



# ZAHANA

## RURAL TRANSFORMATION THROUGH PARTICIPATORY DEVELOPMENT

**Zahana** is a non-governmental organization in Madagascar dedicated to participatory rural development, education, revitalization of traditional Malagasy medicine, reforestation, and sustainable and environmentally friendly agriculture.

It is Zahana's philosophy that development must be based on local needs and solutions proposed by local people. Participatory development means asking communities what they need. A community claims ownership of their own development successes by working collaboratively on their priorities.

To realize the community's priorities, Zahana hires in-country experts to assist with specific tasks and buys supplies and materials the villagers are unable to afford. Villagers donate their labor and locally available materials to each project. In the village of Fiadanana, on the high plateau of Madagascar, integrative participatory development has been implemented since 2005. Community priorities identified and addressed were: clean water, a school and a communal grain storage building.

Please visit our website [www.zahana.org](http://www.zahana.org) (or write to us) for photos and more information about our other projects:

- Starting a micro credit system
- Addressing hunger (food security)
- Introducing new crops
- Malaria prevention
- Village clean up and building toilets
- Building fences and animal pens

### Zahana is Building a School Collaboratively in Fiarenana, Madagascar

Note: Zahana will draw for this project on our experience in building a school with the community of Fiadanana in 2006. (Please visit our [website for details](#))



School in Fiadanana, built in 2006

Fiarenana, the parents see the need, importance and value of a school for their children. This might be a reflection of the village's readiness to tackle their own development issues and seek solutions beyond the traditional boundaries such as trying for a second rice harvest (as the only village in the area) and vegetables other villages never tried to grow. (link to Fiarenana)

In their community meetings the community of Fiarenana identified the need for a school as one of their priorities. This is an important shift in focus from the initial meetings with Zahana in early 2008, when many of the village's children were walking for miles to neighboring villages to attend overcrowded public schools. With a literacy rate of over 80% among the adults in

Zahana hopes that Fiarenana will become the role model for other villages of what is possible if a community comes together and embarks creatively into uncharted territory.

### The Situation

The latest census in March 2009 has shown that over 50 of the village's children between 5 and 15 years of age have currently no access to a school. In the past more children took it on to walk between one to two hours each way to different overcrowded schools in neighboring villages. With the current political crisis parents are weary about such long walks and prefer to keep their children closer to home. (-more-)

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To make their dream of a school within their community a reality a villager has already donated the land where the future school will be built. To show Zahana their commitment the community has offered to contribute to the teacher's salary as well as contributing their labor in building it, as their share in the effort. In Madagascar teachers are traditionally supported by the community with rice or other agricultural products or by building a house for the teacher to assist with their costs of living.



## Building a Living Fence

In addition the community has decided that the parents need to plant a tree for each child that will go to school. They are planting orange, mango and avocado trees, and papayas, that will surround the school as a living fence. Such a living fence creates a sheltered space for the students, keeping animals out and providing shade and food at the same time. In anticipation of building their school trees are already being planted in the future location. Zahana's first school in Fiadanana (see photo), is now surrounded by a living fence of fast growing firewood trees and bananas.

## Building Fiarenana's School

The bricks for the school had been made by the community a few months back already:



In this participatory development effort Zahana will again help pay for the materials that are out of reach for the villagers, while they will contribute locally available materials, all bricks and their labor to make this build their school. Zahana will find and hire the teacher. After selecting the appropriate candidate, Zahana will train the teacher in a month long tailor made program held in the village of Fiarenana where she or he will be living and working.

## Expanding the School Role for Community Education

It has been decided, with the community's input, that in addition to the regular school curriculum, such as reading, writing and math for the children, a strong focus on agriculture, farming practices, crop improvement and nutrition will become an integral part of the teacher's tasks and role. Expanding the schools scope the community requested adult literacy programs, health education based on family planning and trainings in law and land rights. This shifts the focus from a more conventional school for school age youth towards the rural university



for the entire community that is part of Zahana's vision of continuing community wide education.

The role of a teacher comes with social prestige in Madagascar. Teachers are treated with great respect by their community similar to a community elder. At the same time this comes with the responsibility to be a role model and actively participate in the community life and its development. When Zahana will launch microcredit projects, it is expected by the community that the teachers will play an active role in implementing and assisting in these efforts, such as keeping the books and advising and supervising the projects.

## Special Challenges:

Experience has shown that it takes a while to find a suitable candidate that is flexible enough to work in an environment that never had a school before and is willing to move to a remote village without any infrastructure, where the next smaller town with a health center is over an hour's walk away.

On the plus side Fiarenana is a community willing, interested and ready to changing their situation. They already have much greater crop diversity than surrounding villages and grow many fruit trees that shade their village. Since April of 2009 Fiarenana also has a new community well, with safe clean drinking water. In our neighboring pilot village site of Fiadanana, the running clean and safe drinking water was the deciding factor for the two teachers to accept their post two years ago ([water link](#)).

Since most subsistence villages in Madagascar are very poor they cannot afford to pay a teacher's salary, but public schools are often not available either where parents have to pay also fees for their children. This means their children go without any formal education and do not learn to read and write. To help communities overcoming this obstacle, Zahana helps them financially with the building materials and the expertise to built their school. Based on Zahana's participatory development philosophy building the school is a joint effort, but after completion the upkeep and maintenance of the building becomes the community's responsibility. The same applies for water systems or grain storage buildings and other participatory efforts.

Zahana is actively finding and training a suitable teacher as well as paying the teacher's salary for the first two years. This is done in the hope, that after that initial period, the community sees the value of having a teacher in their community and works something out with them to maintain them in their community. Zahana is a small organization with a very limited budget and is not able to commit to pay salaries or other obligations for the long run, and so far we could only built a second school, although we received more requests for schools from

The location for the future school, donated by a community member



To visit the progress of this project on the GlobalGiving website, [please click here](#)