

# AMPiTAPiTAO!



Closing the Gap  
Between

**Community  
Perspectives**

and FP/RH

**Decision-Making**

in Madagascar

**PROJET  
JEUNE  
LEADER**

# In Brief

In Madagascar and many other contexts, decisions made at the higher level about family planning (FP) and reproductive health (RH) are often disconnected from knowledge and experience held at the local level - especially when it comes to youth.

**Projet Jeune Leader (PJL) developed an innovative knowledge management approach to close the gap and shape more responsive, effective programs and policies.** Through our 'Ampitapitao' (or 'Pass it On') magazine series, we created a critical loop between local knowledge and perspectives on FP/RH and national level decision-making processes in Madagascar, capturing over 8,000 comments from local community members in the process. This publication shares our process and lessons learned.



[Find the 'Ampitapitao' magazines featured here in our resource library.](#)

*Projet Jeune Leader's 'Ampitapitao' project was made possible through support from [The Pitch](#) (Season 2), a competition by Knowledge SUCCESS to develop and implement innovative ideas in knowledge management for family planning and reproductive health. The views and opinions expressed in this document are solely those of Projet Jeune Leader and do not necessarily reflect the official positions or policies of donors and partners.*

## About Projet Jeune Leader

Projet Jeune Leader (PJL) is a youth-founded, youth-led, youth-centered nonprofit organization in Madagascar. **Since 2013, PJL has reached over 150,000 young adolescents in public middle schools in Madagascar with comprehensive sexuality education (CSE).**

Our holistic program includes a rights-based, gender-transformative curriculum (taught by a specialized PJL Educator in a time-tabled, year-long class), youth-friendly counseling services and healthcare referrals, and programming for parents and school leaders. We are the only organization, public or private, that delivers in-school CSE in Madagascar.

Today, our CSE model is implemented across three regions of Madagascar. We maintain close partnerships with the Ministry of Education from local to regional to national levels; but ultimately, our we sustain and expand our program each school year because of positive word-of-mouth and high demand from local communities. Building and harnessing [community support](#) for CSE in Madagascar is foundational to our approach.

→ [Learn more](#)

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# Background

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**Quality, accessible, and equitable family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) programs for youth in Madagascar are few and far between.**

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Yet, young Malagasy adolescents are extremely vulnerable to child marriage, early pregnancy, gender-based violence, and school dropout due to the environmental and social conditions in which they live. These challenges are exacerbated by a lack of quality, accessible, and equitable family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) programs for youth in Madagascar.

Part of the problem can be traced back to how knowledge on youth FP/RH is generated and exchanged within the country.

Knowledge management in Madagascar typically serves people with social capital and content expertise, rather than people with direct experience and context expertise.

A salient example is the status quo of high-level, capital-centric meetings to generate and share knowledge on youth



FP/RH. **Malagasy youth and communities who are closest to the issues outlined in these agendas are rarely included in a meaningful way** – if they are included at all. Consequently, youth-focused FP/RH programs are seldom aligned with youth and community needs and preferences.

## Challenges in Knowledge Management

Understanding, respecting, and amplifying the **experiences and know-how of youth and local communities** is not only ethically the right thing to do; it's key to improving the future of FP/RH programs.

As a community-based organization with nearly a decade of experience, we have seen – time and time again – **youth-focused FP/RH projects and programs that are low-quality, not reaching the youth they are meant for, and excluding youth who need them most.** These challenges stem from the broader conditions surrounding knowledge and information flows in the country.



### Information and Power Flows

Madagascar is a resource-constrained context with repressed civic space. Social, cultural, professional, and institutional boundaries have largely dictated who is sharing what knowledge, where, why, and with whom.

