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CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN MADAGASCAR

Joint report by :

La Plateforme de la Société Civile pour l'Enfance (PFSCE)

And

PFSCE Children's Committee

With the support of :



I. PRESENTATION OF THE AUTHORS

1. The **Children's Committee of the Plateforme de la Société Civile pour l'Enfance (PFSCCE)** is a consultative body made up of 20 child beneficiaries of the PFSCCE member organisations. Aged between 9 and 18, they are mobilised for a two-year term and represent a variety of situations: children in street situations, children with disabilities, children in conflict with the law, victims of abuse and exploitation, children without parental support, and children from vulnerable families.
2. This Committee issues opinions and proposals on the definition of policies and the strategic framework developed by the PFSCCE Steering Committee. It aims to be a place where children's voices are heard, listened to and taken into account, focusing on the protection and promotion of their rights in Madagascar and throughout the world. Committee members learn to be citizens and are introduced to democracy and good governance. They formulate opinions and proposals, either at the request of the PFSCCE bodies or on their own initiative. They are supported by PFSCCE member organisations and the coordination team in carrying out joint projects.
3. Currently with 62 members listed in the appendix, the **Plateforme de la Société Civile pour l'Enfance (PFSCCE)** is one of the largest national networks dedicated to the promotion and respect of children's rights in Madagascar. The platform brings together civil society organisations involved in child protection and deals with children's rights issues in a cross-cutting and specific manner. Its mission has four (4) main components: (I) to promote the rights of the child, (II) to strengthen the capacities of civil society actors and encourage their complementarity, (III) to encourage collaboration between child protection actors, and (IV) to influence public and private strategic orientations.

II. INTRODUCTION

4. The Children's Report aims to highlight issues relating to childhood, including the right to health and education, child labour, violence, children without parental support, in street situations, in conflict with the law and with disabilities.

III. METHODOLOGY

5. This report was written with the members of the Madagascar Children's Committee with the support of the PFSCCE. Between June and July 2024, Committee members, supported by educators from PFSCCE member organisations, conducted 16 focus groups in the Analamanga region, consulting 240 children. In addition, 12 other focus groups were conducted by educators in **12 regions of Madagascar** (Boeny, Alaotra Mangoro, Amoron'i Mania, Haute Matsiatra, Vatovavy, Anosy, Atsimo Andrefana, Diana, Sofia, Itasy, Atsinanana, Analanjirofo), totalling **46 focus groups with 705 children consulted**.

6. The present report is based solely on the statements made by the children during the conducted focus groups. It records their perceptions and analysis of their rights situation.

IV. CHILDREN'S RIGHTS IN MADAGASCAR

A. EDUCATION

7. The Children's Committee notes that free public education is being promoted by the State, that "Manara-penitra" establishments¹ are multiplying and that school canteens are being set up. However, free education is not yet a reality in several regions. Moreover, there are still many public education establishments that do not meet standards: non-existent, remote or poor-quality infrastructure, lack of furniture, poorly qualified and under-valued human resources.
8. In addition, several public leisure facilities, such as parks and playgrounds, which are in principle intended for children regardless of class or origin, remain inaccessible to most of them. This case, among many others, reveals a lack of consideration for the equality of children before the public service.
9. Access to school canteens is particularly problematic. Many children still complain about not having access to the school canteens they have heard so much about. They are not motivated to go to school on an empty stomach and prefer to wander the streets looking for something to eat. This situation is leading to a worrying increase in school dropouts and encourages child labour.
10. Finally, most of the children consulted said that they had been discriminated against because of their appearance, especially the clothes they wore. They admitted that this situation often discourages them from going to school.

"We appreciate the construction of the "Manara-penitra" establishments and the attractive parks and playgrounds, but some recently inaugurated playgrounds remain inaccessible to us. However, some recently inaugurated play areas remain inaccessible to us."

"We've heard the President of the Republic advocate for free education for all, but that hasn't happened here."

