

Environmental sustainability madagascar

Honorine Rasoamampionona looks after a tree nursery in Sakaivo Nord, a village in Madagascar's Central Highlands. She spends her days tending to saplings, carefully sprinkling them with soil, fertilizer and water until they are mature.

Rasoamampionona, lives in what is known as an "eco-village". Eco-villages are designations for areas that give communities the right to manage their own natural resources with the aim of halting deforestation, and protecting plants and animals found nowhere else on Earth. "[This work] is helping to revive our environment," Rasoamampionona says.

Eco-villages in Madagascar, previously limited to a few private sites, are now becoming a community-based model for sustainable environmental management nationwide with support from the Ministry of the Environment and Sustainable Development in the country.

Ralison Paul Olivier, National Coordinator of the eco-village projects says that the country is aiming to establish 115 eco-villages across the island as part of a new five-year plan (2027-2032) as it races ahead of a nature and biodiversity crisis. The ambition is to institutionalize and regulate the eco-village model in Madagascar for country-wide expansion through a national program.

Eighteen of the 115 eco-villages, co-financed by the Global Environment Facility (GEF) and the United Nations Environment Programme (UNEP) are scheduled for completion by January 2028. Local governance structures have been established to ensure these villages can operate autonomously after the project's end. The project will also support and train almost 5,000 households in livelihood skills like beekeeping, poultry and livestock farming, essential oils production, and waste recycling.

Madagascar, the fourth largest island in the world, is home to 5 per cent of the planet's biodiversity including a unique array of endemic species and diverse wildlife. Today, habitat destruction, overexploitation, invasive species and climate change threaten this unique biodiversity.

Madagascar's situation is an example of how climate change is impacting countries least equipped to deal with its worst impacts. The country's climate-induced droughts over the past few decades have disrupted agriculture, a primary livelihood for many Malagasy people, causing widespread food insecurity and malnutrition.

The country's unique location makes it the fourth most vulnerable country in the world to climate change and particularly prone to powerful cyclones as climate change warms ocean temperatures increasing storm intensity and frequency such as 2023's Cyclone Freddy. These storms have caused massive damage to crop and natural habitats, impacting local communities, biodiversity and landscapes.

Deforestation and illegal logging are also big problems. Many Malagasy farmers practice slash-and-burn agriculture, clearing what is often pristine forest, says Olivier. "The reality is that these livelihood activities put pressure on natural resources, which in turn undermines environmental sustainability." It is estimated that more than 80 per cent, driving biodiversity loss but also exacerbating the fallout from climate change. This is worrying for a nation where an overwhelming majority of the population depend for livelihood on natural resources, such as forests.

Traditional forest conservation efforts have not been successful because, as Olivier explains, "the approach was simply "don't burn" or "don't cut." It focused solely on prohibition."

The designation of a site as eco-village transfers resource management rights to local communities with agreements renewed every five years. Eco-villages make decisions through a general assembly where members from the local community agree on actions together. This "bottom-up" approach gives everyone, including women and youth, a role in strengthening environmental protection.

People in the eco-villages also learn skills like tree growing, sustainable farming and composting, bolstering their incomes. Many villages use what is known as natural capital accounting, a system that measures the value of forests, water, land and other natural spaces. The tangible wealth of these ecosystems helps eco-village members assess and appreciate the economic value of their natural resources.

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