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MADAGASCAR'S ADULT LITERACY INITIATIVE¹

INTRODUCTION.

The case utilizes findings from a 10-week research study that I carried out on behalf of the USAID-sponsored Eco-regional Transition Project (PTE).² From late June through August, 2004, as a graduate student of the Woodrow Wilson School, Princeton University I interviewed and interacted with over 80 people from a number of organizations and communities in Madagascar. Some of the information that I obtained was used in constructing this case study. The case focuses on the organizational actors that were involved in an Adult Literacy Initiative in Madagascar.³

BACKGROUND.

The numbers and roles of international, national, and community-based development organizations have grown over the past few decades. This is true for the educational development field – in which actors make “systematic efforts to improve education systems to support more general socio-economic development in less industrialized countries” (Chabbott, 2003). Since 1990, when a number of UN agencies sponsored the World Conference on Education for All (EFA) in Jomtien, Thailand, there has been a spurt in coordinated ideas and activities of organizations to achieve universal education in every country (Mundy and Murphy, 2001; Samoff, 2005). Organizations that have been involved in the educational development field include:

- International Governmental/Intergovernmental Organizations (IGOs) like the UN agencies;

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² The project is known by its French acronym, Programme de Transition Eco-régional (PTE). PTE succeeded the Landscape Development Initiative (LDI) project, and was in operation at the time of this study. The Eco-Regional Initiative (ERI) has since succeeded it. However, I use PTE to refer to these USAID-funded initiatives.

³ Unless otherwise specified, the information provided are from interviews conducted by the author with various people who were involved in adult literacy programs in Madagascar.

- Governmental Organizations (GOs), such as Ministries of Education;
- Bilateral Organizations (BOs), such as the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID); and
- Nongovernmental Organizations (NGOs), including International Nongovernmental Organizations (INGOs), such as Save the Children and CARE, National Nongovernmental Organizations (NNGOs), and Local Nongovernmental Organizations (LNGOs) also known as Community Based Organizations (CBOs).

The rise in these organizations was evident in their increased level of cohesion and shared understanding in conferences after EFA, including the major follow up conference on education, the World Education Forum (WEF) in Dakar, Senegal, in April, 2000 (Mundy and Murphy, 2001). Studies of the organizations in the field and their activities have become even more important, and this paper is an attempt to present such a study.

For this case, I focus on a set of organizational and individual actors involved with a network called Alphabétisation Mada (AM),⁴ which was created as a “partnership” (Chabbott, 2003; Samoff, 2005) of IGOs and GOs to develop and implement Madagascar’s Literacy Initiative in cooperation with NGOs. Two key aspects of the Initiative that form the basis for this study include the context in which AM was created to lead the Initiative, and its adoption of a particular type of literacy training method. This case is especially relevant for those interested in the international educational development field, in which there are similar types of organizational structures and activities. The case will also shed some light on international development initiatives beyond the field of educational development.

I present the case in three sections. I first present some information about Madagascar, highlighting why adult literacy is a priority. Next, I provide an overview of the organizational elements related to the case. Following that, I briefly discuss some findings from my research to illustrate the challenges that the Initiative faced.

I. The Need for Adult Literacy Training in Madagascar.

The World Bank (2003) notes that education provides one of the key opportunities out of poverty, and Madagascar⁵ has set education expansion to be one of its priorities. With a national per capita income at around \$290 and poverty rates at around 69 percent, the country’s 17 million people are desirous of economic development (World Bank, 2005).