Recommendation:

11. Give greater consideration to education by ensuring that it is free, and that the quality of public education is monitored throughout the country, while helping families to pay the costs of studying.

¹ *Manara-penitra*, literally "according to standards", is a label used by the Government to designate so-called modern infrastructure.

B. HEALTH

12. The Children's Committee expresses its concern about the State's consideration of the health and well-being of Malagasy children. The best interests of the child are not yet a priority, even though all children should freely enjoy the right to health. Children are confronted with illnesses such as diarrhoea, malnutrition and various skin diseases, due to unsanitary conditions, especially in the capital. The children consulted during the focus groups in the Analamanga region condemned the lack of government initiative regarding sanitation, hygiene and access to sanitary facilities for most disadvantaged and vulnerable. These hygiene-related issues and the lack of access to sanitation are a real danger, especially for vulnerable young girls at the age of puberty.

"I have a friend in Analakely who had a serious skin disease and scabies because he couldn't wash regularly. You see, public showers and toilets are too expensive for the poor. It used to cost 300Ar to take a shower, which is already exorbitant, but now it costs 500Ar and if you choose to shower with hot water, it costs 1000Ar.²

13. Another reason they mentioned was poverty, and more specifically the financial difficulties faced by families. This leads to poor nutrition, resulting in child malnutrition. Many do not get enough to eat, and their meals do not include the fruit, vegetables and meat they should. Their food lacks vitamins and minerals.
14. The children also highlighted the problems affecting them in public health centres, namely the marginalisation of the poor by health staff, the exorbitant cost of medicines and corruption. Also, the number of medical staff is not proportional to the number of patients. This discourages parents from consulting a doctor and means that children do not receive appropriate care. All of this has a negative impact on the quality of services offered to children by health centres.

Recommendation:

15. Improve the quality and accessibility of services in health centres by applying free primary care, eradicating discrimination against the poor, lowering the price of medicine, and increasing the number of hospitals, health centres and health staff working in childcare.

"When I was younger, the services in the basic health centres were satisfactory, now they have deteriorated, the reception is miserable, and the medical staff don't care about the children."

C. CHILD LABOUR

16. The Children's Committee notes that the State has made an effort to take care of working children by placing them in appropriate places and has taken measures against employers who hired minors.

² The children told us that the cost of access to public toilets has doubled in just a few years, and that it is exorbitant.

17. However, the root causes of child labour, such as the vulnerability of families, the lack of parental support and the shortcomings of the education system, are not yet sufficiently addressed.
18. Children feel the need to work as they are aware of the economic situation of their parents and/or family. As a result, child labour is normalised by the children themselves, who believe that it is normal for a child to work and help his or her parents and/or family financially, and therefore, are not convinced that children should not be obliged to work.
19. The Children's Committee is concerned about this situation, which makes them even more vulnerable. These children are victims of several forms of violence: exploitation and extortion by their employers³, abuse by their elders⁴, violence during gang conflicts⁵.

*"I preferred to go to places I didn't know to escape the abuse from my family.
"The people around me encourage me to work for a living."*

Recommendation:

20. Reinforcing support for vulnerable children and their families, whether in terms of livelihoods, education, support or guidance, in order to address their needs and effectively prevent and combat the necessity for them to work.

D. VIOLENCE AND PROTECTION

21. The Children's Committee notes that children's right to protection remains an unknown and misunderstood right by many people in Madagascar. This right is not respected and is not generally known because children are usually subjected to discrimination, contempt, domination, exclusion and stigmatisation by their parents, their families and above all their community, but also among themselves. Yet this right is essential for children, especially those in vulnerable situations and/or victims of violence.
22. There are structures in place, and the state takes action, but these do not always meet their needs. This is why some of them are victims of child trafficking, neglect in terms of medical care and are also forced to drop out of school, work, get married, resort to corruption and other dishonest and unhealthy practices.

"Nobody cares about children's right to protection".

