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Qualitative case study

Teachers for All: Unpacking primary teacher deployment in Madagascar

UNICEF INNOCENTI – GLOBAL OFFICE OF RESEARCH AND FORESIGHT

Executive summary

Country context

In Madagascar, teachers are unevenly distributed – almost a third of the variation in the number of teachers in Madagascar does not depend on the variation in the number of students. Most rural areas experience acute teacher shortages, where trained teachers especially are in short supply. Within schools, too, teachers are unevenly distributed. These imbalances affect learning outcomes to the detriment of younger students as well as those living in rural and remote areas.

In response to these challenges, in 2017, the Ministry of Education (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale [MEN]) launched a Teacher Policy introducing a variety of measures to 'rationalize' the recruitment and deployment of teachers. First, this included the continuation of deconcentration[1] in teacher allocation to facilitate a more equitable distribution of teachers within the country. Second, the government mandated the deployment of all new teachers to rural and remote areas as well as introduced restrictions on their transfers for the first few years of deployment. Third, the government committed to developing and implementing an information management system bringing together data on teachers, students and schools.

More than five years into the implementation of these policies, inequities in the distribution of teachers in Madagascar persist. At the same time, systematic evidence on the reasons behind the continuing imbalance in teacher distribution between and within schools is lacking.

Research questions and methodology

The Teachers for All research project, currently active in 13 countries in Africa, aims to generate evidence on teacher allocation practices and the key policy bottlenecks and opportunities that can inform further improvements. This report presents the findings from the qualitative phase of the project and builds on results from the quantitative analysis of existing administrative and examination data that explored the composition and distribution of the primary teaching workforce in Madagascar as well as the national recruitment and allocation mechanisms (Gouëdard, 2023). Specifically, the qualitative research sought to answer the following research questions, jointly formulated with the Ministry of Education of Madagascar:

1. How does Madagascar's institutional and organizational framework for teacher allocation influence the distribution of primary teachers between schools?
2. What are the key individual and environmental factors that influence the distribution of primary teachers in Madagascar?
3. How do head teacher practices influence teacher retention and distribution of teachers within primary schools?

[1] Deconcentration is a form of decentralization that redistributes decision-making authority as well as financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government. It involves shifting responsibilities from central government officials in the capital city to those working in regions, provinces, and districts.

The findings are drawn from an analysis of secondary data and 30 individual interviews and focus group discussions with national, regional and district authorities, as well as teachers and head teachers, covering a total of 64 respondents.

Key findings

1. **Further progress with deconcentration of teacher allocation is undermined by differing approaches to allocation adopted by central and subnational education authorities and limited communication between them.**

Over the last five years, the Government of Madagascar has set up solid organizational and institutional foundations for advancing deconcentration of the teacher allocation process with a view towards a more effective deployment mechanism. In practice, though, while district (*circonscriptions scolaires* [CISCOs]) and regional authorities formulate transfer suggestions, central authorities make the final decisions. The entire process is lengthy and leads to a reliance on dated information for decision-making at all levels. While central authorities perceive the final validation as necessary, subnational authorities often evaluate final transfer and deployment decisions as misaligned with the needs on the ground.

At the heart of this misalignment are differing approaches to assessing the needs of teachers in schools: while central authorities use the same school-level data as local authorities, the latter also consider individual situations of teachers, schools and educational administration zones (*zones d'administration pédagogique* [ZAPs]). There is little dialogue on the differing approaches or specific allocation cases between the different levels of the administration.

2. **Frequent returns to urban areas, low motivation among the deployed personnel, and delayed transfer decisions hinder the successful (re)deployment of trained teachers to rural and remote areas.**

The latest policies to deploy trained teachers to rural and remote areas are being implemented, and they have helped alleviate shortages of trained teachers in some areas. However, most of the teachers deployed to these areas look to transfer back to urban areas as soon as they receive their matriculation number due to the extreme hardship and challenges of adapting to life in these communities. Among those who remain, motivation is reportedly low, thwarting the intended objective of improving learning for children living in these areas. In addition, the time required for the central level to make and communicate a decision means that deployment decisions frequently come after the beginning of the school year. By then, teachers can appeal to the administrative tribunal to invalidate an unwanted transfer.

3. **Restrictions on transfers of new civil servant and contract teachers help enforce recent (re)deployment policies, but also exacerbate intra-CISCO inequalities.**

The strict rules governing transfers of new contract and civil servant teachers hinder a more equitable distribution of teachers within the CISCOs, according to many interviewees. Local authorities report that the inability to transfer such teachers even within the same ZAP or CISCO for six years after their deployment can aggravate their unequal distribution, which often arises due to the way community

(FRAM)[2] teachers are converted[3] into contract or civil servant teachers. Because their conversion does not consider the prior distribution of teachers within the CISCO but relies on seniority, instances of teachers whose contracts are converted being concentrated in a particular school or ZAP are common.

4. **Trained teachers leave rural areas due to poor public services and infrastructure, lack of access to training opportunities, insecurity, family separation and community dynamics. Meanwhile, community teachers generally want to stay in rural areas.**

Most teachers from urban areas are determined to work in cities and towns. In rural areas, they often have to undertake long and arduous journeys to access health care and further training opportunities, collect their salary and see their family, who usually stay behind in cities and towns. The unavailability of quality health and education services in rural areas is especially deterring for pregnant women and women with young children. Poor telecommunications infrastructure, shortages of electricity and drinking water, drought and insecurity further add to the hardship conditions in many rural areas. The current incentives are insufficient to encourage teachers to stay in these zones, and many are not even aware of the existence or amount of the hardship allowance.

In contrast**,** most community teachers working in rural areas prefer to stay there for a mix of economic and personal reasons. These include family obligations, the possibility of generating additional income from agricultural activities and a desire to make a difference in their community.

5. **The unequal distribution of teachers within schools is linked to student dropouts. It is exacerbated by allocating the best-performing teachers to higher grades and creating multigrade classes at lower levels.**

Allocating teachers to grades falls within the remit of head teachers who usually involve all teachers in the process through the teacher councils. Given a lack of guidelines, specific approaches vary, but assigning the most experienced and best-performing teachers to the final exam grade is common. Meanwhile, the first few grades are often taught by the least experienced teachers and merged into multigrade classes to tackle teacher or classroom shortages, further increasing the high pupil-teacher ratios at these levels.

Recommendations for the Ministry of Education of Madagascar

The following recommendations were generated in consultation with the MEN to address the identified challenges. These should first be piloted before widescale implementation to refine and ensure relevance.

1. **Convene local, regional and national authorities to develop an effective and transparent allocation mechanism and to strengthen collaboration in decision-making at all levels.** Algorithms used for making allocation decisions should take into greater account contextual information specific to constituencies, schools and individual teachers. Local commissions should include a central-level representative to enhance collaboration.

[2] In Madagascar, community teachers are referred to as FRAM teachers after the Malagasy name of the pupils' parents' associations (Fikambanan'ny ray aman-drenin'ny mpianatra) who recruit them.
[3] In Madagascar, the word recruitment is used to refer to changing the status of a teacher. For example, changing status from a FRAM teacher to a contract teacher, and from a contract teacher to a civil servant teacher. In this report, the term conversion is used to distinguish recruiting new teachers from changing their status.

2. **Consider relaxing the rules for intra-CISCO transfers for new civil servant and contract teachers to allow local authorities to redistribute teachers equitably across the CISCO.** Simultaneous care must be taken to ensure that the relaxed rules do not undermine efforts to retain trained teachers in rural and remote areas, as well as to respect the individual situations of teachers.

3. **Continue efforts to attract trained teachers to rural and remote areas, and offer stronger incentives to retain them** (e.g., by raising the hardship allowance, introducing career development incentives and providing teachers greater autonomy in selecting the next deployment location). Complement these efforts by improving teachers' awareness of these incentives.

4. **Continue advocating for greater subsidization of already-serving FRAM teachers, intensify efforts to improve their pedagogical competencies and continue with their integration into the civil service.** To incentivize teachers to take up training and to professionalize the teaching workforce, link transitions into the civil service with competencies and performance rather than seniority.

5. **Develop guidelines for teacher councils on distributing teachers within schools more equitably, and help CISCO and ZAP authorities support their application.** The guidelines should tackle unequal class sizes across and within grades (between sections) as well as the practice of allocating the least experienced teachers to the lowest grades. This should be complemented by government efforts to reduce the prevalence and average size of multigrade classes. In the meantime, given the widespread prevalence of multigrade classrooms, teacher trainings should include modules on effectively managing such classes.

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1. Introduction

African countries are facing some of the world's worst teacher shortages. To achieve universal primary education by 2030, countries in sub-Saharan Africa need to add 4.4 million primary school teachers to the teaching force (UNESCO Task Force on Teachers for Education 2030, 2023). Moreover, teachers are often distributed unevenly, contributing to significant disparities in class size between and within schools. For students living in harder-to-staff areas, this translates to poorer learning outcomes and lower completion rates,[4] representing severe implications for equity in access to quality education.

