



seed madagascar

sustainable environment, education & development

SEED Madagascar: Adaptation and development in response to COVID-19

Date of update: 6th November 2020

Introduction

As in the rest of the world, COVID-19 has posed significant challenges to SEED over the past seven months. March and April saw the evacuation of the vast majority of International staff and between April and July working hours in Madagascar were severely restricted with the offices unable to open or working half days for weeks at a time. This resulted in the continual adaptation of protocols to cope with the developing situation, and in May, risk assessments were introduced for all bush based work as a result of travel restrictions, bans on gatherings and a need to keep both staff and communities safe from the possibility of COVID-19 transmission. With COVID-19 cases more prevalent in Antananarivo, our staff in the capital mixed working from home and shorter days during the weeks when the office could open at all. SEED also introduced a range of measures to safeguard staff including building contactless handwashing stations, providing masks, soap and hand sanitiser and temperature checks at the gate of the office.

Our work in country has faced additional challenges with a slow reduction in the capacity of the international staff with many people having to find part time, or full-time work, to supplement basic stipends only ever meant for living in Madagascar. We are currently working with only 64% of the capacity of international staff that we had in early April. Despite staff being spread over 6 countries and the resulting time zone differences of up to 17 hours, teams are working flexibly to ensure meetings and essential discussions still take place.

In terms of funding, SEED has also seen donors postponing both current and future funding rounds leaving SEED with gaps in funding for projects now due to start, and having to plan for further gaps later in the year as traditional summer and autumn funding rounds are delayed.

Adaptations to existing projects

Since March, SEED has planned its response to COVID-19 by framing this in terms of a continuum of an initial preparation stage before COVID-19 impacted on Madagascar, moving into a mid-term response stage and finally into a post COVID-19 recovery stage. We knew that none of these stages would be easy to define in terms of community needs or timings, but that by continually talking with staff, communities, local authorities and donors, we would be able to move through this continuum and plan services that best met people's immediate needs.

SEED began this process in late March through its social media output and an initial redirection of its Facebook strategy to concentrate on the development and distribution of high quality, clear COVID-19 prevention messages. Recently, our communications have changed again to focus on providing information on the situation in country and what SEED is doing to support communities.

SEED was immediately able to both adapt current projects and develop new projects in line with the emerging needs of communities. SEED's Rural CLTS work funded through UNICEF gave messages on handwashing to 13,063 people and taught 7,752 people how to build a simple household handwashing station. Three new projects have targeted support to health centre staff and patients, particularly mothers with young children. Project co-ordinators and community agents in the Environment and Sustainable Livelihoods Department have adapted approaches and have given COVID-19 briefings to more than 2,000 people living in isolated rural areas who have little opportunity of gaining information outside of SEED.

SEED will continue to adapt its work in the wake of COVID-19. As we have moved into the response stage, we have continued to grow our support to communities through the fundraising, development and implementation of a range of specific COVID-19 projects. Over the next year, SEED will continue to adapt and seek opportunities to support communities within this increasingly difficult environment.



COVID-19 Preparation and Response Projects

1. Rowan Trust - Complete

Timeframe: 3 months: 1st April – 30th June 2020

This grant was rapidly implemented in the very initial stages of the COVID-19 outbreak in Madagascar. Over 5,700 masks were made and distributed. Radio messages in national and Anosy dialects on handwashing, social distancing, avoiding touching your face, and COVID-19 symptoms were developed and broadcast 160 times. 175 posters in accessible graphics and local language, covering preventative measures, were distributed to churches, schools, water points, and other key community hubs. SEED also ran a Malagasy-language social media campaign, publishing clear and concise public health messages, for example on preventative measures, COVID-19 symptoms and correct mask usage. SEED provided a total of 51 handwashing stations to Fort Dauphin and the rural communities of Sainte Luce and Mahatalaky.

2. SEED Mask appeal - Active

Timeframe: Ongoing from 1st May 2020

This grant focusses on mask making and distribution, continues work begun through the Rowan grant, and includes funding obtained through the 'Masks for Madagascar' Appeal, Mask Exchange, and NEST. This income stream funded masks made by Stitch Ste Luce, as well as masks made by seamstresses in Fort Dauphin, which were distributed to healthcare facilities, market vendors, and rural community members in 17 communes.

SEED's new mask exchange went live on the 22nd of June, and has already sold 1,351 masks with a profit to SEED's COVID-19 work of £7,278.



3. Funding for maternal and child health activities - Active

Timeframe: Ongoing from 1st June

This funding was donated through a long term donor of SEED's Maternal and Child Health work and is focussed on the health clinics in Fort Dauphin. In the clinics, handwashing stations, soap, and masks have been provided, and information about COVID-19 in relation to maternal health will be disseminated at vaccination and antenatal visits as well as in each individual households. So far, over 600 women have been supported at these sessions by three COVID-19 trained community health workers.



4. British Embassy Health Strengthening Grant

Timeframe: August 2020 – March 2021

This funding supports four healthcare facilities in Fort Dauphin and six in surrounding rural communes, which refer to the hospitals and clinics in town. This grant focusses on training community health workers to support healthcare facility staff in giving COVID-19 messages and managing the waiting areas, as well as training healthcare facility staff on cleaning protocols. It will provide a total of 7000 masks, 20 handwashing stations, and 10 disinfection kits. Key information will be disseminated through radio messages, TV programmes, posters, and social media posts to increase community confidence in their local healthcare facilities. It will also focus on maternal and child health by training community health workers to conduct information sessions with parents to provide specialised information, taking over the clinic work initially covered by maternal and child health funding.

5. UNICEF Emergency Grant

Timeframe: July – December 2020

In addition to the ongoing Rural CLTS project, SEED has signed a separate partnership agreement with UNICEF Madagascar for a three-month emergency project (which has since been extended by two months) to scale-up current COVID-19 prevention measures in 17 of Anosy’s most vulnerable communes. The project focusses on strengthening the capacity of healthcare workers and community health workers to raise awareness about preventing transmission of the virus, as well as enabling public health centres (CSBs) to have the correct policies and resources in place to ensure patient safety. The funding will be used to establish handwashing points at busy local areas, such as community marketplaces, and to support disinfection activities at train and bus stations. SEED will also carry out research activities in the target communities and will undertake healthcare system assessments in 17 CSBs to gain a better understanding of how COVID-19 is affecting people across the Anosy region.

6. Pending applications

Compounded by poor seasonal rainfall, the economic effects of the coronavirus pandemic are predicted to have a significant impact on food security in Anosy. The World Food Programme has made a call for partners in the south of Madagascar, to which SEED submitted an application in early July 2020. Such a partnership would include activities such as distributing supplies to immediately save lives during severe food shortage, building capacity and reinforcing livelihoods to protect communities against future food supply and malnutrition issues, and building long-term resilience against food insecurity.

In order to further respond to COVID-19 related food insecurity, SEED submitted a proposal to the Darwin Initiative in November 2020 for a rapid pilot of insect and crop farming at the household level, to be conducted in the rural communities of Sainte Luce and Elodrato. Selected for their short time to harvest and low maintenance, yields would provide short-term relief of food insecurity and potential for longer-term recovery through alternative livelihoods.

Distribution

Total numbers				
Masks	Posters & flyers	Radio broadcasts	Handwashing stations	People attending information sessions
16,321	5,305	965	185	24,877