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Questions and Answers

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Political upheaval



Background rivalry

Protest against Madagascar's President, Marc Ravalomanana, built up to a national takeover bid in January 2009 by opposition leader Andry Rajoelina - a media magnate and former disc jockey elected mayor of the capital in December 2007. Two months of turmoil followed, culminating in Ravalomanana handing power to the military, which then supported Rajoelina in installing himself in the president's offices in March.

A wealthy businessman, known as the self-made millionaire who started out by selling yoghurt off the back of

a bicycle, Ravalomanana was democratically elected in 2002 and reelected in 2006. He opened the country to foreign investments, notably in the mining and oil sectors, and his actions triggered protests on the grounds that he was enriching himself at the expense of the population. In particular, his decision last year to lease a vast area of Madagascar to South Korea's Daewoo, along with spending millions of dollars on a private jet, would seem to have contributed substantially to the takeover by the opposition.

History repeats itself? A parallel with the 2002 political crisis

As in 2002, when President Didier Ratsiraka was challenged by the capital's mayor Marc Ravalomanana, this year President Ravalomanana was defied by the capital's mayor Andry Rajoelina. In both cases Madagascar saw several months of political upheaval and resultant disruptions to national services, with the challenger declaring himself president but not being recognised as such by the incumbent leader. In both cases free, democratic elections as well as power-sharing have been emphasised as key priorities by the international community in pushing for a peaceful resolution to the conflicts.

However, some important differences are to be noted: first, elections were not held this year and the opposition leader is under the minimum age of 40 years old required by the constitution for a Malagasy president.

Much as in 2002, pressure from the African Union (AU) and the international community has been brought to bear on the political deadlock, with representatives and delegations struggling to get Madagascar's political leaders to meet to discuss and resolve the situation.

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A breakthrough has finally come (August 2009) via mediation efforts by the Southern African Development Community (SADC) led by former president of Mozambique, Joaquim Chissano. Rajoelina and Ravalomanana took part in discussions which also involved former presidents Ratsiraka and Albert Zafy, reaching an agreement to install a transitional 'unity' government, give amnesty to former presidents Ravalomana and Ratsiraka, and hold presidential elections within 15 months.

Azafady's action: a new collaboration with UNICEF and WFP

This breakthrough will hopefully hold and be duly followed by releases of the \$600 million development aid for Madagascar frozen in the course of the deadlock. During this period, to date, only a limited amount of essential humanitarian aid has got through to support the Malagasy people.

Although the upheavals seen in the capital did not extend to southeast Madagascar to interrupt Azafady's activity in the region, through disruptions to national services, etc., the national political situation has in various ways negatively impacted on those communities Azafady works with, who live in this part of the island in extreme poverty.

Azafady staff first voiced their concerns with local health centres, the National Nutritional Office and UNICEF

about the threat of famine in December 2008. Babies and children, who were being regularly weighed as part of Azafady's successful EU-funded Project Votsotse focused on improving nutrition and health, were critically malnourished and unable to gain weight due to increasing food shortages. Natural disasters pushed the country deeper into crisis through the first months of 2009. Poor rainfall in January delayed crop planting; drought in southern Madagascar led to widespread famine; three cyclones in the first half of 2009, including the devastating Tropical Storm Jade, besides killing people outright and leaving thousands homeless, affected some 120,000 people, as by floods resulting in lost agricultural production. The ongoing political turmoil has generated great additional strains on health, education and natural resources, and many vulnerable families are now struggling to provide food, clean water or healthcare for their children.

With drought, cyclones and political instability combining to exacerbate already scarce food supplies, it was estimated in April that 2.5 million people needed immediate aid. The most recently established UNICEF statistics prior to this specified that nearly 120 out of every 1,000 children born in Madagascar would die before their fifth birthday, 40% of children were chronically malnourished, and 13% suffered from acute malnutrition. According to UNICEF, the effects of climate change are more and more prominent in Madagascar with the average annual rainfall falling from 111

ml to a mere 27.5 ml in the last 20 years. Consequently, droughts are now the norm – along with malnutrition among thousands of children throughout the affected area.

