Schools for Madagascar
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Education Toolkit | Madagascar
Despite its image as a tropical paradise, Madagascar is an island with immense challenges.

Despite its image as a tropical paradise, Madagascar is an island with immense challenges. Its population of nearly 20 million may live in beautiful surroundings, but the country remains one of the poorest in the world: Nearly 69% of the population are considered ‘poor’ and 44% ‘extremely poor’.

Education is essential to help lift the population of Madagascar out of poverty. It begins with working to secure a primary education for all by the year 2015.

Up until the political crisis of 2009 Madagascar was on track to achieve Education for All. The number of children enrolled in primary school had increased from almost 2.5 million in 2001-2002 to nearly 4.5 million in 2008-2009. In such a poor country these primary school enrollment rates were particularly impressive.

But the situation is now worsening; most households have experienced a loss in revenues and public budgets have been cut. Poverty increases the likelihood of children not attending school, and the depletion in government funds has meant a halt to the expansion of access in education and to improvements in quality. Today, if Madagascar is to achieve Millennium Development Goal (MDG) number two — a primary education for all by the year 2015 — it will need to rely on increased external support.

Not enough classrooms
One of the major constraints facing primary education in Madagascar is that for every 100 children who enter the first grade, only 60 will complete the full five-year cycle. The average Malagasy adult completes only 4.4 years of school. The low completion rate is a direct result of a lack of capacity: Madagascar does not have enough trained teachers and it does not have enough classrooms.

Madagascar will need to build 2000-3000 classrooms every year between now and 2015 if it is to achieve primary education for all. (This figure does not include rehabilitating all the classrooms currently damaged or destroyed in cyclones). The environmental impact of such a building program is overwhelming: In a country where deforestation
has already claimed almost 90% of the island’s natural forests, building this many classrooms with traditional techniques and local forest materials would be a disaster.

**Targeting the most vulnerable**
UNICEF believes the greatest improvements in education will come from targeting vulnerable communities — remote communities where children’s access to a complete primary education is the most challenging. Fourteen percent of communities in Madagascar have no school; in 19% of the country’s school districts more than 40% of primary schools are incomplete, offering only two to three years of education. In addition, in many school districts cyclones damage or destroy hundreds of classrooms each year. For UNICEF, the more classrooms that can be built and rehabilitated in these vulnerable areas, the greater the impact on the numbers of children who can attend school. UNICEF’s innovative and environmentally friendly building techniques will ensure that this is not done at the expense of the environment.

However, achieving ‘Education for All’ requires more than simply building or rehabilitating classrooms. The majority of pupils in Madagascar study in classrooms with poorly trained teachers, few learning materials and even fewer amenities: Just 13% of public primary schools have access to water and only 24% have latrines. UNICEF is working with communities and education officials to improve this.

**Contracts for success**
Since 2005 UNICEF has supported the Ministry of National Education (MNE) in developing a participatory, community-based approach to school improvement in more than 3,000 primary schools. Principals, teachers, students, parents and community leaders are brought together to identify specific actions to improve education in their community. A ‘Contract for School Success’ (CPRS) is drawn up where each party lists their commitments to support the agreed actions. In Madagascar, where there is such a diversity of cultural, economic and geographic conditions, the contracts approach
is the one most likely to lead to lasting improvements in children’s education because it adapts solutions to the local contexts, and mobilizes local commitment to change.

child-friendly schools
UNICEF promotes child-friendly schools — schools that are concerned with the whole child and his or her wellbeing as a learner. Such schools consider child-friendly teaching methods, child protection, health and nutrition, water and sanitation, school environment and safety, environmental protection issues, inclusion, non-discrimination and non-violence — in short, all the issues that affect a child’s motivation for coming to school, for staying there, and for obtaining a quality education.

A better future
UNICEF has an established reputation in Madagascar. With its considerable influence at both the grassroots and policy levels it is a strong partner to the Education Ministry. It is capable of introducing effective innovations for improved access to and quality of education. With further financial resources UNICEF can use its influence to help keep education in Madagascar on track. UNICEF is in a good position to contribute so that Madagascar does not lose the immense gains made in primary school enrollment and completion in previous years.

In this booklet and its short companion videos (available at www.unicef.org/infobycountry/madagascar.html), you will meet children from three vulnerable communities as they start the new school year. Manjo attends an incomplete school, Dorlys has no school in her village, and Angita’s classroom was destroyed in a cyclone. Their stories are representative of the experiences of many children in Madagascar and explain exactly why UNICEF’s approach to education is important.