Recommendation:

23. Develop and strengthen measures to combat and prevent violence and provide psychological, social and medical care for all children.

³ For car park security guards, for example, many children are exploited by "bosses", national/municipal police officers and car park managers. Several children complain that they receive nothing for their services.

⁴ Parents, grandparents, members of the extended family.

⁵ "Clans" are formed and each wants to assert its dominance.

"I'm sad because I've been abandoned."

E. CHILDREN WITHOUT PARENTAL SUPPORT

24. The Children's Committee is deeply concerned about the precarious living conditions of children without parental support in reception centres, which lack financial and material resources, sanitary facilities and electricity, potentially rendering their care ineffective.
25. Also, the children consulted during the focus groups reported a marked inequality in the support provided by the State to the various associations and NGOs: some centres benefit from considerable support from the State while others struggle alone to meet the basic needs of children. Most children without parental support consulted admitted to eating no more than two (2) times a day.
26. The Children's Committee also noted that children without parental support are also victims of discrimination and stigmatisation, especially by the community, because of their financial situation, skin colour or appearance.

Recommendation:

27. Ensure adequate and equitable funding for care centres and associations to provide dignified living conditions and quality services for children, making sure that transparent mechanisms for distributing resources are put in place to guarantee equal treatment and compliance with minimum quality standards.

"We see that there are CSOs that benefit from donations and various forms of aid, such as Father Pedro's AKAMASOA association, whereas in our centre the educators pay contributions to meet our needs."

"Give us something to eat because we're not getting enough to eat."

F. CHILDREN IN CONFLICT WITH THE LAW

28. The Children's Committee deplores the fact that children in conflict with the law face numerous challenges on a daily basis, such as malnutrition, the lack of separation between social and criminal cases, the lack of infrastructure and family ties, and limited access to medical care, exacerbated by corruption at every stage of the judicial process, from the appearance before judicial police officers to the trial courts and prisons.
29. The Children's Committee is also concerned about the slow procedures and the injustices faced by children in conflict with the law within the judicial system. The children consulted expressed the need to improve the training of children's to better consider the circumstances of the accused.

Recommendation:

30. Investigate each case of children in conflict with the law in a thorough, fair, and expedited manner, while putting in place an anti-corruption strategy and promoting the use of alternatives to detention.

"Every time I walk into court, I see this scale, the symbol of justice, but I find that it's tilted to one side."

G. CHILDREN WITH DISABILITIES

31. The Children's Committee notes that children with disabilities are constantly excluded by society, their environment and, above all, their peers. Violence, particularly psychological violence, is an integral part of their daily lives and has a lasting emotional impact. Without adequate protection, these children are powerless to address this situation.
32. Furthermore, the State has not put in place any concrete measures, laws and policies to protect these children from all forms of violence and discrimination. The children consulted also noted the lack of awareness-raising and education programmes to change societal perceptions and encourage inclusion. They also expressed the need for the establishment of psychological support structures and access to specialised services to provide the means to develop in a safe and supporting environment.

Recommendation:

33. Improve the education and awareness of the community, especially peers, about non-discrimination and the care of disabled children, with particular attention to training the parents of disabled children.

"There should be no exclusion, but rather a federation and cohesion."

H. CHILDREN IN STREET SITUATIONS

34. The Children's Committee has noted that despite the existence of laws introduced by the Malagasy government, children in street situations continue to suffer from prejudice and stereotypes. These biased perceptions persist within the population, further marginalising these children. Although public care structures have been set up to support vulnerable children, children in street situations continue to receive insufficient attention and their protection remains sporadic and often linked to specific events.
35. Violence against these children is a persistent problem in Madagascar, occurring within the family, at school, and above all in the street. Of the 70 children consulted during the focus groups, 58% aged between 6 and 17 reported having been subjected to violence.

"It was with round wood that my father hit me on the head. My head was hurt, and I still have the scar."

