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Community Involvement in School Management in Madagascar Government Policies and School Practices

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Abstract

The objective of this study is to explore how community involvement in school management is planned at the policy level and implemented at the school level in Madagascar. Decentralization and community involvement in school management are often implemented to fix the failure of centralized education systems. In this case, a strong existing community, managed in a bottom-up manner is needed to yield satisfactory participation. In Madagascar, such a community has traditionally existed in the form of parents' associations, yet, the government is formalizing school management committees, and introducing members from outside schools. It is of interest to study how policy and practice intersect in such a context. Fieldwork was conducted in the central highlands of Madagascar in August and September 2022. Policy documents were analyzed to understand the government's strategies. Then, informal interviews were conducted at public primary schools to explore the implementation of such a management committee at the school level. The results showed that while the more traditional community initially tried to be self-sufficient by gathering funds themselves, establishing the new community is a prerequisite to receiving government subsidies. This drifts from the original self-help mentality to a new state of dependency on the government which paradoxically cannot do much to keep education free. Although a strong community existed before, bringing people from outside the school is likely to alter its stability, further hindering community participation.

Keywords: School management, community involvement, FEFPI, FRAM, Madagascar

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1. Introduction

In recent years, in education research and practice, much focus has been put on education quality, especially how to improve outcomes rather than education access alone. Previous research identified different axes to address education quality challenges, including interventions at the level of the child, the household, the school, the teachers, and the system in general. The latter is defined as an intervention that brings changes at the community, decentralized levels of the government, and at the national level (Snilstveit et al. 2015). Community involvement in school management is then part of intervention at the community and school level. The same paper states that involving the local community is often a way to address the failure of centralized education systems (*ibid.*).

In Madagascar, decentralization of the government has been underway and community involvement in school management is part of such efforts (Republic of Madagascar 2015). However, the community has always been involved in school management since the 1970s with the government letting decentralized communities build schools with their means (Razafimbelo 2011). Such contribution is later seen through the parents' associations (FRAM: *Fikambanan'ny Ray Aman-drenin'ny Mpianatra*), well-known for actively contributing to hiring teachers and paying their salaries when the government fails to provide enough teachers to public schools. The government has been trying to formalize such an association, and in 2015, a first decree was promulgated to legally create associations based on freedom of association, in compliance with ordinance n°60-133 (Republic of Madagascar 1960), but on the government's terms, to improve education access, equity, quality, and good governance. This study explores how policy and practice intersect in planning and implementing community involvement in school management in Madagascar.

2. Literature review

2.1. The expected results of community participation

In recent years, studies on school management have been focusing on the educational outcome of parents' participation (Shibuya 2020). However, its

mechanism is still unclear. Snilstveit et al. (2015) assert that community involvement in school management has been implemented to fix the failure of centralized education systems. They explain the relationship between participation and education outcomes as follows. Community-based monitoring and accountability would lead to better-run schools, which would improve the quality of teaching and learning environments. It would also increase access by increasing the demand for education. A good image of education created this way would better enforce access (*ibid*).

2.2. The nature of school management as part of decentralization

Decentralization is understood as a way to improve quality by strengthening the democratic process and increasing participation. Applied to school management, transparency, accountability, and better quality of service and education outcomes are expected. However, its effectiveness may depend on context. Giving decision-making power to disadvantaged communities may lead to the monopolization of power by the elites. Furthermore, teachers may be accountable to only a more traditional hierarchy rather than to the community, especially when parents have low status compared to teachers (Essuman & Akyeampong 2011). Moreover, a potential co-responsible governance stems from vertical, horizontal, and downward accountabilities (Myende et al. 2018). Top-down implementation is likely to put a strain on the community, which would not yield the results expected (Nishimura 2017). Other studies suggest that despite the claim that schools should make an effort to engage with local communities, such an approach would not work if the community is not fully functional (Shibuya 2020).

In the context of Madagascar, it would be interesting to see how governments' efforts to formalize community participation in school management are planned and implemented as Madagascar has a long history of parental involvement in school management through parents' associations.

3. Methodology

To understand the policy and historical context behind the change in community involvement in school management, policy documents are reviewed, including the ordinance for the creation of associations (Republic of Madagascar 1960) and the decree that sets the different rules for establishing associations related to school management (Ministry of National Education 2015). Education sector plans before and after the creation of the association are also analyzed. They include the Interim Plan for Education (MEN 2012), the Education Sector Plan for 2018 to 2022 (MEN et al. 2017), and the National Plan for Development (Republic of Madagascar 2015).

