Unlocking the Potential of Women and Adolescent Girls in Madagascar

Challenges and Opportunities in Increasing Women’s and Girls’ Economic Empowerment
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Abstract

This thematic note is part of a broader mixed-method study on gender inequalities in Madagascar, which intends to illustrate the key gender gaps in the country and shed light on the unique challenges that young Malagasy women face in their educational, professional, and family trajectories. Due to the persistence of financial, social, and institutional barriers, Malagasy women and girls encounter significant disadvantages across all dimensions of well-being and are unable to access opportunities in an equal manner with men and boys in the country. They are largely constrained in their ability to accumulate human capital in education and health, and to participate in economic opportunities; and they face severe limitations in agency and decision-making, particularly with respect to family formation. Women and girls also appear to be disproportionately affected by the impacts of climate change and the COVID-19 pandemic, which further widen preexisting gender gaps and amplify vulnerability to poverty, violence, and discrimination. This thematic note provides in-depth insights into the status of women and girls’ economic opportunities in Madagascar and proposes several strategic lines of action to enhance women’s economic empowerment. This note is accompanied by the overview of all study findings and three thematic notes that present in-depth insights in the following key dimensions: education, health, and agency.
Acknowledgments

This note is part of a study on gender disparities in Madagascar; the Overview of this study is available as “Unlocking the Potential of Women and Adolescent Girls—Challenges and Opportunities for Greater Empowerment of Women and Adolescent Girls in Madagascar.” The study was conducted by a core team composed of Alina Kalle and Miriam Muller. The report benefited from important contributions by Tamara Bah, Joaquin Gustavo Betancourt, Ursula Casabonne, Fatoumata Dieng, Alexandra Jarotschkin, Francis Muamba Mulango, Esperance Mukeshimana, Stephanie Kuttner, Carmen de Paz, Sabrina Razafindravelo, Hiska Noemi Reyes, Paula Tavares, and David Seth Warren. The team is grateful to peer reviewers Andrew Brudevold-Newman, Tazeen Hasan, and Ana Maria Oviedo for their thoughtful inputs. Honora Mara edited the report. Karem Edwards provided excellent administrative support throughout. The team worked under the guidance of Benu Bidani, Marie-Chantal Uwanyiligira, and Pierella Pacci. A team from Ivorary Consulting collected, transcribed, translated, and coded the qualitative data. This research was funded by a grant from the Hewlett Foundation. Finally, our deepest gratitude to all key informants and to the women, girls, and parents who shared their personal stories with us.
### Abbreviations

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Abbreviation</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Survey</td>
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<tr>
<td>ECDE</td>
<td>Early Childhood Development and Education</td>
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<td>EPM</td>
<td>Permanent Household Survey</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>gender-based violence</td>
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<td>LFP</td>
<td>labor force participation</td>
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<td>MICS</td>
<td>Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>positive deviant</td>
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<td>PEI</td>
<td>productive economic inclusion</td>
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<tr>
<td>POUL</td>
<td>private ownership of untitled land</td>
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<td>SRH</td>
<td>sexual and reproductive health</td>
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<tr>
<td>WBL</td>
<td>Women, Business, and the Law</td>
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<td>WDI</td>
<td>World Development Indicators</td>
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Introduction

While gender equality matters in its own right, investments in the social and economic empowerment of women and adolescent girls have the potential to translate into long-lasting economic growth and overall development for Madagascar. According to global evidence, women's empowerment brings instrumental value for families and for society at large, because it is positively correlated with reduced poverty and food insecurity, with improved labor productivity, and with better chances for future generations (Aguirre et al. 2012; Allendorf 2007; Mulugeta et al. 2021). Evidence also shows that investing in the human capital and empowerment of adolescent girls in particular protects progress made in childhood, accelerates productivity and economic growth, and safeguards the health of the future adult population (Levine et al. 2008). Therefore, focusing investments to ensure the health, education, and empowerment of adolescent girls is a strategic action likely to result in long-term gains for economic growth and sustainable development.

This note is part of a broader mixed-method study on gender inequalities in Madagascar, which aimed to generate knowledge and deepen understanding of gender inequalities and their drivers in Madagascar with a focus on adolescence; to explore challenges and opportunities that adolescent girls face in making decisions about family formation, education, work, and the intersection of these elements; and to identify institutions and strategies that support young women in their decisions about education, work, and family formation. The broader study has three main inputs: a quantitative analysis, a literature review, and a subsequent qualitative in-depth study. The quantitative analysis explored the status of gender gaps across multiple dimensions (human capital, economic opportunity, and women's agency) by socio-demographic characteristics, identified regions with the most severe gender gaps, and assessed the country's development in reducing gender disparities over the past two decades (See box 1 for a list of the quantitative data sources used in this report.). In addition, the team has completed a review of the current legal system and a literature review on gender in Madagascar and on what works to close gender gaps across dimensions based on evidence from the Sub-Saharan Africa region (World Bank 2023).

Box 1. Sources of the quantitative data for the analysis

- Afrobarometer Round 7 Survey on gender attitudes
- Demographic and Health Survey (DHS) 2008–09 and 2021
- International Labour Organization (ILO) estimates
- Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS) Madagascar 2018
- Permanent Household Survey (EPM) 2021–2022
- United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) statistics database
- The World Bank’s Women, Business, and the Law data set 2023
- The World Bank’s World Development Indicators (WDI) database
In addition to the quantitative assessment, the team conducted qualitative research that included individual in-depth interviews, focus group discussions, and key informant interviews in three geographically diverse regions in Madagascar: Analamanga, Atsimo-Atsinanana, and Sofia. In-depth interviews were conducted with young women ages 18–24 and with mothers of adolescent girls. A subsample of young women consisted of positive deviants—young women who managed to succeed in their educational and work endeavors despite encountering the same socioeconomic barriers as other participants. In addition, focus group discussions were held with women ages 25–34 and with mothers and fathers of adolescent girls. Key informant interviews were conducted with religious and traditional leaders; local elected officials; and representatives from civil society and from the education, health, and private sectors.

The key findings from this mixed-method study are:

- **Access to education is a challenge for all in Madagascar, but girls face additional gender-specific barriers.** Although girls outnumber boys in primary and secondary school attendance and completion, the access to schooling is very low for all children: only 36.6 percent of girls and 34.3 percent of boys ages 12–15 complete lower secondary school (WDI UNESCO statistics database 2019). Moreover, the overall rate of educational attainment remains concerningly low and a significant share of adult women is illiterate (23.9 percent vs. 21.4 percent for men; DHS 2021). Although free on paper, attending school involves multiple indirect costs—uniforms, school materials, fees, lunches, and other unforeseen expenses—that are often exacerbated by the impacts of climate change on school infrastructure. Parents are expected to make financial or in-kind contributions to the salaries of unsubsidized non–civil servant teachers, who in some cases make up most of the teaching staff. In addition to the overall scarcity of schools, existing schools often lack appropriate facilities and capacity to accommodate all students. Participation in farming and widespread engagement in labor activities interrupt the school trajectories of adolescents (both girls and boys). Although most of the barriers in access to schooling are universal, girls’ chances to complete secondary education are lowered by high involvement in domestic chores, gender-based violence in schools, limited agency, and—above all—child marriage and early pregnancy.

- **Access to sexual, reproductive, and maternal health services remains limited, especially for adolescent girls and young unmarried women.** Malagasy women and girls are largely disadvantaged in knowledge on and access to maternal, sexual, and reproductive health services, as seen from a low share of professionally

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1 For more details on the methodology, see appendix A.

