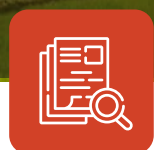




Photo: Mihanta T. Bakoliarimisa



Fokonolona of Tsiafajavona

A territory of life in Madagascar

Author(s):¹ Mihanta T. Bakoliarimisa

It is said that the *Fokonolona*, or local community, of Tsiafajavona descends from the five sons of the King called Andriampenitra. The community's territory of life is partially overlapped with the 8,130-hectare high-altitude **protected area of Manjakatempo-Ankaratra**. The territory of life consists of at least 16,000 hectares located in the district of Ambatolampy, around 100 km south of the capital city of Madagascar. It hosts the third highest mountain in Madagascar known as Ankaratra, culminating at 2642 m on *Tsiafajavona* which means "always mist".

A relationship deeply rooted by a unique history

The *Fokonolona* of *Tsiafajavona* has existed since the royal era.² The territory of life is delineated by the five *tsatobato*, or stones, symbolizing the five sons of King

Andriampenitra. Its delimitation is known as *Dimy lahy manodidina ny kianja* or "the five men around the arena". *Manjakatempo* was a sovereign kingdom belonging to the Merina ethnic group, which is still the majority population today (followed by the Betsileo ethnic group). The King's story relates two significant facts: the culture of *Tsy azo tantaraina* ('keeping secret') and the King's request to his daughter's suitors.

Nowadays, the culture of 'keeping secret' still exists. Initially intended to keep secret the kingdom's defense strategies against other kingdoms during the conquest wars of the reunification period, it is currently used to preserve endogenous knowledge and the genealogy of the King's successive generations.

Although the natural forests already existed, the King promised to marry his daughter to the suitor who would bring him the most forest species in the mountain.



16,000
hectares



Custodians:
Fokonolona of Tsiafajavona,
31,000 members

This is the origin story of today's rich biodiversity which comes from across different parts of the island.

This story is the basis of a strong and rooted identity of the *Fokonolona* community as the descendants of King Andriampenitra. It guides their efforts to bequeath these precious resources and endogenous knowledge to successive generations.

¹ **Mihanta T. Bakoliarimisa** is volunteering for the national network of local communities managing natural resources, **TAFO MIHAAVO**, a Member of the ICCA Consortium. Mihanta is committed to amplify voices for the recognition of rights and responsibilities of local communities. She is also the Chair of the Programme Committee of the ICCA Consortium.

Translation: Mihanta T. Bakoliarimisa and Jina R. Ratsimba

² The royal era lasted between 1500 to 1896; the exact duration of the kingdom of Andriampenitra is not known to the author.

**“Ny mitevy
ala dia maha
kizo fara
– Clearing
forests
compromised
our
descendants’
future.”**

A Tangalamena of Tsiafajavona, 2020

Photo: JRR



One Fokonolona: a territory of life rich in biodiversity, a unique culture, and means of subsistence

More than 5,000 households comprising 31,000 members of the *Fokonolona* depend on the territory of life and its resources. Ankaratra Mountain and its associated forest habitat maintain water sources that feed the lowlands for rice cultivation and provide drinking water. The misty mountain and forest ecosystems of Tsiafajavona regulate the micro-climate of the territory of life due to the soil's water retention and the evaporation that leads to the formation of clouds, mists and rain. The cold lake provides drinking water for the town of Ambatolampy, located about 17 km from the lake.



“Manjakatampo sady tsy tompoina no tsy manompo – Manjakatampo is a sovereign, self-reliant kingdom, not servant to nor served by others.”

Traditional proverb

The *Fokonolona* lives entirely from traditional farming. Rice, cassava, corn and potatoes are the main crops, and cattle, pigs and poultry are the most common livestock. Crops and livestock are dedicated entirely for household consumption. In the case of urgent needs of cash, some of them are sold within the village. The forest also provides firewood from pine and eucalyptus forest plantations, subject to prior authorization from the forestry authorities.