To understand the implementation of the recently introduced School Management Committee (FEFFI: *Farimbon’Ezaka ho Fahombiazan’ny Fanabeazana eny Ifotony*) at the school level, fieldwork was done in August and September 2022 for a period of five weeks. Four public primary schools were visited (Schools A to D). As an exploratory study, convenience sampling was used to select the schools. Informal interviews were conducted with the head of each school to understand the current situation, especially the income and expenditures and their management, followed by issues currently faced by the schools.

Table 1. Characteristics of the primary schools

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Number of households	65	60	63	73
Teachers (paid by parents)	4	2	2	1
Teachers (civil servants)	1	2	1	5
Number of pupils	N/A	105	110	150
Area	Rural area of Itasy	Suburban area of Analamanga	Suburban area of Analamanga	Suburban area of Analamanga

Source: Created by the authors based on interview data

4. Results

4.1. Historical context and policy

4.1.1. The beginning of the decline in education enrollment

One of the reasons why the Malagasy government has implemented different strategies to improve education management can be traced back to the observation of the deterioration of education results around 2009, with a political crisis following the institution of an unconstitutional government. Although the completion rate of primary education and youth literacy rate increased, the net enrollment ratio decreased from a pic of 96.8 percent in 2005 to 73.4 percent in 2010, and a low of 69.4 percent in 2012. Children in poverty, in rural areas, and orphans are the most vulnerable (INSTAT/ENSOMD 2013). Moreover, although education is free on paper, parents still have to cover certain expenses incurred by the school. They spent an average of 66,000 Ariary (\approx USD15) per child between 2011 and 2012. There are differences in spending between regions, public and private schools, and levels of education (*ibid.*).

4.1.2. Addressing the gaps

In December 2012, an Interim Plan for Education was developed following three main objectives (MEN 2012). The first objective (1) was to expand schools' capacity to receive and supervise students, as well as improve retention and reinsertion. It mainly focused on reducing parental financial burden, improving infrastructure, and supporting school feeding programs.

The second objective (2) was to improve the quality of teaching. It mainly focused on providing specific tools to support the learning environment as well as enhancing the management of the teachers hired by parents' associations and improving their effectiveness by developing their qualifications and boosting their motivation through training. In this objective, encouraging accountability is done through promoting a culture of results and transparency towards users, i.e., parents, in their right to claim results in terms of outcomes corresponding to each action taken.

The last objective (3) was to reinforce institutional capacity for planning, management, and communication within the central government and between the

central government and other decentralized institutions in order to establish the notion of accountability.

4.1.3. An issue of structure

The education system in Madagascar is managed through a centralized system led by the Ministry of Education (MEN), setting the general policy of the government. They are supported by what they call decentralized technical services (STD: *Services Techniques Déconcentrés*), representing the ministry at the regional level (DREN: *Directions Régionales de l'Education Nationale*), district level (CISCO: *Circonscriptions scolaires*), and *commune* level (ZAP: *Zone Administrative et Pédagogique*). For all the 22 DREN, there were 114 CISCO, 1591 ZAP, and 35,747 schools (MEN 2012).

The same document acknowledged the considerable centralization of activity conception, planning, training, and supervision to the MEN. The DREN was not considered in charge of programs. The execution was attributed to the STDs, the responsibility at each level was unclear, and the heads of ZAP, called Chef ZAP were overworked (*ibid.*).

Decentralization is not an issue of education alone. In the national plan for development. The government recognizes the need for a real, effective decentralization characterized by an effective transfer of power and significant resources allocated to decentralized administrations (Republic of Madagascar 2015).

1.4.4. An association for school management

Due to the above issues, the Ministry of Education decided to involve the local community in school management by mandating the opening of an association called FEFFI at each public primary, lower secondary, and community school. FEFFI is regulated by the ordinance 60-133 of 3 October 1960 (Republic of Madagascar 1960), according to which, two or more people can gather and put their assets together for common objectives other than profit.

Article 24, states that associations officially declared or recognized as serving the public good are subject to specific controls when they receive subsidies from the State, provinces, or *communes*. Moreover, any hindrance to the exercise of this

control will result in the cancellation of subsidies provided. Although there is no mention of FEFFI being officially recognized on the paper, the same principles seem to apply to them.

The objectives of FEFFI are to improve education in terms of access, equity, and quality as well as good school governance. They will mainly create the “contractual institution project” (PEC: *Plan d’Etablissement Contractualisé*) with the help of the State and its subsidiaries, the financial and technical stakeholders, and any individuals and legal entities wanting to work to improve basic education (Ministry of National Education 2015). The PEC will detail the project of the school including the source of income and spending plans.