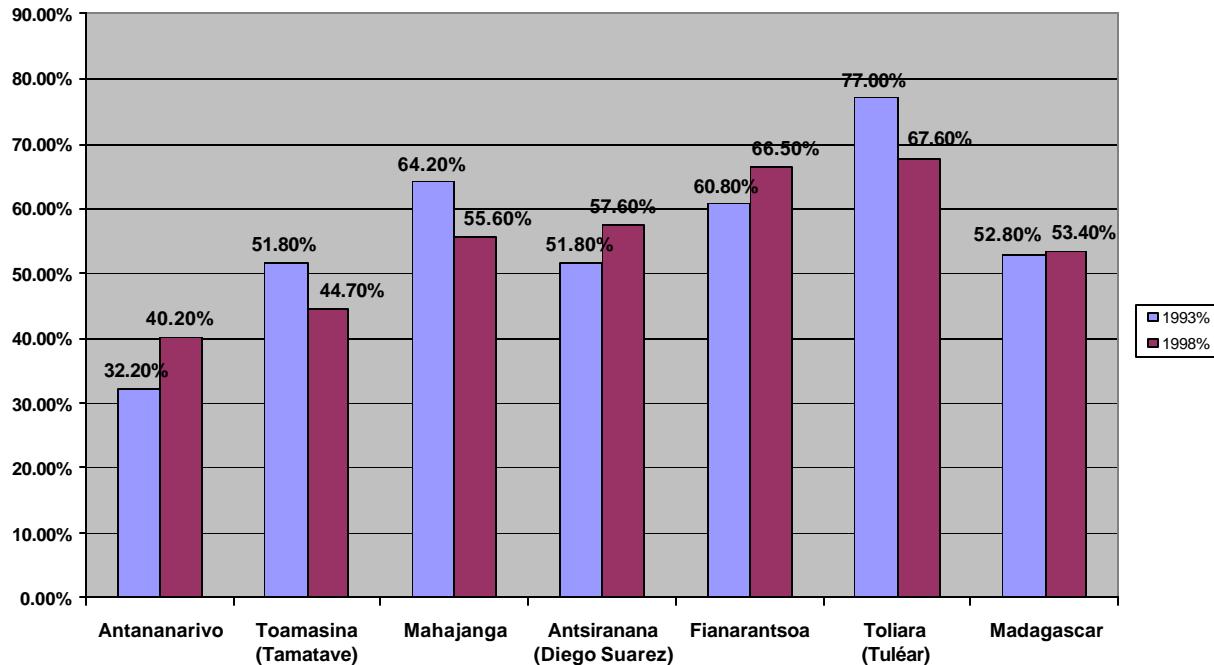
In addition to the education of children, Madagascar has sought to expand adult education because a large proportion of adults are illiterate. UNESCO’s Institute for Statistics estimated that in 1990, as many as 42 percent of Malagasy people of ages 15 and older were illiterate. The rates worsened during the 1990s, so that Madagascar had one of the worst illiteracy rates in the world. Fianarantsoa Province, with one of the highest levels of illiteracy in the country, reflected the larger Malagasy problem as shown below.⁶

⁴ The names of the Malagasy organizations have been changed to be fictitious.

⁵ Madagascar is an Indian Ocean island country off southeastern Africa with a democratically elected government. Its citizens are called Malagasy, and its official languages are French and Malagasy, although the latter is more frequently used in rural areas.

⁶ Since 1998, PTE projects working in the remote areas of the Ranomafana – Andringitra forest corridor of the Fianarantsoa Province had noted the low literacy rates that impede the transmission of information in these areas. Local farming cooperatives, called the *Koloharena*, had requested PTE to assist in establishing rural literacy programs in its areas of intervention, to enable farmers learn improved agricultural techniques that PTE’s programs teach, usually facilitated by the use of written material. After carrying out a national review of literacy programs, PTE put in place pilot literacy programs in Fianarantsoa and Moramanga Provinces. The study I conducted focused

Figure 1. Adult Illiteracy Rates for the Six Provinces of Madagascar in 1993 and 1998.⁷



Source: Office of National Data, National Institute of Statistics (INSTAT), Antananarivo, Madagascar.

The situation has improved, but illiteracy remains high. According to the 2003 Human Development Report, Madagascar's adult illiteracy rate was 32 percent, ranking it 137th among 175 countries. With such low literacy rates, the war on illiteracy was an important aspect of Madagascar's strategy for development.