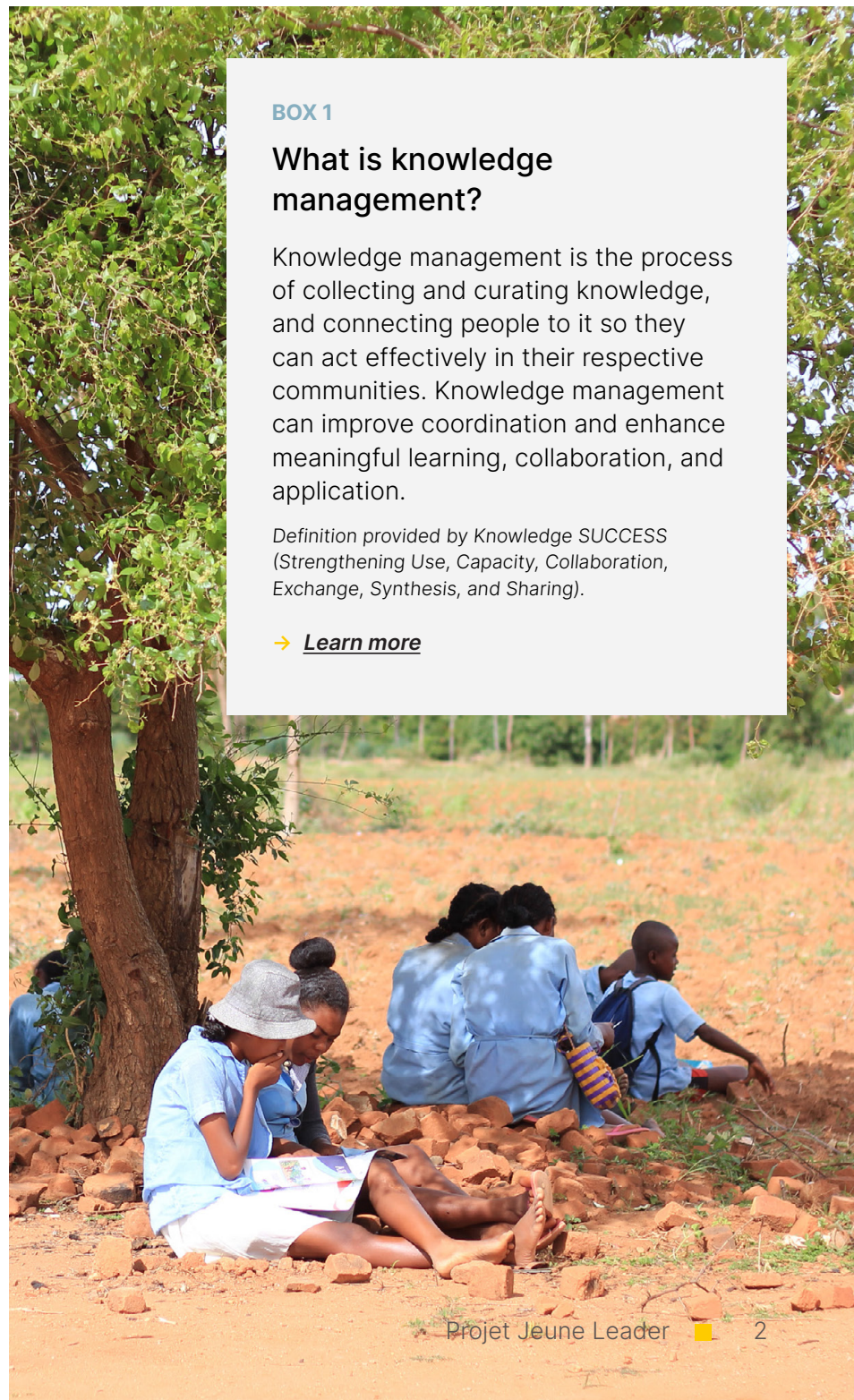
#### BOX 1

### What is knowledge management?

Knowledge management is the process of collecting and curating knowledge, and connecting people to it so they can act effectively in their respective communities. Knowledge management can improve coordination and enhance meaningful learning, collaboration, and application.

*Definition provided by Knowledge SUCCESS (Strengthening Use, Capacity, Collaboration, Exchange, Synthesis, and Sharing).*

→ [Learn more](#)





### Knowledge Generation and Accessibility

National decision-makers often hear from the same technical advisors, most based in the capital city. There is often a disconnect between the data and knowledge decision-makers seek and what is provided. Furthermore, technical information is not always translated into actionable recommendations, best practices are not locally contextualized, and key actors have competing priorities.



### Social Accountability

A common but less acknowledged barrier to knowledge utilization is a pervasive lack of social accountability among those in charge. There is still a large gap between what local constituents want and what technical advisors and decision-makers do.

**Transformations in knowledge management are sorely needed** – transformations that center local lived experience and knowledge while accounting for structural power dynamics and institutional norms and attitudes.





# Dynamic Accountability

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**Projet Jeune Leader has strived to challenge Madagascar's knowledge management status quo, developing innovative and effective strategies building on our keen awareness of the many dynamics – both formal and informal – intertwined in youth-focused FP/RH decision-making.**

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Our most significant effort to tackle knowledge management and advocacy norms came through the 'Ampitapitao' effort profiled in this publication, made possible by our selection as a "Champion Knowledge Management Innovator" of [The Pitch](#) competition of Knowledge SUCCESS.