2 The selected regions not only represent various geographical areas in Madagascar but also differ significantly in terms of gender disparities. Analamanga (center, represented by the capital city Antananarivo) stands out in Madagascar for its relatively low rates of child marriage and women’s illiteracy as well as a high secondary school attendance rate among girls. In contrast, Sofia (north) and Atsimo-Atsinanana (south) demonstrate particularly high gender gaps in literacy, school attendance and prevalence of child marriage. More information on the choice of regions can be found in appendix A.
assisted births (45.8 percent) (DHS 2021) and a high unmet need for contraception (14.6 percent). Maternal mortality rate is also high (335 deaths per 100,000 live births) (WDI 2017). Overall, the scarcity of health centers and prohibitive costs of consultations limit women’s and girls’ access to health services in general. At the same time, young women’s chances of seeking SRH services are further constrained by the lack of reliable sources of information on SRH, absence of quality youth-friendly clinics, and negative social norms that discourage use of family planning services among unmarried women/ women without children. All those barriers contribute to high share of teenage pregnancies (31.1 percent of girls ages 15–19 have begun childbearing) (DHS 2021), which is associated with numerous risks for girls’ well-being, with potential long-term adverse effects for their education, health, employment opportunities, and vulnerability to poverty.

• **The continuum of barriers to finding good-quality employment disproportionately affects women and girls.** Malagasy women are less likely than men to participate in the labor market: 71.3 percent versus 82.4 percent respectively (EPM 2021–22). Moreover, women have limited access to better-quality jobs: only 24 percent of working women are waged employees versus 35 percent of working men, and female employees are over-represented among contributing family workers (14 percent vs. 5 percent of male workers) and in subsistence farming (32 percent vs. 23 percent respectively) (EPM 2021-22). This lack of access to better-quality jobs can be partially explained by the factual absence of jobs and the existence of legal forms of discrimination that prevent women from undertaking certain jobs (e.g., in the industrial sector). Additionally, young women lack required skills and competencies, knowledge, clear vision and instruments on how to translate their job aspirations into action. Based on the interviews, women also encounter discrimination based on their gender, ethnic origin, and physical appearance in the recruitment process; women in informal employment often face degrading working conditions, low and unstable income, and abuse and sexual harassment by their bosses.

• **Women and girls are strongly limited in their agency and decision-making power,** as manifested in high rates of intimate-partner violence (41 percent of ever-partnered women have experienced at least one of its forms) and child marriage (38.8 percent of women ages 20–24 were married by age 18) (DHS 2021). The onset of family formation occurs at a very early age for many Malagasy girls and young women. For many poor girls and their families, the decision to start a family at a very early age is driven by the lack of means, as the marriage ritual implies economic benefits for the household (a dowry). In addition, widespread negative attitudes toward unmarried women and to out-of-wedlock pregnancies often drive adolescent girls and their families to pursue marriage early, partly in order to comply with social norms and expected patterns of behavior. Importantly, practices of child marriage are diverse and show striking geographical differences. With the exception of the capital Antananarivo, child marriage is often celebrated under customary law.

Based on the in-depth interviews and focus group discussions from three regions in Madagascar, a number of intersecting and interconnected factors constrain the well-being of Malagasy girls and women, with long-term effects on their ability to make
informed life decisions and hope for a better life (figure 1). Overall, poverty and lack of means (financial, economic, and social capital) are the major barriers that prevent adolescent girls and young women from accumulating their human capital, delaying early family formation, accessing better-quality jobs, and having a hope for a better future. Additionally, patriarchal social norms and inequitable gender roles largely drive the observed inequalities: the pressure to comply with socially accepted patterns of behavior drives many young women (especially those from the poor households) to start family formation at a very early age, often compromising their chances to complete their schooling and access better-quality jobs later in life. Moreover, women’s inability to access basic services and participate in economic opportunities can be attributed to limited institutional capacity and service delivery. Finally, vulnerability to shocks and climate change poses additional challenges and disproportionately affects women by exacerbating their burden of domestic work, amplifying food insecurity and malnutrition, and obstructing access to education. Altogether these factors severely restrict the context in which adolescent girls and young women can operate and advance in life, often not leaving them options or choices. Across all themes, even when options or choices are available, young women fundamentally lack agency, or the ability to make decisions and act on them. Importantly, while gender gaps are high overall, women and girls from rural areas and poor households are particularly disadvantaged.

Figure 1. Structural issues affecting gender outcomes in Madagascar according to the qualitative research

Source: Original figure developed for this report.
Note: SRH = Sexual and Reproductive Health
This note provides insights into the status of young women's economic opportunities in Madagascar relative to men in the country. It presents findings from the quantitative assessment, revealing the key gender gaps in labor force participation, quality of employment, earnings, access to productive assets, financial inclusion, and landownership. Additionally, the note discusses country-specific challenges and barriers that young women face in their professional endeavors in the regions visited for the qualitative research. Based on the identification of gaps and barriers in economic opportunity and on the evidence of what works best, the note provides strategic directions for policy actions that could apply to the context of Madagascar.

**Gender gaps in economic opportunity in Madagascar**

Malagasy women are largely disadvantaged in their access to economic opportunity; numerous gender gaps exist in relation to labor force participation, quality of employment, earnings, access to productive assets, financial inclusion, and landownership. Although women’s labor force participation (LFP) is high in Madagascar (71.3 percent in 2021), it is still lower than that of men (82.4 percent) (EPM 2021–22). Regardless of age, men are steadily more likely than women to participate in the labor market (figure 2). In those regards, the smallest gender gap in LFP is observed among young generations ages 15–19 (5.6 percentage point difference in favor of men) and the biggest gender gap is documented among individuals ages 25–29 (16.1 percentage point difference in favor of men) (EPM 2021–22).

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**Figure 2** Labor force participation rate, by gender and age, 2021

Percent

![Figure 2](image_url)

Source: Permanent Household Survey 2021-22
In Madagascar, the majority of women and men work in agriculture. As of 2021, 39.4 percent of employed women worked in agriculture, compared to 48.7 percent of employed men (excluding those in subsistence farming) (figure 3). Moreover, more female than male workers are engaged in manufacturing (8.2 percent vs. 4.4 percent). This tendency is unusual for Sub-Saharan Africa, and in many peer countries the share of employed women engaged in industrial jobs is steadily lower than that of employed men. At the same time, male workers outnumber women in transportation and storage (3.2 percent vs. 0.1 percent) and mining and quarrying (3.1 percent vs. 2.1 percent). Nearly equal shares of working women and men are concentrated in education (2.3 percent of male employment and 2.8 percent of female employment) (EPM 2021–22).

**Figure 3** Selected sectors of employment, by gender, 2021

Percent of total women’s and men’s employment

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Sector</th>
<th>Women</th>
<th>Men</th>
</tr>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Agriculture, forestry and fishing</td>
<td>39.4</td>
<td>48.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mining and quarrying</td>
<td>3.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Manufacturing</td>
<td>4.4</td>
<td>2.9</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Construction</td>
<td>2.3</td>
<td>2.3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wholesale and retail trade repair of motor vehicles and…</td>
<td>1.1</td>
<td>0.7</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Transportation and storage</td>
<td>1.6</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Human health and social work activities</td>
<td>0.1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Education</td>
<td>0.7</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Source: Permanent Household Survey 2021–22

Among Malagasy women who are employed, the quality of jobs tends to be lower than for men (figure 4). As of 2021, 32 percent of all working women were concentrated in subsistence farming, in contrast to 23 percent of working men. Moreover, a significant share of employed women are contributing family workers (14 percent), compared to just 5 percent of employed men. The share of self-employed workers appears to be slightly higher among male than female workers: 31 percent vs. 27 percent respectively. Finally, only 24 percent of all working women enjoy waged employment, compared to 35 percent of working men (EPM 2021–22). Importantly, earning differentials between men and women persist; as of 2021, the median monthly earnings were 150,000 MGA.

3 For example, according to 2019 WDI data, in Madagascar, the share of female and male workers concentrated in industry stands at 11 percent and 9 percent, respectively; in Angola, 1 percent and 13 percent; in Mozambique, 3 percent and 14 percent; in Zambia, 4 percent and 16 percent; and in Zimbabwe, 2 percent and 11 percent.
(US$34.1) among working men and 106,666.7 MGA (US$24.2) among working women, meaning that the gender wage gap in Madagascar stands at 28.9 percentage point in favor of men (EPM 2021-22). High concentration of female workers in the informal sector presents numerous threats for women’s income generation and can further amplify poverty traps (Aga et al. 2021; Fernández and Meza 2015).

