

# Gender Equality in Education: Policy, Practice, and the 'Girl-to-Girl Strategy' in Madagascar



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## ***List of abbreviations and translations***

APC	Approche Pour la Competance	Competency-Based Approach
CISCO	Circonscription scolaire	School district
Chef CISCO		Head of school district
CP1/2	Cours Préparatoire ½	1 <sup>st</sup> / 2 <sup>nd</sup> grade in primary school
CM ½	Cours Moyen ½	4 <sup>th</sup> / 5 <sup>th</sup> grade in primary school
CRC		Convention on the Rights of the Child
EFA/EPT		Education for All
EPP	Ecole Primaire Publique	Public primary school
FTI		Fast-Track Initiative
FRAM	Fikambanan'ny Ray amandrenin'ny Mpianatra (Association des Parents d'élèves)	Parents of students' association
HDI		Human Development Index
HIPC		Heavily Indebted Poor Countries Initiative
IMF		International Monetary Fund
MAP		Madagascar Action Plan
MDG		Millennium Development Goals
MENRS	Ministere de l-Education Nationale et la Recherche Scientifique	Ministry of Education and Scientific Research
NORAD		Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation
PRSP		Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper
UNDP		United Nations Development Programme
UNGEI		United Nations Girls' Education Initiative
UNICEF		United Nations Childrens' Fund
UPE		Universal Primary Education
Zandry vavy/ zandry		Little sister
ZAP	Zone Administrative et Pédagogique	Administrative and pedagogical zone
Zoky vavy/ zoky		Big sister

### Map of Madagascar



- ★ Capital City      ★ Regional Capital City
- ◆ Significant City    ● Important City - Town
- Attraction - Landmark    □ River    ▲ Highest Point

# 1) INTRODUCTION

Despite persistent global efforts to improve access to education, there are still 75 million children who are not receiving the education they are entitled to. Madagascar is one of the countries which have had great progress towards providing universal primary education (UPE) during the last decade. The progress can be attributed to the serious commitment that the government has made to education through the 2006 Madagascar Action Plan (MAP), the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All (EFA) Goals. The Malagasy government has, with considerable cooperation from donors, committed to reducing poverty, increasing economic growth and improving and expanding education. The effort has produced significant results in the education sector. The number of children enrolled in primary school has increased dramatically, from 1,5 million in 1995 to 2,8 million in 2002 and to more than 4 million in 2007/2008 (MEN N.d.). However, the quality of education has not been improved accordingly, and as stated in the Madagascar Action Plan (2006), “this success in terms of schooling remains relative insofar as the school retention rate and the internal effectiveness has yet to be significantly improved”.

Gender issues in education also remain to be addressed sufficiently. Among the world's out of school children, girls are overrepresented, constituting 55 % of the children (UNESCO 2008). Madagascar is one of the few developing countries where an equal number of girls and boys enroll in primary school (MENRS 2008), but also there the lack of gender equity in society affects girls' education. Girls face multiple obstacles to prolonged quality education, such as early pregnancy and marriage, heavy domestic duties, negative gendered stereotypes, and that parents do not see the value in educating girls (UNICEF 2007, MENRS and UNICEF N.d.). At the secondary level of school, there are fewer girls than boys who finish their education. It is clear that specific measures towards improving girls' educational situation are needed. United Nations' Children's Fund (UNICEF) and The United Nations Girls' Education Initiative (UNGEI) have recognized this need, and in 2002, they launched the “Girl-to-girl strategy” in Madagascar. The strategy is a peer mentoring programme aimed at reducing repetition and drop-out rates among small girls who are considered most vulnerable.

This study explores the situation of girls' education in Madagascar and the Girl-to-girl strategy in Morondava. With global education policy as point of departure, I look at common theoretical approaches to gender equality in education. Subsequently, I describe Malagasy



policies to promote girls' education, and explore the current educational situation for girls through the perspective of the girls participating in the Girl-to-girl strategy in Morondava. I intend to gain knowledge of how the strategy functions, how the girls perceive participating, and what impression their teachers and parents have of the strategy.

I also seek to place the strategy in the context of national and global policies on girls' education, and in the theoretical landscape of gender equality in education.

## **Motivation of study**

The global lack of gender equality in education, reflected in the lower number of girls in school is, to me, a provocative and sad fact. Millions of girls do not receive the education they have a right, a need and a desire to have. This injustice is one of the aspects that motivated me to do field work in Madagascar. Secondly, my home country Norway is an important contributor to the education sector in Madagascar, and has long historical ties with the island beginning when Norwegian missionaries settled there towards the end of the 19<sup>th</sup> century. Hopefully, the findings in this thesis may be able to provide some input to this cooperation, or to other policy actors such as UNICEF. Thirdly, Madagascar has had remarkable progress in education over the last decade, and is one of the few countries in Sub Saharan Africa which can demonstrate equal enrollment rates for boys and girls in primary school. I believed it would be interesting to go deeper into the case of Madagascar and understand the progress that has taken place despite the widespread poverty. As I am very concerned about the people and their own opinions and experiences, I wanted to go beyond statistics and do hands-on research with the people concerned. That meant interacting with and talking to primary school girls and the people close to them, such as their parents and teachers. In this way, I would be able to give voice to some people who are not often listened to, especially because they are poor and/or young.

I found the Girl-to-girl strategy interesting because it involves the girls and aims to make them active subjects as they help other girls with daily challenges and with improving their experience of going to school. As I could not find an official evaluation of the strategy, there was little more to refer to than strategy documents. By listening to the experiences of the people involved in the strategy at the local level, I hoped to get a better understanding of how this initiative functioned, and whether it has the potential to improve girls' schooling.

In order to understand the current situation in Madagascar and the context in which the Girl-to-girl strategy exists, we need to know more about the historical, cultural and socio-economic factors that have shaped Malagasy politics, society and people. In the following I provide a brief introduction to Madagascar to prepare the reader for the empirical findings and analysis.

## **Madagascar – a contextual introduction**

Madagascar is the world's 4<sup>th</sup> largest island, located in the Indian Ocean off the East coast of the African continent. The country covers 587,040 square kilometers and is home to about 20, 5 million people (2009 est.) (CIA 2009). Madagascar was an independent kingdom ruled by Merina kings and queens until 1896, when it became a French colony. In 1960, independence was regained, but political instability has been prevalent during successive dictatorial and socialist regimes. The instability has had serious consequences for the economy and the Malagasy people's situation.

In the first three months of 2009, there was political unrest and long lasting demonstrations against the President Marc Ravalomanana, and more than 170 people were killed in clashes between the military and the people. The former Antananarivo mayor and DJ Andry Rajoelina came to power after the forced abdication of the President Marc Ravalomanana, a takeover which was condemned and considered a coup d'état by the European Union, the African Union, the United States of America and Norway. The reactions from the international community were strong, and the country was suspended from the regional bodies African Union and the Southern African Development Community (SADC). In addition, non-humanitarian aid to the Malagasy government was frozen by several donors, including Norway, the UN Development Programme (UNDP), and the World Bank, who found that the new government did not comply with the Bank's demands to democratic governance, predictability and security.

Before the crisis, the public sector had been receiving official development aid (ODA) worth \$600 million, which constituted 75 % of the government's investment budget. The crisis provoked the stop of as much as \$200 million of ODA, sending a serious signal to President Rajoelina. The support to education through the Fast Track Initiative, worth 85 million dollar, was also decided not be renewed (Røhnebæk Bjergene, 2009). The sudden halt

in funding has a severe effect on the poor country. The Madagascar Flash Appeal for funds launched by the Madagascar Humanitarian Country Team noted that

*"The current delays and/or the suspension of government programmes, combined with the reduced capacity of the administration due to the sudden change in leadership, and the suspension of some international assistance, has severely curtailed the current government's capacity to meet the basic needs of the population".*

(In IRIN News, 2009).

On the first meeting with international donors, on March 31<sup>st</sup> 2009, the new president confirmed that the state was without financial resources, and he appealed to the international community to restart their funding. In the middle of June, the regional body SADC appointed the former Mozambican President Joaquim Chissano mediate between the parts in the political crisis, with the goal of "bringing the parties in dispute to a negotiated solution that [will] lead to the return of Madagascar to constitutional rule" (AllAfrica 2009). President Rajoelina has proposed to hold elections within two years. SADC, on the other hand, wants elections to be held "as soon as possible so that normality returns", said the SADC Executive Secretary, Tomas Salomao, "(...) so that the people of Madagascar can concentrate on what is fundamental for them, which is the elimination of poverty" (in *ibid.*).

### ***Demography and economy***

Madagascar has a very young population; 43, 5 % of the people are younger than 15 years (CIA 2009). This means that a large share of the population is of school age, and consequently, the demands for infrastructure are high, a demand that remains to be met. The average life expectancy is close to 65 years for women and 61 for men, considerably higher than for most other Sub Saharan countries, which may be partially attributed to the low prevalence of HIV/Aids, which in 2007 was estimated to be 0,1 % in Madagascar (*ibid.*). The average Malagasy woman gives birth to five children (*ibid.*), which means that the population growth rate is considerable. This also has consequences for the economic strains on family economies when it comes to sending children to school. Madagascar is a very poor country, and 71, 3 % of the Malagasy people live below the national poverty line (UNDP, 2007). A striking 85 % of the population has less than 2 dollars a day to live for (*ibid.*).

Half of the Malagasy population does not have access to an improved water source and 15 million people are without electricity in their homes. For those who do have electricity

there is a problem of power shortage and cut-offs, and some places, like in Morondava, power supplies are not stable. This leads to difficulties for those who depend on refrigerating goods, such as fish and dairy. The main products of export from Madagascar are rice, vanilla and seafood. The country's unique flora and fauna is a result of its isolated location over the last 70 million years, and makes it attractive for tourists appreciating wild life, preserved nature, and sandy beaches. Tourism is an important source of revenue for many Malagasy people. The population has origins from Asia, Africa and the Middle East, and belongs to 18 different ethnic groups, but they share a common language, the Malagasy. Malagasy is the official language in addition to French and English.

Madagascar receives financial and technical aid from bilateral and multilateral donors, and the key ones are the World Bank, UNICEF, France, Norway and Japan.

## ***Education***

The Malagasy school system has been influenced by the French system in terms of school calendar, curriculum, and language. French was the teaching language during colonial rule and 12 years after independence. In 1972, a 20 year long, poorly planned experiment of using Malagasy as teaching language started, a period called "la malgachisation" (the malagasification) (Meisfjord 2009). However, the lack of resources, including little support, led to the failure of the project. That was the reason why French was reinstated in schools in 1990. The last few years, however, the Malagasy government has committed itself to make Malagasy the language of teaching. Surely, when children coming from Malagasy speaking families start school where the teacher only speaks French, the possibilities for good learning outcomes decrease. Some teachers also lack a proficiency in French, and end up speaking a combination of French and Malagasy. Thus, problems arise when tests and exams are in French, and the students have been able to develop adequate levels of French to receive good grades.

The school year calendar, adopted from the French, with school starting in September and ending in June, does not suit local Malagasy conditions and needs. Many people are farmers and during times of harvesting, families depend on their children's participation in the field or at home looking after children and cooking. This means less time for schooling and preparation for exams. The government has started a process of changing the school year so that it better suits local realities, like in Morondava, where there are seasons for cyclones and

for harvesting rice. The reform will be carried out gradually by moving the date for school start one month ahead, which eventually will lead to a school start in January. This adjustment can hopefully contribute to better learning outcomes and less absence among students.

### ***Morondava***

The field work for this thesis was carried out in Morondava, the capital of the Menabe region on the West coast at the delta of the Morondava River facing towards the Mozambique Channel. It is relevant to present the town more in detail in order to understand the backdrop for the Girl-to-girl strategy which will be explored later in the thesis.

The Menabe region has about 600,000 inhabitants, the Morondava district has about 170,000, and the urban part of Morondava has 65000 inhabitants. About 70 % of the people in the area work in the agricultural and fishing sectors<sup>1</sup>. Important products of the region are beans, lentils, and seafood such as fish, shrimp and prawns. The main produce is rice, which can be harvested three times a year due to the irrigation channels, compared to twice a year other places. Planting and harvesting is labor intensive work, and families often depend upon the available manpower. This implies that children are needed for helping out their parents either by working in the fields or by looking after younger siblings. It is possible to imagine the negative effect this can have on their children's continuous schooling.

Due to the isolated location of the Morondava region, far away from the capital, and the poor conditions of the roads, the transportation of goods is costly and time-demanding. This may suggest that the levels of revenue from production do not reach their potential because the producers do not have access to bigger markets. Poverty is widespread in Morondava, and the climatic conditions, including dry winters and hot, wet summers with frequent and destructive tropical storms and cyclones, make people's livelihoods particularly vulnerable. In January 2009, the cyclone Fanele struck the West coast, including Morondava, where 80 % of the buildings were destroyed, 3000 people were left homeless, and the water sources were polluted (Irin Africa 2009a, 2009b).

In general, and perhaps as a consequence of the frequent natural disasters, the infrastructure in Morondava is old and run down. The partially paved and potholed main road in Morondava goes from the small airport, through the outskirts, into town, and down towards the sea. The main food market (Analakely) and most of the small shops are located along this

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<sup>1</sup> According to the Mayor of Morondava, Solo André Fanoïna, interviewed on Aug 11<sup>th</sup>, 2008.

road, and there are two gas stations, an internet café, a few restaurants and hotels. Most of the hotels and restaurants are situated along the road in the Nosy Kely peninsula, along the beach. There are two mosques in town, and several churches in the area. The population is a mix of Malagasy ethnic groups, Indo-Pakistani and Comorian immigrants.

The Morondava school district, or CISCO (Circonscription Scolaire), comprises 93 primary schools and 25 private schools. The schools are grouped into 12 administrative and pedagogical zones called ZAPs (Zone Administrative et Pédagogique).

## **Overview of chapters**

The thesis is divided into two parts and eight chapters. It opens with a general introduction to Madagascar including socio-economic, political and demographic facts and a brief mentioning of the initiatives and actors within the field of education. Research objectives and a justification of the study are also presented.

In chapter 2, the theoretical chapter, I mainly draw upon the work of Elaine Unterhalter (2003, 2007, and 2008) and her overview of three main theoretical approaches to gender equality in education: the instrumental, the rights-based and the capability approach. I also present the three forms of rights related to education identified by Wilson (2003); the right *to* education, the right *in* education, and the right *through* education. The criticism to the three approaches, and reasons for their popularity, are also discussed.

Chapter 3 discusses girls' education in an international policy context. I describe the situation of girls' education globally, key actors within the field of education and their initiatives. An overview of international conventions and goals related to girls' education is also presented, with focus and elaboration on the Education for All Framework and the Millennium Goals. This chapter also provides a literature review, presenting some of the literature within the field and experiences from initiatives in different parts of the world.

Chapter 4 explains the qualitative methodology used for the thesis, field work experiences, and ethical considerations related to having children as research subjects.

Chapter 5 is the first empirical chapter, in which I describe policy on girls' education and actors and initiatives within the education sector in Madagascar.

In chapter 6, on girls' educational situation, I use field work observation and interviews to describe the situation for some girls in school in Morondava. I give particular emphasis to explaining the barriers to girls' education, and how this affects their access to education, their situation within school, and future prospects through education.

In chapter 7, I trace the Girl-to-Girl strategy from policy to practical level. I provide the experiences of participating girls, their parents and teachers. Firstly, the chapter deals with the teachers' selection of participants and the criteria they use, their perception on the girls-only strategy, and observed changes in the participants. Secondly, it identifies the most common activities mentioned by the participants and their perception of being a zoky vavy<sup>2</sup> or zandry vavy<sup>3</sup>. Thirdly, it assesses the parents' level of awareness about the strategy and the perceived changes in their daughters.

In the eighth and last empirical chapter, I place the Girl-to-girl strategy in the context of global social policy, and in the theoretical landscape.

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<sup>2</sup> Zoky vavy: big sister in Girl-to-Girl strategy

<sup>3</sup>Zandry vavy: little sister in Girl-to-Girl strategy



**Morondava is situated in the Menabe region.**

**Menabe is Malagasy for red.**



## **2) THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK**

In this chapter I present the theories which I have chosen to use in the explanation of findings from my field work in Madagascar and to analyze policy on gender equality in education. I mainly draw upon the work of Elaine Unterhalter and her model of theoretical approaches to gender equality in education. In order to supplement her views, I include contributions from Madeleine Arnot and Shailaja Fennell. To begin with, as an introduction to the education policy field, I present Bob Deacon's theory on global social policy, which insists on seeing social policies not as isolated national issues, but as globalized, shared tasks.

### **Global social policy and global education policy**

During the last three decades, the increasing interconnectedness between people and processes across the globe has in a way made the world smaller. In the era of globalization, the diffusion and transfer of capital, information, technology and culture knows no borders. Globalization involves "tendencies to a worldwide reach impact, or connectedness of social phenomena or to a world-encompassing awareness among social actors" (Therborn 2000), and involves social, economic, cultural and political dimensions. The latter point includes changes in policy processes, hereby also within the field of education policy. Bob Deacon (2007) calls this the "globalization of social policy", and explains how this has taken place through two parallel processes.

Firstly, national policymaking has become highly influenced by a variety of international actors, such as the World Bank and UN agencies, the "new players into the making of social policy" (ibid, p.9). These "new players" gain influence over national policymaking in developing countries through loans, conditional aid and technical assistance on the condition that certain criteria are met. The development actors take different approaches to social policy, which can produce a situation where countries receive divergent policy prescriptions. In the education policy sector, for example, Deacon argues there is reason to claim the existence of "two global ministries of education" (ibid, p. 11). These two ministries would be the World Bank and the UN agencies, whose policy prescriptions have at times deviated.

The second process contributing to the globalization of social policy is the development of a new, supranational level in which social issues, like education, are addressed. One such example is the Education for All process, through which national

governments have agreed on global goals and committed themselves to work on issues related to education within and across national borders. Due to these parallel processes, Deacon argues that national social policies “can no longer be understood or made without reference to the global context within which the country finds itself” (ibid., p.3). For example, when the Malagasy government abolishes school fees and introduces a new focus on girls, we cannot ignore the policy environment in which Madagascar is located. The two processes described above influence Malagasy education policy in two ways. Firstly; the country receives various forms of conditional assistance from actors such as the World Bank and UN organizations, and secondly; the country has committed itself to global goals such as the UN Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All process. Malagasy education policy will be influenced in these two significant ways, and thus, the country’s education policies are not only expressions of national priorities and needs. Rather, they can be seen as expressions of global education agendas and the priorities of multilateral organizations in combination with national priorities.

Deacon refers to literature on policy transfer and policy diffusion<sup>4</sup> which shows how countries adopt or “copy” social policies from other countries, and how education policy thus becomes similar all over the world. One of the reasons why this may happen is coercion by powerful global actors. Thus, as a result, we see that “(...) national social policy choices reflect globalised policy options and contestations about these” (ibid, p.18). However, although education policies become more similar across the globe, this does not imply that key issues, like gender equality in education, are interpreted equally by the actors. On the contrary; development actors use different theoretical underpinnings and frameworks to justify or legitimize why they should put particular focus on girls in education.

According to Elaine Unterhalter, three main theoretical approaches currently dominate the international discourse on education and development. These are what she calls the “interventionist/instrumental” approach, the “institutionalist/rights-based” approach and the capability approach. In the following, I present and discuss the three approaches, drawing on Unterhalter’s book “Gender, Schooling and Global Social Justice” (2007), and others.

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<sup>4</sup> Deacon mentions Meyer et. al. (1997) and Dolowitz and Marsch (1996).

## **The instrumental approach to gender equality in education**

The instrumental approach involves looking at to gender equality in education as a tool to achieve other results, and draws on the Human Capital theory developed by Theodore Shultz in the 1960s, comparing the input and gains of labor to other investment inputs. Through such a comparison it became possible to measure the value of human labor, and hence the term “human capital” was conceived. Theoretical and economic studies (Psacharpoulos 1973 and Shultz 1962 in Fennell 2008) showed that returns to investment in education was especially high, indicating that developing countries should invest heavily in this sector in order to spark fast economic growth. The education of girls, and particularly primary education (Barro 2001 in Fennell 2008), was seen to give the highest rates of return in producing development, a development defined as economic progress, growth, and good governance (Unterhalter 2003, p.9). The provision of girls’ education would thus produce benefits to society and to the economy. Thus, the focus on girls’ education was not so much about a concern for the girls, but for the effects of their education for others. In this view, girls’ education became a means of promoting economic growth and societal benefit, and not a goal in itself.

In a historical perspective, the focus on girls and women gained prominence in the 1970’s with the women’s movement and the Women in Development (WID) paradigm. Attention was drawn to the importance of women’s work to economic development, partly as a result of the women’s movement’s increasing influence on development policy. The demand of the women’s movement was, in simple terms, to have the same possibilities as men, and that women should be part of development. As a result, the focus was put on women and how to “fix” their situation. Within the field of education policy, this has tended to entail an interpretation of “gender” as “girls”, and gender inequality as “the problem of girls” (Unterhalter 2007 and 2003, p.9). The focus has been to fix the “problem of the girls”, leading to a narrow focus on girls and girl-specific activities rather than a more holistic view on gender and gender relations. The instrumentalist approach interprets gender equality as gender parity, which suggests that the goal for education will be to get equal numbers of boys and girls enrolled in or attending school, and education is defined as “schooling”.