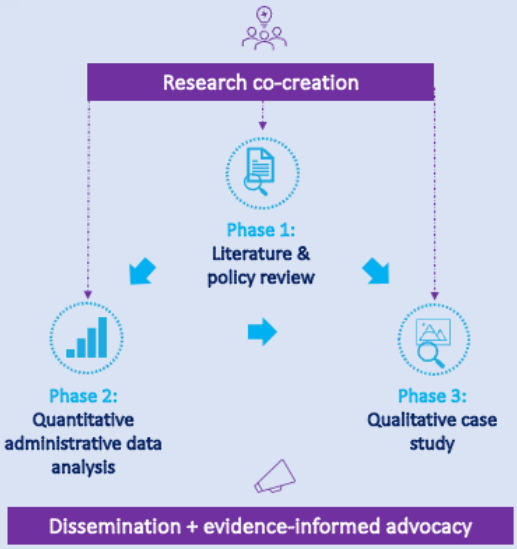
In Madagascar, the widespread hiring of community teachers over the last two decades has helped reduce teacher shortages, with the national pupil-teacher ratio (PTR) dropping from 48 to 43 students for every primary teacher between 2000 and 2022 (Gouëdard, 2023). However, marked imbalances between regions and districts persist. Madagascar struggles to deploy enough teachers to rural and remote areas, especially trained teachers,[5] who prefer to serve in urban and peri-urban areas in the centre of the country.

To help governments tackle such challenges and improve the allocation of teachers already within education systems, UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight is implementing the Teachers for All (T4A) research project, currently active in 13 countries in Africa, including Madagascar. The project aims to generate evidence on teacher allocation practices as well as the key policy bottlenecks and opportunities that can inform further improvements. Box 1 outlines the approach and main components of the project.

Box 1: The T4A research

To generate rigorous and credible evidence, the T4A project adopts a mixed-methods approach that combines: 1) a comprehensive literature and policy review; 2) the analysis of existing administrative and examination data; and 3) qualitative case studies. All phases are implemented through close collaboration with national Governments and education stakeholders, and they are shaped by existing evidence gaps and government priorities. Research activities are followed by dissemination and evidence-based advocacy at national levels.

In Madagascar, Phases 1 and 2 were implemented from June to December 2022. A second round of literature and policy review was conducted in April 2023, followed by Phase 3, which was completed in December 2023.



[4] Results emerging from the up-to-date T4A research carried out in Botswana, the Congo, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar and Zambia.

[5] In Madagascar, teachers are considered to be trained if they hold a pedagogical diploma.

2. Country context

2.1. Distribution of teachers in Madagascar: key challenges[6]

47:1
was the average PTR in rural areas, compared with

42:1
in urban areas in 2020.

In Madagascar, teachers are unevenly distributed with, on average, five more students per teacher in rural areas than in urban areas. In 2020, the average PTR at the primary level in urban areas was 42:1, compared with 47:1 in rural areas (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2020). On the one hand, a quarter of districts, primarily located in the southern and eastern parts of the country, had an average PTR greater than 50:1, with some districts reaching 80–100 students per teacher. On the other hand, another quarter of districts in the country have an average PTR of 37:1 or lower (*see Figure 1*).

83%
of teachers in Madagascar do not have a pedagogical diploma.

Teacher allocation is also unequal within districts. For instance, 10 per cent of districts have a quarter of schools with a PTR equal to or lower than 30:1, and another quarter with a PTR higher than 50:1. Overall, almost a third of the variation in the number of teachers in Madagascar does not depend on the variation in the number of students. Within most southern and eastern districts, the relationship between teacher distribution and the number of students is even weaker, with more than half of teachers in these districts allocated based on factors other than student enrolment in a school.

Moreover, trained teachers are in short supply, especially in rural areas where 64 per cent of teachers are community FRAM[7] teachers who have not undergone pre-service teacher training (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2020)**.** Only 17 per cent of teachers in Madagascar have a pedagogical diploma, and they are heavily concentrated in the country's centre. In a quarter of districts, primarily located in the south and north-west of the country, the share of teachers with pedagogical diplomas is less than 3 per cent. In addition, FRAM teachers tend to have lower academic qualifications (Government of Madagascar, 2017), often holding only a lower secondary diploma (*Brevet d'Études du Premier Cycle de l'Enseignement Secondaire*).

Although the minimum official qualification required to become a teacher in Madagascar is the completion of upper-secondary education, such candidates are not always available, forcing parents' associations to hire underqualified candidates (Government of Madagascar, 2017).

[6] Unless otherwise indicated, all figures quoted in this section about teacher distribution and qualifications in Madagascar are drawn from the first report in this series, which analysed 2020 data from the Education Management Information System across all primary schools in Madagascar. See Gouëdard, 2023 for more details.

[7] In Madagascar, community teachers are referred to as FRAM teachers after the Malagasy name of the pupils' parents' associations (*Fikambanan'ny ray aman-drenin'ny mpianatra*) who recruit them.

Figure 1a: PTR

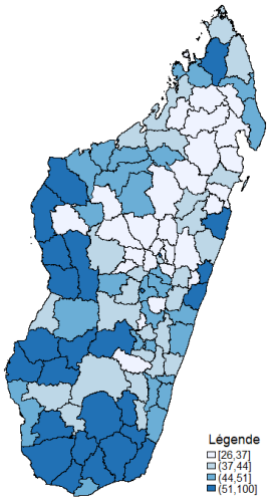
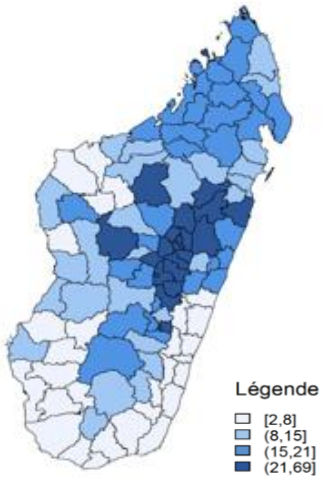


Figure 1b: Share of teachers with a pedagogical diploma



Source: Gouëdard, 2023.

Note: The thresholds in the legend correspond to the quartiles of the distribution. There is therefore a quarter of the number of CISCOs for each of the items in the legend.

The maps do not reflect a position by UNICEF on the legal status of any country or territory or the delimitation of any frontiers.

The unequal distribution of teachers is associated with lower learning outcomes, particularly to the detriment of students living in rural and remote areas. Statistical analysis from the T4A project shows that the student promotion rate is negatively associated with PTRs, suggesting that larger classrooms are less conducive to learning.

The teacher status is also correlated with the student promotion rate, with civil servant teachers being the most effective and non-subsidized FRAM teachers the least effective. On average, compared with their peers in schools staffed only with civil servant teachers, children in schools staffed with only non-subsidized FRAM teachers have a success rate that is 5 percentage points lower in the Certificate of Primary and Elementary Studies (*Certificat d'Études Primaires et Élémentaires* [CEPE]) exam. Children taught by either only subsidized FRAM teachers or only contract teachers, who represent a mix of teachers with different pedagogical and academic qualifications, do slightly better than their peers taught only by non-subsidized teachers. However, they are still less likely to pass the CEPE (by 3 percentage points and 2 percentage points, respectively, on average) compared with their peers in schools with civil servant teachers only.

49:1

is the average PTR in Grade 1, compared with

17:1

in Grade 5.

Teachers are also unequally distributed within schools, which disadvantages younger students. Higher grades have lower class sizes compared with lower grades. For instance, in 2020, the average PTR in Grade 5 (T5 or CM2 – *deuxième année de cours moyen*) was 17:1, compared with 49:1 in Grade 1 (T1 or CP1 – *première année de cours préparatoire*). In general, teacher allocation in higher grades is better linked with the number of students than in lower grades. This

disparity in class sizes between higher and lower grades is even greater in rural schools and those with multigrade classes.

Finally, the lower the grade, the lower the chances of being taught by a teacher with a pedagogical diploma or a civil servant teacher (Gouëdard, 2023). Overall, these trends suggest that children in younger grades of primary schools often face poorer learning conditions than their older peers.

2.2. Recent policy efforts towards a more equitable distribution of teachers

The Teacher Policy launched in 2017 by the MEN, the Ministry of Employment, Technical Education and Vocational Training, and the Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research documented some of the reasons behind the inequitable distribution of teachers in Madagascar.

