



# MADAGASCAR

SUBMISSION TO THE UN COMMITTEE ON THE RIGHTS OF THE CHILD

89<sup>TH</sup> SESSION, 17 JANUARY-11 FEBRUARY 2022

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# THE SITUATION OF CHILDREN IN DROUGHT-STRICKEN SOUTHERN MADAGASCAR

## INTRODUCTION

Amnesty International welcomes the opportunity to make a submission to the UN Committee on the Rights of the Child, ahead of its review of Madagascar's seventh periodic report in January 2022. In this submission, Amnesty International sets out its concerns regarding the situation of children in drought-stricken southern Madagascar. It should not be seen as an exhaustive account of the organization's concerns.

## BACKGROUND

The southern region of Madagascar, commonly referred to as Le Grand Sud (the Deep South) is currently experiencing its worst drought in 40 years, with more than a million people (half of them children) on the brink of famine and thousands more already facing catastrophic famine-like conditions.

The impacts of the drought experienced in southern Madagascar have been aggravated by climate change,<sup>1</sup> as well as by underlying socio-economic factors, such as entrenched poverty, persistent water scarcity, lack of access to basic infrastructure, and limited adaptability of agriculture to climate shocks.<sup>2</sup> In this vein, research has shown that children bear the disproportionate impact of climate change, for example, the United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF) states that nearly 90 per cent of the burden of disease attributable to climate change in the world is borne by children under the age of five.<sup>3</sup> Indeed the climate crisis is a 'child's rights crisis'<sup>4</sup> and this is evident in southern Madagascar where the ongoing drought has had a disastrous impact on the rights of children in the region.

The World Food Programme (WFP) has observed that as a direct consequence of the ongoing drought, malnutrition in the region is increasing, while access to water, sanitation and hygiene are becoming ever more precarious. Over one quarter of the children in the Ampanihy and Ambovombe districts are currently suffering from acute malnutrition and the number of children admitted for treatment for life-threatening

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<sup>1</sup> BBC Madagascar on the brink of climate change-induced famine, 25 August 2021, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-africa-58303792>

<sup>2</sup> The World Bank: World Bank Provides \$100 Million to Support Resilient Livelihoods in the South of Madagascar, 10 December 2020, <https://www.worldbank.org/en/news/press-release/2020/12/10/world-bank-provides-100-million-to-support-resilient-livelihoodsin-the-south-of-madagascar>

<sup>3</sup> The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis:: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index. New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>

<sup>4</sup> The Climate Crisis is a Child Rights Crisis:: Introducing the Children's Climate Risk Index. New York: United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), 2021, <https://www.unicef.org/media/105376/file/UNICEF-climate-crisis-child-rights-crisis.pdf>

severe acute malnutrition during the first three months of 2021 was quadruple the national five-year average. Evidence suggests that some children have already died from hunger.<sup>5</sup>

Additionally the 2021 UN Grand Flash Appeal states that previous rapid assessments carried out during former episodes of drought in the Grand Sud have “clearly demonstrated that drought exacerbates the food and nutritional insecurity issues of families, leading them to adopt negative coping mechanisms affecting specific groups at risk, including the children, women and adolescent girls.”<sup>6</sup> Among the main risks aggravated by the drought, are gender-based violence and sexual violence, child labour and child marriage.

This submission draws from a report released by Amnesty International in October 2021 entitled ‘*It will be too late to help us once we are dead: the human rights impact of climate change on drought stricken-southern Madagascar*,<sup>7</sup> which shines a light on the unfolding crisis in southern Madagascar and its impact on Malagasy people and children. The report finds that children are amongst those who are most impacted by the drought. Because of their specific metabolism, physiology and developmental needs their rights to life, survival and development, food, water and sanitation are particularly disproportionately impacted by the drought compared to adults, as well as particularly threatened by climate change-related impacts in general .