However, these interpretations have serious shortcomings, as critics have pointed out. Firstly, because “parity is a quantitative concept, equality is a qualitative one (Wilson 2003, p.3) and secondly, because “[g]ender parity on its own cannot tell us much about gender

equality in relation to accessing education, progressing through school, and living in a gender-equitable society after school” (Unterhalter, Rajagopalan, & Challender, 2005, p.6). Thirdly, statistics may present false pictures when a country has gender parity rate close to 1, which implies full parity, when in reality only 50 % of boys and girls go to school. Thus, with parity as the tool of measurement in education, the focus narrows in to having equal numbers of boys and girls in school. As Wilson argues so well, “[t]he human rights protection and promotion of gender equality requires more than *numerical equilibrium*, it also requires *conceptual equilibrium*<sup>5</sup>, and a conscientious effort to redress inequality, as it exists” (2003, p.3).

The Basic Needs approach followed the human capital approach as the predominant development paradigm. It was a critique of the cost/benefit analysis present in instrumentalist approaches, and an attempt to provide certain standards for what people need, also in terms of education. This resulted in a view of education as a commodity, and the approach thus fell into the trap of becoming similar to what it had been critiquing. Advocates of this strategy might have believed and still believe that the completion of a fixed number of years in school can be a panacea, but as the approach does not take local conditions and individual needs into consideration, this has to remain an illusion. However, as Unterhalter argues, the basic needs approach has perhaps been more “successful” than other strategies in terms of providing quantitative, measurable results, including the schooling of “millions of children” (Unterhalter 2007, p.55). The reason for its appeal to development actors and its relative success may be due to its measurability and its possibilities for clear policy messages. When the goal is to have an equal number of boys and girls in school, and to provide them with five or six years of education, firstly, it is easy to measure whether this goal has been achieved, and secondly, it does not pose any demands to the quality of the education or the systems which may be influencing the initial lower enrollment of girls. Clear policy messages such as “abolishing school fees, providing food for school, and digging latrines” (ibid.) are typical examples of what is seen to “work” in girls’ education<sup>6</sup>; that is, what can increase enrollment and thus increase returns to investment and to society.

This clear link between policy prescriptions and outcomes is perhaps the reason why instrumentalist approaches continue to maintain their popularity among certain development

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<sup>5</sup> My italics.

<sup>6</sup> See for example Hertz and Sperling 2004: What Works in Girls’ Education. Evidence and Policies from the Developing World.

actors, as we will see later. However, although this seems to be a simple and measurable approach to gender equality in education, in reality, such an approach addresses neither gender nor equality. When an instrumentalist approach is used as starting point for a project, such as keeping girls in school, girls' situation will not necessarily improve, and they may not have significant learning outcomes, because the approach does not focus on the quality aspects of the education.

## **The rights-based approach**

The second approach is what Unterhalter calls the institutionalist or rights-based approach. Since the adoption of the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UDHR) in 1948, the world has seen a large number of law reforms and partnerships intended to ensure schooling for the world's out of school-children. This development has been and still is concerned with the deepening of alliances and the reform of institutions and laws to provide equal rights through legal instruments.

Unterhalter argues that the rights-based approach is "generally concerned with addressing elements of want and inadequate provision" (2007, p. 35). It has a broader understanding of gender than the instrumentalist approach, and does not interpret gender simply as "girls", but as "constructed social relations and power" (Unterhalter 2003, p.9). Thus, the understanding of gender equality is based on the redistribution of power, sometimes termed equity (*ibid.*). The rights-based approach is suited to facilitate the smooth running of the instrumentalist approach. It is founded on the idea that institutions and legal frameworks can provide gender equality in education, and that this is an intrinsic goal - a goal in itself, and not a tool for other outcomes. The argument can be presented morally or legally. Unterhalter shows how rights to gender equality in education are granted on the basis of previous documents or instruments, and thus are believed to be "moral and real" (2007, p.64), in a kind of "legal positivism". The scenarios described in existing laws are interpreted as truths, implying that further philosophical explorations or discussions are unnecessary. Unterhalter argues that this is the reason for the popularity of the rights-based approach among many actors within the field of education, because when a standpoint is seen as a truth, it becomes indisputable.

There are ways of interpreting rights that make them more complex and specific. In a paper commissioned for the EFA Global Monitoring Report 2003, Duncan Wilson proposes

that we interpret rights and education more holistically than just counting the number of children in school or the amounts spent on schooling. He distinguishes between three forms of rights related to education: the right *to* education, the rights *in* education, and the rights *through* education. These rights can be (but are not necessarily) mutually reinforcing and can jointly create gender equality in education. The right *to* education concerns access to schooling and progression through learning, and the rights *in* education involve being treated fairly and equally in school. The rights *through* education signify access to the labor market, and fair treatment within the economic, social and political domains, such as receiving a fair wage and having possibilities for social, economic and political participation. In this perspective, education can contribute to the fulfillment of other human rights (Beetham 2000, Wilson 2003, Unterhalter, 2007) because it gives people knowledge about their rights and the tools to achieve or claim the rights. For example, knowledge about nutrition and health can make a significant difference to people's well being: because "in the absence of knowledge about what causes illnesses, or how to make the best use of available food, an otherwise adequate supply may prove insufficient to meet basic needs" (Beetham 2000, p.122).

Evidently, the rights-based approach to gender equality in education is multi-leveled, and hence, more difficult to implement and to evaluate in terms of results compared to an instrumentalist approach. Subrahmanian (2005, p.404) suggests how this can be done through providing an indicative list of what indicators could be used to evaluate whether rights to, within and through education are fulfilled. Firstly, indicators to equal access to education could be rates of enrolment, survival, completion, attendance, repetition, transition of boys and girls between education levels, and the number of male and female teachers. Secondly, indicators to equality within education could be subject choice, performance, teacher to student ratio, gender balance in classroom, teachers' qualifications, and factors shaping student performance such as student health, nutrition, domestic work burden, and discrimination in class and in society. Lastly, the suggested indicators to equality through education could be "male/female employment across different levels of education by gender", "gender differentials in wages across different levels of employment/education" (ibid.), and political participation. The latter, the rights *through* education, are probably the most difficult to achieve and to measure, partly because there are such a large number of factors influencing people's life choices.

So far we have seen that the fulfillment of certain rights can be difficult to achieve and to measure. In addition, it is possible to identify some other weak points in the rights-based

approach. The first has to do with responsibility. Although states may be committed to sign conventions and unite with others in partnerships, it is not always clear who has the responsibility to fulfill the rights, and to follow up on the commitments. Thus, the commitment may be presented on paper, and yet, the “[f]ormal acknowledgement of rights, including the right to education, does not mean either a state obligation to provide education of a certain quality (...)” (Chinkin 1999 in Beetham 2000, p.64). However, as Wilson points out, parties to human rights treaties are “obliged to provide initial and then periodic reports on compliance with the obligations therein” (2003, p.6). Still, as this indicates that countries are responsible for their own reporting, it does not seem likely that they will report non-compliance or human rights violations. Another criticism is that the existence of a right does not necessarily translate into practice because “[c]oncentrating only on the legal or rhetoric dimensions of rights gives no attention to the ways in which people gain resources to make use of their rights” (Beetham 2000, p.63-64). Additionally, the language of rights frequently used by organizations can look committing and promising, but in reality, it might be just simple and shallow rhetoric, as Unterhalter (2003, p.8) critically explains:

*“It is widely held in the Universal Declaration of Human Rights, in documentation associated with the EFA movement, with the Millennium Development Targets and in the Constitutions of many countries that education is an intrinsic good for women and men. But sometimes these statements appear merely rhetorical. Education is good partly because it helps secure other ‘goods’, for example securing a job, contributing to increased income, protecting one’s own health or the health of a child, participating in decision-making forums. But education is also a ‘good’ for women and men, because education is good in itself.”*

There are some other controversial aspects around the Universal Declaration of Human Rights (UNDHR) that can be included. Ray Kiely presents three areas of contention; firstly; he argues, there is nothing that can be called natural rights, because rights are historically specific, and “too easily ignores complex social and political realities” (Kiely 2007, p.110). Secondly, the rights are too selective, and “their origin in Western, individualist liberal thought means that social, economic and collective rights tend to be ignored” (ibid.). The third objection is related to the second, and concerns the claim of “universality” of the rights in the Convention, which, “is actually a claim made to justify Western rights (and power) over other ideas about rights” (ibid.). What is argued is that the human rights claim validity for all people although they were designed by few, and they do not capture local and individual needs. On

the other hand, proponents of human rights might argue that they do capture essential, basic needs that all people, independent of geographic location or socio-economic situation, can relate and consent to.

## **The capability approach**

The capability approach is critical towards the instrumentalism of the human capital and basic needs theory, and the universalism of rights-based approaches in relation to gender equality in education. It represents a critique against the focus on quantitative resources and outcomes, the preference satisfaction, and the lack of responsibility to fulfill rights.

The capability approach is often seen in relation to the human development paradigm pioneered by Mahbub Ul Haq. Amartya Sen contributed to the theoretical framework which became applicable to development processes. The capability approach was mainly developed by Sen, drawing on his work on quality of life, well-being, freedoms, capabilities and functionings. Sen argues that what matters are valuable “functionings” and capabilities to function – called *beings and doings*. One of the central issues is people’s ability to be able to be and do what they want. When we relate this approach to the field of education, clearly, the value of education will be different for different individuals. Nevertheless, there is wide consensus on the importance of education to people’s well-being.

The capability approach defines equality and education differently than the two approaches mentioned previously. Development is defined as freedom, equality is interpreted as equality of rights and capabilities, and education is seen as a basic capability (Unterhalter 2003, p.9). Capabilities are defined by Sen as “the opportunity to achieve valuable combinations of human functionings – what a person is able to do or be” (Sen 2005, p.153), or in other words; “people’s freedom to achieve what they have reason to value” (Sen in Unterhalter 2007). Gender equality in education is considered important in its own right, or intrinsically important, because it contributes to expanding other capabilities (Unterhalter, 2007, p.79), in three ways.

Firstly, “it helps establish conditions in which a wider capability set is available to girls and boys”, indicating that through education, children get *access* to more opportunities. Secondly, “because it alerts us to differential conversion processes linked to gender and other social divisions in regard to how resources are utilized to establish the capability set” (ibid.). The conversion process can be interpreted as the way a person is able to use the access to



opportunities mentioned in the first point. For example, a brother and a sister with equal education may not be able to utilize their education equally due to their different capabilities, and thus they may not be able to achieve the same functionings (Sen 1980 in Unterhalter 2007, p. 78). A Malagasy girl may not be able to find a job, or to continue on to secondary school like her brother due to varying reasons; she can be expected to look after siblings or to cook for the family, the school may not have adequate latrines, and the girl may not be able to attend school when she has her period, or she may have too little to eat because the men in the family are considered more needy of the scarce food resources available. Thirdly, gender equality in education can increase capabilities through “preventing human insecurity and establishing conditions for capabilities and freedoms” (ibid.). Sen shows how the ability to read and write can help underprivileged women to claim other legal rights, to react to unjust treatment, and they “tend to have greater freedom to exercise their agency in family decisions (...)” (Sen 2000, p.199)

The progress made in relation to gender equality in education, which for example has led to the superior performance of girls in school in certain countries, must not be used as an argument for giving less attention to the issue, Unterhalter argues. The argument has come from human capital theorists, and ignores the fact that gender inequality in society may prevent girls in making use of their education and in turning it into valued combinations of functionings (Unterhalter 2007). The capability approach is concerned with the expansion of life choices. One does not necessarily need to use the opportunity or right, that is the decision of each individual, but the existence of the opportunity is the key issue. Therefore, through the lens of the capability approach, gender equality in education is not achieved just because the right to education seemingly has been fulfilled, because an equal number of boys and girls attend school, or because they achieve similar results in school.

Sen’s work on the capability approach has extended to the concept of human development, and the development of an evaluative framework, the Human Development Index (HDI) in which countries are ranked based on literacy, life expectancy and per capita income. However, there has been criticism towards using the capability approach in development policy and action. One of the key arguments is that, unlike the instrumentalist approach, it is difficult to measure or evaluate because it focuses on opportunities rather than outcomes (Unterhalter 2007). How can we measure if people’s opportunities have increased or not, and more so; the reasons for why some people use them, while others do not? This may be one reason for reluctance to the approach from the side of development aid actors,

who tend to be concerned with the evaluation and measurement of results in their programs in order to consider whether the money is spent in a useful way or not. However, Ibrahim and Alkire have produced a list of “internationally comparable indicators of individual agency and empowerment” (2007, p.379). Agency can be measured through the following processes, leading to empowerment; *power over*, *power to*, *power with* and *power within*. The authors also present lists of survey questions that would operationalize these indicators to a practically feasible project.

A second criticism is that the capabilities approach does not consider cultural relations sufficiently (ibid.). For example, Frances Stewart claims that capabilities are oriented towards individual well being, and individual capabilities, while in reality, group capabilities should also be included as groups can also contribute to people’s well being (Stewart 2005 in Unterhalter 2007, p.89). A third point of critique is that any evaluation of the capabilities approach demands a vast data material that is difficult to produce. Unterhalter presents John Roemer (1996) as a key figure in this critique. In order to evaluate real gender equality, equal opportunities and capabilities successfully, school statistics come a short way in providing the necessary data.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have discussed three main theoretical approaches to gender equality in education as proposed by Elaine Unterhalter: the instrumentalist approach, the rights-based approach, and the capabilities approach. I have shown how an instrumentalist approach interprets gender equality in education in a narrow way, and uses it as a tool to achieve a higher goal, namely economic growth and development. In a rights-based approach, emphasis is placed on the legal provision of rights that can guarantee children education. This approach has been criticized for being weak in its ability to ensure that responsibility is taken and resources are set aside in order to fulfill rights. The capability approach takes a different stance towards gender equality, and focuses on opportunities rather than outcomes, but as seen, critics have warned that this makes the measurability and evaluation work difficult. However, this is not unique to the capability approach. As seen, attempts to evaluate the fulfillment of the rights within education and through education, may encounter similar challenges. Such evaluations would require extensive data material, a difficult and time-consuming task. It is therefore not surprising that some development actors tend to hold on to

instrumental approaches, as these can provide clear policy messages and straightforward evaluation due to their focus on aspects of quantity. However, as seen, instrumental approaches tend to overlook aspects and nuances related to individuals, culture, and the quality aspects of education, like the capabilities approach emphasizes, and they do not have the legal or moral grounding like the rights-based approach.



**Classroom in primary school in Morondava, Madagascar.  
Photo: J. Olsen**

### **3) GIRLS' EDUCATION - AN INTERNATIONAL POLICY CONTEXT**

In the first half of this chapter, I give an introduction to the international/multilateral education policy landscape by describing selected goals and agreements to gender equality in education. I also describe some key actors that are relevant to the Malagasy education policy field, and their approaches to gender equality in education. This presentation will function as a contextual backdrop to the Girl-to-girl strategy in Madagascar, and help us to orient in a policy field that is full of good intentions, goals and actors working to improve the situation of girls' education. In the second half, I discuss relevant literature and some key findings based on the readings.

#### **Commitments to gender equality in education**

Since the adoption of the Human Rights Convention in 1948, when education was recognized as a human right, many steps have been taken towards assuring this right. Countless times, the commitment has been reiterated, seemingly with new enthusiasm and determination every time. The goals have been renewed and new deadlines have been set, as former goals have not been accomplished in time. In addition, rights are provided for in legal documents, and governments have committed themselves to fulfill the rights through signing treaties and conventions. However, despite all efforts, desired goals such as universal primary education (UPE) and gender equality in education have not yet been achieved.

In the following, I will look into some of the existing international goals and commitments<sup>7</sup>. I will particularly focus on two that are at the center of attention today, namely, Education for All framework, and the Millennium Goals. Box 1 shows a brief historical overview of some previous commitments, which will show the vastness of initiatives.

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<sup>7</sup> Based on overview by Colclough (2007) and UNICEF.

### **Box 1. Overview of some key international commitments**

1948 Human Rights Convention

1960 UNESCO Convention against Discrimination in Education

1966 International Covenant on Economic, Social and Cultural Rights

1981 Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Discrimination against Women

1989 UN Convention of the Rights on the Child

1990 World Conference on the Education for All, Jomtien

1994 International Conference on Population and Development

1995 Fourth Convention on Women, Beijing

1995 World Summit for Social Development, Copenhagen

1999 Global Campaign for Education (GCE)

2000 World Education Forum, Dakar

2000 UN Millennium Summit; Millennium Declaration; MDGs

2005 International Conference on the Right to Basic Education as a Fundamental Human Right and the Legal Framework for its Financing, Jakarta Declaration

Two main messages can be drawn from this long, but still incomplete list. Firstly, that at the formal level, the commitment to improving the situation seems strong and the number of initiatives and goals is considerable. Secondly, that the large number inevitably provokes certain confusion and curiosity. One may wonder about the need for so many different initiatives and goals. It seems that there has been a considerable and constant need to reformulate and redefine the goals over the years. Two reasons for this seem clear: One is the lack of success in reaching former goals and commitments. Another is the need for new initiatives and campaigns to spark attention, interest and resources for working to improve education. Through this process, development actors and nations may publicly reiterate their commitment to education, and gain recognition and support.

Two of the initiatives that are currently at the center of attention in education policy

field are the Education for All framework and the Millennium Development Goals. Below I will elaborate on these and their goals for gender equality in education.

### ***Education for All***

In 1990, the first World Conference on Education for All in Jomtien, Thailand, was hosted by four UN agencies and attended by 155 governments (Unterhalter 2007). The conference was expected to bring a new focus on education. However, ten years later, perhaps due to the slow progress, it became necessary to reiterate the commitment. At the UN Education Conference in Dakar in 2000, the global partnership between countries, multilateral institutions and civil society was renewed with the purpose of increasing the efforts to improving education and providing primary education for all. The commitment was summarized into goals, and three of these have an explicit focus on gender:

*2) Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality;*

*3) Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults;*

*5) Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls' full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality;*

(UNESCO, 2000)

Today, all participating countries in EFA are required to produce national plans for education in accordance with EFA principles and goals. Every year a monitoring report shows the progress and status quo in relation to the goals, and points to steps which must be taken in order to achieve the goals by 2015. The 2009 EFA Global Monitoring Report declared that although significant progress had been made towards the achievement of the EFA goals, many of the goals, including Universal Primary Education, would not be reached by 2015 unless efforts are increased drastically. The 2009 report affirmed that education is a human

right, and presented ‘good governance’ as key to increase possibilities for reaching the goals. In a gender review of the report, UNICEF/UNGEI noted the lack of gender-aggregated data and the insufficient focus on equality in all forms, and asserted that “gender remains insufficiently emphasized” (2008, p.23). This may not only be the case for the EFA report, but also for the priorities of the countries committed to education for all. Global gender parity goals were not reached by the initial deadline of 2005, and have still not been reached as we write 2009. In a year or two, it is probably possible to predict whether the gender goals and the other EFA goals will be reached by 2015, and whether the goals will need to be redefined and rescheduled.

### ***The Millennium Development Goals***

In the year 2000, another significant milestone for the promotion of education and gender equality took place. The member countries of the UN adopted the Millennium Declaration. The eight Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) were declared by the UN Secretary General “to be the shared goals of the UN system, the World Bank, the IMF and the OECD” (Deacon 2007, p.76). All of the 191 members states to the UN committed to reaching the goals by 2015. The United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) was given the responsibility to operationalize the MDGs and examining a way of reaching them (ibid, p. 77). Two goals were specifically oriented towards gender and education, based on among others the EFA goals;

*2: Universal Primary Education. Ensure that by 2015, children everywhere, boys and girls alike, will be able to complete a full course of primary schooling*

*3: Promoting gender equality and empowering women. Eliminate gender disparity in primary and secondary education, preferably by 2005, and in all levels of education no later than 2015.*

Years after, as we write 2009, we know that these goals have not yet been achieved. The prospects for achieving the goals seem bleak for many countries, especially African countries South of Sahara. Most of the countries in Latin America and the Caribbean, Europe, Central Asia, East Asia and the Pacific (for which data exist) have already met or are on track to meet the target. In other regions the development has not been equally good, and only 3 out of 36 countries in Sub-Saharan Africa are on track to meet the goals of primary education by



2015 (World Bank, 2009). With a net enrolment rate of 96,2 % in 2006 (UNDP, N.d.), Madagascar seems to be one of the few which will meet the goal of universal primary education. Most of the global progress has taken place at the primary school level, and countries in Sub-Saharan Africa lag behind at all levels for gender parity in education, particularly at the tertiary level. In Sub-Saharan Africa, twenty out of thirty-seven countries (with available data) are not on track for gender parity in education, and another ten countries lack data. When it comes to gender equality and women's empowerment, "[f]emale participation in the labor force has increased, but labor force participation rates, occupational levels, and wages reveal continuing significant gender gaps" (ibid, p.225 ). The report noted that in all of the countries in Sub-Saharan Africa, except Liberia, women's literacy rates were lower than that of men.