The need for improved education was perceived to be even greater in the rural areas where 70 percent of Malagasy live, and significantly contribute to the country's economy through agricultural output, accounting for about 30 percent of GDP (World Bank, 2005).⁸ Communities in rural areas have been interested in learning literacy and numeracy skills to help them adopt farming techniques, usually facilitated by the use of written materials (PTE, 2004). Effective implementation of adult literacy training was also deemed vital for success in the nation's efforts to improve formal education as numerous studies show that parents' educational attainment is linked to the school enrollment and achievement of children (Oreopoulos, Page,

on two rural communes in Fianarantsoa Province: Alaitsainainy-Ialamarina and Ikongo. With a population of over 18,600 Alaitsainainy-Ialamarina is located about 36 km east of Fianarantsoa, the capital of the province. Previously, other organizations have carried out adult literacy programs in other villages in the commune. Per its community development plan, as of 2004, with official adult literacy and school enrollment rates estimated at 60% and 54% respectively, the commune had requested continued assistance in its adult literacy campaign. Similarly, the commune of Ikongo was campaigning against illiteracy among its population of over 28,500. While some literacy programs have been implemented in the commune, its community development plan requests additional programs to improve its adult literacy and school enrollment rates, estimated in 2004 at 56% and 81% respectively.

⁷ These illiteracy rates appeared incredibly high to me, leading me to initially suspect they may have been inflated. However, I was told that the situation was that bad, especially in the rural areas, outside of the mostly urban Province of Antananarivo.

⁸ Industry accounts for about 15 percent (with the food, energy, and beverages industries as the main sub-sectors), and services about 55 percent.

and Stevens 2003; Black, Devereux, and Salanes 2003; Behrman and Rosenzweig 2002; Haveman and Wolfe 1995).

II. Overview of Organizing Elements.

In 2001, as part of Madagascar's war on illiteracy, the Malagasy Government and a number of international organizations created a network called Alphabétisation Mada (AM). AM had the goal of implementing Madagascar's commitments under the 1990 United Nations' Education for All (EFA) and the follow-up 2000 World Education Forum (WEF) conferences (Government of Madagascar and United Nations, 2001).

Organizational Actors - UN Agencies, Government Ministries and NGOs:

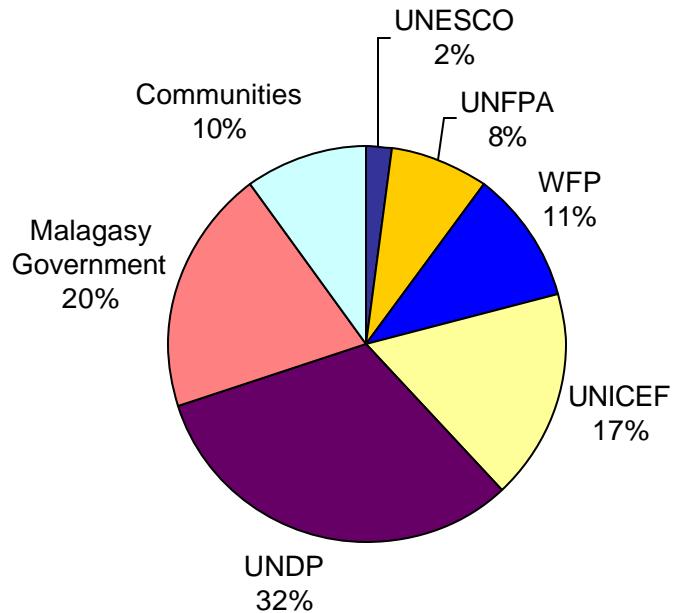
In an environment where the international development community was promoting "stakeholder ownership" of development programs, AM was to operate as a "partnership" (Chabbott, 2003; Samoff, 2005) of organizational actors drawn from UN agencies and a number of ministries of the Malagasy government, working with NNGOs and LNGOs to finance and implement the Initiative. The UN agencies were primarily concerned with the macro-level development of Madagascar, indicated by data such as reduced illiteracy rates. These international organizations sought to expand education, per EFA, as a human right (Chabbott, 2003). The six key UN agencies that were involved in the Initiative were the United Nations Development Program (UNDP), United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO), United Nations Children's Fund (UNICEF), World Food Program (WFP), United Nations Population Fund (UNFPA), and the International Labor Organization (ILO). To achieve EFA's goals in Madagascar, UNDP was to provide coordination expertise, its core technology; UNESCO was to focus on providing technical expertise and oversight for achieving EFA and WEF objectives, as well as collect and disseminate data; and UNICEF was to provide its expertise on developing programs for women and children, as well as the production of educational materials. ILO's expertise was in employment training, whereas WFP's was in developing food and nutrition programs for rural communities. UNFPA was to primarily assist with the collection and provision of population data, and coordination with the Malagasy Ministry of Population, which was the primary government administrator of nonformal education.

