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MADAGASCAR

FIRST PERSON

Women Mayors Come Together

Dynamic women mayors inspire each other to improve government



Photo: Pact Madagascar

Brigitte Rabemanantsoa, mayor of the central Malagasy city of Ambohimalaza.

“Only now do I really understand what my role as mayor is and the benefits of involving the community in decision-making,” said Brigitte Rabemanantsoa, the first woman to be elected mayor of Ambohimalaza, central Madagascar.

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Brigitte Rabemanantsoa is the first woman to be elected mayor of the town of Ambohimalaza. Her town was the birthplace of three kings and a queen and was home to the current president during his childhood, yet the town is still poor. In the two years she has been mayor, she has already helped 30 percent of the population triple their income by building three dams to improve irrigation for rice farming. With these changes, farmers and their families can now eat three meals a day.

When she met with the other mayors for a democracy workshop, she realized that only 62 of the 1558 mayors in Madagascar are women, yet these few women were making a real difference in their communities. One mayor brought potable water to her commune; another one advocated to provide birth certificates for thousands of children; another worked to bring nutritional rehabilitation services to her town. They are visionaries; they are committed, resourceful and dynamic and they are making their voices heard.

The women mayors decide to form an association to strengthen their voice, support and learn from each other, maximize their impact, and advocate for women’s rights. They had the will and the desire, but they needed more expertise if they were to achieve their goals. A USAID-funded program helped them in formalizing the group, creating its constitution, electing officers through a democratic process, and creating a concept paper and strategic plan. Training on urban planning, the roles and responsibilities of mayors, good governance, community participation and women’s rights strengthened the members’ abilities to govern. Their advocacy efforts helped shine the spotlight on women mayors and brought impressive results. First, they convinced national authorities that towns run by women should be a priority for launching pilot projects. Second, they secured funding from the government for each mayor to improve one road in her town, bettering prospects for commerce to grow. Finally, they advocated for special consideration for nutritional rehabilitation and support centers and for AIDS prevention education. These determined women still have a ways to go, but with a strong association backing them, they can be confident they will get there.