 pounds,” she said. “After the full 12 days, he weighed nearly 22 pounds.”

Now her toddler son is a healthy baby boy full of life and health. Gone are the days when the small boy was given only boiled cassava. Now his mother knows to diversify his diet with a variety of fruits, nuts, and grains.

Though Th  r  se still works hard to provide an income, she now has better techniques to maximize the naturally-growing crops of this region.

“I feel very happy because I am not worried about his health anymore,” she said. “I will keep preparing good food for my children—food with vitamins and fruits.”



*Top left: Health Agent Marguerite regularly monitors the growth of H  l  ne’s son. Bottom left: H  l  ne’s son is eager to eat his colorful dish full of nutrients. Above: Thanks to the support of Health Agent Marguerite, H  l  ne’s son is today a healthy baby boy.*



## Homestead gardens

To complement the Tsikonina sessions, ASOTRY promoted the concept of homestead gardens. Lead Mothers were the first to receive the training, which was then extended to all caregivers. The objective was to provide a more varied diet through local production.



## Cooking demonstrations

Lead Mothers and Community Health Volunteers also led cooking demonstrations during community events, always promoting the “Rainbow food” concept.





## Growth Monitoring and Promotion



Growth Monitoring and Promotion is done monthly by Community Health Volunteers in their communities. These sessions allow Community Health Volunteers to gather information on a child's growth progress, which can be shared with local health services to identify children requiring special attention. During the sessions the Community Health Volunteers also share information on nutrition, on hygiene and on health issues so that caregivers adopt behaviors that will lead to improved health and nutrition.



## Care Groups and household visits

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ASOTRY used the Care Group model to ensure that health, hygiene and nutrition information is shared with as many people as possible in targeted communities. The project identified Lead Mothers who were ready to learn key concepts and trained them in collaboration with local Community Health Volunteers. The training covered many topics over a period of months. This allowed Lead Mothers to visit other households in their neighborhoods and share the lessons they'd received, thereby increasing the learning to many households. The activity specially targeted women with children, pregnant women and women ready for motherhood, but it also involved the entire household members and the community at large, through the involvement of Lead Fathers, who were ensuring awareness-raising to encourage support to caregivers by the other members of the households.







*Georges and Marine, parents of eight children, and Lead Father and Mother for their village.*

## *Lead Parents Model Improved Health for Community*

### ***Community change begins with hardworking local couple***

George and Marine may seem like an ordinary couple in the rural farming community of Ankafina, and in many ways, they are. The husband and wife are in their mid-forties, they have eight children together, and they earn their livelihood from the crops they grow and sell.

But in this community, they are no common couple. As Lead Father and Lead Mother, the active pair serve as a bridge between the skills, knowledge, and awareness-raising provided by ASOTRY and the needs of their community.

When communities participate in the ASOTRY project, they are electing to change nearly all aspects of their life, in the components of health, agriculture, and livelihoods. The learning curve can be steep, and the long-term commitment can be daunting.

By working with community-appointed Lead Mothers and Lead Fathers, ASOTRY Field Agents initiate local change from the inside out. Instead of overwhelming villagers with programmatic details, they train a select few to guide the process.

“The community appointed me as Lead Mother to teach mothers to vaccinate their kids, weigh their babies, encourage them to go to health centers for prenatal care, encourage them to attend nutritional feeding sessions, teach them about handwashing, clean the courtyard and the house, and to treat water,” Marine said. “A Lead Mother is like an animator, a person who educates the community about health topics. It is important that the men and women are healthy.”

It is equally important that the men do not prevent their wives from learning. This is where George comes in as Lead Father.



“The men can be an obstacle for the women to participate. If there are many tasks to do in the house, the men don’t let the women attend trainings, or they prefer the women go to the field to work,” George said. “Because they can prevent them from attending the trainings, I decided to help the Lead Mothers to convince the men to let their wives attend the trainings and get skills and knowledge to apply in the household.”

With people like George and Marine in place as community animators, ASOTRY continued to provide the activities that have changed lives in Ankafina.

“The village is cleaner, and we have fewer kids suffering from malnutrition because we apply the rainbow food diversified diet,” Marine said. “Now, the community has applied everything that ASOTRY taught us. We are happy to benefit from all the things we have learned about health.”

George agreed.

“The standard of living was quite poor before the project came,” he said. “Now it is different because we have acquired new techniques. As a Lead Father, I see that it is important that we are healthy because we cannot work if we are not healthy.”

“We thank the project for all the things they taught us, especially in health,” he added. “We are willing to apply everything they teach us, and we will keep applying these things in our life.”

**ASOTRY, funded by USAID, has made a difference in the life of 46,308 children under 5 years old, who participated in growth monitoring and other nutrition and health activities of the project.**



*Top right: Georges raises awareness among fathers in his village about nutrition and hygiene.*

*Bottom right: Marine conducts home visits and shares health messages to mothers.*



# Community Health Volunteers

Through the training of Community Health Volunteers in growth monitoring, nutrition, health and hygiene promotion, ASOTRY has contributed in reinforcing the local health and nutrition services offered at community level, particularly aiming at pregnant women, lactating mothers and children under five years old, since adequate nutrition and health from pregnancy until a child reaches five years old are key to fight chronic malnutrition.







*Health Agent Viviane trains a pregnant mother about prenatal care.*

## *Health Messages Raise Awareness Among New Mothers*

### **Local Community Health Volunteer trains mothers on newborn health**

It was still early afternoon, and Viviane Razafindranoro had already conducted a weight and arm measurement with 30 children between the ages of 24 and 59 months and had trained their mothers on the topic of malaria treatment and prevention.

For the Community Health Volunteer (CHV) of Akondro, in Ambalakely Commune, a day like this is typical.

“I received trainings and my role is to share these trainings with the community,” Viviane said. “It is important for this community because there is no health center here. They don’t know anything about it.”

The vacuum of knowledge which she continues to fill includes awareness-raising and trainings on all aspects of community health: vaccinations, nutrition, preventable diseases, use of latrines, handwashing, water treatment, and any other health topic relevant to the needs of the community.

“The community members really apply the messages,” she said. “For example, all of the kids are vaccinated now, which was not the case before ASOTRY. The mothers used to think the vaccines would make their kids sick, but now they are willing to do all the vaccines.

“I always encourage them to continue because people forget sometimes,” she added. “But they always follow the messages.”





Community health messages are made available as needed—to the extent that community members will drop by her house unannounced seeking advice—but the typical structure follows a four-week schedule: week one is dedicated to infants under six months; week two for infants 6-12 months, week three for babies 12-23 months, and the last week for toddlers 24-59 months, and all others who missed their assigned week.

Though each week offers age-appropriate messaging—encouraging mothers of infants under six months to continue breastfeeding, for example—all four groups have in common weighing and measurements, and continued home visits to assess and encourage the mothers.

The role is one that Viviane takes seriously.

“If ASOTRY wasn’t here, they wouldn’t be able to access any health care,” she said. “They wouldn’t know anything about health, and their health would be poor. Malnutrition and diseases would prevail in the community.”

Though she has worked as a Community Health Volunteer for the local government and other NGOs—it is why she was appointed by her community again—she is most active and proud as an ASOTRY health worker.

“I have been working a lot with ASOTRY, compared to when I was a Community Health Volunteer before,” she said. “ASOTRY has done a lot of good, and the changes are significant. There haven’t been any major epidemics in this area, whereas before we had outbreaks of cholera.”

“I am thankful for the project and for the American people who helped implement this project,” she continued. “Now life here is very different. The community itself seems to be different than before.”

**ASOTRY has trained 1,548 Community Health Volunteers like Viviane offering health services to the population of 379 communities.**



*Top left: Monitoring of pregnant mothers’ weight is part of Viviane’s work.*

*Bottom left: Children under 5 benefit from regular growth monitoring.*



# Water, Sanitation, Hygiene

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## Hygiene

Good hygiene is a necessary complement to good nutrition, in order to avoid putting the people at risk of getting sick from water related diseases. In addition to education done through Care Groups, ASOTRY promotes improved hygiene through the promotion of hand washing, adequate water sterilization and storage and sanitation.

ASOTRY also promotes improve hygiene by encouraging the use of simple hand washing devices that are easy for the people to build and use. These are called Tippy Taps. Some are simply made using a string, a recycled water bottle and ashes, when soap cannot be used, while some beneficiaries developed hand-washing devices using plastic jerry cans, which they saw more adapted to their context.



## Community-Led Total Sanitation

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ASOTRY has contributed to the improvement of sanitation through two approaches, CLTS or Community-Led Total Sanitation, which is implemented through the Community Health Volunteers, and another approach simply called Total Sanitation, implemented at community level.

Both approaches aim at creating a model village where there is no more open defecation, so all people are encouraged to build and use latrines, and keep the surroundings clean, to emulate similar adoption of positive sanitation behavior in neighboring villages.





*Tamasoa was the first to build a latrine in his village.*

## *Latrines Solve Health Crisis*

### ***Hygiene messages reduce cases of diarrhea in Belamboa Bas***

Tamasoa may live in a rural village, but that does not mean he has a rural perspective. In a region rife with old beliefs and practices, the 27-year-old is ahead of his time, and intends to bring his friends and neighbors up to speed with him.