The *Fokonolona* has pride linked to the presence of flagship species, endemic to their territory of life. The existence of the amphibians *Boophis williamsi* and *Mantidactylus pauliani* has granted the area status as a **Zero Extinction Alliance site**. There is also an endangered species of Gecko, *Lygodactylus mirabilis*. Part of the territory of life is considered an important area for birds' conservation, especially for the species *Tachybaptus pelzelinii*. Aloe macrolada is also present in the protected area, a widely used medicinal plant listed under **CITES (Appendix II)**. The Protected Area has 11 Critically Endangered, 32 Endangered, and 25 Vulnerable species (**CEPF profile 2014**). This rich biodiversity promotes ecotourism, another source of income for some members of the community who are united in the association of local guides.

The *Fokonolona*'s attachment to their territory of life

The 'cold lake' provides drinking water for the town of Ambatolampy. Photo: JRR



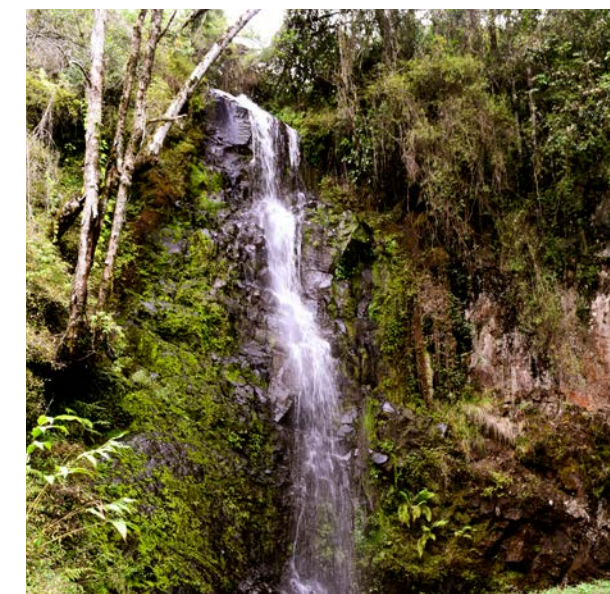
Rice fields alongside the road to the main entry of the Protected Area Manjakatampo-Ankaratra. Photo: JRR

lies in ecosystem services offered to them. They are intransigent about the conservation of their forest because it represents the dowry of their princess and a legacy to successive generations. The territory has seven *Doany*, or unique sacred sites, mostly tombs of successive kings where thousands of people from across the country come to practice rituals and worship every year. Waterfalls and water sources are among the sites where people ask to be healed from incurable diseases or delivered from evil spells or witchcraft.

The methods for weather forecasting rely on the birds called *Kankafotra* (*Cuculus rochii* or Madagascar Cuckoo) which predict a period of rain, drought, or hail. Offering rituals are accordingly indicated by the Tangalamena at specific sacred sites to thank or ask for blessings from ancestors and nature. Astrological omens are used to determine specific days, including the most famous *Alahamady*, *Alakaosy* and *Alahasaty*. *Alahamady* is a rejoicing day celebrated every three years to thank Mother Earth, also known as *Malagasy* New Year's Day. *Alakaosy* is dedicated for rituals to honour parents. People are prohibited from playing music, drinking alcoholic beverages, and eating pork and garlic at *Ankaratra* sacred sites during these rituals.

Several interests in contradiction and a complex game of actors

There are divergent interests between conservation



Waterfall of Ankaratra and sacred site ou Doany. Photo: JRR

and use, commons and private interests, which led to multiple designations in parts of the territory over time:

- From 1923, as a forestry station designed to protect natural forest and practices of silviculture with exotic species such as pines and eucalyptus during colonization;
- Under state management after independence in 1960;
- From 1998: implementation site for the project of Integrated Forestry Development of *Vakinankaratra* through the State Ministry of Water and Forests, and German cooperation (Gesellschaft für Technische Zusammenarbeit);
- From 2001, in accordance with Law 96-025 called GELOSE,³ contracted management of forest by "Union Forestière d'Ambatolampy";
- From 2008, return to state management;
- Proposed twice as an area of high conservation priority;
- As a new protected area (Manjakatampo-Ankaratra) in 2013 for temporary protection purpose (see **ARRETE N° 14983/2013**); and
- As a definitive protected area (Manjakatampo-Ankaratra) since 2015 (see **DECRET N°2015-711**).

