



COVID-19 IPPF Innovation and best practice: Advocacy for an essential health package

SRHR must always be an essential package but in times of crisis, people's rights remain and must be respected. COVID-19 quickly demonstrated the negative impacts like the increase in GBV cases and a decrease in family planning users. It was more than necessary for FISA to intervene and provide solutions. For us, it is vital to work with the Government and to solve together the problems related to SRHR.

Malala Randriamanana,
FISA National Programme
Coordinator

The COVID-19 pandemic and its consequences negatively affect the availability of and access to basic services, including sexual and reproductive health (SRH) care, and is further exacerbating existing inequalities. IPPF Member Associations have been affected by the spread of COVID-19, as service delivery points were forced to close, and some operations were suspended. Concerted political action to secure sexual and reproductive health and rights (SRHR) provision is necessary to face this challenge adequately.

IPPF Member Associations have been actively engaging in advocacy with decision-makers at national, regional, and international levels to ensure that access to SRHR and SRH services are safeguarded and available to all who need them. Member Associations have demonstrated exceptional leadership and resilience in their advocacy efforts to secure these goals:

- to secure and promote the continued provision of and access to SRH care and SRHR programmes
- to champion innovative approaches to service provision and programme delivery
- to tackle counter-attacks on SRHR
- to ensure that long-term policies and programming on SRHR are not affected by a shift in priorities in funding and emergency services

This Learning Brief highlights innovations through the Madagascar IPPF Member Association Fianakaviana Sambatra (FISA). Since the beginning of the COVID-19 pandemic, FISA has enhanced its advocacy efforts to ensure that sexual and reproductive healthcare could be adopted as part of the national essential health package that was set up by the government in response to the pandemic.

The initial findings of the International Planned Parenthood Federation's (IPPF) COVID-19 impact survey March 2020 showed a steep reduction of women's access to health services in Madagascar. Restricted movement, service reduction and fears of infection risk during visits to health centres demonstrated an urgent need to ensure women had continued access to life-saving sexual and reproductive healthcare.

COVID-19 impact

The pandemic had a severe impact on the provision and access to FISA's services mainly due to movement restrictions in Madagascar. The immediate effect of these restrictions was seen both with regular clients and new service users throughout the country. Service usage was reduced by 2% amongst existing users, service uptake by 50% amongst new users. The risks to women's health and protection were exacerbated by gender-based violence, increased living costs, and individual movements being restricted by stay at home advice.

Enhancing services in the pandemic

Madagascar's first 500 COVID-19 cases were registered in May 2020. FISA saw a drop in client flow and greater demands on healthcare providers being called to support COVID-19 patients beyond the provision of sexual and reproductive healthcare. Limited services and lower levels of clinic attendance meant that women lost access to contraception services and commodities, increasing the number of unintended pregnancies and cases of gender-based violence (GBV) as the lockdown continued.

FISA's agile response to the impact of the pandemic was to strengthen its remote service delivery approach through outreach and mobile clinics to reach the most vulnerable populations. FISA enhanced its access and information through a network of women's peer champions who pass on information within their communities and act as community-based distributors to provide SRH commodities amongst their communities. FISA expanded their capacity for Sayana Press self-injection in 2020, with 16,710 injections distributed. As young people were no longer able to access vital comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) and services in clinics, FISA intensified CSE through social media sites such as Facebook, reaching more than 331 young people through online sexuality education (SE).

SRHR adopted as an essential service package

In Madagascar, FISA has been working with the government for several decades as the leading sexual and reproductive health provider in the country, advising on sexual and reproductive health issues to improve the lives of women and young people across the country. FISA is the founding member of the national SRHR Coalition for strengthening the health system at the national level. The IPPF Member Association played a crucial role in SRHR service delivery by working with the government on the national COVID-19 Task Force and collaborated in the national public health messaging on COVID-19 and SRH. FISA is and remains a member of the committee set up by the Ministry of Public Health.

A logistics subcommittee meeting and leadership training was organized to strengthen its members' capacity to manage contraceptive commodities to ensure there were no stockouts. These activities were under the leadership of the Ministry of Public Health.

FISA worked with the Ministry of Public Health to raise awareness on the updated reproductive health and family planning Law (SR-PF 2017-043) by celebrating World Contraception Day under the theme Family Planning and COVID-19 for September 2020.

FISA continues to push for enhanced SRH care quality and participates in parliamentary debates to remind the government of the importance of SRH. As a key SRH partner, FISA contributes to national targets and will continue to monitor their SRHR accountability work, as the government firmly committed to ICPD+25.