According to the policy, the high degree of centralization in teacher management has been one of the key institutional factors hindering improvements in human resource allocation (Government of Madagascar, 2017). As of 2017, the thrust of decision-making was vested with the MEN, with regional education authorities (*Directions Régionales d'Éducation Nationale* [DREN]), district education authorities (*circonscriptions scolaires* [CISCOs]) and education administration zones (*zones d'administration pédagogique* [ZAP]) playing supporting roles. However, central authorities have struggled to obtain and process adequate and up-to-date data, leading to allocation practices that lacked transparency and were often unaligned with local needs. According to the policy, the reasons for this included: insufficient capacities to collect and transmit data at school and ZAP levels; a lack of appropriate information management tools; and limited cooperation between the education authorities at different levels.

The policy also acknowledged that some laws have limited a more equitable distribution. Specifically, until the introduction of the new policies in 2017, transferring a civil servant teacher to another school or district required the teacher's consent. In practice, as the policy indicates, civil servant teachers often refused transfers to rural areas due to the lack of security in many regions.

In response to these challenges, the MEN launched the Teachers Policy and the Education Sector Plan for the 2018–2022 period, which introduced a variety of measures to "optimize the use of teachers by rationalizing their recruitment and deployment" (Madagascar MEN, 2017) with the wider goal to "provide all pupils and students with a sufficient number of well-trained and motivated teachers to guarantee the quality of the teaching they receive" (Government of Madagascar, 2017). The new allocation policy had three main prongs.

First, the new policy advocated for the continuation of deconcentration[8] in teacher allocation to facilitate a more equitable distribution of teachers within the country. In 2013, a reform, initiated by the Decree governing the movement of staff employed by the Ministry of National Education (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2013), established National and Regional Allocation Commissions (CNAs and CRAs), transferring

[8] Deconcentration is a form of decentralization that redistributes decision-making authority as well as financial and management responsibilities among different levels of the central government. It involves shifting responsibilities from central government officials in the capital city to those working in regions, provinces or districts.

the responsibility for inter-CISCO allocation from MEN to regional authorities (Directions régionales d'éducation nationale [DREN]). The 2017 reform built on this earlier Decree to further delegate the responsibility of intra-CISCO allocation to CISCO authorities, and to establish Local Allocation Commissions (CLAs) to promote transparency.

The new policy revised relevant legal frameworks governing teachers' movements and introduced plans to strengthen the role of CNAs and CRAs. Further, it declared that in the medium term, the government would aim to achieve a complete deconcentration of teacher management.

Second, the government introduced a range of legislative and procedural measures to deploy new and already-serving teachers to rural and remote areas. One of the most significant policy changes was the decision to deploy all new graduates of the National Teacher Training Institute (*Institut National de Formation Pédagogique* [INFP]) and its regional centres (CRINFP) to Zones 2 and 3. Zone 2 corresponds to rural areas outside district capitals and Zone 3 to very isolated areas outside of the main towns of rural communes (*see Box 3*). New incentives, such as an increased hardship allowance, were also introduced to encourage already-serving trained teachers to take up teaching in these zones.

Box 2: Overview of recruitment and allocation mechanisms in Madagascar since 2017

Procedures for recruiting, deploying and transferring primary school teachers in Madagascar depend on the educational background and status of the teacher.

In general, those graduating INFP and CRINFP are recruited and deployed by the MEN as civil servants or contract teachers. Since 2017, unless they qualify for exceptions due to health reasons or marriage to another civil servant, these teachers do not have a say in the location to which they are deployed. After four years in their initial post, INFP and CRINFP graduates are eligible for a permutation – a swap with another equally qualified teacher. After six years, they will be eligible for a transfer without requiring a matching replacement.

As per the 2017 Policy: CLAs composed of CISCO and ZAP chiefs of district education authorities are responsible for managing intra-CISCO transfers; CRAs composed of DREN and CISCO chiefs for intra-DREN transfers; and CNAs composed of MEN and DREN personnel for inter-DREN movements.

All other teachers are locally recruited by the FRAM parents' associations to fill up shortages of contract and civil servant teachers. In this modality, candidates apply to specific schools that announce an opening. These teachers are referred to as FRAM teachers and almost half of them are subsidized by the government.

Normally, FRAM teachers cannot be transferred as they are tied to a particular parents' association. After years of service, a CISCO-level assembly called ampahibemaso can convert their status to a contract teacher and subsequently to a civil servant teacher if the relevant training requirements are met. The transfers of formerly FRAM teachers who have become contract and civil servant teachers are handled as those of (CR)INFP graduates.

Source: Information shared by education authorities during co-creation workshops and interviews held for the T4A research project between 2022 and 2023.

In 2018, a first Plan for the deployment and redeployment of trained teachers to Zones 2 and 3 was published, setting forth legislative, organizational and communication initiatives to realize this vision. In addition, the government introduced a series of restrictions on the movement of teachers to retain them in rural and remote areas. This included a complete ban on transferring contract teachers outside the CISCO area of initial deployment for the first four years of their service and the requirement of a swap with another equally qualified teacher for a transfer of a trained teacher within the first six years of their deployment (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2023).

Box 3: Classification of schools by location

With a view to achieving greater fairness in teacher assignments, the Ministry of Education has redefined the previous classification of deployment zones using a new remoteness index. This index combines the following factors as proxies for remoteness and isolation:

- Distance from the school to the ZAP and CISCO administrative centres.
- Travel times to reach the school and the ZAP and CISCO administrative centres.
- Existence of basic services and infrastructure such as health services, telephone and internet coverage, access to national or regional roads, and means of transport.

The index is on a scale from 1 to 7, 1 designating the least remote schools and 7 the most remote ones. In line with this classification, the new zones are defined as follows:

- **Zone 0**: In the urban communes and head towns of the region – remoteness index 1
- **Zone 1**: Generally, in the communes that are district capitals – remoteness index 2 and 3
- **Zone 2**: Generally, in the rural commune capitals – remoteness index 4 and 5
- **Zone 3**: In very isolated areas, far from the rural commune capitals – remoteness index 6 and 7

Based on the new policy, all new graduates of INFP and CRINFP are deployed to Zones 2 and 3.

Source: MEN (2020) Plan de déploiement et redéploiement des enseignants qualifiés dans les zones 2 e 3. Version 2.0 (Plan for the deployment and redeployment of trained teachers to zones 2 et 3)

Third, the new allocation policy required developing new tools and enhancing existing tools to support the implementation of the new deconcentration and (re)deployment policies. In the short term, the government committed to developing and implementing an information management system bringing together data on teachers entering and leaving the workforce, the number of students and the number of sections in each school. In the medium term, the policy foresaw a system that contained relevant information on each teacher and would allow for forecasting teacher needs, therefore enabling forward planning of recruitment and allocation.

Moreover, to facilitate the implementation of the new rules regarding deployment and transfer on the ground, the government committed to developing a tool laying out the key policy principles and rules, alongside methods for applying the central-level guidelines. To this end, the MEN began circulating yearly *Guidelines for managing assignments during Local Allocation Commissions (CLA), Regional Allocation Commissions (CRA) and the National Allocation Commissions (CNA)* (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2023).

Finally, the 2017 Teachers Policy also put forward several measures to improve the overall supply of trained teachers in Madagascar. These included a new recruitment wave, regulating the recruitment of FRAM teachers and converting the longest-serving ones into contract teachers, as well as strengthening pre-service and in-service training.

2.3. Progress five years since the policy introduction: existing evidence and remaining knowledge gaps

57%

of trained teachers deployed to rural and remote areas in 2018 have left their posts within two years.

More than five years into implementation of the measures envisaged in the Teachers Policy and the Education Sector Plan for the 2018–2022 period, inequities in the distribution of teachers in Madagascar persist. While many measures to improve the distribution of teachers were implemented, efforts to better redistribute trained teachers across the country have only been partially successful.

The 2020 *Plan for the deployment and redeployment of trained teachers to Zones 2 and 3* shows that out of the 976 CRINFP graduates recruited in 2018 and deployed to Zones 2 and 3, only 423 (43 per cent) have remained in their posts two years after their initial deployment. The two most common reasons for requesting a transfer were getting married (70 per cent of transfers) and health reasons (25 per cent of transfers).

Data gathered via discussions held during a co-creation workshop for this research reveal that the MEN continues to grapple with extremely high rates of transfer or post abandonment among trained teachers deployed to rural and remote areas. Internal inquiries by the MEN reveal that teachers deployed to rural and remote areas struggle to adapt to living there, not least because of insecurity. According to this anecdotal evidence, teachers often seek all means to be transferred back to bigger towns and cities, including marriage, sudden medical diagnoses and favours from their connections.

At the same time, **systematic evidence on the factors that drive teachers in Madagascar towards urban areas is lacking. Similarly, there is a dearth of evidence on how the recent policies are shaping teacher allocation in the country**, i.e., what policy aspects facilitate a more equitable distribution and what the remaining implementation challenges are. Finally, existing research and policy documents offer little insight into the practices of teacher allocation within schools. A lack of a nuanced understanding of the reasons behind the continuing imbalance in teacher distribution between and within schools undermines further policy efforts in this area.