## **Some key actors within the field of education**

In the multilateral setting, there is a range of actors who work to improve girls' education through different means and strategies. In the following, I will look at some actors who are central to the work on girls' education, and present some of their frameworks, policies and/or strategies on gender and education. I have chosen to look at the World Bank, UNICEF and UNGEI for three main reasons. Firstly, they are all important in the education sector in Madagascar. Secondly, their size, resources and organization vary significantly, and thirdly, they take different approaches to gender equality in education.

### ***The World Bank***

The World Bank is the largest international actor in education in terms of financial resources and investment, and as a result, the one with the most influence and impact. The Bank is committed to poverty reduction and development and the achievement of the Millennium Development Goals, and "eliminating gender disparity in primary and secondary education" is currently among its main goals (World Bank, n.d.). The Bank declares that their activities are geared towards "assisting countries' own efforts to advance gender equality", providing financial assistance through loans in addition to technical assistance, such as "analytical, advisory, knowledge-sharing, and capacity building activities" (ibid.) and mobilizing funding from donors and the private sector.

The World Bank is concerned with gender parity, and sees girls' education as a good investment, as it "yields some of the highest returns of all development investments, yielding

both private and social benefits that accrue to individuals, families, and society at large” (ibid.). The use of the term “returns to investment” in the statement alerts us to what approach the World Bank takes to gender equality in education. As described in the previous chapter, this jargon is the typical example of an instrumental approach. Girls’ education is seen as an investment that is expected to produce certain outcomes; and in this case, the desired outcome is to achieve economic growth and other development goals. In fact, the World Bank considers girls’ education as the most effective investment to achieving development goals, and provides a long list of the “compelling benefits” associated with girls’ education, including

*“the reduction of child and maternal mortality, improvement of child nutrition and health, lower fertility rates, enhancement of women’s domestic role and their political participation, improvement of the economic productivity and growth, and protection of girls from HIV/AIDS, abuse and exploitation.” (ibid.)*

In the statement, it seems that the World Bank considers girls’ education as an instrument to achieve other desired outcomes, and that the fulfillment of the right in itself is not the key priority. The Bank is concerned with the social and political outcomes of girls’ education, but it seems that the goal is that these factors ultimately contribute to economic growth.

### ***United Nations Children’s Fund (UNICEF)***

Another central actor within the field of education is UNICEF. The organization works with education in different ways, as development and implementation support, policy support and technical assistance for governments and communities, and it is committed to reach and help the most vulnerable children, including in crisis and post-crisis environments. The mandate of UNICEF given from the UN General Assembly is “to advocate for the protection of children’s rights, to help meet their basic needs and to expand their opportunities to reach their full potential”. UNICEF is guided by the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and sees education as

*“(…) a fundamental human right: Every child is entitled to it. It is critical to our development as individuals and as societies, and it helps pave the way to a successful and productive future. When we ensure that children have access to a rights-based, quality education that is*

*rooted in gender equality, we create a ripple effect of opportunity that impacts generations to come.*” (UNICEF, n.d.)

In this statement, we see that UNICEF takes a rights-based approach to gender equality in education: Children should be educated because it is a fundamental right. However, UNICEF also considers the improvement of girls’ education as particularly vital for the achievement of the other Millennium Goals. The organization sees the education of girls as

*“(…) a sure way to raise economic productivity, lower child and maternal mortality, improve nutritional status and health, reduce poverty and eliminate HIV/AIDS and other diseases. (ibid.)*

The argument in this statement is more similar to the argument of the World Bank, presented above. Girls’ education is considered a tool to achieve other desired outcomes, including economic growth. This stance is representative of an instrumental approach to education. So far, we have seen that UNICEF uses both rights-based and instrumentalist arguments to champion the importance of girls’ education. However, it is not limited to these two approaches. UNICEF also presents arguments in line with a capabilities approach when they warn against the non-fulfillment of improving girls’ education arguing that

*“(…) as long as girls are left behind, the goals of educating all children and ensuring real human development can never be achieved” (ibid.).*

Hence, as we see, UNICEF applies a broader theoretical understanding of gender equality in education than the World Bank. UNICEF clearly uses elements from the three different theoretical approaches presented previously; the rights-based, the instrumental and the capabilities approach.

### ***United Nations Girls’ Education Initiative (UNGEI)***

UNGEI is an example of a smaller initiative, launched in 2000 by the UN Secretary-General with the intention of assisting national governments to meet their commitments to gender equality and education. UNGEI is an alliance of partners, including UNICEF, UNESCO, the World Bank, the Global Campaign for Education, and the British, Danish, Norwegian and Swedish departments for international Development (DFID, SIDA, NORAD and DANIDA), and others. The alliance works to improve the quality and

availability of girls' education, to mobilize resources for small and large-scale interventions and programs, and to remove barriers to education, for instance school fees and violence in school. UNGEI also focuses on the needs of the most underprivileged, by using strategies that ensure their needs in policies, plans and budgets related to education. UNGEI aims to bring "gender issues into the mainstream of planning and policy, improving the quality of education for girls and boys, and advocating for specific actions in regions with high gender gaps" (UNGEI 2008). The vision of UNGEI is

*"A world where all girls and boys are empowered through quality education to realize their full potential and contribute to transforming societies where gender equality becomes a reality".*

(ibid.)

In the mission statement, they declare that partners should support and facilitate "an enabling environment where girls and boys can flourish and unleash their untapped potential" (ibid.). In these two statements, there are some key concepts worth noticing; related to "girls and boys", empowerment, potential and flourishing. Firstly, UNGEI does not speak exclusively about girls, but about girls and boys, which gives the impression that they focus on gender, and not only on girls' situation. Secondly, the language of potential and flourishing echoes some aspects of the capabilities approach presented in the previous chapter. The capabilities approach concerns widening the set of opportunities and possibilities available to people. UNGEI presents a mission to unleash the untapped potential of boys and girls, which could mean that children should be able to be and do what they want to.

## **Concluding remarks**

In this section, I have presented some key actors who work with gender equality in education and their different approaches to the field. The World Bank considers girls' education a "smart" investment which can be used as a tool to achieve other desired outcomes, like general development and economic growth. This is characteristic of an instrumental approach, in which certain means (girls' education) are used to achieve certain goals (economic growth and development). UNICEF, on the other hand, takes a rights-based approach to education, and sees it as essential for human development. The organization also emphasizes instrumental arguments for girls' education claiming that education not only

benefits the girls themselves, but also their families and the society in general. However, the instrumentalist argument that UNICEF presents differs from the arguments presented by the World Bank. This is perhaps because the starting point is a rights-based approach, and thus, the strategies and interventions are grounded differently. UNGEI, in contrast, take a more radical stance towards gender equality in education. This is apparent in the use of concepts like “flourish” and “untapped potential”, which resonates with a human development and capabilities approach as presented previously.

## ***Literature review***

In the following, I identify some key foci in research on gender and education. I mainly focus on literature which is related to education policy because that is the key focus in the thesis. I argue that much of the literature has focused on the quantity aspects of education and the “returns to investment” when spending on girls’ education. There is also a tendency that some donors, like the World Bank, are seen to dictate education policy in developing countries. In addition, there has been widespread conceptual confusion on the use of “girls” and “gender”, and therefore, a somewhat distorted view in policy and practice. In this section, I also look at the barriers to girls’ education that are commonly identified in the literature, and the state of girls’ education according to the reports and research available. I also present some examples from other African countries that in different ways are relevant to the case of Madagascar.

### ***Focus on quantity and returns to investment***

Until the 1980s, little research had been conducted on gender and education. The focus had been on the economic efficiency of educating girls based on theories of human capital. When researchers started paying more attention to the gendered aspects of education, the focus was still narrow, and girls’ access to school and to the labor market was at the center of attention (Swainson et al., 1998). Until 1998, most of the research in the field of gender and education had “concentrated on the access, persistence and attainment, the financing of education – the role of the teachers and the curriculum has not been adequately addressed” (ibid, p.4). Thus, we may say that the research done on girls’ education concentrated on the quantity aspects, and not so much on the quality aspects of education. In much of the recent literature on girls’ education, the presence of arguments based on human capital theory is evident, and so are arguments for the “economic efficiency”, “returns to investment” and

“high returns to economic growth” in relation to girls’ education (see for example Hertz and Sperling 2004, Klasen 1999, Shultz 2002, Lewis and Lockheed 2008).

An example of this approach to girls’ education is the report “What works in girls’ education” published by the independent, American organization ‘Council on Foreign Relations’ (Hertz and Sperling 2004). The key message in the report is that “educating girls pays off *substantially*”<sup>8</sup> (p. 1). The report suggests strategies to improve girls’ enrollment rates and the quality of education, and how to mobilize funding for the accomplishment of the strategies. The authors clearly take an instrumental view towards girls’ education by focusing on the effects external to the girls being educated;

*“Serious efforts, even in countries with highly constrained resources, are likely to yield impressive results, both for educational outcomes and for the society as a whole. In short, there may be no better investment for the health and development of poor countries around the world than investments to educate girls.” (ibid., p.83).*

The same line of argument remains prevalent in World Bank publications, for instance in a recent report where the authors of the introduction state that “[r]esearch conducted in a variety of countries and regions has established that educating girls is one of the most cost-effective ways of spurring development” (Phumaphi and Leipziger, World Bank, in Tembon & Fort, 2008, p.xix). Publications from the World Bank (2002, N.d.), does, like the organization, tend to focus on the economic benefits of educating girls and women, rather than the rights and empowerment aspects of education. When the notion of empowerment is mentioned, it is often in relation to access to the labor market and to being economically empowered, as exemplified in the introduction below (World Bank, N.d.):

*“Gender equality is not just a women’s issue, it is a development issue. Women’s economic empowerment is essential for economic development, growth, and poverty reduction not only because of the income it generates, but also because it helps to break the vicious circle of poverty. Educating girls and women is critical to economic development.”*

The World Bank publications present extensive evidence for the advantages of girls’ education to economic development and to society in general. The message is clear; poor and developing countries make a smart move in financing girls’ education due to the growth and

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<sup>8</sup> Authors’ italics.

benefits it brings to society in general. Some of the benefits mentioned frequently are reduced child and maternal mortality, reduced fertility, and children's education. The mantras should be known to most people now; "educate a girl, and you educate a whole family", and "educated girls have fewer, healthier and more educated children".

### ***Donors dictate?***

Evidently, donors such as the World Bank develop policies based on what they believe will work. This means that the policies of the Bank will focus on the economic aspects of education, including when they plan and review their interventions. The last decade the amount of attention directed towards the importance of gender in education, especially in relation to the achievement of global goals, has increased considerably. Swainson et. al. (1998, p.115) note that much of the donor-funded research which has been conducted "has often been oriented towards meeting donor goals rather than those of the recipient governments". The authors also argue that the information obtained through such research has to a large extent not been available locally or been utilized in a fruitful manner. This indicates that research which could have been used to change policies and interventions to the better, remain unexploited. The donors may not have interest in sharing their findings with national governments as that may put unwanted pressure on the donors to change strategies.

Due to the presence and power of a large number of donors, developing countries are not completely autonomous in the development and implantation of education policies. For example, in 1998, Swainson et al. noted that there were nine and ten actors<sup>9</sup> in the education sector in Malawi and Tanzania respectively, and that aid to education largely had been directed towards the provision of physical infrastructure, such as books and classrooms, and to little extent to improvement of the education system and quality. Donors also decide what part of education they want to focus on, and the last two decades there has been a heavy focus on primary education. The focus on gender has become vital with donors, though with different moral and theoretical underpinnings as seen previously in this chapter.

### ***Girls' vs. gender***

Many critics have argued that the "gender" focus presented in activities by donors often has been reduced to a focus on girls, and not on the gendered relations in and outside

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<sup>9</sup> Including USAID, UNESCO, DFID, NORAD, CIDE, JICA, UNFPA, UNICEF and DANIDA (p.75).

school. As Swainson et.al. (1998, p.116) note, “there has been a general reluctance on the part of donors not to upset the status quo in the recipient countries as far as gender is concerned”. This is perhaps due to exaggerated respect for the gendered social reality in a country, or to high degrees of culture relativism with the donors. There might also exist a conviction that girls’ educational situation can be improved in an isolated way by just focusing on them. Another reason might be the nature of gendered relations; they are not tangible, concrete or easily measurable, and thus, the degree of “success” of interventions is hard to measure. Social structures can be difficult to change, and will not change quickly, and thus working with this requires long-term perspectives. However, it is certain that many donors and actors strive for quick and measurable results, and thus, working with deep social structures may seem out of reach or outside their mandate.

### ***Country examples***

Several studies also offer empirical cases of the development in the education sector and the implications for girls’ education. A study called “Promoting girls’ education in Africa. The design and implementation of policy interventions” (Swainson et. al. (1998) provides the examples of Malawi, Tanzania and Zimbabwe. Several of the findings in the study are of relevance, and comparable to the situation in Madagascar, and will be elaborated on below.

From 1993/94 to 1994/95, Malawi doubled the number of children enrolled in school from 1,9 million to nearly 3 million due to the implementation of free primary education. This increase is very similar to the enrollment increase that took place in Madagascar from 1995 and onwards and thus the challenges faced and the development in Malawi can be relevant to what Madagascar has been experiencing since the turn of the century. In 1998 Swainson et. al. noted that the efficiency of the education was poor due to high levels of repetition and dropout, and that half of the children drop out before reaching grade 5. The authors also noted that sharply increasing rates of drop out were linked to the deterioration of the quality in education following the increase in enrollment. Additionally, the dropout rate of girls increased more than that of boys. The gender gap in passing the Primary School Leaving Certificate (PSLC) was especially significant in rural areas. If we turn to the secondary school level, Swainson noted that only 12 % of those who had passed the PSLC continued on to secondary school. Again, the numbers are similar to the ones in Madagascar, although with a 10-year difference. The authors also argued that “[t]he overall quality of secondary schooling is extremely low as evidenced by high pupil: teacher and high pupil: classroom ratios, and the



very poor availability of teaching and learning materials” (ibid, p. 15).

The authors of the report also address the issue of constraints to education, presented as socio-economic, socio-cultural, and school-related factors. Economic constraint is the most common reason presented for dropout and non-enrolment (ibid, p.22). Even though school fees were abolished, parents could not afford buying clothes, or do without the contribution to domestic duties, especially the ones of the girls. Socio-cultural factors have also been reported to restrict girls’ education, in particular early marriage and early pregnancy, as shown by several researchers<sup>10</sup>.

Another interesting study by Lloyd, Mensch and Clark (2000) looked at the effects of the primary school quality on drop-out and retention in Kenya. In 2000, Kenya had, like Madagascar has today, enrollment rates close to 100 in primary school, and a higher drop-out rate for teenage girls. The authors found that factors relating to family and to the school environment affect girls differently and more severely than boys: “Individual and family factors, such as age, mother's education, religion, and parents' marital status, are all statistically significant factors affecting the probability of dropout, many with stronger effects for girls than boys” (p.143). The authors also assert that despite the existence of apparently similar school conditions, boys and girls experience school differently due to factors like “differences in curricular opportunities within the school; differences in treatment by individual teachers; and differences in rules, regulations, and administrative practices” (ibid, p.114). Other studies have provided other school-related factors to explain higher dropout and lower enrollment and achievement among girls in school. One of these factors involves the negative gender stereotypes present in textbooks, teaching material and in teacher attitudes, as we will see in the case of Madagascar in chapter six. The distance to school also plays a role, as girls are more exposed to sexual, physical and psychological harassment and violence on their way to school.

## **Conclusion**

In this chapter, I have presented some key actors within the field of education, and some of the literature on gender and girls’ education. We have seen that actors, exemplified by the World Bank, UNICEF and UNGEI, take rather diverse approaches to gender equality in education. We have also seen that the number of agreements and goals set out to improve

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<sup>10</sup> Swainson et al. list Kainja 1990, Sagawa and Thawe 1990, Grant-Lewis 1990, Kapakasa 1992, Hyde and Kadzamira 1996, and others.

education have been considerable, although this has not yet produced the desired outcomes of universal primary education and gender equality in education.

In the available literature on education and gender equality there has been a focus on the tangible, measurable results, and reports to support the positions of the development actors. Although the policy level has been subject to examination and analysis, little has apparently been done on the practical project level. The voices of the people in concern have not been taken sufficiently into consideration, and when they have been heard, it has often tended to be in relation to legitimizing certain points of view.

I would argue that what is also lacking in the field is a more holistic, integrated study of different levels, from policy to project level, which can address the gaps between the levels, and the gap between rhetoric and action. This study is an attempt to fill some of this gap. I do this by tracing initiatives for the improvement of gender equality in education from the policy/top level to the project/individual level. The first step towards bridging the gaps would be to reveal and identify them. Through this new awareness, inspiration could grow, as well as initiatives towards increased consistency, coupled with determination and consensus at the international policy level to increased efforts and resources at the local level.



**“I can write my name, look!”  
Zandry vavy, Morondava  
Photo: J. Olsen**

## **4) METHODOLOGY AND METHODS**

### **Introduction**

This chapter presents the methodology and methods used for the gathering of knowledge to this study. The chapter will provide a justification for the choice of methodology, describe the course of the field work and illustrate the challenges and ethical dilemmas encountered in the process.

The main knowledge gathering for this research was conducted during three months of field work in Madagascar. The objective was to explore the situation of girls' education in Madagascar, and the functioning of the "Girl to Girl Strategy". When investigating social realities such as people's relationships, experiences and feelings, qualitative methods can provide in-depth information through open-ended interviews and observation. My intention was to use a variety of qualitative methods in the field, partly to obtain different types of information, and partly to adjust to the participants, as many of my participants would be children, involving certain methodological challenges. I chose to do structured and semi-structured interviews with teachers, principals and parents, and informal talks, drawing activities and observation with primary school girls. These methods could give room for the participants' sharing of personal experiences, feelings and points of view (see for example Kvale 1997, p. 1), something which quantitative methods cannot easily provide. The intention of this field work was precisely that; to capture people's experiences and opinions on girls' education and the Girl to Girl Strategy. Besides, considering the young age of many of the participants (primary school age), quantitative methods were considered as less capable of gathering rich information from the girls' perspective. Drawing activities, in combination with writing, however, proved to be the purposeful method for capturing the views of the young girls.

### **Preparing for field work**

An important criterion for the success of any project is careful planning and preparation. The process of preparing for this field work started five months prior to the departure to Madagascar. During the planning period, I developed a project proposal, interview guides and a plan for the field, with close support and advice from fellow students and my supervisor. I also contacted academicians who had done field work in Madagascar

who could comment on the proposal and give useful advice for the field. I read Malagasy newspapers in French on line and documents on the Girl to Girl Strategy, education reform and girls' educational situation in Madagascar. Having done field work in a developing country before, I was prepared for the challenges the context could imply for the research and how my role as an outsider could influence the knowledge gathering. Hence, to minimize this uncertainty I planned and organized the field work thoroughly to prepare for the unpredictability and to be able to organize a productive field work. Nevertheless, no matter how much one plans a head, there are always a number of uncontrollable factors such as transportation, weather, health situation and the willingness and availability of participants which could influence and even determine the outcome of the field work.

### ***Gatekeepers and the site selection***

In order to decide where to do the field work I contacted UNICEF, who is responsible for the Girl to Girl Strategy, and acquired a list of the school districts where the Girl to Girl Strategy had been implemented. I also got important advice from a former doctorate student who knew the country well after many years of research in Madagascar. I chose to go to the Morondava school district because it met the criteria I had set out: there was a rural/urban setting, the strategy had been implemented for some time, and the accessibility from the capital was not too difficult.

UNICEF was my main gatekeeper as I was investigating the Girl to Girl Strategy, and I was dependent on them to get information about the strategy and the places where it had been implemented. I was in touch with the organization before and during my field work, and they provided me with suggestions of places to visit. On one hand, this meant that UNICEF was able to influence the place of the field work, but on the other hand, I felt confident that they provided me with sincere suggestions, and this was a practical and time-saving way of arranging it.

Upon arrival in Morondava I contacted the head of the school district, Chef CISCO, and got the permission to carry out school visits. Next, I met the woman responsible for the Girl to Girl Strategy in the CISCO, who presented me with a list of schools. I was interested in visiting schools both in urban and rural areas, and schools where the strategy worked well and not so well. However, due to the poor condition of the roads, and the need to spend at least 4 days in each school in order to carry out the necessary knowledge gathering, I chose four schools which were within acceptable reach from town. When visiting the schools, the

permission of the principal was always sought before the initiation of any interview. Additionally, the teachers were asked for permission to talk to the students. The principals and teachers did not agree with me that it was necessary to ask the parents or guardians for permission, and this was a bit difficult to accept, with the Norwegian ethics guidelines in mind. The solution was that we carried out drawing activities and informal talks with the girls at school, and when we wanted to talk to them more or try to do something similar to an interview, we would walk home with the girl and talk to her parents or guardians.

