

IN MADAGASCAR, A CHAIN OF UNION SOLIDARITY SUPPORTS SOME OF THE MOST MARGINALIZED PEOPLE



As the world reels from the impacts of COVID-19, workers and communities are affected differently in their local contexts. Over the course of the summer, the Steelworkers Humanity Fund (SHF) Updates will report on the experiences of our partner organizations in Asia, Latin America and Africa, as they respond to this evolving crisis. This fourth update will focus on Syndicalisme et Vie des Sociétés (SVS) and Sendika Kritianina Malagasy (SEKRIMA), in Madagascar.



Eugene (SVS) giving a helping hand during the distribution event in Ampasy Nahampoana.

“Here in Andrakaraka, our livelihood comes from fishing. That is the only activity we do to support our children, to send them to school.” For Florine, as for many others from her village, although COVID-19 always felt like a remote threat, the strict restrictions imposed by the Malagasy authorities brought very concrete consequences to their livelihood.

Andrakaraka lies only a few kilometres away from the nearby town of Fort-Dauphin, where mining giant Rio Tinto has been exploiting ilmenite and other metals for many years now. But unlike other communities around it, most of the village did not benefit from the presence of the mine. As observed by a 2019 USW delegation, many families eke out a living by cutting and selling kindling, the product of small plot farming or their

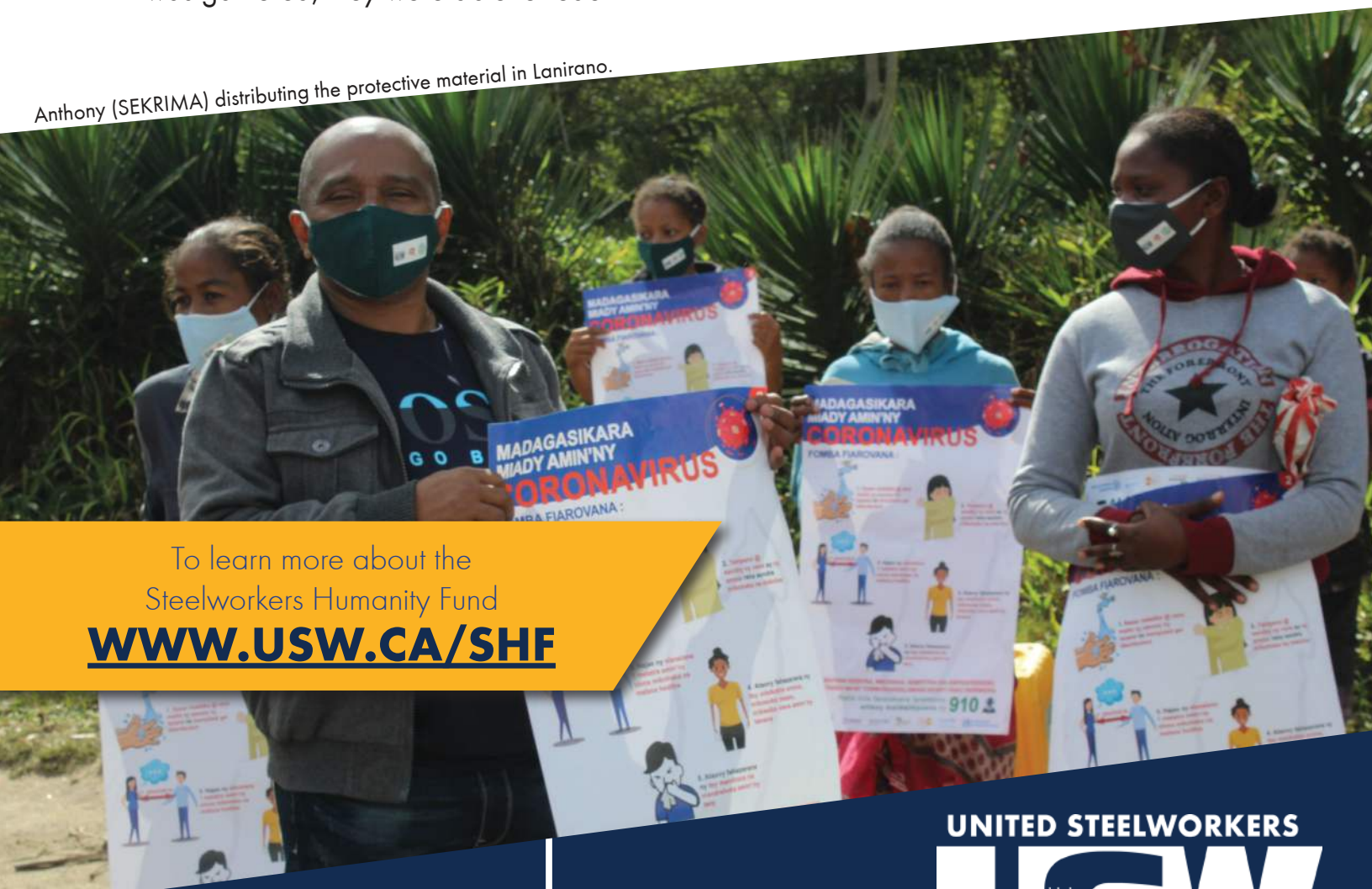
few catches from the nearby lake, which saw its fish stock decline dramatically when it was damned for mine use. When COVID-19 hit Madagascar and the isolated town of Fort-Dauphin, the government, as in many other places of the world, imposed a partial lockdown to contain the spread of the pandemic. Following those restrictions, the price of essential goods skyrocketed. The informal sector workers, many of them street vendors, farmers and fishermen from surrounding communities, had no choice but to defy the restrictions in order to continue feeding themselves and their families, without taking the necessary precautions. Often, they were also violently apprehended by the police as they were unable to buy masks, the use of which had been made compulsory by local authorities.

Prior to the pandemic, union leaders Eugene and Anthony have been denouncing the long-standing economic marginalization and political neglect in which Andrakaraka and the neighbouring communities in Emanakana, Lanirano and Ampasy Nahampoana have been left for years. With the economic consequences of COVID-19 being felt even more strongly than the virus itself, they approached the Steelworkers Humanity Fund for support in organizing a series of awareness-raising events and the distribution of basic protective equipment and food staples in those villages. Once all of the necessary food and equipment was gathered, they were able to reach

410 households (a total of 1530 people) in just 4 days, bringing the local press to pay attention to the dire situation in the communities, all of this while respecting the government's health guidelines. Through chains of solidarity such as this one, the Steelworkers Humanity Fund is able to support some of the most vulnerable populations, in Madagascar and around the world. But as for other similar initiatives, this could not have been possible without the dedication and commitment of local partners and union activists with strong involvement in their community and organizing skills.

Photos: Solidarité syndicale SVS/SEKRIMA

Anthony (SEKRIMA) distributing the protective material in Lanirano.



To learn more about the
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