3. Phase 3 of Teachers for All: objectives and methodology

This qualitative phase of the T4A research (Phase 3) was designed to address existing knowledge gaps around teacher allocation and to help refine policy measures to tackle persisting challenges. This phase has three main objectives.

First, it aims to advance the current understanding of how the recent allocation policy reforms have panned out on the ground as well as what organizational and institutional factors hinder further progress. Second, it explores the individual- and environmental-level factors behind many teachers' strong preferences to work in urban or peri-urban areas. Third, it examines how school-level factors (including head teacher practices, shape teacher preferences) and how within-school distribution of teachers can be made more equitable. Accordingly, the research questions guiding this investigation were:

1. How does Madagascar's institutional and organizational framework for teacher allocation influence the distribution of primary teachers across schools?
2. What are the key individual and environmental factors that influence the distribution of primary teachers in Madagascar?
3. How do head teacher practices influence teacher retention and distribution of teachers within primary schools?

In order to explain the trends and challenges in teacher distribution in Madagascar (i.e., to pin down the 'how' and 'why' of the continued inequities in teacher distribution), explanatory case study research was chosen as the research methodology. The research questions and study sample were co-created together with the representatives of the MEN and UNICEF Madagascar through a Core Technical Team set up for this purpose.

The study focuses on primary public schools in Madagascar and excludes private schools, which are not subject to national allocation mechanisms.

The key data sources included a review of policy and planning documents and primary data collection. Primary data collection was composed of a sample of 30 semi-structured individual interviews and focus group discussions conducted at the central, regional, district and school levels, covering 64 respondents.

Regions, districts and schools were selected in a purposive manner to cover diverse geographical and education contexts as well as various allocation outcomes. Fieldwork was conducted in three regions, covering the north, south and centre of the country, and it included six CISCOs displaying different combinations of PTRs and coherence coefficient rates as well as six schools in areas of various degrees of rurality and urbanity. Figure 2 provides an overview of the respondents consulted at each level.

Figure 2: Overview of the fieldwork conducted

The interviews were conducted in Malagasy using guides for semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions, piloted and refined for the Madagascar context. All research protocols and data-collection guides were approved by the Health Media Lab Institutional Review Board of the Office for Human Research Protections in the United States of America.[9] The fieldwork, data collection and research activities were conducted in line with ethical principles and practices, which include: respecting the dignity of participants; abiding by just and equitable treatment; prevention of potential risk of harm; informed and ongoing consent; and confidentiality.

Qualitative data collection was carried out between 9 June and 26 July 2023 by national researchers, with close technical collaboration and oversight by UNICEF Innocenti. All interviews were recorded, transcribed and subsequently thematically analysed using the NVivo text analysis software. Each transcription was independently analysed by two researchers using inductive and deductive coding techniques. Differences in interpretation were discussed and aligned, allowing for a nuanced understanding of areas where further research may be needed.

Like any primary research, challenges encountered during fieldwork may introduce limitations that are important to consider while interpreting the results. First, some initially sampled central-level stakeholders were unavailable for interviews. Some, but not all, were replaced in the sample, introducing the risk that the central perspective is not fully captured. Second, some interviews were shorter than desirable due to limited availability; and for these respondents, telephonic interviews were used to follow up for more information. Third, some interviewees had only recently assumed their posts and therefore provided limited insights. Finally, the fieldwork was conducted a few months before presidential elections in Madagascar, possibly causing some government interviewees to moderate their responses.

[9] The Health Media Lab Institutional Review Board and the Office for Human Research Protections provide ethical assurance for the protection of human subjects in international social and behavioural science research for children, education, and vulnerable and high-risk populations, among other topics. The IRB application for this stage of the T4A research was approved on 28 May 2023.

4. Key findings

4.1 How does the institutional and organizational framework for teacher allocation influence the distribution of primary teachers in Madagascar?

This section focuses on how the recent efforts to decentralize teacher deployment as well as deploy and retain trained teachers in remote and rural areas are panning out, with the aim of highlighting progress achieved and remaining policy challenges.

4.1.1. Recent efforts towards a more effective and decentralized teacher allocation system

Over the last five years, the Government of Madagascar has established strong organizational and institutional foundations for advancing the deconcentration of teacher allocation. Fieldwork showed that CLAs and CRAs are organized each year as per protocol, and that their chiefs and members are aware of and understand the current rules and procedures for allocating and transferring teachers.

The national allocation and transfer guidelines are perceived as clear and coherent, and minimal capacity gaps exist for implementing these guidelines at the decentralized level. Only one CISCO (out of the six visited) reported issues with interpreting the transfer rules and applying them to individual cases on the ground. CRA and CLA chiefs and members are experienced education officials who have served at different levels of the education system, often starting from the teacher position and progressing to ZAP or/and CISCO chief. Most were confident in their capacities to manage teacher allocation in their circumscription, although they report needing more IT equipment to collect and store data efficiently.

With rare exceptions, the interviewees reported having positive working relationships with each other, both horizontally (with other chiefs at the same level) and vertically (between ZAP, CISCO and DREN authorities). Most interviewees are also confident in the MEN's ability to provide the planning and guidance for the implementation process.

> Yes, the regulations [governing the deployment and transfer of teachers] are clear. [...] From our side, we are just following what the MEN is doing, in relation to the circular sent out, which sets out the instructions and procedures to be followed. So, it's clear.
>
> – A CISCO representative

In practice, however, teacher allocation in Madagascar remains largely centralized due to the lack of a viable information system for transparent implementation at subnational levels. On paper, DREN and CISCO authorities manage intraregional and intradistrict teacher movements. In reality, however, the central level makes all final allocation decisions, which are validated at the Cabinet level.

According to central-level authorities, high-level validation is necessary to limit corruption and address assignment requests that are inconsistent with school-level data, so long as a viable information management system is still lacking. As of December 2023, the government continues to discuss creating a

system for tracking and validating decisions made during local, regional and national allocation commissions.

> The DREN [...] does not have full power over assignments. Decentralization is not effective. There are times when the DREN doesn't even process postings, but the ministry does. But when we do it, we need validation from the ministry, i.e., the cabinet [...], which is a political position.
>
> – A DREN representative

> If we are to get back on track with effective devolution, we need to step up the communication aspect, because allocation has become a very sensitive issue for everyone […]. Sometimes there is misinformation on both sides about an assignment, which encourages corruption.
>
> – A MEN representative

Meanwhile, CISCO and DREN authorities assess many final allocation decisions made at the central level as misaligned with the needs and priorities on the ground. They report that final transfer decisions often differ from their proposals and are not well-calibrated. For example, as a replacement for a departing teacher, some CISCOs have received a teacher who is about to retire or request another transfer due to upcoming spousal reunification. Most CISCO and DREN interviewees also reported cases of suboptimal deployment of new teachers, where multiple CRINFP graduates were sent to the same school or ZAP, while their neighbouring schools or ZAPs remained understaffed.

> [...] some deployments are incompatible with the needs of the locations. Like what happened at [...], these newly recruited CRINFP teachers arrived at the same time, in the same location, while the neighbouring location had a shortage of teachers.
>
> – A DREN representative

There is a consensus that **political interference contributes to this misalignment between local-level recommendations and final allocation decisions made by central authorities.** During the fieldwork, several instances of allocation decisions made as personal favours to teachers were reported at both central and subnational levels. Indeed, corruption and political interference in the teacher assignment process have been frequently documented as reasons for suboptimal allocation in various low- and middle-income countries across centralized and decentralized systems (Tournier, 2015).

> There's a teacher who is friends with someone in the higher hierarchy, and he didn't want to go far away, so he was posted to a place he wanted, and that's how he got the privileged position.
>
> – A FRAM teacher

But misalignment also occurs due to the differing approaches to assessing teacher needs, with local authorities considering individual teacher situations in addition to school-level data. Central authorities make data-driven decisions based on survey sheets (*fiche primaire d'enquête*) collected at local levels and

containing details on each school's teachers, students and classrooms. The school-level PTR is used as the main indicator, with schools having a PTR higher than 50:1 defined as needing additional teachers.

Meanwhile, in addition to conducting a detailed study of the distribution of teachers per status within each region, district and school using the same survey sheets as the central level, CISCO and DREN authorities also analyse the individual situation of each concerned teacher. Their decision-making factors in the teacher's motivations and preferences to ensure that they are satisfied in their job, their family's proximity to the new post and any other factors such as transfer history to assess the likelihood of them staying. The local authorities believe that their understanding of the dynamics on the ground and their access to up-to-date data on the needs of each school could be better leveraged for making transfer and allocation decisions concerning their constituencies.