³ Law 96-025 regards local management of renewable natural resources. See [here](#).

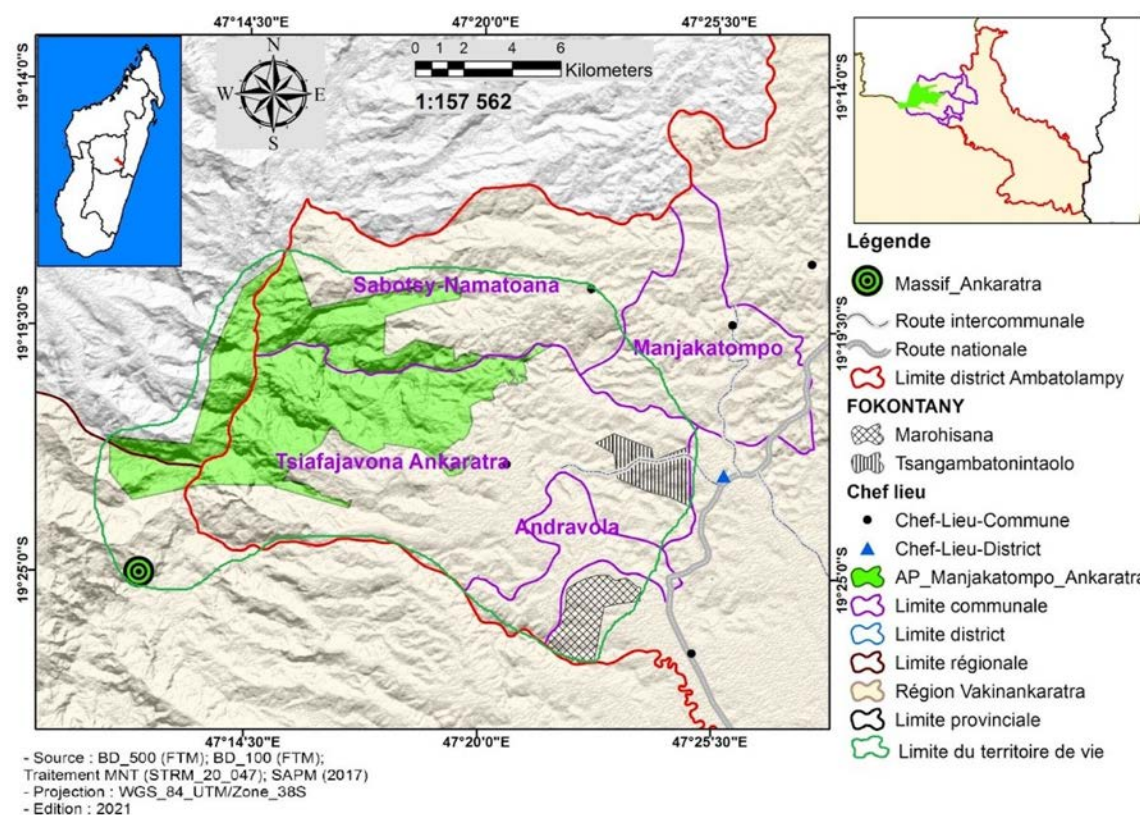


The *Fokonolona*'s self-determined territory of life does not have any legal recognition. Governance remains customary and respects the advice of the *Tangalamena*, or wise persons, grouped in the association *Ankaratra Tsy Rava Fenitra*. The *Tangalamena* act as guardians of ancestral values and as cultural guides. They hold specific attributes, knowledge and know-how, depending on the genealogical lineages of the five sons of King *Andriampénitra* to which they belong. They are responsible for: (1) interpreting meteorology; (2) being the guardian of the *Hazomanga* or ritual stick; (3) being the guardian of the fady or forbidden; (4) practicing traditional medicine; and (5) predicting specific days according to astrology and the appropriate rituals of offerings to sacred sites called *Doany*. Decision-making by the *Fokonolona* related to use of natural resources, fauna, flora, water and land, depending on guidelines set by the *Tangalamena*.