## RIGHT TO FOOD, WATER AND SANITATION (ARTICLES 24.1.C AND 24.1.E)

Given that the majority of people in southern Madagascar feed themselves through subsistence farming of rain fed crops, the drought has caused widespread shortages of safe drinking water and food. This is particularly dire for children, given that insufficient access to safe drinking water and nutritious food can result in long-lasting and even irreversible impacts on their cognitive and physical growth.<sup>8</sup>

According to the IPC, approximately 27,100 children required lifesaving treatment for severe wasting at the end of the year 2020, and 135,476 children under 5 were wasted.<sup>9</sup> The prevalence of stunting in Madagascar is considered “very high,” at 42 percent, placing the country 10th among the most-affected countries in the world. According to UNICEF, malnutrition is associated with at least 44% percent of deaths among children under 5 years old in Madagascar.<sup>10</sup> In 2020, the Covid-19 public health and social measures further complicated the early detection and treatment of child wasting and Vitamin A supplementation, because of the disruption of essential health and nutrition services.<sup>11</sup> Nearly half of the country’s children suffer anemia, and micronutrient deficiencies are prevalent.

While conducting research in southern Madagascar, Amnesty International spoke to a health worker called Amélie who told the organization that the current drought did not compare with previous ones, and that children paid the ultimate price, stating: “This year, there are many children in a state of severe and moderate acute malnutrition because of the drought and the very strong winds, the sandstorm. People can no longer cultivate because of the drought. The earth is dry and the rain doesn’t fall. Here, 54 children are in severe acute malnutrition, and between 300 and 400 are in moderate acute malnutrition.”<sup>12</sup>

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<sup>5</sup> Tribune Madagascar: Kere: a ninth death reported in Ankilimarovahatse, 12 October 2020, <https://www.madagascar-tribune.com/Kere-un-neuvieme-deces-sigale-a-Ankilimarovahatse.html>

Also see: France 24, ‘In southern Madagascar, people are dying of hunger’, <https://www.france24.com/en/tv-shows/focus/20201106-in-southern-madagascar-people-are-dying-of-hunger>

<sup>6</sup> Flash Appeal, Grand Sud, January – May 2021, p. 20, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDG\\_20210118\\_Grand\\_Sud\\_Flash\\_Appeal\\_English.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDG_20210118_Grand_Sud_Flash_Appeal_English.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> Amnesty International, *It Will Be Too Late To Help Us Once We Are All Dead The Human Rights Impact Of Climate Change In Drought-Stricken Southern Madagascar*, (Index: AFR 35/4874/2021), October 2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr35/4874/2021/en/>

<sup>8</sup> OHCHR, Analytical study on climate change and the rights of the child, para. 13, <https://www.ohchr.org/EN/Issues/HRAndClimateChange/Pages/RightsChild.aspx>

<sup>9</sup> Integrated Food Security Phase Classification: Madagascar: Acute Food Insecurity and Acute Malnutrition Situation for October - December 2020 and Projection for January - April 2021, <http://www.ipcinfo.org/ipc-country-analysis/detailsmap/en/c/1152969/?iso3=MD>

<sup>10</sup> World Food Organization Global Report on Food Crises – 2021, <https://www.wfp.org/publications/global-report-food-crises-2021>

<sup>11</sup> World Food Organization Global Report on Food Crises – 2021 p. 173, <https://www.wfp.org/publications/global-report-food-crises-2021>

<sup>12</sup> Amnesty International interview with Amélie Zafretifa, Ambondro, 07 March 2021 in Amnesty International, *It Will Be Too Late To Help Us Once We Are All Dead The Human Rights Impact Of Climate Change In Drought-Stricken Southern Madagascar*, October 2021, index: AFR 35/4874/2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr35/4874/2021/en/>

# RIGHT TO HEALTH (ARTICLE 24 AND GENERAL COMMENT 15)

Children have also been disproportionately affected by the health impacts of the drought. The United Nations (UN) Flash Appeal for 2021 notes that according to the weekly monitoring report, the number of diarrhoea cases among children aged 5 increased from 10,021 to 16,374 between 2018 to 2020, and that there has also been a countrywide resurgence of malaria which has affected the Deep South, aggravated by food insecurity.

Furthermore, use of health services has declined by more than 40 percent in 2020 compared to the same period in 2019 in three districts of the Deep South (Betrioky, Amboasary and Ambovombe), and the decline is attributed to the reduction in household income caused by the harvest decrease, which cannot cover health expenses.

