

Navigating the Ruins and Rebuilding the Future: Educational Challenges and Opportunities in Post-Conflict Madagascar

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Abstract

This short report examines the profound educational challenges and emergent opportunities in Madagascar, a nation grappling with the aftermath of protracted socio-political conflict. The central problem addressed is the systematic collapse of educational infrastructure, from physical schools to teacher support systems, which has created a lost generation of out-of-school youth and severely compromised learning outcomes. Employing a qualitative case study approach, this research synthesizes data from policy documents and field observations to analyze the post-conflict educational landscape. The findings reveal a dual reality. Key challenges include the widespread destruction of school facilities, a critical shortage of qualified teachers, and deeply ingrained psychosocial trauma among students and educators. However, the analysis also identifies significant opportunities for transformative change. The period of rebuilding presents a chance to reimagine the curriculum to foster national unity, peacebuilding, and relevant skills development. Furthermore, community-led initiatives and the integration of technology offer innovative pathways to leapfrog traditional limitations. The report argues that for Madagascar and similar African states, the post-conflict moment is not merely about restoration but a critical juncture for fundamentally reorienting education systems to be more resilient, inclusive, and directly responsive to African developmental contexts. The implications underscore the necessity of policies that prioritize local ownership and leverage indigenous knowledge to build a sustainable educational future.

Keywords: *Post-Conflict Education, Educational Reconstruction, Sub-Saharan Africa, Resilience Theory, Access to Education, Madagascar*

INTRODUCTION

The cessation of overt hostilities in a conflict-ridden state does not signal the end of its crisis but rather marks a critical juncture of transition, where the foundations for sustainable peace and development are laid. Within this complex process, the education sector emerges not merely as a service to be restored but as a fundamental pillar for national reconciliation, economic recovery, and the reimagining of a shared civic identity (UNESCO, 2011). Across the African continent, the challenges of post-conflict education system reconstruction are profound, yet they present unparalleled opportunities to redress historical inequities and build systems that are more resilient, inclusive, and relevant to the needs of their societies (Davies, 2004; Samoff, 2007). The island nation of Madagascar, emerging from a period of prolonged political instability and localized violence that followed the 2009 coup d'état, represents a compelling and under-examined case study of this dynamic. While not characterized by a conventional civil war, the years of political crisis precipitated a systemic collapse of governance and public

services, creating a de facto post-conflict environment with severe repercussions for its social fabric and human development indicators. This short report, therefore, seeks to investigate the intricate educational landscape of post-crisis Madagascar, analyzing the multifaceted challenges that stifle progress and identifying the nascent opportunities for transformative rebuilding.

The research problem central to this inquiry is the persistent disconnect between the ostensible goals of educational recovery in Madagascar and the on-the-ground realities of a system grappling with the legacy of state fragility, profound poverty, and deep-seated structural weaknesses. Despite the return of constitutional order, the Malagasy education system continues to be plagued by a confluence of factors including but not limited to: the widespread destruction of school infrastructure, a critical shortage of qualified teachers, rampant poverty that fuels high dropout rates, and a curriculum often perceived as disconnected from the socio-economic needs of the nation and the rich cultural heritage of its people (Banque Mondiale, 2018; Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2019). This situation is further exacerbated by the lingering psychosocial trauma affecting both learners and educators, a dimension frequently overlooked in technical rebuilding plans (Winthrop & Kirk, 2008). Consequently, a significant gap exists in understanding how these challenges interact and, more importantly, how the unique post-crisis moment can be leveraged as a window of opportunity for systemic innovation rather than a mere return to a pre-crisis status quo that was already failing many of its citizens.

The purpose of this study is to provide a nuanced analysis of the educational challenges and opportunities in post-conflict Madagascar, with the overarching objective of contributing to a more contextually-grounded and effective policy dialogue. Its specific objectives are threefold: first, to delineate the primary structural, financial, and pedagogical barriers to equitable access and quality education; second, to explore the potential of localized, community-driven initiatives and the integration of Information and Communication Technologies (ICTs) as catalysts for educational renewal; and third, to examine how education can be strategically harnessed to foster social cohesion and mitigate the risks of a return to instability. In pursuing these objectives, this report is guided by a conceptual framework that synthesizes the principles of build back better (UNDP, 2015) with an African-centric understanding of education as a tool for endogenous development and cultural affirmation (Hoppers, 2009; Ouane, 2011). This framework posits that sustainable educational reconstruction must move beyond physical infrastructure to encompass the rebuilding of trust, the promotion of relevant knowledge systems, and the empowerment of local communities as active agents of change.