**Figure 4 Employment status, by gender, 2021**

Percent of total women’s and men’s employment

![Employment status, by gender, 2021](https://via.placeholder.com/150)

**Source:** Author calculations based on Permanent Household Survey 2021-22

Although most women in Madagascar work in self-employment and the informal sector, women in the formal sector face several legal impediments to access employment in certain types of jobs, sectors, and industries. Currently, the Labor Code (Articles 85, 93, and 99) and Decree No. 62-152 of March 28, 1962 (Articles 1 and 7) restrict women from working in jobs deemed dangerous or in certain industries. Article 85 of the Labor Code specifically states, “Women, regardless of age, may not be employed at night in any industrial establishment whatsoever. … for this article, the following are considered industrial establishments: mines, quarries, extractive industries of all kinds, industries in which products are manufactured, modified, cleaned, completed… [the list continues].” Article 93 states, “Decrees issued after consultation with the National Labor Council set the nature of the work prohibited for women and pregnant women.” Article 99 states, in part, “The Labor Inspector may request the examination of women by an approved doctor to verify whether the work for which they are entrusted does not exceed their strength.” Men, however, need not submit to a doctor’s examination, may work at all times, and are not subject to blanket decrees issued by a government agency—making it easier for them to pursue the career of their choosing. In Sub-Saharan Africa, 25 (of 48) countries have no restrictions on the industrial jobs women may work in, and 28 (of 48) countries have no restrictions on women working in occupations deemed dangerous.
Women’s limited access to quality employment can be partly attributed to harmful social norms and traditional values. The recent Afrobarometer survey highlights those values: 37.2 percent of respondents agreed, and 20.3 percent of respondents strongly agreed, that men should have an advantage over women in getting a job when resources are scarce.4 Only 14 percent of respondents strongly disagreed with that statement. Although respondents from all age groups had similar attitudes, responses differed notably by gender, with women more likely than men to disagree. In addition, most surveyed individuals supported the statement that it is better for a family if a woman has the main responsibility of taking care of children and the household (42.4 percent of respondents strongly agree and 43.1 percent agree). Interestingly, respondents supported this statement regardless of their level of education.

Importantly, strong evidence suggests that economic and employment opportunities of women and girls in Madagascar are likely to be disproportionately affected by the multifaceted negative impacts of climate change and natural disasters. Women are more likely to suffer economic losses in crises, because the sectors in which they work, such as in the informal economy, are often most affected (Barclay, Higelin, and Bungcaras 2016). Although in Madagascar a slightly lower percentage of women than men are engaged in agriculture, women farmers are less able than men to transition to off-farm work; women are also disadvantaged in adopting agricultural adaptation strategies because they have less access to inputs, information, and resources than men (Coulibaly et al. 2015; Hisali, Birungi, and Buyinza 2011; Simtowe 2010). Although less likely to have the necessary resources or knowledge to adopt climate-smart agricultural practices, women farmers are more likely than men to adopt such practices when they do have the resources. This situation points to the importance of ensuring that agricultural extension services address gender-specific access constraints (Glazebrook 2011; Nhachena and Hassan 2007; Twyman et al. 2014). Women with disabilities face additional physical challenges to coping during a disaster and experience discrimination in accessing relief efforts (Lord et al. 2016; Sightsavers 2015).

Evidence from our qualitative study further indicates that climate change has strong negative effects on women’s time use, preventing them from participating actively in professional life because of the increased burden of domestic chores. Several participants in the study mentioned that women undertake most of the household duties, including water fetching. In the south, frequent and intense droughts have caused wells to dry up, requiring women to travel longer distances to fetch water. The increase of domestic work not only affects women’s time use but also hinders their access to income-generating activities.

And the women take much longer to ... to fetch water now. (Key informant, elected official)

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Because there are these phenomena, finally the problem related to water but also to food because the more the drought increases, the less food there is, so you have to either go work the land very far away, or run, finally walk very far to find water… (Government representative at the national level)

The study uncovered evidence that extreme weather conditions can push women into new working sectors. When discussing the impacts of climate change on income-generating activities, some participants mentioned that, because frequent droughts reduce time spent on agricultural work, some women have started to engage in other activities in order to sustain or contribute to their household needs. It is not possible to estimate how frequent such practices are or how easily women can change their professional activities under precarious conditions.

When there is drought, they [women] will do something else. The women cultivate breeds [leafy vegetables] and then sell them at the market—there are women who make bricks. (Young woman, Sofia)

Finally, climate change also amplifies the situation of food insecurity and poverty, with women being particularly affected. Coping strategies adopted by households facing drought and flooding (sale of assets, indebtedness, reduction in food rations, and so on) tend to have greater negative impacts on women than on men, partly because of underlying gender norms. For example, existing evidence on Madagascar indicates that, during scarcity, men’s food rations are larger than women’s because men require more strength and energy to ensure the household’s livelihood and because the household would have much more to lose if the head of the family sacrificed himself by reducing his food rations. Furthermore, climate change has led to increased time poverty as women and girls spend increasing amounts of time traveling to collect water and firewood, which also increases their risks of exposure to violence, particularly in the southern region where dahalo (armed bandits) attack villages and commit various forms of violence against women and girls (UNFPA Madagascar 2017).

(Continuum) of barriers to finding good-quality employment

The low quality of women’s employment in Madagascar is the outcome of multiple barriers. According to the qualitative findings, women encounter obstacles at different stages of professional life—from their job search to recruitment and hiring, and finally in the workplace. Some barriers in access to good-quality jobs affect both women and men, whereas some of them are gender specific. Figure 5 summarizes the continuum of barriers that prevent women from finding a good-quality job in Madagascar.
Figure 5. Barriers to finding a good-quality job in Madagascar

The job search stage

For both men and women, access to quality employment is compromised initially by the gap between school or university qualifications and job requirements. Possession of a diploma does not guarantee the ability of applicants to perform the tasks associated with a given position. Participants in the study reported that the educational system fails to prepare graduates for the realities and requirements of the labor market, thus devaluing the pursuit of education in the first place.

*Here in Madagascar ... there is a real divide between studies and the job market. That is to say, even if I have completed my studies and immediately want to enter the world of work, it is difficult because I don’t have the useful qualifications for the professional world.* (Key informant, civil society at the national level)

Both young women and parents, especially in rural areas, elaborated on the limited applicability of the theoretical knowledge taught in schools to the reality around them.

Source: Original figure developed for this report.

Note: Boxes outlined in red present gender-specific barriers. GBV = gender-based violence.
and the world of work. The Sofia region, for instance, is an agro-pastoral area, yet the school curriculum does not contain any module related to agricultural techniques. Consequently, recent graduates find themselves ill equipped when it comes to searching for a job. On the one hand, they are unable to engage in agricultural entrepreneurship because they lack know-how; on the other, they cannot enter civil service because of the lack of job options in their regions. 

_We need to change the school system a little because … they know nothing except what they learned there (at school); and that has nothing to do with agriculture._ (Father of an adolescent girl, Sofia)

_So they can create jobs, that’s what we should change in the education system: you teach from the ground up, agriculture, livestock breeding, poultry farming … we need to include in our teaching this kind of learning. If we do that, there will be no more unemployed here._… (Father of an adolescent girl, Sofia)

Although this mismatch between education and the demands of the labor market affects all young people, it seems that the lack of qualifications affects young women more than young men. This disparity appears to be related to girls’ limited access to vocational training opportunities, which seem to be more available for young men and to equip them for skilled work opportunities. As a result, young women often remain unemployed or end up working in precarious jobs that do not require specialization. Participants in all three studied regions raised this issue, and many participants indicated that even qualified specialists sometimes opt for lower-quality jobs because of a lack of other options. The problem appears to be particularly pronounced in rural areas, where the only alternative for graduates is agriculture.

