Unlocking the Potential of Women and Adolescent Girls in Madagascar

Challenges and Opportunities in Education

WORLD BANK GROUP
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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 discusses in detail the status of girls’ and women’s education in Madagascar and proposes several strategic lines of action to assist girls and young women in completing schooling. 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: health, economic opportunities, and agency.
Acknowledgments

This note is part of a broader mixed-method 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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<tr>
<td>CT</td>
<td>cash transfer</td>
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<tr>
<td>DHS</td>
<td>Demographic and Health Survey</td>
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<td>FP</td>
<td>family planning</td>
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<td>FRAM</td>
<td>Fikambanan'ny Ray Aman-drenin'ny Mpianaatra (association of parents of students)</td>
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<td>GBV</td>
<td>gender-based violence</td>
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<td>MGA</td>
<td>Malagasy ariary</td>
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<td>MICS</td>
<td>Multiple Indicators Cluster Survey</td>
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<td>PD</td>
<td>positive deviant</td>
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<td>RGPH</td>
<td>General Census of Population and Housing</td>
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<td>SRH</td>
<td>sexual and reproductive health</td>
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<td>WASH</td>
<td>water, sanitation, and hygiene</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 (PDs)—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 concerning 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 its 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, several intersecting and interconnected factors drive the observed
gender inequalities and affect the ability of Malagasy girls and women to make informed life decisions and to hope for a better life (figure 1). To start with, poverty and lack of means are the major barriers that prevent adolescent girls and young women from accumulating their human capital in education and health, delaying early family formation, and accessing better-quality jobs. 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 presents the mixed-method assessment of the status of girls’ education relative to that of boys in Madagascar. It presents key gender gaps in education and discusses country- and context-specific barriers in access to schooling, divided into three broad categories: (1) financial barriers, (2) school-related barriers, and (3) gender-specific barriers. In addition to barriers, the note also presents evidence on the protective factors for girls’ education in Madagascar. The note ends with a menu of policy recommendations for enhancing access to schooling among Malagasy girls and improving overall literacy rates among adult women. The selection of policy actions is based on the evidence of what works to close gender gaps in education in Sub-Saharan Africa.

**Gender gaps in education in Madagascar**

In Madagascar, illiteracy remains high, particularly in rural areas and among women. Illiteracy rates vary significantly between regions (map 1) with the highest rates found in the south, where about 50 percent of the population ages 15–49 cannot read a sentence. Some regions have recorded noticeable progress in reducing the prevalence of women’s illiteracy over the past decade; for example, Androy saw a decrease of 16.1 percentage points between 2008 and 2021, and Atsimo-Andrefana a decrease of 9.6 percentage points. Other regions, however, show a worrisome trend; in Sofia and Menabe, the shares of illiterate women increased over the past years by 10.1 and 8.6 percentage points, respectively (map 1). Women tend to display lower literacy rates than men in most regions (figure 2). In some provinces—namely Atsimo-Atsinanana, Ihorombe, Melaky, Menabe, and Sava—the gender literacy gap is particularly high (up to a 29-percentage-point difference in Menabe) with women at a disadvantage. The urban-rural divide is also notable: 91.1 percent of urban women ages 15–49 are literate versus only 71.8 percent of rural women. Men’s literacy rates are 92.5 percent and 75.0 percent in urban and rural areas, respectively. Likewise, illiteracy rate varies significantly by income group: while only 5 percent of women from the highest wealth quintile are illiterate, the share increases to 20.3 percent among women from the middle wealth quintile and 58.9 percent among women from the poorest one (the same numbers among men stand at 3.8 percent, 19 percent, and 52.5 percent respectively) (DHS 2021).

Madagascar has a very low school enrollment rate, with girls slightly outnumbering boys at both primary and secondary school levels. According to DHS data, the net primary school attendance rate has decreased for both girls and boys ages 6–10 in the past two decades, from 76.8 percent of girls and 77.1 percent of boys in 2003 to 75.4 percent of girls and 71.3 percent of boys in 2021. In contrast to primary school, attendance at the secondary level has increased for both boys and girls ages 11–17 (figure 3). Between 2003 and 2021, the net secondary attendance rate grew from 23.4 percent to 30.8 percent among girls, and from 21.7 percent to 27.6 percent among boys of relevant school age (DHS 2021). Importantly, primary and secondary attendance rate differs significantly by place of residence and wealth quintile, being lowest among rural population and those from the poorest income group. For example, only 4.3 percent
Map 1. Illiteracy rate in Madagascar: Women who cannot read, 2008–21

Figure 2. Illiteracy in Madagascar: Individuals who cannot read, by gender and region, 2021


Source: Demographic and Health Survey, 2021.
of girls ages 11–17 from the lowest wealth quintile attend secondary school, the share increases to 24.5 percent among girls from the middle wealth quintile and 67.1 percent among girls from the poorest one (the same numbers among boys ages 11–17 stand at 5.6 percent, 21 percent, and 63.7 percent respectively) (DHS 2021). Rural boys have the lowest rate of secondary school attendance (22.2 percent), when compared to rural girls (24.9 percent), urban boys (52.5 percent) and urban girls ages 11–17 (56.7 percent) (DHS 2021).

Primary and secondary school completion rates also registered significant progress over the past two decades, with some difference by gender. As of 2019, more girls than boys of relevant school age had completed primary school (66 percent vs. 61 percent) and lower-secondary school (36.6 percent vs. 34.3 percent)—figure 4.

Figure 3. Primary and secondary school attendance rate, net by gender, 2003–21

Figure 4. Primary and lower-secondary completion rate, net by gender, 2000-19

Despite that progress, educational attainment remains low in Madagascar among both men and women. For instance, according to DHS 2021, only 3.1 percent of Malagasy women and 3.4 percent of men ages 15–49 had completed lower-secondary education (figure 5), and about 2.7 percent of women and 3.2 percent of men had attained higher education. Women are more likely than men to have no formal education at all—19.5 percent vs. 18.7 percent. Moreover, Madagascar shows high rates of adolescents out of lower-secondary school—29 percent and 31 percent for girls and boys, respectively (figure 6).
The level of educational attainment increases with wealth quintile in Madagascar. According to DHS 2021 data, only 0.1 percent of women ages 15–49 from the lowest wealth quintile had completed upper-secondary education, compared to 1.3 percent from the middle wealth quintile and 11.9 percent from the richest. The corresponding
figures are similar among men: 0.3 percent, 1.6 percent, and 11.9 percent. Moreover, whereas almost no woman from the poorest wealth quintile has higher than secondary education, the share increases to 15.5 percent among women from the richest quintile (compared to 18.0 percent among men). Notably, 43.5 percent of women ages 15–49 from the poorest wealth group have no formal education, compared to 2.5 percent of the wealthiest women (40.6 percent and 2.2 percent among men, respectively) (DHS 2021).