He believes, for example, that a man should prepare food for his wife if she is about to go work in the field. In addition, he believes men should hold the baby if it is crying and the wife needs to rest, and that a man should not make his wife carry water if she is pregnant.

Though these messages are not always easily received by the other men in his home village of Belamboa Bas, in Gogogogo Commune, Tamasoa has earned a reputation as a man to whom one should give respect and a listening ear.

“They are convinced by these messages,” he said. “Yes, there are a few who are not very willing to listen, but I keep encouraging them and they end up following this model.”



The model began when Tamasoa, with the help of ASOTRY field agents, helped to update the cultural beliefs in his community about sanitation and hygiene. Because honest discussions about such health topics are often considered taboo, his community members were living as they always had—defecating in the open, not washing their hands, and accidentally contaminating food with fecal matter.

Though the causes remained a mystery to the community, one thing was painfully clear: their children were suffering.

“Before ASOTRY, many kids were sick with diarrhea,” Tamasoa said. “The first time ASOTRY Field Agents came here they selected Lead Mothers and Fathers and they had a meeting with us and asked us what the biggest issue is here. We said: ‘our kids are sick and have diarrhea.’”

Tamasoa was part of that meeting. As a Lead Father, he was chosen by his village president to represent the needs of the community, and to come back with the solutions. Today, everyone is well aware of the many causes of diarrhea, but back then, not even Tamasoa knew the basic problems.

“Before, we defecated in the open and we had feces scattered everywhere in the field and in the courtyard,” he said. “Anytime we would go to relieve ourselves, we didn’t even wash our hands. Then we would prepare our food with the dirty hands.”

During those ASOTRY committee meetings, he began to learn more about basic health and sanitation. He learned that it is important to have a pit latrine because the waste could be contained and covered against flies and chickens, instead of out in the open where animals can transmit bacteria from fecal matter.

He also learned about the tippy-tap, a system that requires only a container with soap or ash, a bottle of water, and a simple frame from which to hang it for ease of handwashing access.

Armed with these lifesaving techniques, Tamasoa went home and spent a week digging a latrine and building a wood and grass privacy screen.

“I was the only one to build the latrine in the beginning,” he said. “My children became healthier as a result, and when the community saw that, they became convinced that we should build more latrines.”

Thanks to Tamasoa, there are now 6 latrines for the 15 households in his immediate community, and they have plans to build more. Now, everyone knows to use the latrine and to wash their hands after.

“Everyone practices that behavior now,” he said. “We really see that we are healthier as a result.”

Not only has the health of the community improved, the appearance has, too. The grounds are raked and smoothed, the houses are all tidy, and enclosed latrines are built throughout the village.

“We are really happy because we are healthy now,” Tamasoa said. “We know that is the result of the project. We are now willing to apply what the project teaches us because we know it is good for our wellbeing.”

**ASOTRY, a project supported by USAID, has promoted improved hygiene in 29,344 households and created 335 model communities promoting an Open Defecation Free environment, thanks to the participation of dedicated people like Tamasoa.**



*Left: Tamasoa shares health messages during a meeting of the community.*



*Right: Tamasoa is an advocate for gender equality: he looks after his baby while his wife is washing dishes.*



# Safe water points

Also to curb the incidence of water related diseases, ASOTRY has improved 168 water sources and wells thus contributing to improved access to safe water in all targeted areas. The rehabilitation helped increasing the quantity and the quality of the water available. For all improved water points, a water users committee was created and trained to contribute to the long-term sustainability of the improved water supply.







## *A Village on a Mission*

***The villagers of Ambodifanovo have made it their mission to protect their water point, so that it can continue to protect them***

Ambodifanovo in Ivoamba Commune is a community of 55 households and 356 members. There is one main water point in the center of the village, and it is there that all community members go for water.

Before ASOTRY, a USAID-funded project, that solitary waterpoint was almost more trouble than it was worth. The open well dried often, and even when there was water, it was often contaminated by fecal waste.

“Before, feces were scattered everywhere, and sometimes we couldn’t even find where to step when we walked outside,” said Rajean, president of the Water Committee in Ambodifanovo. “When kids had diarrhea, we sent them anywhere to relieve themselves, and the disease spread as a result.”

With an open, shallow well, it was impossible to regulate cleanliness and monitor usage, and the community members suffered.

“The water from this well was really insufficient for us,” Rajean added.

“Sometimes, we had to go to another village to fetch water, and we felt we were really struggling. The issues with diarrhea were indescribable. The water we drank was not safe at all, so diarrhea really prevailed here.”

When ASOTRY Field Agents came to Ambodifanovo, they discovered an old, unreliable well, and a dangerous lack of hygiene and sanitation. They partnered with a well company to rehabilitate the waterpoint, and they formed and trained a community-based Water Committee to educate the community to WASH standards and practices, and to protect the rehabilitated waterpoint.

After the well company cleared the well, repaired it, and installed a pump to cover and regulate the water source, Rajean knew he and the 11 members of his Water Committee needed to do more to ensure the longevity of the lifesaving water source. While most communities only build a small wooden fence around their well, and sometimes nothing at all, the Water Committee knew the protection of their water point was paramount.



“When the final reception of the pump was done, we discussed between us and decided to build a house to protect it, that we can lock, because it was essential that we stopped drinking unsafe water,” he said. “If we didn’t build a protection for it, it would be destroyed.”

Together with the whole community, Rajean and his team spent a month constructing a shelter to protect the well. Everyone contributed money for bricks and wood, and gathered grasses for the roof, and by early December of 2018, the shelter was complete. In a region where wells are often marginally protected or completely neglected, this construction was a feat of exceptional devotion.

In addition to providing a secure shelter for the well, the committee also built one toilet and two washing rooms away from the water point to prevent contaminated water and soggy grounds around that well that can damage the components.

“We received training in Water, Sanitation, Hygiene” said Justine, the communication officer for the Water Committee. “The purpose of the toilet is to prevent open defecation, because when one defecates in the open, the fecal matter is brought by water flowing to the well.”

“That’s why we were very motivated when we heard the awareness

messages about clean water,” she added. “None in the village refused to participate, and we did all of the work here together.”

Now, when you go to Ambodifanova, the well in the center of town is not a dried-up, dirty waterpoint. It is a clean, secured, and ever-flowing access point for hydration and sanitation.

“Our kids were the ones who really suffered from diarrhea before, but today, there are no more cases of diarrhea,” Rajean said. “We thank ASOTRY. It is not only the committee who thanks them, but the whole village of Ambodifanova. You have done so much for the country—not only for our village but the whole country. Whoever comes here can drink from this water.”



*Bottom left: Women are happy to fetch safe drinking water.*

*Top right: The water point is well protected thanks to the commitment of the Water Committee.*

*Bottom right: Villagers will no longer wash themselves next to the well.*





**COMPONENT 2:**  
Agriculture and Livelihoods



# Farmer Field School

To increase the availability of nutritious food and to contribute to increasing household income, ASOTRY has promoted the adoption of improved agricultural or livestock techniques, inputs and equipment through Farmer Field Schools (FFS). Farmers were encouraged to join into groups of farmers from the same area, and under the leadership of ASOTRY staffs, learn improved production techniques and practice together, so that they could learn from each other while cultivating or growing animals.



## Demonstration plots

The Farmer Field School techniques used the concept of demonstration plots for farmers to practice together learned techniques, test improved seeds or farm implements.



## School gardens

In addition to working with farmers in improving production practices, the project reaches out to local schools to teach gardening techniques to children, while promoting better nutrition. The school committees, involving parents, children and teachers, run these gardens and decide how to use the harvest from the gardens either to complement existing school feeding activities, or for children to bring back home.







## *A New Home for Voahangy*

### ***Farmer Field School inspires local woman to improve her life and her community***

Voahangy looks out across the rice fields from the comfort of her third story window. Her brick house sits at the back of the valley, on a slope that rises toward the rocky summit, and it has a vantage of all the activity below.

Workers in colorful shirts till the soil, cows bellow under the strain of the plow, and voices can be heard echoing from the neighboring homes, all of which look as nice and new as the one in which Voahangy currently sits.

“I have been longing for a house of my own for at least six years, but I never managed to do it because I didn’t have enough money,” she said. “It’s not always easy to live with your in-laws. I always wanted to leave but I didn’t have the means, so we had to stay there.”

When she got married to her husband, Sebastien, Voahangy left her family to live with his. She had a child, then another one. Years passed, and the young family scraped together what income they could, but they only ever had enough money for food and basic school supplies for the children. Voahangy felt her dreams disappear more each year.

Then, in 2015, the young mother heard about a development project called ASOTRY, supported by USAID, in a neighboring village. The project offered a Farmer Field School to teach members of the community to farm more efficiently.

Voahangy saw an answer to her problems.



“I was mainly interested in the promises of knowing improved techniques in agriculture,” she said. “Before ASOTRY I was farming rice, beans, peanuts, maize, and lettuce, but I didn’t follow any techniques, and the yields were bad. I could sell my crops before, but in small quantities.”

Voahangy decided to attend the meetings. For the four months of the program, she walked to the next village to learn about how to improve her farm, her yields, and her income. She continued to go, despite the criticism of her friends, community members, and even her husband.