In an attempt to alleviate the crisis, Azafady joined forces with UNICEF, the World Food Programme (WFP) and the Malagasy Ministry of Health to provide emergency food aid across the worst hit regions in the south, from Mahatalaky to Ambosary regions. As a result, through an early warning system and with the help of community volunteers, UNICEF estimates that 80% of malnourished children in the drought-affected regions have been reached. Targeting pregnant and nursing mothers, 16 members of staff from Azafady's Project Votsotse, Sustainable Livelihoods and Community Agents schemes took part in the initiative. It is estimated that 5,600 people, including malnourished children and their families, benefited from the distribution of flour, oil and other food. It's a strong testament to our effectiveness as a small organisation that Azafady was asked to assist the United Nations in distribution of food aid and ended up covering some 40% of the total distribution deemed necessary for the region.

At time of writing, Azafady is watching with optimism as the peace deal just brokered appears to be holding, focusing respect between the parties directly involved and gaining ground through international acknowledgement – paving the way to better conditions for the Malagasy people and for organisations across the island working with them.



Project Sekoly



Project Sekoly is now entering its 3rd year and is still going strong. With four schools being built every year in isolated villages, the fruits of Azafady's work will enable over 18,000 of Madagascar's most impoverished children to attend primary school over the next decade, to help them break the cycle of poverty. A Pioneer helping

to build a school in the remote village of Agnena had this to say about the project:

"Building a school in Agnena was eye-opening, rewarding and utterly, utterly magical... The enthusiasm for the school and what we were doing was also wonderfully obvious from the children. They watched and joined in with sanding or painting at break-times and we became friends with many of them: their singing and dancing welcomed us on our first day and continued throughout our stay... The school stands proud now, and so do I."



Project Salama



Project Salama has now completed the end of its current phase with great success, providing sustainable health and sanitation solutions to more than 10,000 of Madagascar's most vulnerable people. Activities in Mahatalaky and the surrounding Communes have focused particularly on empowering women in understanding the link between poor sanitation and infant mortality, whilst simultaneously providing the sanitation infrastructure to support this knowledge and meet the demand arising with it. Fun-filled and informative games

sessions were held at several of the local primary schools, engaging hundreds of children in activities that highlighted the importance of good hygiene and sanitation practices in daily life, with volunteers from our Pioneer Volunteer Scheme leading the children in rousing song and dance! With the results in from our comprehensive evaluation of the project, Azafady are now in the process of expanding Salama to reach more vulnerable communities in the area, providing them with life-saving skills and services.

News from London

Some of you may be wondering what happens on the UK side of Azafady – the office, though small, is always a hive of activity!

We have had several volunteers in the London office over the last few months doing fantastic work promoting our volunteering programmes and helping raise vital funds for the organisation. In particular, we have been working on a Corporate Engagement programme to encourage businesses to participate in our volunteer programmes and, in doing so, gain essential team building skills whilst enjoying a welcome break from the office. If you think your company would be interested in learning more about these opportunities then please get in touch.

On September 10-11th Azafady will be showcasing at the Business Design Centre in London at the annual Forum 3 event – a great opportunity to come and find out about different volunteering and work opportunities. If you are around, come and say hi – it would be great to have some past volunteers on hand to talk to visitors about their experiences.

From January 2010, we are pleased to launch the exciting new Azafady Conservation Programme which will incorporate all aspects of our conservation work, replacing and widely expanding on our current Lemur Venture scheme. The idea of the new programme is to offer 2 week 'modules' which can be put together to create a unique volunteering

opportunity in areas such as Lemur Study, Flora and Fauna Research, Construction, Environmental Education and Reforestation. Volunteers can combine the various modules to optimise on their interests and experience. For more details please contact info@azafady.org

We are always keen to hear from anyone interested in volunteering either in Madagascar or the London office. As well as our volunteer programmes, we have longer term opportunities in project development and English teaching. If you are interested, please get in touch with mark@azafady.org



Lisa Bass, Azafady's Director of Programmes and Operations in Madagascar was also a Pioneer Volunteer in October 2007. Taking time out from her hectic schedule she talks to us about working for an NGO.