> Teachers don't want to go [to rural and isolated areas]. But when we make an assignment, we analyse the human side and the places that really need teachers. We also look at the teachers who are close to these areas. These are our criteria for posting.
>
> – A CISCO representative

> The higher levels should know the reasons for our proposal because we are the ones who see the realities on the ground. This does not mean that we are going to make abusive allocations, just that we are going to consult the opinions and understand the existing situation on the ground.
>
> – A CISCO representative

While the most suitable approach to teacher allocation can be debated and local actors may be unaware of some constraints or latest priorities, **a lack of transparency and limited collaboration between the central and local authorities constrain the process.** Currently, DREN and CISCO authorities do not understand the reasons for many allocation and transfer decisions that they perceive as suboptimal, while feeling that they must deal with the consequences. Once deployed, a new contract teacher cannot be transferred to another school for the next six years, making any adjustments during that period difficult. DREN and CISCO officials have also complained that many assignment or transfer decisions are often not communicated to them at all, recalling cases of sudden teacher arrivals or departures in their constituency. Central-level authorities report facing similar challenges of ZAP or CISCO chiefs authorizing transfers without notifying them. Cases of ZAP or CISCO chiefs making transfer decisions outside of the CLA were also reported.

In addition, the relevance of both local-level proposals and final allocation decisions is compromised by the lengthiness of the current teacher transfer process. The time taken for the central level to receive, consolidate and analyse school-level data means that proposals and final decisions are often made using dated information.

The CLA begins assembling as early as February–May to allow the CRA and CNA to gather one after the other (*see Figure 3*). This means that local allocation proposals for the new school year are based on data from the middle of the previous school year. By the end of the school year, much of the data is no longer relevant, as the teacher and student populations fluctuate over the year. The numbers of students can change dramatically due to high dropout rates in some locations (*see Box 4*). The number of teachers throughout the school year is not constant either, with cases of teachers leaving abruptly or passing away, or new FRAM teachers joining during the school year being not uncommon. While head teachers provide

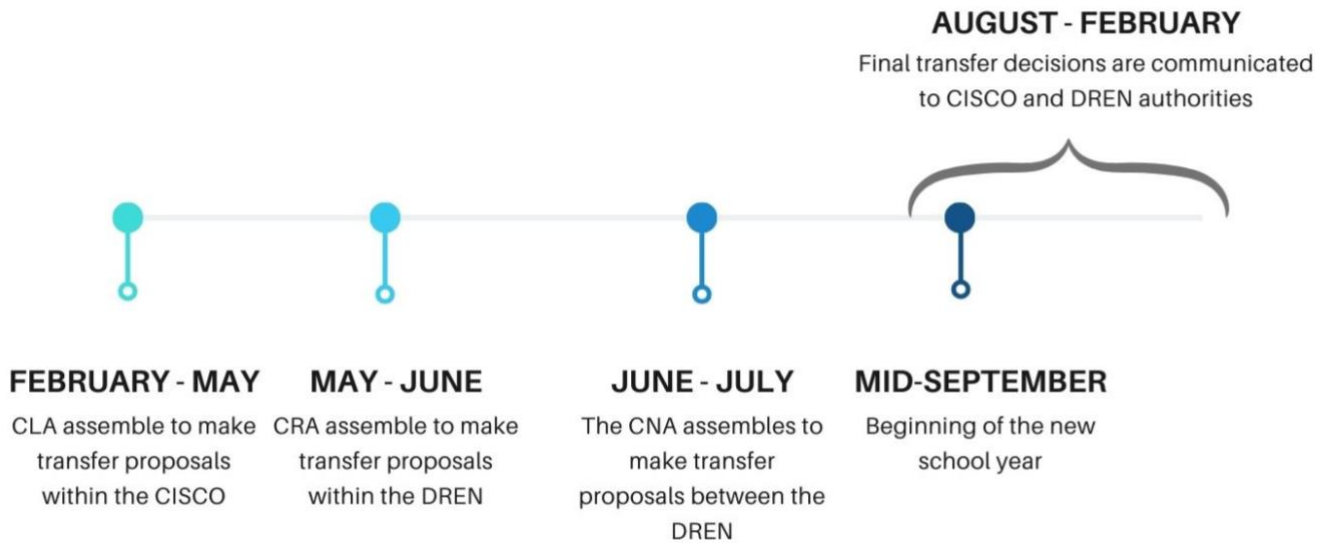
updates on their teacher and student populations to ZAP authorities monthly, it takes time for this data to enter the central-level statistics.

Box 4: Reasons behind the constantly changing class size in Madagascar

Class size fluctuates throughout the year in Malagasy schools due to high dropout and repetition rates, which are especially pronounced in rural schools and the poorest regions. In 2018, only 56 per cent of students in the country completed primary school, down to below 30 per cent in the poorest regions. Dropout occurs throughout grades and peaks at the end of each cycle, i.e., in Grades T2, T3 and T5 when students must pass end-of-cycle exams.

The reasons include: high rates of child labour during the harvest season between April and June; migration linked to the nomadic lifestyle; poverty; insecurity; and natural disasters (UNICEF and MEN, 2022). In addition, almost 1 in 4 primary school students repeat a grade (UNESCO Institute of Statistics, no date), with repetition rates being the highest in the first and last grades. Significant dropout and repetition rates were reported in all grades in the schools visited during this study. In one school, a teacher who just finished teaching Grade T3 described how the size of her class reduced from 140 students at the beginning of the year to only 74 students who attempted the end-of-year exams. Out of these 74 students, only 41 were promoted to grade T4.

Figure 3: The key milestones in the process of teacher transfer



4.1.2. Recent efforts to deploy and retain trained teachers in rural and remote areas

The deployment of recent INFP and CRINFP graduates to rural and remote areas has helped to alleviate shortages of trained teachers in some areas. However, frequent returns to urban areas and low motivation among the deployed personnel undermine the policy's effectiveness. Authorities at all levels report that most graduates deployed to Zones 2 and 3 do not manage to adapt and seek to transfer back to cities and peri-urban areas as soon as they receive their matriculation number. Contractually, they must remain in their initial post for at least six years, but they can receive an exception due to health issues or marriage to another civil servant (spousal reunification).

Despite the strict rules, the transfer rates are high. Among the 976 CRINFP graduates recruited in 2018 and deployed to Zones 2 and 3, only 423 teachers remained in their initial posts in 2020 – an attrition rate of 57 per cent in a third of the contractual time frame. Among those who transferred, 70 per cent did so for spousal reunification, 25 per cent for health reasons and 5 per cent for other social reasons (Ministère de l'éducation nationale, 2020).

Insecurity, separation from family due to distance and poor transportation, and inadequate medical services are among the key push factors. The current incentives offer insufficient encouragement to teachers to stay in these zones, and many teachers are not even aware of them (*see next section for details*).

Among the CRINFP graduates remaining in rural and remote areas, motivation is reportedly low, thwarting the intended goal of improving learning for children living in these areas. According to several interviewees, this often contrasts with motivated but poorly paid FRAM teachers who hail from the local community, and who understand their students and their learning needs better than CRINFP graduates.

As such, under the current conditions, deploying teachers with pedagogical diplomas to remote and rural areas against their wishes may not be the best way to equalize learning conditions and outcomes between urban and rural areas. As some have suggested, investing in the qualifications of community teachers could be an alternative and possibly more effective approach.

> The Ministry did its job by sending them to these areas, but not all of them were able to adapt to them and stay. So, it should be locals working there.
>
> – A CISCO representative

> If we want to apply the guidelines and regulations, we need to see the human side. Because if we're very strict about the laws, we run into problems. [...] If you employ someone who is not motivated, they will not be effective. Yet Malagasy pupils depend on their teachers.
>
> – A DREN representative

Effective (re)deployment of trained teachers to rural and urban zones is further jeopardized by delayed assignment decisions, which can be contested by teachers. According to local authorities, final decisions regarding teacher assignment or transfer often arrive after the beginning of the school year, extending the waiting times for new teachers (*see Figure 3*).

Effectuating a teacher transfer during the school year disrupts the organization of education in the affected school and is not allowed by law. As a result, teachers who receive a delayed transfer decision can submit an appeal to the administrative tribunal, which, according to the interviewees, usually sides with the teacher. Several interviewees believed that teachers often use the delays to contest an unwanted transfer. In some cases, such situations have led to conflict between the concerned teacher and local authorities.

> After the delays in the assignment decision from the central level, there are conflicts between CISCO staff and the teachers concerned about the assignment. If the teachers are not satisfied with the decision and the delay in the decision, they will take their case all the way to the administrative court.
>
> – A CISCO representative

Finally, the strict rules governing transfers of new contract and civil servant teachers hinder the possibility of better redistributing trained teachers within the CISCOs, according to many interviewees. Local authorities argued that their inability to transfer new contract or civil servant teachers even within the same ZAP or CISCO for six years after their deployment aggravates their unequal distribution.

