Since late 2009 the country office is actively trying to engage the private sector. A handful of very positive partnerships have been developed since. Particularly good examples are the partnerships with the country’s three mobile phone companies to establish a joint free help line for abused children; the free logistical support of a shipping company in times of disaster (cyclones/flooding); or the donation of cement for the construction of latrines from the largest cement producer in Madagascar. These early success stories, however, cannot veil the fact that it has become very difficult to find new partners and to further expand the cooperation with the private sector. What are the reasons? First of all investment in Madagascar has been very poor since the outbreak of the political crisis in 2009 and potential partners are rare. Secondly, the legal framework in Madagascar is not conducive to CSR partnerships. Finally, the concept of Corporate Social Responsibility has no tradition in Madagascar and faces wide scepticism within the private sector. In order to adjust its CSR strategy to this challenging environment, UNICEF Madagascar has engaged in a very strategic partnership with the international management consulting firm Ernst & Young.

In 2011 Ernst & Young provided in-land services and conducted a study for UNICEF about CSR in Madagascar. The objective was to learn about the perception of the concept of CSR within the private sector and to analyse the current practice and potential for CSR activities in favour of children. Ernst and Young and UNICEF elaborated a questionnaire and established a data base of companies. In total 321 enterprises of 20 different sectors were contacted of which 108 were then randomly selected to participate in the survey.

Some of the results were matching UNICEF’s assumption, for example the fact that only 40% of the questioned companies were familiar with the concept of CSR or that only half of them had some kind of internal code of conduct. Other results were very encouraging, saying that 83% of the enterprises were in some way or other already engaged in supporting their communities, i.e. through infrastructure projects or donations to charities. UNICEF learned furthermore that 87% of the companies were generally in favour of engaging in CSR activities for children, in particular in school construction, WASH and fight against child labour. As obstacles for such an engagement they mentioned three main reasons: lack of means, difficulty to measure the impact of CSR activities on their business and lack of information about projects they could potentially support.
The Ernst & Young study provides UNICEF Madagascar with important knowledge as to how to design potential partnerships with specific sectors. Recently UNICEF is, for example, attempting to extend cooperation with the booming mining sector in Madagascar. Understanding these potential partners, their corporate needs and interests, will be the key to creating new and fruitful partnerships and a great entry point to advocate for compliance with child friendly business practices in the mining industry.