“There was conflict between them in the beginning,” said Rina, the ASOTRY Field Agent for Agriculture and Livelihood in Ambato Mitongoa. in Anjoma Commune. “Her husband thought she should be bringing back money and not be wasting her time. He was even jealous because she was traveling with ASOTRY so often for trainings.”

It did not take long for Voahangy to prove herself. As soon as she began to implement advanced farming techniques, her income increased dramatically.

“Before, if I planted 100 cans of beans, I could harvest 180 cans of beans,” she said. “Now, the same quantity will yield three times that amount. I plant the same crops as before, but the yields are much higher.”

“I notice an improvement in my income now,” she added. “The best part is that I was able to build my house with the income that I got from ASOTRY activities.”

In November of 2018, Voahangy and her husband finally moved out of their crowded, multigenerational house, and into a brand-new house they built high on the hill.

“I was very happy because before I used to live with my parents-in-law,”

she said. “I felt like we weren’t fitting in the house. Here it is big, and I feel free. This is my house.”

The change has been noticed by everyone in Ambato Mitongoa. Since Voahangy came back from that first Farmer Field School, she has helped set up an Farmer Field School in her hometown, plus a Village Savings and Loans and Farmers Business Association.

“We have trainings with everyone, but sometimes people don’t engage or listen,” Rina said. “When we leave, we need a key person like Voahangy to continue the project. We work with that person to become a partner of the project and a leader of the community.”

There is no doubt that Voahangy is now a leader of the community.

“I see that I am very respected. Even the village president told me I should be the head of this village,” she said. “My reputation goes beyond my own village. Even now people come here to ask advice on success. They say ‘we see your success, what is your secret?’”

Voahangy is happy to share her success with everyone. Most of all, she is eager to share that success with her children.

“When I was a kid, I felt very limited. my parents were poor and could not give me many opportunities,” she said. “Now my kids have access to more opportunities than I did. I don’t want them to become like me, but to be better than me.”

Thanks to her income, her new house, and the private school she can finally afford for her children, her children are on track to do just that.

**ASOTRY has trained 38,933 farmers through Farmer Field School groups, with the participation of 795 lead farmers like Voahangy.**



*Left: Voahangy and family are proudly standing in front of their future house. Middle: Voahangy is also a successful chicken breeder. Right: Voahangy and her husband apply composting, a farming technique taught by ASOTRY.*



## Lead Farmers

The Farmer Field School approach also allowed to identify among farmers groups some farmers that had learned and implemented improved farming techniques and have trained them to become Leader Farmer, so that they could continue bringing technical support to Farmer Field School groups once the project closes, for continued improvement in farming practices.







## *Agricultural Training Gives School Dropout a Second Chance*

***A single mother and high-school dropout leads her community toward prosperity and education.***

When her father died, Miharisoa Elisabeth, known as Hary, was in the second year of high school. The teenager excelled in her classes and was on track to graduate with her peers.

But when the head of the household and primary breadwinner passed away, he left three generations in a shared home without a reliable source of income.

There was the farm, of course, a small plot of land on which a few meager crops grew, but it was not enough to sustain both the family and Hary's education.

The girl was forced to drop out.

“We relied on our father when he was still here. When he passed away, we were really struggling financially,” said Hary, who is now 24-years-old. “I aimed to get my high school diploma, but because of the problem in the family, I had to stop. I was really sad because of that.”

When she dropped out, Hary assumed her dreams of education were over. Instead, she scraped her meager living from the hard soil every day. When she was 21, a man got her pregnant and then left her. Her widowed mother needed her. Her younger siblings needed her. And now, her baby girl needed her.



For Hary, life became what it always would be: an existence of hard work and hard-won survival.

When ASOTRY Field Agents came to take a census in Andovoka Sahave, the precocious young woman volunteered to help. After the census, the agents began to set up the various associations in health, agriculture, and livelihood.

Hary joined all of them.

“When they arrived and I heard their awareness messages, I started to think I might find good things by working with them,” Hary said. “I became a Lead Farmer, a Lead Mother, and a Community Health Volunteer.”

Though she is only 24 and female, Hary is not surprised by her leadership roles, nor does she feel ill-equipped. The young woman has always enjoyed leadership—in her church scouts group as a kid, and in school as a teenager—and she was already positioned to be the leadership link between ASOTRY agents and her community.

“In the beginning, it was the people who appointed me,” she said of her leadership roles. “I like it because I am in close relationship with the technicians, so they teach me first and then I pass those skills on. It helps me build a closer relationship with the community and impart new knowledge and skills.”

Perhaps most importantly, Hary is a model of success to her entire community. After implementing the improved agriculture techniques learned from the ASOTRY project, the single mother noticed a dramatic

change in her harvest, and subsequently, her income. Hary knew just what to do with her profit.

Last September, the 24-year-old fulfilled a dream that had nearly died when she was forced to drop out of school years before. She graduated high school. Not only did she complete her studies while raising her daughter, caring for her mother and siblings, and tending to her crops, she completed her studies with honors.

“My father would be happy to see that I finished my studies,” she said. “I hope that all the farmers who get training from projects like this really apply the techniques. I am a testament to the fact that they are really successful.”

And her success is still growing. Next year, Hary plans to attend the agriculture university in Fianarantsoa, the big city two hours away.

“When I see people who succeed in life, I want to be like them,” Hary said. “That’s why I like studying. Before we were really struggling. Now, I plan to go on to higher education so I can train other farmers about agriculture.”

**The dedication of community leaders like Hary contributed to the success of the project and the development of all 32 participating communes. We thank the 1,548 Community Health Volunteers, 4,093 Lead Mothers, 1,395 Lead Fathers, 887 Lead Farmers, 1,385 Farmers Business associations leaders, 262 Livestock Marketing Groups leaders, 370 Village Savings and Loans village agents, 2,988 infrastructure association members, 52 Early Warning System agents and 3,842 Disaster Risk Reduction members that have joined the project.**



*Left: Hary applies the techniques taught by the project, including row planting.*

*Right: Hary graduated from high school with honors.*





## Seeds producers groups

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As poor seeds quality is a major factor reducing agricultural productivity in rural areas of Madagascar, ASOTRY has included in its activity the identification of model producers interested in learning about improved seeds production, so that improved seeds can become available sustainably in the targeted communities of the project. These farmers were trained as Seeds Producers Groups, to learn how to improved seeds production. The groups were also linked to national level certified seeds producers who were providing technical support and base seeds so Seeds Producers groups could increase the quality of the seeds they produced. The project also linked these groups to farmers participating in the project as these farmers had learned the benefit of using improved seeds over seeds that they produce themselves using traditional methods.



## *Seeds for Change*

### ***Local seed producer improves quality of crops and lives in Soaserana***

There is a shade tree on the corner of the peanut field overlooking the surrounding farmlands. At noon, it is the perfect place to rest, reflect on the morning's work, and plan for the work to come.

And it is here, under the protective awning of this sprawling shade tree, that Rajery can look with pride at his productive fields, and the fields of his neighbors.

Two years ago, the view from this shade tree was grim: Small plots of land held uneven, scattered rows of crops, most of which withered away under the harsh sun before they could yield anything edible or profitable. The few crops that did survive the harvest offered meager returns, and the families in Soaserana, in South Betioky, suffered during the lean season. Cattle grew thin, goods were sold off, and children were left to imagine, maybe next year I will go to school.



“We planted but the crops were so poor,” said Rajery, a local seed producer. “We planted the crops just by scattering seeds without techniques.”

When ASOTRY field agents came to his village and offered to teach the community members better farming techniques, 51-year-old Rajery decided he had nothing to lose. His older children were tending to his few head of cattle instead of going to school, he could not afford for anyone in his family to get sick, and his farm was costing him more time and money than it was returning.

In the Farmer Field School, he learned several basic techniques that had immediate results: how to plant in rows, how to work the field, how to use fertilizer, and how to choose the right seeds for replanting.

All these techniques changed the way he farmed, but it was the latter skill—how to choose the right seeds—that changed the way his whole community farmed.

“I started as a member of the Farmer Field School, and at one point, the technicians asked us, ‘who has a field plot and is willing to become a seed producer?’” Rajery remembered. “I volunteered to become a seed producer and to provide my field for the training. I already saw the benefits from the other activities, and I knew that everything the technicians told us was good for us.

“When they talked about the seeds activity, I knew it would be good for me to cope with my problems,” he added. “That’s why I was willing to volunteer.”

During the training, Rajery learned how to harvest his peanuts, shell them, dry them, and then select the very biggest and best seeds to replant for the next peanut season. It did not take him long to abandon the old methods

and adopt the new.

“The traditional way of selling the seeds was just to mix every kind of seed,” he said. “The peanuts might even be rotten, for example, and we would sell 1 can (300 grams) for only 400 ariary (about \$.12 cents). Because the product was not good quality, we had to sell it for lower value than it should be.

“Now that we sell good quality seeds,” he added, “we can sell the same amount for up to 1,000 ariary (about \$.30 cents).”

Now that the farmers are selling good quality products, they have more than doubled their original profits. It is not uncommon for a farmer to end peanut season with a profit of 800,000 ariary (about \$235 USD)

And this upward mobility affects everyone. When Rajery sells his famous seeds to other farmers in his community, he also makes sure to teach them what ASOTRY taught him.