Unequal distributions of civil servant and contract teachers within ZAPs and CISCOs arise due to how teachers are converted from FRAM to contractual or civil servants. Status conversion is awarded based on individual teacher characteristics, such as seniority, without considering the existing teacher distribution within the CISCO. Hence, there are cases when teachers whose status is converted in a given year all teach in the same school or ZAP.

While this does not directly influence the number of teachers in the constituency, it changes the distribution of teachers of different statuses across schools. Moreover, it means that some schools are now in a better position to hire more community teachers than others because the state now covers the salaries of more of their staff. As a result, inequalities deepen without the possibility of transferring teachers whose statuses were recently changed between the schools.

According to local authorities, more flexible transfer rules could help them mitigate prior suboptimal allocation decisions. They could also allow for accommodating the individual preferences of some teachers to assure their well-being without compromising the overall supply of teachers in the given constituency.

> So, we need to change the strict, rigid rules, for example, the rules governing newly recruited teachers, which prohibit them from being deployed [elsewhere]. As in the case of a school here in [...], there were three FRAM teachers who were [converted into contract teachers] together, even though the number of pupils was already small. So [...] one should be able to make arrangements and exceptions depending on the case.
>
> – A CISCO representative

4.2. What are the key individual and environmental factors that influence the distribution of primary teachers in Madagascar?

This section explores the factors that shape individual teacher preferences regarding their deployment location. It dives into the reasons behind trained teachers' reluctance to work in rural and remote areas as well as sheds light on the location preferences of FRAM teachers.

Most trained teachers and community teachers who come from urban areas have a strong preference for working in Zones 0 and 1, with better access to public services and opportunities for further training being the main attractors. One of the key factors pulling teachers towards urban areas is access to health care for themselves and their children. Those who worked in rural areas described the long and arduous journeys they had to make to receive health care when they or their children fell ill. Access to health care in urban areas was particularly important among pregnant women and women with young children, partially explaining why female teachers tend to be concentrated in urban areas (Gouëdard, 2023).

Similarly, access to better quality education for their children was frequently raised as a reason to work in a city. The availability of education and training opportunities for the teachers themselves are another important motivator to move back and/or remain in urban areas. Several teachers reported wanting to boost their knowledge and profile, either to improve their prospects in teaching or to find another job.

> "I had worked in the rural area. And my child was often ill, but the road was still very difficult and we always had to cross it by a canoe. So, I asked to work here in the city."
>
> – A contract teacher

> "I also prefer the urban area, because if you work in the city, you can still study at the same time. And [in the countryside], there's no way of doing that."
>
> – A FRAM teacher

Other factors that deter teachers from living in rural areas include poor transport and telecommunications infrastructure, electricity and drinking water shortages, drought and insecurity. Poor road infrastructure complicates access not only to vital health services, but also to cash, causing some to travel for days to collect their salary or access a loan in the city. As of 2017, approximately 10 per cent of teachers, primarily in rural areas, missed work to undertake long journeys to collect their salary, sometimes on foot (Government of Madagascar, 2017).

Furthermore, some remote areas are completely isolated during the rainy season, lasting 3–4 months, during which venturing outside the area is only possible with a canoe. Coupled with poor telecommunications and electricity infrastructure, teachers often find themselves unable to contact their family who remain in urban areas. In fact, family separation is not uncommon due to the hardship conditions in some zones. As noted by some, this can affect the well-being of the teacher, which, in turn, has negative repercussions on the quality of their work.

> As for the salaries, they still had to waste time getting up here in town to collect them. What's more, they sometimes have to take a week to get a bank loan in town, with a three-day walk.
>
> – A CISCO representative

> And, even if you can use telephones, there are public primary schools in these areas that don't have networks, and you are forced to go up into the mountains to make a call.
>
> – A DREN representative

Teachers in rural areas also face risks to their physical health and safety. As one interviewee noted, some teachers deployed to remote locations experience health problems stemming from a different diet and the unavailability of safe drinking water. In some of these areas, especially along the coastline, this is exacerbated by acute food shortages due to drought and/or attacks by the local bandits, *dahalo*. In some pockets of the country, *dahalo* regularly steal cattle and food from locals, leading to severe malnourishment in the communities. Sometimes, they may go as far as killing locals and setting fire to entire villages. In these areas, teachers have been impacted too, with some being killed or kidnapped, and others experiencing chronic stress due to the constant threat of attack.

> In some isolated areas, all the teachers have fled because of insecurity. It's a huge problem. For example, this place in [...] was burnt down, resulting in the deaths of all the villagers in the Fokotany, and a teacher there fled [...] as the only civil servant teacher there. In addition [there are] kidnappings in these areas and it's the teachers who have been kidnapped there.
>
> – A DREN representative

Due to the extent of hardship in many rural and remote zones, the current hardship allowance is too low to retain trained teachers there. Moreover, many teachers are unaware of its existence. Across the locations visited, teachers assessed the current hardship allowance that stands at 59,000 Malagasy Ariary (MGA) for Zone 2 and 64,000 MGA for Zone 3 per month[10] as too low to affect their decision-making. Teachers shared that the incentive needs to be significantly increased, validating the proposed increases in the 2020 (Re)deployment Plan, which stipulated their increases to 250,000 MGA and 350,000 MGA, respectively. However, many trained teachers clarified that financial incentives are insufficient to encourage them to move or remain in far-flung areas. Other measures such as improving access to health care and training opportunities, facilitating prompt salary payment, and rewards for serving in Zones 2 and 3 were also deemed necessary.

> First of all, work and money remain on the side. But it's different in the city. Because roads and distance are still the problems in Zones 2 and 3. Especially if you have a baby, far from the doctors. That's just the way it is.
>
> – A contract teacher

[10] These amounts represent up to 50 per cent of a community teacher's salary and 25–30 per cent of a salary of a (CR)INFP graduate.

In contrast, most community teachers working in rural areas prefer to stay there for a mix of personal and economic reasons. Personal reasons include: proximity to family, especially the need to care for ageing parents; owning a house or land in the countryside; and a preference for the rural lifestyle. Many teachers undertake agricultural activities on the side and see this as an integral part of their life and identity.

The possibility to grow crops, raise livestock, or fish for subsistence and/or additional income is also a strong economic motivator for community teachers to remain in rural areas, given their low and irregular salaries. Some subsidized FRAM teachers compared their teaching work to volunteering, saying that they have not been paid for months and that they were able to feed their families thanks to agricultural activities. Many also believed that their teaching income would simply be insufficient for meeting the higher costs of living in urban areas. Finally, their income from teaching is also tied to a particular parents' association (FRAM), so transferring would require applying for a new position with another 'employer'.

> Personally, I prefer the rural area, because with our current salaries, we'd find it difficult to live in the city, with rents and children's education being more expensive. However, in rural areas, you can live better because you can farm and raise livestock, as another income-generating activity.
>
> – A FRAM teacher who recently became a civil servant

> I've always lived in a rural area, so, according to what my colleagues were saying earlier, we come from here. So, I'm not really ready to move to the city and we were also country girls (short laugh). So maybe it's going to be difficult if we live in the city.
>
> – A FRAM teacher who became a contract teacher

Additionally, many FRAM teachers see their work in their village as their mission and want to contribute to the advancement of their community. For some, working alongside or succeeding the teacher(s) who taught them when they were children has been a long-time ambition.

However, difficult working conditions in rural schools combined with low and irregular salaries result in some teachers seeking transfers or leaving the profession altogether. Due to teacher shortages in many rural schools, multigrade classes with more than 50 pupils are common and are difficult to teach. Many teachers reiterated the need to improve the school infrastructure, describing dilapidated buildings and toilets. Their precarity is aggravated by the lengthy wait times and uncertain pathways for FRAM teachers to be integrated as contract and civil servant teachers, with many already waiting more than 10 years. The situation weighs heavily on the job satisfaction of many FRAM teachers and may discourage new generations of community teachers from applying for the job in the first place.

Figure 4: School building and toilets in a rural school

Source: Domoina Raharisoa.

> To confirm, as far as multigrade classes are concerned, it's not a question of laziness if you make a request [for a transfer] or a complaint. But [...] the programmes are specific to each class and you can't confuse them. For example, if the multigrade classes in T1 and T2 are 30, that's still bearable. However, if the number of pupils increases, it becomes very heavy.
>
> – A FRAM teacher

Finally, cultural differences and social dynamics also affect the distribution of teachers, with many rural communities being more accepting of teachers of a similar background and dialect. In rural areas, FRAM teachers are usually recruited from the same village and have pre-existing bonds with the community. They often share similar customs and dialects, and they are generally appreciated by the community.

In contrast, trained teachers deployed to rural areas from cities and faraway districts can face an unwelcome reception from the local communities, further complicating their adaptation into the community and adding to their desire to be transferred to an urban area. Due to the higher risk of a prompt transfer of a new trained teacher assigned to a rural area, some head teachers also prefer having a FRAM teacher in their school. However, the financial burden of having FRAM teachers on the community often prompts head teachers to seek out civil servants or contract teachers despite the risk and the adaptation challenges involved.