With your help UNICEF can support the efforts of teachers, parents and children in Madagascar to create a better future.
More than 16% of communities/villages in Madagascar have no school. In some remote districts that number can be as high as high as 50-60%. For many children this means that they never set foot in school. Others walk as far as ten kms to the nearest school, sometimes traversing rivers and other dangerous stretches on the way.

After some time many of these children drop out, finding the daily journey too strenuous to continue. It is difficult to perform well after walking so far to school, and often having had little to eat. Others are forced to end their education early so that they can help out at home. Boys are needed to watch the livestock, girls to help with household chores.

Parents also worry about the dangers their children may face, and may prefer to keep their children, especially girls, safe at home, especially as they reach puberty. Another factor in their decision may be marriage. Arranged early marriages for girls are common in this part of Madagascar.

In the following pages you will meet 12-year-old Dorlys, a student at Esalo primary school in the Anosy region of southern Madagascar. Dorlys lives more than four kms from school in the village of Zafimahavory. Despite traveling more than two hours a day to school and back, and all of the chores she must do at home, Dorlys plans to continue her education and her parents plan to continue sending her to school. Dorlys is one of the lucky ones. There are other children in the village who have never gone to school or who have dropped out—children for whom a school close to home would have changed their lives.
My name is Dorlys. I live in the village of Zafimahavory. I am 12 years old and I am in the third grade. When I grow up I want to be a nurse.
Dorlys

Dorlys, 12, is a student at Esalo primary school, which is located more than four kms from her home.

Today is the first day of school. I am glad. I like going to school. The only thing I don't like is the long walk. I walk with my friends. It takes us about an hour to get there. Sometimes we're late and we have to run. Sometimes we just run for fun.

Some of my friends in the village have dropped out because the school is far away. One girl I know went with us to grade one, but then she stopped. She was tired of walking so far every day and she had a hard time keeping up with all of the other children. Now she is 13. She takes care of her younger brother and works at home while her parents are working in the fields. She is also promised to be married.

Another friend stopped after grade three. She was sick so she had to repeat grade one and then she was sick again and had to repeat grade two. When the teacher said she had to repeat grade three, her parents said 'No, that's enough'.

I know other children who have had to stop because their parents could not afford to buy notebooks and pens, or because they had to help their parents to watch the cows or to work at home. And there are some who have never even been to school.

I am lucky. My parents want me to continue my education. They want me to be like my brother who is studying in the university. That's a good thing. I will have to go to school for a long time if I am going to be a nurse.

I don't know many girls in my village who have continued their education past grade five. Right now I can only think of one. Her school is very far away. She leaves early in the morning and returns in the evening. When she finished grade five she was living with her grandmother, who told her it was time for her to get married. She told her grandmother that she wanted to continue to study, but her grandmother refused. 'I have my uncle,' the girl said. 'He will help me to continue my studies.' So now she lives with her uncle, but if her uncle stops supporting her, she will have to go back and live with her grandmother and get married.

I want to keep going to school. But if there was a school in the village it would be so much easier. Then I wouldn't have to spend so much of my day walking and I would have more time to do my chores, finish my homework and play with my friends.
After I wake up I go to the river to wash my face and hands.
I feed our animals

I bring water for my family.
I am a farmer. I have a tiny plantation of manioc and sweet potatoes. I also have a cow, a goose, a chicken and a duck.

I also have six wonderful children. All of them have gone to school. I am really proud of them. Three are in school now: Dorlys and her sister are in grade three and my oldest son is in university. One of my other two daughters finished grade five, then stopped. She’s married now. The other one dropped out. I can’t remember when that was. And then I have one more son. He dropped out—I think it was in grade nine. He was discouraged by having to go so far to school every day. Now he helps me in the field.

I really hope that Dorlys will go far in her education. I want her to succeed in life and not just be a small-time farmer like me. I hope one day she will go on to university like her brother. If she completes grade five and passes the exam, we will do everything we can to send her to junior secondary school. It is far away—nine or ten kms from the village—but if she wants to continue her education, it is our responsibility to help her to do so. It will be her choice, not ours. Children have to learn for themselves how hard life is.

I only completed grade four, but I know that education has many benefits. Of course the chief benefit is a better life in the long term. However, day to day it means that you can read official papers and that nobody can make a fool of you when you have to negotiate something. A good education also opens doors, like the door to getting a good job and not being a poor farmer.