“The community is really happy with my seeds. They ask me how I have such good quality seeds, and I tell them, ‘this is the way I do it. If you want to learn you can come and I will teach you how to do it,’” Rajery said. “The number of people who become convinced by my techniques really increased this year. If it continues in this way, my community will overcome the impact of famine. If there are still people suffering from famine, it’s the few people who don’t apply these techniques.”

As for Rajery, his family has put the strains of famine behind them for good. He owns two cows and 22 sheep, a new rice field and a new peanut field, and, most importantly, all six of his children are in school.

“I have applied these techniques for two years now and have seen much improvement,” he said. “My life has really improved.”



*Left: The yields of peanut for Rajery and the other farmers are high this year. Right: Rajery is cautious about the quality of his seeds.*



## Farmers Business Associations

Supporting farmers to improve agricultural production allows them to increase sales so they can get more income. ASOTRY helps farmers to constitute groups, or Farmers Business Associations (FBA), and train farmers to have a better understanding of marketing, value chains and business development. Farmers Business Association groups would normally chose one product that they are ready to put together to sell as a groups, thus providing them access to markets where they can get a better price for their products. ASOTRY also helps some of the Farmers Business Association groups with processing equipment depending in the product that they chose to commercialize.



## Agricultural Collecting Center

Some of the Farmers Business Association groups will also join together into a larger association for ASOTRY to help them acquire and manage warehouse facilities as well as processing equipment. These Agricultural Collecting Centers, or ACC, allows them to gather large quantities to meet large demands of products from suppliers. The Agricultural Collecting Centers can also offer to farmers of the areas, whether they are Agricultural Collecting Centers members of not, services such as dehushing of rice or groundnuts.







## *Grandmother Earns Security with Agricultural Collection Center*

### ***Community-based agriculture provides financial security for vulnerable farmers***

Marthe Razafindravelo remembers when farming was almost more trouble than it was worth. The work was arduous, the free market seemed hostile to homestead sellers, and if she wasn't getting figuratively robbed by cunning buyers, she was getting literally robbed by thieves.

"The thieves came twice," she remembered. "They came at night with knives and guns and I hid upstairs as they stole everything. The first time, they stole our animals, and the next time they stole everything in the house."

Life was never particularly easy for Marthe, but when her husband was still alive, things were relatively stable. When he died six years ago, however, the newly-widowed 62-year-old had few options.

"Life was really hard after my husband died," she said. "When he passed away, I moved in Sahave because the cost of living was higher in town. One of my daughters already had a house here, and so I lived with her."



The widow scraped a living from the hard soil, but life remained difficult. One day, Marthe met several women carrying crops and speaking about the farmer association to which they belonged.

“I asked the women: ‘are they any criteria for joining this project?’” she recalled. “They said no, and I so attended each ASOTRY training.”

First, the grandmother learned from the Farmer Field School how to plant, water, and harvest properly. She began to grow cassava and peanuts and beans in record numbers. Then, she learned from her Farmer Business Association (FBA) how better to sell her crops. Her income began to climb.

And now, thanks to the recently built Agriculture Collection Center (ACC), Marthe has a safe place to store her crops from thieves, pests, and market lulls.

“Now I don’t keep my crops in my house any longer. I store all my crops in the center,” she said. “Also, before I had to look for buyers on my own. I had to go to villages to find buyers for the small products that I had. Now I am not worried about finding buyers, because it is the association that searches for buyers.”

Because the Agricultural Collecting Center represents 200 farmers in four different Farmers Business Associations, the days of selling piecemeal at low prices are over.

“Now there is unity and solidarity between us,” said Agricultural Collecting Center president Jean Baptiste. “Before, we just did everything on our own. Now that we sell our crops in groups, we can sell the rice at higher prices. Before, if the price in the market was 150 ariary per 300 grams, we were forced to sell. This year, we can sell our rice at 260 ariary per 300 grams.”

Because the farmers lacked a safe way to store crops long term, they were forced to sell immediately after harvest, along with everyone else in the market. As the crops inundated the market, prices plummeted.

Thanks to the Agricultural Collecting Center, members can harvest their rice in May and sell in November, when the price is high again. Last year, rice farmers of the Agricultural Collecting Center of Sahave shared more than one million ariary in profit.

And because the unified farmers represent crops in bulk, they are attracting wholesalers willing to come purchase everything at once.

“We choose between the potential buyers, then we sell in bulk to the one who offers the best price,” Jean Baptiste said. “We have a really good reputation among the buyers now. Now it is no longer us who look for buyers, it is them who look for us. We have the luxury to choose our favorite.”

Marthe feels the difference. Now she has her own house, and enough food and money to get her through the worst of times.

“I thank God that the project came here,” she said. “Life at home is much better. Even though I am a widow, my life is stable now. I think if everybody applies what the project teaches, their lives will be better as well.”

“I think my husband would be proud of me and the great change in my life,” she added. “I am not rich, but life is stable.”

**ASOTRY, funded by USAID, supported the construction of 8 Agricultural Collecting Centers and 25 local storage centers, with a total of 2,052 members like Marthe.**



*Left: Marthe records the quantity of rice stored in the collecting center.*



*Right: Rice bags are stacked in compliance with the techniques taught by the project.*



# Livestock Marketing Groups

Farmers growing animals are also encouraged to join marketing groups similar to Farmers Business Association. These groups are Livestock Marketing Groups , or LMG. While the marketing purpose remains the same, these Livestock Marketing Groups are also used for farmers to discuss and manage together aspects of livestock activities, such as grazing difficulties and animal health. Livestock activities in the central highland include honey production, fishing and chicken raising, while in the southwest, much of the livestock activities are around goat raising.



# Community Livestock Worker

In support to livestock activities, ASOTRY supports the extension of veterinary services to farmers through Community Livestock Workers, or CLW. Pretty much like Community Health Volunteers do for health of women and children, CLW coordinate with existing local veterinary services to provide animal health services to remote areas in the communities.







## *Cattle Breeding Saves Large Family in Lazarivo*

### ***Members of the remote village use improved techniques to expand herd***

There are 97 houses and 200 people in the rural village of Lazarivo II, in South Betioky District. All of the houses are uniform and built neatly in rows, and almost all of the people are descendants of the same man, a wizened, blind, and hairless patriarch said to be 120 years old.

According to Lambovelo, one of ten second-generation descendants and the leader of the village, his father moved here from Antananarivo because there was too much crime in the capital city. He took his wives and his few possessions and headed south for the unpopulated lowlands.

Since then, the original homestead has expanded from its first-generation encampment of two houses to a legitimate village four generations old.

And thanks to the recent work of ASOTRY field agents, it is a village of great success—even wealth.

“Before the project, our agriculture activities failed,” Lambovelo said. “We didn’t have any crops, and even if they worked, we still didn’t have much income. We couldn’t even sell cattle because they were sick and many of them died. We ourselves were often sick and tired, too.”

In a region that is annually devastated by drought and famine, having a reserve of food and money can mean the difference between life and death. For Lambovelo and his growing immediate family—which currently includes three wives and 28 children—and his extended family of more than 150 people, each dry season was like a footrace against fate. If they could just make it to the first rains of December, perhaps they would all survive.





When ASOTRY field agents came to Lazarivo 2, they taught the familial village how to prepare for the lean months. By using proper agricultural techniques, the period of drought became less a time of devastation, and more a time of conservation.

“When the project came, they taught us how to plant, water, fertilize, and manage resources,” Lambovelo said. “The harvest increased a lot, and as a result, we were able to buy cattle.”

Thanks to the healthy and lucrative crops, the first harvest of its kind in Lazarivo 2, the village finally had money for cattle. Together, they purchased two cows and ten sheep.

That was nearly three years ago. Currently, the herd numbers 250 sheep, 200 cows, and 100 chickens. The growth of the herd can be attributed to the ASOTRY cattle breeding practices, which have ensured the proper health, stabling, feeding, and rearing of the animals.



“Before, I lost a lot of cattle,” Lambovelo remembered. “Now that I know how to vaccinate and feed them, their numbers increase a lot. For example, when a sheep is born, we write the date of birth and then three months after, we know to vaccinate the sheep. That way they are healthy and grow well.”

“The project also taught us we should separate the male and female in different stables,” he added. “And they taught us about the specific trees we need to plant with which to feed the animals.”

Now, when June comes around, Lambovelo does not fear the drought. He knows he has a safety net to care for his family, all 200 members.

“I am thankful for the project, for the trainings, for the knowledge, and all the new skills,” he said. “I am happy because my life is not like the lives of my parents. They were really struggling, but we are happy now.”



**ASOTRY, funded by USAID, supported and trained 51 cattle breeders like Lambovelo, as well as 130 Community Livestock Workers who in turn provide animal health services to farmers in 105 villages.**

*Top left: Lambovelo’s sheep are healthier, now that he knows to vaccinate them.*

*Middle left: The large family of Lazarivo is today safe from food insecurity.*

*Bottom left: Thanks to the cattle breeding techniques, Lambovelo can today meet with the needs of his many children.*



# Village Savings and Loans

ASOTRY complements its livelihood activities with the well-recognized Village Savings and Loans activity, or VSL, which allows participants to increase their knowledge of financial management at households and local levels, and provides participants access to loans to start small Income-Generation Activities (IGA). As many of the Village Savings and Loans participants are very vulnerable, the Village Savings and Loans is often their only chance to access small loans as the principles of Village Savings and Loans are simple, they are decided by group members and all activities are managed by the group members themselves. Once a group reaches an adequate level of knowledge and capacity, ASOTRY introduce them to other financial services, such as e-banking, or local financing institutions and how to use these services to their benefit.