### ***Selection and recruitment of participants***

The main participants in this study were primary school girls in 1<sup>st</sup> and 4<sup>th</sup> grade who were “zoky vavy” (big sister) and “zandry vavy” (little sister) on the Girl to Girl Strategy. The teachers introduced the research team to the zokys and zandrys, and they were given a presentation of us and the project. I would explain that I was there to understand the Girl to Girl Strategy, and maybe they could explain it to me through drawing and talking. Several times, I underlined the voluntariness in the participation, and that there was no problem if they didn’t want to. In one school, half of the girls withdrew after being given this information, and the other half, about five girls, decided to come with us. This was reassuring and to me, it meant that they felt safe to say “no”. The teachers sometimes tried to tell the girls to go and talk to me, and it may have been perceived as a command by the girls. In one school, the school principal more or less ordered the girls to talk to me, and then I would repeat what I already had told her; that it had to be voluntary, if not, it would be of no use.

The other participants in the study were teachers, principals and parents/guardians. I would ask the school principal to introduce me to teachers responsible for selecting zokys and zandrys, and ask the teachers if they wanted to do an interview. They all consented, and they had a lot to say, either about their own situation or their impressions and experiences with the Girl to Girl Strategy. The girls’ parents or guardians were also contacted in order to obtain consent for the girls, and to ask them if they would accept to be interviewed. The parents were given information about the researcher and the intention of the study, and they were asked if they had time some other day to do an interview. All of the parents and guardians agreed to this, although two parents were a bit hesitant because they had to work if they had electricity and thus they would not be available for interviews.

In one school, the teachers informed the students that they should tell their parents to come to school the next day, and in another school, we accessed the parents/guardians by

asking the girls if they thought we could come home with them and talk to their parents or superiors. In the fourth, the teacher contacted two mothers who lived close to the school. Below is an overview of participants that I recruited and the type of method used.

**Box. 2. Participants and methods**

Type of participant	Interviews	Informal talks	Drawings <sup>11</sup>
Zoky vavy		10	19
Zandry vavy		15	17
Teachers	8		
Principals	4		
Parents/guardians	18		
Ped. Responsible CISCO	2		
Mayor of Morondava	1		
UNICEF	1		
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>34</b>	<b>25</b>	<b>36</b>

**The main research phase: Knowledge gathering**

***Interviews***

The principal and at least one teacher in all four schools were interviewed by using an interview guide. The principal was in three out of four cases interviewed without others present, and they seemed free to talk, considering that they told me personal opinions on other teachers. The way they treated me and the amount of information they gave me varied greatly. One principal gave a spontaneous and thorough analysis of girls’ situation in her area. Another was extremely distracted and didn’t seem to have time to talk, but as soon as we sat down with a teacher, she showed up and tried to take over the interview.

A different interview guide was used when talking to the parents and guardians. Questions had to be reformulated after the first interview as the participants had difficulties understanding the questions. In two schools, the parents came to school and we carried out the interview there, while in the two other, we carried out the interviews in their home. At school we would interview 2-3 parents at the same time, which created dialogue and some discussion between the participants. Although the research team tried to balance the speaking time between the participants, the older parents and teachers either took or were given more time to

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<sup>11</sup> Drawings made by zokys also include text (explanations of what is or does the zoky/zandry)

speak than the others. Sometimes, when the older mother has expressed herself, the younger would say; “I think the same”. In this way, some information might have been held back, but on the other hand, the group interview created a dynamic effect. During an interview with two fathers this was evident, as they expressed clearly opposing views on girls’ education.

When parents were interviewed at home, we would sit outside the house on a mat or in the sitting area inside the house. Sometimes children would approach the parent during the interview or try to listen. Children who could be by themselves were encouraged to go play so that the parent could talk freely without interruptions and without having to moderate her- or himself. At one occasion the mother and father of a zoky were interviewed together, but this didn’t seem to limit them in expressing what they thought, although they had different opinions on core issues. Their disagreement was expressed in a straight forward way towards the interviewer. Sometimes, if the participant agreed, I would use a recorder in order to capture what they said word by word. Other times, I would note down what my interpreter said.

### ***Drawing activities and informal talks***

When children are the main participants in a study, one encounters certain methodological and ethical challenges. The question is how to balance the need for rich information with the need to protect the children and create a trustful environment. I solved this by arranging drawing activities with groups of girls. This contributed to create a positive and trusting environment. First, the zandry vavys, the “little sisters”, who ranged from 6 to 11 years of age, were informed about the study in an understandable way. Then they were given sheets of paper and colored markers, and they were asked to draw themselves in school. While drawing or when they had finished we would ask some questions about school, who and what they had drawn.

I had not planned drawing activities with the zoky vavys, who were between 10 and 14 years old. However, in our first session, it became obvious that they were timid and quiet. The solution was to improvise a drawing activity which could break the ice. I sketched up stick people (stick girls) on paper, supposed to represent the zoky and/or zandry, and asked the girls to form groups of two to three. They were asked to color and write around the drawing who is this girl, and what does she do with her zoky or zandry. This improvised activity proved to give very insightful and valuable information about the activities and relationship between the zoky and zandry, and we did this in three of the schools. Many of the girls were quite shy to



answer questions, but in this way, they were able to express themselves through writing. Both the zokys and zandrys seemed to really enjoy the activities, and the zokys had to cooperate to write and color their figures.

### ***Observation***

Observation of zokys and zandrys was also supposed to be part of the knowledge gathering. The intention was to walk together with the zoky and zandry home from school, and observe how they would treat each other. However, this proved to be very difficult and unfortunately had to be left out as a method. When we walked with the girls, hordes of children would follow suit. The setting became everything but natural, and the zandrys started holding my hand instead of their zoky's hand. The children seemed to find it amusing that a *vazaha*, a foreigner, was walking with them. However, I was able to do some observations of the girls when they were drawing, of principals and teachers interacting with children, and parents interacting with children. These observations were random and not planned for, and were not done in a structured manner. Although they cannot be analyzed in a structured way, they can contribute to the overall impression of the situation.

### ***Secondary data***

In the field, I gathered relevant documents and information to be used as additional sources in the study. These included statistics on enrollment, drop-out and repetition from all four schools, selection forms for the Girl to Girl Strategy from 11 schools, UNICEF material on the strategy and education politics, and official education strategy documents.

### ***The research assistant***

The cooperation of a research assistant during the course of this field work was absolutely invaluable. In advance I had contacted the deaf school where I was going to live to ask if they knew a person who would fit my criteria; female, young, preferably educated and Malagasy/French speaking. The principal of the deaf school had announced this in church, and the very first day I came to Morondava I met Oly. She was 27, like me, she was taking a bachelor in International Business, and she spoke not only Malagasy and French, but Norwegian. She had lived in Norway for three years some years back, and still knew Norwegian. She was interested in the job, and from the next day we started working together. In the beginning we would spend a lot of time going through the goals and methods of the

upcoming study. She would read material in Norwegian and French in order to understand the Girl-to-Girl Strategy. She had no previous experience in working as an interpreter, and it was important for me to tell her exactly what I wanted and expected from her. After a short while she would translate automatically when I spoke to people in French. Although French is one of three official languages and teaching language in Madagascar, even teachers and other adults wanted to do interviews in Malagasy. I would pose questions in French, which participants would usually understand at least parts of, and then Oly would translate my questions and their responses to and from Malagasy and French.

There are certain potentially problematic issues related to using an interpreter. Without a doubt, something happens to the information when it is translated from one language to another, especially when the interpreter has not been trained thoroughly, and one of the languages is not her mother tongue. In this setting, a Malagasy person would speak, Oly would translate into Norwegian, and I would write this down in Norwegian or English. The danger in this is that the original meaning gets lost. I like to think that we somehow avoided this by making sure that Oly involved herself and knew my project and my goals well. I also asked follow-up questions to see if I understood the answers correctly, and I repeated questions by asking them in a slightly different way. The feedback I got then was often; “but I already answered that question”.

During drawing activities, I would instruct my assistant about what I wanted, and she would function as an assistant as well as an interpreter. Before, during and after interviews, she would also function as a cultural guide to me, and she could explain behavior, statements or events that I could not quite grasp due to my different background. Needless to say; without my research assistant, I would not have been able to do this field work, and without her, it would not have had the same quality.

## **The end of the field work**

After the main knowledge gathering phase was over, data were processed, and interviews were transcribed. My research assistant spent a lot of time transcribing, and we later spent a great amount of time going through the transcription and to clear potential unclear points. All of the interviews were written out on the computer. The last phase of the field work consisted of preparing for and doing final interviews. I visited three of the families again in order to hear about their situation, their daughters, and their thoughts on schooling

and the start of the school year in September. I presented my preliminary research findings for the person responsible for the Girl to Girl Strategy in Morondava, and we had a fruitful discussion. In the end, I interviewed the Mayor of Morondava and UNICEF, in French and English respectively, without my assistant.

## ***Analysis***

After returning to Norway, I started categorizing, coding and analyzing the data. The analysis of qualitative material involves a “complete process of analysis requires that the data be organized, scrutinized, selected, described, theorized, interpreted, discussed and presented to a readership” (Ryan, 2006 p.95). This process is the key to unravel the findings, as the data should not be expected to “speak for themselves”. It is through organization, categorization and discussion that we can go beyond the raw data and into its meanings and implications. For me, the process started by reading and going through all of the material. The research questions laid the base for what topics I should explore in the material. Due to the large number of interviews and material I had, I had to be selective, and leave out certain parts. As Ryan suggests, the goal was to have “quality and key insights rather than quantity and easy generalizations” (ibid, p.103). My focus was thus on the girls’, parents’ and teachers’ experiences with the Girl-to-Girl strategy, the girls’ activities at home, and the activities the *zokys* and *zandrys* did together. During the analysis I made sure to change the names of the participants and to avoid using revealing personal facts about them, in order to protect their privacy.

## **Ethical issues and challenges**

*“Conducting international fieldwork involves being attentive to histories of colonialism, development, globalization and local realities, to avoid exploitative research or perpetuation of relations of domination and control. It is thus imperative that ethical concerns should permeate the entire process of the research, from conceptualization to dissemination, and that researchers are especially mindful of negotiated ethics in the field.”*

(Farhana Sultana 2007, p.375)

The statement above introduces this section in an insightful way. Sultana illustrates how researchers must tread carefully and thoughtfully throughout the entire research process, and particularly during fieldwork, in order to respect our research participants. This was the

objective during the course of my field work and further thesis work. In the following sector I explain how I dealt with ethical issues such as informed consent, children as research subjects. I also reflect on my positionality as a researcher and the position of my research assistant.

### **Informed consent**

Before the initiation of any interview and activity, the participants were informed about the intention of the study. A sheet of paper listing all the necessary information was read out aloud and translated to the participants. The information included intention of study, voluntary participation, anonymity, possibility to withdraw and refrain from answering questions, use of interpreter, etc (see appendix). The consent to participate and/or carry out an interview was then sought orally. This was due to the assumption that many of the people would be illiterate; the girls in school might not have sufficient reading skills to understand what it said, and the parents might not know to read. In order to avoid intimidating those who didn't know how to read and write, the consent would be obtained orally. However, there was one challenge in seeking the informed consent; many participants, and particularly parents, did not seem to appreciate or understand the need for this session. They would ask for the "real" questions, or if we could not just start right away. It seemed that they thought by agreeing to an interview the first time we asked and inviting us back to their home, they had already consented to do the interview. Thus, the introduction seemed unnecessary to them, and they were impatient or eager to get to the "real" questions. Despite their impatience, I considered this was something that needed to be done according to Norwegian research ethics, and in order for the participants to know about the project and their rights in relation to the interview.

### **Children as participants**

In this study, children and young girls are among the main participants. That requires a particular focus on research ethics, as children are more vulnerable than adults and may not be aware of the possible consequences of their actions. According to Alderson (in Fraser et al. 2004, p.98), we can relate to three ethical frameworks or approaches: "the principles of respect and justice", "rights based research" and "best outcomes based ethics". In the first, one is concerned with doing the correct thing, for example by "always respecting children as sensitive dignified human beings" (ibid.). The second includes children's rights such as

providing, protection, and participation, and the third is concerned with “how to avoid or reduce harm and to promote benefits” (ibid.). Anderson suggests that researchers find out which one they prefer. Before consulting with the literature I had the idea of elements of each approach; gathering knowledge in a morally correct way, not causing harm and making participation a positive experience for the children. According to research ethics, when children are participants, parent(s) or guardians should be informed and give consent for their children to participate in any research activity. The use of children in research is not entirely straight forward, and extra care has to be taken before, during and after interviews and/or activities. In this study it was important for me to give the girls a voice so that they could share information about their situation and the strategy, which is supposed to give the girls a better chance in school. I was not looking for sensitive or private information, and the voluntariness of participation was extremely important to me. However, as mentioned above, it was a challenge to make the teachers understand that they shouldn't force their students to participate.

In Madagascar, teachers can be very authoritative, and violence in school, although forbidden by law, is not unusual. During an interview with a teacher, we heard a teacher in the classroom next door hitting students. This was a sad and shocking thing to realize for someone who has never seen violence being exercised in a classroom before. In a school where this is common, it is likely that the students do what the teachers tell them, also when it comes to talking to a foreign student. Informing the teachers and students before initiating any interview was therefore vital. The children were told they could choose not to participate, and they could withdraw if they wanted. They were told to refrain from answering questions if they wanted, and to treat other participating students with respect. For example, this would imply not laughing at or making fun of other students' drawings. This was also an important step in creating an environment of trust.

An important aspect of this field work was to give room for the children to express themselves on their own terms, and not to force the information out of them. I sought to build rapport and create a positive environment during these activities, to facilitate for giving the participants a good experience. In fact, the girls seemed to really enjoy drawing and telling me about their life in school and at home. We were told that they had let their teacher know everything about what they had done, and the teacher seemed pleased as well.

Another ethical issue was the one of taking the precious time of the girls. Most of them had a lot of responsibilities in the house, and this implied they might not have any free

time during the three hour lunch break. Zokys were expected to walk their zandry home, and then come home for lunch. In the afternoon they would return to school, and there would be little free time between the end of the school day and the sunset and dark at 6 pm. Sometimes girls would have the afternoon off, but the classrooms would be occupied by other students, and this also limited the access to our meeting ground. Keeping in mind the vast responsibilities I knew the girls had at home; fetching water, doing dishes, looking after smaller siblings and cooking, I was conscious of not asking them for too much time, maximum an hour a session and we did not do more than two sessions with the same girls.

## **Challenges**

The main challenges during the course of field work were the limited time I had, lack of electricity and some health problems. When planning the field work, I related to a school calendar for Madagascar the school year 2007/2008 made by the Ministry of Education (MENRS), provided by UNICEF. However, upon arrival in Morondava, it became clear that the school year ended earlier than what the calendar had indicated. That meant I had less time than planned to carry out the field work. The solution to this was to start visiting the schools immediately, and to do school visits, interviews and activities from early morning until lunch, and from after lunch until the sun set. During midday and lunchtime, most activities come to a stop, schools and shops close, and people go home to have lunch with their family. Thus, during this long break it wasn't possible to meet people or arrange activities. In addition, during the last week of school most students had exams and left school early, so it was difficult to reach them there.

Another challenge in the field was the lack of electricity; during two weeks there was only 3-4 hours of electricity a day, and I would not always be home to charge my computer at this time. This implied careful planning for the use of mp3-player/recorder and the computer. The last challenge was personal; spending three months away from my family and friends, living under more basic conditions than usual, never-ending bug bites, and periods of illness due to bacteria in food or water. I was in a foreign culture, I didn't understand much Malagasy, which is the commonly used language, and I wasn't familiar with cultural norms and practice. However, despite the challenges, the three months in Madagascar were deeply rewarding, and provided me with broad and valuable knowledge to my study. This can be

attributed to my previous field work experience, the meticulous preparations, and the amicable cooperation from my field assistant and research participants.

## **Reflections on the position of researcher and interpreter**

The significance of the positionalities of the researcher(s) for research ethics and outcomes should not be underestimated. Positionality is usually referred to as “*aspects of identity – race, class, gender, age, sexuality, disability*”, Hopkins (2007, p. 391) agrees, and can also include “*personal experience of research such as research training, previous projects worked on and the philosophical persuasion of the researcher.*” To that list we could also add nationality, marital status, socio-economic background, and many more. Some critics, including feminist scholars, have been skeptical to this trend nominated “the reflexive turn”, due to the potential risk of putting too much focus on oneself (Kobayashi 2003, in Hopkins 2007), or that one becomes paralyzed and avoid the field work (Sultana 2007). However, the awareness of one’s positionalities can contribute to more honest and observant field experiences. In the following I reflect on the positionality of me as a researcher in Madagascar and my research assistant in relation to the research participants.

I am a Norwegian, 27- year old, white, unmarried female with a university degree. I have no children; I come from a middle-class family, and had never been to Madagascar before. The participants in Madagascar were between 6 and 70 years old, they were of at least three different ethnicities; Sakalava, Antandroy and Vezo. Some of the parents and guardians had never gone to school, while two had studied at university level. The parents and the girls could be placed in the lower economic strata, while the principals, officials, and some of the teachers could be placed in the middle class segment. I always tried to dress modestly and a bit conservative in order to show respect and seriousness, and I was respectful to people’s opinions although they diverged from my own. I hoped that my (relatively) young age and playfulness made the children see me as harmless, and not a strict adult. If they perceived of me more as an aunt, sister or friend, I thought they would not be afraid or shy when I asked questions. My (odd) pronunciation of Malagasy words and attempts to express myself in their language also worked as an ice breaker, and people seemed to be grateful that I tried to learn their language.

The research assistant is Malagasy, Betsileo, 27 year old, unmarried and a mother of one girl. She had met some of the participants before because she had worked in the local

bank, and participants were eager to ask her personal questions. Her middle class background was evident because her father, a former school director, was known to some of the participants, and because of the way she dressed. We would agree on dressing modestly when visiting poor families in order to avoid emphasizing the economic gap which obviously existed between the research team and participants. If participants felt intimidated, they might not be comfortable talking about their economic situation and their ability to send their children to school. Therefore it was important to establish trust and spend some time familiarizing before the beginning of the interview. I felt that my position as an “outsider” allowed me to ask “stupid” questions without being ridiculed, because they knew I did not know all of the cultural codes and what was considered appropriate or not.

On the other hand, my position is likely to have influenced the type of information I was given. There is the risk that people told me what they thought I wanted to hear. For example, teachers may have spoken more positively about the Girl to Girl Strategy, or parents may have exaggerated their motivation for schooling because they thought that was what I wanted to hear. Due to my position as a white, foreign woman I could not blend in, I could not obtain complete objectivity or expect to find the “truth”. However, I believe that this awareness was important for how I acted in the field and how I treated the information I was given.





Zoky says:

"We play together when we have a break, and we sing too, and we play teacher and student. We love each other and we are both friends. We don't fight with each other. When we are together, we play, and I [zoky] talk. I teach the zandry I look after and make her clean."

Zandry says:

"We play teacher and student. We eat together, we love each other and we are best friends. We zandry and zoky don't argue."

## **PART 2**

### **5) EDUCATION POLICY IN MADAGASCAR**

In the second section of this thesis, I present the education policy landscape in Madagascar, including key actors, initiatives, national plans and the policy development in the last few years.

#### **Key policy actors**

It is rather difficult to see Malagasy policies on education as detached from the multilateral setting in which they are formulated. This is due to at least three factors, two of them drawn from Deacon (2007), as presented in chapter two. Firstly, there are a considerable number of actors involved in the education sector in Madagascar. Secondly, international policies influence national policies and priorities; and thirdly, the country receives large amounts of development assistance. Madagascar relies heavily on financial assistance to the education sector: more than 60 % of the education budget is financed by donors (Afrol News 2009). International organizations increasingly influence national social policies through loans or technical aid (Deacon 2007, p. 10).

The key actors within the field of education in Madagascar, in addition to the government, are the World Bank and the UN agencies, which cooperate with the national Ministry of Education, the *Ministère de l'Éducation et la Recherche Scientifique* (MENRS). UNICEF Madagascar works in many areas, including immunization, water improvement, deworming treatment, and training of policy officers in children's rights (UNICEF 2008). The organization is also one of the key actors within the field of education in Madagascar. UNICEF has assisted the Ministry of Education in training more than 43,000 teachers, and 1,400 teachers have been trained in educating students in HIV/AIDS prevention (ibid.). UNICEF also piloted the Girl-to-Girl-strategy together with UNGEI, which is aimed at reducing repetition and drop-out rates among small girls who are considered vulnerable.

