

## Village development programme in Madagascar for vanilla farming communities

Vanilla is an iconic spice sourced in Madagascar where it is grown mostly by smallholder farmers, many of which live in the island's Sava region. Here, the Givaudan Foundation has been supporting 32 villages of vanilla producers since 2014 with projects benefitting up to 17,000 villagers. In this article we highlight some initiatives that aim to increase food security and access to education in vanilla producing communities.

### System of Rice Intensification as a mean to increase food security

In the vanilla villages producers depend on their own rice fields for family nutrition. As a result of population growth in the Sava region, a rising number of forest areas around the villages are being cleared for subsistence production. Families without access to additional land find themselves at risk of facing a situation of food insecurity.

Intensifying rice production in a sustainable way has become a key component to tackle this issue. To help vanilla farmers in adjusting their production techniques, training and coaching have been developed and delivered whereby farmers learn to apply a combination of measures following the System of Rice Intensification (SRI) and the benefits of such a method are explained to them. In 2019, 799 farmers supported by the project cultivated rice applying these methods. In total, the fields gave the farmers an overall yield of 17 2 tons of rice on an area of 45 hectares.

In addition, the promotion of SRI methods has reduced farmers' use of slash-and-burn cultivation techniques helping to conserve forest resources. Thanks to the use of compost and organic fertilizer the SRI practices also have a positive impact on soil fertility and lead to a reduction of greenhouse gas emissions.

Sinège, villager of Morafeno (Madagascar), who has been cultivating rice applying SRI methods since 2016, explains: *"On my plot of 4 ares, I harvested 300kg of rice in 2019. This is double the amount I used to harvest before receiving support from this project".*



Vanilla farmer Sinège (on the left) in front of his field, on which he cultivates rice following the System of Rice Intensification (SRI)

Arsène Arthur from the village of Ambo dimatsiko has achieved an even more impressive yield thanks to SRI cultivation techniques: *"On my plot of 3,2 ares, I managed to produce 600kg of rice for my family in 2019"* he says.



Vanilla producer Arsène Arthur, standing in his rice field, explains to a local representative of the rural development project how he is implementing the techniques he learned in SRI trainings.

## Initiative of a remote village community to build a school

The reinforcement of the education infrastructure is an essential stepping stone for the training of the young generation in order to give them the knowledge and assets to further contribute to local economic development. The villagers recognize and value the importance of educating their youth for the future of their communities, and many of them volunteer to take part in the schools construction for their children.

Nevertheless, following a severe storm that caused a school building established by the community to collapse, classes had to be held in a church and the teachers did their best to teach in this improvised setting. This situation unfortunately lasted for several years and it was clear for the village's elders that this situation could not be sustained. They took the initiative to formulate a request to the rural development program management team to receive support in building a new school that would be used by the village and several surrounding ones, all of which are in a remote location and difficult to access.

Andry, rural development project manager, explains the interactive planning process for the school construction after the team had received the request from the community:

*"The analysis of the request received from the village took us several weeks. Several steps had to be followed including the visit of the village and discussion with the villagers to estimate their motivation to be actively involved in the construction. This process is very important because while the project team will accompany the villagers in the realisation of their development projects, the villagers remain the owners of all activities to be carried out."*

Andry further details: *"In the photo, you can see us on the way to the village. It was a six-hour journey from Antalaha by car, motorcycle, dugout canoe and finally on foot. The trail was more or less practicable. After arriving at the*

*village, we held a meeting with the Tangalamena (the elders of the village)".*



*Andry and his team on their way to a meeting with the community to discuss the school construction project*

Soon after reaching the agreement with the community, the works began.



*Community members working together to prepare the site for the construction of the new school.*

The agreement with the community to cooperate on building the school was signed at the beginning of April 2019. By the end of October 2019, the first classes had been held in the new building. This type of initiative has been supported by Givaudan since 2010 and since 2014 by the Givaudan Foundation and is a perfect example of the power of local communities that can be revealed in such projects.