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Local women join a community meeting organized by the International Organization of Migration in Madagascar.

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## Bolstering social cohesion and trust between communities in Madagascar

Daria Kosheleva took up an assignment as UN Volunteer with the International Organization of Migration (IOM) in Madagascar in 2021. She shares her experience supporting projects that address environmental and gender issues, as well as security concerns, in local communities. Dania's assignment is fully funded by the Russian Federation.

An 18-month project on responding to threats to peace and social cohesion, supporting the empowerment and promotion of women in Madagascar (REAP) was launched in early 2020. It is funded by the UN Peacebuilding Fund (PBF) to the tune of US \$1.5 million and implemented by IOM and the UN Development Programme (UNDP).

The REAP project has environmental and gender dimensions. Its objective is

to support social cohesion between local and migrant communities.

Tensions arise due to limited resources. Migrants practice slash-and-burn agriculture that leads to deforestation and less fertile soil. Conflicts arise between the communities because of the lack of trust.

“ We implement capacity-building activities , and have created community committees for migrant and local women to mitigate conflicts and build trust. They work together to resolve tensions and promote environmental activities.

For example, a recent activity was planting trees to recover damage to the environment. Over 200 community members joined from both sides.

Another project has also been implemented in the Betroka district to build social cohesion. It takes place in the mountainous region, where there are security concerns. Dahalo or cattle thieves attack people for robbery or put their houses on fire.

We try to build social cohesion between the communities by conducting peace rituals that symbolically bind local people to follow the rules and prevents them from violating the local customs.

We reinforce the local police, or Gendarmerie, to build outposts in the strategic locations of the mountain chains. To build trust and encourage collaboration against criminal activities, we conduct community dialogues with security forces.

The IOM mission has nominated me as a communication and gender focal point. I draft annual reports and newsletters every three months.

Shortly after my arrival, I developed a communications strategy. I administer our Facebook page and recently started Twitter account. I take many photos, prepare project briefs and develop visibility materials, like rollups and t-shirts.

Part of our offering is regular capacity-building sessions. I led the first

training session on photography, since I spent four years taking photography classes. It helped us to engage more colleagues in supporting our communication efforts.

Communication skills and gender bias became topics of subsequent sessions. We engaged thematic experts for staff training. The next learning sessions will address sexual harassment at work.

“ Volunteering is an amazing opportunity that allows you to work in a completely different culture. It is an opportunity to stay closer to the beneficiaries and note the direct impact of your organization's work. It is particularly important at the beginning of your career. It can strengthen your motivation to develop and progress in the UN system.

The main personal challenge I faced was adapting to a new context and different security conditions. I learned to be watchful of my belongings and refrain from going outside after dark.

At work, I was challenged with starting many new functions. My educational background is in law, and I had to learn a lot about the subject matter and programme interventions. In performing communication functions, my skills attained from photography and drawing have helped a lot, and I continue to develop my writing skills.



• Russian Federation

Sustainable Development Goal: [SDG 5: Gender equality](#) [SDG 11: Sustainable cities and communities](#) [SDG 17: Partnerships for the goals](#)