36. Various types of discrimination, stigmatisation and violence are unfortunately common for children in street situations, further excluding them from society and worsening their already precarious situation. The Children's Committee has not noted any State initiatives aimed at improving this situation for these children.

Recommendation:

37. Increase the number and quality of state-run reception centres and/or refuge centres, particularly regarding basic services (health, education, nutrition, support and guidance), while raising awareness about the non-stigmatisation of children in street situations.

"When we're at the market or in crowded places, people see us coming and call us smelly, people who smell of excrement, or say that we're pickpockets."

V. LIST OF RECOMMENDATIONS

38. Give greater consideration to education by ensuring that it is free, and that the quality of public education is monitored throughout the country, while helping families to pay the costs of studying.
39. Improve the quality and accessibility of services in health centres by applying free primary care, eradicating discrimination against the poor, lowering the price of medicine, and increasing the number of hospitals, health centres and health staff working in childcare.
40. Reinforcing support for vulnerable children and their families, whether in terms of livelihoods, education, support or guidance, in order to address their needs and effectively prevent and combat the necessity for them to work.
41. Develop and strengthen measures to combat and prevent violence and provide psychological, social and medical care for all children.
42. Ensure adequate and equitable funding for care centres and associations to provide dignified living conditions and quality services for children, making sure that transparent mechanisms for distributing resources are put in place to guarantee equal treatment and compliance with minimum quality standards.
43. Investigate each case of children in conflict with the law in a thorough, fair, and expedited manner, while putting in place an anti-corruption strategy and promoting the use of alternatives to detention.
44. Improve the education and awareness of the community, especially peers, about non-discrimination and the care of disabled children, with particular attention to training the parents of disabled children.
45. Increase the number and quality of state-run reception centres and/or refuge centres, particularly regarding basic services (health, education, nutrition, support and guidance), while raising awareness about the non-stigmatisation of children in street situations.

ANNEX I. LIST OF PFSCE MEMBER ORGANISATIONS

- ACCESS MAD
- ACTION CONTRE LA FAIM
- AIDE ET EDUCATION
- AINA - Enfance et avenir
- AKANY AVOKO FARAVOHITRA
- Akany Fiezahana
- AKANY FITIAVANA IKIANJA
- Ank'Izy
- ASEFFEMA
- ASMAE
- Association Save Zoé
- ASSOCIATION AT HOME
- Association des Jeunes acteurs pour la Communauté
- ASSOCIATION DIAVOLANA
- ASSOCIATION ENFANTS D'ANTANANARIVO
- Association FITAFI
- Association Gazela pour le Développement Social
- ASSOCIATION INTERNATIONALE DE LA CHARITE
- Association Mihary Soa
- Association MSA
- Association OHATRA
- Association pour la Promotion de la Lecture chez les Enfants à Madagascar
- Association Sahia
- Association Tsaramasay - Centre Mahereza
- ASSOCIATION VANONA
- Association Young Efficient for Success
- ATD Quart Monde
- AVOTRA FFF
- Centre Betania Ankasina
- Centre NRJ
- Ecole de Rugby, Ecole de la Vie
- ECPAT France
- Enda Madagascar
- Enfant du soleil
- FMA
- GRAINES DE BITUME
- GRANDIR DIGNEMENT
- HARDI
- Hay Kanto
- KOLO AINA
- KOZAMA
- La Chaîne de 'Espoir

- La Cometa
- LA RUCHE
- ManaoDE - Manao Droits de l'Enfant
- MANDA
- Mentor ECCE
- ONG HAFA
- ONG MERCI
- ONG Ny Aiko Wealthy
- ONG TSINJO
- SEED Madagascar (Sustainable Environnement Education Development)
- SIF
- SOMBINIAINA
- SOS VILLAGE D'ENFANTS
- Tia Hina
- Un Enfant par la Main
- ZARA AINA
- Zova an'Kids
- Association AVANA
- ONG Ketsa
- Zazakely Sambatra