Finally, girls outperform boys in reading and math, although all Malagasy children have low basic reading and math skills. Data from 2018 on early learning and parental involvement show that 26 percent of girls and 21 percent of boys ages 7–14 have acquired basic competency in reading and 8 percent of girls and 6 percent of boys have achieved basic mathematics competency (Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey [MICS] 2018). Malagasy children lag those in Lesotho and Zimbabwe on both foundational numeracy and reading skills (figure 7).³

**Figure 7.** Children with foundational numeracy and reading skills, by gender, selected countries, 2017–19

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th></th>
<th>Girls</th>
<th>Boys</th>
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<tr>
<td><strong>a. Foundational Numeracy skills</strong></td>
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<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>23</td>
<td>17</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
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<td>15</td>
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<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>11</td>
<td>10</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
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<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
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<td>6</td>
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<tr>
<td>Chad</td>
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<td>8</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>0.5</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>DRC</td>
<td>0.5</td>
<td>0.5</td>
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<tr>
<td><strong>b. Foundational Reading skills</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lesotho</td>
<td>53</td>
<td>48</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Zimbabwe</td>
<td>34</td>
<td>41</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Madagascar</td>
<td>26</td>
<td>22</td>
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<tr>
<td>Ghana</td>
<td>20</td>
<td>13</td>
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<tr>
<td>The Gambia</td>
<td>11</td>
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<td>DRC</td>
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<tr>
<td>Central African Republic</td>
<td>4.5</td>
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<td>Chad</td>
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Note: The sixth round of Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS6) from participating countries with data available is used. The time range of MICS6 survey included in this database is 2017 and onward.

³ *Foundational numeracy skills* measure the minimum proficiency skills in numeracy expected in grade 2/3 and are divided into four tasks: number reading, number discrimination, addition, and pattern recognition. Each task is composed of several questions, and the child must correctly answer all questions to successfully complete the task. A child who succeeds in all four tasks is considered to have foundational numeracy skills. *Foundational reading skills* measure the minimum proficiency skills in reading expected in grade 2/3 and are divided into three categories: word recognition (correctly reading 90 percent of words in a story), literal questions (replying correctly to all three literal questions), and inferential questions (replying correctly to both of two inferential questions). A child who succeeds in all three tasks is considered to have foundational reading skills.
Barriers to accessing education

The quantitative analysis shows limited access to education for many Malagasy girls and boys, leading to overall low levels of educational attainment and a high share of adolescents out of school. This section, which presents the findings from the qualitative data collection, contributes to the knowledge on the country- and context-specific obstacles in access to education across the studied regions in Madagascar. Although most of the identified barriers are universal, affecting all children regardless of gender, some are gender specific and particularly affect girls. The following subsections present those barriers grouped into three broad categories: (1) financial barriers, (2) school-related barriers, and (3) gender-specific barriers (figure 8).

Financial barriers

Even though the principle of free education is enshrined in Madagascar’s Constitution (Art. 24), ensuring it in practice has been inconsistent. In 2020, the Malagasy government put in place a set of measures to reduce parental financial burden, commonly known as the “zero ariary policy,” which eliminated school registration fees. This policy

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4 Official announcement from the official government web page in Malagasy available here. For more information, see news releases, for instance, https://fr.allafrica.com/stories/202012220430.html.
aimed to provide grants/transfers for parents of school children to cover school-related expenses. Although the policy was announced before the COVID-19 pandemic, its planned implementation coincided with that period. The delay, and sometimes failure, in implementing the measures often had adverse impacts: schools continued their operations despite the lack of committed funding and were forced to resort to parents to cover operational costs. In response to this shortcoming, the government undertook another reform through the adoption of Law N°009/2022 of June 15, 2022, on the general orientation of the education system in Madagascar. The new law mandates the provision of free public education for all; upon adoption and promulgation of that law, free public primary education will be a recognized right in Madagascar.

Nevertheless, despite constitutional and legal provisions, parents often have to pay for different costs involved in their children’s schooling. Parents are expected to pay registration fees as well as cover the costs of school supplies, lunches, insurance, and other unforeseen expenses, such as the renovation of school infrastructure. Several participants in the study emphasized the need to buy a school uniform. Wearing a school uniform is required by teachers but is, at the same time, a matter of status and prestige. Children whose parents cannot afford to purchase a uniform might face stigmatization and discrimination. Thus, parents do everything possible to collect the money needed to buy an appropriate school uniform.

Education in public institutions is said to be free. But there are still mandatory fees to pay…. There is also an insurance…. Besides that, there are the school supplies. (School manager, Antananarivo)

It is with school fees that they buy equipment such as chalk, pens because the State does nothing…. It’s the students who buy everything. That’s the reason for the contributions…. (Mother of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

On top of these costs, parents are also expected to pay the salaries of unsubsidized non–civil servant or FRAM teachers, who in some cases make up almost the whole teaching staff. Although the recruitment of non–civil servant teachers has been prohibited since 2014, the practice continues because of the lack of alternative employment options for recent graduates and lack of school funds allocated for teaching staff. However, there are no regulations regarding the compensation of FRAM teachers, which often becomes an additional financial burden for students’ parents. Given that only 19 percent of non–civil servant teachers are subsidized by the state, the rest are remunerated by the parents of students. Participants in the qualitative study recurrently complained about this practice. Some parents also reported that, even when teachers do get subsidies from the state, parents are still expected to contribute to their salaries.

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5 FRAM stands for Fikambanan’ny Ray Aman-drenin’ny Mpianatra, which is the Malagasy equivalent of the association of parents of students. FRAM teachers are teachers recruited by the community and funded by students’ parents. Often such teachers have no initial training in teaching.

There are too many things. Once we manage to register our children, it should be the State that pays the teachers. We can take care of the notebooks or the pens, but the remuneration of the replacements is really too much for us. (Mother of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

Because of the high rate of monetary poverty and lack of financial means, families often make school payments in the form of bags of rice. In total, parents must pay non-civil servant teachers 50 kg of rice per child at the end of the school year, which coincides with the lean season when the price of rice usually soars. Parents report that, to meet that requirement, they must cut their daily food consumption, potentially leading to the undernourishment of their children.

*We pay the general expenses, then we pay two daba of rice in addition! It’s hard for us, the rice with the drought! We are in trouble.* (Mother of an adolescent girl, Sofia)

Paying tuition becomes increasingly difficult for families especially because it increases with grade level. Many participants in the study complained about the unjustified increase in school expenses with each grade. The failure to fulfill school payments puts children at risk of being expelled. As a result, some girls might be forced to leave school after the fourth grade because of their parents’ inability to cover school fees. Even though they are struggling, parents are reluctant to voice their complaints, fearing that their children might be discriminated against or mistreated in school if parents do not comply with the expected patterns of behavior.

*Last year … they told us to pay twenty-six thousand Ariary. We were surprised in class because it is twenty thousand Ariary that is indicated on the bill. We asked for an explanation, they said it was to buy books, to improve the school. So … we ask … to add an invoice for the money that comes in and out.* (Young woman in a focus group discussion, Antananarivo)

Meeting the increasing costs of education can be particularly difficult for the most vulnerable parents, particularly single mothers. Notably, the issue of single mothers came up repeatedly in the Atsimo-Atsinanana region. In this region, regardless of marital status, it is not uncommon for men to abandon their partners after childbirth, and many mothers return to their parental home with their own children. Many participants referred to this phenomenon, pointing to the economic difficulties that arise for single mothers under such living arrangements. Without the father’s financial support, women struggle to make a living and may reduce the money they dedicate to their children’s education.