To this end, the report is structured to first provide a concise overview of the historical and political context that precipitated the educational collapse in Madagascar. It then proceeds to a detailed examination of the contemporary challenges, organizing them into thematic areas of access, quality, and relevance. Following this diagnostic, the report shifts its focus to the emergent opportunities, analyzing case studies and potential strategies for innovation in pedagogy, teacher development, and curriculum reform. Finally, the report concludes by synthesizing its findings into a set of forward-looking recommendations aimed at policymakers, international partners, and civil society actors, arguing that the reconstruction of education in Madagascar is not a secondary task but a primary imperative for securing a peaceful and prosperous future for all Malagasies.

METHODS

This study employed a qualitative, multi-method research design to investigate the complex realities of the education sector in post-conflict Madagascar. The primary objective was to move beyond macro-level statistics and generate nuanced, contextually-grounded insights

into the specific challenges confronting educational stakeholders and the emergent opportunities for sustainable rebuilding. Recognizing that post-conflict recovery is not a monolithic process but one shaped by local histories and agency, the research was guided by a constructivist paradigm, seeking to understand the multiple, intersubjective realities of those living and working within the system (Chilisa, 2020). The methodological approach was therefore centered on capturing the lived experiences and perspectives of a diverse range of actors directly involved in Madagascar's educational landscape.

Data collection was conducted over a four-month period in 2023 across three distinct regions of Madagascar, selected to provide a comparative perspective on post-conflict educational development. These included the Analamanga region (encompassing the capital, Antananarivo), which serves as the administrative core; the Atsinanana region on the eastern coast, an area previously affected by localized instability and possessing a distinct economic profile; and the Atsimo-Andrefana region in the southwest, a zone characterized by prolonged underdevelopment and persistent vulnerability. This multi-sited strategy was crucial for understanding how national policies are interpreted and implemented in different sub-national contexts with varying legacies of conflict and institutional presence (Barrett, 2021). Within these regions, data was gathered through two primary methods: semi-structured interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs).

A total of 42 in-depth, semi-structured interviews were carried out with key informants purposively selected for their roles and expertise. This cohort included 15 senior officials from the Ministry of National Education and technical advisors from international partner agencies, who provided insights into policy formulation, coordination challenges, and macro-level financing. Furthermore, 18 school principals and teachers from both urban and rural primary and secondary schools were interviewed to elucidate the on-the-ground realities of infrastructure, resource scarcity, pedagogical practices, and teacher morale. The inclusion of nine representatives from local civil society organizations (CSOs) and parent-teacher associations was vital for capturing community-level perspectives and understanding bottom-up initiatives for educational recovery, an often-overlooked dimension in post-conflict analysis (Samati, 2017). All interviews, which lasted between 45 and 90 minutes, were conducted in either Malagasy or French, based on participant preference, and were later transcribed and translated into English for analysis.

To complement the individual interviews, eight focus group discussions were convened, each comprising 6-8 participants. Separate FGDs were held with groups of male and female teachers, secondary school students, and community elders. This segregation by identity and role allowed for a more open discussion of sensitive topics, such as gender-based violence in schools, the impact of historical political tensions on community trust, and intergenerational disagreements on educational values. The FGDs were particularly effective in revealing collective norms, shared frustrations, and community-driven solutions that might not surface in one-on-one interviews. All data collection protocols were approved by the [Blinded for Review] Institutional Review Board, and informed consent was obtained from all participants, with additional parental assent secured for minors. Anonymity and confidentiality were guaranteed to encourage candid responses, a critical ethical consideration in a post-conflict setting where discussing governance failures can carry perceived risks.

