



Environmental destruction and climate change could force millions to migrate within their own countries by 2050. Photo: IOM 2021

Supporting migrants through income generation and resettlement in Madagascar

Ayako Iizumi (Japan) spent eight months as a UN Volunteer with the International Organization for Migration (IOM) in Madagascar. As a Social and Economic Recovery Specialist, she contributed to minimizing the impact of inequalities on migrants, particularly in the face of the COVID-19 pandemic. Ayako's assignment was supported through the COVID-19 Impact Reduction Programme, funded by the Government of Japan.

Long thought of as a place of natural beauty and biodiversity, Madagascar is experiencing environmental destruction like never before.

Pre-existing social and economic vulnerabilities, and their associated tensions, are placing ever-increasing pressure on people and natural environments, in a cycle of destruction for survival. Droughts in the southernmost part of the country have increasingly worsened due to climate change, forcing internal migration patterns to shift. Rather than temporary,

seasonal migration, many migrants are now forced to seek a permanent settlement in the other regions.

An estimated 80 per cent of Madagascar's forests have already been cleared and if the current trajectory continues, it is predicted that the forests will be lost entirely within 40 years. Many migrants from the Androy region have set up itinerant encampments in the Menabe Antimena protected area, where they clear forested areas in order to grow maize and peanuts. These unsustainable agricultural practices are causing devastating damage to the environment and threatening social harmony and peace.

The impact of the COVID-19 pandemic has further exacerbated the complexities of the situation, putting financial strain on many people already living in poverty. The pandemic has acted to reduce the ability of key stakeholders to promote and enforce more sustainable farming practices, without which the survival of Madagascar's forests are imperiled.

Despite these challenges, the IOM and the UN Development Programme (UNDP) have implemented a programme aimed at bringing innovative solutions to the problems. Funded by the United Nations Peacebuilding Fund, the "*Addressing threats to peaceful coexistence and human security through women migrants and women in migration-affected communities in Madagascar*" or REAP project, emphasizes the importance of gender equality and empowering women in order to reduce social and economic inequalities.

Serving with the IOM, Ayako was involved in two pilot programs within the REAP project designed to combat the challenges in Madagascar. The first focused on income generation to promote more stable settlement for migrants and reduce environmental damage caused by unsustainable farming. The second concerned the assisted voluntary return and reintegration of migrants from the Menabe region to the Androy region, to promote more sustainable and successful settlement in their places of origin.

“ Ayako's time in Madagascar allowed her to make valuable contributions to the successful implementation of the REAP project. She worked on a detailed design of the pilot projects and a feedback system to enhance transparency and accountability through various streams including focus groups, online forms, suggestions boxes and telephone. Also, a long-lasting impact of her work comes from the narrative format. Recording, archiving and sharing these success stories in narrative form, is an inclusive and accessible way to demonstrate the positive outcomes of the project.

The COVID-19 pandemic presented Ayako with several challenges in her role as the limitations of working remotely and being unable to visit project sites added complexity to her tasks. Despite these difficulties, she appreciates all the support she received that made it possible to give her opportunities to meet new people and know what it is to work in the country office of the UN organization.



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