> As far as we're concerned, we've stayed in our region, because there are certain people who don't like foreigners at all. For example, if there's a foreign teacher, they say "aren't there any graduates among the villagers?" So, they don't like him.
>
> – A FRAM teacher who recently became a civil servant

4.3. How do head teacher practices influence teacher retention and distribution within primary schools?

This section explores to what extent the practices of head teachers affect teacher preferences to deduce whether and how head teachers can attract and retain teachers in their schools. It also explores the within-school dynamics of teacher allocation across grades.

4.3.1. Head teacher practices to attract and retain teachers in their schools

Head teachers have limited power to attract new teachers to their schools. CRINFP graduates are not given any choice regarding their first deployment. Meanwhile, aspiring community teachers apply for any new posting in their vicinity because openings are infrequent. They reportedly are unable to factor in the working conditions in a school or the head teacher's reputation due to this low frequency of new openings. Additionally, as schools in rural and remote districts uniformly struggle with poor infrastructure, insufficient classrooms and large multigrade classes, teachers in these areas rarely seek a transfer to another school, as the expectation is that things will be similar.

However, head teachers who facilitate a friendly and collaborative atmosphere can strengthen teacher retention in their school. While the working environment is not commonly a factor attracting teachers to a school, personal conflict with the head teacher has driven some to request a transfer. A positive working environment can help teachers deal with the difficult working conditions and may prevent teachers from leaving the workforce altogether.

Interviews revealed that a positive school working environment has three main components. First, a supportive and approachable head teacher who treats the teachers as their equals. Second, a head teacher who consults and involves the teachers in decision-making about various aspects of the school management (for example, when assigning teachers to grades and classes before the new school year). Third, an environment where teachers have friendly and collaborative relationships with each other. In some schools, head teachers actively seek to strengthen these bonds (for example, by organizing integration activities). In one urban school, the head teacher raised funds over the year to organize a staff retreat at the seaside during the summer break.

> When it comes to retaining teachers, it's primarily down to school governance, which is mainly based on consultation and exchange. I'm very flexible towards the teachers and they can come and talk to me freely when they have problems and we try to resolve them together.
>
> – A head teacher

In some rural areas, head teachers also help teachers access additional remuneration to dissuade them from leaving the profession altogether (for example, by helping them access extra income from cultivating rice or vegetables). According to a district-level interviewee, such practices can help community teachers meet their daily needs and retain them in the school, given their low earnings from their teaching job.

4.3.2. Teacher allocation within primary schools

School head teachers have complete authority in distributing teachers within schools and have different approaches to assigning teachers to classes. Interviews revealed that there are no central government guidelines on allocating teachers within primary schools and head masters have complete freedom to manage the process. In most schools visited, head masters summon the teacher council during the summer break to jointly decide allocation to classes.

> It's not necessarily my decision to change it, but it always involves a dialogue between us, that's the teacher council [...] It was just the way it was, but there's no strategy that you must follow.
>
> – A head teacher

One of three predominant models is used for within-school distribution of teachers. In the first model, teachers are assigned to a class of children, teaching them throughout the primary cycle from Grade T1 to Grade T5. In this model, the teacher moves up a grade every year, together with the class. The main reasons for adopting this approach include building close relationships between teachers and students, taking turns in teaching multigrade classes and ensuring that teachers stay in practice at teaching various levels. The second model consists of assigning teachers to a particular grade that they continue teaching over the years. For instance, under this approach, a teacher assigned to T3 will continue teaching T3 over multiple years. The rationale is to expose children to different teaching styles, avoid them getting 'too comfortable' with the teacher and to build on the teachers' individual strengths. Finally, in some schools, the process is more ad hoc. Teachers are assigned based on their preferences and the head teacher's assessment of the best fit for a given class. This determination is based on an assessment of teacher qualifications, performance and personal situations.

In the last two models, **decisions are primarily made to maximize the CEPE exam pass rate. Hence, the best-performing and most experienced teachers are first allocated to the last grade,** and the remaining teachers are distributed among the other grades. In many cases, the head teachers, who are generally men and trained (Gouëdard, 2023), assume teaching responsibilities for the last grade themselves. In contrast, teachers who fall ill or get pregnant are often assigned to lower grades where the pressure to perform is lower. To some extent, these trends explain why female and untrained teachers tend to be overrepresented in lower grades (Gouëdard, 2023).

> Our strategy is that for one school year, if the CEPE pass rate is 100 per cent, and we ask the teacher if he still wants to teach that class, then he continues to teach that class. And the teacher of the multigrade class (T1, T2) had just been trained and couldn't leave her class. In fact, it's the teachers' council that makes the decision.
>
> – A head teacher

The marked differences in class size between grades observed across schools in Madagascar are partly due to pupil dropout and grade repetition, and partly due to the prevalence of multigrade classes in Grades T1–T3. The *2022 Education Analysis for Global Learning and Equity* report (MICS EAGLE) showed that due to high dropout and repetition rates, the number of pupils generally reduces with each grade (*see Box 4*).

Furthermore, because of teacher and classroom shortages in many rural schools, head teachers often merge two or three grades into one class taught by a single teacher. Usually, the early grades are merged due to the importance given to performance in the final grade. Across visited locations, head teachers reiterated the need for more teachers so that the national PTR standard of 50:1 can be respected not only for the school as a whole, but also for each class. They called for an even lower benchmark for multigrade classes, describing the 50:1 ratio as inadequate.

> As teachers, we'd like to see proportionality between the number of teachers and the number of classes, like one teacher per class. [...] It's preferable to have a lot of students per class, rather than multigrade classes with few students. Because the programmes should all be completed.
>
> – A teacher and head teacher

> My hope is that the infrastructure will enable us to send these students back to school and meet the PTR standard.
>
> – A head teacher

Finally, **different class size within the same grade observed in many schools are driven by parent preferences.** Parents may have a say in which class their child joins, and parents often move their children to a class with a more motivated teacher. This effect is magnified in the first few grades, which commonly have more children and thus several sections as compared with one or two sections in the final grades. As a result, there is greater room for variations in class size in lower grades as compared with higher grades.

> When allocating [children to] classes, we tried to balance the numbers. For example, if the eleventh grade class has three sections, we have split the number of pupils [equally], but if there is a shortage of pupils in Section C, it is because the parents of the pupils did not agree to place their children in that section because the teacher was negligent.
>
> – A head teacher

Figure 4: Board displaying the type of teachers and the distribution of students across grades in a rural school

Source: Holimalala Randriamanampisoa.

5. Conclusions and recommendations

The multiple sources of data analysed in this study have surfaced various insights and corresponding recommendations for consideration by the MEN. These recommendations were generated in consultation with the Ministry and should be discussed with other stakeholders, and they should be piloted before widescale implementation where relevant.

Conclusion 1: Limited collaboration between central and subnational authorities as well as poor transparency in decision-making at all levels undermine effective teacher allocation in Madagascar. Progress with deconcentration was paused to address allocation decisions that were unaligned with school-level data. However, the decision-making process at the central level is also opaque and was assessed by subnational authorities as insufficiently considering contextual information of each allocation case. The lack of transparency at all levels continues to favour political interventionism and corruption, and a lack of dialogue hinders further improvements to the process.

Recommendation 1: Convene local, regional and national authorities to develop an effective and transparent allocation mechanism as well as to strengthen collaboration in decision-making at all levels. Algorithms used for making allocation decisions should take contextual information specific to constituencies, schools and individual teachers into greater account. To improve the transparency and efficiency of the allocation process, consider having a representative from the central level sit on the local commissions and provide inputs into the discussion to collectively come to an agreement. This would help avoid repeating a costly process at the central level and ensure decisions are made according to local needs. Meanwhile, continue building the information system envisioned in the new policy to streamline recording, tracking and validating deployments.

Conclusion 2: The ban on transfers of new civil servants and contract teachers for the first six years of service facilitates enforcement of the latest policy, but it exacerbates intra-CISCO inequalities. In each CISCO, quotas determine the number of FRAM teachers to be converted into contract or civil servant teachers. The conversion process mainly depends on the teacher's seniority and does not consider the distribution of candidates for conversion in the CISCO. Since newly converted teachers must remain in their first deployment location for several years, the current process may exacerbate imbalances when several teachers from the same school or ZAP are converted simultaneously.

Recommendation 2: Consider relaxing the rules for intra-CISCO transfers for new civil servant and contract teachers to allow local authorities to redistribute teachers equitably across the CISCO. To ensure that the relaxed rules do not undermine efforts to retain trained teachers in rural and remote areas, the transfers could be permitted only within the same zone. The exact stipulations, including when the teacher's consent would be required for such a transfer, should be discussed with representatives of CISCOs, DREN as well as teachers.

