
OBSERVATORY FOR CULTURAL AND AUDIOVISUAL COMMUNICATION
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ICT VILLAGE PROJECT – MADAGASCAR

Summary of Events Dec. 5-7, 2005

Following the meeting with the Mayor of Sambaina on Thursday, December 1, the next formal meeting was on Monday December 5th. On this day we again traveled to the village of Sambaina. The purpose of this trip was to visit the potential sites that the residents had identified for the digital village.

Several members of the President's staff who had not been with us on the previous visit to Sambaina joined us. They include:

Georges Lamoure, Architect
Jean-Paul Clement, Conseiller pour l'organisation solaria
Lalaonirina Rahamefy, Director General SEIMad
Zaza, from the President's economic office

Mr. LaMoure was there to help identify the best site satellite connection. Mr. Clement is an educator from France and Mr. Rahamefy has expertise in equipment. It was encouraging to see so much visibility and high-level support for the project.

The Mayor identified the Sambinia community center as the primary site for the project. The central location, high foot and vehicle traffic, ongoing renovations of the center that would be complete in time to begin the project and availability of electricity were among the reasons for choosing the site.

We next went to the home of Ankadimanga, of one of an 18th century Kings 13 wives (his favorite) located on an unpaved road about a mile or so from the community center. I was impressed that the village had been well prepared for visitors by the residents and staff. Each building had been recently cleaned; all the walkways had been swept clean that morning and everyone turned out to gracefully receive visitors.

The residents have visions of turning this typical village of its 18th century era into a destination for tourists. There are several buildings that could be used to house tourists, a park like setting on a pond, and the possibility of establishing walking trails that would help tourists learn the history of the village. The site also serves as a place to train residents in weaving and production of items for sale to tourists or exporters.

There are two schools in the community as well. The pre-primary school is private with small class sizes and relatively well-off children when compared to the public school children. However the public primary school on site boasted one of the highest pass rates in the country for children going on from the 5th to 6th grades.

The site also has a health center that appears to be well kept. A mother and baby, born earlier that very morning, were the only patients on site.

Following the tour of the village, we attended a small gathering at the pond where we were served hot food and beverages under a canopy that had been set up for the occasion. There, we further discussed the plans that the manager of this site had for the future and how connectivity would accelerate development of the site. We also encountered two farmers from France who were assigned to the site as volunteers, noting that resources are available in this location.

A major negative for this site was the lack of electricity although a power line from a hydro electric plant approximately 20 km. away was sending electricity past the village to the capital city of Antananarivo.

The next visit was to the radio station a distance away of no more than two miles. With the community center located between the village we had just visited and the radio station, it appears that the sites selected represented a tight circle of potential activity. The radio station staff showed off the equipment and broadcasting facilities and demonstrated the crank-up radios that were made available to villagers for a nominal fee. The staff expressed a need for training to expand the scope of programming and talked about other projects offered by donor agencies and the many possibilities for expanded communication that connectivity would bring to the region.

During the evening I met with Zaza and Ivy from the President's office to give them another copy of the "Village TIC SMSI 2005 Project Directeur" and to discuss the day's activities. I told them that I believed that the project was feasible, expressed how much I was impressed with the way the entire community had come together to support the project and stated how thorough they had been in thinking through the project. I also stated that it should be possible to get the project off the ground by April 2006 if we had adequate support from the top.

Wednesday, December 7, 2005
Wrap Up Session

Interestingly, Zaza presided over the wrap-up meeting. Although none of the staff listed above from the President's office that attended the tour on Monday attended this meeting, we were joined by:

Andry-Tiana Ravalomanda, Assistant Executive Manager – TELEMAD

During this meeting we discussed the schedule of activities that must be carried out to complete the task on time for the April 20th Infopoverty World Conference. All agreed to work toward the schedule (attached) that calls for getting back to OCCAM by December 21st with a clear statement of needs. I received a call from Zaza following the meeting confirming the schedule and committing OCCAM to get back to him by January 30th with the elaboration of the preliminary Plan of Action as stated in the draft schedule of activities.

Wednesday December 7, 2005
Meeting University of Antananarivo

Prof. Pascal Rakotobe, President
Irene Rabenoro, Vice President – International Relations
Amb. Zina Andrianarivelo
Elaine Raveloson, director of Economic Expansion - Madagascar
Eric, Head of the Law School and Newspaper Publisher

During this meeting we explored ways the university could contribute to the Digital Village Project and possible links between the university and the University of Oklahoma. I explored the possibility of using the facilities of the University of Antananarivo to enhance extension education in and near the digital village. Not sure how well this was received because it did not seem to resonate with the university president. He mentioned that there is a communications consortium of some sort that the university is already involved with that does something very similar. He pushed for some type of memorandum of agreement for his university - that I restated as an agreement with OCCAM that would focus on the project. We agreed that I would draft such an agreement and work with Ms. Rabenoro to get something back to him by the end of next week.

On the university-to-university type of relationship, Prof. Rabenoro talked about the composition of the faculty at the university and two major needs. Succession planning is needed because the average age of faculty is about 58 years and there must be plans in place to prepare younger members for leadership positions in the future. She also talked about the need for more international exposure of faculty and the need to engage in faculty exchange programs of one sort or another. We agreed to communicate in the future.

In conclusion, and referring also to the meetings held by Pierpaolo Saporito, President of OCCAM, the explorative mission produces the following results:
some important results were achieved:

- The seat of the project as been individuated in the village of Sambaina, District of Manjakandriana
- The local technical working group has been created under the chairmanship of Mr. Alfred Razafindratsinjra, Mayor of Sambaina in order to identify priorities and needs of the community where the project will be implemented
- In a special meeting, OCCAM delegation met with H.E. Marc Ravalomanana, President of the Republic of Madagascar, who agreed on the guidelines of the project and appointed Mr. Ivohasina Razafimahefaas his delegate to the project
- Various meetings with local authorities were carried out, such as those with the Minister of Culture and with high level representatives of the Ministries of Foreign Affairs, Health, Education and Scientific Research, Decentralisation.

Thus the ICT Village Project, intended as replicable model to fight poverty and contribute achieving the Millennium Development Goals through the use of the ICTs, will be fine tuned to the needs of the community in close partnership with all local authorities and an executive Plan of Action will be redacted and presented to the Authorities and the international community.

Arthur Cole