Key challenges

- Reaching communities remains complex and challenging as the Member Association needs to have approval from a public authority to operate outreach delivery models.
- Youth SRHR needs stronger focus with more specific advocacy efforts to ensure that youth-related interventions and activities complement the government youth strategy.

Next steps

- More strategies to reach those who are vulnerable by identifying them and offering tailored services. During periods of confinement, pregnant women still needed their consultations. UNFPA and its partners set up a transport system for these pregnant women.
- Continue to strengthen communications on sexual reproductive health and rights in a crisis setting.
- A better method mix should be offered with self-injection and long-acting with support for women in their communities for monitoring Sayana.
- FISA has had approval from the Ministry of Population and the Ministry of Public Health for implementing telemedicine from February 2021. The teleconsultation and counselling hotline runs with FISA providers and covers psychosocial care for GBV and family planning services.
- Continue to develop advocacy strategies - involving youth - targeting decision makers (government, parliamentarians) to raise awareness on implementation gaps in existing SRHR related legislations, policies, and commitments (including ICPD+25).

Lessons

- To work more closely with the government for approval to carry out additional outreach activities and interventions within communities.
- Need to sustain collaboration with the government with the SRH progress achieved. Must ensure that the policies and commitments secured are now operationalized across the country.
- Stronger focus to improve client trust and putting COVID-19 measures in facilities, both static and mobile. These measures must include distancing, hand washing and PPE to ensure every client feels more confident. Need to ensure facilities are well equipped and monitored continuously.
- Implement specific strategies to sensitize clients who fear infection from attending clinics, such as working with women's committees to influence peers in the community.
- Promote contraception methods that are effective in crisis settings - more long-acting and promotion of self-injection. Before COVID-19, Sayana Press was not in the main method mix offered. The pandemic situation led to the government and FISA promoting self-injection. When a client is interested in self-injection, she is monitored and supported for three months to ensure it is suitable. After three months, a client will stop being monitored and can continue with self-care.



Recommendations for SRH services, governments, and civil society organizations (CSOs)

- Governments must ensure that all political responses, whether aimed at the domestic or international action, are people-centred and gender transformative, guarantee the right to health, uphold the commitment to universal health coverage (UHC) and strengthen health systems with adequate resources for SRHR, able to mitigate the impact of future epidemic outbreaks.
- Governments should ensure that countries have emergency preparedness plans to secure access to essential SRH services, including Sexual and Gender-Based Violence (SGBV) services and prevention and comprehensive sexuality education (CSE), during emergencies.
- Donors, governments and CSOs should ensure that adequate support is provided to movements and local civil society, especially to those working on youth and women's rights, who play a crucial role during health crises in realizing and defending human rights, including SRHR for all.
- Donors, governments and CSOs must develop long term collaborative efforts to ensure adequate resources for SRHR, including specifically for SRHR advocacy in times of crisis.

It's hard to self-inject, already seeing my baby getting vaccinated is very hard, but I'd like to try, I'd save more time to do something else like take more care of my home. I also know that FISA will always be there to accompany me when I need it.

Sayana client

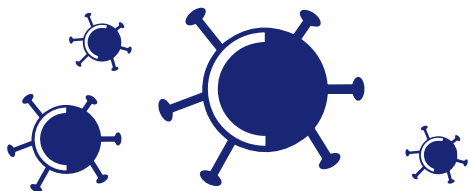
Endnotes

IPPF COVID-19 Impact Surveys

IPPF COVID-19 Impact survey 1 March 2020: [COVID-19 Survey Results | IPPF \(ippf-covid19.org\)](https://ippf-covid19.org/)

IPPF COVID-19 Impact survey 2 June 2020: [COVID-19 Round 2 Survey Results | IPPF \(ippf-covid19.org\)](https://ippf-covid19.org/)

IPPF COVID-19 Impact survey 3 November 2020: [COVID-19 Round 3 Survey Results | IPPF \(ippf-covid19.org\)](https://ippf-covid19.org/)



About FISA

Fianakaviana Sambatra (FISA) delivers a wide range of services: family planning, prevention and management of HIV and AIDS and the provision and dissemination of comprehensive SRH materials. FISA uses its on-the-ground experience to advise the government on national SRH policy. It has partnered with the Ministry of Health, Family Planning and Social Protection, and the Ministry of Youth to advocate for a concerted approach to resolving the country's critical SRH issues.



Who we are

The International Planned Parenthood Federation (IPPF) delivers sexual and reproductive health services that let people make their own choices. We fight for everyone to exercise their right to make those choices. We are local, through our members and volunteers, and global, through our network. We meet need, wherever it is, whoever requires it, for as long as they want it.

Published: May, 2021
Image 1: Madagascar/ FISA
Image 2: Madagascar/ FISA
Image 3: Madagascar/ FISA
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