Conclusion 3: **The recent deployment policies have only partially succeeded due to the extreme hardship teachers face in rural areas and the challenges of adapting to life in these communities.** This study confirmed the many difficulties that trained teachers face in Zones 2 and 3, including: a lack of public services; poor road infrastructure and transportation; insecurity; family separation; shortages of nutrition and water; and prejudice from local communities. Receiving the matriculation number is often the only motivation to accept such a post, after which teachers try all means possible to transfer back to cities. Among those who do not leave immediately, motivation tends to be low and impacts the quality of their work. Teachers perceive the hardship allowance as too low, and many are unaware of its existence or amount. For some trained teachers, the conditions in certain rural locations are so harsh that even a substantial allowance would be insufficient to convince them to live there.

Recommendation 3: **Continue efforts to enhance the incentive mechanism to attract and retain trained teachers in Zones 2 and 3 and improve teachers' awareness of these incentives**. This should include raising the amount of the monthly hardship allowance to at least 250,000 MGA for Zone 2 and 350,000 MGA for Zone 3 as stipulated in the (re)deployment plans. In addition to financial incentives, consider additional incentives such as a career development pathway for teachers serving in Zones 2 and 3. This could include scholarships for advanced training for teachers who remain in these zones for several years as well as access to distance learning, seminars and workshops (Adedeji and Olaniyan, 2011). Furthermore, consider giving these teachers a greater choice in choosing their next deployment location. Such a solution was implemented in Senegal (Safin, forthcoming) and in India (the state of Karnataka), where teachers accumulate points depending on how long they have served in different zones (with the hardest-to-staff zones being worth the most points). Teachers with the most points have greater choice in selecting schools in future rotations (Béteille and Evans, 2019).

To improve teachers' awareness of the incentives, consider rolling out an information campaign, which could involve sending text messages to teachers or clearly stating all benefits in the job postings. Such information campaigns have proven effective in increasing deployment to rural areas in other countries, especially among low-income teachers (Ajzenman et al., 2021).

Complement these initiatives with education and training that would equip teachers with the pedagogical skills suited to rural pupils and prepare them for establishing positive relationships with other communities. Finally, telephone banking or mobile money structures could be explored to facilitate prompt salary payments for teachers in rural areas. All these solutions will need to be implemented in the context of broader cross-sectoral efforts to improve basic infrastructure and public services in rural areas.

Conclusion 4: **While undertrained, community teachers represent a valuable, motivated and reliable workforce that generally wants to stay in rural areas and is favoured by local communities.** In 2020–2021, FRAM teachers represented 51 per cent of primary teachers in the country (Gouëdard, 2023) and are the dominant workforce in rural schools. In light of the structural challenges that complicate efforts to attract trained teachers to rural and remote areas, FRAM teachers will continue to be an essential part of the teaching workforce. Although their working conditions are very poor, they are usually motivated and committed to working in their community. However, the current wait times and uncertainty in the pathways for recruitment as contract and civil servants are discouraging for many FRAM teachers and may deter future applicants from joining the teaching workforce.

Recommendation 4: Continue advocating for greater subsidization for already-serving FRAM teachers, intensify efforts to improve their pedagogical competencies and continue with their integration into the civil service. Based on the findings and in line with the suggestions of local and regional authorities, the MEN should continue advocating with the Ministry of Economy and Finance to better subsidize the salaries of already-serving FRAM teachers and continue with their integration into the civil service. For this, more efforts to boost the pedagogical skills of FRAM teachers are required.

Given the absence of local training centres in rural areas, the government could introduce a sponsorship scheme for FRAM teachers working in rural areas who are willing to undergo training at CRINFP. Such a solution was, for instance, implemented in Ghana, where the sponsored teachers were then required to return to and teach in their district for at least three years (Cobbold, 2006). To incentivize FRAM teachers to invest time in their professional development and to retain them within the teaching workforce, they must be given clear pathways to change their status. Importantly, these transitions should be better linked with competencies and rely less on seniority, which currently holds the most weight.

Conclusion 5: The unequal distribution of teachers within schools is linked to grade repetition and student dropouts. It is exacerbated by allocating the best-performing teachers to higher grades and creating multigrade classes at lower levels. While the allocation process within schools is participatory, the CEPE exam grade is usually prioritized and taught by the best teachers, often head teachers who are generally trained and male. In turn, lower grades are often taught by the least experienced teachers. Furthermore, head teachers and teachers believe that multigrade classes represent inadequate learning conditions for pupils and should be avoided altogether. However, due to shortages of teachers and infrastructure, multigrade classes are common and tend to be created among the lowest grades. Within-school inequalities are further exacerbated by parents who request that their children be allocated to teachers perceived as more competent. As a result, these teachers often face oversized classes and difficult teaching conditions.

Recommendation 5: Provide guidelines for teacher councils on allocating teachers to grades more equitably as well as guide CISCO and ZAP authorities in supporting schools in this process. The guidelines for teacher councils should identify the unequal class size across and within grades (between sections) as a problem as well as provide advice on how to allocate teachers more equitably. They should also advise against the practice of systematically allocating the least experienced teachers to the lowest grades and explain the potential impacts of this practice on learning inequalities and student dropout. CISCO and ZAP authorities should also be supported in assisting schools in applying the guidelines.

To make these changes possible, the MEN should adopt the objective of reducing the occurrence and size of multigrade classes and creating the conditions needed for its realization. The objective of avoiding multigrade classes could be incorporated into the mechanism for allocating new teachers and transferring already-serving teachers between schools. The Ministry should also consider lowering the PTR standard of 50:1 for multigrade classes, while continuing to advocate with the Ministry of Economy and Finance for more resources for new teachers and classrooms. Finally, given the reality and widespread prevalence of multigrade classes, teacher trainings should include modules on how to manage such classes.

Acronyms

CEPE	Certificate of Primary and Elementary Studies
CISCO	District education authorities
CLA	Local Allocation Commission
CNA	National Allocation Commission
CRA	Regional Allocation Commission
CRINFP	Regional Centre of the National Teacher Training Institute
DREN	Regional education authorities
FRAM teachers	Community teachers
INFP	The National Teacher Training Institute
MEETFP	Ministry of Employment, Technical Education and Vocational Training
MEN	Ministry of Education
MESupReS	Ministry of Higher Education and Scientific Research
MGA	Malagasy Ariary
PTR	Pupil-teacher ratio
T4A	Teachers for All
ZAP	Educational administration zone

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Acknowledgements

The Teachers for All (T4A) research initiative in Madagascar is based on close collaboration between the Ministry of Education (MEN), UNICEF Madagascar and UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office for Research and Foresight.

T4A in Madagascar has benefited, and continues to benefit, from the expertise, ideas and support of many people, an exhaustive list of whom unfortunately cannot be reproduced here.

This report was written by Dominika Safin (Education Researcher, UNICEF Innocenti). Coordination, strategic conceptualization and supervision were provided by Sonakshi Sharma (Education Specialist, UNICEF Innocenti). Holimalala Randriamanampisoa and Domoina Raharisoa led the data collection in the field and made conceptual and analytical contributions to the study.

T4A research in Madagascar would not be possible without the leadership, dedication and overall support of all the members of the national technical team, including the following people at MEN: Auguste Razafintsalama (Director of Human Resources), Jullino Serge Rasamison (Director of Educational Planning), Luc Tahiry Ramiandrisoa (Human Resources Department), Voahangy Rahelimanantsoa (Educational Planning Department).

Within UNICEF Innocenti, the author would also like to thank Pierre Gouëdard (formerly UNICEF Innocenti) and Michelle Mills of the T4A team, as well as Brigitte Matchinda, Mamy Andrianarilala and Joyce Patricia Bheeka of the UNICEF Madagascar Country Office, for a rich and ongoing dialogue on issues of teacher allocation and student learning. Matt Brossard, then Linda Jones, as Chief of the Research on Education and Development (READ) Unit at UNICEF Innocenti, provided strategic direction for the entire T4A research programme, and this report in particular.

UNICEF Innocenti would also like to thank Nelly Rakoto (University of Antananarivo), Frédérique Andriamaro (Catholic University of Madagascar) and Kathleen Letshabo (UNICEF Headquarters) who reviewed the manuscript and provided valuable comments to improve it.

Finally, this report would not have been possible without the contributions of many UNICEF Innocenti staff members at strategic moments in its production, including Amparo Barrera and Miguel Bountsolas Ferrer.

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50121, Florence, Italy

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Social media: @UNICEFInnocenti on Facebook, Instagram, LinkedIn, and YouTube.

Suggested citation

Safin, Dominika, *Teachers for All: Unpacking primary teacher deployment in Madagascar – Qualitative case study*, UNICEF Innocenti – Global Office of Research and Foresight, Florence, November 2024.

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