

SUCCESS STORIES

Benefits of dialogue opportunities, as per Soamana

Soamana's life was doomed. In her community, woman should not speak in public. Thus, as a female head of household, she has learnt to be silent whatever her problems. Soamana, a woman head of family was among women participating in the group discussion during the gender analysis in the Fokontany of Marohanka I, Commune Andemaka.

Soamana earns her living by making mats that she sells in the marketplace every Wednesday, the village market day. Thus, not only is Soamana a single mother, but she nurtures with difficulty her four children. Because of her status, she did not expect respect and consideration from her peers. She is 44 years old now and has never felt heard.

After the group discussion, Soamana expressed her joy: "I thank the RANO WASH project for having consulted me on this discussion panel. This is the first time someone asked my opinion on my daily life. It is very encouraging to have this opportunity to share everyday concerns. I hope that RANO WASH will provide us more occasions to discuss and to exchange our problems, especially relating to women's and children's well-being. It will allow us to feel more confident and to provide advices among ourselves. »



Raising awareness on girls and women issues during menstruation

Discussing menstrual hygiene in Madagascar is not very common especially in rural areas. Speaking about it publicly is still considered as a taboo in many families and communities, and it is often tagged as a women-only topic. However, this silent treatment and avoidance create issues that threaten the well-being of many girls and women. Indeed, women and girls' needs related to their periods are rarely considered in households as well as in larger communities and institutions, such as schools or health centers. There are even remote localities where women must leave temporarily their households during their periods, because they are not considered "clean". In many cases, girls and women use different means for protection during their periods, and these range from used rags, leaves to nothing at all. This situation is very challenging for these girls and women, and a teenage girl confesses shyly: "*I pretend to be sick when I have my period, because I do not want to risk having bloodstains on my clothes and to be embarrassed by the boys in my class*". How many school days will this young girl miss, just because she regularly has her periods? In other cases, using inappropriate means as period protection, combined with limited access to good hygiene can cause diseases. Hygienic pads are not affordable, because they are expensive. They are not always available, especially in rural areas.

RANO WASH, funded by USAID, as a project aiming to improve health, nutrition and environment through WASH activities, decided to address menstrual hygiene in its core activities through mass communications, group discussions, households visit and peer discussions. RANO WASH is among the few institutions that have dared to publicly address this topic, despite the seemingly cultural barriers related to it in Malagasy rural communities. However, the first feedbacks from the communities and stakeholders are quite interesting, and a bit unexpected.



During the International Women Day celebration, RANO WASH participated in the event by working closely with girl scouts who are familiar with reaching out to young girls on many topics including menstrual hygiene. Their experiences on open discussion with girls and women were leveraged to create animated discussions on the topic, and the assistance were unanimous to agree that it is important to discuss this topic, and that this is a real issue that all women go through but none dares to raise.

RANO WASH is also working with potential providers to improve the access of rural girls and women to better protection. Recently, RANO WASH has established potential partnership with Days for Girls, an international NGO that provides reusable pads. Those pads are made with soft cotton tissues to make them comfortable, are padded with absorbing material, and are delivered with underpants. RANO WASH plans to have local providers to produce similar products to make them available and affordable in rural areas. RANO WASH is studying the shape and type of materials appropriate as washable pad model for rural women that they can sew themselves.



The Minister of Public Health and even the Madagascar President praised those initiatives as important and innovative to be scaled up.

Dr Alain Randriamaherisoa, Chief of Party of RANO WASH explains how much this issue is important to the project:



“RANO WASH is proud to be among the projects that make breakthroughs in this field. We know how much it is important for women and girls to be understood, and that their needs are met. RANO WASH is ready to bring its resources and its expertise to help them through their periods.”