

Re-aligning the development trajectory in Madagascar through local voices



The political history of post-independence Madagascar is similar to that of other former French colonies on the continent, which have been characterised by a strong presidency, weak state institutions and complete absence of the state around the periphery. The 2009 uprising in Madagascar necessitated rethinking fundamental questions of how states were formed in Africa and of findings new ways of community consultation and development, says *Olivia Lwabukuna* et al.

Madagascar's instability peaked in 2009 when tensions between Madagascar's former president, Marc Ravalomanana, and Antananarivo's former mayor, Andry Rajoelina, culminated in the forcible removal of Ravalomanana from office. This was preceded by a week of violent protests, followed by the military declaring Rajoelina president. After several rounds of failed negotiations, presidential elections were eventually held in December 2013, with Hery Rajaonarimampianina claiming victory through a run-off. He took office on 25 January 2014.

The violent nature of the 2009 uprising and the fact that mutinous military and large crowds of protesters supported the move, suggested weaknesses in the social structures in the country, which could be interpreted as remnants of the country's colonial past.

The roots of the crisis in Madagascar can be traced back to the difficult transition from a French colony to democracy and failure to consolidate democratic processes and structures in the early 1990s, from which Madagascar is still recovering.

Understanding the scope of the crisis

Research was undertaken at the end of 2015 in Antananarivo, Madagascar. It gathered information on the role of local voices in various circumstances, and included evaluating and gathering information on the survival and resilience mechanisms employed by communities and civil society responses, as well as government's role in resolving issues underlying the crisis.

Research and field study questions took into account that the Madagascar situation was akin to many African scenarios where historical factors combined with bad governance had resulted in political crises that the larger population had to endure. Additionally, such crises had to be resolved by external actors, questioning the involvement of local populations in decisions of governance after the passing of the crises, and if so, their expectations of the future.

The researchers conducted semi-structured interviews with individuals and developmental community-based organisations (CBOs). Interview questions included: Is the absence of local voices the reason for the stagnated development in Madagascar and Africa in general? Where are the local actors

in the drive towards African solutions to African developmental challenges or when the military intervenes on the continent? Where are the voices of women and youth groups? Could the outcome of these interventions have been different if local communities were consulted? What is the impact of these crises and interventions on the vulnerable in African societies?

The research gathered information on contributions and impacts of the social and political history of Madagascar on the current state of affairs; inter-community discourses on the new path to development in Madagascar; the role of legal and policy mechanisms in the creation and resolution of the Madagascan crisis; implications of the crisis on vulnerable communities; and the role of external actors, including neighbouring and regional actors such as South Africa, Southern African Development Community (SADC) and the African Union (AU).

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Preliminary findings

- The country lacked an inclusive participatory approach to development prior to the 2009 political upheavals. Its governance structures had not responded to local realities in building peace and confidence among local communities.
- Local peace building and development frameworks such as Dynaby and Fiavarna had collapsed, paving the way for a protracted and knee-jerk approach to peace and nation building initiatives.
- The crisis had an excessive impact on women and children, significantly increasing orphaned and street children due to unemployment and land loss for women, broken family structures, maternal deaths and prostitution.
- Challenges and opportunities had been created by the conflict, including a need for investment to reconstruct and develop the country. South Africa could lead this process, given its SADC hegemonic position and experience in home-grown peace-building processes.

The results indicated the Madagascar crisis was political, social and historical, resulting in a constitutional disorder. Contrary to popular belief and contrary to our hypotheses, the roles played by SADC, the AU and South Africa received little recognition. In fact, Madagascar was more inclined to relate to and rely on Indian Ocean Islands and regional Francophone organisations than on SADC or the AU. French socio-economic and political influences call for France's incremental role in peace-building, though mindful of Malagasy voices.

Additionally, the legal system in Madagascar is in disorder, not trusted and used mostly as a tool of power and political manoeuvre. Corruption, which is highly embedded in Madagascan structures, has negated any presumption of legal impartiality, or trust that justice will prevail or be a tool of social transformation tool. Investments of any sort in Madagascar must take cognisance of institutional corruption as a risk factor.

The Madagascan crisis was caused by lack of an inclusive participatory approach to development thinking

Strengthening a fragile peace

The Madagascan crisis was caused by lack of an inclusive participatory approach to development thinking, which was exacerbated by elitist SADC regional responses and lack of intervention support and mechanisms at domestic level adopted to localise SADC protocols.

Weaknesses in, or lack of, appropriate social policies tailored to address the impact of the violent conflict on the vulnerable, also contributed immensely to the current narrative. As a result of the crisis, the international community, including the AU and SADC, intervened and pushed for negotiations that led to the installation of a new constitutional order, while the former president was relegated to exile in South Africa.

The peace in Madagascar is fragile. Its institutions are critically underfunded, lowly staffed and highly in need of strong management and governance. Additionally, as a country in transition, Madagascar is still highly reliant on international donor aid and has for a long time been classified as a humanitarian-aid receiving state.

This has contributed to gaps in institutional governance and accountability, including failure to account for funds, the politicising and personalising of public institutions and loss of confidence in public institutions and the government. This, in turn, has diminished calls for accountability and transparency.

The large presence of donor and humanitarian support has to a large extent shifted responsibility for services from government to international agencies, and this is not good for accountability.

Lastly, the Malagasy psyche has been demoralised by continuous cycles of low intensity instability, economic and environmental crises, cultural and educational barriers and political impunity, resulting in apathy.

Lessons learnt

Lack of inclusive participatory approaches to development processes and political impunity, with total disregard for accountability, can breed democratic decay and the stagnation of development projects.

Madagascar presents lessons for other African states, namely that citizen engagement sustains post-colonial states as a vehicle for development. Madagascar proves there can be no democratic development if citizenship and civic engagement are discouraged. It is the perfect example of apathy, fatigue and political dysfunction in post-colonial Africa, but it also presents an opportunity for reconstruction of the state if local voices are consulted. ■

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