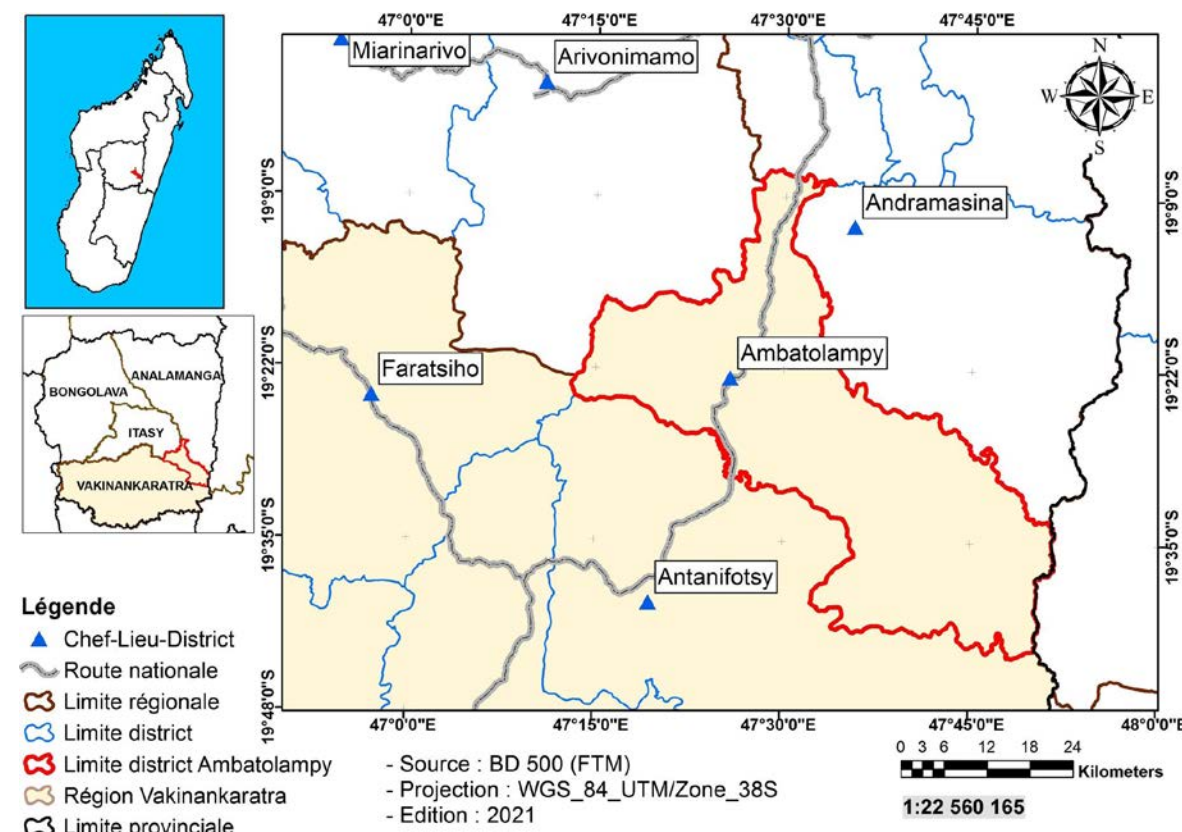
The legal rights to manage the Manjakatempo-Ankaratra protected area (which does not cover the entire territory of life) are assigned to two different types of institutions with overlapping responsibilities. On the one hand, there are eight community-based organizations called *Vondron'Olona Ifotony* (VOI),

legitimately representing the descendants of the King. Since 2014, they are legally managing eight sectors of the Manjakatempo-Ankaratra Protected Area through contracts of management transfer (initially for 3 years and then renewed for 10 years).⁴ The VOI were created around the same time as the proposition for the new Protected Area in 2011. On the other hand, there is the NGO *Vondrona Ivon'ny Fampandrosoana* (VIF), based in the capital city Antananarivo, which had promoted the creation of the Manjakatempo-Ankaratra Protected Area with the financial support of Global Wildlife Conservation (GWC) and Conservation International (CI). Following this, the NGO was mandated by the Ministry of the Environment to be the delegated manager of the protected area.