*I’m worried … I can’t afford it anymore. Life is difficult, especially when a woman must take care of two children alone! Only one woman! Rice is very expensive…. Schooling costs seventy thousand ariary per child in a general

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7 Lean refers to the period between harvests, which is commonly associated with the increased risks of food and financial insecurity, poverty and vulnerability among farming households.
Importantly, the damage caused by extreme weather events results in additional financial burdens for parents of students. Madagascar is very exposed to climatic hazards and natural disasters such as tropical storms, cyclones, floods, droughts, and locust invasions. Most recently, in January 2023, the tropical storm Cheneso affected 115 schools, completely destroying 54 classrooms, partially destroying 113 classrooms, flooding 45 schools, and affecting more than 4,337 students. The deteriorated state of many of the buildings or the failure to comply with anti-hurricane standards often results in serious damage to the country’s infrastructure, including schools—causing temporary closure of classes and/or entire schools. After extreme weather events, parents of students must also cover unforeseen expenses such as the rehabilitation of classrooms. Taking into account the pervasive poverty in Madagascar, the unforeseen expenses to rehabilitate classrooms damaged by extreme weather events present a serious obstacle for children’s education.

Finally, parents in all three regions repeatedly mentioned malnutrition as a cause for children’s demotivation and early dropout from school. Undernourishment is common and affects both boys and girls in the three regions: 36.1 percent of girls and 43.6 percent of boys under five years of age are stunted, and as many as 10.5 percent of girls and 14.9 percent of boys under five years of age are severely stunted (DHS 2021). Moreover, 8.2 percent of girls and 10.8 percent of boys under five years of age suffer from malnutrition (DHS 2021). According to study participants, children affected by undernourishment often come to class hungry and struggle to concentrate. In addition, children suffering undernourishment may also experience feelings of shame with respect to their peers, which further demotivates them from pursuing their studies. Several study participants reported this demotivation as a key factor driving their children to leave school.

In my case, I’m not ashamed to say it but what discouraged my child from studying, my little girl, was the lack of food. Sometimes there is food and sometimes there is not, so she lost all motivation. (Mother of an adolescent girl, Antananarivo)

The food needed to enable her to follow her studies is not enough. (Mother of an adolescent girl, Sofia)

In addition, the lack of means forces some children, especially adolescent girls, to prioritize work to help the family to make ends meet. Several participants in the qualitative study reported the need to contribute to the household income as the main reason they chose work over completing their studies.
We have money problems.... I have a lot of brothers and sisters, and my father and mother could not support us anymore. We couldn’t finish school, so we went to work. (Young woman, Antananarivo)

My parents encouraged me to go to work. They told us to work. For our survival in rural areas, we have to work. It’s like that. (Positive deviant [PD], 9 Sofia)

Poverty and financial instability—and the resulting strong pressure to make an income—may lead girls to engage in economic activities even when their parents do not insist. Girls and young women are lured by the economic attractiveness of income-generating activities such as clove cultivation in the south or sales activities or gold mining in the north. Some study participants admitted wanting to have some money to afford clothes like their peers had.

I wanted to have money, yet the parents were tired of me asking them all the time. I then said to myself that it would be good to work to have my own money and buy everything I wanted with it. (PD, Antananarivo)

Child labor affects all three regions but is particularly widespread in rural areas. The Malagasy population is predominantly rural and makes its living mostly from agriculture, which influences the life path of girls. Girls in Sofia and Atsimo-Atsinanana contribute extensively to agricultural work, and many study participants began working between the ages of 10 and 13.

I was ten years old when I started planting rice. (PD, Sofia)

Especially in rural areas, the tension between the agricultural and school calendars appears to be a significant constraint to education in Madagascar, leading to permanent dropouts and deterioration of learning. Parents actively involve their children in farming, which negatively affects school attendance. For instance, in the Atsimo-Atsinanana region, both girls and boys are absent from school during the clove season, yet girls are more involved in the harvesting activities. Many students never return to school after their temporary agricultural work, and those who do return sometimes have a few months’ delay, resulting in age-grade distortion. Parents in this study expressed their willingness to reenroll their children after the cultivation season, but in some cases teachers were reluctant to accept students back to school because of the prolonged absenteeism. Students who do not want to repeat a year might move to another school or stop studying altogether.

Take for example students in second grade. In three months, the harvest will start and they are waiting for it. The harvest ends at the beginning of the

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9 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 succeed in their educational trajectories in spite of the observed barriers in their community.

10 According to the 2018 General Census of Population and Housing (RGPH), the population living in rural areas represents 80.7 percent of the total population.
third quarter. Afterwards, they ask to come back to study. From that point on, the teachers are confused, knowing that they [students] have hardly followed a large part of the school program.... We don't know what to do. They were only able to get through half of the curriculum in the first quarter. They were totally absent in the second quarter, the third quarter is coming to an end. So how can they still be allowed to come back? (Key informant, education sector, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

Young women in the study emphasized that, because clove harvesting is the only source of income their families have, they cannot afford to miss it, even if it interferes with their school attendance. The prioritization of agricultural work over schooling is likely the outcome of widespread poverty and lack of economic means. The 2018–2022 Plan Sectoriel de l'Education suggested a reform of the school calendar in order to address students’ and teachers’ absenteeism during the months of December-February. The reform has not been implemented, however, because of many reservations raised by students’ parents in rural areas and from private schools;¹¹ one of the common concerns is that shifts in the school calendar will result in the decrease in the overall learning hours, thus requiring children to study more years to obtain their school-leaving certificates.

In general, in the commune of Masianaka, the inhabitants do not prioritize education enough because they are influenced by the economic popularity of cloves and coffee.... At the time of the harvest, let’s say there are 200 students, at most there are only 100 students left in class.... (Key informant, education sector, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

At the level of rural schools, from January onwards, parents ask teachers to take their children to help in the fields. And there are many students who help their parents during this period.... This is usually held between January and March during the cultivation period, the rice cultivation. And it’s mostly the young women who help. (Key informant, education sector, Sofia)

Child labor affects not only children’s human rights but also their well-being and health. Young women in the study repeatedly mentioned feelings of tiredness and deprivation due to the necessity to work early on. Some have also suffered the physical health consequences of engaging in heavy work activities at a young age.

All of this is to help my parents and not for me personally, I never had a childhood, teenage years but I always fought for life... (Young woman, Antananarivo)

I was tired. What I earned was not proportional to the effort I put in. We transported so much yet we received very little. Getting tired for so little money. (PD, Antananarivo)

School-related barriers

The scarcity of and distance to schools constitute an important physical barrier for school attendance. In remote and rural areas, the concentration of schools, especially upper-secondary schools, in specific localities forces young people of the surrounding communes to make long journeys in order to study. Such journeys are physically exhausting; as a result, students arrive in class tired, hungry, and unable to concentrate, which adversely affects their academic performance. In the long run, the scarcity of schools results in students leaving school and returning to the countryside to help their parents.