*Thanks to the loans from VSL, Juliette could start a sewing business.*

## *Village Savings and Loans Association Boosts Income in Belafika*

### ***Community-based finance project inspires a mother to invest in and lead her village***

Five years ago, Juliette Razaiarisoa could be found in the market selling coffee and donuts, or in her meager garden, attempting to coax life from the drought-dry soil. Neither the market nor the farm proved successful, however, and the mother of three could barely afford to keep her children fed, clothed, and in school.

Today, the 49-year-old has a flock of chickens and six goats, two sons in secondary school and a burgeoning businesswoman for a daughter, and a one-year plan to build a new house. She even has her own solar-powered charging station for her cellphone.

The upward mobility is not a mystery: Juliette is quick to attribute her success to the Village Savings and Loans (VSL), a core component of the ASOTRY project in her village of Belafika.

“My family’s life has really improved since we joined Village Savings and Loans,” she said. “Before ASOTRY, the community was poor, especially as a result of the drought. There was no income for the households, and the crops were bad.”

“As soon as I became a member, I noticed improvement in my life,” she added.

Juliette was out of town the day ADRA field agents came to Belafika, but it did not take long for her to see their initiatives in action.

“When the project came and had the first meeting, I wasn’t there, but my friends were there and formed a Village Savings and Loans group,” she remembered. “When I heard about their association, I asked them, ‘what are you doing? Why are you in this group?’”





The women explained that Village Savings and Loans group was an opportunity for the women to be more than the sum of their parts. One woman alone could not afford to invest in new economic opportunities. Ten women together, however, could pool their money and provide the loans necessary to kickstart a business, buy a pair of breeding chickens, or invest in seeds and farm tools.

“When I joined the Village Savings and Loans group, I started with chicken raising,” she said. “I bought two chickens, and as I got more money, I bought more chickens.” The two feathered investments laid eggs to sell, and they bred more feathered investments.

As the money increased, so did Juliette’s investments. She bought a sewing machine and began to make and sell clothes. She bought goats. She bought a solar panel. She bought roofing sheets for the house she plans to build within a year.

And as her investments grew, so, too, did her reputation.

“As I became more involved, I was appointed village agent and I managed to set up a second Village Savings and Loans group,” she said. The new community mobilizer became president of that second association. She convinced her daughter and husband to join as well, and her work in the community-led to a third Village Savings and Loans group.

“Everybody here is in a Village Savings and Loans group,” she said of the 30 members in her immediate community, and a few others in the surrounding area. “Now people can raise animals and send their children to school.”

Juliette is happy for her own success as a businesswoman and as a leader, but she is most happy for her community—especially those who are finally getting recognition as equals.

“In this culture, women are in a lower position in society compared to men,” she said. “Now we are on an equal status and we help each other in everything we do. I encourage the other women to join the association because I don’t want the benefit to be my own. I want the others to benefit from it, too.

“Even now, when I visit other villages, I motivate them to create a Village Savings and Loans association, even if they are not involved in the ASOTRY project,” she added. “I will continue to encourage the women in other villages to create and set up their own association.”



*Top left: Juliette is also a successful chicken breeder thanks to the loans from VSL*

*Bottom left: In her role as Village Agent, Juliette motivates other women to join a VSL group.*



## Literacy

Since many farmers and members of Village Savings and Loans groups had very minimal levels of literacy, thus were unprepared to manage financial transactions on their own, ASOTRY offers literacy classes to community members already participating in an ASOTRY activity.



*Literacy class in Anaody, led by Vero (middle).*

## *More Than Words*

### ***Adult literacy training turns illiterate farmers into confident businesspeople***

It is dark and cool in the room below the house. The students are seated on the floor, their backs pressed against an old wooden bed frame, the bare cement wall, or large sacks of grain.

At the command of his teacher, a man rises from the floor and approaches the chalkboard. He is instructed to complete the two math problems displayed: 6,202 divided by 7; 2,313 multiplied by 3. He navigates the long division with ease; the multiplication even quicker. He takes his seat against a bag of grain as his classmates clap in unison.

His backrest is fitting. After all, it is the grain itself that has brought these men and women here to learn. As they well know, the market is unforgiving for a farmer who is illiterate.



“Literacy training is a program for adults who don’t know how to read, write or do math,” said Vero Hanitritiniaina Antoinette, known as Vero, an ASOTRY literacy teacher and site animator, whose responsibilities include the education of her own students and the students of three other literacy program sites in this region. “We have associations in ASOTRY where it is a big disadvantage for those who don’t even know how to count.”

In a trade consisting of crop varieties, quantities, dates, administrative processes, and sales both piecemeal and bulk, the inability to read, write, or count is an obvious limitation. Illiterate farmers are tricked into bad deals, miss out on good deals, and in general remain stagnant in a fast-moving industry.

And in Anaody village, in Anjoma Commune, it is a common disadvantage.

“We have many illiterate people in the community,” Vero said. “When we have food commodity distribution and the people have to sign, we notice many can’t even sign the form.”

The ASOTRY literacy program offered to change that for any willing to learn.

“I wanted to join the literacy training because I didn’t know how to read or write at all,” said Marie Louise Ravampionona, a 46-year-old mother of six and recent graduate of the seven-month program. “It was my husband who managed everything in my life. When I joined a Village Savings and Loans group I couldn’t even write my name, so I had to ask others to do that. I didn’t like it.”

Those sentiments are the same ones that compel farmers of all ages, both

male and female, to enroll in the program. After years of fear and shame, the adults of this community have chosen a change.

“Before, if they had to go do administrative activities, they were scared,” Vero said. “Now they are not scared. They can fill out forms and write papers and understand easily. The administrative processes are no longer difficult for them. In meetings, they can stand and express their point of view, and in their daily lives they can rely on themselves to go to the market and pursue their daily activities.”

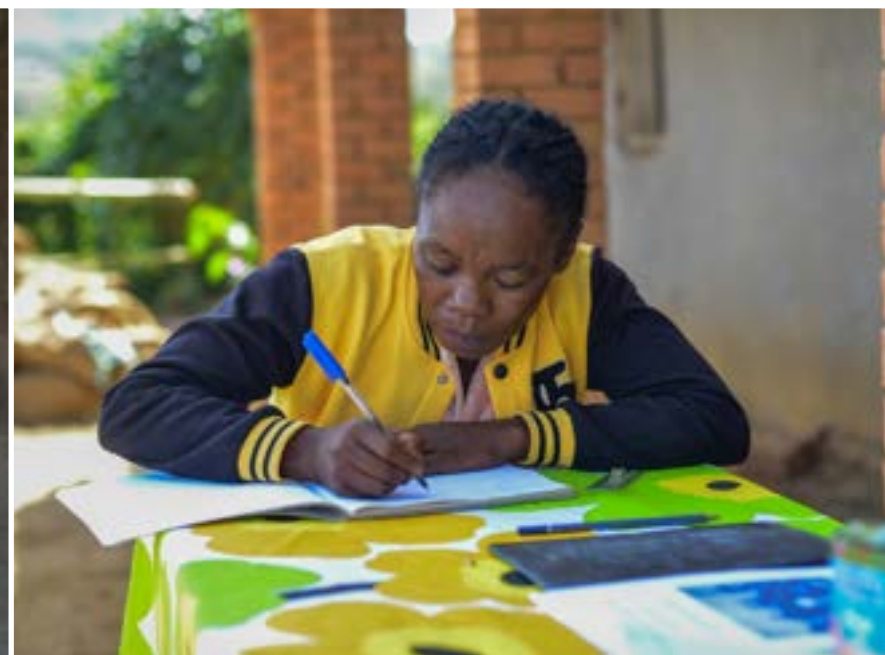
After the math problems are completed, Vero calls on a young mother to go to the chalkboard and write a sentence: Mahay manoratra aho. The woman does so and reclaims her seat to the sound of clapping.

Though the clapping ritually follows each correct answer, it seems especially fitting now. The sentence this young farmer just wrote is the perfect marriage of action and meaning; in English it translates to: I can write.

“I hope the students become models for the community, that their lives improve and that, in turn, they teach the other members of the community,” Vero said. “I even see it taking place now—they have that capacity to teach the others.”

“We thank ASOTRY for this program,” she added. “It is a way for the community to reach development.”

**ASOTRY, a project funded by USAID, has provided literacy classes to 7,013 people like Marie Louise, allowing them to be better equipped to improve their lives.**



*Left: Thanks to the literacy program, farmers can write and do simple math required in the business.*

*Right: Marie Louise is more self-reliant now that she can write.*



## Income-Generation Activity

While members of Village Savings and Loans associations can invest in any Income-Generation Activity that they chose, ASOTRY researched IGA activities and value-chains that offered most potential for Village Savings and Loans participants in the long term. Some members may have chosen to simply get loans to increase their small trading activities, while others have learned about food processing and transformation, or sewing to make or repair clothes, etc.