I am especially proud to see my children studying because I know the difficulties many parents in Zafimahavory—myself included—face when it comes to sending our children to school. The first is financial. The costs of life weigh heavily on parents’ shoulders. School materials, uniforms and contributions can be expensive—especially if you have more than one child in school.

Safety is a big concern. Four kms is a long way to go. When they are small an adult from the village should always walk the children to school. The older children walk together, but they have to cross a river and go through the forest where thieves are said to be hiding. Nothing has happened so far, but we are always worried.

Another issue is the children themselves. Boys are usually lazy about going to school. They prefer to play or help their parents in the field. For girls, it depends. Some want to go to school, some don’t because it’s too far. Dorlys is a good girl. Such a nice girl. She always helps her mother and she’s always happy to go to school in the morning. Not all children are like that.

Imagine if there was a school in this village: There are many children here, and I am sure that almost all of them would attend. They would not have to walk so far to school, so they would not be tired when they arrived, and that would mean better results. It would also mean fewer would drop out. For parents, it would mean we could relax. Our children would have more time to help us at home, and we would no longer have to worry about their safety. That would be marvelous!
The large number of communities without schools is a major reason why primary net enrollment in Madagascar is just 86%.

A traditional approach to teaching and a high number of untrained teachers in Madagascar means that 20% of children repeat at least one grade of primary school.

A combination of difficult access, poor quality and families living in poverty leads to high dropout rates: Almost 25% of children drop out in the first grade.
0702 I leave for school with some of the children from my village.

0714
Esperance: I’m glad school is starting again. It’s better than working in the fields.
Dorlys: Me too. I’m looking forward to seeing my friends.
Tina: I hope our new teacher is nice.
We cross the river. When there is a lot of rain the river gets too deep and we can't go to school.
0735 ‘Hurry up! We’ll be late!’
'Wait for me!'
A parent walks with a group of children to the school.
0756 Entering Esalo
You’re late! Go outside and line up. And don’t disturb the other children.
‘We are here to learn. So that you can learn well, I ask you to remember that our school has a number of rules: one, don’t be late; two, don’t talk in class; three, don’t come to school dirty. Before you come to school you must wash your face, your hands and your clothes.’
In this school we have 631 students. Only half of them come from this village. The rest come from further away. Many, like those from Zafimahavory, travel four kms to school each way. They run and play on the way, so when they arrive they are sweaty and tired. Sometimes they sleep in class. Many don’t eat before they come to school. They are hungry. They don’t pay attention. They get in trouble and end up having to repeat the grade.

Only half of the children who start school in grade one complete grade five. There are a number of reasons for this. Sometimes it is because their parents are poor and can’t afford to buy school supplies. Other times it is because the parents need their children to help them at home. But most often it is simply because the children get tired of coming so far to school every day. The journey is too long and too hot. And when it rains it is really difficult for them to get to school. So when they are in grade three or four they drop out.

Typically it is the girls who drop out in grade three, the boys in grade four. This is the time when girls grow up. If a girl is promised to be married she may have to drop out because her fiancee’s parents, afraid that she might take another boy, bring her to live with them at their house. And then her schooling is usually finished. But all of this depends on the parents and the in-laws.

Usually an equal number of girls and boys end up graduating from grade five, but sometimes there is an exception: last year in our school more girls graduated than boys.

If there was a school in Zafimahavory village a lot of these problems would be solved. The drop out rate would decrease and the village would be developed. Education brings light. In a family, if even one child goes to study, it can change the mentality of the whole family. Take these children here, for example, at school a child learns to wash his hands before eating. This will change the practice of the families in the village. They will learn to do the same. Another example is the latrine. We have latrines at school. They do not have them in the village. It is difficult to change behavior, but if a child learns about these things in school, he or she will explain to their family: ‘wash your hands, use the latrine...’ In this way the child becomes the agent of change for the entire family.
Now kids, you must pay attention and raise your hand if you have the answer and want to speak. Ready? We are going to have a Malgasy lesson. My first question is: What is a sentence? Raise your hand! Come on, I’m sure you can do it!
‘Dorlys, wake up! Why are you sleeping in class? Didn’t you sleep last night?’
While primary school completion rates can reach 80-90% in larger towns, in remote areas they can be as low as 40%; the overall primary completion rate is 60%.

Of 100 children who enter primary school:
- Four will start grade six (junior secondary school)
- Two will continue to grade nine
- One will continue to grade ten
- 0.5 will complete grade twelve

In districts with easy access to a school, 85% of girls go on to junior secondary school, compared to only 27% of girls in remote rural districts.
Romain Ribahira

President of Esalo fokontany, the administrative unit that includes both Zafimahavory and Esalo villages

I have six children and all of them have gone to school in Esalo— in part because I happen to live near to the school — but also because I see the importance of education. I completed grade 12. By chance my parents also lived near the school, so it was easier for me to attend.