Similar to the IGOs, the Malagasy government was concerned with macro-level development. It viewed the problem of illiteracy as one that was best tackled through the nonformal education sector, hence the designation of the Ministry of Population as the primary ministry to administer the Initiative in each of Madagascar's 6 provinces. However, other ministries including those for education, training, statistics, and communication were to be integrally involved in the Initiative. Also, other ministries were to provide support, including the ministries for agriculture, women and children, health, youth and sports, industry and development, culture, and economic planning.

The NGOs that were part of the Initiative were more concerned with development at the micro community level. Most of the NNGOs (such as *Lire Soamada*, one of Madagascar's premier education NGOs) were based in the provincial capitals, whereas the LNGOs (such as the *Koloharena* farming cooperatives) were based in the rural communities where they were to implement the literacy programs. In addition to the UN agencies and the government, the beneficiary local communities also had some financial obligations for implementing the

programs. The figure below shows sources of funding for the Initiative over the period 2001 - 2005.

Figure 2. Sources of Funding for the Adult Literacy Initiative from 2001 – 2005.



Source: Government of Madagascar and United Nations, 2001.

Agents - “Internationalized” and Domestic Malagasy Professionals:

To achieve the overall goals of the Initiative, representatives from the UN agencies and the government ministries were to work in AM, focusing specifically on their agency-specific tasks in coordination with the staff from the other participating organizations. They also were to coordinate with staff in their agencies and ministries, which were primarily to provide technical and financial assistance without being involved in the everyday activities of AM.

Each of the six UN agencies and four key government ministry provincial directorates had at least one representative working for AM. In the province presented in this case, some of the organizations had more than one person in AM: UNDP and the Ministry of Population each had a total of three representatives. AM's staff in the province were all Malagasy, although they worked with some international staff when they participated in meetings at the national level. At the time of this study, the director of AM in the province was a Malagasy UNDP representative. The representative was one of a number of AM's staff that I call *internationalized*, having gained international experience through work with some INGOs and NGOs. The provincial NGO actors encountered in the study were Malagasy with little or no international experience. A couple of key staff of the NNGO *Lire Soamada* had participated in international conferences. The LNGO actors, such as the *Koloharena* members were from the rural communities where they worked, and they strongly believed that members of their communities could improve their livelihoods by learning to read and write, and by improving their technical skills.