_It’s so true. You have the bachelor’s degree, but you just put it in your pocket. But we can’t find a job._ (Young woman, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

In addition to the scarcity of job opportunities, women’s limited sense of agency or control with regard to accessing those opportunities poses significant challenges. Young women have difficulty envisioning their economic future or imagining a pathway into better-quality work. Notably, the lack of guidance at the school level leaves some interviewees without a clear idea of how to look for a job or acquire relevant qualifications. In addition, some participants could not clearly name the sector in which they would like to work.

_I imagine myself being like everyone else who works outside, leaving home in the morning, and coming back in the evening, and not having the rhythm that I have for home chores._ (Positive deviant who managed to enter a vocational training program, Antananarivo)

Although some study participants could not clearly name the sector in which they would like to work—likely because of their lack of agency—young women reported finding certain sectors attractive. In Antananarivo, young women generally expressed interest in office jobs because of those jobs’ stability and associated social status and prestige. As mentioned earlier, however, the weak growth of the private sector in
rural areas confronts young female graduates there with two work options: working in agriculture or joining the civil service. In the Sofia and Atsimo-Atsinanana regions, positive deviants (PDs)⁵ who have completed secondary education expressed particular interest in becoming public service employees. They hope to teach in public institutions after graduation, starting out as non-state-funded teachers and hoping to one day be recruited as civil servant teachers. Young women without education have minimal chances of finding a job outside of agriculture, and even graduates have limited access to government jobs because of the sector’s low absorptive capacity and prevailing corruption.

Furthermore, traditional social norms regarding women’s and men’s roles in the private and public spheres are a key factor in preventing young women’s adequate labor market inclusion and access to quality jobs. Participants in the study repeatedly mentioned that girls are expected to help mothers with housework and to prepare for future marriage and motherhood. Consequently, girls’ socialization revolves around accomplishing household chores and caring for younger family members. Families expect girls and young women to supplement their mothers’ work, although no such obligation in expressed for boys and young men.

> In my case when I was little, I was introduced to “fanty fantan-jazy” in order to learn what is needed in the home to live. The initiation to “fanty fantan-jazy” consists of taking the girl to the market to find out the price of the goods. (Mother of an adolescent girl, Sofia)

> The main duty of the girl is to look after the well-being of her juniors and her mother. (Young woman, Sofia)

Importantly, although aware of the negative consequences of their extensive domestic work routine, young women in the sample appeared to have little sense of control to change the situation. For example, some participants pointed to the unjust distribution of household tasks between women and men and the associated negative consequences (feeling tired, lack of free time, and so on). At the same time, however, women appeared to internalize such attitudes and comply with the traditional division of duties in the household—potentially as a way to be accepted and valued in their family and community.

> The main thing our parents do is order, order, and just order.... They just say “go cook the rice, go do this, go do this” and then you do it. That’s all they do there, but afterwards I’m also tired of them giving me orders all the time, I don’t like it, I feel like a servant. Am I a servant? Then I concluded to myself that if I am assigned the same tasks all the time, it is because it is my responsibility to do them. (Young woman, Antananarivo)

⁵ A positive deviant (PD) approach implies a focus on researching individuals who confront similar challenges and constraints as their non-PD peers but who employ strategies and behaviors that help them overcome those constraints and achieve positive outcomes that are unusual in their own contexts. In this case, PDs refer to young women who managed to launch their own small business in spite of the observed barriers in their community.
By contrast, the responsibility for working and earning money rests predominantly on men, although with some differences by region. According to participants in the Atsimo-Atsinanana region, a man is expected to provide for all the needs of his family and so has more reason than a woman to find a job and earn money. Essentially, such attitudes and norms around women’s and men’s tasks contribute to the challenges that women encounter when looking for a paid job. Participants in the Analamanga and Sofia regions had more heterogeneous perceptions about the distribution of responsibilities between women and men in terms of sustaining the household. Although they still see the father as the main income provider in the family, women’s participation in economic activities is normalized. The need to make ends meet prevails in explaining the joint participation of men and women in income-generating activities. In cases when women alone manage the household, they are particularly likely to engage in some economic activities outside the home.

*Life is hard, you might say. Everyone tries to find money and we help each other!* (Father of an adolescent girl, Antananarivo)

*When it is still daylight, there is no time to rest, there are always things to do for both men and women.* (Young woman, Sofia)

Notably, the types of jobs available for women in our sample did not vary significantly by place of residence. In all three regions visited, women mentioned doing laundry, cleaning houses, fetching water, and sewing as typical female occupations in their communities. Moreover, many women work as market sellers; based on the interviews and focus group discussions, in all three regions women typically sell food, groceries, fish, and rice. In the rural communities in Atsimo-Atsinanana and Sofia, unlike in Antananarivo, references to women working in agriculture (cultivation of cloves and rice) were frequent.

*The majority of the women, some are saleswomen, open a grocery store or something. All sales, some in the field of cooking, soup.* (Young woman, Antananarivo)

*The women here sell fish, rice, that’s how they get money here.* (Young woman, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

*Among our friends there are some who sell, cultivate, do sewing, do the laundry of others.* (Young woman, Sofia)

Even though all women appear to be affected by the scarcity of jobs, women in rural areas are particularly disadvantaged in this respect. Contrary to the discourse among key informants, young women in the sample often stated that the real problem is not the mismatch between education and the labor market but the very absence of jobs is. In rural areas, where the main sector of employment is agriculture, school diplomas do not offer any advantages for the recent graduates. Overqualification concerns a significant number of graduates, who are forced to do the same work as those without formal education, unless they seek opportunities elsewhere. In the Atsimo-Atsinanana region, young women are more likely than young men to end up in precarious work, often as agricultural laborers in rice fields and plantations, regardless of their education level.
There is no work to be done! A lot of people got the bacc6 here but are unemployed because there is no work. It’s not like in Fianarantsoa or Antananarivo or Tamatave or Majunga! Since they have no work, they do agriculture like their parents! It is true…. (Mother of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

Those women who manage to launch their own businesses attribute their success to the support—both motivational and financial—of their families. One PD in our sample admitted that she could start her business in selling because her mother was already engaged in this field and helped her with information, contacts, space, and finances. In another example, a woman who managed to launch her business in sewing reported encouragement and support from her family members as important factors that helped her to navigate work-related difficulties. Nevertheless, only a small share of women in our sample could enjoy access to financial and informational support at the beginning of their professional endeavors, which essentially limited their chances and aspirations for securing better-quality jobs.

**The recruitment/hiring stage**

Corruption was reported to be an integral part of the recruitment process in both the private and public sectors, and it affects all the regions included in the study sample. Young women and fathers of adolescent girls reported demands for bribes, requests for sexual favors, and favoritism toward family members.

_In order to get hired, you first have to give money. And yet it seems clear that if you are looking for work, it is because you have no money!_ (Father of an adolescent girl, Antananarivo)

The necessity to pay bribes presents a real obstacle for young women who have difficulty collecting the required amounts of money. Even when women manage to work a series of small jobs before applying to a desired position, they cannot save because they ultimately spend the income they earn on sustaining their living. Some young women go into debt to be hired or give up their first salary for that purpose.

_And there are those who are forced to give their first salary. If you really want to work, you have to give one month’s salary to the person who has integrated you in the company. So, you have to work two months before you can get a month’s salary._ (Father of an adolescent girl, Antananarivo)

Evidence from the study also indicates that some young women are forced to engage in transactional sex in order to get a job. This was the case, for example, during the recruitment of non–civil servant teachers in selected cases. In the absence of a regulatory framework, recruitment is left to the discretion of local administrative officials, who can abuse their power.

