**Women’s March Madagascar – 2019**

Three years ago, on January 21, 2017, I joined 600,000 people in Washington D.C. and over seven million people worldwide to walk against hatred and bigotry and in honor of equal rights and kindness for all. It was a day that I will never forget.

Though geographically far from Madagascar at the time, my thoughts turned often to my Malagasy friends and colleagues on that day, as they do on any day when I am feeling great emotion. I have been working in Madagascar for nearly ten years now, and not a moment goes by when I am not made a better person from all that Madagascar has taught me. The experiences, relationships, and discovery that have defined my years of work in this great nation have changed me completely – and for the better.

I am a co-founder and co-organizer of E2M2: Ecological and Epidemiological Modeling in Madagascar, an annual course that teaches biological and epidemiological statistical and mechanistic modeling techniques to Malagasy – and more recently – to a small subset of *vahiny* students. Since 2016, we have been hosting this course every Malagasy summer at Centre ValBio in Ranomafana. Additionally, I am a postdoctoral scholar in the Department of Integrative Biology at UC Berkeley in the United States of America.

In the United States today, female students earn more university-level bachelor’s degrees every year than male students but account for only 35% of annual degrees in the so-called STEM-related fields of Science, Technology, Engineering, and Mathematics. Even more problematically, evidence abounds of the so-called “leaky pipeline” phenomenon whereby women drop out of STEM-related careers with advancing years, largely due to pressures associated with balancing family obligations. Women account for only 20% of faculty positions in STEM fields at top-tier public universities across the country and are severely underpaid as compared to male counterparts occupying the same positions. On average, women in STEM-related fields in America earn $5USD per hour less than men for the same level of work. That’s 180,000 Ariary lost for every 10-hour work day.

In Madagascar, publicly available education data are more difficult to come by—especially for rural regions, where challenges in access to educational resources plague students of every gender. In urban centers like Antananarivo, women outnumber men in STEM subfields like biology and medicine but are still under-represented in higher-paying disciplines like engineering. In our 2019 E2M2 class, we are proud to report that 2/3 of our student body and 4/5 of our mentoring team is female—but we recognize that the fight does not end here. My colleague and co-instructor Christian Ranaivoson reminded me the other day that E2M2 is part of what he calls “a big thing” –an ongoing struggle to advance science education and opportunity for both men and women alike – and to continue that support as students advance in their educational trajectories. In Madagascar, the leaky pipeline is applicable to every type of student, as financial and family pressures accumulate as students get older, making continued study unjustifiable and impossible for many in the absence of educational stipends and guidance in procuring extrinsic grants and fellowships.

Several of our E2M2 students have asked me this week what the Women’s March is supposed to be about. For me, the Women’s March is about being fair. The Women’s March acknowledges that the world as it is is a very unfair place, and by marching, we affirm our commitment to trying to change that. And so I march as a promise to do my best to make the world a better place—for my nieces and nephew in America and for our E2M2 students, mentors, and even instructors in Madagascar. On the day that our youngest participant – baby Tiantso – comes back to teach me how to model my data, maybe then I will know that in some small way we have succeeded.

In the words of a wise US Senator and onetime Secretary of State, I say—in Malagasy and in English:

*“Ataovy ao an-tsaina fa matanjaka, sy misy lanja ary tena il****à****na ianareo. Ary koa mendrika ary manan-jo ny hahazo izay zavatsoa sy fahafahana misy amin'ny fiainana inareo*

*“Never doubt that you are valuable and powerful and deserving of every chance and opportunity in the world.”*