"Antsakabary is seventy-nine kilometers away.... They take the boat.... A day and a half. They sleep halfway … (it) is far away, is really on the other side and they are physically tired. (Father of an adolescent girl, Sofia)"

Although the scarcity of schools and long travel distances affect all children, the barriers appear to be more significant for girls. These findings are in line with global evidence suggesting that the need to travel long distances to the nearest school reduces the likelihood that girls will complete their education. Regional evidence indicates that parents, fearing for the safety and well-being of their daughters on the road, might be reluctant to send them to schools located far from home (Colclough, Rose, and Tembon 2000; Shahidul and Karim 2015). In addition, long distances to school might require the use of public transportation, thus adding to the overall financial cost of schooling and making it unaffordable for many poor families in Madagascar. Madagascar’s scarcity of schools was compounded by the increased number of students following the announcement of the “zero ariary policy” eliminating school registration fees. In many schools attended by research participants, more than three students sit on a bench and many sit on the floor.

Some participants noted the unsatisfactory conditions of classrooms and school bathrooms in the schools they attend. According to the World Health Organization and United Nations Children’s Fund Joint Monitoring Program (2022), only 37 percent of Malagasy schools have basic drinking water services. As many as 63 percent of primary and 74 percent of all secondary schools have no drinking water services at all. Additionally, 28 percent of all schools have no sanitation facilities, with primary schools being more disadvantaged than secondary ones (36 percent vs. 21 percent, respectively). According to study participants, many schools lack adequate water, sanitation, and hygiene (WASH) facilities, and any existing facilities are in a very poor state. As a result, some girls try to avoid using school bathrooms at all during their studies.

"Often, going to the bathroom was a waste of time because there were only two stalls. Sometimes you would have 40 students in front of you and so you would stand in line for a long time. So that’s it. (PD in technical school, Antananarivo)"

It was dirty. It was dirty. Even though it was a free school, it was dirty. Even the classrooms, it wasn’t really, it wasn’t really pretty to look at. (PD who owns a small business, Antananarivo)

In addition to its school infrastructure–related challenges, Madagascar faces a serious shortage of qualified teaching staff. In 2021, civil servant and contractual teachers represented only 37 percent of the teaching force, subsidized FRAM teachers 19 percent, and those paid by parents and communities 43 percent.13 Most of those teachers do not have the qualifications and training necessary to meet teaching standards, and they do not receive training even when integrated into the public service. The lack of budget for recruitment and training and inadequate financial resources for schools make it difficult to attract strong candidates, with many choosing the teaching profession out of necessity rather than vocation. Deplorable working conditions in rural areas contribute to understaffing there and decrease the motivation of qualified personnel to be deployed to those areas (Ralaivao 2019; Venart and Reuter 2014). The lack of regulations covering the recruitment and payment of non–civil servant and FRAM teachers also affects the quality of Madagascar’s teaching force. Procedures and remuneration ranges are left to the discretion of the authorities in each case.14 Unsubsidized teachers, supported by parents and the community, are paid less than subsidized teachers—who receive 220,000 Malagasy ariary, or MGA (US$50.00) per semester for preschool and primary school, MGA 240,000 (US$55.00) for middle school, and MGA 300,000 (US$68.00) for high school. Teachers subsidized by the state, however, report important delays in the payment of their subsidies. Low and/or unreliable pay is among the key factors that make it difficult to attract qualified, formally trained teachers (Gamero Burón and Lassibille 2016).

Additionally, women are still underrepresented among the educational staff, particularly at the level of secondary school. As of 2019, women constituted more than half of the teaching staff at the primary school level (53 percent), but only 41 percent of all educators at the secondary school level (WDI 2019). Global and regional evidence indicates that recruiting more female teachers is positively associated with improved girls’ schooling outcomes (Agyapong 2018; Herz 2002; Mouganie and Wang 2020). Apart from providing positive role models to young girls, particularly in rural areas, parents are put at ease about their daughter’s safety by the presence of female teachers (Herz and Sperling 2004).15

Because teachers are at the heart of the educational system, their behavior toward their students can be a source of both motivation and demotivation for girls and boys.

15 For instance, research from South Africa and Uganda shows that female teachers actively respond against sexual gender-based violence by providing formal and informal “caring” and social protection through developing trusting relationships and leading life skills groups (Bhana 2015; Porter 2015).
Study participants reported common misconduct among teachers, including being systematically absent, late, or drunk. Teacher’s absenteeism specifically appears to be a serious problem in Madagascar, reported numerous times.

*There’s another one [teacher] who drinks.... Sometimes they have a class at ten o’clock and the man doesn’t come.... Sometimes he is absent for one day, sometimes for one week....* (Mother of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

*There is one of our teachers who has just had a drink and arrives at school and then tells us to go home. Our physics teacher who comes drunk and often can’t teach us. He is an alcoholic.* (Young woman, Sofia)

Reports also indicate that teachers tend to be more attentive to students with wealthier parents; indeed, students with poor parents complained about neglect and sometimes even abuse from teachers. Girls reported harassment and feelings of shame because of their lack of means, reflected for instance in the poor quality of their notebooks or by incessant reminders of the need to pay their school fees. Such feelings demotivate them and become a reason to drop out.

*Yes, that’s exactly it, they prefer those who can pay their tuition and all other money matters on time to those who cannot. It was really remarkable there.* (Young woman, Antananarivo)

Factors potentially explaining this type of misconduct include the absence of disciplinary sanctions; the special social status attached to a senior teacher (called *ray aman-dreny*, literally “father and mother”); the weak monitoring and evaluation framework for teacher conduct; and a lack of adequate financial renumeration from the state or delays in receiving teacher salaries.

Finally, Madagascar law prescribes that instruction take place in French or English, with which many students are not familiar. Although children learn to read in Malagasy and learn other subjects in that language until grade 3, French is the official language of instruction from grade 4 on (GPE Secretariat 2017). French has been the dominant academic language: the political elite in the cities send their children to French-speaking schools, and the cities’ poor families who aspire for a better future for their children also try to enroll them in French-speaking schools (Dahl 2011). At the same time, the rural population uses Malagasy as the primary language and might be particularly disadvantaged by the French-speaking instructions in schools (Dahl 2011). Importantly, as mentioned earlier, the rural population represents 80 percent of the total population in Madagascar (RGPH 2018). Students from rural areas might have particular difficulties learning in French or English because they have little opportunity to practice those languages and because their teachers have not mastered them.

**Gender-specific barriers**

Child marriage is one of the main causes of school dropout, yet the circumstances and the context of marriage differ from region to region. After girls marry, schooling is often
no longer an option for them. Married girls face social pressure to prioritize household responsibilities—which are seen as incompatible with pursuing an education, especially in rural communities. In addition, husbands, who in some cases assume sole decision-making responsibilities in the household, prohibit their young wives from studying. In other cases, girls themselves decide to stop studying after the marriage—likely because of their shifting roles and status in the society.

_She must stop! In fact, we are in the countryside, it is not like in town. If she studies and gets married at the same time, society will judge her._ ... (Young woman, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

Likewise, early pregnancy is another significant constraint to girls’ education. When girls get pregnant, they drop out of school partly because of feelings of shame and stigmatization. The burden of childcare following the pregnancy as well as pressure to earn a living are among other barriers that explain school dropout among pregnant girls and adolescent mothers. In this study sample, there were no cases of pregnant girls who successfully continued their studies without interruption. Importantly, although society places great value on family formation and childbearing, teenage pregnancy—especially out of wedlock—seems to be taboo. As a result, pregnant girls might encounter discrimination, mocking, or stigmatization.

