

## A NEW NEIGHBOURHOOD IS BORN!

*Traduit du français par Thomas GELIN*

"Tsaratànana is an unforgettable adventure!" This was the motto-like exclamation from Josoa, one of the heads of family, on the eve of the new neighbourhood's inauguration on 18 April this year. How right is he! It would probably take a book to recount those intense months that changed us all, to put words on so many emotions, probably as numerous as the many bricks that were needed to make a dream reality and make a haven for hope and life out of a modest 60 hectares piece of land (60 hectares out of the 60 million hectares that make up Madagascar). However the story is yet to be written as this was only the first chapter. The pen is in the hands of the families and those accompanying them but also to some extent it still in our hands in a way reminiscent of Saint Exupéry's 'The Little Prince':

*"It is the time you have wasted for your rose that makes your rose so important.*

*It is the time I have wasted for my rose, said the little prince, so that he would be sure to remember.*

*Men have forgotten this truth, said the fox. But you must not forget it. You become responsible, forever, for what you have tamed. You are responsible for your rose.*

*I am responsible for my rose, the little prince repeated, so that he would be sure to remember."*

You might point out to me that all these points are not very technical. So maybe I should now come up with a few figures and stats in order to look a bit more serious. Rest assured that this will come in due time! But please allow me to wander around my garden today to be able to tell myself: "it was worth all those sleepless nights, those often (although thankfully not always) pointless applications, those disappointments and misunderstandings. The paths going up are tough; there is a strong temptation to turn round and go back. But there are the people you meet, the companionship and then you reach your goal and you realise that it is so much better than anything you had dreamed of. Thankfully life is not limited to the boundaries that we set. It is effervescent because behind lies a deeply humane adventure. We have had a wonderful journey together, far from idealistic and requiring constant adjustments, a path full of contradictions and laughter. What can one say? Each life experience changes us deeply so long as we allow it. So if we had to do it all over again? 'Yes', not once but twice, 'Yes' we would do it all again.

Here I am daydreaming and I can feel your impatience to find out what we have actually done during all that time in this beautiful island of Madagascar, especially those last three months. On 28 April Lalao and Pierre as well as Bernadette and Jacques, the last two families to join the project, said 'Yes' to each other before the Second Mayor Assistant of the town of Ambohidratrimo (and secretary of the 'Miara Dia' Association), a beautiful symbol to seal the first chapter of this story. Everyone was so beautiful on the red carpet in Tsaratànana that it felt like our very own Cannes festival! Each and every person contributed to the preparation of the event. There was a genuine family spirit.

We were planning to have the inauguration on 18 April as an incentive to finish the works. A challenge from hell as always but it was met, save for a few details. Eric, one of the heads of families, came to speak with an emotional voice in front of the assembly, which was numerous for this event, probably a breath of fresh air in the constant slump of the last three months. He was speaking for the families and expressed the gratitude of each of them and most importantly he effectively said "look at what we have done, don't hesitate to hire us, we are able to do things like this". Aren't these the words of a man standing tall and proud?

Then came other speeches including Mr Clovis Arthur, mayor of Ambohidratrimo, who positioned this event in a clearly non-political perspective, something which is very important given the current climate in Madagascar. He thanked CAP ESPERANCE, the funders and donators who allowed everyone at their own level to realise those projects that were dear to the town for several years. He also took this opportunity to announce that a new partnership with CAP ESPERANCE was possible. We will discuss this further in the 'projects' chapter. A commemorative plaque was offered by the town to be placed on the stele that also had the names engraved of most of those who took part in the creation of this new neighbourhood through their donations as well as the logos of the institutional sponsors.

You can see yourself by looking at the various pictures how all the objectives were met.

As we mentioned in our earlier mail, the various administrative procedures necessary for the setting up of the management centre and the opening of the crèche were not possible because of the ongoing political crisis. However we hope to achieve this in the months to come. Technically speaking everything is ready.

