

# 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, 31 August 2021

## Starting New Collaboration in the Far North

The second stop on my colleagues' 3-stop trip to northern Madagascar was to Antsiranana, in the far north, after colleague Rolland Razafiarison first went to the Church of Jesus Christ in Madagascar (FJKM)'s Synoda Lehibe (=General Assembly) meeting which was held 11-18 August in Sambava (see Update: "Synoda Lehibe in Sambava"). After leaving Sambava on 19 August, he met colleague Germain Andrianaivoson at Ambilobe and both proceeded the next day to Antsiranana. They went there at the invitation of the pastor of the Antseranana Fahazavana FJKM church, Pastor Andriafaratafika Robiarizafy. The Antseranana Fahazavana church has a piece of land about 30 ha in size at Mahavanona about 25 km out from Antsiranana. The pastor, on behalf of the church, wanted to explore with the Fruits, Vegetables, and Environmental Education Program (FVEE), possibilities for growing fruit trees and establishing a tree nursery on this land.

When Rolland was in Sambava, the FJKM Synod President for the far north, Pastor Rabevita Saina, asked the FVEE to do a training about growing and propagating fruit trees for churches in the Antsiranana area. So this was arranged, and took place on Saturday 21 August. All told, 28 people attended the one-day training representing 4 FJKM churches, the military chapel, and 1 Catholic church. They transplanted tangerine and jaboticaba seedlings, planted a tree in the ground, and learned to graft mango trees complete with hands-on practice using rootstocks that Germain had brought for that purpose. Each participant took home the tangerine tree and jaboticaba tree that they transplanted as part of the training. In addition, each of the 6 participating institutions received at least 2 grafted mango trees, of the 'Van Dyke' and 'Valencia Pride' varieties.



Trainees from the Antseranana Fahazavana FJKM church at Mahavanona, 21 August.



The training took place at the FJKM's land at Mahavanona so while there, Rolland and Germain had a chance to look at the land. They concluded that there are about 5 hectares (12.5 acres) of very good land for growing fruit trees, with water readily available. Much of the rest of the land is already being used for growing rice.

That evening, Rolland and Germain met with representatives of various branches of the Antseranana Fahazavana church: women of the church, men of the church, Sunday School, etc. The church representatives wanted to know what all would be involved in setting up an orchard and fruit nursery. Rolland and Germain explained that a priority would be to have a technician permanently on site to look after the trees and manage the nursery. The FVEE could train this person for at least 3 months at the fruit center at Mahatsinjo. Rolland and Germain also indicated that the FVEE could provide all the mother trees needed for the nursery as well as many of the trees for the orchard. The church will examine the possibilities and get back to the FVEE at a later time.



Rolland Razafiarison leading the training.



Practicing grafting was an important part of the training.

The new nursery at Antsiranana -- assuming as I expect that the church will proceed with plans to install one at Mahavanona – will be just one in a series of new nurseries that the FVEE has helped establish or is in the process of establishing for the benefit of different FJKM entities. Since Covid arrived in Madagascar in March 2020, my colleagues have set up two new nurseries that are now operational: one at Fihaonana about 50 km from the capital Antananarivo and one at the FJKM seminary at Mandritsara. In each case, the FVEE established the basic infrastructure needed for the nurseries, provided the mother trees needed to provide propagation material for the nursery, and trained the nursery manager. Another nursery, at the FJKM church at Ankaramena about 45 km W of Ambalavao in South Central Madagascar, is in the process of being set up. It is taking a few years and a lot of expense because a wall around the church property is needed to help with security.

After leaving Antsiranana on 22 August, Rolland and Germain got about 20 scions from a popular mango variety, 'Tombato' at Anivorano. They took these to Mandritsara where the nursery manager, Jeremia Ratsirahonana, grafted them onto mango rootstocks. This is the latest in our efforts to gather a collection of Madagascar's best mango varieties for propagation and comparison with some of the best varieties from other parts of the world. Already, we have gotten 'Diego', 'Hiesy' and 'Manga Be' from the Mangatsa research station and 'Manga Bory' (Round Mango) from Mandritsara. A friend once described 'Manga Bory' as the best mango in Madagascar. Rolland and Germain also successfully got scions of an odd-shaped mango called 'Manga Gana' (Duck Mango) near Ambatondrazaka. All of these mangos are being propagated and will be planted at the fruit center at Mahatsinjo, the Mango Palace. Rolland and Germain had time constraints which prohibited adequate exploration of the mango varieties of northern Madagascar. Besides, the best time to collect mango varieties is when the fruits are ripe which won't be until November and December. So a return trip may be necessary.



The 'Tombato' mango at Anivorano Avaratra

On 23 August, Rolland and Germain visited the Toby Kristy Manavao at Mangabe near Ambanja where the Synod President had asked the FVEE to plant fruit trees. A Toby is a spiritual center where people with mental issues receive care. The FJKM has over 60 Toby spread out over the island. Toby often have a good bit of land associated with them and the leaders sometimes do a lot of gardening and grow some fruit trees. Rolland and Germain left 5 trees at the Toby for planting there including 2 grafted mangos and a canistel. They will try to send back about 10 more fruit trees to plant on the grounds of the Toby, mostly grafted mango trees.





The Toby (spiritual center) near Ambanja



At the Toby near Ambanja: Rolland Razafiarison (2<sup>nd</sup> from left) and the elders of the Toby with the trees from the FVEE.

Then, at Antsohiy, Rolland and Germain left National Road #6 for the 8-hour drive on a dirt road to their 3<sup>rd</sup> stop, at Mandritsara, where the FJKM has a seminary. The purpose of that stop was to do a 2-day training for pastors and volunteer technicians and to assist with further improvements to the new nursery (see Update: Training and Nursery Progress at Mandritsara).

The efforts of the FVEE to spread good mango varieties and the grafting techniques needed to propagate them have been bearing much fruit in Madagascar during the past few years, even during this difficult time of Covid-19. Ongoing efforts to train people about growing and grafting mangos and setting up new nurseries to produce grafted mango trees are major components of these efforts. Many thanks to all who support this ministry!