Another key actor is the World Bank, which has been present in Madagascar since 1963 and has been supporting the education sector since 1989. Madagascar receives most of the support from the World Bank through the Education for All – Fast Track Initiative, which is the major source of financing to the education sector. Madagascar also receives debt relief from the World Bank and the IMF on the Highly Indebted Poor Countries (HIPC) Initiative.

This agreement poses certain conditions; firstly, of the estimated \$50 million which Madagascar saves in interest payments until 2012, 25 percent needs to be earmarked the education sector (World Bank 2002). Another prerequisite for receiving debt relief is that countries prepare national Poverty Reduction Strategy Papers, called PRSPs.

## **Key policy documents**

The Malagasy government prepared its first PRSP in 2003, and the main goal was to reduce poverty levels by half by 2013. When revising the plan in 2005, the government realized that further efforts had to be done to reach the goals (MDG Monitor (2007). Consequently, in 2006, the Malagasy government launched the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP), which set out to increase growth rates, decrease poverty and improve a variety of sectors, including the education sector. At first glance, the MAP may seem like an independent initiative produced by the government to solve the country's difficulties. But when examining the policy setting in which the document was prepared, this impression is diluted. The Action Plan is in fact a "second-generation PRSP", according to the World Bank, and the UN MDG Monitor (2007) calls it an "ambitious, MDG-based, development strategy". The plan thus seems driven on one hand by donor demands (prepare PRSP to receive debt relief) and on the other hand by international commitments (fulfill the Millennium Goals by 2015). Deacon argues that one reason why these policy transfers take place is because a country is being coerced into doing so by powerful actors (2007, p.18). Gould disapproves of the entire PRSP process, because it apparently involves representatives of INGOs instead of people from the local civil society (2005 in Deacon 2007). The question is thus whether the goals of the MAP are grounded in the Malagasy reality, or whether they are copying international policies in order to please donors and assure continued support.

The Madagascar Action Plan sets out specific challenges with specific targets to be reached by 2012 for all three levels of the education cycle. In Commitment 3, "Educational Transformation", the government declares that it will

*"(...) create an education system with world class standards in quality and in effectiveness, which stimulates creativity and helps our students to actually transform their dreams into reality, and which provides Madagascar with the necessary human resources to become a competitive nation and a successful player in the world economy."*

(2006, p.52)

In this ambitious statement there is a combination of approaches to education which can be traced to policies of the main international actors in Madagascar, namely the World Bank and the UN agencies. As discussed in chapter 3, in most World Bank policy there is a focus on efficiency and the instrumental value of education for economic growth. In most recent UN policies, however, we find an influence from the human development/capabilities approach à la Amartya Sen, which recognizes the intrinsic value of education and the potential education has to enable people to become what they want. It seems possible that the Malagasy government has intended to merge the two approaches in the MAP. Although the reason for this may be complex, the most immediate explanation may be that Madagascar depends on international support and recognition. Therefore Madagascar will tend to adjust national policies to please donors, and consequently, donors play an active, although indirect role in the national policy making. This process is an example of what Deacon refers to the “globalization of social policy”; and Madagascar is a good example of that policy making is no longer a strictly national issue.

Madagascar Action Plan Commitment 3: Educational Transformation is divided into eight challenges, and addresses the whole spectrum of education from preschool to vocational and higher education, ending illiteracy, and increase participation in sports and civic activities to “develop capacities and mindsets of young people” (challenge 7). Challenge 2 is the most relevant goal to this thesis, as it addresses the primary education sector through the following four goals:

1. All Malagasy children will be provided with primary education of 7 years.
2. The consolidation and the sustainability of knowledge, acquired competences as well as literacy will be guaranteed.
3. Differences between genders, social categories, regions, urban and rural will be diminished.
4. The completion rate of primary school will go from 57% to 95%.

The first goal involves that free primary education is extended from the current five years to seven years, and it also implies a restructuring of the lower and upper secondary school, which now will be three and two years respectively. The first goal does not specify that quality education will be provided, but the second goal might indirectly refer to quality as this is a prerequisite for achieving literacy and competency. The third goal refers to the diminution of differences, but does not operationalize or specify how this will be done. The last goal, a

near doubling in the primary school completion rates seems very optimistic, and as we write 2009, chances are high that this goal will not be met. This can be attributed to many factors, such as the poor quality of schooling, general poverty, poor infrastructure, and a curriculum that may appear irrelevant for the children's future life.

Another example of how Malagasy social policy has been globalized is the Education for All (EFA) framework described in the previous chapter. The Malagasy government has produced two national EFA plans. In the 2003 edition, the government committed to abolishing fees in primary education, supporting teachers recruited by the community, and providing school kits and backpacks to contribute to increased possibilities for schooling of children and of girls in particular.

The second EFA plan was published in February 2008 in cooperation with a large number of partners<sup>12</sup>. The 240-page document describes the current situation in education in Madagascar; progress and deficits, the new education reform, the need for financing, and sets out plans to how to improve the education system. The number of organizations and agencies involved in the policy making is quite compelling, and can be interpreted either as an expression of their power or that the government seeks to involve as many as possible to ensure financing of the reforms. However, what seems clear is that policies become streamlined and uniform in such processes, and that education policies "become the same everywhere in conformity with professional standards (Deacon 2007, p. 17).

During the last decade, the economic prioritization of education, and particularly primary education, has increased significantly in Madagascar. The government increased the spending on education from 12,8 % of total government spending in 2001 to 19,2 % in 2004 (NORAD 2005, p.13-14). The expenditure on primary education was augmented from 47,9% of the total education expenditure in 2002, to 62,8 % in 2004. Spending on higher education decreased considerably in the same time period, from 25,6 % to 2,7 % of the total education expenditure (ibid.). More than half of the resources allocated to the primary education sector go to teachers' salaries, and a small share goes to infrastructure and utilities (ibid.). This can partly explain the current poor conditions in many schools.

The different actors present in Madagascar all have their particular priorities and core issues that they focus on. The World Bank focuses on economic development and growth and

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<sup>12</sup> The French Development Agency (AFD), The French Embassy, the World Bank, the African Development Bank, ILO, EU, Japan International Cooperation Agency, Embassy of Norway, World Food Program, US Agency for International Development, UNICEF, UNDP, and international consultants.

UNICEF focuses on children's rights. For France, the former colonial power, keeping French as a teaching language in Madagascar has been an important part of linguistic policy. And Norway, the global number one in gender equality<sup>13</sup>, surely emphasizes a focus on gender and girls in the policy making and doing.

This chapter has shown how policy making is not an isolated national issue, but rather a globalized issue. Malagasy education policy is developed in a setting with powerful international actors and international policy frameworks. The question is whether there can be national autonomy in policy making in a developing country in a globalized world. Critics (including Deacon 1997) argue that national sovereignty has been reduced because of powerful actors in the world economy and politics. This seems to be the case for the education policy making in Madagascar as well. The government produces plans in cooperation with donors and partners, and they are dependent on their resources and credibility, leaving less space for national priorities. What this ultimately can imply is that policy becomes determined not only by national priorities and needs but by donor demands.

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<sup>13</sup> According to UNDP Human Development Reports.



**“Me and my zandry vavy”  
Drawing by zoky vavy, 10, Morondava.  
“Photo: J.Olsen**

## **6) GIRLS' EXPERIENCES IN EDUCATION IN MADAGASCAR**

In this chapter I examine the situation of girls' education in Madagascar. I describe and explore girls' educational situation in Madagascar in general and in Morondava in particular. Based on the stories of girls and parents in Morondava, I give particular emphasis to explaining their access to education, their situation within school, and future prospects through education. This twist is inspired by Wilson's (2003) distinction between rights *to, within and through* education. Wilson argues that we must look beyond the enrolment rates and think of education more holistically, and that is what I intend to do here. By going beyond the impressive statistics and listening to girls', parents' and teachers' perceptions on education and the girls' future possibilities, we can get a more integrated and nuanced picture of the situation of girls' education.

### **The educational situation in Madagascar**

Since the late 1990's, the education sector in Madagascar has been thoroughly reformed and improved. The number of children enrolled in school has increased dramatically, from 1,7 million in 1997/98 to more than four million in 2005/06 (MENRS 2006 and MEN, N.d.). The primary school net enrollment ratio (NER) is now 96 % for both sexes, significantly better than many other poor African countries South of Sahara. In Madagascar, the gross enrolment rate (GER) is 142 for males and 137 for females. While the NER indicates the share of children of official primary school age that are enrolled in primary school, the GER concerns the proportion of children of any age that are enrolled in primary school (UNSD, N.d.). A high GER compared to the NER indicates that there are many children who start school before or after official entry age, or that many children repeat grades. Both of these explanations are valid for the case of Madagascar.

Unfortunately, the impressive enrolment rates for primary school do not translate to the secondary level. Less than 1 out of 4 girls and boys enroll in lower secondary school (UNICEF 2009). The literacy rate among youth (15–24 years) is 73 % for men and 68 % for women, a significant improvement from 1990. Thus, it seems that the efforts to improve the education system have translated to higher literacy levels among young Malagasy people. The remarkable increase in enrolment in primary school in Madagascar is a result of important policy changes and serious efforts from the government and the associated partners, described in the previous chapter. However, it is important to note that although the statistics give the



impression that there is nearly full enrollment in Madagascar, there are significant differences based on regional, gendered, and socio-economic factors. These differences become striking when we divide the population into five different economic strata. In the poorest quintile of the population, as many as 45 % of the children are not attending school, while among the richest quintile only 3 % of children are out of school, as shown in the table below.

**Box 3. Distribution across wealth quintiles of children not attending primary school (%)**

Year	Net Attendance rate (%)	% of primary school-age group not attending	Q1 poorest quintile	Q2	Q3	Q4	Q5 richest quintile
2004	80	20	45	29	19	6	3

(Source: UNESCO 2008, p. 79)

In addition, there is significant regional variation between school districts (CISCOs). In 50 of the 111 CISCOs, the primary completion rates are lower than 45 % (Endorsement Report 2008). The explanations to the low completion rates are complex, and they are the same in most of the CISCOs. The explanations are related to geographical, climatic and economic factors. Madagascar is a vast country, and many people live in remote areas, where there are few schools, few and untrained teachers, multi-grade classes, one-room schools and high pupil to teacher ratios. In addition, partly due to difficult climatic conditions such drought and cyclones, there are issues related to food insecurity and hunger (ibid.).

Gender issues, which are not clearly reflected in statistics, is another important factor determining particularly girls' education. Although statistics do not present major gender differences in enrolment, repetition and drop-out in primary school, there is reason to believe that the picture is more nuanced. In Madagascar, as in many other countries, the lack of gender equity in society affects girls' education. There are many obstacles to girls' education, and the following have been identified as the key obstacles:

- Household duties: Girls often have a heavy workload in the home, and this may interfere with their studies.

- Child labor: In some regions, tourism-related activities are encouraging girls to leave schools earlier. In the South Central areas, some parents make their daughters quit school so that they can become domestic workers in larger towns.
- Early marriages and teenage pregnancies contribute to girls dropping out of schools.
- Lack of gender-sensitive material in the educational system. School textbooks with stereotypes, few female role models, and teachers acting in discriminatory ways.
- Poverty: Family can't afford to buy school utensils, or children have to work in order to earn money for family.
- In some cases, parents invest more in boys' education, because they are regarded as the household breadwinners whereas the girls are assumed to leave their family after marrying to live with their husband's family.

(UNICEF 2007, MENRS and UNICEF N.d.)

The list presented above is relevant to the school girls in Morondava as well. In addition, the list can be extended to include other aspects which are relevant to the context of Morondava and perhaps other places as well. In addition to poverty and early marriage, a primary school principal in a school outside Morondava suggested adding the following to the list over common factors that could influence girls' education negatively:

- Absenteeism. The mothers keep their daughters at home. When it is the season for beans, they let the girls stay at home to watch the small children.
- Environment: When girls are in CM2, or fifth grade, they meet men on the streets. This can reduce their interest in schooling because they make good money. This was mentioned as a great problem in the rural area.
- Puberty. The principal claimed that when girls are 15, the parents let her live in a small room because they are embarrassed over what she does. They let them do what they want, and they don't give her food. The parents will accept the offer if someone asks to marry her. This contributes to early pregnancies, and pregnant girls are usually expelled from school, and have a difficult time returning to school.
- Late to school. Girls are often late to school because they look after their siblings. Boys in CM1 and CM2 are late because they look after the cows.

In addition, there are other problems in Malagasy schools which affect both girls and boys,

such as poorly educated and few teachers, poor infrastructure, and a lack of locally and regionally adjusted education (UNICEF 2007).

### ***Quality of education***

The rapid growth in the number of children in school has contributed to the deterioration of the quality of education in Madagascar (Plan Education Pour Tous 2008). The growth led to significant increases in the teacher to student ratio, an important aspect concerning learning outcomes. It rose from 48:1 in 1999-2000 to 61:1 in 2004-05 (ibid, and MENRS in Endorsement Report 2008). By 2005/06, the rate had been lowered to the levels of 1990, and was envisaged to decrease to 30-40:1 by 2012 (MENRS 2006). The weak management of schools and teachers at all levels was also considered a constraint on the quality of education (Endorsement Report 2008). Additionally, the linguistic policy was seen as one of the principal causes for the poor results achieved by students (ibid.), because French is defined as the teaching language in math, geography and common knowledge. According to tests carried out in 2006, only 1 % of primary school teachers have sufficient skills to teach in French. In consequence, the teachers often use a mix of Malagasy and French in class, and students end up with poor skills in both languages. In Morondava, this phenomenon was highly visible, and teachers confirmed their lack of skills in French indirectly as they were unable to carry out an interview in French, or answer basic questions, and instead resorted to using Malagasy and the interpreter.

Another aspect contributing to poor student performance is the low number of actual hours spent teaching, as compared to how many hours should be spent every week. Absenteeism among teachers and students reduces the hours of schooling from 27 to 20 a week, according to estimates in the most recent Madagascar EFA Report (Plan Education Pour Tous 2008). In Morondava, absenteeism and late arrival of teachers to school was mentioned as a problem in one of the four schools. A class of primary school children ran around in the school yard and in the class room, playing and shouting for an hour until the teacher showed up. According to the principal, this particular teacher was always late, but she could not be sanctioned as she was senior and had been teaching for 20 years. The only means of sanction that the principal could use was to report the incident to the head of the CISCO, who sometimes would stop the disbursement of her salary. In two other schools, the teachers were eager to explain the difficult economic situation they were facing as a result of not

receiving their salary. Although parents had paid their part of the teacher salaries to the school, the money did not get to the teachers. As one FRAM-teacher explained:

*“I think the principal has eaten the money. We have [many hundred] students who paid. The money is gone. We got our salary for September to December in January. We went to the Treasury, we want to have a meeting with them and the principal. A FRAM<sup>14</sup>- teacher makes 200.000 FMG<sup>15</sup> a month. (...). The salary of a regular teacher is one million FMG<sup>16</sup>. The parents don’t want it to be 200.000. Now the parents don’t want to pay anymore [because the teachers don’t get it] and they feel sorry for us.”*

Another aspect that affects learning results which is particularly relevant in the poor, rural areas is the lack of stable access to food, and poor nutrition (Plan Education Pour Tous 2008). This phenomenon seemed relevant in Morondava, where the majority of the population grows and sells rice for a living. As a single mother explained, some days she did not have any food to give to her daughter, and the only meal she could give her was some plain rice in the afternoon. A family of eight explained they could only afford preparing two *kapoka (cups)* of rice a day for the whole family. They felt they could not provide their daughter, a *zoky vavy* in 4<sup>th</sup> grade, with the sufficient nutrition, and they were frustrated because they could not follow up on the nutritional recommendations given by the school:

*“They have told us that we should give her chocolate, because then she will be smart and not tired during the exam, but how are we supposed to buy that? She always needs money for the *goûter (mid day snack)*, but we can only give her that when we have money.”*

### **Access to education**

With the new education reform (MAP), education is mandatory for children aged 6 to 14 years. However, many children start school much later than when they are six. In a primary school 7 kilometers outside Morondava, I met two girls aged 11 and 12 who were in 1<sup>st</sup> grade. The girls had lived in the *brousse*, or countryside, where there were no schools, and they did not start school until their families moved closer to school. The girls were on the Girl-to-girl programme, and both had a *zoky vavy* in 4<sup>th</sup> grade looking after them.

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<sup>14</sup> FRAM: Fikambanan'ny Ray amandrenin'ny Mpianatra. Teacher employed through the parent-teacher association

<sup>15</sup> 40.000 AR, \$19.

<sup>16</sup> 200.000 AR, or \$96.

In Morondava, I also met with parents whose 10-year old daughter Yola had not started school before January that year, although school started in September. The parents explained that they could not afford sending her to school before, and that her delayed enrollment in school also was due to difficulties with acquiring a birth certificate, a prerequisite for starting school. In order to obtain such a certificate, one must bring two witnesses to the Mayor's house and the local Court, and pay fees, both official and unofficial ones. The clerks expect to be paid to speed the process of the application. These costs may present a challenge to poor families, who already are struggling to buy sufficient food for the family.

The education reform has also contributed to lowering the costs of education by removing school fees and providing support by providing children with backpacks and some utensils. However, there is still not free primary education as certain costs, for school registration, payment to FRAM-teachers, and the mandatory uniform remain. The parents I talked to in Morondava said that the *inscription*, or registration fee, was around 7000 Ariary<sup>17</sup>. In addition, the parents had to contribute to pay the salary of the FRAM teachers. Students must wear a uniform to school in the last years of primary school, and the costs of notebooks, pens, chalk, and other necessary equipment amounts to 20000 to 50000 Ariary<sup>18</sup> for one child. Evidently, primary education is far from free, and the costs represent a strain on tight family budgets. For example, Yola's family had trouble finding sufficient money to pay for her further education. In June, when Yola had almost finished half a year of schooling, the parents explained they would take her out of school due to lack of money for inscription and school materials. The father had been dismissed from his job after yelling at the boss when he was drunk, and the mother had finished her temporal work at the local fish handling factory. Thus, the family was without income and had taken the decision to take their two daughters out of school.

### ***Situation in school***

If parents and children overcome the financial barriers to education, there are still many aspects that may make the schooling less than ideal. One such aspect is the age limit in school. A grandmother, the guardian of a 14 year old girl in her 4<sup>th</sup> year of primary school,

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<sup>17</sup> Approximately \$3,50

<sup>18</sup> Approx. \$10-24.

explained how she feared that the girl wouldn't be able to continue on to 6<sup>th</sup> grade (junior high) because of the age limit. According to her, students cannot be older than 15 years when they start in 6<sup>th</sup> grade. This meant that her granddaughter would have to pass her exams that year in order to make it to 5<sup>th</sup> grade and later to 6<sup>th</sup> grade before she turned sixteen.

When some children start school late, this is reflected in the age composition in the different classes. A first grade teacher in a school with more than 700 students explained that she had 21 boys and 21 girls in her class aged from 6 to 14 years. When the older students failed to respond correctly to questions asked in class, she would tell them in front of the others that the younger ones are better than them. She didn't know what to do with them, she said. Another teacher claimed that the older girls had a negative influence on the younger ones because they dressed up and used nail-polish. Girls aged 6 year and 14 are obviously at very different stages in life. However, all girls, from very young ages, are expected to take a lot of responsibility at an early age. Girls are expected to contribute significantly in the household chores, and this takes up time that otherwise could have been spent on leisure or homework. This is why the chores and responsibilities must be accounted for when explaining their situation in school. It is likely to assume that the chores can influence the quality of their education as the time for homework and leisure is reduced. The story of eight year-old Roselyne, a *zandry vavy*, illustrates the amount of chores a small girl does:

*"I get up early, then I fetch water, I do the dishes, then I cook food, and after that I go to school. I make porridge with rice. After I finish school I make dinner, boil rice, and go to the market to buy food. I go by myself. My mother gives me money to buy something. Sometimes it is meat, other times it is fish. (...). I do my homework before I go to bed. I also help my mother to wash the clothes of the baby."*

The story shows that Roselyne contributes significantly to her household, and the amount of chores she does is not unique to her. All of the girls I talked to in the four different schools said they had chores both before and after school. Most of them did chores like Roselyne, fetching water in buckets, doing dishes, cooking, and going to the market. Some girls also mentioned sweeping the floor and looking after younger siblings. It seems evident that the women and the girls do most of the work in the house. Some of the older girls I talked to in Morondava were aware of these gendered differences in work, like Joanna, 12, who explained her daily routine:

*“I live with my mother, father, sister, brother and aunt. I do the dishes and fetch water in the morning and in the afternoon. I get up at 7; I have classes in the afternoon. I do my homework in the morning, I start school at 12.30, and finish at 5, and then I walk fast because I have to cook. What I like to make is rice and loka. Men and women do different things in the house. Men look for wood. Women buy things, after school we make food, and it is only the girls who fetch water.”*

Like Roselyne, Joanna also contributes substantially to her household. She has school in the afternoon because the school cannot fit all of the students in the morning sessions. This particular school has more than 700 students, and only 10 classrooms. The school administration solves this by providing both morning and afternoon sessions. Still, like in many other schools, the teacher to student ratio is high, around one to forty or forty-five. In general, there seems to be a lack of infrastructure and resources in schools. In the four schools visited, the principals expressed frustration over inadequate and leaking roofs, few classrooms, desks and books. The teachers were frustrated that they had to copy the books to the blackboard as they only had one book for the whole class. Much of the students’ time in class would thus be spent copying from the blackboard.