_They (friends at school) laughed, they talked about me and said, “Oh, she’s pregnant? … What happened to her?” I was really ashamed._... (Young woman, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

_It was when I was in school that I got pregnant and that was the cause why I left school because when they saw me, the other students were grumbling, but the teachers didn’t say anything… After that I left school because I was ashamed._ (Young woman, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

In addition, girls’ heavy involvement in domestic chores and unpaid care severely limits their ability to go to school. Within households, it is almost always girls who help their mothers take care of other family members and perform all the housework. This burden significantly constrains the free time girls might have and their time for studying. The situation becomes even more difficult for girls who live in a household with persons with a disability or chronic illness.

_Poverty and limited work opportunities may also discourage young women’s aspirations and motivation to study. Although young women and girls do place a high value on learning, they might lack interest in studies because of doubts about the potential returns from education_, according to a school principal in Atsimo-Atsinanana. Girls do not perceive education as a guarantee of better opportunities because they see _

16 The latest available data suggests that returns to education tend to be higher for men than women. For instance, having complete primary education is associated with a 30.4 percent increase in earnings among women vs. 36.7 percent among men, and incomplete secondary education—with a 60.1 percent among women and 64.6 percent among men. However, returns from complete secondary education appear to be slightly higher for women than men (86.4 percent among women and 85.6 percent among men) (EOM 2021–22).
no clear benefits of pursuing education in the context of limited economic opportunities. Lack of support and parental involvement may also contribute to lack of interest in schooling. Parents may prioritize their children’s engagement in work or agricultural activities. In addition, girls might encounter less pressure than boys to study in order to secure a good job in the future; the idea that they will be financially sustained by their husbands or partners undermines the instrumental value of education, according to a key informant from the education sector in the Atsimo-Atsinanana region. This assumption clashes with the reality in which, as discussed earlier, it is not unusual for a man to abandon his partner and children, sometimes after the first year of their relationship, leaving the woman to depend on only her own income.

Today, men make children for you and then leave you. They don’t even assume their paternity and leave you to manage on your own. (Mother of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

At the same time, many young women in the sample appear to lack agency and control over their lives, which leads to low self-reported aspirations related to education. In all three regions, when asked about plans and hopes for the future, young women emphasized the desire to own a house and be able to sustain themselves and their children. They also mentioned completing their education, but rarely as a priority. Notably, when speaking about life goals and plans, young women often rely on their faith in a providential God—yet another indication of their perceived lack of capacity to change their living conditions and circumstances.

For now, she really intends to finish her studies. Given our situation [financial difficulties], she said, “We always rely on others.” And if God is watching over her, she said, may Jesus help her succeed. “You’ll be relieved, Mom, if I succeed in my studies,” she said. (Mother of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

I will try and I will succeed if it is the will of God. (Young woman, Antananarivo)

The qualitative study found mixed evidence on the preference for boys’ or girls’ education in Madagascar. Key informants mentioned a societal preference for educating boys rather than girls. According to them, the traditional belief that girls will marry and become mothers, and that boys will become the head of the family and the main providers, leads parents to see investments in boys’ education as more cost-effective. These findings are in line with the global evidence: when they face prohibitive costs of school fees, uniforms, or school supplies, families with limited resources may choose to educate their sons rather than their daughters, perceiving that this investment offers a greater return for the family (Perisic, Komarecki, and Minujin 2012).

What happens in most cases ... in cases where a family has multiple children going to school ... they choose to stop the girl’s schooling and prefer to support the boy because ... people don’t mind that the girls don’t have any knowledge ... she’s not going to be the one to provide for the family anyway.... And that’s why we choose to support the boys because they are
the future of the home and they will get married. And they’re going to be the head of the household … parents prioritize the education of their boys. (Key informant, education sector, Sofia)

Parents in the sample expressed differing preferences. Some admitted the tendency to prioritize firstborn sons. In some regions, being the lahimatoa (eldest son) confers a lot of responsibility but also more support and prioritization from the family and society. In return, parents expect more accountability, or valim-babena, from that son who will remain in the family home. Those parents do not find it worthwhile to invest in their daughters’ education knowing that, when they marry, they will join the family of the husband.

Almost ... all the girls in the municipality of Soamagnova could not continue their studies. First reason: parental negligence towards their daughters because ... according to tradition, women do not inherit from their parents. Well ... by getting married, the man will kind of support his wife, who will stay at home. As a result, parents prefer to teach their boys more because they are the ones who will work later. (Young woman, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

Importantly, however, some fathers in the sample reported either neutrality or a preference to educate younger children or those who have not yet reached the highest level, regardless of their sex, when financial resources are scarce. In some cases, a preference is given to those children who are performing best in terms of academic achievements.

It depends on their levels. It will be the one who will have reached the superior class whether it is a girl or a boy who will have to stop (if the financial means are missing). (Father of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

You see, I’ll be proud to hear that my child is gifted. Who is not, we take them away [from school]. It depends on their [grade] average, and if the child reaches a certain average, we’ll see what we can do for them. (Father of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

Study participants reported that gender-based violence (GBV) by teaching staff may prevent girls from continuing their education. Sexual harassment by a male teacher is difficult to prove, and the mechanisms for reporting this type of offense do not yet exist or are not yet fully operational. Even if a girl’s parents support her claim, it ultimately comes down to the girl’s word against the teacher’s. Limited evidence from the study indicates that sexual abuse by teachers—and the lack of psychological support for young women survivors—has a strong detrimental effect on girls’ education and mental health.

Yes, when I was in the 8th or in the 7th [grade] at the time, our teacher, he always bothered me in class because at the time I was still very round, and … he always touched my breasts and that made me not want to go to school and then I repeated from time to time.... I repeated in 8th grade, and he was our teacher again … and finally my mother decided to transfer me to another school, and I didn't have any more worries after that. But when my mother talked to him, he got angry, so he didn't let me pass the
class and was always harassing me ... that’s why my mother was forced to transfer me. (Young woman, Antananarivo)

**Supportive factors for girls’ education**

Along with the multiple and often intersecting barriers that prevent Malagasy girls from completing their education, several protective factors that can strongly encourage girls to pursue education were identified. This section presents the factors that enable and support girls’ education in Madagascar, divided into four broad categories: (1) family support, (2) community support, (3) school-related support, and (4) individual resilience (figure 9).

**Figure 9. Factors that enable and support girls’ education in Madagascar**

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Individual resilience</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>• Clear life goals, aspirations and hope for a better future</td>
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<tr>
<td>• High value attached to education</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>• Intention/willingness to postpone early marriage</td>
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<tr>
<td>• Balance between studies, leisure and domestic tasks</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School-related support</th>
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<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Supportive/involved parents</td>
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<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Community support</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Support from friends and relatives</td>
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</table>

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>School-related support</th>
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</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Qualified and encouraging teachers</td>
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<tr>
<td>Provision of school meals</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Reduced financial costs</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

The answers of PDs in the research sample suggest that the supportive factors keeping girls in school—once the financial and other barriers are not insurmountable—relate to the positive aspects of learning and to a supportive environment and encouragement from their families, peers, and teachers.

