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SUCCESS STORY

TAHINJANAHARY Hortensia : a young minor who finances her education by joining her village's savings and loan group



At only 16 years old, Tahinjanahary Hortensia has found a way to finance her studies through her entrepreneurial skills and by joining the village savings and loan association Fitiavana

Hortensia is a girl and a minor, only 16 years old. She was almost expelled from school several times because of financial difficulties. However, she did not give up and looked for a solution. So, she joined the Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) Fitiavana in Andonabe, in the Fitovinany region.

The Village Savings and Loan Association (VSLA) is composed of 13 to 25 members. The village agents trained by the USAID-funded RANO WASH project are the creators. Andonabe currently has 25 savings and loan groups. In the case of VSLA Fitiavana, it was created in 2020. The association participates in various activities and encourages each member to start or expand a business to improve their income.

As for Hortensia, the fundamental objective of joining VSLA Fitiavana is to find a way to finance her studies without depending on her grandmother. However, in the beginning, Hortensia borrowed money from her grandmother for her membership fees in the association. She paid about 1,500 ariary per week for three months, for 18,000 ariary.

A member can borrow three times her membership fee, so Hortensia borrowed 54,000 Ariary after three months of saving. With the amount borrowed, she first bought chickens and raised them. She then sold the eggs and chicks. The profits from the sale allowed her to pay back her grandmother's money and that of VSLA Fitiavana. In addition, she was able to develop her chicken farm. The results are incredible, touching several elements, notably the economy, education, social, water, sanitation, and hygiene.

Young entrepreneurial girl

Thanks to her entrepreneurial skills, even at a young age, Hortensia is in her 4th year of college if she was about to be expelled in her first year. Her ability to use the money she borrowed from VSLA Fitiavana has allowed her to pay her school fees of 25,000 Ariary per month for almost three years now. Also, she takes care of her body and health by buying herself hygiene products such as sanitary napkins for her menstruation and soaps to wash herself and her things.

«Joining VSLA Fitiavana is a path to self-reliance. I want to invite girls and young people of my age to do the same and not always depend on parents,» testifying Hortensia with pride. Now, she has ambitions to expand her small business and hire full-time employees to devote herself to her studies until university and reach her goal of becoming a midwife one day.

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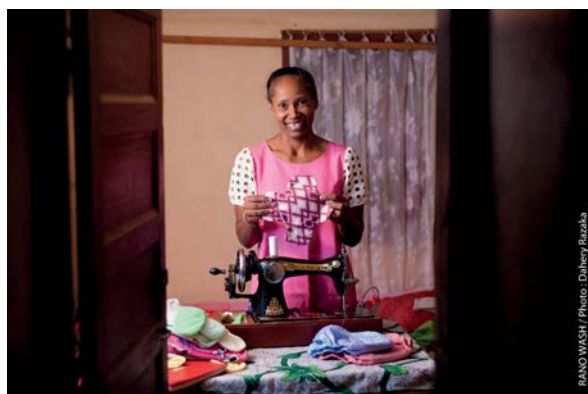


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RAKOTONINDRINA VOLAFARIVO : A woman with reduced mobility but autonomous and a leader at the same time



RANO WASH / Photo: Dabney Ruzaka

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At an early age, Vola fell down the stairs and has since become a woman with limited mobility. It is difficult, but she has made a living by getting involved in water, sanitation, and hygiene. With goodwill, confidence, and determination, anything is possible.

«Do not become a burden to the family and community.» This motto of the Association of Handicapped Women of Madagascar (AFHAM) was the goal that inspired Vola in her life long before she joined this association. From a young age, Vola was convinced that work would be the only way to achieve this goal. So she worked so hard to succeed in her studies.

However, she had to drop out during her second year of university in computer science due to a lack of funds and money. Fortunately, she was recruited as a polyvalent technician in a pharmacy in Fianarantsoa. After 14 years of service, this company had to fire a hundred staff, including Vola, due to a technical problem.

This situation was a great disappointment for Vola, and she felt discriminated against during her search for a new job. Many companies responded to her application but hesitated to hire her when they saw a woman with crutches coming in during interviews. «I am sure I have the experience, but people are still reluctant to work with disabled people,» she says.

So Vola was unemployed for several months before finding training in cutting and sewing for people with disabilities with the Ministry of Population, Social Protection and Promotion of Women (MPPSPF). This was the door that led Vola into washable sanitary napkin making. Indeed, she stood out from the other apprentices by the quality of her work and her leadership skills during her training. The trainers also noticed her qualities and skills. As a result, the MPPSPF recommended that she be trained in sewing washable sanitary napkins by the USAID-funded RANO WASH project.