Manjakatempo-Ankaratra is a "Natural Resource Reserve" and classified as IUCN management category VI.⁵ The establishment of a protected area was decided by the State via the Commission of the System of Protected Areas of Madagascar, following a consultation which many residents perceived as flawed. As the community notes, the consultation process did not comply with the best standards for seeking free, prior



Map showing the approximate delimitation of the Fokonolona of Tsiafajavona (green outline) and the protected area (green area). Credits: P. Ramanamandimby / M. Bakoliarimisa



Administrative boundaries and location in Madagascar. Credits: P. Ramanamandimby

and informed consent. Instead, consultation meetings were marked by a culture of fear that created a silent majority, and those who expressed their reservations and disagreement were struggling to find the right arguments and were ultimately not heard.

According to existing laws and rules,⁶ the modality which should be applied in this protected area is co-management with local communities. The creation of the protected area was also formalized through a *Dina* (a typical *Malagasy* social convention) and a *Tangalamena* (wise person) is in charge of its application. The *Dina* is a set of rules defined collectively in consultation within the management committee, which is presided by the mayors of *Tsiafajavona* and *Sabotsy Namatoana* administrative communes and made up of representatives of the eight VOI community-based organizations and the *Tangalamena*. Three monitoring patrols are carried out weekly by rangers called *KASTI* alongside members of *Fokonolona*, to prevent and detect any illegal exploitation and non-compliance with the *Dina*.

There have been challenges, however. Since June 2020, this institutional arrangement has become

flawed because the NGO VIF left the area after its project funding ended. Also, the mandate of the mayor concluded. The management committee is therefore no longer functional. Meanwhile, the process of legal recognition of the *Dina* is still pending at the Court of first instance.

The State government, through various ministries and its branches, owns and holds full powers to decide over the use of national lands and natural resources while the *Fokonolona* remains an advisory body in decision-making related to the use of its territories. Unfortunately, this advice is often ignored by the authorities. The following decisions were made entirely within this prerogative: use of Cold Lake (120 ha) by Jirama (state-owned company supplying electricity and drinking water); establishment of the Harivola trout fishing farm

⁴ According to the law 96-025 (called GELOSE) on the local management of renewable natural resources.

⁵ Article 1 of Decree No. 2015-711 of the Establishment of the Protected Area called "Manjakatempo-Ankaratra".

⁶ Article 5 of Decree No. 2015-711 of the Establishment of the Protected Area called "Manjakatempo-Ankaratra".

in 124 ha; use of 60 ha of forest containing water sources for the Nouvelle Brasserie de Madagascar⁷ bought by the Brasserie Star beer brewery; allocation of cultivation land to Fifamanor; and the allocation of a forest concession to the furniture company Hazovato.

Main threats to the Fokonolona, their territory of life, and their future generations

The risk of conflicts between conservation and use of resources affects the future of the territory of life. The fact that the State recognizes only protected areas as a privileged means of biodiversity conservation and imposed modern governance institutions threatens the *Fokonolona*'s sense of belonging to the territory. The lack of recognition of the *Fokonolona* risks leading to disempowerment and disinterest of community members in their traditional governance body.

No proper participatory spatial planning process took into account the different rights-holders and interest groups when the boundaries of the Manjakatempo-Ankaratra Protected Area was superimposed on part of the territory of life. This is detrimental to the sound management of natural resources. Not considering the *Fokonolona*'s decisions related to their commons gradually erodes their will to participate in the management of the territory. Even more, community members point out that it disturbs the transfer of traditional knowledge to the next generation. Many consider that the *fady* (secret and forbidden) has been broken.

There are other threats to the survival of the *Fokonolona*. For example, growing families that have been farming

the same plots of agricultural land for generations cannot expand their farmland because the state granted large areas to private groups. Other sources of income such as tourism activities are scarce because of difficult access due to the bad state or lack of roads.