The FEFFI at a given school will have a general assembly, a permanent board, and a control board. To join the general assembly, one must be at least 18 years of age at the time of application, enjoy full civil and political rights, and not have been convicted of a felony or misdemeanor. In addition, such a person needs to be either of the following: a personnel of the school, a parent living in the area of the FEFFI, an individual or a legal entity wanting to contribute to basic education, being the head of a decentralized local authority or traditional authority, or being the head of a Non-Government Organization that is a stakeholder of basic education duly authorized for this purpose (Ministry of National Education 2015).

The permanent board is led by a president and a treasurer, democratically elected, a vice-president appointed by the president, and a secretary. The head of the school is automatically appointed as the secretary of FEFFI. The president also appoints several counselors (*ibid*). The role of each board member is detailed in the decree. Their activities mainly focus on managing the association, their assets and resources, and ensuring the implementation of the PEC. They are, however, under the control of Chef ZAP. They can also have work groups that work on different matters important to the association (*ibid*).

The control board is composed of two auditors, democratically elected, and a committee that ensures the implementation of the PEC, the modality of which is determined by the general assembly. They ensure the management is accurate and transparent (*ibid*).

The assets of the FEFFI come from goods or services they provide, material,

financial, or human resources from parents, associations, funding agencies, or the government. All transactions need the signature of the treasurer, the secretary, and the president of the permanent board. However, the use of each fund is determined by the funding entity (*ibid*), which may not give much freedom to the association.

1.4.5. The evolution of FEFFI

FEFFI is not the first instance in which the community gets involved in school management in Madagascar. Between 1972 and 1975, with the *Malgachization* (using the Malagasy language exclusively) and democratization of education, one primary school was created for each *fokontany* (the smallest administrative subdivision in Madagascar) and it was considered the duty of the people to build schools under the government's instructions (Ratsiraka 1975). During these times, schools expanded quickly, and new graduates soon became teachers. In early 2000, with the inability of the country to provide teachers, parents' associations were largely created at schools to manage the funds gathered by parents to hire teachers. In 2016, the number of such teachers reached more than 50,000 (MEN et al. 2016). Parents' associations' activities are not limited to hiring teachers but also to building schools. Community schools are schools built by such associations. They provide the classrooms and some teachers, enough to run the school. Later, they ask for government support, especially for civil servant teachers. If they fulfill certain conditions, such as the number of students, they will be considered as public schools (From the interviews).

In 2002, an attempt was made to revolutionize community involvement in school management. School Development Partnership (FAFF: *Fiaraha-miombon'Antoka ho an'ny Fampandrosoana ny Fanabeazana*) was created. They were composed of the head of the school, one teacher, one parents' association representative, one local community representative, and one student. A democratic election was not yet held, and its function was deemed unclear, with the existence of the FRAM. In a report by JICA, the ministry considered that at a certain time, the FAAF, the FRAM, and the head of school coexisted in a situation of conflict of interest, which led to the implementation of a democratic election (JICA 2020). The FAFF was abolished with the implementation of FEFFI. A unique account for the school was established and

FRAM accounts were closed to foster transparency and trust between the community, parents, teachers, and head of school. They consider the FEFFI as an entity of regulation for fund use and control, democratically elected (*ibid*).

4.2. Practice at the school level

This part will deal with how schools are managed under FEFFI and what issues were considered at each school. The situation of each school is summarized in Table 2 and Table 3. The details of each school are reported below.

Table 2. Annual cost for each household

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Rice (Kg)	40	-	-	-
Cash (Ariary)	5 000	40 000	46 000	23 000
Other activities	Earthworm growing, Literacy programs	-	School lunch Firewood, rice (150g), cooking	School lunch 200 Ariary, rice (150g), cooking

Note: USD1 \approx 4380 Ariary

Source: Created by the authors based on interview data

Table 3. Funds received by each school per year

	School A	School B	School C	School D
Government	500 000	500 000	525 000	680 000
Funding agencies	130 000	250 0000	250 000	250 000
Parents' Association (Rice)	3 640 000	-	-	-
Parents' Association (Cash)	325 000	2 400 000	2 898 000	1 679 000

Note: USD1 \approx 4380 Ariary

The numbers are rounded to keep the schools anonymous

Source: Created by the authors based on interview data

4.2.1. FEFFI practices at primary school A

(1) School management

School A is managed by FEFFI, the board is composed of nine people, including

the president, a secretary, a treasurer, and counselors. All decisions have to be made by the general assembly. The school has three sources of funds. Two kinds of funds come from the government, one from tax-payers and one directly from international donors under a project for basic education support (PAEB: *Projet d'Appui à l'Education de Base*). Another fund comes from FRAM contributions. It can be noted that FRAM still exists at the school as an entity with its own account. The subsidies from the government depend on the number of students and their use is limited to expenses related to management such as teaching materials and stationaries. As it comes often late, the school uses FRAM funds while waiting.