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6 The equivalent of an upper-secondary school diploma, a prerequisite for entry into university.
So, there are such and such conditions, for me to give you a job, one that suits you…. You will work here but there will be this between us for me to grant you the job. (Mother of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

Additionally, young women report that they are subject to multiple forms of discrimination during the recruitment process—based on, for example, physical appearance or family situation. In the capital, some participants had the same experience, with physical appearance taking precedence over all other criteria. They mentioned that recruiters give advantage to attractive women who dress well. In addition to physical beauty, recruiters often discriminate on the basis of skin color, which affects young women and men, and results from prejudice regarding ethnic origin. Some women also observed that discrimination based on physical appearance is particularly evident when the recruiter is a man.

I had an interview. We were four young women applying. And at home, I was ordered to dress smart.... And when I got there, they recruited the one who wore a miniskirt and a crop top. There were three vacancies, but the same person took all three positions at the same time. So, I went home empty-handed. (Young woman, Antananarivo)

But they also judge us by our skin color.... (Young woman, Antananarivo)

Motherhood—or the idea that a woman can become a mother at any time—adds to recruiters’ reluctance toward female job applicants. The burdens that accompany motherhood condemn young women in advance, especially if they are single, and result in what is referred to as the “mother’s ceiling.” In the Atsimo-Atsinanana region, mothers reported difficulty finding work in the agriculture sector because landowners assume that all of their energy and availability are taken up by childcare and household duties. Interestingly, the issue of the “mother’s ceiling” also arose in the capital Antananarivo, but not in the Sofia region.

That’s what happens here when there is work to be done, they always judge me and say, “How is she going to manage to finish this with her child?” They think that we won’t be able to do the work if we have a child. (Young single mother, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

In rural areas, another key source of discrimination against young women is the demand for physical strength and worries about the risks of physically demanding work. For the majority of activities—such as preparing land, taking care of cattle, or maintaining plantations—landowners tend to favor men. Even when women are willing to engage in physically demanding jobs, they are denied because of the potential risks of such jobs to their (maternal) health. In rice production, for example, tasks are divided up according to the intensity of the physical strength required, with women assigned to transplanting, threshing, and drying, and men to plowing. Notably, women in the sample reported such preferences and attitudes on multiple occasions.

According to the work to be done ... if they wish to plow here, the owner chooses men.... (Young woman, Atsimo-Atsinanana)
Thus, young women find it difficult to find work unlike young men because they have strength. (PD, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

Young women are also discouraged from applying to jobs that require technicality and precision. Jobs in the technical and science fields are often considered the prerogative of men. Even in technical high schools, social perceptions about typical female and male skills push young women and men into different fields of study. Girls are considered to be skilled at communication and therefore more inclined toward literary studies; men are considered to be good at calculation and rationalization and therefore more inclined toward scientific studies. It appears that young women who have pursued technical education end up in low-income jobs whereas young men will have access to better jobs.

For example, in the ... sectors of BTP, Building and Public Works, you can see that there are few women really who are workers or who are laborers. Whereas the BTP for example ... can offer ... potential jobs ... for men and for women ... women don't have access so to this type of jobs ... also, for example, in the transportation sector, almost in all sectors.... (Key informant, private sector at the national level)

In the workplace (the case of informal employment)

Because of the difficulties Malagasy women face in the job search and recruitment/hiring stages, informal employment becomes one, if not the only, option available to many of them. Although informal jobs are easier to obtain, they are associated with a number of risks for women engaged in them. Informal work generally provides young women with few skills to support themselves. Such work involves performing various tasks for others—often as domestics workers—and provides women with little opportunity to save and therefore aspire to a better future. Because they work without a written contract, informal employees can easily lose their job and income at any time, depending on the availability of work and customers. Moreover, informal workers are not covered by social protection programs, making them particularly vulnerable to various shocks (Guven, Jain, and Joubert 2021). Evidence for Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that the gender wage gap in informal employment stands at 28 percentage points in favor of men, compared to a 6-percentage-point gap in the formal sector (UN Women 2016). Regional evidence also indicates that informality is associated with lowered labor productivity and limited access to productive assets (Ingram, Ramachandran, and Desai 2007; Nagler and Naude 2017). Thus, although it seems like a viable option for short-term needs, informal employment is associated with poverty and vulnerability to shocks.

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7 According to the report of the 17th International Conference of Labor Statisticians, informal employment is characterized by noncompliance "with national labor legislation, income tax, social protection or the right to certain employment benefits (e.g., notice of termination, severance pay, paid annual or sick leave, etc.)."
In informality, women … are not covered by any law, they don’t benefit from social protection … when there is a hazard, or when there are restructurings for example at the commune level, these women are always victims…. (Key informant, private sector)

Evidence from the qualitative data collected shows that young women who work informally are often exposed to abuse by employers and face undignified working conditions. Because informal workers are not protected by law, they are at heightened risk of encountering employer abuse and violence. Participants in the sample referred to abusive behaviors and attitudes by their bosses, the necessity of working long hours or at night, and cases of underpayment.

Before, I worked, when I still worked … for example, my boss took me much too much for his slave … it was agreed that I would start at seven in the morning and finish at five in the evening, but I usually started at seven and finished at nine in the evening. I often missed the bus…. (Young woman, Antananarivo)

When I was working there, in a restaurant, we had agreed on 15,000, they only paid 10,000 and then it ended with 5,000 Ariary. (Young woman, Antananarivo)

Whether they work formally or informally, their responsibilities for domestic tasks affect women’s professional activities. Childrearing, childcare, and the burden of domestic work are time-consuming. In rural areas, young women’s tasks also include fetching water. All of these burdens fall on women and prevent them from participating actively at work and developing professionally.

You see in the rural environment, there are other factors. It is the overload of women’s work. Because even if there are women who can have a job, they have a lot of workloads and sometimes they are prevented from developing professionally…. They are forced to take care of the family first. For example, to fetch water, they have to travel miles and miles. And that takes time. And with the children in charge, the fact of breastfeeding, the fact of looking for the baby’s food, all that is not easy. So, there is a lot of work that is dedicated to women. (Key informant, civil society working throughout Madagascar)

In summary, Malagasy women have limited ability to participate in good-quality employment, partly because of supply-side factors (for example, tight labor market and scarcity of jobs) and partly because of gender-specific constraints (gender-based discrimination in recruitment, gender-based violence [GBV] in the workplace, and the burden of domestic chores and childcare). As a result, even women with school or university diplomas cannot find suitable jobs and must resort to informal options. Because of the risks associated with informality, priority measures should focus on expanding formal job opportunities and on improving working conditions for informal workers.
Access to finance and landownership

Women have limited access and capacity to use formal financial services. In 2021, only 4.4 percent of women ages 15–49 had and used an account at a bank or another financial institution, compared to 5.3 percent of men (figure 6). Interestingly, nearly no woman or man without formal education and from the lowest wealth group has a bank account. The use of a bank account increases with level of education, and the increase is more pronounced for women than men: as of 2021, 43.7 percent of women ages 15–49 with higher education have used a bank account in contrast to 42.7 percent of men (DHS 2021). The use of a bank account is nearly nonexistent in rural areas for both women and men; in urban areas men have a slight advantage over women (15.5 percent vs. 12.5 percent) (DHS 2021). Although Madagascar performs well in terms of establishing legal equality between men and women in signing a contract, registering a business, and opening a bank account, it does not have legislation in place prohibiting gender-based discrimination in access to credit (Women, Business and the Law [WBL] 2023). In legal terms, Madagascar meets international good practices across the dimensions of access to assets and pensions, and in providing equal opportunity for men and women in this regard (WBL 2023).

![Figure 6](source: Demographic and Health Survey, 2021.)
The use of mobile money, however, is widespread in Madagascar; notably, more women than men ages 15–49 use their mobile phones to conduct financial transactions (56.4 percent vs. 45.6 percent) (DHS 2021). The use of mobile money is positively associated with educational level, wealth quintile, and living in an urban area. Women are consistently more likely than men to use mobile money, with the only gender gap in favor of men observed among persons with higher education (figure 7).