The shipment of books and computers by CAP ESPERANCE's Board allowed the settlement of a media library which is open to the public. A project of initiation to IT for children and adults is being considered.

Regarding education, a training programme for 'functional alphabetisation' has been set up for adults since 14 March. It occurs every Saturday. We also have a demand for French language classes.

Leisure is not forgotten. On 4 April the second football tournament was organised by Lala with a turnout even higher than the first time. The trophy was quite original as it was an ewe, alive of course and pregnant according to the specialists. It left with the winners, wearing a football shirt.

Twice a month the 'Grain de Blé' association supervises a children group for Tsaratànana and its neighbourhood. They presented a few of their songs on the inauguration event. Holiday camps are planned for this summer. The children are all very impatient.

The band Ny Ako also offered a quality show on the inauguration day. Their singing and their music drew in the neighbours.

Health-wise, a new partnership was set up with the '*Office National de Nutrition*' (the 'National Nutrition Office' or 'ONN'). As a first step it focuses on the planting of 100 saplings of 'ananambos' offered by the ONN. The leaves and flowers of these trees make them a real goldmine. Indeed several studies have demonstrated ananambos possess many qualities which could help in the fight against malnutrition. It is a tree of many possible uses, it is very resistant to droughts, grows very quickly and its culture is very easily extended. Nutritional analysis have shown that the leaves of the ananambo (or '*moringa oleifera*' in Latin) have more vitamins, minerals and proteins than most other edible plants.

The partnership should be completed by scientific training programmes focusing on its use in a daily diet and on the drying of its leaves which could then be sold and thus generate income.

There are probably many other things to say but time should be taken to thank the Lord. Many things can be done without Him but so much more can be done with Him, through the faith He puts in us to help us to overcome obstacles, to believe in the unbelievable and most of all to love. Thank you to all of those who have accompanied us: CAP ESPERANCE's Board, our family, all our friends, the 'Association des Amis de CAP ESPERANCE' and especially Gaby who joined us on three occasions and injected his dynamism and enthusiasm into the project, the donators, either known or anonymous, who have touched so many families' hearts by showing they cared, the sponsors for their trust, the town of Ambohidratrimo and the entire network of friends and professionals that was built in Madagascar, including the members of Miara-Dia who had the courage to join their efforts to ours in a difficult yet extraordinary adventure.

Now we need to keep going in the same direction; that is, through the union of the forces, skills and means of each of us. We believe the project will be a real success once the families are in a position to pass on what they received to others, like 'hope messengers', so that other people in need can go the way forward.

## **The projects**

As I stated earlier on, CAP ESPERANCE has already been asked to take part in a new project. What kind of project though?

The state school of Fokontany d'Antohibe (a district of Ambohidratrimo, of which Tsaratànana is a dependency) currently teaches 260 pupils, including three fairly rudimentary classes. Based on demographic studies and on the upcoming integration of new sections, there should be 400 pupils in a few years' time. Therefore the issue of finding new buildings adapted to children should be treated as a matter of urgency. For reasons related to the surface a piece of land next to Tsaratànana was chosen (and we are really happy about it). The town officially asked us to help in the realisation of this school through the engineering of projects but also obviously to assist in finding the funds necessary for this type of project. We created a 'think tank' like committee made up of teachers, representatives from parents association and town representatives to gather the various elements necessary for such a project. We thought about what would be the 'ideal' school from a local perspective and a few requirements came up: nine classes, a canteen and areas for sport and leisure, all in an environmentally friendly vision that would include recycling, treatment of liquid waste and recovery of rainwater, reforestation and use of renewable energies...

Here are the main principles which will need to be elaborated in order to come up with a consistent project. We would love to add another dimension to this project by including a 'training on building site' programme which would seek to improve the skills of voluntary workers. We also plan to optimise Tsaratànana's collective equipment, polyvalent rooms for training sessions...