



WWF

BAREFOOT
COLLEGE

2015



Barefoot College
Women of Light

Our sincere thanks to the generous contributors who helped make this project a success :

The Indian government, the Indian Embassy in Madagascar,

The Malagasy government, the Ministry of Energy

Barefoot College

WWF International

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Small Grants Programme - UNDP

Open Circles Foundation Private donors

Rural commune of Ambohimana, Vondrozo

Rural commune of Miarinavaratra, Fandriana

Fanantenana and Imaintsoanala Associations

Tsaramandroso Association

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Dear friends and partners,

We took on an extraordinary challenge by starting this rural electrification project. This project reflects both our commitment to the adoption of clean and renewable energies in Madagascar and our trust in women. The training of these seven Malagasy technicians at the Barefoot College in Tilonia India, has been a catalyst for dynamic development within their respective communities.

Upon their return from six months training, the women went beyond their commitment to introduce solar energy in their villages; they inspired in their neighbours the desire to improve living conditions by developing promising projects with sustainable benefits. We put our trust in seven grandmothers and they in turn inspired trust from their communities. This is proof that progress starts from the grassroots level and, when fed with the nutrients of real change and visible benefits, can take root and grow.

WWF's mission as a conservation organization is to preserve natural resources and to stop the degradation of the environment. In Madagascar, where supplies of sustainable energy remain low, the forest is the daily provider for rural households. It is from the forest that people collect what they need to live on and build their homes and futures. These communities are now making efforts to reduce their dependence on natural resources by investing in income generating activities. These initiatives are fruitful and should be supported. By investing in the potential of these communities WWF and its partners support their efforts to build a better future with their own hands. We can change the world together.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Nanie Ratsifandrihamanana'.

Nanie Ratsifandrihamanana,
Country Director, WWF Madagascar.

The opportunity of a lifetime



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These seven grandmothers lived quiet lives in a pair of remote villages in Madagascar. They were all between 40 and 55 years old and, like most Malagasy grandmothers, they lived within big families of children, grandchildren and relatives. The grandmothers were all born and raised in their regions. They had never had the opportunity to leave Madagascar, or even to visit big cities inside the country. For them to go “an-dafy”, or abroad, was a dream beyond reach. Their illiteracy had always been a handicap in their lives. Furthermore, their positions as grandmothers did not allow them to actively contribute to community actions and decisions.

“If I was told that my weaknesses could one day be turned into my strengths, I wouldn’t have understood,” confesses Zafitsiha, smiling.



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When weaknesses become strengths



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In 2012, teams from the Barefoot College and WWF met with the populations of Iavomanitra (Amaron’Imania) and Tsaratàna (Atsimo Andrefana). These two villages were selected for their remoteness, but also because of the dynamism of their communities. “The objective was to find grandmothers willing to be trained to become solar technicians and lead the electrification of their village. They were looking for grandmothers who barely went to school and who did not have responsibilities in the village. It was unusual.” recalls Berthe Razanamahasoia, one of the grandmothers. The selection took a whole day, as the questions and answers kept on coming. “Leaving Madagascar and the family for six months and then coming back as a technician, when before I was only able to write my name! And yet we were selected by our peers, who gave us their blessing.” recalls Dotine.

Discovering, understanding and learning



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The seven grandmothers left Madagascar in March, 2013 to study at the Barefoot College in Tilonia. “We lived with women coming from other countries such as Nicaragua, Niger and the Comoros islands who were all following the same training in solar electrification. Our cultures were so different that we were always amazed,” recalls Dotine. Because students and teachers did not speak the same language the courses were taught using sign language. “The color codes helped us remember the fittings and the necessary steps for the connections,” explains Florette Vonjiniaina. Daily exercises, tests and demonstrations helped participants to master the skills necessary for installation, maintenance and repairs.

“We remain in our communities”



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When the training course ended in August, 2013, news of their return quickly spread in the surrounding region. “People came from everywhere to welcome us. We danced and sang. Our photos were in the papers and radios talked about us,” recounts Lydia. While the grandmothers were in India their villages built workshops where the women could work on the solar systems. Families came to register to receive a solar unit so they could benefit from the electrification project. Each participating household provided a small contribution of 3 000 to 10 000 Ariary to help supply spare parts and cover the salaries of the seven grandmothers, giving the women a job and an income.

“Barefoot College understands the wisdom of training grandmothers. We do not leave our villages and our families to work in big cities. We remain in our communities and pass on our knowledge. We are no longer competing for jobs but we want to share, for the good of all,” says Germaine.

“Trust the women”



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It took the grandmothers two months to equip each household with solar panels. “Some households are only accessible on foot, a day’s walk away,” explains Zafitsiha. “But we managed to visit and to equip all of them. They all have light now.” The lights have changed many lives. Before, families used lamp oil for lighting, which was expensive and polluted air inside the homes with fumes. To save money, they would only use the lamp oil for an hour in the evening. Now, mobile globes and light bulbs light the rooms and villagers can work and study later into the evening.

“It is more than just bringing light to houses. It is providing families with the means to improve their daily living: better health, more time to learn, to begin various craft activities, to have family discussions,” states Florette Vonjiniaina. “The villagers view having light as a sign of development. This motivates them for further progress and to be more modernized. We are inspired by our experience in India, but also by the suggestions and ideas that everyone has to improve our village,” says Zafitsiha. The results of this new motivation are dramatically improved villages: toilets have been built, there are pens for the livestock, kitchens are constructed outside the homes and there is a higher level of hygiene and cleanliness. One village also decided to purchase a television set and a satellite sensor, powered by the solar panels. Now, every Saturday, all the villages and people from the surrounding hamlets come to watch TV reports from around the world. “You can trust women and grandmothers, they can inspire their grandchildren,” says Philomène, her grandson in her arms.



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From left to right:

Lydia Razafndramanana, 52 years, Iavomanitra. Upon returning to her village, she found out that her family had become more involved in community life. She has decided to help her hearing-impaired youngest daughter to continue her schooling.

Berthe Razanamahasoa, 54 years, Iavomanitra. She has opened a small restaurant where she serves traditional dishes to travelers. She decided to apply one good habit she received in India: to vary daily meals.

Germaine Razafndravelo, 55 years, Iavomanitra. She has enlarged her crop fields and her livestock. She now contributes to improving the living conditions of her family. She shares her knowledge learned in India about various ways of cooking foods.

Florette Rasoamampionona, 44 years, Iavomanitra. She has started a new craft activity to support her family.

Zafitsiha, 50 years, Tsaratànana. Upon her return to Madagascar, Zafitsiha proved to be a passionate and engaged leader within her village. Her peers listen to her and she has now become one of the most influential people within her community.

Dotine, 42 years, Tsaratànana. She is now advocating for hygiene and cleanliness within her village, by applying the lessons and teachings that she received from the Barefoot College. She mobilizes mothers in her village to educate children in cleanliness.

Philomène, 52 years, Tsaratànana. She has returned to school, with her grandchildren. Eager to learn and to write, she also encourages the parents in her village to help their children pursue an education. She is a model for the young women of her association, whom she supports in their professional projects.

Madagascar and Western Indian Programme Office

Conservation

WWF has 4 priority conservation landscapes in Madagascar

Vision 2050

Madagascar uses 100% renewable energy sources



Protected areas

10% of Madagascar's surface is under protection

Rural electrification

2 pilot villages have been using solar energy since 2014



Why we are here

To stop the degradation of the planet's natural environment and to build a future in which humans live in harmony with nature