Technology - The Adult Literacy Training Methods:

The decision to adopt a specific adult literacy method for the Initiative is central to this case study, given that there were different methods of training used in Madagascar. Typically, each type of program is designed to have three stages: an initial planning, outreach and recruiting stage (Pre-Alpha) during which sites and schedules are decided in consultation with potential participants; a second stage in which participants learn how to read, write, and do calculations (Alpha); and a third stage during which they apply their newly learned skills, usually working on some income-generating activities or projects (Post-Alpha).⁹ The programs would typically be offered at no charge to the trainees, who may have to buy a few items, such as pencils, chalk, etc. This study focused on three different types of methods summarized below, with details provided in the **Appendix**¹⁰:

- *SMT - Sambatra ny Mahavaky Teny* (Good to Read and Write).
 - ~ 16 weeks of classroom instruction; focus on reading and writing; no Post-Alpha integrated; very flexible schedule; costs ~\$15 - \$25 per trainee.
- *AFISOD - Alphabétisation Fonctionnelle Intégrée pour le SOutien au Développement* (Functional Literacy Training Integrated for the Support of Development).
 - ~ 16 weeks of instruction; focus on reading, writing, and numeracy; Post-Alpha integrated; flexible schedule; costs ~\$15 - \$25 per trainee.
- *AFI-D - Alphabétisation Fonctionnelle Intensif pour le Développement* (Intensive Functional Literacy for Development).
 - ~ 28 weeks of instruction; focus on reading, writing, and numeracy; Post-Alpha integrated; least flexible schedule; costs ~\$11 - \$17 per trainee.

A number of Malagasy organizations, predominantly religious NGOs including *Baibolygas*, had been using the SMT method for some years, prior to the use of other methods. This method focused on teaching how to read. Another method emerged before the turn of the decade. Beginning in 1997 a number of Malagasy organizations, including religious NGOs (e.g. *Baibolygas*), secular NGOs (e.g. *Lire Soamada*), and agricultural cooperatives had come together with some BOs to conceptualize a method that would enable trainees gain literacy skills for employment. This came to be known as AFISOD by 2001 (Institute for International Cooperation of the German Adult Education Association [IIZ/DVV], 2003). Some of the organizations began to implement the method but there did not seem to be a coordinated effort my Malagasy organizations to employ that method until 2003, by which time another method had been officially adopted for the Initiative. As of 2004, a number of Malagasy organizations were advocating to have the AFISOD method “validated” by the government.

The method that AM adopted for the Initiative in 2001, AFI-D, had been imported. In 1999, UNDP-Madagascar had hosted a Burkinabe adult literacy expert, who had trained Malagasy literacy trainers using AFI-D, which had been used in Burkina Faso and had been highlighted by UNDP as being highly successful.¹¹ With AFI-D, training sessions are held for 48 days, consisting of 4 stages, each having 8 hour sessions over 12 days, with a 7 day break between each stage, during which time trainees may go back to their farming, and are to apply the skills they have just learned in their everyday lives. From November 1999 – November 2000

⁹ The literacy programs I studied were conducted in Malagasy.

¹⁰ The primary sources of information on the training methods were the staff working on the Initiative, including UNDP representatives, various representatives of Malagasy NGOs, and literacy trainers.

¹¹ For example, see <http://www.un.org/works/women/women4.html>

the UN agencies had funded pilot programs conducted in 21 sites in two of Madagascar's 6 provinces and declared AFI-D to be feasible (Government of Madagascar, 2003). Given the lower cost of the AFI-D method of training relative to the other methods, it was likely to be the preference of the IGOs who had to pay the greatest portion of the training costs. In addition to the cost factor, the other methods already in use in Madagascar were not adopted because they had not been internationally tested or standardized.

Social Structure – Unequal “Partnership”:

The formal structure of AM was that of a “partnership” between the IGOs and the Malagasy actors – GOs, local NGOs, and rural communities. However, as previously shown, the UN agencies provided most of the funds for the Initiative. Thus, these IGOs were more powerful than the financially constrained and dependent Malagasy actors (Emerson, 1962).

Also, with the IGO and GOs based in the provincial capitals, their staff members were removed from the poor rural communities, whose representatives were peripheral in the Initiative. The rural communities did not have regular, direct communication with the IGO and GO actors, and they only had indirect relationships through NGO representatives in the provincial capitals.