### *Village Chief Brings Cheese and Change*

#### ***Advanced training introduces community to new food and economic opportunity***

Down a labyrinth of dirt roads, at the end of a cactus-choked path, there is a little village of 300 households. For years, the community of Andohakaolo in Lazarivo, has subsisted entirely on the meager crops and cattle that survived the lean months of drought and famine.

Here, there has never been much more to eat than the staple items: cassava, goat and cow meat when available, and the ubiquitous cactus fruit.

“Famine is an issue in this village,” said village leader Maharo Fitsahara. “Lack of food is the impact of the drought, because we didn’t have good crops. We were suffering from crop failure.”

When ASOTRY field agents came, they trained community members to improve access to their staple crops. But they didn’t stop there. They also introduced a new ingredient to the menu, and a new way to make money: cheese.

Andohakaolo is so far away from anything that it is not hard to believe Maharo when he says, “before ASOTRY, people didn’t even know about cheese.”

Now, the 38-year-old father of eight makes sure everyone in town knows about cheese.

“ASOTRY sent us to Toliara to learn about cheese making, and when I came back here, I applied what the project taught me,” he said of the experience he had with four other members of the community. “This skill is important for me because it allows me to have income. I can sell and eat the cheese.”

Though he is one of only a handful to have the training, he does not harbor secrets to monopolize the market. The village leader is happy to share his knowledge with everyone.

“People are interested in learning,” he said. “If they want to learn from me, I can teach them. It is important to learn new things because it opens opportunities to get income.”

It also opens more opportunities for his family and his community:

“Now I have enough money to meet the needs of my kids, like buying clothes, food, or healthcare. Before, if I had any urgent needs, I had to sell my chickens. Now I don’t have to sell my assets any longer. Everything is different. I make more money from the cheese, and I also have more crops because ASOTRY has taught me better planting techniques.”

“It is much better than before,” he added. “My community won’t be struggling anymore thanks to what we learned in ASOTRY.”

**ASOTRY, funded by USAID, has supported and trained people like Maharo in a variety of Income Generation activities, including cheese making, making oil from peanuts, sewing, making pasta, and crafts, through working with 1,038 Village Savings and Loans groups.**



# Making Cheese with Maharo

**Preparation time:**  
5 minutes

**Cooking time:**  
30 minutes

**Ingredients:**  
½ liter milk  
2 tablespoon vinegar  
Pinch of salt

**Tools:**  
Pot  
Strainer  
Cheesecloth  
Slotted spoon

1.  
Wash your hands  
with soap and water



2.  
Let cool boiled milk



3.  
Place over the heat,  
stir in vinegar until  
milk coagulates



4.  
Remove from heat



5.  
With a slotted  
spoon, ladle  
coagulated milk into  
cheesecloth



6.  
Wrap cloth and  
wring out excess  
fluid



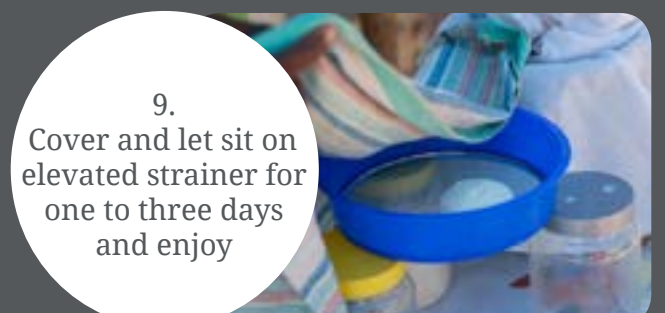
7.  
Transfer cheese onto  
elevated strainer to  
increase airflow



8.  
Shape cheese with  
spoon and add salt to  
taste on both sides of  
the cheese round



9.  
Cover and let sit on  
elevated strainer for  
one to three days  
and enjoy







**COMPONENT 3:**  
Resilience and infrastructure



# Resilience

ASOTRY’s efforts in Nutrition and in Livelihoods can only have positive impact on the population if the people are also prepared to face natural shocks annually recurring in Madagascar. Cyclones, droughts, pest infestations, floods, are all shocks that may destroy a household harvest or even their dwelling itself. ASOTRY works on various aspects to prepare the population to face shocks and to minimize their impact on their livelihoods.

## Simulation

The Disaster Risk Reduction committees regularly organize simulations in which part of the population participates, as a way to teach people how to react in case of an emergency.



## Disaster Risk Reduction Groups

ASOTRY works with community leaders and representatives of the community groups to form Disaster Risk Reduction groups, or DRR, who learn about how to mitigate the effects of shock, for example by combating erosion or by ensuring rapid evacuation of water during a flood, and how to react in the event of a shock, to ensure that the population remains safe. Disaster Risk Reduction groups develop a Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation Plan for their communities, detailing all measures that they commit to take to mitigate shocks and respond in case of emergency.

## Early Warning System

In complement to Disaster Risk Reduction activities, Early Warning System agents are selected in each commune to gather information on market prices and local weather conditions, to inform the local population and the relevant authorities, which include the National Office for emergency response, the weather department and the Chamber of Commerce, so all can follow this information to make decisions on how to be best prepared for a shock.







*Albert, member of the Disaster Management Committee of Belamboa Bas.*

## *Cactus for Cattle*

### ***Villagers in Belamboa Bas plant edible cacti as cattle fodder during drought***

Cacti grow wild in much of southern Madagascar—they blanket the flatlands like giant weeds, their spiny stalks protruding menacingly.

But in the village of Belamboa Bas, in Gogogogo Commune, cacti are anything but a menace. Edible varieties are handplanted in tidy rows just outside of town, and they are the answer to a problem that has plagued the community for decades.

“ASOTRY came to our community to set up a Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) committee and develop a plan to mitigate the impact of our chosen disaster,” said Albert Tanandraza, one of ten leaders in the committee. “We chose to plant cactus trees, because drought is the main disaster in this area. When the dry season comes, the animals don’t have food to eat.”

The 38-year-old father of five knows this all too well. In the lean years of 2011 and 2013, he lost 20 cows to famine.

“I felt really sad and helpless when they died,” he said. “When ASOTRY came, we gathered the community and asked them: ‘what do you think we need in this village?’ We all agreed that we needed to plant the cactus trees because that is what our animals needed.”

Belamboa Bas is like all the villages in this region: cacti grow wild, taking hold in the most unlikely places. But this common variety is not edible for cattle or humans—it is a feature of the landscape, only, not also the diet.



As a result, the entire community came together and spent one month planting 2,000 edible cactus seeds on 4 hectares. The tenacious plant took root in the dry soil and, within one year, was already towering over the villagers.

More importantly, it was filling the bellies of their cattle.

“Before, when the lean season came and the cattle didn’t have food to eat, they became thinner and thinner and they would die,” Albert said. “Now we have enough to feed our cattle during drought. We no longer have cows dying from hunger.”

During the lean months of July to December, members of the community have a surplus of cattle fodder growing just out of town. Accessing food is as simple as taking a wagon, hacking off some stalks and branches, searing the large spiky leaves over a hot flame to remove the dangerous thorns, and feeding the cows and goats the fresh green produce.

“I was personally affected by the loss of my cows, which is why I find it important to be the first to participate in the work,” said Albert, who is unanimously identified by his peers as the most hardworking member of the Disaster Risk Reduction. “I am also happy because my community can find the solution as well.”

**ASOTRY, with the support of USAID, has trained 3,832 Disaster Risk Reduction members in 379 communities, helping them in being ready to face drought, cyclones, floods, fires, as the main threats to their communities.**



*Above: The cacti serve as food for the cattle during drought periods.  
Below: In one month, villagers of Belamboia Bas had planted 2,000 cactus seeds on 4 hectares.*







*Sabosoa, member of the Disaster Committee of Tsimaimpaosa.*

## *Fighting Drought with Weeds*

### ***Villagers in Tsimaimpaosa gather and store grass and weeds for cattle feed***

The village of Tsimaimpaosa, in Belafika Haut Commune, is like all the neighboring villages in this part of Southern Madagascar: it is a small community comprised mostly of mud and thatch huts, it is poor, and between the months of July and December, it is fatally dry.

But it has one significant difference, represented by the clustered piles of leaves, grass, and weeds. When the season is lean, the people and cattle of Tsimaimpaosa are not.

“ASOTRY trained us on how to prepare for disasters,” said Sabosoa, a member of the local Disaster Risk Reduction (DRR) committee. “In case of drought, ASOTRY taught us how to store food for the animals.”

The methods are simple, but lifesaving. For about a week before the season turns hot and barren, community members gather the best vegetation—post-harvest peanut plants, wild grasses, and weeds—and let them dry. Afterwards, they secure them like giant birds’ nests on wooden platforms or in the crooks of trees to prevent rot. For a few weeks, the whole village resembles a bushy, Dr. Seussical, tableau.

But there is nothing silly about these clustered food deposits when July comes.



“We feed the cattle with the grass starting in July because we cannot find any green grass anywhere,” Sabosoa said. “Before, I noticed the cattle didn’t have enough food and they were thin. Now that they have enough food, they are healthy and fat.”

The benefits are obvious. Before the start of ASOTRY, Sabosoa had only two goats. Now he owns 22 goats and six cows. More than just reaping the benefits himself, however, Sabosoa works hard every year to ensure the health and wellbeing of his entire community.

