

An Update of the Fruits, Vegetables, and Environmental Education Program of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar

by Dan Turk, PC(USA) mission co-worker, 1 September 2021

Training and Nursery Progress at Mandritsara

On 24 August, my colleagues in the Fruits, Vegetables and Environmental Education Program (FVEE) of the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM), Rolland Razafiarison and Germain Andrianaivoson arrived in Mandritsara, the 3rd stop on a 3-stop trip to northern Madagascar. At the first stop, Rolland attended the FJKM's Synoda Lehibe (= General Assembly) meeting in Sambava in northeastern Madagascar (see Update: Synoda Lehibe in Sambava). Then he and Germain went to Antsiranana in the far north where they led a fruit tree training and explored possibilities for collaboration with the Antseranana Fahazavana church to put in a tree nursery and orchard (see Update: Exploring Collaboration in the Far North). At Mandritsara there were two objectives: to lead a training for pastors and volunteer technicians on growing and propagating fruit trees and to help improve the new nursery at the FJKM seminary.

The training is part of the FVEE's program to train volunteer technicians who will volunteer their time to help the FJKM churches where they are located to do tree-planting activities and help others grow fruit trees. The volunteer technicians receive training not only in how to grow and graft fruit trees, but also in how to lead tree planting efforts and how to do the follow-up needed to assist others in their communities grow fruit trees. At the first training of this type that the FVEE did in late 2019 for volunteer technicians from the FJKM Maevatsara Synod where the fruit center at Mahatsinjo is located, only volunteer technicians got trained. Then pastors from the parishes where the volunteer technicians were serving asked that they also get trained so that they could better understand the potential of growing trees and could better collaborate with the volunteer technicians. A follow-up training for these pioneer volunteer technicians and their pastors took place in February 2021. The plan is to include pastors in all subsequent volunteer technician trainings.



Grafting training in progress, Mandritsara.

The 2-day training at Mandritsara began on 24 August. Fourteen people took part including 5 pastors and 7 lay people representing 6 FJKM churches, Ambalapaiso, Ampitatsimo, Antsiatsiaka, Antsahabe, Mandritsara Fitiavana, and Marotandrano; and 1 evangelism post, at Pont Sofia. All are located in the Androna Atsinanana Miara Mifoha Synod which has its headquarters at Mandritsara. The FVEE had previous relations with several of the participating churches. The pastor at Ambalapaiso, Andriamisaina Niritsoa, had already received fruit trees from the FVEE which he planted at his church. Ambalapaiso, is a very remote location in the far NE of the synod, where the altitude is high enough to grow low-chill temperate fruits such as peaches and nectarines. Antsiatsiaka and Marotandrano are locations where the FVEE had previously led field trips for the seminary students from the Mandritsara Seminary. At Antsiatsiaka the FJKM owns a large piece of land on the eastern edge of the synod, just before the landscape plunges into the lowlands of eastern Madagascar. Marotandrano is the closest town to Marotandrano Reserve, a remote protected area reachable only by foot that was the destination of a memorable field trip in 2018.

At the end of the training, each of the trainees received a grafting knife, a sharpening stone, a watering can, a pair of snips, and plastic for tying grafts. Each person also received 5 fruit trees: a tangerine, a jaboticaba, and 3 grafted mango trees. The mangos are from among the best varieties in the world including: 'Tommy Atkins', 'Van Dyke', 'Kensington', and 'Valencia Pride'. The mango trees were produced at the new nursery at Mandritsara.



The trainees with the equipment and trees that they received.

Rolland and Germain reported that the nursery at Mandritsara is progressing well. The nursery manager, Jeremia Ratsirahonana, has grafted over 120 mango trees and produced about 1000 mango rootstocks. These trees are growing very well. Jeremia has also come up with a potential solution for permanent nursery labels: pieces of plastic etched with a hot piece of metal.



Jeremia Ratsirahonana with some of the mango trees he grafted.