Parents told Amnesty International that their children suffered from hunger, diarrhoea, vomiting, and headaches. They often were not able to explain precisely what condition their children were suffering from. For example, one mother told Amnesty International delegates: “my children are nearly all sick...this one has liquid coming out of his ears, and the other one often suffered from crises – like in a coma. One of my daughters was also like that, but I managed to see a doctor, and she’s a bit better now.”<sup>13</sup>

In addition to stomach aches, diarrhoea and vomiting linked to undernutrition, the children living in southern Madagascar face other risks to their human right to health related to climate change impacts, including greater risk of injury, disease and death due to more intense heat waves, increased injury and ill-health triggered by extreme weather events and increased risks of food and water-borne diseases such as cholera and other diarrhoeal illnesses and vector-borne diseases such as malaria.<sup>14</sup>

Additionally the United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA) reports that the drought has also limited girls’ access to essential sexual and reproductive health services, including family planning and maternal health care.<sup>15</sup>

# RIGHT TO EDUCATION (ARTICLE 28)

In addition to suffering from the same human rights impacts as adults, the drought also impacts their age-specific human rights, such as the right to education.

This situation is particularly concerning as the Deep South was already affected by particularly low rates of school enrolment. While school enrolment rates are low throughout Madagascar, with an adjusted net enrolment rate in primary education of 76 percent,<sup>16</sup> strong disparities across regions mean that children living in the southern parts of the country are less likely to attend school: for example, elementary school attendance is 95 percent in the Anamalanga region, where the capital city Antananarivo is situated, whereas in the southern regions of Anosy and Atsimo Andrefana, it is around 50 percent only.<sup>17</sup> Similar disparities are found when looking at the primary completion rate, and first cycle of secondary school.<sup>18</sup>

The drought has aggravated the situation. Amnesty International met with a number of parents who explained that they had stopped sending their children to school since the start of the drought, either because they needed them to work or beg for money because of the family’s loss of revenues, or because they were worried about their children going to school unfed. Others migrated since the drought struck in search of better opportunities and could no longer put their children in school.

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<sup>13</sup> Amnesty International interview with Soamomeie, Ambovombe, 6 March 2021.

<sup>14</sup> IPCC, Fifth Assessment Report: WGII, p. 713; WHO, Climate Change and Infectious Diseases, 2003, [www.who.int/globalchange/climate/en/chapter6.pdf](http://www.who.int/globalchange/climate/en/chapter6.pdf)

<sup>15</sup> UNFPA, Survival strategies put the lives and rights of women and girls in Madagascar’s drought-hit Grand Sud at risk, 16 September 2021, <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/news/survival-strategies-put-lives-and-rights-women-and-girls-madagascars-drought-hit-grand-sud-risk>

<sup>16</sup> Madagascar 2018 Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), <http://ghdx.healthdata.org/record/madagascar-multiple-indicatorcluster-survey-2018>

<sup>17</sup> Flash Appeal, Grand Sud, January – May 2021, p. 13, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDG\\_20210118\\_Grand\\_Sud\\_Flash\\_Appeal\\_English.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDG_20210118_Grand_Sud_Flash_Appeal_English.pdf) p. 13

<sup>18</sup> Flash Appeal, Grand Sud, January – May 2021, p. 13, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDG\\_20210118\\_Grand\\_Sud\\_Flash\\_Appeal\\_English.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDG_20210118_Grand_Sud_Flash_Appeal_English.pdf)

A WFP assessment in Amboarsary, the epicentre of the 10 hardest-hit southern districts,<sup>19</sup> found three out of four children had quit school, mostly to help their parents forage for food.<sup>20</sup> It is estimated that about 300,000 school-age children living in the nine districts of the Grand Sud most affected by the drought currently do not go to school.<sup>21</sup>

## **RIGHT TO CLEAN, SAFE, HEALTHY, SUSTAINABLE ENVIRONMENT (ARTICLE 24 AND DRAFT GENERAL COMMENT 26)**

On October 8, 2021, at the Human Rights Council's 48th session, forty-three nations adopted resolution 48/13, 211 recognizing the right to a safe, clean, healthy, and sustainable environment as a human right.<sup>22</sup> Further, this Committee is currently in the process of drafting a Draft general comment No. 26 on children's rights and the environment with a special focus on climate change, indicating the importance of this right.

The ongoing drought highlights very clearly that a healthy environment, including a safe climate, is indispensable for a life of dignity and security for all children. If climate change were to worsen the future droughts in Madagascar, as the projected trends suggest, it will further impact the right of all Malagasy children to live in a safe, clean, healthy and sustainable environment.