For instance, the previous year, school A received 500,000 Ariary directly from the government and 130,000 Ariary as PAEB (Table 3). In order to receive the funds, they need to prepare some documents detailing how they use it. The funds are directly sent to the school's bank account but only 100,000 Ariary (\approx USD23). Ariary is allowed to be kept as cash, which is defined by the decree discussed in the previous part.

From the FRAM, the school receives 40kg of rice paddy per household to pay for the teachers' salaries. The previous year, with 65 households offering 40kg of rice each, they can gather 2600 kg per year, which will be divided by four, the number of teachers paid by the FRAM. For 1400 Ariary per kilogram at that time, a teacher receives around 910,000 Ariary (\approx USD208) per year. In addition to the rice paddy, each household pays 5000 Ariary per year, which amounts to 325,000 Ariary (Table 3). Teachers can go on receiving such a meager salary for a long time. For instance, the head of this school has worked as a teacher paid by the FRAM for 11 years before being hired as a civil servant in 2013. There are some who enter retirement as FRAM teachers, without pensions. Recently, with the introduction of the FEFFI, the school is trying other sources of income by raising earthworms using the back of a classroom. The school itself has many classrooms, old ones, and four others they received from a British NGO.

(2) Current issues considered

Difficult access to school prevents children from attending school. Currently, pupils have to cross two rivers to come to school, which is hard during the rainy season because they need to go around, which takes them 90 min just to commute.

The teachers go out to meet them at the river and help them cross.

Parents' work activities are a barrier to students coming to school. Several months before the harvest, parents are reluctant to send their children to school as they do not have food at home. In addition, parents work hard during these seasons and the older children often take care of the youngest. The majority of the little boys who do not come to school herd the cattle and little girls take care of their young siblings. When they come back to school, they have difficulties keeping up with their fellows. The school tries to give school lunch during such a period but can barely afford it once a month.

Teachers do not perform well as they are underappreciated in the community. From the head of the school's perspective, although the school infrastructure is good, the quality of the teachers is not satisfactory as they are not motivated. As members of the community, teachers have different duties in their villages from which they want to be exempt. For instance, due to insecurity, people in the villages take part in patrol duties every night. Not only they are tired from their night watch, but they also feel that teachers are not valued as they should be.

4.2.2. FEFFI practices at primary school B

(1) School management

School B had 105 pupils in 2021 and 95 pupils in 2022. They have four teachers, two of whom are managed by the FRAM while the two others are civil servants. They have five classrooms, one of which is used by the lower secondary school. Each household pays 40,000 Ariary per year (Table 2). 24,000 Ariary is paid at the beginning of the school year (September - October) and the rest is paid in April. With about 60 households, the school raises 2,400,000 Ariary per year. From the government, they receive 500,000 Ariary, and their PAEB amounts to about 250,000 Ariary (Table 3). If the two civil servant teachers' salary is not considered, parents are covering more than 75 percent of all the spending.

(2) Current issues considered

Even though a significant part of the funds is expected from the parents, one of the biggest problems is that not all parents can pay the 40,000 Ariary per year. Moreover, in January and February, before harvest, parents work, and children need

to help them. In September and November, they are also busy practicing off-season crops. Then, in October and December, rice pricking starts. Students do not completely stop going to school but come from time to time. The head teacher tries to look for people or associations who can support the pupils. For instance, an NGO supports some pupils at the school through a kind of scholarship. Implementing this type of project is one of the objectives of FEFFI but for school B, it is still an initiative of the head teacher. It is also interesting to find that some people in so-called suburban areas are practicing agriculture, which negatively affects their children's education despite their proximity to the capital city.

4.2.3. FEFFI practices at primary school C

(1) School management

The school has three teachers, with one teacher for the first and second year, another one for the third and fourth year, and a last one for the fifth year. The headteacher is the only civil servant. The other two teachers are paid by the FRAM. They have four classrooms, one of which is used as a kitchen for school meals and another one serves as the head teacher's office. With ten pupils taking the primary school leaving examination the previous year, only 3 succeeded.

Each household pays 46,000 Ariary per year (Table 2). Half is paid in September at the beginning of the school year and the other half is paid in January. Each teacher receives 100,000 Ariary (\approx USD23) per month. From September to October, pupils go to school only in the morning. From November, they go to school the whole day (7:30 to 11:30 and 13:30 to 15:00). On Fridays they finish at 14:00.