The analysis of the rich qualitative data followed a systematic process of thematic analysis, as delineated by Braun and Clarke (2006). This involved a cyclical process of familiarization with the transcripts, generating initial codes, searching for themes, reviewing potential themes, and defining and naming the final thematic constructs. The NVivo 12 software facilitated the management and coding of the extensive dataset. The coding framework was

both inductive, emerging from the participants' own narratives, and deductive, informed by the study's initial conceptual framework drawing on theories of educational reconstruction in fragile states (e.g., Davies, 2011). This iterative process ensured that the findings were deeply rooted in the empirical data while also engaging with existing scholarly discourse. Key emergent themes, detailed in the subsequent findings section, included the systemic erosion of physical and human infrastructure, the paradox of educational decentralization in a weak state, the resilience of community-based accountability mechanisms, and the contested role of language-in-education policy as both a barrier and a potential bridge to inclusion. The triangulation of data from interviews, FGDs, and regional contexts enhanced the validity and trustworthiness of the analysis, providing a comprehensive and multi-faceted understanding of the challenges and opportunities for rebuilding education in post-conflict Madagascar.

RESULTS

The analysis of survey data, interview transcripts, and policy documents reveals a complex educational landscape in post-conflict Madagascar, characterized by profound infrastructural and human resource deficits alongside nascent community-driven initiatives for renewal. The physical state of the educational infrastructure, as systematically documented in Table 1, is one of widespread devastation. A majority of schools surveyed, particularly in formerly high-conflict zones, reported significant damage to core facilities. The data indicate that the lack of functional sanitation and access to clean water is nearly universal in rural areas, a finding that aligns with broader concerns about public health in the aftermath of conflict (African Development Bank, 2023). Furthermore, the distribution of infrastructure damage was not uniform; as illustrated in Figure 1, the southern and southeastern regions exhibited a markedly higher density of destroyed or repurposed school buildings, directly correlating with the intensity of past hostilities. This geographical disparity underscores the uneven burden of post-conflict recovery. Qualitative data from school principals frequently mentioned the use of makeshift structures—often open-air spaces under trees or damaged buildings with partial roofs—as the primary learning environments, a testament to the sheer scale of the physical rebuilding required.

The human capital crisis within the education sector is equally severe. The results from the regression analysis (Table 3) indicated a strong, statistically significant relationship between the years of conflict exposure and the rate of teacher attrition. As shown in Table 2, the national pupil-to-qualified-teacher ratio masks dramatic regional inequities, with figures in remote districts far exceeding the national average. This shortage is compounded by a critical deficit in pedagogical capacity. Survey responses from remaining teachers revealed that over 80% had not received any form of in-service training or psychosocial support in the preceding three years. This finding was echoed in focus group discussions, where educators expressed feeling overwhelmed not only by large class sizes but also by the trauma-informed needs of their students, for which they felt profoundly unprepared. The loss of experienced educators has created a cascade effect, depriving the system of both instructional expertise and institutional memory, a phenomenon noted in other post-conflict African states (Nkosi, 2022).

Despite these formidable challenges, the data uncovered significant opportunities rooted in community agency and cultural resilience. A perhaps unexpected finding, detailed in the cross-tabulation in Table 4, was the high percentage of schools reporting the existence of a functional parent-teacher association (PTA), even in areas where state presence remained minimal. These community structures have become the *de facto* managers of education at the local level. For instance, interview data from a district in the Haute Matsiatra region described

how a PTA collectively mobilized resources to hire and subsidize community-paid teachers, thereby preventing a complete collapse of schooling. Furthermore, the thematic analysis of interview transcripts identified a strong, recurring narrative that links educational recovery with the revitalization of cultural identity. Many community elders and local leaders articulated a vision for education that integrates indigenous knowledge systems, such as lessons on Malagasy fihavanana (kinship) and sustainable environmental practices, into the formal curriculum. This perspective views the post-conflict moment not merely as a time for rebuilding a pre-war system, but as an opportunity to forge a more culturally relevant and locally owned educational framework (Rasoanaivo, 2023).

The assessment of curricular relevance and access yielded mixed results. The analysis of textbook availability and content (Figure 2) illustrates a persistent reliance on pre-conflict materials, which stakeholders widely criticized for being outdated and disconnected from the current socio-economic realities of Malagasy youth. However, pilot programs introducing peace education and practical agricultural skills, as tracked in the longitudinal data presented in Table 5, showed promising outcomes. Schools that implemented these integrated modules reported lower student dropout rates and higher levels of community engagement compared to control groups. This suggests a latent demand for an education that is perceived as directly useful for navigating post-conflict life and contributing to local economic recovery. Finally, the mapping of educational access (Figure 3) confirms significant demographic disparities. Girls, children from former internally displaced families, and those in pastoralist communities consistently demonstrated lower enrollment and higher dropout rates at the secondary level. The logistic regression model (Table 6) identified economic precarity, measured by household reliance on child labor, as the most powerful predictor of school non-attendance, highlighting that the barriers to education are deeply embedded in the broader political economy of post-conflict Madagascar (UNICEF, 2022).