## **CHILD EXPLOITATION**

UNICEF reported that in a recent rapid assessment in 12 communes affected by the nutrition emergency, 70 percent of respondents said risks to children had increased due to the drought. Some 88 percent of respondents felt that child labour had increased, with sexual exploitation and begging also cited as increased risks.<sup>23</sup>

### **CHILD MARRIAGE (ARTICLES 24.3 AND 34)**

In Madagascar, 41 per cent of girls are married by age 18, and 12 per cent by age 15. Six per cent of adolescent girls are already divorced, widowed or separated. These statistics are worse in the southern region where 58 per cent of women aged 20-49 in the Atsimo Andrefana region got married before the age of 18, 55 per cent in the Androy region and 45 per cent in the Anosy region.<sup>24</sup>

In times of drought desperate families resort to child marriage so that they have 'one less mouth to feed'<sup>25</sup>. The UNFPA has found that as families' desperation grows, so do cases of sexual exploitation, domestic v and forced marriage.<sup>26</sup>

### **CHILD LABOUR (ARTICLE 32)**

A 2020 US Department of State report found that children in Madagascar are subjected to the worst forms of child labour, including in commercial sexual exploitation and domestic servitude. Children also perform dangerous tasks in the mica-mining sector and in agriculture, including in the production of vanilla. The number of children involved in economic exploitation is alarming, with an estimated 47 percent of children

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<sup>19</sup> World Food Organization Global Report on Food Crises – 2021 p173, <https://www.wfp.org/publications/global-report-food-crises2021>

<sup>20</sup> World Food Programme: WFP Global Update on COVID-19: November 2020, <https://www.wfp.org/publications/wfp-global-update-covid-19-november-2020>

<sup>21</sup> Flash Appeal, Grand Sud, January – May 2021, [https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDG\\_20210118\\_Grand\\_Sud\\_Flash\\_Appeal\\_English.pdf](https://reliefweb.int/sites/reliefweb.int/files/resources/MDG_20210118_Grand_Sud_Flash_Appeal_English.pdf) p. 13

<sup>22</sup> See: <https://undocs.org/a/hrc/48/l.23/rev.1>

<sup>23</sup> UNICEF Madagascar Humanitarian Situation Report No. 4: September 2021, <https://reliefweb.int/report/madagascar/unicef-madagascar-humanitarian-situation-report-no-4-september-2021>

<sup>24</sup> Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey (MICS), 2018, <http://ghdx.healthdata.org/record/madagascar-multiple-indicator-cluster-survey-2018> this.

<sup>25</sup> Mail and Guardian, Malagasy women take on drought, 1 Dec 2017, <https://mg.co.za/article/2017-12-01-00-malagasy-women-take-on-drought/>

<sup>26</sup> UNFPA, Survival strategies put the lives and rights of women and girls in Madagascar's drought-hit Grand Sud at risk, 16 September 2021, <https://esaro.unfpa.org/en/news/survival-strategies-put-lives-and-rights-women-and-girls-madagascars-drought-hit-grand-sud-risk>

ages 5 to 17 are engaged in child labour, 32 percent of them are working in hazardous conditions.<sup>27</sup> The same report found that the Androy region in the south is one of the regions where the highest number of children are engaged in child labour.

During the research mission to Madagascar, Amnesty International spoke to Damy who is 16 years old, and migrated with his parents, to the big city of Fort-Dauphin from Ambondro. Like many others, his family has had to sell many of their belongings to afford the travel to escape poverty in their home village. He has been forced into child labour, mining mica, which involves smashing large mica blocs to break them down and is considered a difficult and dangerous job. However he earns 1,000 ariary (USD 0.26) a day – more than what he could earn back at home.<sup>28</sup>

## RECOMMENDATIONS

Amnesty International calls on the Malagasy government to:

- Increase humanitarian relief efforts to southern Madagascar, including providing sustained and regular emergency food assistance and access to clean and safe water for domestic use and consumption, prioritizing those who are most marginalized (such as children), and seeking assistance from the international community where necessary.
- Take the most ambitious and human rights-consistent measures possible to the full extent of its abilities to support people in Madagascar, and particularly those living in poverty and most marginalized (such as children), to adapt to climate change and become more resilient in the face of adverse weather events and avert a prolongation and intensification of acute food insecurity.
- Ensure crucial infrastructure, such as water, sanitation, health and education, is resilient to climate impacts, particularly in the less-developed southern regions of the country, seeking assistance from the international community where necessary.
- Support agricultural practices and other approaches capable of making food systems and livelihoods more resilient to climate change impacts, while adopting public policies that promote and facilitate sustainable agriculture, food systems and human rights-consistent agricultural land use and management practices
- Invest in social protection and social services to reduce vulnerability to and mitigate the risks of disasters and climate-induced stresses, ensuring that children access to them and that the needs marginalized groups are taken into account.
- Seek international assistance and co-operation to take sufficient climate change adaptation measures and provide remedy to people suffering from loss and damage
- Ensure that the best interests of the child is a primary consideration when assessing impacts of disasters, and developing policies in relation to disaster risk reduction and climate change, with particular attention to marginalised groups of children most likely to be affected. Decision making process must take into consideration the impact that certain measures may have on children and demonstrate that the best interests of the child has been taken into account.
- Put in place policies, child-specific programmes and services to protect the right to life, survival and development of all children, paying special attention to those at most risk of abuse or neglect and ensure adequate levels of financial support and social protection for families that need it, particularly those in the most disadvantaged and vulnerable situations, to ensure that all children, including

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<sup>27</sup> US Department of State “Child Labor and Forced Labor Reports: Madagascar,” [https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/madagascar#:~:text=182,-Children%20in%20Madagascar&text=An%20estimated%2047%20percent%20of,percent%20working%20in%20hazardous%20conditions.&text=Madagascar%20has%20ratified%20all%20key,child%20labor%20\(Table%203\).](https://www.dol.gov/agencies/ilab/resources/reports/child-labor/madagascar#:~:text=182,-Children%20in%20Madagascar&text=An%20estimated%2047%20percent%20of,percent%20working%20in%20hazardous%20conditions.&text=Madagascar%20has%20ratified%20all%20key,child%20labor%20(Table%203).)

<sup>28</sup> Amnesty International interview with 16-year old Damy, in Fort Dauphin, 11 March 2021 in Amnesty International, *It Will Be Too Late To Help Us Once We Are All Dead The Human Rights Impact Of Climate Change In Drought-Stricken Southern Madagascar*, October 2021, index: AFR 35/4874/2021, <https://www.amnesty.org/en/documents/afr35/4874/2021/en/>



children out of school, can enjoy their economic and social rights, including their rights to health, food, an adequate standard of living and education

- Facilitate children's access to information by working with local and community media to ensure frequent and clear messaging on weather and risk related issues, recommended actions and available assistance, with particular attention to ensuring access to such information by children most vulnerable to the impacts of disasters, with specific interventions designed to reach, protect and empower remote and marginalized communities to build their resilience to natural hazard-induced disasters.
- Increase efforts to prevent and protect girls from gender-based violence and abuse aggravated by the nutrition emergency including forced and child marriages. Increase the availability and accessibility of quality and acceptable sexual and reproductive health information, services and goods to girls in the Deep South as well as the provision of comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) programmes delivered in schools and communities. Ensure girls in child marriages receive all necessary support and care to continue exercising their rights including access to comprehensive sexual and reproductive healthcare and information about it, psycho-social and economic support, and continued access to education.
- Remove financial and other barriers to accessing primary education and provide for free and compulsory education. Provide a clear roadmap indicating how children experiencing any nutrition emergencies' right to education will be upheld as well as reintegrate into the school system children whose education has been disrupted because of their involvement in child labour as a response to the drought.
- Remove children from mica mining and other forms of child labour and put in place measures to address children's health, physical, educational, economic and psychological needs. Ensure that reintegration activities are aligned with income-generating opportunities available within the community.
- Ensure that the labour inspectorate has sufficient resources and training to monitor and enforce labour laws in high risk areas and to address the worst forms of child labour.
- Develop programmes to provide better psychological, legal and financial support to people at risk of early and forced marriages, in consultation with people most at risk, key governmental and civil society representatives.
- Undertake information and education campaigns aimed at both women and men to address the cultural and social acceptance of early and forced marriage as a coping mechanism during emergencies, including by raising awareness of its harm to the victims and the cost to society.



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