The previous year as PAEB, they received 250,000 Ariary and from the government, they received 525,000 Ariary. In contrast, if all parents paid, they would have collected 2,898,000 Ariary (Table 3).

They have school lunch taken care of by a foreign NPO. Each student contributes about 150 grams of rice per day while teachers contribute about 300 grams. Volunteer parents take turns bringing firewood and cooking the food while the NPO provides the ingredients for the main dish and dessert. The previous year pupils took turns fetching water.

(2) Current issues considered

The school does not have enough classrooms and teachers. Students should perform better because they have school lunch, but teachers must take multiple classes at the same time, which is not effective.

4.2.4. FEFFI practices at primary school D

(1) School management

Children from the village and other five villages come to the school. Those from villages without any public primary schools are accepted without any selection process and the school also accepts students even towards the end of the school year. In 2021, they had 150 pupils (80 girls and 70 boys).

They receive funds from the government, which cannot be used for teachers' salaries. Funds from parents are used to pay only one FRAM teacher. They have 5 other teachers paid by the government. Nevertheless, each household pays 23,000 Ariary. With 73 households, the school gathers 1,679,000 Ariary per year (Table 3). The FRAM teacher receives 110,000 Ariary (\approx USD25) per month for 10 months. In contrast, the other teachers (civil servants) with *baccalauréat* earn from 300,000 Ariary (\approx USD69) to 600,000 Ariary (\approx USD137) per month, depending on their experience and responsibilities.

The school itself is situated in a village that an NGO built with the future dwellers who financially struggled at the time. The NGOs provided the materials and the people provided with manpower. The beneficiaries take the management and maintenance of the village and the school. For the school, it is easy to collect money from the parents; they will pay when money is needed for reparation.

When the funds from the government do not come on time, the school uses funds from the parents for urgent expenses. In 2020/2021, for 175 students, they received 530,000 Ariary from the government. In 2021/2022, they received 680,000 Ariary for 150 students, and as PAEB they received 250,000 Ariary (Table 3).

School lunch is provided by the village, which is a tourist attraction where people pay to visit. The entrance fees amount to 10,000 Ariary (\approx USD2) for those who want to visit the village, with a 70 percent discount for local people. Twenty-five percent of those fees are used to cover school lunches and people from the village take care of the cooking. Before COVID-19 lunch was provided on Monday, Tuesday, and

Wednesday for all classes from preschool to the fifth grade. During COVID, only the fifth grade came to school as they were preparing for the national examination. Each pupil brings about 150 grams of rice and 200 Ariary (\approx USD0.046) per day. The village provides 300 Ariary per child per day. This money is used to buy meat or legumes, vegetables, and desserts. Depending on the season, the school would buy the produce grown by the parents in the village. Students only come to school in the morning.

5. Discussion and conclusions

The objective of this study is to explore the intersection between policy and practice in community involvement in school management. Although some schools started some revenue-generating activities, the overall community participation seems to be hindered by some structural changes involving other stakeholders.

Until recently, the local community (FRAM) that supported education did so because the government could not afford to pay additional teachers' salaries. Their activities also included school facility improvements and new constructions. The spirit was to be self-sufficient in helping the school. However, with the new format, the way of thinking is the opposite. Schools create the FEFPI in order to receive funding from the government and other funding bodies.

The new system did not only trigger an expectation to be provided help but also a hope not to contribute to education as parents. It is stated in the constitution (Republic of Madagascar 2010) that education should be free. The same statement was iterated by the president of the republic in his speech in 2020, which led to parents not willing to financially contribute to their children's education.

Despite the government's promise to keep education free, it is not realistic for the moment. Although they made efforts to hire FRAM-paid teachers as civil servants, non-civil servant teachers are still present at school, which requires the school to collect fees from parents. Even for the funds used to manage schools on a daily basis, when the government's payment is late, schools have no other choice but to collect fees from parents for emergencies.

Unlike the FRAM which only parents are members of, FEFPI brings different

people from outside, which is likely to disturb the long-time established community. On one hand, the deployment of FEFFI seems to be fast, but on the other hand, it is questionable whether it would be as stable as the existing FRAM. If the community does not turn out to be functional, it may, on the contrary, hinder community participation (Shibuya 2020).

FEFFI has been implemented as a response to the perceived failure of centralized education systems (Snilstveit et al. 2015), however, while devolving the tasks to the lowest level of decentralization, it seems to give much more control to the central government that provides comparatively less fund than the local community. In future studies, it would be interesting to focus on how such a system would affect access, equity, and quality of education as stated in their objectives.

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