*I still want to continue my studies because I know now that even if I have nothing, there are still people who encourage me, at school.* (Young woman, Antananarivo)

Support and guidance from family encourage girls to pursue their education and overcome the challenges inherent to their academic journey. In fact, global literature
presents clear evidence that parents’ encouragement and support positively affect their children’s school achievements, attitudes, and aspirations. Supportive behaviors of mothers toward their adolescent children positively predict both self-esteem and academic achievement (Bean et al. 2003). Evidence further indicates that parental expectations and perceptions of parental expectations have the potential to raise children’s academic expectations and, thus, improve their educational achievement (Patrikakou 1997). In the study, PDs referred to the support and encouragement of mothers and other relatives as decisive factors that helped them to succeed in their educational endeavors.

How I overcame it…. My mother always encouraged me by telling me that she had the will to educate me. And then the time I spent with my friends made my worries go away. And when I thought about it, the pressure was on me to stay in school. (PD who completed high school without interruption)

Family support—both emotional and financial—also appears as a strong protective factor of completing school education in the event of pregnancy. One PD in the research sample from the Sofia region managed to continue studying while pregnant and reenroll in upper-secondary school after giving birth. Because she missed some months following the birth, she had to repeat one year but eventually was able to sit for the final exams. As she explained, her ability to return to school was largely connected to encouragement by her family as well as financial and childcare assistance from her mother.

I wanted to get my bacc,17 that’s what really motivated me. My mother is financing my studies, he encouraged me (the child’s father): “Continue your studies if there is someone who can still take care of the child!” he said. (PD, Sofia)

Furthermore, some PD participants in the sample reported that support from friends helped them to pass exams. They referred to both practical support (such as friends hosting them at their houses during the exam period) and emotional encouragement and motivation. Friends’ support was particularly emphasized as an important positive aspect of studying by women who have left their homes to attend a secondary or higher school.

Finally, the exams were approaching but we still had nothing at home and in order to concentrate on my exams, I had to go and live with one of my friends. She took me in for the exam and told me that they would share everything they had and what they ate. By the grace of God, I passed my BEPC18…. (PD who completed secondary school without interruption, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

A relationship of trust between teacher and student is another key factor for girls’ success. Studies around the world have obtained similar findings, showing that teachers’ positive attitudes toward students play a vital role in how youth perceive the value and

17 The equivalent of an upper-secondary school diploma, a prerequisite for entry into university.
18 The Brevet d’Études du Premier Cycle de l’Enseignement Secondaire (BEPC) is an examination that certifies completion of the lower-secondary general education program.
importance of their own education (Banerjee et al. 2018; Gunderson et al. 2012; Li 1999; Machado and Muller 2018; Tiedemann 2002).

Beyond relationships, participants mentioned support to feed children in schools through school canteens as a key factor keeping children in school. Undernourishment, discussed earlier, is one of the major impediments to the transition from elementary to secondary school, making good nutrition critical for learning and attendance. In 2015, the Malagasy government introduced school canteens in about 2,000 schools,19 which helped parents overcome the difficulty in providing adequate nutrition for their children and gave children the chance to concentrate better in class. The project, still in the pilot stage, gives priority to vulnerable neighborhoods in urban agglomerations and to southern regions.

> [S]o what is good for the commune of Soamanova at the moment is that they are helping us with meals.... The State helps the parents with the studies because the child eats at school. (Father of an adolescent girl, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

All of the above-mentioned factors help build individual resilience among adolescent girls and encourage them to complete secondary education. Interviews with PDs show that balancing school, leisure, and domestic tasks is key to girls’ success. The key according to some participants is to organize the time in a way that allows them to do their revisions.

PDs in the Atsimo-Atsinanana region attribute an instrumental value to studying. School studies constitute a safeguard against early marriage: in some cases the ability to continue schooling appears as a strong protective factor against child marriage. These girls also see education as a pathway to meaningful employment and economic opportunities. For the girls interviewed in a focus group discussion, education provides knowledge and understanding. It provides them with the minimum skills to face life and to develop personal projects. Obtaining a diploma then becomes a considerable stake for which PDs are willing to gather all the necessary means (accumulation of small jobs, savings).

> If you don’t go to school and you’re still a minor, you’ll be lost because the parents will force you to get married because they don’t like you to be just another burden at home. So, if I don’t go to school, the parents will force me to get married. (PD who completed secondary school without interruption, Atsimo-Atsinanana)

In Antananarivo and Sofia, PDs associate studies with a sense of personal accomplishment and social prestige. They see their studies as a guarantee for a better future, and as something that allows girls to become independent. For young women in the capital, studies bring social recognition but above all pride for the family.

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Unlocking the Potential of Women and Adolescent Girls in Madagascar

I will have my degree and all my efforts are not in vain. Having a degree is already a pride for me, you are proud of all the effort you put in to get it. But on the other hand … I want to get a job so I can fund my education and my child’s education. (Young woman, Antananarivo)

To make life better, because if you are successful, you don’t have to wait for inheritances…. I study to have a better life, to guarantee a better life for my descendants. (Young woman, Sofia)

Moreover, contrary to what was reported for the South, a willingness on the part of parents to take girls as far as possible in terms of education was noted in Antananarivo and Sofia. Yet this option is not available for all girls, especially not those living in poverty. As seen from the analysis above, even when girls are motivated to study, extreme poverty and lack of means force them to prioritize work over education.

In summary, access to schooling has increased for both girls and boys in the past decades, leading to relative gender parity in school enrollment and attendance rates. Despite that progress, overall educational attainment in Madagascar remains concerningly low, and a high share of adolescents is out of school. The qualitative findings show that access to education remains very limited because of the direct and indirect costs of studying, scarcity of relevant infrastructure and facilities, lack of qualified teachers, and pervasive poverty that drives children to engage in income-generating activities from a very early age. Gender-specific barriers—such as high involvement in domestic chores, GBV, limited agency, and, above all, child marriage and early pregnancy—appear to result in greater limitations for girls than for boys in access to schooling. At the same time, family, community, and school support appear to play a strong protective role in empowering girls to pursue education and build their individual resilience and motivation to study. All of these findings provide the basis for the policy recommendations described in the next section.

Policy recommendations

Improving overall access to education and particularly assisting girls and young women in completing primary and secondary education represent the strategic development priority for Madagascar. Global evidence has proven that education plays a crucial protective function for girls: girls who remain in school are less likely to be married as children and to experience adolescent pregnancy and early marriage (Population Council 2019; World Bank 2012). Moreover, each additional year of schooling decreases the risks of early marriage and teenage fertility (World Bank 2012) and increases women’s chances of securing better-quality employment later in life (Habib et al. 2019). Furthermore, women’s education is positively associated with better investments in children’s human capital: children of educated women have higher immunization rates, are less likely to be stunted, and are less likely to die as infants (Diamond, Newby, and Varle 1998; Klugman et al. 2014; World Bank 2012). Klugman et al. (2014) cite a

20 See Note 4, “Challenges and Opportunities in Enhancing Girls and Women’s Agency.”
broad body of evidence showing that education is also a key driver of women’s agency. Global evidence shows a correlation between increased levels of education and reduced poverty incidence (Schultz 1993; Summers 1994; UNESCO 2017). Thus, investments in girls’ and women’s education represent a promising strategy for Madagascar to reduce poverty and increase shared prosperity.