“My role is to motivate the people,” he said. “I gather them and prepare them for disaster. When I find that the weather is getting worse, I tell them how they should collect and gather the grass. There are some people who don’t know the techniques, so I personally go out with them and teach them.”

“I train the people because I myself received training from the project,” he added. “There are 10 of us in the committee and we applied the techniques as soon as we got the training. It was so easy, and the others saw this and came and learned and applied them, too. I find it brings good to the community.”

Sabosoa is right: healthy cattle are definitely good for the community. In this region, people treat cattle the way other cultures treat the stock market. If the investment increases in size, there is elation. If the investment withers away, there is despair.

In Tsimaimpaosa, the investment is booming, with no bust in sight.

“Life is much better now,” Sabosoa said. “I don’t feel stress and I don’t worry about the food for my cattle. Before I used to worry every day and wonder, ‘what are my cattle going to eat?’ Now I can just feed them the grass that I have kept.”

**ASOTRY, funded by USAID, has helped livestock owners like Sabosoa, in training 236 groups of farmers owning goats, sheep, poultry, bee hives or fish ponds.**



*Top right: Leaves and grass are dried on a platform and served to the cattle at the time of drought.*

*Bottom right: Sabosoa is freed from worries thanks to the weeds.*

*Bottom left: Sabosoa’s goats are healthier and fat, now that they have enough food.*





## Natural Resource Management

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ASOTRY also carries a series of Natural Resource Management (NRM) activities in the communities. The complementarity to Disaster Risk Reduction activities is obvious as most shocks in the communities are the result of natural events, which can also be tempered by improved management of natural resources.

### Natural Resource Management training

Disaster Risk Reduction groups are trained in Natural Resource Management and complete their Disaster Preparedness and Mitigation Plan by adding the Natural Resource Management aspects to it. Natural Resource Management activities in the communities can include erosion control, reforestation, water and watershed management, shore protection, and also many improved agricultural techniques such as agroforestry and conservation farming.

### Go Green

To promote adoption of improved practices in Natural Resource Management by the population, ASOTRY held a contest named Go Green, in which communities were selecting Natural Resource Management practices to implement, aiming at getting a "Green" rating.

### Reforestation

In support of Natural Resource Management activities, ASOTRY trained a large number of people and supported them in creating local nurseries, to produce plants that could be used for reforestation. Once plants were old enough, they were transplanted in areas identified in the Natural Resource Management plans as key areas for reforestation, either to contribute to watershed management, or to combat erosion or other function to the benefit of the communities.







## *This Land is Our Land*

### ***Local couple plant trees to fight erosion***

When David and Mary look out across their property, they don't just see rice fields in the valley and acacia seedlings dotting the hillside. They see a rich and green future for their six children and all subsequent generations.

Two years ago, the husband and wife in the agricultural community of Mirarisoa, in Ambalavao District, never imagined such an alternative. They saw only low-yield rice fields and eroded hillsides sloughing soil down into the farms below. They saw a future where their grandkids would continue to toil in the boiling heat and desiccated earth.

"The challenge in this area is the environment is already destroyed," Mary said. "If the erosion continues, it will destroy our rice field in the valley. It will be covered with earth."



When ASOTRY field agents visited Mirarisoa, they saw a community on the brink of environmental collapse. Though the farmers lacked proper farming techniques and business training, and their families suffered from food insecurity, early change needed to start with reforestation. Farmer Field Schools would improve the quality of the rice, but it would not prevent the dry, eroded soil from destroying it.

“When we heard about the objective of the project to fight against food insecurity, we were very interested,” Mary said. “That is one of the issues we face here, and many members of the community were very interested.”

The ASOTRY training began with a wide range of topics related to farming, business, health, and education, but the foundation was always reforestation.

“When the project trained us about tree planting, we were interested because I saw the value for the environment,” David said. “The hills here are already bare, and we saw it would improve the soil. Reforestation protects the soil from erosion and it also helps the management of water. When there are trees, it retains the water.”

David wanted his family to be examples of the value of reforestation. In fact, the 41-year-old father and farmer has wanted to protect the environment ever since he was a boy, but he always lacked proper training and tools.

“I learned about the protection of the environment as a child in school. I have been aware of it for a long time,” he said. “I even tried to plant trees in my field before, but it turns out I was not planting the right type of

tree—eucalyptus dries out the soil, and the project taught us to plant the acacia tree, which is better for the soil because it retains the water under the ground.”

When ASOTRY field agents asked for volunteers to offer their land for reforestation, David and Mary were quick to sign up.

“When the technicians came here, they taught us the bad effect of deforestation on the environment and they asked if some of us were willing to plant seedlings,” Mary said. “We agreed because we are aware of the destruction of the environment.”

Once volunteers like David and Mary were identified, the project provided seedlings, tools, and offered commodity incentives to local tree planters. Within two days, the hillside overlooking David and Mary’s rice field was home to nearly 3,000 acacia seedlings.

The following year, the couple decided they wanted even more trees on their property. Without the support of their community or hired workers, the family of 8 planted 2,500 additional seedlings. It took them one month. “We had to have a very good schedule because we planted the trees and we also had to work in the rice field,” Mary remembered. “We were very tired by the end of the month.”

But the effort paid off: now their hillside has more than 5,000 seedlings that continue to grow. Within five years, they will be about ten meters tall, and the whole hillside will be transformed from the dry, baked brown of the past into a leafy, green forest.



*David and Marie’s acacia plantation, in Mirarisoa village.*



“We are really happy because we have been longing for this to happen for a long time,” David said. “We have been wondering how to make this place green. We never expected to get help, and when the project came, we were really grateful and happy.”

Not only will the valley become more beautiful, it will also become more fertile. Because the acacia trees promote the healthy containment and flow of water, the hillside will be free of erosion, and the water table at the base of the hill and throughout the valley will ensure better and more frequent planting.

“Thanks to the trees, you can have more water and as a result of that you can plant different crops in different seasons,” David said. “Counter season planting as well as normal season planting.”

Mary already sees the difference in her family.

“Now, I notice the food security in our household has improved much,” she said. “My kids are healthier and smarter.”

The difference shows in the community, too. Because of their hard work with ASOTRY, the couple were selected to serve as nursery agents. In this capacity, they produced seedlings in their home nursery and distributed them throughout the community. In the last two years, the pair have produced 407,000 seedlings.

“In Malagasy we have a saying which says if you plant a tree when you

are young, when you are old you will have shelter,” David said. “I hope my grandkids will inherit a good and green environment. They will be able to say, ‘these are what my grandparents planted for me.’”

**As a result of the collaboration between ASOTRY and community leaders like David and Mary, all 32 targeted communes have developed and are implementing Natural Resources Management Plans which include reforestation, fight against forest fires and erosion, protection of rivers, use of natural protection for infrastructures, including the 317 kilometers of rehabilitated road and 3,804 hectares of land irrigated by rehabilitated irrigation projects.**



*Above: David regularly looks after the acacia trees.*

*Below: Mary prepares seedlings for the next tree-planting season.*







## *The Money Trees of Bedia Analalava*

### ***Local nurseryman boosts income with improved techniques***

Jean Bruno has been a nurseryman most of his working life, but he was never particularly successful. He would grow and sell camphor trees, but the meager income from his seedlings forced him to turn to livestock and farming just to support his wife and two children.

Because of his low income, Jean Bruno and his family could not afford to live on their own. Instead, they shared a home with his aging mother and father.

“Before, I lived with my parents,” he said. “My wife and I had always wanted to build our own house, but we didn’t have the means for it.”

In 2016, ASOTRY Field Agents came to Bedia Analalava, in Sahambavy Commune, to provide advanced nursery training to Jean Bruno and all other nurserypersons in the community. They taught which trees were easiest and most lucrative, how to prepare the seedlings for planting, how to set up the plant bed, and how to space, water, and spray the seedlings. In addition to trainings, they also provided seedling bags, watering cans, and regular consultation.

“I received a comprehensive training about nursery management,” Jean said. “Before I did everything on my own, but now I have the support of the project. It is why my business is really thriving.”



The difference is obvious. Before ASOTRY, Jean Bruno could produce and sell no more than 1,500 camphor seedlings. Today, the successful nurseryman produces and sells 30,000 acacia, orange, and eucalyptus seedlings, and Arabica coffee plants. His first sale of seedlings in 2016 earned him 800,000 ariary (\$218 USD). His most recent sale of coffee plant seeds brought in 5,000,000 ariary (\$1,365 USD).

“The first time someone bought the seedlings [in 2016], I realized that it was a very good source of income,” he said. “I discussed with my wife, and we decided to move forward with this.”

Now, Jean Bruno is selling his seedlings directly to local humanitarian agencies—including ADRA—who then distribute the seedlings to the community for their reforestation projects.

The changes don’t stop in the nursery: Jean Bruno has seen improvements in his personal life, too.

“I can buy food throughout the year with the money I earn,” he said. “I could build a new house, and we can provide for our daughter’s education.”

“I thank ASOTRY for providing me with knowledge and training about this nursery activity,” he added. “Life in general is easier than before.”

**Thanks to the work of 501 nursery workers like Jean Bruno, a total of 1,552,858 tree seedlings were planted, covering 1,013 hectares.**

*Below: Jean Bruno could build this house thanks to the sales of seedlings.*





# Infrastructure

In support to Disaster Risk Reduction activities, ASOTRY identified in plans developed by communities, infrastructure projects that could be implemented by them and with the support of the project, to improve access to services, increase agricultural production potential or provide access to water to livestock.