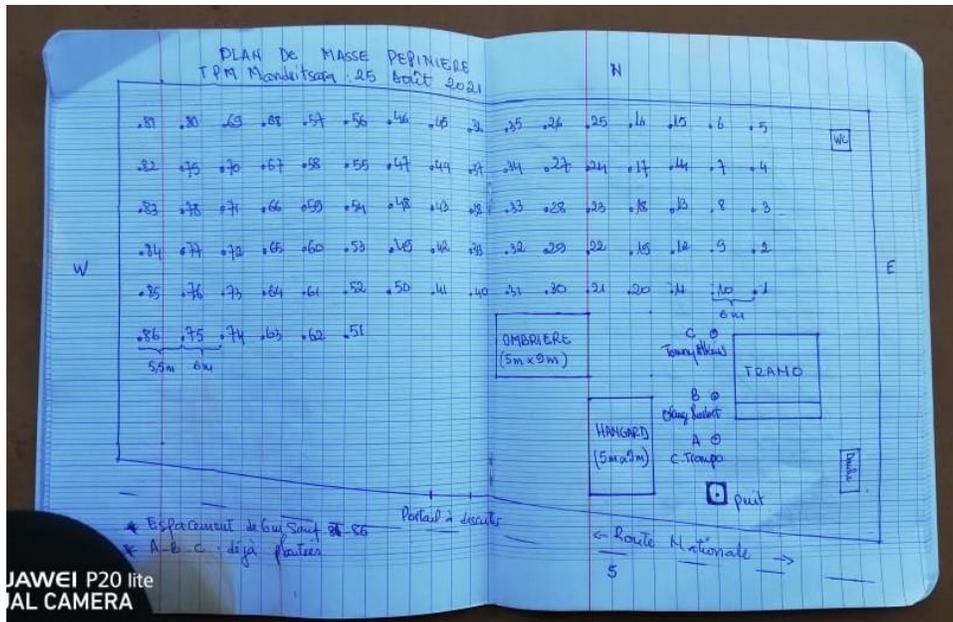


One of the labels Jeremia created to identify mango varieties.

The main work for Rolland and Germain in terms of assisting the nursery, was to arrange for the construction of two shade structures, the installation of a metal gate that had been sent from Antananarivo, the digging of a second well, and the staking out of the locations for planting mother trees for the nursery. The mother trees will serve as sources of propagation material for the grafted and marcotted trees to be produced at the nursery. In all, stakes for 89 trees were put in, at 6 m spacing (this is close for mangos – mango trees will need to be pruned aggressively to keep them from getting too large). The first 3 of these trees were planted during the training: 'Tommy Atkins' and 'Orange Sherbet' mangos and a 'Trompo' canistel.



Jeremia Ratsirahonana helping to put in stakes for 89 mother trees at the Mandritsara nursery.



The plan for the nursery at Mandritsara

Rolland also had a meeting with the director of the Mandritsara seminary at which they put on paper the agreement between the FVEE and the seminary. Basically, the FVEE is providing the infrastructure for the new nursery, training and technical support for the nursery manager, and support for the nursery for 3 years. The nursery will be managed by the seminary. After 3 years, the FVEE will no longer provide financial support for the nursery, but sustainability will be achieved via the sale of grafted plants, with profits going to the seminary. The FVEE will provide technical support indefinitely.

It has been exciting for me to see the work of the Fruits, Vegetables and Environmental Education Program bearing fruit in very tangible ways through trainings and the establishment of new tree nurseries. Particularly exciting are plans that are coming together for expanding this work into southern Madagascar, where in the far south a combination of drought, climate change and economic hardship due to Covid-19 has left the region on the precipice of famine, with hundreds of thousands of people hungry and many already experiencing acute malnutrition. Mangos, which ripen during what is known as the hardship period when food is often in short supply, could play a much greater role in alleviating hunger and providing sources of income. Many thanks to all who support this pioneering work.