



## Promoting an abortion decriminalisation network in Madagascar Workshop Meeting, Antananarivo 11-13 March 2019

### I. Key aspects of the legal, health service and advocacy landscape on abortion (safe and unsafe)

In 2017, the Ministry of Public Health announced that about 75,000 abortions a year were taking place in Madagascar. The number was based on a 2008 estimate by the Observatory of the Rights of the Child for the Indian Ocean Region (ODEROI) and corresponded to one abortion for every ten live births.

In Madagascar, there are 575 deaths annually due to the complications of unsafe abortions, and are the second most common cause of maternal death in the health system after pre- and post-partum haemorrhage. Voluntary and therapeutic termination of pregnancy are criminal acts and healthcare does not cover abortion access. This means abortions are done clandestinely and through dangerous practices. The management of complications following unsuccessful and unsafe abortions is legal.

### II. Organisation and work on abortion

In February 2018, a movement called "Nifin'Akanga" was created in Antananarivo as a response to the women's rights violations caused by lack of access to safe abortion, especially the right to life. Nifin'Akanga<sup>1</sup> is a feminist participatory movement that fights against all forms of violence against women and aspires to decriminalize abortion in Madagascar.

Nifin'Akanga is a pro-choice movement. We think women should have the right to choose the option that suits them the best, and they should have the right to safe abortion, without fear for their physical health or fear of punitive legal reprisals.

The movement advocates for a systemic change by either changing existing legislation or introducing new legislation, so abortion can become legal in Madagascar by 2023 (next election deadline). Nifin'Akanga wants to increase public awareness of the harmful consequences of the penalization of abortion and bring together the civil forces committed to decriminalization and those working in reproductive health and family planning.

Activities of the network also include organization of debates and conferences, sharing workshops, reflections on the theme of violence against women in Madagascar; and lobbying political forces.

As part of the activities of "Nifin'Akanga", a workshop was organized in Antananarivo to set up a national network to advocate for decriminalization of abortion.

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### III. Aim, outcomes and lessons learned from the meeting

<sup>1</sup> "Nifin'Akanga" is a thorny plant which serves as an abortifacient plant, the main cause of mortality and infections; literally "the teeth of the guinea fowl": a little joke to say that the time has come, that it is time to finish with the general indifference on these topics related to the rights of the woman.

The main objective of the workshop was to create a national coalition for the decriminalization of abortion in Madagascar. The specific objectives of the workshop were to:

- Bring together key actors on the theme of the right to choose, the right to life for women
- Strengthen participants' knowledge on the theme of abortion in Madagascar
- Equip the participants to carry out actions in their regions of origin
- Plan joint actions by region.

The two-and-a-half day workshop had the participation of 24 people from seven localities in Madagascar (Majunga, Antananarivo, Diégo Suarez, Fianarantsoa, Morondava, Tamatave and Nosy Be). (See Annex 2, Participants list). The workshop offered an opportunity to exchange and share perspectives on the realities in the field and included sessions on abortion statistics, the international legal framework on abortion, civil society strategies and advocacy work (See Annex 1, Agenda).

On the first day, the session was started with a values clarification session led by Nifin' Akanga, which was followed by a presentation from Médecins du Monde on the statistical data available on abortion in Madagascar. In the afternoon, the president of the National Commission of Human Rights in Madagascar, Mireille Rabenoro, spoke about the human rights aspects of abortion, including international and national laws and treaties on abortion.

The second day included group work to discuss the realities of abortion practices in Madagascar's different regions and suggest strategies. Practices differ between localities and in some, abortion is spoken about more freely than in others. Unsafe practices of abortion are seen in all localities and the price of an abortion varies enormously, according to the standard of living in the different zones.



Stakeholders brought new knowledge to the participants. Abortion is experienced and treated differently in each region, depending on the culture. The fact that people who grew up and live in these localities could share what really happens locally about abortion helped others to understand and to embrace the particular issues specific to each region. Moreover, a recent study by Marie Stopes International has helped to understand the reality of abortion in Madagascar and changed perceptions of abortion trends. For example, there has been a

perception that young people are more likely to have abortions, but the study has shown that there are more women over age 40 who have abortions.

Civil mobilization was presented by Ketakandriana Rafitson, an activist involved in human rights issues. Ketakandriana has led many civil mobilization initiatives, and she shared her experiences, the problems she has encountered and mobilization strategies.

Following the workshop, a charter for the creation of a national network to decriminalize abortion in Madagascar was signed by the participants. Thus, a national network called the "Nifin'akanga Network" was created. It is notable that this charter is the first of its kind in the field of abortion in Madagascar. It is also a breakthrough because all the participants agreed that the mission of the network is the total decriminalization of abortion and not only in cases of rape, incest or at-risk pregnancies.

Participants were provided with briefcases with which they can start workshops in their localities. The briefcases included tools that will enable them to implement workshops to:

- Meet a variety of people who are directly or indirectly affected by the issue
- Get to know the practices in the local region
- Get to know the positions, arguments and expectations of local people
- Understand those positions and arguments.

Knowledge about the issues and the reality of the practices will be put together by the participants. The implementation of these workshops will be done according to a schedule we define together. If finances allow, the founding members of the movement Nifin'Akanga will support each new network during these workshops.

