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MADAGASCAR

SUCCESS STORY

A National Voice for Civil Society

Putting in place a national coalition of civil society organizations



Photo: Pact Madagascar

Imbe Venance, left, from northern Madagascar's Antsiranana province, and Perilina, from the northeastern area of Sambava, celebrate the creation of a national civil society coalition in Antananarivo.

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“Civil society organizations are in the best position to really know the realities and aspirations of the Malagasy people in all sectors at all levels,” says Lalao Randriamampionona, the president of a national association of women’s organizations. These organizations should have no political agenda and should not make money or be part of the government. They should consist of community leaders and strive to improve quality of life. There have been several attempts since the early 1990’s to put in place a national coalition of civil society organizations in Madagascar. But many were politically motivated, and they failed. USAID decided to help steer the country’s efforts at developing a strong, independent, and apolitical civil society.

The first step was to organize a national conference to establish a national coalition of civil society groups. A USAID-funded program organized the conference, bringing representatives from all the regions of Madagascar and all interested associations regardless of size, field, and seniority. USAID’s program also steered the organizers away from potentially divisive, politically motivated issues, keeping them focused on creating the coalition. Independent consultants ensured that elections of officers were free, fair and transparent.

In June 2005, the participants voted on a charter to establish a national coalition for civil society organizations. At the conference, 309 participants representing 220 organizations voted for both the charter and the organization’s first officials. The charter was approved and officials were elected in a transparent manner.

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The nascent coalition is a success. Although there is still much work to be done — regional networks need to be strengthened and the democratic processes modeled at the national conference needs to be formalized — the momentum generated by the conference’s success will carry the coalition a long way.