

Community Fights For Clean Water in Madagascar

Ms. Pulchérie, a single mother of three young children, led a typical household in the village of Talatamaty in Madagascar. For the 2,000 villagers living in about 300 homes, raising cattle and rice cultivation are the main sources of income.

In the recent past, waste water poured into rice paddies and polluted the communal stream from which the villagers drank. As a result, the population was plagued by illness and death from food and waterborne illnesses such as typhoid and diarrhea. Like many of her fellow villagers, Ms. Pulchérie believed that her illness came from the polluted water. When Ms. Pulchérie died after a long illness, the villagers were inspired to take action to change their community.

FIHEZAMA, a local youth sports association, responded to the community's discontent over Ms. Pulchérie's death and mobilized the community around the water issue. Despite the community's desire and motivation to bring about change, however, locals did not have the skills or knowledge to improve their situation. When Ms. Haja Irma, the leader of FIHEZAMA, learned that USAID was promoting civic education in her community, she jumped at the chance to include FIHEZAMA's participation in the program.

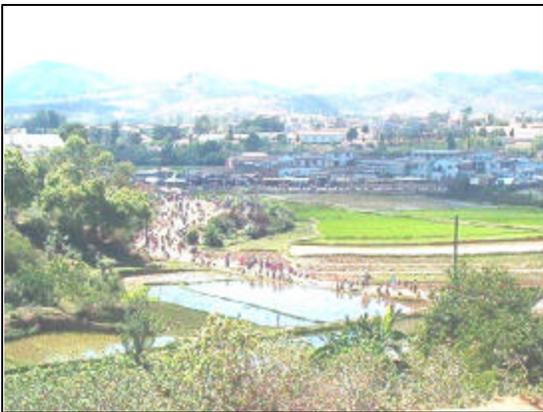


Photo: USAID/Madagascar

The village of Talatamaty and surrounding rice paddies

Through its pilot civic education program, USAID provided training to FIHEZAMA and other youth associations on how to promote civic education in their community. Participants found that community-based training approach – based on a clear step-by-step process – was well designed to serve their objectives. After receiving USAID training, FIHEZAMA met with community leaders to identify key public issues, determine past efforts to address them, and develop a future plan of action.

Supported by technical assistance provided by USAID, FIHEZAMA first sensitized the population of Talatamaty about the advantages of village sanitation, waste disposal, and well water protection. The information campaign was followed by concrete actions to change the physical environment. Initially, FIHEZAMA worked on these issues alone, but little by little, the population of the village joined the cause.

Changes soon occurred - wells produced potable water, the village became cleaner, and the number of waterborne diseases decreased tremendously. Prior to the mobilization effort carried out by FIHEZAMA, the community of Talatamaty did not have access to a single clean water source. Now the residents gather their drinking and cooking water from twenty-five wells throughout the village.

In order to build on the results obtained and the positive community spirit, FIHEZAMA contacted the local utilities company to request public lighting and water sources in Talatamaty. FIHEZAMA'S efforts led to the installation of electrical lights.

Other associations, led by the local Catholic church, joined the FIHEZAMA development effort by building fire hydrants for the village. Villagers have also formed a committee to monitor and follow-up on Talatamaty's development activities. Thanks to USAID support and the local initiative, the population of Talatamaty has seen a massive change in their community. Inspired by Ms. Pulchérie, her children and the other villagers can now enjoy cleaner water, fewer diseases, and a better quality of life.