## Food For Work

Once projects were identified, the community worked with ASOTRY to identify beneficiaries of the infrastructure to do the work, and receive food to compensate for the work done (Food For Work). ASOTRY also provided the technical support in the design and in the building of structures needing specialized labor.



## Roads rehabilitation

ASOTRY rehabilitated a number of rural roads between communities within commune in order to improve access to services to the population, for example to the school, to the local health center or to the market, and to increase opportunities to transport local production for its commercialization in regional markets.





# Multi-use water points

More specifically in the southwest where much of the year conditions are dry and access to water is limited, ASOTRY contributed not only to the increase availability of safe water as mentioned in Nutrition and Health, but also contributed to increase access to water for cattle and for small gardening by creating a number of multi-use water points.



*Model of a multi-use water point built in the South West area.*

# Irrigation system rehabilitation

To increase production where irrigation is possible, the project built or rehabilitated irrigation projects, resulting in increasing the number of hectares and the number of farmers able to grow one or even two harvests a year.







## Users Associations

For each of the infrastructure project created or rehabilitated, ASOTRY installed and trained a users' association who will have the responsibility to operate and maintain the rehabilitated structure on the long term. These associations get trained on association life, on technical maintenance, on management and on various topics such as gender and good governance and were encouraged to put in place methods to sustain the operation of the infrastructure there are managing, for example, by creating a user's fee, or by asking members to participate in annual maintenance.







*Daniel and Clovis, members of the Water Committee of Ankazofady.*

## *Villagers and Their Road*

### ***Road User Association provides for the safe transportation of villagers traveling in and around Ankazofady***

Chief Daniel estimates that more than 1,000 people use the roads outside his lowland village of Ankazofady, in Ambohimandroso Commune. Children walk to school, ranchers herd their cows, farmers harvest and transport crops, and mothers go to town to shop.

When the weather is good and the roads are dry, the few kilometers that separate Ankazofady from the next town are easy to navigate. During the rainy season of December to February, however, the roads flood, bridges wash out, and all access is cut off.

For these few, disastrous months, nobody uses the roads.



“When flooding occurred, the community had no more access to facilities,” said Clovis, the ASOTRY Road User Association (RUA) President. “The children could not go to school, the farmers could not transport their crops to the market, the community could not go to other villages.”

Worse than the inability to transport crops was the inability even to access crops. During the worst of the rains, roads in Ankazofady were so bad that farmers could not make the short journey from their homes to their fields. Crops were left to ripen in the field and die.

“Before, the crops stayed in the field for about one month too long and by the time we could get to the crops they were already destroyed,” Clovis said.

Daniel remembers his own misfortunes before ASOTRY brought road repair and maintenance tools and skills to his people.

“Before ASOTRY, my crops were destroyed and the cattle were suffering from shortage of food during the flooding,” he said. “When he was on the road to school, one of my sons even fell in the water and all his school supplies were dumped in and lost.”

When ASOTRY Field Agents came to Ankazofady, they brought the knowledge and resources necessary to make the roads passable all year. Clovis and the members of his RUA learned to level the road down to the bedrock, bevel it for runoff, and widen it to 5 meters and 70 centimeters.

Additionally, they learned how to build up an embankment, dig out drainage ditches every three meters, and build and repair small bridges.

“ASOTRY gave us practical training on the roads,” he said. “Before, when we repaired the road, we just filled in the potholes.”

Now, the members of the RUA dedicate two days every year for maintenance—one in November before the rains, and one in February after—and additional days on an as-needed basis.

“Before the rains come, we clear the road and the surroundings and all the villagers participate with the association,” Chief Daniel said. “The community members also contribute money which we will keep later when we need to do repairs. For example: if the bridge is broken and we need to buy cement, we will repair it with the money people have contributed.”

Because of the hard work of Clovis, Daniel, and all the villagers who commute here, the road is now in pristine condition. Thanks to the knowledge and resources from ASOTRY, it will remain that way.

“I thank the project for their good partnership with our community,” Daniel said. “Thanks to the road, we can overcome some of our challenges.”

**ASOTRY, supported by USAID, rehabilitated a total of 317 kilometers of road over a period of five years.**

*Below: The road rehabilitated by ASOTRY, and a bridge built by the Water Committee.*







**Cross-cutting**



As ASOTRY worked with community groups in Nutrition and Health, in Livelihoods activities and in resilience activities, it included training and promotion of specific aspects contributing to improved association life.

# Gender

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A main pillar in the ASOTRY intervention, the Gender strategy of the project included ensuring that all groups understand the importance of the participation of men, women, youth, elders, and handicapped in the activities of their group. Participants were introduced to the importance of consulting and giving a voice to all entities of their groups in the decision making and in the management of their groups in order to represent all interests of theirs members. The gender strategy also included promoting consultative decision making in the households when it comes to making choices on livelihood and on health of family members. It finally made promotion against gender-based violence in the households and in the communities.







*Clement and his wife Felicia help each other in their small business.*

## *A Village United*

### ***Gender promotion unites the men and women of Soaserana***

For Clement Tovonirina, being the gender animator in his community means many things: working with ASOTRY field agents to build key messages about gender equality; conducting home visits to raise awareness among men about the value of women; organizing town hall meetings with the community to further disseminate information.

Above all responsibilities, however, being the gender animator means Clement is a better husband to his wife, Felicia.

“I have to serve as a model to the other households and show an example to the community,” he said. “The promotion of gender starts with me.”

Gender promotion is not a standalone ASOTRY project, but the connective tissue among all projects. This cross-cutting theme goes wherever ASOTRY field agents go: where there are improved agriculture techniques, there is gender equality; where there are baby weighing stations, there is gender equality; where there are livelihood trainings, Village Savings and Loans associations, and Farmer Field Schools, there is gender equality.

For Felicia, like many of the women in this community, that message of gender promotion means a dramatic shift in household roles and responsibilities.



“Before ASOTRY, no man would fetch the wood or clean the house,” she remembered. “Women did everything—cooking, cleaning, fetching wood and water. But now men are really involved in the household.”

For a culture that has lived for generations by a patriarchal hierarchy, this shift is of no small importance—in fact, it is redefining the way men and women perceive themselves and each other.

Perhaps most encouraging of all is not the fact that men are beginning to promote gender equality, but the ease with which they were convinced to do so. For Clement, the process is ongoing, but the bedrock of the message was formed without resistance. He has seen the willingness with which the men are opening their minds and altering their actions.

“First, I explain to the men what gender is, and I explain what is wrong about the situation: it is as if men consider themselves on a higher level than the women; it is as if they are enslaving their wives,” Clement said. “Then, I make them aware that they should change their behavior and just try and see if their lives will improve if they apply gender equality. When they try it, they start to see the benefit, and really become convinced as a result.”

“Now, the men are really behaving differently,” he added. “There are men going to the market, fetching water, holding the baby while a woman is busy. These things are really remarkable because you would never find that before.”

That same change of perspective has touched Clement himself. Before he learned about gender equality from ASOTRY field agents, the farmer was like all the men in his village: the role of his wife was to cook, clean, and take care of the children. In addition, if a child got sick, or the house needed supplies, it was her responsibility to provide the money.

“Before, men would never contribute toward the expense of the house,” Felicia said of her husband and the other men in the village. “If we had to buy soap or medicine, it was always our money that we paid. As a result, the woman became weak and burdened with worries. We were the ones always worried about how to provide for the family.”

Clement remembers his former mindset.

“Before, if I had work and got money, I would keep it for myself,” he admitted. “Now I come back and say, ‘this is how much I have, how are we going to use it?’”

“There is solidarity within our marriage,” he added. “We make decisions together, and it positively affects everything.”

This positive effect is rippling beyond the borders of Soaserana. Now, people from neighboring communities will visit just to see gender promotion in action, and to ask Clement to advise in their own marital relationships.

Clement is pleased to see how the messages are spreading.

“We should always promote equality,” he said. “If this situation continues, I think the life of the community will continue to improve. There will be more peace and unity.”

**ASOTRY has contributed to promoting gender equality through its work with 2,495 community groups in 32 targeted communes, identifying leaders like Clement, to continue gender promotion in the long term.**



*Left: Clement and his wife Felicia are a model to the other households. Right: Clement seizes every opportunity to raise awareness among men.*



# Good governance

Concepts of good governance were shared in all ASOTRY created groups. Good governance principles include aspects of internal management of the group according to its purpose, for example whether it is meant to become permanent or only to exist for a period. It also includes aspects of representation of the group in the community, and with the local authorities managing its sector of intervention.



Farmers partners of the project are awarded with a certificate of appreciation .

# Sustainability

ASOTRY project has had impacts in all the sectors it carried activities, but for these impacts to be longlasting, the project implemented a strategy involving individual adoption of improved practices, as well as empowerment of community groups in the management of their activities on the long-term. Sustainability of these impacts rest on ensuring that knowledge was acquired, that individual motivation remained high, that resources would be managed to remain available and that links to partners in implementation were created and would remain once the project is over.







*The ASOTRY team organized the “Vitrine ASOTRY” to showcase results of the project in the capital city of Antananarivo, on the 19th and 20th of March, 2019.*

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