The meeting received various media coverage (See Annex 3).



Lessons learned:

- The length of the workshop allowed for in-depth discussion and time for the sharing of ideas between the participants.
- The reception provided the participants with an opportunity to get to know each other and network.

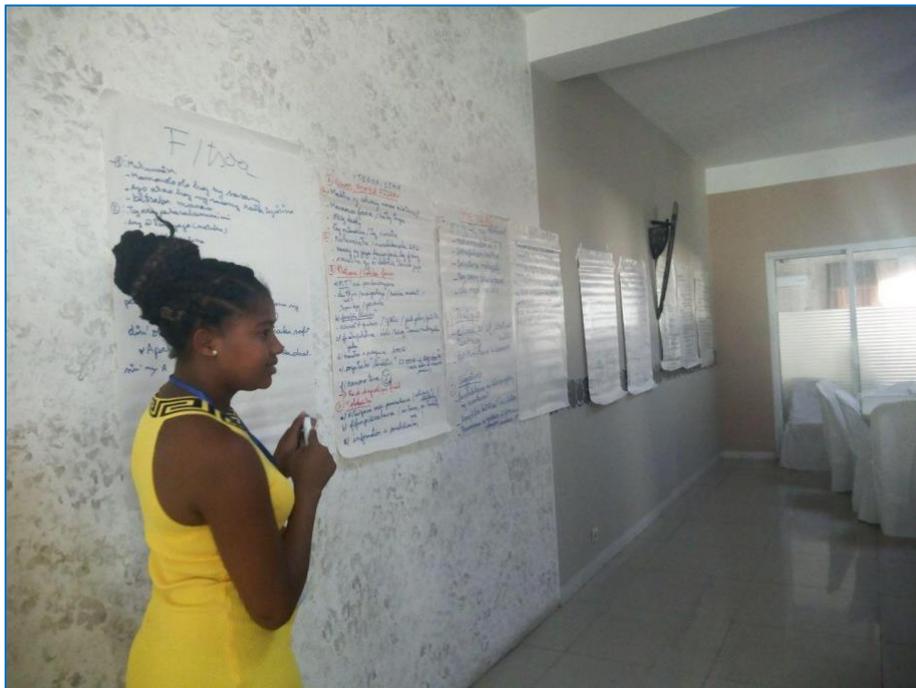
- The inclusion of representatives of the media is crucial to the visibility of the movement and the overall purpose.
- Participants discussed the importance of including representatives of political parties in the network, which is a very big step in the Malagasy context.

#### **IV. Future priorities and follow-up activities**

Future priorities and follow-up activities are:

- Announcement of the network.
- Implementation of the activities of each region and support for them (depending on the means available).
- Organization of a meeting with governmental and non-governmental organization partners with the support of the French Embassy.
- Creation of a data book to share with members.

For the creation of national coalitions, it is important to carry out actions in the localities and to target and involve potential activists in the field. Following this, a national coalition can be established which can equip participants so that they can immediately return to the field and organize their own activities and actions.



## Annexes

Annex 1: Agenda

Annex 2: Participant list

Annex 3: Reports in the media

### Annex 1: Agenda

Date	Hours	Thematic	Intervener
Jour 1	9h – 10h30	Values clarification	Nifin' Akanga
	10h30 – 10h45	Tea break	
	10h45 – 13h	Values clarification	Nifin' Akanga
	13h – 14h	Lunch	
	14h – 15h30	Statistic on abortion	Médecins du Monde
	15h30 – 17h	Abortion and Human Rights: International treaties, legal framework on abortion in Madagascar	Mireille RABENORO – National Commission of Human Rights
Jour 2	9h – 9h30	Day 1 Summary	
	9h30 – 10h30	Group work on abortion reality in each local region	Nifin' Akanga
	10h30 – 10h45	Tea break	
	10h45 – 11h45	Feedback from group work	Nifin' Akanga
	11h45 – 13h	Advocacy in sexual health	International NGO
	13h – 14h	Lunch	
	14h – 15h30	Civil mobilization	Ketakandriana RAFITOSON – Transparency International
	15h30 – 17h	Community-based communication	Samy RABENIRAINY – Journalist
Jour 3	09h – 09h30	Day 2 Summary	
	09h30 – 10h30	Presentation and discussion on the Charter of the network of movements for the decriminalization of abortion and signing of the Charter	Nifin' Akanga
	10h 30 – 10h45	Tea break	
	10h45 – 13h	Development of action plans by locality	Participants
	13h – 14h	Lunch	

## Annex 2: Participants

Of the 24 participants, there were:

- 3 participants from Antananarivo (Nifin' Akanga)
- 5 participants from 2 international NGOs

and the following number of participants from the localities:

- 2 participants from Nosy-Be
- 4 participants from Morondava
- 2 participants from Toamasina
- 2 participants from Diego-Suarez
- 4 participants from Fianarantsoa
- 2 participants from Majunga

## Annex 3: Reports in the media

The issues and the meeting received media coverage both in newspapers and on online platforms. Examples include: [L'Express](#) on 14 March 2019 and [2424.MG](#). The following is a [2424.MG video](#) with French subtitles:



and two newspaper articles about the issues and the meeting:

