Sanitation marketing: low-cost approaches to technology improvements

The World Bank estimates that over 95 percent of the Malagasy population lives on less than $2 a day. This situation can be linked to the prolonged 2009-2014 political crisis that crippled the economy. Furthermore, the country is exposed to a number of natural hazards such as cyclones, floods and droughts, often leading to famine. It is within this context that the FAA has approached sanitation marketing, which applies social and commercial marketing approaches to increase supply and demand for improved sanitation facilities.

The FAA programme encourages people to climb the sanitation ladder by valuing local technologies, materials and skills emerging from the communities themselves, as opposed to imposing externally developed technologies. Such context-appropriate technologies are of particular importance in areas where climatic and geological factors threaten the sustainability of behaviour change. The FAA does not promote one-size-fits-all solutions but rather encourages a range of context-specific solutions developed within local communities. These solutions are continuously refined by sub-grantees, working across the country with engineers who emerge from within the communities during the programme activities. This process encourages people to improve their latrines through the use of affordable materials and skills, while ensuring that their facilities are hygienic and last.

The diverse sanitation marketing approaches cover everything from support to small-scale entrepreneurs to low-cost solutions implemented directly by the latrine owners. For example, communities are sometimes encouraged to collectively buy a bag of cement to smear the slabs of their latrines made of mud and manure, thereby making the latrines easier to clean. The FAA also considers handwashing technologies an integral part of sanitation marketing, as well as various other tools, such as an ash scoop that makes it easier to effectively distribute ash in the pits.

FAA sub-grantee Caritas developed a sanitation marketing approach using an alternative financing mechanism. The approach involves village saving schemes and in-kind payments such as a bag of sweet potatoes, beans or tomatoes in exchange for products and services to improve their latrines. This approach is strongly consistent with Malagasy culture. Furthermore, Caritas works closely with small-scale masons and entrepreneurs to test the market and together with community members and village engineers, they find creative and affordable technological solutions. A non-negotiable principle, applied across all FAA activities, is that sanitation marketing must never compromise the focus on collective behaviour change, led by the community members themselves. The FAA’s support to the marketing of local and appropriate technologies is therefore initiated only after a village has achieved ODF status.