In the schools visited in Morondava, physical punishment seemed common. Many of the girls I interviewed said that being hit in class was what they liked the least about school. The teacher would hit with a stick over their fingers or on the hip, or make them kneel beside the desk. The girls explained it in a matter-of-fact way, indicating that this was common or normalized. Without accepting violence in school, we may perhaps say that the strictness of the teachers can be related to the large classes they are set to administer. Teaching takes place in a strict environment, with students yelling “*Ye tompoko!*” (Yes Mam!) to teachers’ instructions.

Despite insufficient school material, strict teaching styles, and heavy domestic burdens, the primary school girls I talked to expressed enthusiasm about going to school. Most of them said they liked best to read from the blackboard, and to write, and that they go to school to know “everything”. In the breaks, they liked to play games like *pera* and *kibora* with other girls, but not with boys, because they “only hit and kick us”, they said. “If I see a boy playing *pera*, I will tell him to play soccer, *pera* is not for them”, one girl in fourth grade said. Although there are mixed classes in school, boys and girls do not necessarily interact in their spare time. This phenomenon, however, is hardly unique to Madagascar.

Several parents of girls in primary school expressed concern about the difficulty of educating girls, especially when they reach puberty. They felt that if they did not monitor their daughters closely, anything could happen to them, and they could quickly become pregnant. One 70-year old father explained:

*“Girls are the source of sin. At the age of 15 or 16, if we don’t watch them closely, they are exposed to doing all kinds of things. (...). In puberty age, they always find excuses to leave the house, especially here where we live in the brousse (bush), it is very, very difficult. That is our problem here, that raising girls is a delicate issue. They start to not fear their parents, and they don’t even listen to the teacher.”*

In Bemanonga, 7 kilometers from Morondava, there is only one primary school, and children have to travel to the centre of Morondava for higher education. Taking a bus takes from twenty-five minutes to an hour, as the bus waits for passengers in order to depart, and the road and the buses are in extremely poor condition, leading to frequent break downs and stops. One father of a primary school girl said he would like her daughter to continue to the university, but even secondary school would become a problem as they would have to pay 1200 Ariary<sup>19</sup> for the taxi ride each way, every day.

The principal and a teacher in Bemanonga said that many parents did not see the need for education because they make money without an education. Their attitudes lead to less motivation among the girls, who did not see a need to do their homework because they were going to plant rice and sweet potatoes. Some girls were also kept out of school during harvest time in order to look after their siblings. The primary school principal was concerned about the girls who would leave school in order to make money by picking mangoes. She had told them: “Think about your lives. The mango won’t always be there”. After that, the principal recalled, the girls got pregnant. The grandmother of a zoky and the mother and father of another zoky said that education is the best heritage to give to the children because they don’t have any money to inherit:

*“We force them to go to school because that is the best heritage; no one can take that from them. We, the parents, won’t be here, because God will take us away. They must do everything to lead better lives.”*

Mother of zoky vavy

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<sup>19</sup> About \$0,60.



## **Estele**

The story of Estele (see box below) is the example of a young, single mother with little education who struggles to make ends meet. She lives in a small shack with her seven year old daughter Esperance. Her son who just finished 4<sup>th</sup> grade lives with other relatives, but she says he isn't happy there, and they hit him. The family tells her she should take him to her place but she says "we don't have anything to eat, so what should I do?" Estele sells vegetables in the local market, but lately she has been sick and unable to sell. Instead, she has started washing some people's clothes, but it doesn't pay well, only 1000Ariary (\$0,50) for a big bag. She asks the people she washes for to give her some food. During our conversation, she shows her collar bone several times and says that people have told her she has become so skinny. She also shows us her bulging stomach; she might have a cyst, she doesn't know and cannot afford going to the hospital. She hasn't been able to sleep all night because her tooth aches so much, and she has trouble speaking. During our talk she asks her daughter to go find painkillers, and I give her some water for her to swallow the pills.

Estele cannot afford buying water from the nearby well for 50 Ariary a bucket (\$0,02), and she and her daughter drink water from a polluted source. Later we discover that both of them suffer from typhoid fever due to the contaminated water. Esperance is a lively seven year-old who likes going to school. She likes to write, and does well in school. During the vacation in July and August she keeps studying and learning. Esperance is a "little sister" on the Girl-to-Girl programme, described in the next chapter. Esperance's education and future is determined by her mother's ability to make money and pay for her schooling. But her future is difficult to determine due to the situation she and the mother are in. In order to understand the hardships of being a single, sick mother, and the consequences and possibilities for her daughter's education and future, we can listen to Estelle's story, and try to understand the complexity of their situation.

## **ESTELE'S STORY**

I went to school for four years. Both of my parents died, we were poor, and nobody took care of us. We were six siblings. The first time I had sex I got pregnant. My mother was dead, so I didn't have money, so a man gave me money to go with him. It was difficult to give birth because I was so little. The father ran off when I was four months pregnant. My aunt bought everything for the baby. My daughter doesn't have a birth certificate, so I have to go to Court, but it costs 60.000 FMG (\$5). (...). I want them to go [to school] because I didn't understand anything in school. I want them to go because then they can help me when they finish. I want them to go on after primary school. (...) It depends on the salary. I want her to be a teacher, but don't know if she has the possibility. She could be a doctor, police or military. (...)

My daughter and I don't always have breakfast or dinner, and she goes to school all quiet, she says; I'm so hungry.

This is my house, I built it, but there are holes and it rains inside. I'm like the man here, I built the house. (Later she shows us how she puts an umbrella over her daughter's bed so that it won't rain on it). (...)

I'm so poor and I don't want her to be like me. School starts at 2, but she goes at 1 because she is so eager. The watchman told me not to let her go so early, someone might kidnap her. I was happy when she showed me the drawing she had made in school. I saw that she can draw. (...)

There is nothing bad about school. It's nice to go to school because then you can live better, not like me, who haven't gone to school. I have to be the man and the woman in the house. If someone if our family dies, I let her go to school still.

The teacher told me; please, buy the school utensils, because then she can get better, it is hard for her when she has nothing. I said to her; I don't like to see that she doesn't have anything, but I don't have money, but I will do everything for her to go to school. The teacher says she wears dirty clothes, but how am I supposed to do it when she only has two sets of clothing, and when one is dirty, I wash it. (...)

She walks alone to school; she waits till the sun is up before she goes because she has no jumper, so she is cold. She goes after the others have gone, but no, she is not late. (...). She does well in school, and the teacher has told me that she has gotten better. There was only this one day her feet hurt. Although her feet were swollen, she went to school, but the teacher sent her home and asked me why I let her go.

When she comes home from school, she shows me what she has done and that she got 10 out of 10 on a test. I turn on the light and take the mattress out, so that she can do her homework.

## ***Future prospects through education***

Now I would like to turn to how the girls perceive their future in terms of further schooling and work. I also include their parents' and teachers' perceptions. The primary school girls in Morondava had different views on how long they wanted or needed to go to

school, and their answers varied from 5 years to 32 (!) years. In one school, almost all of the 25 zokys and zandrys said they would like to become a nun, because then they would not have to marry or have children. Among the forty to fifty girls I talked to, only one said explicitly that she wanted to be a mother. This finding, that many girls didn't want to have children, is quite interesting as Madagascar is a traditional country in terms of the importance of family, and the birth rate is quite high, at 4,8 children per woman (UNICEF 2007). However, it is clear that the girls' views on being a mother might change as they grow older and start being attracted to boys.

Many of the other zokys and zandrys wanted to become teachers, doctors, or police women. The parents also said they wanted their daughter to be a teacher, doctor or midwife. It seemed that all of the parents had high aspirations for their daughters, and wanted them to have a long education and learn "everything", but many of them admitted that it depended on the costs and on the motivation of the daughter. "If she does not have the will, there is nothing we can do", many parents said. A 12 year-old girl, who came from a family who grew rice for a living, explained how her parents' expectations conflicted with her own wishes:

*"They want me to be a teacher and to help them, cultivating rice and if I work, I give money to them. I want to be a teacher. But no, I can't be a teacher and cultivate rice. I don't have time or energy to become a teacher if I cultivate rice."*

The grandmother of a 14 year-old fourth grader said that education was important although the girls would not continue to advanced studies. The grandmother wanted her grand-daughter to become a seamstress, but she thought that education was still important, more important than becoming married at a young age. Learning French, for example, would help her understand more, as "everything is in French", she said. Parents also emphasized that girls need to be educated so that no one can fool them. The parents of 10 year-old Yvonne had told her that without education, everyone would boss her around, and she did not want that. Even if their daughter would become a housewife, she would need to be able to read. They reasoned that if she could not read, and her husband had a check, she would not understand how much it was, or, if her husband got letters from a girlfriend, she would not be able to understand. A first grade teacher presented a different explanation, putting emphasis on the fact that girls become more independent and get more possibilities when they are educated:

*“I would tell all the girls that they must go to school and don’t let themselves become an instrument for others. If I were the president I would tell the parents that they must let their children go to school. In school it is nice, and people cannot do whatever they want with her, and she can become good and do whatever she wants with her life.”*

The teacher’s argument is in fact similar to Amartya Sen’s argument, presented previously in this thesis. Sen sees education as freedom - freedom to do and be what one wants to, and that education widens the set of capabilities available to a person. In Madagascar, an increasing number of girls enroll in primary school, and thus, we may say that there is a possibility that their capabilities increase. At the same time, as long as the lack of gender equality remains the same, and the rest of the society stays at the status quo, the girls do not necessarily become enabled to use their possibilities.

The situation in Bemanonga, outside Morondava, can be used to illustrate this point. Most of the families make a living through planting and selling rice, a profession that does not necessarily require advanced education. Basic abilities learned in primary school, like knowing how to read, write and do basic calculus is sufficient to sell the rice in the market. Thus, some families may not see the need for their girls to be educated at a higher level. However, what education might provide the girls with is increased insight to their possibilities and a greater understanding of the society they live in. When an educated girl works in the rice field, she can lead her mind elsewhere. The simple fact of being educated may give her a different approach to life and to her future, and may plant seeds of dreams that she later will strive to achieve.

## **Concluding remarks**

In this chapter I have looked at the educational situation for girls in Madagascar and in Morondava in particular. We have seen how action plans and policy changes over the last ten years led to massive increases in enrollment, which caused a deterioration of the quality of education. The positive quantitative development did not cause positive changes in the quality. Madagascar faces a significant deficit in terms of trained teachers, classrooms and teaching material. The payment to the teachers is also considered a problem, and it is the parents who are supposed to pay for the many newly recruited FRAM-teachers. Thus, despite removal of key fees associated with schooling, some expenses remain, contributing to the continued exclusion of the poorest children, and of girls.

In this chapter we have also seen that girls, exemplified by the girls I met in Morondava, have heavy domestic burdens in addition to their school duties. The extent of their domestic activities may be affecting their school performance and results.

The girls I met with in Morondava had high aspirations for their future, and the majority of them wanted to become professionals, working as policewomen, teachers or doctors. The girls' parents also expressed ambition for their daughters' careers, perhaps with more realistic thoughts about the feasibility of the girls becoming professionals. The parents expressed concern for the cost of education, and some of them saw limitations to their ability to provide a long education for their daughters, unless they received external support. It is evident that poverty is one of the key issues on the long list of obstacles to girls' education, which also includes early pregnancy and marriage, teachers and school material with gender stereotypes, absenteeism due to child rearing or other domestic duties, and more.

The awareness of the many obstacles has prompted action, and some initiatives have been taken to improve girls' educational situation. The Girl-to-girl strategy, initiated by UNICEF and UNGEI in Madagascar is one such example. In the next chapter I present the strategy from the policy to the practical level, and look into how the strategy functions in some schools in Morondava.



**“Zandry vavy is like a relative and a big sister and a little sister. What we do every day is to play, make her talk, and teach her when she finishes school.**

**Zoky vavy is like a friend and she acts like a sister.”**

**Made by zoky vavys, Morondava.**

## 7) THE GIRL-TO-GIRL STRATEGY

In the previous chapter, we saw that Malagasy girls face many obstacles to a prolonged, quality education, and that steps have been taken towards improving their educational situation. One example is the Girl-to-Girl Strategy, which was launched as a pilot project in one school district in Madagascar by UNGEI and UNICEF in 2002. The objective of the strategy was to reduce dropout and repetition rates among primary school girls. Two years later, in 2004, the strategy was extended to another district with high repetition rates for girls. The project is now implemented in 16 Malagasy CISCOS (school districts), and reaches 12 000 girls, according to UNICEF estimates<sup>20</sup>. The Girl-to-Girl strategy has many levels; from the policy level of UNICEF to the local and individual level.

In this chapter I trace the strategy from top to bottom levels to see how it is intended at the policy level and how it is put into practice. At the local level, I present the strategy through the point of view of teachers, girls and parents, and give space to their experiences and opinions. Starting at the teachers' level, I analyze interviews and selection forms used by teachers in order to find out what are the most common criteria teachers use for selecting girls to be *zandry vavys*, and whether this corresponds to what UNICEF set out in their strategy documents. I go on to discuss the views and experiences of the participating girls, find out what their main activities are, and how the girls experience being a *zoky vavy* or a *zandry vavy*. Subsequently I revise and discuss the views of the parents. Have they heard about the Girl-to-Girl strategy? If they have, what do they know and think about it? Lastly, I return to the teachers' experiences and their recommendations for the improvement of the strategy. I also look at the degree of coherence between how the strategy is formulated and intended at the policy level and how it is actually carried out at the school level.

In the following I will use the Malagasy terms when referring to the girls: *zoky vavy* or *zokys* for the “big sister or big sisters” and *zandry vavy* or *zandrys* for the “little sister or little sisters”.

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<sup>20</sup> Mail correspondence with UNICEF Madagascar, 27.2.2008.

## ***The policy level***

The main intention of the Girl-to-Girl Strategy is to reduce repetition and dropout rates among girls. More specifically, the strategy sets out the following objectives:

- Make girls finish primary school
- Make children participate in the fight against discrimination
- Reduce the disparities between boys and girls in primary school and in society
- Favor the girls' intellectual and social development and flourishing while particularly keeping in mind their vulnerabilities
- Reassure the parents of their little girls' security

All of the schools that have the strategy should receive a booklet which includes guidelines to the teachers indicating how the strategy should be carried out. Teachers should identify girls in 1<sup>st</sup> and 2<sup>nd</sup> grade (CP1 and CP2) who they consider vulnerable to repetition or dropout, and team them up with a “big sister” from 4<sup>th</sup> or 5<sup>th</sup> grade. In the booklet, the criteria for choosing little sisters (zandry vavy) are divided into four categories: difficult family situation, hygiene & health, particular vulnerability and problems to adapt in the school community.

The big sisters (zokys), on the other hand, should be mature, disciplined, proper, smart, able to share and be nice with others, and they should be older and preferably from the same village as the zandry vavy. The zoky then gets the responsibility of helping the zandry overcome difficulties, to organize her school life, to become integrated in school, and to learn about daily hygiene<sup>21</sup>. The zokys should support the younger ones by walking together to school, doing homework, and building their confidence. According to the Ministry of Education (MENRS and UNICEF, n.d.) there are fewer dropouts among the participants, and the older girls act like role models, building their own confidence at the same time.

The responsibility of the Girl-to-Girl strategy lies with the Ministry of Education, and UNICEF/UNGEI. At the local level, it is the CISCO administration which is responsible for the strategy. The Morondava CISCO includes 96 public schools, all of which have implemented the strategy. The CISCO is divided into smaller administrative units, ZAPs, and according to the pedagogical leader in the CISCO, it is the Chef ZAP who is responsible for the control and evaluation of the strategy. The teachers interviewed said they had been

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21 L'Education des filles à Madagascar, document from UNICEF Madagascar, received on e-mail 27.2.2008



instructed by the Chef ZAP on how to carry out the strategy. At the end of each school year, the Chef ZAP is supposed to visit the schools in order to complete evaluation forms and submit these to the pedagogical leader of the school district, who reports to UNICEF in Antananarivo.

***The teachers’ and principals’ point of view***

***Selection of participants***

In the four schools visited for the purpose of this study, it is the teachers in 1<sup>st</sup> grade (CP1) who select the zandrys, and the teachers in 4<sup>th</sup> grade (CM1) who select the zokys. The teachers had been given the responsibility to select the girls, and had not decided this themselves. Most of the teachers had received one day of training with UNICEF, the APC (Approche pour la Competence) or the CISCO. One teacher said she hadn’t received any training, “it was just the friends here who told me how to do it”, she said, referring to another teacher. The four schools visited have had the strategy for about three years. When school starts in September, the teachers have to pay extra attention to certain girls, in order to be able to identify who needs the support of a zoky vavy, and who are able to be role models as zoky vavys. But as it will be shown, the teachers in the four schools have very different perceptions on how many girls and on what criteria they should be selected.

**Box 4. Selection of zandry vavys, and what teachers believe to be the numerical limit to selection.**

<b>School</b>	<b>Number of zandrys chosen, and proportion</b>	<b>Believed limitation to selection</b>
A – urban	30, all girls in the class	None
B – rural	5 per class	Teacher thought 5 was maximum
C – urban	Few in 1 (out of 2) classes	Teacher of class 2 had not been trained
D – semi-urban	3-4 out of 19-27 per class	Unknown

In school B, the teacher thought there was a limitation to how many girls she could choose, while in the three other they didn’t operate according to a limit. This means that in one school, school A, all the girls, more than 30, were made zandry vavys, while in the school B, only 5 out of about 20 girls were chosen because she thought that was the maximum number. In school C, only the girls in the A-class were chosen because the teacher of the B-class had not received training, and in the last school, school D, the three teachers chose 3-4

girls per class out of 19-27 girls per class. It becomes clear that the selection of girls is somewhat random when in one school they think very few can be zandrys, while in others they believe that all first grade girls should be zandrys. Coincidences clearly play a role – like in school C where no girls in the B-class got a zoky vavy because the teacher hadn't been trained. In school D the teacher had just received instructions from a colleague, but in school C this did not happen.

The criteria used for choosing the girls, a vital point to get the strategy right, also differ quite a bit from school to school.

### ***Selection criteria***

The teachers are expected to fill out a form with the name and school class of zandry vavy, the reason why she was chosen, and name and class of the zoky vavy. The form should be used to 1) identify the reason for which the little girl was chosen and 2) evaluate the development of the girl in the course of the school year. Some teachers list only one reason for choosing her, while others provide two or three reasons why the girl needs to have a zoky vavy. An examination of forms from twelve schools in the Morondava school district shows a very clear pattern in what criteria the teachers use for selecting the zandrys. In the selection of 125 zandrys in the twelve schools, the most commonly used reason is related to hygiene and appearance of the zandry vavy. The girls are described as snotty, smelly, having dirty clothes or clothes with holes, having messy hair, etc. These criteria are presented as the only reason for selecting 28 girls, while 11 other girls were chosen partly because of this. This means that altogether 39 girls were chosen to be zandry vavys only or partly because their hygiene and/or appearance was not considered adequate.

The second most common reason that teachers use is that the girl is quiet, shy, she will not talk or talks too little. This criterion is presented as the only reason why 19 girls were chosen to be zandrys, while 17 girls were chosen partly because of this, totaling 36 girls being chosen partly or entirely because of this. The third most common reason is related to inattentiveness; the girl does not pay attention or she talks a lot or too much. This was the only reason given for selecting 13 girls, and part of the reason for another 13 girls, totaling 26 girls being chosen partly or entirely because of inattentiveness or talking.

During the interviews, the teachers gave the same reasons for selecting the zandry vavys, mentioning hygiene and aspects of appearance and being quiet, shy or unwilling to talk about as many times. This principal, from school D, has quite typical views:

*“Maybe sometimes a girl doesn’t say anything, she has a lot of snot, her clothes are dirty or have holes in them, and it is nice that she can be clean like the others.”*

One teacher gave a quite different reason when she explained that she would choose the girls who miss something in their lives. After talking to the teacher and principal in one school it also became evident that the location of the girls’ homes plays a major role:

*“We choose the [zokys] who live close to school, the ones who like going to school; I don’t choose the ones who live far away because of the parents. She should live close to the zandry because then the zoky can walk her home and teach her at home”,*

Teacher, school C.

This implies that a girl who might need a zoky will not receive one because her family lives too far away from the school. When the zoky walks the little girl home for lunch or after school, she will be late, as the same teacher explains: “If the zandry lives far away, the parents don’t like it, they don’t trust the zoky. Before, some people kidnapped children, maybe that’s why”.