Apart from the teachers at the school, I am one of the most educated people in this area. Having an education means I can read and write. It means I can understand what things mean and I can explain them to others. It means people cannot cheat me, and it means I can manage my money and I can manage this village.

But many people do not have the same opportunity my family and I have had. In Zafimahavory there are 450 children, of whom 300 should be in school. Many are not because it is a long way from that village to Esalo.

I would really like to see a school in Zafimahavory. It would bring a change to the people and to the village. It would allow some people to learn to do different jobs. It would also help those who continue to do agriculture. They could learn new methods and be more productive.

The most important thing is to keep these children in school through grade five. In Esalo we have a contract for school success. In it
the parents agree not to take their children out of school until after they have completed grade five. This has had a big impact on the number of drop outs. If they built a school in Zafimahavory and made a similar contract, it would also make a big difference.

But we also have to think further ahead. In order to get good jobs our children need to be able to continue their education beyond primary level. And most of the children here, even if they pass the grade five exit exam, will not be able to go on to grade six. The junior secondary school is almost ten kms away. The children are bigger, so the journey is easier for them, but it is still very far. Most parents cannot afford to send their children to live near the school. It is also difficult for them to afford the increased cost of materials. So what usually happens is the girls get married, or help their parents at home, and the boys help their fathers look after the cattle.

We want to bring change to our villages. Making sure there is a primary school in Zafimahavory and that the children there complete grade five is the first step to doing this. And as more children complete grade five, I am sure that, despite the difficulties, there will be some who will find a way to go on to junior secondary school.
In this district alone there are 43 villages without a school, which affects the education of about 1500 school age children.

If we are going to achieve Education for All, a number of things need to happen: First, we need to build more schools, and they need to be located near the people, so that they can send their children to school. Second, we must have people, like the president of the village, who will encourage the parents to send their children to school. Third, the Ministry of Education must continue, as they have in the past, to help poor families by providing each student with a school bag containing notebooks, pens and pencils. Finally, we must have a contract with the parents and the community — a contract for school success (CPRS) — so that they keep their children in school through grade five.

Currently, most if not all of these things are happening in places like Esalo. But in villages like Zafimahavory, we are at the first step: the need to build a school.

In planning to meet Education for All, the objective was set that each fokontany should have a primary school. But in reality, there are some big villages like Zafimahavory that need their own school because there are many children living there and they are located far from the fokontany school.

However, as much as they may want to build schools in these villages, local administrators have little money and too many competing priorities — like the need to build clinics and dispensaries. They do not have the financial resources with which to build another school unless they can find a way to raise more money, or find partners to help with funding.

An average classroom built of local materials and constructed with the help of parents costs about US $2500. But this depends on where it is located. If it is built in a village far from the main road, like Zafimahavory, it will cost more. This is because the materials needed to build a school — stone, bricks, cement, wood — are not available near the village, and transporting them there is difficult and costly.

Being far from the main road has other drawbacks. Nobody sees remote villages like Zafimahavory. When authorities come they just stop at the school in Esalo. They don’t go any further. UNICEF is the first partner to come to Zafimahavory.

UNICEF has already helped our school district in many ways: Teacher training has been very important, as has the contract for school success. In the future we hope that UNICEF will continue to help us by building schools in remote villages like Zafimahavory. This will help Madagascar to make Education for All a reality.
UNICEF has worked with 2791 school communities in Madagascar to put in place contracts for school success (CPRS).

This has contributed to:

- improved primary school access
- increased completion of primary education
- greater parent and community involvement in education
We walk home after eating lunch at the canteen.
My friends and I go to the river to wash our families' clothes.

We pick greens to cook for dinner.
We collect water
0413 I play with my friends.
I cook dinner for my family.

After we finish eating I wash the dishes.
My brother helps me with my homework.
Bringing schools close to home will allow more children in villages like Zafimahavory to go to school and to stay in school through grade five.

With your support, UNICEF Madagascar can work with local education authorities to provide 60 remote communities with child-friendly schools by 2013.

This is part of a larger UNICEF initiative to complete more than 1200 child-friendly schools in Madagascar by 2013. By equipping them with the amenities, staff and materials needed to provide a quality education, UNICEF will have a direct impact on more than 125,000 children by 2013, and on many more in the generations to come.