**Figure 7** Percentage of Malagasy women and men ages 15–49 who use a cell phone to conduct financial transactions, by location, education level, and wealth quintile, 2021

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Place of residence</th>
<th>Educational level</th>
<th>Wealth quintile</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>No education</td>
<td>Q1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Urban</td>
<td>Primary</td>
<td>Q2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Rural</td>
<td>Upper secondary</td>
<td>Q3</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Higher</td>
<td>Q4</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>Q5</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

Percent

- Men
- Women

Source: Demographic and Health Survey, 2021.

In addition to the gender gaps in financial inclusion, discrimination in landownership is an important challenge facing rural women. Although both men and women have the legal right to own land in Madagascar, in practice the vast majority of land belongs to men. According to the latest DHS (2021), only 10.7 percent of rural women ages 15–49 own land alone, compared to 24.8 percent of men. At the same time, more than half of all rural women (52.1 percent) do not own land, in contrast to 41.4 percent of men (figure 8).

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8 Malagasy women are in general disadvantaged in access to land, regardless of the place of residence. However, as the share of population owning land is significantly higher in rural than in urban areas, this section will focus exclusively on the gender gaps in land tenure among rural women and men.
Although Madagascar’s 2005 Land Reform\(^9\) did not contain specific gender equality principles, the National Land Program (2016–20) attempted to narrow gender gaps in land rights and ownership by placing a stronger emphasis on women’s land rights than in previous policies. Particularly, it included a focus on increasing land certification for women through the education of local authorities and widespread communication on the importance and benefits of land registration. Following a change to the land certificate format, women could register land individually or jointly. Additionally, decentralization of land administration to the commune level improved women’s access to land services.

There is broad support among the population for equal opportunity in landownership for men and women in Madagascar. About 39 percent of respondents strongly agree and another 41.9 percent agree that women should have the same rights as men to inherit land. Only 3.9 percent of respondents strongly disagree with this statement (Afrobarometer 2016/18). Favorable social norms around women’s land rights can be a significant factor in increasing their access and ownership over agricultural land.

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\(^9\) Launched under the government of Ravalomanana (2002–09), the 2005 Land Reform set out to secure land rights for as many people as possible, quickly and at an appropriate cost for the economic context. It sought to reconcile the legal dimension (the formal legal framework) and the legitimate dimension (social and traditional recognition of landownership). This reform was responsible for two significant advances: it removed the presumption of state ownership, and it created a new legal category—POUL (private ownership of untitled land). POUL status confers on farmers an ownership right over land that they have occupied or farmed for a long time, via the obtention of a land certificate, on that condition that no one else holds a formal title for the same land. The reform placed allocation and management of POULs in the hands of subdistrict offices (Delcourt 2014).
Women’s secure land tenure offers gains not only for women themselves but also for their families, communities, and economic growth at large. First, women’s secure landownership is associated with positive developments in endowments and agency, including improved maternal and reproductive health outcomes, and enhanced decision-making power in the home and in public places (Goldman, Davis, and Little 2016; Grabe, Grose, and Dutt 2015; Muchomba, Wang, and Agosta 2014; Selhausen 2016), and increased resilience to GBV (Agarwal and Panda 2007). Second, women’s landownership empowers women economically and reduces their vulnerability to poverty (Agarwal 2003; Salcedo-La Viña 2020). Women’s land rights and ownership offer many benefits to their families and households, such as improved food security and better investments in children’s human capital (Allendorf 2007; Meinzen-Dick et al. 2019; Menon, Van der Meulen Rodgers, and Nguyen 2014). Finally, women’s land rights provide benefits for society at large by boosting agricultural transformation, amplifying economic growth, and strengthening resilience of rural farm households. For instance, regional evidence suggests that women’s landownership increases land investments, which improves households’ resilience to climate change (Dillon and Voena 2017; Goldstein et al. 2018). Thus, securing women’s land rights and ownership is of the utmost priority for Madagascar.

Despite the recognized value of women’s secure land tenure, customary practices often disadvantage women because of their matrimonial status, especially in rural southern areas. Because of the expectation that women will leave the family house when they get married, they systematically do not have the right to inherit land. Instead, sons inherit and hold all family assets and land, in accordance with the Malagasy proverb “ny lehilahy no mamelo-maso ny anaran-dray” (“men perpetuate the name of their father”). Under the patriarchal system, the head of the family—that is, the father—has the prerogative to decide on the allocation of land. Women therefore join their new home without any assets, which accentuates their dependence on their husbands. For example, study participants in Atsimo-Atsinanana reported that women there have only two options to secure a land plot: either they buy it with their own money or their father or brother grants it to them.

*Since the man is the head of the family, he may not give land to his daughters if the area is not sufficient for sharing.* (Traditional leader, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

In the Sofia region, however, women have the same right to inheritance as men. When they leave the family house to get married, the brothers become custodians of their property.

*The inheritance? Well, here now they are the same if they have the same father and the same mother … the man and the woman are treated equally. But what differentiates them is that the men watch over the land because they live there, while the women follow their husbands. When women follow their husbands … they ask them (the brothers) to take good care of the land. And if they divorce, the division of the property of their parents is done*
equally. At the same time, the community does not accept that women do not receive their share from their father. (Traditional leader, Sofia)

Overall, however, the vast majority of Malagasy women are still widely deprived of the ability to own property and land, and to access productive assets. Despite equal rights provided by law, customary practices can place women at a disadvantage. Ensuring equal rights in inheritance and property ownership is crucial not only for women’s empowerment but also for overall economic growth and development. Thus, a more sustained action is required to improve women’s access to land and property rights and ownership.

In summary, Malagasy women are largely constrained in their ability to participate actively and productively in employment opportunities. Malagasy women participate in the labor market to a lower extent than men, and the quality of employment available to them remains low, as seen from the overrepresentation of women workers in vulnerable and self-employment. Occupational segregation and earning differentials between men and women persist, further limiting women’s chances to engage in quality employment. While the ability to participate in better-quality employment is limited for all in Madagascar because of supply-side factors (for example, overall scarcity of jobs, lack of infrastructure, mismatch between education and skills demanded by the labor market, and so on), women encounter a layer of gender-specific constraints, such as risks of GBV and sexual harassment, high burden of unpaid domestic work, and discrimination in hiring based on physical appearance and marital status. Women’s limited access to quality employment can be attributed partly to harmful social norms and discriminatory legal provisions. In addition, climate change and natural disasters pose additional challenges for women’s professional activities by disproportionately affecting their time spent on domestic chores. Malagasy women also appear to be disadvantaged in access to and ownership of finance and land.

**Policy recommendations**

Promoting women’s access to economic opportunity offers a wide variety of benefits not only for women themselves but also for their families, their communities, and societal and economic development at large. Based on the global evidence, economic empowerment expands the role of women in the household and society, because of its association with increased decision-making power (Acharya et al. 2010), reduced vulnerability to gender-based violence (Aizer 2010; Lenze and Klasen 2017; Vyas et al. 2015), and increased likelihood of delayed early marriage and fertility (Chakravarty, Das, and Vaillant 2017). Moreover, improved economic status of women positively affects household consumption and food security and brings gains for future generations (Burroway 2015; Doss 1996). At the same time, enhancing women’s labor force participation is likely to bring macroeconomic gains: for instance, raising the female labor force participation rate to country-specific male levels would raise gross domestic product in the Arab Republic of Egypt by 34 percentage points; in South Africa, by 10 percentage points; and, in Tanzania, by 2 percentage points (Aguirre et al. 2012).
Conversely, lack of effort to improve women’s economic opportunity is associated with income loss and reduced labor productivity (Cuberes and Teignier 2016), as well as heightened vulnerability to poverty and shocks (Faborode and Olugbenga Alao 2016; Wei et al. 2021).

Table 1 summarizes the main identified barriers, potential strategic directions, and policy recommendations for enhancing women’s economic opportunities in Madagascar. Based on the mixed-methods analysis, the following strategic directions have been identified:

• **Strategic direction 1:** Enhance women’s access to better-quality jobs.