Table 1 summarizes the main identified barriers, potential strategic directions, and policy actions for enhancing access to schooling among Malagasy girls and improving overall literacy rates among adult women. It focuses on areas with the most significant gender gaps and barriers, identified through this mixed-method research. The table also differentiates between measures for short-, medium-, and long-term responses. The selection of key strategic directions and policy actions described is based on the evidence of what works to close gender gaps in education in Sub-Saharan Africa.21 The qualitative findings have resulted in the identification of the following strategic directions:

- **Strategic direction 1**: Lift financial constraints to accessing, staying in, and completing school.
- **Strategic direction 2**: Address school infrastructure–related barriers and the poor quality of teaching.
- **Strategic direction 3**: Eliminate gender-specific barriers in access to schooling, particularly those related to the child marriage and early pregnancy.
- **Strategic direction 4**: Improve adult women’s literacy rates.

In the short term, facilitating access to schooling for all children and for girls in particular can be achieved through lifting financial costs of education, e.g., implementing effective school subsidies and ensuring timely and transparent payment of teachers’ salaries. Another critical priority for Madagascar is the implementation of the proposed reform on aligning school and agricultural calendars. Regarding infrastructure, the short-term response could include provision of safe and reliable transportation options and resumption of school canteen initiatives. Finally, adopting regulations to encourage pregnant girls to resume their education free from complex processes for withdrawal and reenrollment will also likely bring significant gains in the short term for girls’ schooling outcomes. Table 1 summarizes the main identified barriers, potential strategic directions, and policy recommendations for assisting girls and young women in Madagascar in completing their schooling.

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21 As part of the Gender Data for Policy program, a review of impact evaluation studies was conducted to collect evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa on what works to close gender gaps. The search included briefs, published papers, and working papers from 2000 onward, published on the World Bank’s Open Knowledge Repository and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation’s Evidence Hub. The selected studies were limited to studies estimating causal impacts, either through experimental or quasi-experimental methods. Out of a total of 460 studies identified, 162 studies were selected and reviewed.
<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Barriers</th>
<th>Term</th>
<th>Policy recommendations</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic direction 1: Lift financial constraints to accessing, staying in, and completing school</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Prohibitive costs of schooling</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>• Implement effective school subsidies by allocating resources to the zero ariary policy and disbursing them timely.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Ensure that salaries of and subsidies to teachers are covered by the state, not by parents.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>High involvement of children in labor/agricultural work</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>• Resume efforts to implement the reform to align school and agricultural calendars.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Offer financial support to vulnerable families through child benefits, and/or financial incentives through unconditional cash transfers, school vouchers, and scholarships.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Malnutrition; food insecurity</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Expand the government program of canteens in schools, with a focus on the poorest and most vulnerable areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Empower households economically through the provision of food vouchers/subsidies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic direction 2: Address school infrastructure–related barriers and the poor quality of teaching</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Scarcity and remoteness of schools</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>• Provide safe and affordable transportation options.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>• Improve availability and access to schools, especially in remote areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide boarding facilities for girls from rural or remote areas.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of adequate and climate-resilient school infrastructure</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>• Improve school-relevant infrastructure and facilities (classrooms, WASH facilities, electricity supply, provision of separate toilets).</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Insure school infrastructure against climate-related hazards and provide for repairs.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Lack of qualified (female) teachers</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Recruit more civil servant teachers, especially female teachers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Poor quality of teaching; language barrier</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Improve the working conditions of teachers and ensure on-time payment of salaries.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide (quality) instruction in the mother tongue beyond the first years of schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic direction 3: Eliminate gender-specific barriers in access to schooling, particularly those related to child marriage and early pregnancy</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>School-based GBV</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Enact and enforce anti-sexual harassment policies.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Enforce a child-friendly complaints mechanism to report cases of teacher misconduct.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Implement GBV sensitization in school-based programs and as teacher certification requirements.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Girls’ limited agency and lack of sense of control over their lives</td>
<td>Long term</td>
<td>• Develop adolescent empowerment programs to encourage girls to complete their schooling.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Provide female peer mentorship and role models.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Child marriage and teenage pregnancy</td>
<td>Short term</td>
<td>• Adopt regulations to encourage pregnant girls to resume their education free from complex processes for withdrawal and reenrollment.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Provide financial support for adolescent mothers to continue and complete their education.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Promote positive attitudes toward education of pregnant girls and adolescent mothers.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Strategic direction 4: Improve adult women’s literacy rates</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Problem identified</td>
<td>Policy recommendations</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Low levels of literacy among adult women</td>
<td>Medium term</td>
<td>• Provide basic literacy classes for adult women with flexible schedules and childcare provision.</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td>• Organize weekly/monthly community meetings and safe spaces for adult women with the provision of literacy classes.</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>


Note: ECDE = early childhood development and education; GBV = gender-based violence; WASH = water, sanitation, and hygiene.
Strategic direction 1: Lift financial constraints to accessing, staying in, and completing school

To start with, lifting financial barriers to schooling is a promising strategy to improve educational outcomes of all and girls in particular, especially in the context of poverty and lack of means. In those regards, priority policies for Madagascar would be to implement effective school subsidies by allocating resources to the zero ariary policy and disbursing them timely, and to ensure that salaries of and subsidies to teachers are covered by the state, not by parents. School fee subsidy programs are positively associated with improvements in girls’ enrollment and dropout rates and with increased professional aspirations, according to evidence from Benin (Koumassa, Olapade, and Wantchekon 2021), Kenya (Duflo, Dupas, and Kremer 2015), and Zimbabwe (Dion Halfors et al. 2015). Additionally, cash transfers (CTs) targeted at adolescent girls and/or their parents also appear to be one of the most effective interventions to increase school enrollment and attendance (Akresh, De Walque, and Kazianga 2016; Baird et al. 2009; Kim 2016). Considering the mixed evidence on the impacts of the conditional CTs, it would be recommended for Madagascar to introduce unconditional CTs to ensure that girls/young women are not pressured to provide financially for their families, and to prevent any potential spillovers of such programs on teenage pregnancy. More targeted approaches to subsidizing other secondary school costs are also required, for instance, for school equipment and uniforms for vulnerable families. Expanding the programs on subsidized meals in school canteens can also go a long way in encouraging attendance and improving the performance of the most vulnerable children while addressing their nutritional needs—as shown by a program in Madagascar (WFP 2020).

The qualitative assessment highlights the importance of reforming the school calendar in order to tackle the problem of students’ and teachers’ absenteeism during agricultural seasons. Madagascar is the only country in southern Africa whose school year runs from October to May, similar to the school calendar in the northern hemisphere. As participants in the study reported, however, this timing creates problems for access to school during the cultivation/cropping seasons for children who have farming tasks and for rural teachers who often farm themselves. Thus, a more country-tailored school calendar developed through public consultations with the consideration of regional and geographical differences is needed to increase school attendance and retention.