In the beginning of the school year, the school should inform all of the parents about the strategy, and that they will choose girls to zoky vavys and zandry vavys within the next few months. However, two of the schools did not call for such a meeting, and this meant that parents were unaware of the functioning and the purpose of the strategy. Some parents had opposed to their daughter being chosen as a zandry, claiming that they could take care of them themselves, while parents of zokys had refused because it was a lot of extra work, “(...) like a job with no pay”, according to one principal (school D). For families who already have little money, and need their daughters to help out in the house, a job without pay would seem unattractive, and maybe they felt that their daughters were being exploited. According to a teacher (school B), some parents got angry because their daughters were chosen, because they don’t want them to care for others than themselves, and “mind their own business”. Another problem which was mentioned in one school is that if the mothers are not informed that their daughter has a zoky/zandry, the mother would think that the other girl is “the child of the father” (i.e. that the girl’s father was unfaithful and had had children with another woman), and this may cause suspicion towards the husband/father.

After problems like the ones mentioned had become apparent, the schools had invited the parents to a meeting in order to explain to them about the strategy and why it would be

beneficial for their daughters. After that, the teachers explained to me, the parents had understood, and there didn't seem to be resistance towards the strategy.

### ***Teachers' impressions on the strategy goal, and how they instruct the girls***

It is interesting to look at what reasons the teachers and principals give for the existence and the goals of the Girl-to-Girl Strategy. It does not seem that the goals set out by UNICEF have reached this level in their entirety. One teacher believed that the strategy was intended to motivate the zoky to continue school until 6<sup>th</sup> grade and at the same time she would inspire her zandry to continue school: "We tell the zoky she should continue learning, think about the zandry; she will have problems when you are not here." Another teacher believed that the girls needed to be cheered up

*"(...) because imagine, when the children go home from school they are tired, and their mothers ask them to do dishes, and wash clothes. The mothers don't say nice things to their children, they only yell at them. So when the girl is in school we must make her happy."*

This statement shows that the teacher has empathy for the girls' situation, and she wants to contribute to motivate the girls in school. A third teacher said that the real problem is the parents, because many parents drink and don't take proper care of their daughters. Thus, the teacher wants the zoky to take care of the little girl, and the zandry can be safe with her zoky. Several teachers emphasized the importance of zokys taking good care of their little sisters. Like one teacher in Bemanonga, outside town, who explained that

*"[S]ometimes we gather the girls and ask them who is your zoky, and we tell them to take care of each other, do their homework together, share your food"*.

### ***Why just girls?***

The teachers and principals provided different explanations to why the strategy should only be for girls. Most of their explanations did not correspond well to the ones provided by official strategy documents. One teacher reasoned that when girls get older, they don't want to go to school, because "they only think about marriage, both the girls and their parents". She thought that the strategy could help the girls because the teachers would tell them that it is better to go to school and learn than to get married. "We tell them to not think about anything

else but school”, she said. Some teachers and one principal revealed gender stereotypes when they explained why the strategy is for girls only. A female teacher reasoned that “boys aren’t going to look after the children. It’s not the men’s job when they are married. That is our job, the women’s job.” The other female teachers around her laughed and confirmed the statement. When I followed up by asking if the strategy thus is a preparation for marriage, she argued that it is not only a preparation for marriage, but for life itself. Another teacher explained what she thought about boys’ ability to care for others, or rather, the lack of this ability:

*“They didn’t choose boys to be zokys because boys are stubborn. If a zandry boy has bread, the zoky boy would take it from him! Girls don’t do that. I think if a zandry boy cried, the zoky boy would hit him. He can’t look after a zandry.”*

Clearly, this characteristic provided by the teacher is very gender stereotypical. Her view is that all boys are stubborn and violent, and that no boys can take care of others. It is similar to what the teachers expressed above, that all women should look after children, and that is not men’s job. It seemed that the teachers I met in Morondava, who are putting the strategy into practice, had quite stereotypical views on gender and sex roles. This may have consequences for the possibilities and the transformative potential of the strategy. As mentioned initially, one of the objectives of the strategy is to reduce gender disparities and discrimination in school and society in general. One may wonder how this can be achieved when some teachers actively promote gender stereotypical views.

However, not all teachers have the same perceptions of gender. Two teachers in different schools said they would like to have the strategy for boys as well, because boys also need help in school. But, as one teacher reasoned; “Those who made the strategy saw that girls perform more poorly and they are absent from class”. One teacher claimed that the real problem is when girls grow older, both the girls and their parents only think about marriage. She argued that the Girl-to-Girl Strategy can help the girls “because we tell them that it is better to learn than to get married. We tell them to not think about anything else but school”. The teacher does not mention that the same concern could be addressed to the parents, who seem to contribute to encouraging their daughter to get married. Another teacher held the parents responsible for the girls’ problems in school: “The father or mother drinks, and they don’t take care of their daughter, so it is the zoky who takes care of her. Zandry is safe with her zoky”, the teacher said. Based on the criteria of selection and the reasons for only choosing girls, we see how the zoky vavy becomes an element in the care chain for the little

girl, taking up some of the responsibility of the parents.

***Have they seen any changes in the girls who participate?***

All of the teachers and principals I talked to, seemed to have a positive impression of the Girl-to-Girl Strategy, and they could mention several changes in the participating girls. Typically, the teachers would describe this in a “before and after” way;

*The zandrys have changed. (...). The girl who was quiet, now talks, the girl who was absent, shows up, the girl who slept in class, doesn't sleep anymore. They also look cleaner.*

Teacher (school B)

Keeping in mind the criteria for selection, it is clear that the teacher mentions change at several levels. There has been change in the three areas most frequently mentioned when selecting zandry vavys; related to hygiene and appearance, being shy/not talking and inattentive. A teacher in a different school has the same focus on hygiene, and she also highlights reading/writing activities:

*I have a positive impression, because the children have changed. In the beginning of September the zandry was dirty, she had a running nose and dirty clothes, but when she got a zoky it got better. She has become clean, and the one with the nose now uses a handkerchief. They have become better, and in the break the zokys take small blackboards and show the zandrys how to read and write.*

In addition to helping out with everyday activities, the zokys also function as moral support and motivators for the little girls, by showing “what’s good and not good”, according to one teacher (school B), and motivating her to go to school; “her zoky does everything [in order] for her not to be fed up”. She can also help the little girl if she faces physical aggression; “Sometimes if somebody hits zandry it is zoky who helps her, she doesn’t go to the teacher anymore, but to the zoky. She trusts her zoky”. This indicates that the zoky and zandry have become close to each other, and that the little girl finds support and help in her ‘big sister’.

**Drawing by 'Esperance', 6, zandry vavy, Morondava.**



***The girls' point of view***

***What do they do together?***

The zokys' and zandrys' perception on what activities they do together seem to be related to the selection criteria used by the teachers. The activities mentioned most frequently by twelve zokys and twelve zandrys in four different schools are activities related to hygiene and appearance. The zandrys mention this even more frequently than the zokys. More specifically, the girls talk about activities such as washing of hair, face and nose, combing and braiding of hair, and making sure the zandry's clothes look nice. In her explanation, a 12-year old zoky shows how she in fact is doing tasks traditionally performed by a mother or other close caretaker:

*“When she isn’t ready to go to school, I pick her up, bathe her and dress her before we go to school”*

*Zoky vavy, 12, school A.*

The second activity which is mentioned often by both zokys and zandrys is walking together to and from school. The zoky goes to the house of the zandry, finds her, and takes her to school. At lunchtime, when all students go home to eat, the zoky walks her back to her house before she goes home herself. The girls are usually paired up with someone who lives close so that the zoky will not have to walk too far. However, when one of them moves, which was the case for one zandry, the zoky might have to walk far in order to keep her responsibility. The third activity mentioned often by the 24 girls is related to teaching and learning; doing homework together in school or at home, and the zokys show or teach the zandrys how to read and write.

*“My zoky vavy teaches me how to read books, school books. I like to read books.”*

*Zandry vavy, 8, school D.*

Activities related to hygiene and appearance, walking to and from school, and teaching and learning are thus the ones which zokys and zandrys mention the most often. It is a bit surprising to find that activities related to appearance and hygiene are the most frequently mentioned. How can this be explained? Is appearance and hygiene what is most important to learn or to improve as a primary school student? Is the Malagasy society exaggeratedly focused on appearance and hygiene? In a country where only 34 % of the population has access to improved sanitation and only 50 % have access to an improved water source (UNDP HDI 2008), it is hard to believe this is the reason. Another explanation may be that the activities are related to the instructions the zokys receive from the teachers who choose them. As seen in the section above, the teachers focus was on hygiene and appearance related issues as well.

The zandrys also mention playing as many times as walking to and from school together. The zokys, on the other hand, only mention this activity two times. This does not necessarily indicate that they play little, but it might be a consequence of their age – the zoky vavys are from 10 to 13 years, and might find playing childish or for small girls. Some of the zokys are teenagers and might strive to do more “adult” activities, and therefore it is likely that they do not over report playing. The zandrys, on the other hand, having only barely finished their first year in school, and being between 5 and 10 years old, they put more



emphasis on playing. It is also relevant to consider the responsibility a zoky feels for a little girl, and playing, although possibly vital for the well being of the little girl in school, is not considered an important task by the zoky.

The zokys and zandrys mention a wide range of activities, and the ones mentioned above are mentioned the most frequently. Five of the zokys also said they help with chores in the house of the zandry, like doing dishes and laundry. The story of Liasoa helps us to understand the range of activities the zokys do, as well as the great responsibility the zoky takes to help her zandry:

*We meet where we live, in the house of the zandry. I go there every Sunday. I go there to wash her clothes. It is not the parents' job. She has parents, but her mother is sick, and the father can't wash clothes. I do everything so that she can get better in school. I tell her that she has to go to school. I tell her to care about school. Yes, she can read and write a little. She cannot write her name. The zoky vavy should look after the zandry vavy. I like to be a zoky so that she can be healthy, I'm the one who takes care of her.*

*Zoky vavy, 10 years, school D*

This particular zoky vavy seems to take her job very seriously, more seriously than some of the others. She even claims that washing the little girls' clothes is not the parents' responsibility, because the mother is ill and the father, perhaps judged by the mere fact that he is a man, cannot wash clothes. The result is that this dedicated, hard working girl spends her Sundays caring for the little girl. She seems to genuinely care for the zandry vavys' health and well being, and she also considers motivating the zandry as part of her job. Only one other zoky vavy I talked to mentioned that motivating the zandry was part of her tasks, while two zandrys said more generally that the zoky should take care of the zandry. This is of course a general statement which does not relate to a particular activity the girls do together, but it implies that the zoky should look after and care for the zandry.

### ***What is it like to be a zoky vavy or zandry vavy?***

In general, the zokys and zandrys conveyed a positive picture of the Girl-to-Girl strategy, by direct and indirect statements. Liasoa, the dedicated zoky who was mentioned above, was very clear about what she thought of being a zoky vavy and why she was chosen:

*Yes, it's good for me to be a zoky because I can look after her and help her. We meet every morning, and we help her mother with the dishes. Her name is Rasoa, she is 5. They chose her because she needs someone to take care of her. I was chosen because I am big, the others in my class are smaller than me. Before we didn't have zokys and zandrys. Her parents know that she is a zandry, the principal asked them to come to school. They were happy that I will help. I have learned to braid hair and a teacher taught me how to wash clothes. It is different now, I like better going to school now.*

*Zoky vavy Liasoa (10 years)*

From this statement it seems that this zoky has a positive experience with the strategy, and that she has learned to do traditional “women’s tasks” in order to help her zandry. She seems very proud, and she is even more motivated to go to school now when she is a zoky. Liasoa was not the only zoky who noted that her new responsibility had brought about some positive changes. Two other big sisters said they paid more attention to their appearance, because they had to act as good role models for the little girls. Two zandry vavys said that the zoky vavy could protect them against physical harassment in school. Six year-old Esperance explained that

*“I like to have a zoky because I don't like it when people hit me. The boys hit me after school. They don't do it now. I don't know why they hit me, but I didn't hit them”.*

Her zoky clearly has an important task in protecting her against the unmotivated harassment she experienced after school. However, there is one kind of physical harassment which the zokys cannot protect themselves or the zandry vavys against, and that is those from the teachers. It seems common that teachers hit students, and it did not seem to be a sensitive topic for the girls. When this came up unexpectedly during our informal talks, the girls would explain that the teacher will hit them on the hands or on the hip with a stick, or make them kneel on the floor, if they talked too loud or didn't listen, as one zoky vavy explained :

*“(...) she hits on the hands with a bamboo stick. She hits not one, but many times. I have been it sometimes when I talked too much. It happens sometimes. The pupils shouldn't talk so much. When I tell them they shouldn't talk so much, I get hit too”.*

Physical correction may be common in many countries, but this does not justify it, and it may violate the Convention of the Child (Art. 28 on education). Although zoky vavys may be able

to protect the little girls against physical or psychological harassment from peers, it is clearly not their responsibility to end harassment in schools, which is also being performed by teachers.

**Drawing by 'Yola, 10, zandry vavy, Morondava.**



***The parents' and guardians' point of view***

In this section I consider the communication between the school and the home, and the impressions and experiences that parents and guardians have on the strategy.

***What do they know about the Girl-to-Girl strategy and the activities they do?***

As described in the part on teachers' views above, the schools are supposed to inform all of the parents/guardians of girls about the strategy before they choose some of them to be zandry vavys and zoky vavys. However, it seems that this is not always the course of the process. I interviewed seventeen guardians of fifteen girls in four different schools. Out of these, only three mentioned having a meeting with the school in the beginning of the year. The parents of one girl said the school had called for a meeting in January, and that was due to the fact that many parents of zoky vavys got angry because their daughter always came late

for lunch because she followed her zandry vavy home first. One grandmother had been informed by the school principal, while seven guardians knew about it, but did not specify where they got the information from. Surprisingly, parents of three girls did not know about the strategy at all, or that their daughter was a participant. One mother said that her daughter had told her the day before the interview.

According to the strategy guidelines (MENRS/UNICEF 2005), the schools should invite the parents for a meeting one week after school starts in September, in order to tell them of the necessity of the strategy, and inform them about what will happen. As shown, this did not happen in the four schools in this study. It is obvious that the communication between the schools and the parents is far from ideal. Many parents/guardians do not know that their daughter has the responsibility of taking care of a young girl, or that an older girl takes care of her. If the schools informed the parents/guardians properly, the parents would be able to support their girls more, and they would have a greater understanding for why she was chosen; she is dirty, shy, comes late, or doesn't understand much, so she was chosen to be a zandry vavy, or she can be a role model, she is mature, sociable and clean, and can be a big sister. Parents were not asked directly regarding the activities the girls do together, but when asked what they knew about the strategy, they mentioned a wide range of activities. One mother (Victorienne, parent of student in school B) explained:

*“In my neighborhood, there are some “filles pour filles”. When they are going to school they shout: Come, we are going to school, go wash yourselves, and get dressed! When the zandry’s hair is messy, the zoky says: Come, I will comb your hair! When she has done that; where are your shoes? Here! And after that they go to school together.”*

Parents of girls in all four schools say that they have seen them walking to and from school together. The other activities mentioned more than three times are washing (of hair, nails, etc.) and combing their hair. Parents of two girls also mentioned protection against physical attacks, and one mentioned washing of clothes.

### ***Have their daughters changed?***

After the initial confusion and suspicion towards the arrangement of older girls looking after the younger ones, when parents had been informed about the strategy, they seemed happy that their daughters had been chosen. Despite the scarce information the parents/guardians have received, they still seemed to have a very positive impression of the

strategy, and parents/guardians of both zokys and zandrys liked that their daughters were chosen. The parents I talked to were proud of their daughters and almost everyone confirmed that they had noticed that the girls had changed to the better. The parents of the zokys said that they had gotten better grades, they bathed more frequently, and helped out more in the house. One 30-year old mother of 8 children, including a zoky vavy, explained enthusiastically:

*I was very happy because she has changed. She was also very happy. She does very well now, she bathes and takes care of herself, and she's not late. She wasn't doing so well before, but now she is. Every night after school they do their homework together.*

The parents/guardians of zandrys also confirmed positive changes. Two said they do more home work, two said they behave better, and two said they have started to braid their hair. In the school outside town, braiding of the hair seemed to be an important tradition, judging on the explanations of the mothers and on observation of people in the area. In town, however, there were not so many who emphasized this, and many girls would just keep their hair in a pony tail. Outside town, however, it seemed that whether a girl's hair was braided or not would tell something about her state or her family, and that girls need to braid their hair to be "proper". The mother who didn't know about the Girl-to-Girl strategy and her daughter's participation, mentioned one episode which happened the week before, when a boy had hit her daughter, and the zoky vavy had stopped him.

Evidently, the parents/guardians mentioned a range of positive changes, and they seemed very positive to the strategy.

## **Conclusion**

The first major finding in this chapter is that the Girl-to-Girl Strategy changes from policy level to practical level. The way the strategy is carried out and understood at the local level differs from how it is explained in the official guidelines. Three main reasons can be identified in order to explain this phenomenon. Firstly, there seems to be a too little information and communication between the CISCO administration and the schools, between the school and parents of girls, and between the teachers and the girls. The fact that the parents are not always informed early enough about the strategy gives grounds for mistrust and discontent. Secondly, it seems that some teachers do not receive sufficient training to be

able to implement the strategy the way it was intended. The criteria set out by UNICEF are not clearly reflected in the teachers' selection of girls, and this may be due to lack of information and training. The teachers' emphasis on hygiene and appearance trickles down to the activities of the girls, who also focus on these aspects. Thirdly, the teachers view on girls and boys is colored by gender stereotypes, and affects how they perceive the strategy and thus how they instruct the girls. In consequence, the strategy's potential to improve existing gender patterns is diluted.

The second finding is that the responsibility of being a zoky vavy can significantly add to girls' domestic burden, as many girls spend a lot of time helping the zandry with domestic duties; duties which would normally be done by parents or guardians. As seen in the previous chapter, most girls contributed significantly to tasks in their household, and the tasks of being a zoky would add to this already heavy burden. It would be appropriate to reflect over the implications of the responsibility given to the zokys, who are still children, and whether it is the responsibility of the 4<sup>th</sup> grade girls' to improve the education of the 1<sup>st</sup> grade girls. The answer to that seems quite clear; that it is not their responsibility, but the responsibility of the state, the school, the teachers and the parents. However, this does not necessarily imply that we should do away with the Girl-to-Girl Strategy altogether, and I see two immediate reasons to this.

The first reason is related to the last finding that I would like to emphasize here. That is the fact that almost of the 40 girls I talked to said they liked to participate in the Girl-to-Girl Strategy. The zoky vavys seemed to be proud to have the responsibility for the zandrys, and some took the responsibility very seriously. The zandry vavys said they were happy to have a "big sister" taking care of them, washing their hair, and protecting them. Teachers and parents also conveyed positive impressions of the strategy, and they mentioned several changes in the girls who participate; for example; the girl who didn't talk, not talks, the girl who was dirty, is clean now, etc.

The second reason has to do with the potential of the strategy to achieve certain outcomes. In chapter two, we saw how different theoretical approaches to girls' education can produce different angles from which we can determine the accomplishment of a project. In the next chapter, I intend to explore the Girl-to-Girl Strategy from the three theoretical approaches. This will give an idea of the strategy's potential, and how we determine its outcomes.



**“I’ll walk you home”  
Zoky and zandry, Morondava  
Photo: J. Olsen**

## 8) GATHERING THE THREADS: GLOBAL SOCIAL POLICY, MALAGASY EDUCATION POLICY AND THE GIRL-TO-GIRL STRATEGY

In this last chapter I situate the Girl-to-Girl Strategy in the context of global policy on girls' education and Malagasy education policy. I also return to the three theoretical approaches to gender equality in education presented in chapter two, and place the strategy in the theoretical landscape.

In chapter three we saw how the globalization of social policy implicated that national policies increasingly become influenced by powerful global actors. These actors also implement strategies corresponding to their policies in the countries where they are present. The globalization of social policy has also affected the education policy sector. The impact of key global actors with divergent views on education, namely the World Bank and the UN agencies, led Deacon to claim that the world has two ministries of education.

In addition, global education policy is firmly linked with global policy frameworks including the Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) and the Education for All (EFA) process. These frameworks contain goals related specifically to gender and education, and Madagascar is one of the many countries committed to reaching the goals. This commitment is reflected in the country's own strategy plan, the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP), with goals that are similar to the MDGs and the EFA goals. The Malagasy goals in education cover to a large extent the same issues as the global frameworks. For example, all of the three plans strive towards achieving universal primary education (UPE), through they express it somewhat differently. In the EFA document, the following is goal number two, formulated as seen below:

*“Ensuring that by 2015 all children, particularly girls, children in difficult circumstances and those belonging to ethnic minorities, have access to and complete free and compulsory primary education of good quality.”<sup>22</sup>*

In the MDGs, this is also goal number two, and addresses the provision of *“Universal Primary Education for all boys and girls, and completion of primary school”*.