• **Strategic direction 2:** Eliminate all forms of discrimination and corruption facing Malagasy women in the labor market.

• **Strategic direction 3:** Improve the working conditions of women in the informal economy.

• **Strategic direction 4:** Improve women’s access to finance and secure rural women’s land rights and ownership.

In the short term, policy measures could focus on eliminating discrimination in the recruitment process through establishing clear and transparent protocols for recruitment for public sector jobs and allowing women to undertake all jobs in the same manner as men. Additionally, measures such as career and counseling services, in-company training opportunities, and professional career guidance services will be of special value to facilitate the school-to-work transition. Importantly, even though the share of formal female employees is very low in Madagascar, special policies should be undertaken to improve their working conditions, particularly through taking action to fight workplace gender-based violence and protect the survivors. Table 4 summarizes all policy recommendations for enhancing women’s economic opportunities in Madagascar.

**Table 1. Policy recommendations to improve women’s economic opportunities**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Policy recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic direction 1: Enhance women’s access to better-quality jobs</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mismatch between education and skills demanded by the labor market</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>• Provide opportunities for in-company training.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Adapt education to the real demands of the labor market, especially in rural areas and among girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Assist young women in developing their technical and life skills through facilitated access to training programs, including vocational training, particularly in the digital sector.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of jobs</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>• Expand productive economic inclusion programs with a gender-responsive design and targeted at vulnerable women.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Invest in rural markets and value chains that can generate better jobs for youth in rural areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Limited vision regarding job preferences and prospects of girls and young women</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>• Improve information and guidance available to young women on professional careers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Offer programs combining social and economic empowerment to adolescent girls.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Expand girls’ aspirations and access to networks and knowledge dissemination (for example, female role models and mentorship programs).</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Strategic direction 1: Enhance women’s access to better-quality jobs

One of the key barriers to labor market opportunities for both young men and young women is the mismatch between school or university qualifications and the skills required for jobs. According to Nordman and Pasquier-Doumer (2014) and Oketch (2014), in-company training and vocational education could help to address skill mismatches, and often translate into better earnings than pursuing tertiary education. In a comprehensive review of evidence, Adams, de Silva, and Razmara (2013) report that in Nigeria, for instance, technical training raises the chances of formal sector employment by 26 percent. In-company training may offer more relevant experience (“transferable skills”) than trade-specific formal education, which often lacks the flexibility required by the rapidly changing labor market. Special attention in those regards should be paid to the vocational training opportunities in the digital sector, the demand for which is increasing in the country.

Moreover, because of the scarcity of jobs in the labor market, policies should focus on expanding work opportunities for young women—for example, through productive economic inclusion (PEI) programs. Although the design of PEI programs varies across countries, such programs commonly provide an integrated package of services, such as material or financial grants and training. Regional evidence...
suggests that gender-responsive PEI programs have expanded women’s’ employment opportunities, increasing women's earnings and improving their agency and decision-making power. For example, women participants in a productive social safety net program in Tanzania were 7.6 percentage points more likely than nonparticipating women to work on nonfarm activities (Rosas et al. 2019). Evidence from PEI programs in Uganda—the Youth Opportunity Program and Women’s Income-Generating Support Program—shows increased earnings and overall household income of participants, mainly because of shifts in employment patterns and higher access to productive assets (Blattman, Fiala, and Martinez 2014, 2019).

**Given that most employment opportunities for young people are in the agricultural sector, a focus on diversifying and up-scaling economic activities in this sector is also required.** In view of the conclusions of the qualitative assessment, in the Malagasy context it is of special importance to offer quality training for young people that meets rural labor market demands. The objective of a potential curriculum reform should therefore be to encourage young people's interest in agriculture and farming (because these activities sustain the economy of many regions) and to instill know-how in this field. Formal and nonformal agricultural training, vocational education, and extension services would be key in this regard and could raise youth productivity and employability in rural areas. Beyond farm jobs, there is also significant potential for job creation in rural nonfarm activities around food value chains linked to sustainable agriculture, agribusiness development, and related support services. Investments in infrastructure and services, including business development services, can make rural markets work better and provide more work opportunities for rural youth (Mueller and Thurlow 2019).

**Programs that provide young women with information and guidance on potential careers, and empower them socially and economically, can improve girls’ aspirations and increase their likelihood of securing paid employment and higher earnings.** Information support and guidance on career opportunities can act as a bridge for young people from secondary to higher education levels (UNESCO 2017). Moreover, combined interventions aimed at the social and economic empowerment of adolescent girls can increase their chances of participating in the labor market and securing paid employment. For example, participants of the Empowerment and Livelihood for Adolescents program in Uganda, which combined vocational and life skills trainings with a safe space for adolescent girls, were 72 percent more likely to be engaged in income-generating activities and reported self-employment earnings three times higher than the original average (Bandiera et al. 2020). In addition to improving employment outcomes, such programs have a wide range of positive impacts on young women's well-being, social networks, and mental health, which together increase the chances of economic and financial empowerment. Finally, research from Ethiopia and Uganda highlights the importance of knowledge dissemination and the support of mentors in improving women's economic prospects (Alibhai, Buehren, and Sreelakshmi 2015; Campos et al. 2015).
Strategic direction 2: Eliminate all forms of discrimination and corruption facing Malagasy women in the labor market

Eliminating all forms of discrimination in the recruitment process and amending discriminatory labor law provisions are important strategies to facilitate women’s economic empowerment. Priority actions should focus on establishing clear and transparent protocols for recruitment and merit-based selection to public sector jobs, based on the principles of nondiscrimination and equality. Moreover, the key legal change that should be undertaken in this regard is allowing all men and women to have access to the same jobs in all industries, which could be achieved by repealing the current provisions in the Labor Code (Articles 85, 93, and 99, quoted earlier), along with all implementing directives (including Decree No. 62-152). An article could also be added stating that men and women may work in all industries regardless of their sex. In Sub-Saharan Africa over the last decade (2011–21), the following countries have eliminated restrictions on which industries women may work in: the Democratic Republic of the Congo, Niger, São Tomé and Príncipe, South Sudan, and Togo. South Sudan, for example, amended its labor laws in 2017 to eliminate restrictions on women’s occupations and industries.

Strategic direction 3: Improve the working conditions of women in the informal economy

Special attention should be paid to alleviate the risks of GBV in the workplace and protect its survivors. The qualitative study indicates that women are vulnerable to abusive behaviors and harassment by their bosses. In the context of high informality, general policies such as criminalizing sexual harassment and establishing a code of conduct for employees might be insufficient to prevent and address GBV. Additional recommended measures include (1) setting up adequate grievance redress and responsive accountability mechanisms to allow women to report cases of abuse and get support, and (2) providing safe spaces for working women. Global evidence suggests that the establishment of women- and girl-only spaces provides women and girls with a safe entry point to engage with each other, build important connections, find solidarity and support with other women and girls, exchange information, and rebuild community networks (IRC and UNFPA 2017).

Increased access to affordable early childhood programs, including daycare and preschool, can help reduce household care activities while providing an important investment in the human capital of younger generations. Strategies to reduce the burden of childcare are important in expanding women’s opportunities to engage in income-generating activities. In Burkina Faso, a short-course training and temporary job program at public works sites was accompanied by the provision of mobile childcare units. This innovation helped participating women to increase their work productivity, save a considerable portion of their wages, and use this money to start up a business once their temporary job contracts ended (World Bank 2021). Another strategy is to reduce financial constraints of early childhood development and education facilities.
For example, in Kenya, women who received vouchers for the use of daily childcare facilities were 8.5 percentage points more likely to be employed than those who did not receive vouchers (Clark et al. 2019).