• What is your role at Azafady?

It's twofold - to build organisational and individual capacity. Sounds grand but all it really means is to put in place an organisational structure, one that best suits the work that we do. And to work alongside staff to build their confidence and skills in order that they can manage the bigger project grants that Azafady is now attracting, and understand and work with the needs of western donors.

• How did you originally get involved with Azafady?

I was a Pioneer in 2007 and for part of this I worked in the office. It was interesting to see how quickly Azafady was moving from being a small organisation to a much larger one.

From the moment I went to the airport to catch the plane home after finishing as a Pioneer I knew that I just wanted to be back in Madagascar. I gave myself a month to make sure that this wasn't just a bad case of holiday blues. I returned four months later to work on policy development in order that we had the underpinning policies and procedures in place that would provide a framework for the project work. Then in December the job of Director of Programmes and Operations came up and I applied.

• What do you see as being your biggest challenge working for an NGO in Madagascar?

The fact that everything that you do has far more real consequences than back in the UK. In the UK I was working for the Red Cross supporting people through some of the worst times they would have and I could still go home at the end of the day and know that people would be OK. Here every decision you make has such an impact on the people that you work with that the responsibility you hold is much greater. This was particularly true during the political crisis when we were trying to assess whether to continue with Pioneer and Lemur Venture - you know that the wrong decision to bring them could result in them being placed in danger and the adverse publicity from this could close Azafady, yet to not bring them if we could ensure their safety would mean a loss of income that also could close Azafady. The impact this would have on the staff in losing their jobs at a time when unemployment was increasing as construction of the mine was completed and international aid was being withdrawn from other NGOs could have been devastating. In the Red Cross I knew whatever decisions we took I would wake up the next day and the Red Cross would still be there..... there were times when I wasn't so sure that Azafady would be.

• How do you keep yourself entertained in the evenings and weekends?

This area of Madagascar is stunning and even in the town there are amazing beaches (who could forget Libanona) and the countryside around from St Luce and Evatra and into the mountains is breathtaking. There are always people heading off somewhere so camping trips and day trips are part of life out here. The team from the office and friends in town are all very much of the same mindset, so evenings spent over a glass of beer in a bar and nights around each others' houses ensure that evenings and

weekends are pretty busy.

• If you could have anything sent over from the UK what would it be and why?

Simply a parcel is amazing - it doesn't matter what's in it!! In terms of the ideal parcel I don't think it's changed much from what we used to dream about as Pioneers - cheese, chocolate, anything to spice up the food, warm socks, wine, good soap, DVDs. And I would definitely have friends and family deliver it. It's really special to be able to show other people the place where you have made home and share what makes Madagascar so amazing.

• With more than 17 years experience working in the charity sector and now working for an NGO, what advice would you give anyone thinking of working overseas for an NGO?

Do it! But don't just jump in at the deep end without really knowing at least the kind of area that you want to work in as this could be a huge waste of time and money and you could end up somewhere you really shouldn't be. One way of doing this is to take part on a volunteer programme. I'm keen to extend upon Azafady's internship programmes that are available with both Lemur Venture and Pioneer, which have proved popular with our American volunteers. I'd like to set up an internship programme that can give people the opportunity to work with us for 3-12 months in a safe environment where they can start to work with some of the projects and think about which of the areas they are interested in pursuing as a career when they leave Azafady. This way Azafady benefits from their time and skills and they get to test out whether they want this as a career and gain valuable experience for their CV that will put them ahead when applying for jobs.

Have you been on one of Azafady's volunteer programmes that inspired you to change your career or life? We'd love to hear from you at mark@azafady.org