A good marketer and job creator

To ensure the sale of its products, Vola has designed a good sales and marketing strategy by targeting people who are sick, in hospital and with reduced mobility. This does not prevent others from consuming them as well.

It offers several product lines such as diapers for adults, children, and babies, and several types of washable sanitary napkins. Since the era of the coronavirus, Vola also sews washable masks (mouth covers). An item costs between 3,000 and 6,000 Ariary. At the beginning of her career, she sold about 100 products per month, and today she sells an average of 600 pieces per article.

The promotion of these products was effective due to her integration into



RANO WASH / Photo: Dabney Ruzaka

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the Association of Handicapped Women in Madagascar (AFHAM). She is the president of this association in Ambositra, where she lives. She regularly shares her experiences in this association, spread over 19 sites. Several of these women are hired to make products to fulfill orders. These products are then sent to each site so that other women with reduced mobility can resell them and make a profit.

Inspirational leader

Thanks to her ambitions and skills, she has become a professional seamstress. USAID's RANO WASH project has recruited her as a trainer, and other organizations occasionally call on her to share her experiences. Vola's life is unique with all its successes and difficulties, but the courage she has had to face them all is enormous. She is recognized as a leader and autonomous woman at the same time. That is why on March 7, International Women's Rights Day, she was selected to share her story with the First Lady of Madagascar and reached thousands of people.

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RASTA : A local mason who built an inclusive sanitary block



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Father of four children, Rakotoarisoa Jean Clarel, known as Rasta, is 45 years old. He is a mechanic by training, but his dynamism and versatility have made him land in the construction of latrines. On this subject, he has already worked with various organizations. Afterward, his skills were reinforced through training provided by the RANO WASH project, funded by USAID. Currently, he has become a trainer of local masons. At the same time, he provides several offers such as the sanitary block in the College of General Education (CEG) and Public Primary School (EPP) Andonabe, Fitovinany region, where he lives.

Inclusive touch

Rasta knows how to combine his achievements with his innovative side. At the beginning of this year, the ACCESS Project related to Water Sanitation and Hygiene and funded by the French Development Agency (AFD) entrusted him with the construction of a sanitary block at the College of General Education (CEG) and Public Primary School (EPP) Andonabe. Thus, Rasta has built an inclusive and ergonomic infrastructure by paying attention to the needs of all users, especially those with reduced mobility.

Five students with disabilities, including four girls and one boy, attend the Public Primary School (EPP) and College of General Education (CEG) Andonabe. Rasta has already seen these students during the visit to the premises. Hence the idea to adapt the infrastructure to everyone.

The sanitary block has two compartments, one for girls and one for boys. Each cubicle has a toilet with two English chairs and two latrines with a sanplat floor, a shower, and a hand-washer with three taps. Upon entering the facility, a tactile guide strip assists the visually impaired in the restrooms, showers, and hand washing area. In addition, there is a ramp with a slight incline instead of stairs. This facilitates access for people with reduced mobility such as wheelchairs or crutches. Once inside, support bars help people with disabilities relieve themselves independently and comfortably. Within 60 days, Rasta mobilized his team to complete the construction properly.

«I am happy to create work for others and see that these students with disabilities can easily use this toilet block,» says Rasta.

A real job

Rasta has worked as a mason since 2020. He tries to vary his offers and prices for latrine construction according to the preference and means of his clients. For example, a simple pit latrine costs 67,000 Ariary, a latrine with a siphon costs 75,250 Ariary, and an ecosan latrine costs 105,000 Ariary.

Rasta believes that these prices correspond to the purchasing power of the inhabitants of his region and allow him to make a profit. In addition, he



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sometimes offers a payment facility. One example is the exchange of latrine manufacturing services for local products. For example, he builds a free latrine for those who find two or more clients for him. With about 5 latrines built per month, Rasta is satisfied with the money he earns. «One of my greatest joys in this business is that I was able to finance the education of all my children until they graduated from high school. Now, my three sons are still in college in the big cities,» he said.

Rasta is proud to participate in the zero open defecation challenge through the construction of latrines. Currently, Rasta receives up to ten orders per month which is far more than his production capacity. He is solicited by both individuals and companies and would like to recruit and train a permanent staff. With this in mind, he aims to set up his business formally.

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