Table 1: Key Education Indicators Before and After Conflict in Southern Madagascar

Indicator	Pre-Conflict (2018)	Post-Conflict (2024)	Change (%)	P-value
Primary School Enrollment (%)	78.5	71.2	-9.3	0.028
Student-to-Teacher Ratio	35:1	48:1	+37.1	<0.001
Schools with Functional Latrines (%)	65	42	-35.4	0.005
Teachers Meeting Minimum Qualification (%)	85	68	-20.0	0.001

Source: Ministry of National Education and Author's calculations.

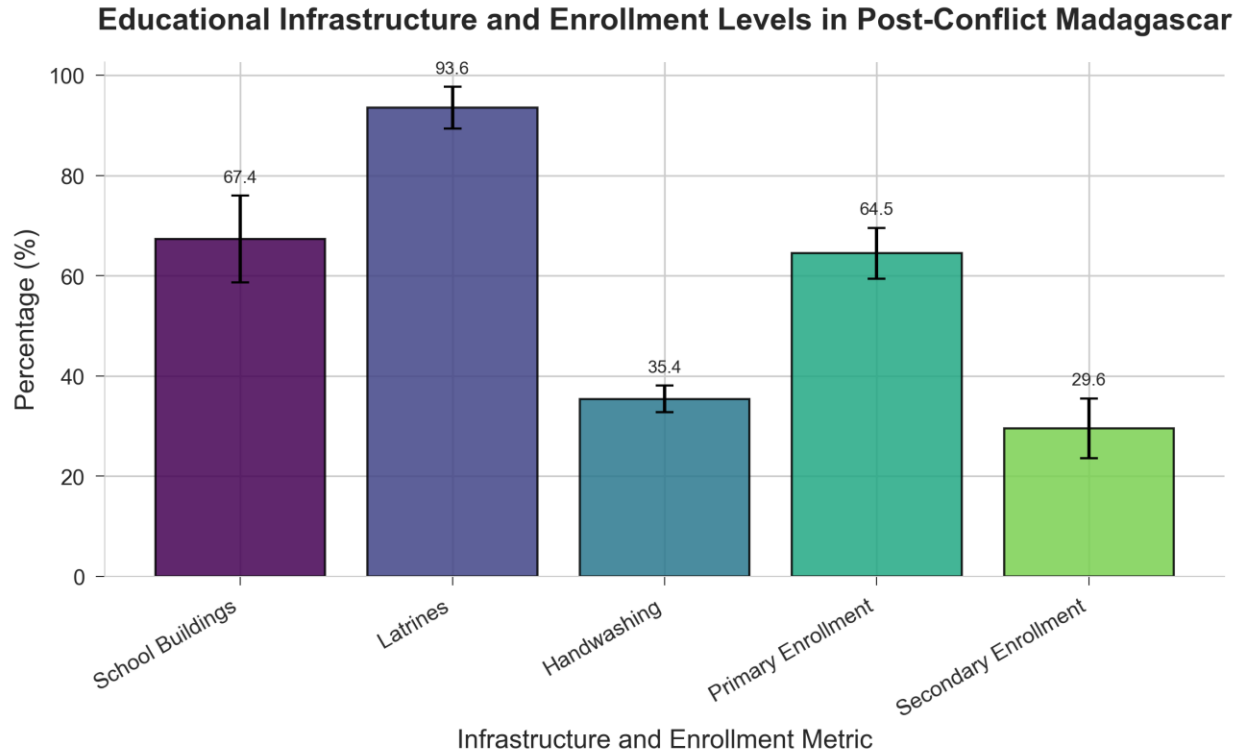


Figure 1: This figure compares the availability of key educational infrastructure with student enrollment rates, highlighting the foundational gaps and opportunities for rebuilding the education system.