III. Findings.

My study indicated that despite the successes that AM's Adult Literacy Initiative had achieved, it faced issues that were mostly related to the socio-economic environment in a developing country like Madagascar. AM's literacy programs did not appear to meet the needs and expectations of the rural adult trainees, who were primarily interested in improving their livelihood. There was a danger that because the programs did not improve their livelihood, but rather, cost them farming time, they would be apathetic to future attempts to implement literacy training programs.¹² Below are some key findings about the Initiative:

- i. There was high trainee attrition, and programs did not survive to completion. At some sites the attrition rates were high (>50%) during the Alpha phase, due to the apparent lack of fit between the programming that the AFI-D method used and the responsibilities and schedules of the rural Malagasy. For example, although the Initiative provided meals for trainees, one of the reasons villagers cited for dropping out was their inability to work on their farms and earn their livelihoods or obtain meals for their families while participating in training sessions for 8 hours per day. The longer a training program took, and the farther participants had to travel from their farms (by their homes) to training centers, the higher were the attrition rates. Also, dropouts were high at the peak of the farming season, during famine and cyclone seasons, and generally when participants were faced with greater socio-economic obligations, such as when there were outbreaks of diseases among family members. Villagers also cited low motivation as one reason for attrition, arguing that the programs had only focused on recruiting large numbers of trainees during the Pre-Alpha stage, without providing a clear understanding of the commitments trainees would have to make to benefit from the program. Also, the trainees would have liked to have more input in determining the calendar for the training program, so that it fit better with their farming schedules.

¹² The research resulted in a presentation and an unpublished PTE report: “Le besoin pour l’Achèvement des tous les Phases d’Alphabétisation des Adultes.” [Proposed title for English version: “Taste deep or drink not: The adverse effects of incomplete adult literacy programs.”]

- ii. For the participants who persisted after the Alpha phase, in some instances there were no Post-Alpha activities, as no planning or provisions had been made for that phase. With no income-generating Post-Alpha activities to enable the newly trained people to apply their skills in their everyday life, they regressed into semi or complete illiteracy, and the minimal or negative impact on their livelihood (due to the time “wasted” in training sessions) served as a disincentive for participation in future literacy campaigns. There were also few opportunities for people to read and write in Malagasy, due to limited materials in the language.¹³
- iii. Although various communities implementing programs at different times were facing similar challenges, some mistakes were being repeated. Communities carrying out adult literacy training were not aware of programs that had been implemented in other areas, even where they were geographically close by, although there were some evaluations by LNGOs carrying out literacy training under the umbrella of AM. Problems faced and successful practices learned from evaluations of some programs were not being adequately disseminated.

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¹³ Since the study was conducted, ERI, the follow up to the PTE project, has invested resources in writing up more technical documentation in Malagasy, encouraging farmers to write up their own brochures and agricultural documentation in Malagasy.

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APPENDIX A: Details of Literacy Training Methods in Madagascar

