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The Women's Associations of Andavadoaka and Lamboara, South West Madagascar



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“I’m not married, and I don’t fish” says Clarice, 33 (pictured right) from Andavadoaka who has three children aged 2, 14 and 7. “But being a member of the Women’s Association means that I can earn some money for myself by selling my embroidery.”

Clarice lives in a tiny hut just above the high tide line on the beach in Andavadoaka, southwest Madagascar. There is just enough room for a bed, a small rickety table and some wooden chairs to sit on. The walls of the hut are in severe need of repair, large holes are covered with large pieces of cardboard to keep the wind and the sand out. Clarice has big hopes for the future. In the long term, she’d like to have a stall of her own to sell her embroidery to visitors and tourists. But in the short term, her ambitions are more humble – to repair her hut. As a single mother with three children, the opportunities to earn enough money to put towards the repairs were extremely limited until relatively recently. However, Clarice is an able seamstress, and thanks to the collaboration between Blue Ventures and the Women’s Association of Andavadoaka she is now able to earn a small income from selling her embroidery to the volunteers and staff of Blue Ventures.

Structure of Women’s Association

In July 2008, the Women’s Association had 46 full members, who each pay a monthly membership fee of 100 Ariary. This fee goes into the communal account of the Women’s Association. The organisation has a formal structure, with a President (currently Madame Ziza, 42) and a Treasurer (Janet Omega, 24). As the nearest bank is 50 km away in the town of Morombe, the association does not have its own bank account, and all money must be held physically. The association meets regularly.

Blue Ventures’ Involvement

“Before Blue Ventures came to the village, the WA didn’t have any ways of earning money” explained Madame Ziza. “Since we’ve been working together with Blue Ventures, the skills of the women have developed and they’ve been able to earn some money which helps support their families”.

Blue Ventures currently assists two Women’s Associations, a group in Lamboara as well as the one in Andavadoaka. There are plans to expand this out further to Women’s Associations in other villages in the region. The collaboration has seen the two groups flourish and expand their activities over the past twelve months. Blue Ventures currently helps the associations in a number of ways. Firstly, it has provided a dedicated support worker whose job is to help them develop alternative livelihoods. Lalao Aigrette was employed by Blue Ventures in January 2008. Previous to Lalao’s appointment, the staff member liaising with the Women’s Association was Volanarina Ramahery who helped the women with initial seamstress and embroidery training. This training was able to kick-start the women’s business activities, giving them the skills to produce items to be sold to BV’s volunteers.



Financial Capital

BV provides financial capital by loaning the women money to buy materials when required. To date, these loans have ranged from small amounts for needles and thread to larger loans for bigger items, such as a sewing machine. BV is also able to assist the women by purchasing the essential materials on their behalf from the city of Tulear. Tulear is over 150 kilometres south of Andavadoaka. The cost of getting to Tulear is prohibitive for most of the women, many of whom have never left the village before. Blue Ventures organises a camion truck to transport its staff and volunteers to Tulear, and it is during this time that essential materials for the Women’s Association are purchased by Blue Ventures’ staff. The loans to the association are interest free and usually paid back within six

weeks of being made. As there is no bank in the village, Blue Venture's financial involvement is often the only way that the women would have access to having cash in advance to invest in their business activities.

Importance of Financial Alternatives

"There are less octopus than there used to be", says Celestine, 50. "Before, when I went fishing for octopus, I would catch around 15 -20 a day. Now I'll be lucky if I just get one or two. So, it's really important that we can try and earn money in different ways" she concludes.

"The biggest problem for women in Andavadoaka is that many of the women don't have jobs" says Madame Ziza (pictured below) "this means that an unmarried woman with five children must be looked after by her parents because there aren't any jobs for her to earn money to feed herself and her children. The Women's Association is really important then because we can help her learn to sew and join in with the women's associations activities and earn some money".



Traditionally, while the men from the village go out fishing from boats, the women of the village have gone fishing for octopus at low tide. The increased population of the region together with additional man-made and environmental stresses has meant that marine resources in the area have been drastically reduced. Part of Blue Ventures' long-term aims is to enable the communities to be able to use these dwindling resources sustainably. Therefore, Blue Ventures has a long commitment to helping to find financial and sustainable alternative livelihoods.

Its involvement with the Women's Association is part of this commitment.

Income Generating Activities

There are currently two main income generating activities employed by the Women's Association.



Craft

Embroidery, making clothes and other craft items make up the biggest source of revenue for both women's associations. These products include embroidered tablecloths, handkerchiefs, made-to-measure clothes and hammocks. These are sold directly to Blue Ventures volunteers. Blue Ventures staff and volunteers have worked with the Women's Association to increase the variety of products and regular feedback ensures that the Women's Association is able to supply products that the volunteers are interested in buying. There are further plans to sell products through other local hotels to other tourists travelling through the region.

Catering & Entertainment

Each expedition, the women's association of Andavadoaka organises a welcome lunch for the staff and volunteers of Blue Ventures. They also perform songs and dance at the event. The women's association is also often employed to provide lunch and refreshments for Velondriake workshops. The women also regularly hold

fundraising parties attended by the village and volunteers and staff of Blue Ventures.

Where the Money Goes

The majority of the money earned by the Women's Association is invested back into the group. For each item sold, the Women's Association takes a percentage with between 1,000 Ariary to 3,000 Ariary going to the seamstress who has made the item. Money made from the welcome lunch or any other food services goes directly into the central account, as does the membership fees. To date, this money has allowed the women to buy their own uniforms and buy essential cooking equipment and crockery for the lunches. There is also a central fund run by the Women's Association which money earned from dancing activities is put into this account. This fund is primarily used to help fund essential materials for children in school – such as pens and books

Future Plans

The expansion of the Women's Associations products has been relatively recent – since Lalao's appointment in January 2008. The obvious success of the Lalao's input and the increase in revenue has increased a feeling of

empowerment and pride in the members. The ambitions of the women are to eventually build and own their own building to work from. Many women have never been outside of Andavadoaka before and are interested in doing a village exchange and further training and skills swaps.

Obstacles to Expansion

At this current time, the sales from handicrafts and catering is not enough to provide a full time income for the women. If the Women's Association is to see an increase in income, access to markets outside of the Velondriake region is essential as tourism is still extremely limited in this region. The women need to be able to broker relationships with individuals owning shops in towns which see more tourists. Unfortunately, the isolation of the villages of the southwest is one of the major obstacles to this. The women would also benefit from training in business skills and from language skills – such as improved French or English.

If you have experience of similar development initiatives, and working with communities to establish alternative livelihoods, Blue Ventures would be interested in hearing from you as they endeavour to expand the project and create a sustainable and replicable Women's Association model for Andavadoaka and Lamboara and other Malagasy communities.