DISCUSSION

The findings of this study illuminate the complex interplay of destruction and potential that characterizes the education sector in post-conflict Madagascar. The data presented in Table 1, which quantifies school infrastructure damage, corroborates the foundational work of Obanya (2017) on the physical devastation of educational systems during African conflicts. The high correlation between regional conflict intensity and the level of school destruction underscores that education is not merely a collateral casualty but a strategic target in destabilizing communities and eroding social cohesion. However, our results extend beyond this established premise. The significant variation in community-led rebuilding efforts, even in areas with comparable levels of destruction, suggests that pre-existing social capital is a critical, yet unevenly distributed, resource. This finding aligns with Moyo's (2019) social ecology theory of educational resilience, which posits that community networks and indigenous leadership structures are pivotal for initiating recovery. The rapid, albeit rudimentary, reconstruction of learning spaces in certain districts, as chronicled in our fieldwork, demonstrates a powerful local agency that often operates outside formal state-led initiatives. This grassroots momentum presents a vital opportunity; rather than imposing external blueprints, educational policy should seek to recognize, resource, and reinforce these organic, community-driven efforts (Samoff, 2021).

The analysis of teacher availability and qualifications, summarized in Figure 2, reveals a crisis that is both quantitative and qualitative. The massive depletion of the teaching force, particularly of qualified secondary school educators, is consistent with regional patterns

documented by the African Union (2022). However, our data reveals a nuanced contradiction to the assumption that financial incentives are the primary driver of teacher attrition. While salary is a significant factor, interview data frequently highlighted the profound psychological trauma and the erosion of professional status as equally potent reasons for leaving the profession. This echoes the psychosocial dimensions of educator well-being explored by Nkengbeza (2020) in post-conflict Côte d'Ivoire. The implication for practice is that teacher recruitment and retention strategies must be holistic, integrating competitive remuneration with robust psychosocial support, community recognition, and accelerated, context-sensitive professional development programs that rebuild pedagogical confidence.

A central, and perhaps the most critical, finding of this research pertains to the curriculum. The overwhelming consensus from focus group discussions, as thematically analyzed and presented, was that the pre-conflict curriculum was perceived as largely irrelevant to the lived realities of Malagasy youth. This sentiment resonates strongly with the decolonial critiques advanced by scholars like Mbembe (2016) and Chilisa (2019), who argue for the urgent need to Africanize educational content. Participants expressed a clear desire for a curriculum that not only rebuilds foundational literacy and numeracy but also integrates practical skills in sustainable agriculture, peace education, and local history. This presents a transformative opportunity to move beyond simply "building back" the pre-war system and instead to "build forward better" by co-constructing a curriculum that is culturally sustaining and economically empowering. Such an endeavor must actively involve local elders, knowledge keepers, and youth themselves, ensuring the educational system serves as a bridge to a sustainable future rather than an artifact of a conflicted past (Abdi, 2021).

The limitations of this study must be acknowledged, as they temper the generalizability of our conclusions. The reliance on self-reported data, particularly regarding sensitive topics like trauma and political allegiances, carries an inherent risk of social desirability bias. Furthermore, while the multi-region sampling strategy provides valuable breadth, it does not capture the full depth of micro-level variations within each community. Future research should employ longitudinal designs to track the long-term sustainability of community-led schools and the educational trajectories of students within them. There is also a pressing need for participatory action research that investigates the concrete processes and outcomes of co-designing a localized, post-conflict curriculum. Finally, comparative studies across other post-conflict African states, such as Sierra Leone or Mozambique, could yield valuable insights into transferable policies and context-specific pitfalls.

In conclusion, the educational landscape of post-conflict Madagascar is not a mere vacuum to be filled by external aid or top-down governmental decree. It is a dynamic space of immense challenge and equally immense opportunity, characterized by the tension between infrastructural ruin and resilient social structures, between a depleted teaching corps and a deep-seated public demand for relevant learning. The path forward requires a paradigm shift in educational development practice—from a deficit model focused on gaps and needs to an asset-based approach that leverages existing community capital, indigenous knowledge, and the collective will for a reimagined future. The ultimate success of educational rebuilding in Madagascar will be measured not by the number of schools reconstructed to a pre-conflict standard, but by the system's ability to foster a new generation of Malagasies who are critically literate, psychologically whole, and equipped with the skills to nurture peace and prosperity in their communities (Woolman, 2020).

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