	SMT	AFISOD	AFI-D
Pre-Alpha Phase	<p>1 week or more.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Public awareness campaign about literacy training (what it is, who can participate, etc; why they should participate; and explanation of commitments and responsibilities: e.g. contracts with school principals to use schools for training, etc.) - Training and creation of a local management committee - Designation of lead trainer (responsible for pedagogy) - Census to determine who is illiterate - Recruitment of trainers - Recruitment of trainees - Budgeting - Training of trainers (8hrs/day for 5 days) - Discussions with participants to determine training schedule - Monitoring and follow up 	<p>1 week - 3 months.</p> <p>1) Public awareness campaign about literacy training and study of the community (1 week for the training of study leader), which should yield the following:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - objectives of the training, and income generation activities that can be pursued - identification of themes to be covered in the training - creation of a local management committee - recruitment of trainers & designation of lead trainer (responsible for pedagogy) - recruitment of trainees and determination of levels of illiteracy - logistical planning <p>Determination and signing of commitments and responsibilities for each of the 3 phases of the training</p> <p>2) Training of the trainers: theories about literacy; pedagogical skills for teaching math, reading, writing; testing and assessments, use of texts and other resources.</p>	<p>~1month.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Discussions about the benefits of training, and commitments - Study of the community - Developing objectives of the training - Training of trainers - Drawing the schedule
Alpha Phase	<p>200h = 4 months (16 weeks): 2h30 x 1 time per day x 5 days/week x 16 weeks</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - literacy training 	<p>240h = 3 - 4 months (12 - 16 weeks): 2 stages of 120h blocks in 6 weeks X 2 (=12 weeks)</p> <p>(4h x 5 days/week x 6 weeks; OR 3h x 6 days/week x (6 weeks + 3 days); OR 3h x 5 days/week x 8 weeks).</p> <p>1) Basic literacy and numeracy training - 6 weeks</p> <p>2) Further training to build on basic literacy and numeracy by applying themes from trainees' daily lives (trade, health, nutrition, etc.).</p>	<p>672h = 17 - 28 weeks: 2 stages: AI & FCB.</p> <p>1. AI: Alphabetisation Initiale 384h = 48 days (~10 weeks): 4 blocks of 8h x 12 days OR <i>Adapted Schedule:</i> 64 days (~13 weeks): 4 blocks of 6h x 16 days OR 96 days (~19 weeks): 4 blocks of 4h x 24 days</p> <p>Each block separated by a week of break (for rest, self-review, and for them to focus on their social obligations), OR no breaks if they choose not to have them.</p> <p>2. FCB: Formation Complementaire de Base. 288h = 36 days (~7 weeks): 3 blocks of 8h x 12 days Each block of 12 days separated by a week of break</p>

	SMT	AFISOD	AFI-D
Post-Alpha Phase	Not an integral part of the training. Depends on the trainees, availability of funds, etc.	<p>48h=3 months: divided into 12 weeks, with 2 sessions per week (2h x 2 days/week x 12 weeks)</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - project to use literacy and numeracy skills in their daily life (in income generation or other activity). - Establishment of a village library, cultural or other center with reading material and resources (e.g. radio) related to their daily lives. 	<p>FTP: Formation Techniques et Professionnelle de base</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Income generating project for the best 15-18 trainees (due to budget constraints), with micro-credit for the best 5 trainees. <p>The duration depends on the project: 8 days (e.g. fish-farming) - 45 days (e.g. carpentry and masonry)</p>
Class Size Per Site (approximate)	1 trainer / 20 trainees	1 trainer / 25-30 trainees	2 trainers / 35 trainees (may be in 2 different sites)
Cost & Source of Funding	<p>Pre & Alpha: ~\$15 - \$25 per trainee (transportation costs for training, cost of books, etc.)</p> <p>Communities and independent funders. No long-term source of funding.</p>	<p>Pre & Alpha: ~\$15 - \$25 per trainee (transportation costs for training, cost of books, etc.)</p> <p>Cost of Post -Alpha depends on the project.</p> <p>Communities and independent funders. No long-term source of funding.</p>	<p>Pre & Alpha: ~\$11 - \$17 per trainee.</p> <p>Cost of Post -Alpha depends on the project.</p> <p>Communities, and long-term funding from AM.</p>
Implementing Organizations	<i>Baibolygas</i> (literacy organization that grew out of <i>Baibolygas Church</i>), and a variety of independent Malagasy organizations.	A variety of independent Malagasy organizations	AM, selected NGOs: <i>Lire Soamada</i> , a growing variety of NGOs
Number of Sites	Unclear. One source estimated 6,000 trainees per year.	<p>March - November 2003: 15 sites</p> <p>April - September 2004: 22 sites:</p>	<p>1999-2000: 21 sites</p> <p>2001-2002: 187 sites</p> <p>2002-2003: 400 sites</p>