**Strategic direction 4: Improve women’s access to finance and secure rural women’s land rights and ownership**

Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa suggests that increasing women’s ownership and access to land can increase the labor productivity and earnings of women farmers. As noted in the previous section, the enforcement of laws guaranteeing women’s land-tenure rights is limited in Madagascar (Widman 2014). Therefore, it is important to design interventions to help women secure land tenure through default joint titling of land; providing specialized assistance and awareness-raising on land rights, policies, and processes to women; and engaging women as active participants in land inventory activities through local land offices and local land occupancy maps. The Malagasy government can include default or mandatory joint titling of land for married or cohabiting couples as was done recently in Rwanda (World Bank 2020). In this case, both spouses hold the land and/or housing either through a joint title or by holding equal rights over the property (Casabonne, Arango, and Stanley 2020). In Uganda, a conditional subsidy combined with a gender sensitization component was shown to be effective in increasing women’s documented land rights (World Bank 2020).

Finally, accelerating women’s access to finance is another priority for Madagascar to undertake. The government can use a variety of financial solutions to support women informal workers, such as grants, fee reductions, cash transfers, and loans on flexible terms (Rubiano Matulevich and Iavocone 2021). A new tool to be explored in this regard is the use of psychometric testing as a replacement for collateral (Alibhai et al. 2022). Finally, providing opportunities for women’s digital financial inclusion and use of mobile money could also help increase women’s access to finance and ability to save money.
Appendix A. Methodology of the qualitative background study

This report is based on qualitative data collected in three regions of Madagascar in June and July 2022. Before the qualitative data collection with young women and parents of adolescent girls, existing quantitative data were analyzed, followed by a literature review, a review of the current legal system, and 10 key informant interviews. The key informants interviewed included a range of representatives from relevant government institutions, development partners, researchers, nongovernmental organizations active in relevant areas, and activists. The interviews followed a series of questions intended to explain girls’ and young women’s experiences in relation to education, family formation, and labor market participation. Key informant interviews helped to reflect on and discuss barriers, facilitators, and other important aspects of observed gender gaps in the country. Findings from the interviews informed the design and focus areas of the subsequent qualitative research.

On the basis of those key informant interviews, initial quantitative data analysis, and literature review, a subsequent dedicated qualitative data collection effort focused on exploring the issues faced by young women in Madagascar. The overall qualitative research aimed to generate knowledge about a range of factors that contribute to gender inequalities in education, family formation, employment, and access to health care, with a particular focus on adolescent girls and young women. Building on a life-cycle approach, the study focused on the issues young women in selected regions face in their educational, family, and work trajectories. This research followed the principles of protection of human subjects outlined by the Belmont Report (National Commission for the Protection of Human Subjects of Biomedical and Behavioral Research 1979) and the World Health Organization’s “Putting Women First: Ethical and Safety Recommendations for Research on Domestic Violence against Women” (WHO 2001). All research protocols were submitted to an ethical review board for approval before data collection. In addition, all World Health Organization and national COVID-19 protocols were followed to ensure the safety of the research team and participants.

The qualitative data collection took place in three regions in order to capture the geographical diversity of Madagascar. In addition, selected regions differ significantly in terms of gender disparities observed (Table A.1). In particular, the Analamanga region was represented by the capital city Antananarivo, which displays the lowest proportion of illiterate women (8.7 percent) and the lowest share of women ages 20–24 who married before the age of 18 (17.9 percent) (DHS 2021). In Antananarivo, two urban communities were chosen with a concentration of industrial companies, businesses, and stores in each area. Atsimo-Atsinanana and Sofia regions were selected because they have high rates of illiteracy among adult women (54 percent and 25 percent, respectively) and high prevalence rates of child marriage (54.5 percent and 65 percent, respectively, of women ages 20–24 were first married by age 18) (DHS 2021). The districts of Mandritsara (Sofia region) and Vangaindrano (Atsimo-Atsinanana region) were selected because
they display large gender disparities in favor of boys in secondary school enrollment and attendance rates.

Table A.1. Justification of the choice of regions for the study

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Analamanga (capital Antananarivo)</th>
<th>Atsimo-Atsinanana</th>
<th>Sofia</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Women’s illiteracy rate</td>
<td>8.7 percent</td>
<td>54 percent</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child marriage rate</td>
<td>17.9 percent</td>
<td>54.5 percent</td>
<td>65 percent</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Net secondary school attendance rate</td>
<td>54.8 percent (vs. 45 percent of boys)</td>
<td>16.5 percent (vs. 23.1 percent of boys)</td>
<td>21.6 percent (vs. 22 percent of boys)</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Data collection used the following three main instruments:

1. **Key informant interviews** with a wide range of representatives from the education, health, and private sectors; religious and traditional leaders; elected officials; and representatives from civil society.

2. **Focus group discussions** with women ages 25–34 and mothers and fathers of adolescent girls. Because of COVID-19 considerations, each focus group consisted of up to five persons.

3. **In-depth interviews** with young women ages 18–24 and mothers of adolescent girls. A subsample of young women for individual in-depth interviews consisted of positive deviants (PDs). A PD approach implies a focus on researching individuals who confront similar challenges and constraints as their non-PD peers but who employ strategies and behaviors that help them overcome those constraints and achieve positive outcomes that are unusual in their own contexts. The advantage of the PD approach is the ability to identify solutions that some individuals already employ (Pascale and Monique 2010). In this study, the PDs consisted of young women who (1) completed high school without interruptions, (2) reentered school after dropping out, (3) completed professional training, or (4) launched their own small business.

Interview guides for the different groups of interviewees or focus groups included questions related to the aspects of education, family formation, and labor market participation of young women in Madagascar. Local authorities, particularly the fokontany (chiefs) supported the recruitment of participants for the individual in-depth
Interviews and focus group discussions. The research team provided them with the desired criteria as well as the quotas to be reached for each subsample of participants. The local authorities were then responsible for identifying potential participants. Volunteers who came to register were screened to ensure that they met the criteria (age, status as a parent of an adolescent girl, educational background, and so on). Additionally, snowball sampling complemented the volunteer-based sampling in identifying the four types of positive deviants. See Table A.2 for a summary of the study participants, their region, and which activities they participated in.

Table A.2. Distribution of study participants, by region and instrument of data collection

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Analamanga</th>
<th>Sofia</th>
<th>Atsimo-Atsinanana</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>FGD IDI KII</td>
<td>FGD IDI KII</td>
<td>FGD IDI KII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young women ages 18–24</td>
<td>2 3 2 2 2 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young women ages 25–34</td>
<td>2 2 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of adolescent girls</td>
<td>1 2 2 2 2 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers of adolescent girls</td>
<td>1 2 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD (completed high school)</td>
<td>1 1 2 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD (reentered school after dropping out)</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD (completed professional training)</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD (created small business)</td>
<td>1 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives from civil society</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives from education sector</td>
<td>1 2 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives of health sector</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious and traditional leaders</td>
<td>1 1 2</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives from private sector</td>
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<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local elected officials</td>
<td>1 1</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6 8 6 8 9 5</td>
<td>8 8 4</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: FGD = focus group discussion; IDI = in-depth interview; KII = key informant interview; PD = positive deviant.

All individual interviews and group discussions conducted in Malagasy were voice-recorded, transcribed, and translated into French. Generic coding, a method of coding that involves classifying each interviewee’s statements into previously established thematic codes, was used (Huberman and Miles 2003). As new information became available, the list of preestablished codes was revisited and expanded.

The team encountered several challenges during fieldwork. The research team encountered a language barrier in the Atsimo-Atsinanana region. Most group discussions were conducted in the presence of the focal point, who provided translation from the local dialect to official Malagasy and vice versa. Because that translation occurred only at the end of each discussion so as not to cut off the interviewees’ answers, it is possible that the rephrasing could have distorted some of the comments. In addition, many factors such as the interviewer’s attitude, the interviewee’s social status, and existing taboos come into play in interview situations, affecting the authenticity and richness.
of the information collected. These factors elicited reactions described from some
of the interviewees during the various interviews including inhibition (manifested in
either abrupt and underdeveloped responses during interviews or limited participation
in focus groups discussions) or defensive attitudes (specifically in the case of one
traditional leader in the Atsimo-Atsinanana region).
References