Strategic direction 2: Address school infrastructure–related barriers and the poor quality of teaching

Making schools accessible in rural and remote areas and expanding school-relevant infrastructure could also contribute to increasing school enrollment and attendance.

Note the increase in teenage pregnancy observed among conditional CT recipients in Malawi when they dropped out compared to unconditional CTs recipients, which points to some serious trade-offs between different human capital objectives (Baird et al. 2009).
rates. In this regard, general interventions such as building and equipping schools and expanding school-relevant infrastructure can deliver gains for all students and for girls in particular (Evans and Yuan 2019). Evidence from Sub-Saharan Africa shows that construction of new schools increases girls’ enrollment rates (Dumitrescu et al. 2011), and provision of latrines and drinking water containers results in reduced absenteeism among students (Freeman et al. 2012). In addition, providing free transportation to and from schools can be a promising strategy for improving girls’ schooling outcomes (Porter 2010, 2014). Several participants in the qualitative assessment mentioned offering adequate boarding schools for girls from remote areas as a potential way to address physical barriers to access.

The recruitment of qualified (female) teachers and the quality of teaching need to be improved. Adequate efforts need to be directed toward improving the recruitment of civil servant teachers; addressing teacher shortages; and generally improving the working conditions of teachers (UNESCO 2015a, 2016). Some education systems provide teacher rewards linked to performance, which encourage motivation and efforts to improve learning outcomes (UNESCO 2016). Rewards may include targeted allowances, bonuses, and financial and nonfinancial incentives, including pensions and other forms of social security and leave entitlements. In addition, it is advisable to recruit more female teachers, especially at the secondary school level. Evidence for Sub-Saharan Africa shows that recruiting more female teachers is positively associated with increased girls’ school enrollment (Herz 2002), school attendance (Banerjee and Kremer 2002), academic performance and test scores (Agyapong 2018), and motivation to learn (Bages, Verniers, and Martinot 2016).

In addition, it will be necessary to explore alternatives that offer learning in the mother tongue. Research shows that basic education should be conducted in the first language (mother tongue) of the children. Teaching the first language implies great advantages for the development of children’s cognitive achievements and with respect to their cultural identity and self-understanding. If the language of instruction differs from children’s first language, it will result in both cognitive and pedagogical difficulties and cultural alienation (Dahl 2011). Most of the population in Madagascar speaks some variation of Malagasy in everyday life, with no natural opportunity to hear or practice anything else (Thornell and Legère 2011). Arguments in favor of teaching in the mother tongue in Africa and the push for this trend have increased in recent years (Kioko et al. 2014; Piper, Zuilkowski, and Ong’ele 2016; UNESCO 2018).

Strategic direction 3: Eliminate gender-specific barriers in access to schooling, particularly those related to child marriage and early pregnancy

Addressing school-based GBV is an important strategy to improve girls’ schooling outcomes. A promising strategy for Madagascar—as observed for the region—could entail sexual harassment policies and enforcement mechanisms for educators, staff, and students (see Beninger 2013 for the examples of Ghana and Kenya). Another promising
strategy for protecting students from abuse by teachers is to set up a child-friendly complaints mechanism (UNICEF 2019). Evidence from different countries shows that adoption of such a mechanism in different contexts (schools, health care, and others) helps to harness the voices of children, recognize abuse, and undertake measures to address it and prevent in the future (UNICEF 2019).

Furthermore, raising girls’ aspirations around education and empowering them to complete their studies are other priority actions for Madagascar. Regional evidence shows that rolling adolescent empowerment programs would help to increase girls’ enrollment and retention in school. For example, the Berhane Hewan program in Ethiopia, which combined an awareness-raising campaign and mentorship for young women, has been associated with dramatic improvements in girls’ enrollment and school attendance, along with positive effects on the age at marriage, reproductive health literacy, and contraceptive use (Erulkar and Muthengi 2009).

Finally, because child marriage and early pregnancy are among the key reasons young women drop out of school, efforts should be undertaken not only to increase girls’ agency and encourage them to delay early family formation but also to support pregnant girls and adolescent mothers who want to continue or return to school. In terms of education, Madagascar has specific reentry policies that set conditions for pregnant girls and adolescent mothers (HRW 2022). Lifting the burden of early pregnancy requires simultaneously addressing three challenges: (1) creating a supportive legal basis for education of pregnant girls and adolescent mothers, (2) promoting positive social norms and attitudes toward pregnant girls, and (3) alleviating the financial burden of childcare. Addressing these challenges can be achieved through targeted programs that provide financial and/or childcare support for young mothers (Groves et al. 2021; Jochim et al. 2022). Those efforts can be combined with the recently implemented Refresher Course Program in Madagascar that aims to support school reintegration of students who dropped out through the provision of financial and material support (Ralaiarjoana 2022).

**Strategic direction 4: Improve adult women’s literacy rates**

Widespread illiteracy among adult women in Madagascar makes focusing on adult education models equally important. Evidence from various Sub-Saharan African countries (Angola, Mozambique, and Niger) shows that education centers specifically for women and run by civil society or trained mentors from the community are effective in increasing women’s basic literacy skills (UNESCO 2015b, 2019). The fact that courses take place in a local language and are facilitated by a community member is what makes such models particularly successful. Another promising model is the Mother and Child Education Program piloted in Nigeria, which allowed women to attend literacy

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23 See Note 2, “Challenges and Opportunities in Health,” and Note 4, “Challenges and Opportunities in Enhancing Girls and Women’s Agency.”
classes with their young children, who could play in specifically dedicated spaces during the classes. The program led to the increase in women’s literacy and education rates, with positive spillovers for their children’s school attendance, performance, and learning outcomes (UNESCO 2013). Rich regional evidence also points to the success of community-mobilization programs (such as TOSTAN in Senegal and the Integrated Women’s Empowerment Program in Ethiopia) in promoting adult women’s literacy among many other outcomes (UNESCO 2013).
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>Region</th>
<th>Women’s illiteracy rate</th>
<th>Child marriage rate</th>
<th>Net secondary school attendance rate</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Analamanga (capital Antananarivo)</td>
<td>8.7 percent</td>
<td>17.9 percent</td>
<td>54.8 percent (vs. 45 percent of boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Atsimo-Atsinanana</td>
<td>54 percent</td>
<td>54.5 percent</td>
<td>16.5 percent (vs. 23.1 percent of boys)</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Sofia</td>
<td>25 percent</td>
<td>65 percent</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 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 PDs. 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</td>
<td>IDI</td>
<td>KII</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young women ages 18–24</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>3</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Young women ages 25–34</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Mothers of adolescent girls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Fathers of adolescent girls</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD (completed high school)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD (reentered school after dropping out)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD (completed professional training)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>PD (created small business)</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives from civil society</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives from education sector</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives of health sector</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Religious and traditional leaders</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>1</td>
<td>2</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Representatives from private sector</td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Local elected officials</td>
<td>1</td>
<td></td>
<td>1</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Total</td>
<td>6</td>
<td>8</td>
<td>6</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