Some members of the *Fokonolona* are demotivated from participating in conservation activities by the imbalance or lack of benefit-sharing by private companies. They are also deprived of the use and access to vital resources to their survival. For example, the Cold Lake supplies the city of Ambatolampy with drinking water, while the communities who are protecting it do not have access to it. Local communities have to pay fees to collect firewood, while each community-based organization has an obligation to produce and plant 12,500 plants annually, according to the contract of management transfer with the Ministry of Environment and Sustainable Development.

Insecurity, due to political instability that has reigned in the country since 2009, pushes the *Fokonolona* to sleep with their livestock to prevent being robbed. The ineffectiveness of law enforcement and the justice system in case of theft or illegal exploitation threatens the social peace within the territory of life.

Uncontrolled bushfires ravaged part of the forest between 2009 and 2011. This threat of wildfires always occurs during dry periods. Reforestation actions are deployed to restore these parts, firebreaks are put in place, and increased surveillance is carried out during risky periods.

The *Fokonolona* members are often victim of reprisals when they claim their rights and seek accountability from



The Tangalamena, a representative of the forest department and community members indicating the territory of life delineation on sketch map. Photo: JRR



Community leaders and representatives of the Fokonolona, the eight community based organisations, the Tangalamena, the association of local guides, TAFO MIHAARO Vakinankaratra. Photo: JRR

authorities, including compensations for the use of natural resources in their territory. In order to restore the balance in benefit sharing from the use of natural resources, the *Fokonolona* has begun the process of taking over the management of the protected area. This process aims to achieve the status of Community Protected Area under the **Code of Protected Areas**, which mentions "community governance" as a recognized governance type and considers Community Protected Areas and Marine Protected Areas as a specific Protected Area type. Several Community Protected Areas already exist in Madagascar where co-management is promoted between major international conservation organizations and community-based organizations. However, the aspiration for Manjakatempo-Ankaratra is to make it an entirely community-led (governed and managed) initiative.

Appropriate recognition of community rights is the missing piece for authentic sustainable development

Aware of the importance of its flora, fauna, land, and water to their survival, the *Fokonolona* of *Tsiafajavona* aspires to restore indigenous forests and revive local cultures for future generations. This forest restoration drive is accompanied by their initiative to use plastic-free alternatives within the nursery through the use of earthen pots. They request access to technologies such as the use of drones to carry out forest

monitoring, in order to reduce their workload and redirect it to productive sectors.

The *Fokonolona* asks that benefit-sharing arising from the exploitation of the territory of life's resources should be renegotiated with all stakeholders. The aim is to set up win-win collaborations between the state, the private sector and the *Fokonolona*.

Strengthening *Fokonolona*'s rights to appropriate and affordable land tenure remains a priority to improve their livelihoods. Community members hope that improved access to land combined with agricultural inputs and capacity building on organic farming will boost production. In particular, they have in mind a local variety of potato called *Ovin'Ankaratra*, for which the region was once famous.

To realize their vision, it is fundamental to gain the appropriate recognition of the customary governance system and legality of *Fokonolona*. Thus, the *Fokonolona* of *Tsiafajavona* wants to have their territory of life recognized as a Community Protected Area where decision-making on resources and spatial planning are community-led and adapted to the local culture.

⁷ Article 6 of Decree No. 2015-711 establishing the Protected Area called "Manjakatempo Ankaratra".



About this report

This chapter is part of the Territories of Life: 2021 Report, composed of local, national, regional and global analyses of territories and areas conserved by Indigenous peoples and local communities (sometimes abbreviated as “ICCAs” or “territories of life”). The report is part of an ongoing process to develop the knowledge base on territories of life in support of Indigenous peoples’ and local communities’ self-determined priorities. It is produced by the **ICCA Consortium with the support of several partners**.

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Available at: report.territoriesoflife.org.

About the ICCA Consortium

The ICCA Consortium is a global non-profit association dedicated to supporting Indigenous peoples and local communities who are governing and conserving their collective lands, waters and territories. Its organisational Members and individual Honorary members in more than 80 countries are undertaking collective actions at the local, national, regional and international levels across several thematic streams, including documenting, sustaining and defending territories of life, as well as youth and intergenerational relations.

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