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<sup>22</sup> My underscore in all quotes.



The Madagascar Action Plan expressed the commitment to this through the three following goals, from Commitment three:

*“All Malagasy children will be provided with primary education of 7 years.”*

*“The consolidation and the sustainability of knowledge, acquired competences as well as literacy will be guaranteed.”*

*“The completion rate of primary school will go from 57% to 95%.”*

When goals from the three plans are juxtaposed like above, we see how the Malagasy goals differ from the MDGs and EFA goals which they were developed in relation to. Firstly, the MAP does not address gender or girls in particular, like the two other plans. Gender is mentioned later in one of the other goals, but the commitment is not expressed as firmly as in the Millennium Development Goals and the Education for All documents. While these two have an explicit focus on girls and women, the Madagascar Action Plan only mentions gender once and then together with other vulnerable categories. The EFA goals set out to:

*“Achieving a 50 per cent improvement in levels of adult literacy by 2015, especially for women, and equitable access to basic and continuing education for all adults”*

And

*“Eliminating gender disparities in primary and secondary education by 2005, and achieving gender equality in education by 2015, with a focus on ensuring girls’ full and equal access to and achievement in basic education of good quality.”*

(UNESCO, 2000)

The MDGs include

*Promoting gender equality and empowering women, aiming at removing all gender disparity in primary and secondary education preferably by 2005 and at all levels no later than 2015.*

(United Nations, n.d.).

The Madagascar Action Plan, on the other hand, does not mention empowerment or ensuring full access, it simply states that

*Differences between genders, social categories, regions, urban and rural will be diminished.*

(MENRS and UNICEF, N.d.)

Thus, there seems to be some difference in the approaches taken to gender equality in education. While the Madagascar Action Plan is less ambitious in addressing gender issues, it is more ambitious when it comes to setting a deadline by which the goals should be reached. The goals in the Madagascar Action Plan are to be achieved by 2012, while the MDGs and the EFA goals have set 2015 as their deadline. However, the realization of the ambitious goals depends on the continued technical and financial support from the international partners. The consequences of the global financial crisis and the political instability in Madagascar may also have severe impact on the financing of education reform. As already mentioned, several international partners withdrew their support from the country when President Rajoelina came to power. In addition, the financial recession may lead to reduced funding capacity of key partners. Thus, it remains to be seen whether the goals can actually be reached by 2012.

The Madagascar Action Plan is a political tool which involves an extensive reform of the education system; increasing the number of years of schooling, removing school fees, making Malagasy the main language of instruction, greater availability of material, construct more class rooms, and more and better educated teachers. However, national reform is not the only tool being utilized to improve education. The government cooperates with international actors who have their own initiatives towards improving the educational situation in Madagascar. Some of these initiatives may be seen as attempts at giving weight to policy areas and issues which are international priorities. These initiatives can complement the national policies in areas that are not firmly addressed. The Girl-to-Girl Strategy is one such initiative, which was developed by UNICEF and UNGEI, who take a rights-based approach to gender equality in education, and include elements of capabilities. The strategy is directed specifically towards girls, and thus adds an increased focus on girls, which the Madagascar Action Plan seems to be somewhat short of. The main objective of the strategy is to keep girls in school so that they are able to finish primary school. It has the potential to address important issues related to girls' motivation, security and self-confidence. The evidence from Morondava showed that the zandrifs felt more secure because the zokys could protect them against harassment. According to their teachers, they were cleaner and perhaps less embarrassed to go to school as a result. The zokys seemed proud to be responsible for the small girls, and some said explicitly that they liked going to school more than before. In addition, the girls conveyed positive experiences through their drawings, which depicted happy girls in school. Based on the accounts of the girls in Morondava, it is possible to say that participation in the program has some positive effects on the girls' education. As seen,

girls in Madagascar have had lower primary school completion rates than boys. It seems likely that the girls have higher chances of finishing primary school when they receive extra support. Schools that have the Girl-to-Girl strategy may experience that repetition and drop-out rates among girls decrease. Through an *instrumentalist* lens, the strategy can thus be considered successful because it has the potential to assure that girls remain in school, get more years of schooling, and that equal numbers of boys and girls are enrolled in school. However, there are many externalities influencing girls' education, and positive change in girls' enrollment or schooling cannot only be attributed to one single initiative like the Girl-to-Girl strategy. Although the situation in school remains the same, other external factors influence girls' prolonged or improved education. The economic situation of the parents is a key factor, and in poor areas like Morondava, this seems like one of the key determinants to whether girls will remain in school or not. Another factor is the parents' appreciation of education. If the parents want their daughter to grow rice like they do, they might not see the need to keep the girl in school for many years.

As seen, the strategy has a quite narrow focus on girls. In chapter two we saw how actors which take *instrumental* approaches tend to focus on girls and the "problem of girls", and do not emphasize efforts to address or change gender relations. This also seems to be the case for the Girl-to-Girl Strategy. So far we have seen that the strategy can contribute to that girls stay in school, one of the key goals in international frameworks like EFA, but that it does not address external factors which are likely to influence girls' educational situation.

Now what about the strategy's potential to assure the *rights to* education? As I have already argued, it seems that the Girl-to-Girl Strategy can be successful in assuring some girls the *right to* education, at least for the girls who are already in school. If the participating girls gain motivation and self-confidence, the chances of completing more years of schooling and having the right to education fulfilled, increase. However, it is more uncertain whether the right to be educated is provided for as the quality of education in Madagascar is reportedly weak. For example, my experience from Madagascar showed that several girls who had finished first grade had not learned to write; they could not even write their name.

Instead of constricting ourselves to a focus on the *right to* education, I have shown the value of distinguishing this from the *rights within and rights* through education. Such a distinction makes the fulfillment more nuanced and also adds to the complexity. Does the strategy have potential to fulfill *rights within* education? The presence of *zokys* in the schoolyards seems to increase the feeling of security among the small girls. However, the

strategy does not address teachers' attitudes and behavior, which are influenced by common gender stereotypes. On the contrary, we have seen how teachers' gender stereotypes influence how they carry out the strategy. Thus, it is less likely that the strategy can change the way they treat girls or students in general.

Now what about the potential of the Girl-to-Girl Strategy to assure girls' *rights through* education, such as access to the labor market, fair treatment within the economic, social and political domains, fair wages and possibilities for participation? This is also a major aim among many donors. Such positive outcomes are even more difficult to evaluate due to the time aspect and the complexity of external and internal factors affecting the choices people make and how they lead their lives. Although the outcomes of the strategy are difficult to predict through such a perspective, we can hypothesize around some possible outcomes. For example, through participation in the Girl-to-Girl strategy, a girl may have gained self-confidence and motivation to perform well in school. Still, her family's socio-economic status will, to a considerable degree, determine whether she will enter the formal labor market or whether she will work in her family's rice field. It seems that while the strategy can increase the possibility of fulfillment of the *right to* education, at least for girls who are already in school, it can to a much lesser degree address the *rights within* and *rights through* education. It does not involve changing aspects of quality or of gender equality; its main objective is simply to keep girls in school. However, it seems evident that its implications and potential goes beyond that.

Through a *capability* perspective, we can ask whether the Girl-to-Girl Strategy has the potential to expand girls' possibilities, agency, and ability to make choices founded on what they value. I will claim that the girls I talked to in Morondava seemed to have more reason to value school when they were part of the Girl-to-Girl strategy. The *zokys* were proud to take responsibility, and the *zandrys* were happy to have extra support. In a short-term or present-day perspective, through the accounts of the girls, their parents and teachers, we can say that the girls seem to value going to school more, and they are more motivated to learn. Some parents and teachers noted that the girls were doing better in school than before, not necessarily in terms of better grades, but the way they handled going to school and being in class. In a long-term perspective, however, it is difficult to predict the outcomes due to the intricacy of evaluating increased opportunities and how the girls use these, and whether their lives improve in the long run. Although education may increase a girl's opportunities in life,

gender inequality in society may prevent her from making use of her education and from turning it into valued combinations of functionings.

This deliberation has attempted to show that the degree of successfulness we attribute to the strategy depends on the parameters we use. The Girl-to-Girl Strategy may be considered successful through an *instrumentalist* approach if it contributes to more and longer education of girls. Through this, the strategy may also be fulfilling the *right to* education, as advocated through a rights-based approach, but it does not have the same possibilities for the *rights within* and the *rights through* education. Through the lens of a *capability* approach, the success of the strategy is more difficult to determine. However, the short-term changes that the girls experienced are undeniably positive regardless of what theoretical lens we choose to apply. In this we can see the great potential of the Girl-to-Girl strategy.

The strategy also has potential to contribute to reach some national education goals, including the Madagascar Action Plan goal of providing children of 7 years of schooling and contributing to reach the goal of reducing disparity between social categories and urban/rural areas. This is because the strategy is implemented in areas where girls' situation in school is difficult, and it targets girls who are deprived or perform poorly in school. However, as mentioned, the strategy does not address quality aspects of education or structural problems like poverty, which are considered key obstacles to girls' education. It needs to be accompanied by other measures which specifically address these issues. Therefore the strategy can be considered one piece in a larger, more complicated puzzle that needs to be solved before gender equality in education becomes a reality in Madagascar. This puzzle can show us how multilateral action has the potential to correct and complement the national policy level, for example by addressing gender equality in education. The international actors may perceive that certain issues are not addressed sufficiently or adequately by the national government, and thus use the possibility of addressing these issues in at least two ways. Either, they can influence or supplement national policy according to their convictions, or they may supplement national action with their own initiatives, such as the Girl-to-Girl Strategy. UNICEF and UNGEI take rights-based approaches to education and gender equality. The Malagasy government, on the other hand, seems to use a combination of instrumentalism and capabilities approach to education. Perhaps the parallel use of three different approaches can provide fruitful results, if they contribute to reaching both intrinsic and instrumental goals of education. This recognition, that one single initiative cannot solve all of the challenges that Madagascar's education sector is facing, is important.

While making clear the limitations of the strategy, I do not wish to underestimate its potential benefits. In a context of deprivation like Morondava, the value of increased motivation for schooling should not be underestimated. The girls live under difficult conditions, and participation in the strategy, either by helping a little girl or receiving support from an older girl can possibly increase the girls' feeling of self worth and confidence. The girls said that going to school has become a more positive experience than previously.

## **Concluding remarks**

This thesis has attempted to give insight into the education policy landscape by identifying key policies, actors and common theoretical approaches to gender equality in education. More specifically, I have explored the situation of girls' education in Madagascar by looking at a particular project for girls, the UNICEF-initiated Girl-to-Girl strategy. By giving voice to the primary school girls who participate in this programme, and their parents and teachers, I have attempted to contribute to a better understanding of the complexity of factors influencing their schooling. I have shown that the Girl-to-Girl strategy can improve how some girls perceive going to school, and boost girls' self confidence through being responsible for other girls. Participation on the programme can actually improve girls' motivation for school, and feelings of self worth.

By exploring the strategy through three common theoretical approaches, I have also shown the limitations and the potential of the strategy. The degree to which strategies like the Girl-to-Girl strategy can be considered successful depends on the theoretical framework and the inherent success criteria.

My impression is also that the strategy places a considerable burden on the girls, and that the strategy to a significant degree leaves the responsibility of improving girls' education on the girls and their teachers. I suggest that for strategies like the Girl-to-Girl strategy to be useful, the responsibility must not only be placed on the girls, and the goal must be widened to go beyond keeping girls in school. Or, at least, such strategies must be followed by other initiatives challenging the deeper causes of gender inequality, including gender stereotypes. As seen, the national policy framework through the Madagascar Action Plan does not address girls' situation or incorporate gender specific goals to the same degree as the MDGs and the EFA goals. The potential of the Girl-to-Girl strategy could perhaps be realized if the government had a broader strategy for combating discrimination and gender inequality, not

only in school, but in society in general. As the number of girls who finish school remains lower to that of boys, there is a continued need for girl-specific strategies which not only address their access to education, but also the quality and the outcomes of education.

Coordinating national and multilateral efforts and using a broad theoretical grounding can be a significant step towards improving girls' situation in school and society. When this happens, girls can gain confidence, have longer and better educations, gain agency and awareness of the society they live in, their opportunities and the possibilities in their futures.



**“Me and my zandry vavy on the way to school.”  
Zoky vavy, 10, Morondava.**

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## **Appendix 1: Consent forms.**

### **Consent form adults.**

**To be read out before interviewing adults. Must be approved to carry out interview.**

Hello, my name is Jeanette. I am a university student and I come from a country in Europe called Norway.

I am happy that I can talk to you. Thank you for letting me talk to you.

The reason I am in Madagascar is because I want to know more about girls' education and about the girl to girl program in Madagascar.

I will talk to girls on the program, teachers and parents of the girls.

I am not here to evaluate the program. I don't work for UNICEF or any other organization.

I want to learn more about it, and I would like to hear your experiences and opinions.

No answers are wrong; you can say what you want and what you think.

I will use the knowledge I gain here to write a report in the university.

I will not use your personal name in the report. If you tell me something you don't want me to tell others, that is okay.

Other people will not know that it was you who told me these things.

The interpreter (name) will not tell others about what you say.

The reason why we need (name) is that I don't speak your language, and you don't speak mine.

The interpreter will only interpret what I say to you and what you say to me.

She will not come with her own interpretations or comments.

If there is anything you don't understand, you ask me, not her.

Is it okay for you that she is here? Can you understand her?

Would you like to ask me something before we start?

Sometimes I might stop you when you are talking. I don't do this to be rude. I do it because I want to talk about certain things.

If you find out you don't want to do another interview, you can tell me. It is your choice.

Will you agree to make this interview?

Now can we talk for 1 hour and then have a break, is that okay for you?

**Consent form children.**

**To be read out before interviewing children.**

**Must be approved to carry out interview/ semi structured talks.**

Hello, my name is Jeanette. I am a university student and I come from a country far away called Norway.

I am happy that I can talk to you. Thank you for letting me talk to you.

I am in Madagascar is because I want to know more about girls' education and about the girl to girl program in Madagascar.

I will talk to girls on the program, both girls that are zoky vavy and zandry vavy.

I am not here to evaluate the program. I don't work for UNICEF or any other organization.

I want to learn more about it, and I would like to hear how it is to go to school for you.

No answers are wrong, you can say what you want and what you think.

I will use the knowledge I gain here to write a report in the university.

I will not use your personal name in the report. If you tell me something you don't want me to tell others, that is okay.

Other people will not know that it was you who told me these things.

The interpreter (name) will not tell others about what you say.

The reason why we need (name) is that I don't speak your language, and you don't speak mine.

The interpreter will only interpret what I say to you and what you say to me.

She will not come with her own interpretations or comments.

If there is anything you don't understand, you ask me, not her.

Is it okay for you that she is here? Can you understand her?

Is it okay that I ask you some questions?

Sometimes I might stop you when you are talking. I don't do this to be rude. I do it because I want to talk about certain topics.

If you find out you don't want me to ask more questions, today or a different day, you can tell me. It is your choice.

Would you like to ask me something before we start?

## **Appendix 2: Interview guides**

### **A. Topics for informal talks and possible questions for girls.**

#### **What's the education situation for girls/ What is it like being a girl in school**

1. Age
2. Grade
3. Years in school
4. Favorite subject in school and why
5. Least favorite subject and why
6. Break activities?
7. Who are you together with in the breaks?
8. Do the boys and girls do the same things in the breaks?
9. Like most about going to school?
10. Anything you don't like about going to school?
11. Does it happen that people are not nice to each other in school?
12. Is it different for girls to go to school than for boys, if so, how?
13. How does the teacher treat boys? And girls?
14. If you could change something about school or the people there, what would you change?

### **B. What is it like being a girl in the home/ the family/ and aspirations**

1. How many people live in your house, parents or guardians, and how many brothers/sisters do you have?
2. Do your brothers and sisters go to or have they gone to school? Why/why not?
3. Who decided you would go to school, and why?
4. For how long do you want to go to school?
5. For how long do your parents want you to go?
6. What do you want to be/do when you finish school?
7. Who does what in your house? What are the main tasks of father/mother/brother/sisters and you?
8. What is expected from you in the house, what do you have to do, can you explain what and when?
9. Can you explain what you do before you go to school in the morning?
10. Can you explain what you do when you come home?
11. Is it easy or difficult to do these tasks?
12. Are there different tasks for boys and girls? Why?
13. Who do you think do most?
14. If you could change how things are done in your house, what would you change?

**C. What is it like to 1) have a big sister  
or 2) to be a big sister on the GTG programme.**

**Question in italics is for the little sister only, questions with parenthesis are for big sisters as well. Q 18 is only for big sisters.**

1. For how long have you had (been) a big sister?
2. *How do you get to and from school, and do you go with someone?*
3. *If you go with your big sister now, who did you go with before?*
4. How often do you meet; every day, only school days?
5. Where do you see your big (little) sister?
6. What do you do when you meet her? Play? Homework?
7. Do you sometimes play many big/little sisters together?
8. What did your parents say when you were asked to get (become) a big sister?
9. Do you have friends who don't have big sisters?
10. Do you know why you were selected to participate?
11. *Do you remember how it was to go to school when you didn't have a big sister?*
12. What is it like going to school now when you have one?
13. Is it different, and how is it different?
14. Can your big sister help you? How?
15. Have you learnt something from having (being) a big sister?
16. Is it good for you to have (be) a big sister? Why?
17. *Do you want to be a big sister when you are older? Why/ why not?*
18. Do you wish you had had a big sister when you were younger? Why/why not?

#### **D. Questions for teachers who identify and select participants for the GTG-programme**

1. Name of school
2. Your position/role
3. For how long have you had this position/role
4. Who took the initiative for you to have this role?
5. Sex
6. Age
7. Number of children in your school
8. Number of teachers
9. Gender ratio in among students in school
10. Gender ratio among teachers
11. Main problems of students in school, and girls in particular
12. Other problems in school
13. How are participants for the GTG-programme selected?
14. How many participants in your school?
15. Why and how do you select certain girls to have big sisters?
16. Why and how do you select certain girls to be big sisters?
17. Do you have any positive experiences with the programme?
18. Do you have any negative experiences with the programme?
19. What could be done to improve the programme?
20. Does participation help the girls overcome the problems they are facing in school?  
Why/why not?



### **E. Questions for parents/guardians of girls participating in the GTG-strategy:**

1. Age
2. Sex
3. Place of residence, rural/urban
4. Occupation or source of livelihood
5. Number of children, girls/boys? Relation to zoky/zandry.
6. Level of education of mother/ father?
  
7. Can or will all your children go to school?
8. Who are/ are not in school now?
9. Why did you decide that your children would go/ not go to school?
10. What is good/ not good about school?
11. What level of education do you want for your sons and daughters? Why?
12. What is the highest level of education in your family?
13. What do you see as the advantages of educating your daughters? And your sons?
14. Are there different needs for educating boys and girls?
15. Do you see any barriers to educating children, and particularly girls?
16. How much money do you have to spend on schooling of your children? Is it a significant amount/a lot/ or is it not so much?
17. If school cost more/less would you send fewer/more of your children to school?
  
18. Have you heard about the girl to girl programme?
19. What was your reaction when your daughter was asked to be on the GTG-programme?
20. In your opinion, did she have any problems in school prior to this?
21. Have you seen any change in her performance in school since she started?
22. Have you seen any change in her behavior at home since she started?
23. Do you think participating helps her somehow?
24. Do you think participation will help her overcome the possible problems she had before, why/ why not?
25. Is there anything else that could improve your daughter's performance in school?
26. What is your general impression of the GTG-programme?
27. What else do you think could be done to improve girls' education?

## **Appendix 3. List of people interviewed in Madagascar June – August 2008**

### **School A**

1. School principal (Directrice)
  2. Teacher
  3. Grandmother of zoky
  4. Grandmother of zoky
  5. Mother and father of zoky
  6. Mother of zandry
  7. Zoky
- + 2 drawing activities with zoky and zandry (separately)  
+ small group talk with zokys

### **School B**

8. School principal (Directrice)
  9. – 11. Mothers of zandry
  - 12-14. Mothers of zoky
  - 15-16. Fathers of zandry
  - 17-18. Teachers
- + 3 drawing activities: 2 with zokys and 1 with zandrys

### **School C**

19. School principal (Directrice)
  - 20-22. Teachers zandry
  - 23-24. Teachers zoky
  25. Parents zandry
  26. Mother zandry
  - 27-28. Zokys
- + drawing activities: 1 with zokys and 1 with zandrys

### **School D**

29. School principal (Directrice) who also identifies zokys
  30. Teacher zandry
  31. Mother zandry
  32. Mother Zoky
  33. Small talk with zoky
- + drawing activities: 1 with zokys and 1 with zandrys

### **Morondava:**

34. Chef CISCO
35. Chef pedagogique CISCO of Morondava, Henriette Razanarisoa
36. The Mayor of Morondava, Solo André Fanoïna.

### **Antananarivo:**

37. UNICEF Madagascar, Aya Kibesaki
38. Minister of Education, Madagascar, Strangeline Ralambomanana