Our inspiration for this effort stems in our longstanding programmatic work in dynamic constituent accountability.



## Improving Accountability to Local Constituents

In 2018, we began producing a magazine series called EKO about our comprehensive sexuality education program to **increase our responsiveness and transparency and build trust** among our key constituents: tens of thousands of adolescents, parents, teachers, and school administrators in hard-to-reach, rural communities.

This approach included a feedback loop: **at the end of each magazine, we left a dedicated blank space for magazine readers to write back and express their needs, preferences, and values related to our program.**

Communities' responses to the EKO magazines were outstanding. In 2021 alone, we received over 4,600 handwritten comments, questions, and suggestions from the series readers. Through their carefully handwritten comments, we saw how readers felt they were being listened to and valued for their knowledge.

The accountability mechanism was transformational for our organization. **By regularly collecting and responding to community feedback, we can continually improve our program founded on the priorities and needs of those we are meant to serve and strengthen our shared values and goals.**

The success of EKO the magazines sparked our interest in how a similar mechanism could be used to shape knowledge and decision-making on a larger scale.



4,600

handwritten comments, questions, and suggestions received through the EKO mechanism in 2021

**80%**

of Madagascar's population  
lives **in rural areas.**



**45%**

of people in rural  
areas have a  
**phone or radio.**



**7%**

of people in  
rural areas have  
**access to the  
internet.**

## BOX 2

### Why paper-based tools

Systemic underinvestment and marginalization of Madagascar's rural majority is one of the most salient socio-political challenges to quality, accessible, and equitable youth-focused FP/RH. Information flows throughout the country are obstructed by low connectivity and poor technology infrastructure.

In this context, **digital-forward** communication tools or even more "traditional" mass media tools such as radio and TV are **largely ineffective.**

**For this reason, Projet Jeune Leader primarily utilizes printed paper magazines that can reach rural constituents.** This format also allows for two-way communication, as readers can write back their comments in the blank pages we include with each magazine. Our Educators, who work full-time in public middle schools and live full-time in the communities in which they work, collect the comments and bring them back to our monitoring and evaluation team for analysis.

Data from MICS 6 (2018). Enquête nationale sur la situation socio-démographique des ménages. Mass media, communication et Internet.

# 'Ampitapitao!'

## Our Knowledge Management Innovation

How can we address the lack of **quality, accessible, and equitable family planning and reproductive health (FP/RH) programs** for youth in rural Madagascar through more **accountable and equitable knowledge management strategies?**

"Hot topics" and major policies in FP/RH in Madagascar informed development of

**4 magazine issues**

distributed to

**51 communities across 3 regions**

**8,498 written comments**

received from community readers that directly feed into the development of

**4 magazine issues**

distributed to

**50+ national decision-makers**

to inform improved programs and policies



# 1 • Locally Oriented Magazines

## The Format

The Projet Jeune Leader (PJL) team created four issues of a new, community-facing magazine (branded in Malagasy as 'Ampitapitao!', or 'Pass it on!').

To collect readers' written responses, PJL Educators placed A5 sheets of white paper in the back page of the magazines where the feedback mechanism was explained. Each time readers would return the magazines, community-based PJL Educators would check if they had written feedback, and if so, collect the papers and replace it with new ones.

## Thematic Focus

We selected the first four issue themes based on our nearly ten years of experience as a community-based organization, focusing on where we observe particularly significant disconnects between local knowledge or realities and national policies. We also focused on issues that are "trending" in national policy discourses – "hot topics" in youth-focused FP/RH.

We centered the magazine content around **Family Planning High Impact Practices** and **current Malagasy approaches and policies in youth-focused FP/RH**, serving a purpose of sharing information and raising awareness.



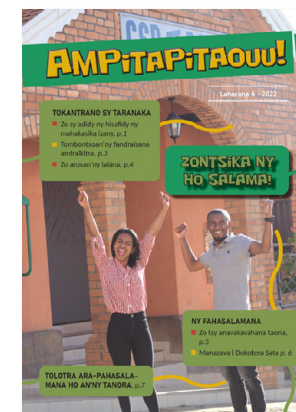
*Explore the collection of 'Ampitapitao' magazines on our resource library.*

ISSUE 1 →  
Mainstreaming  
sexuality education



← ISSUE 2  
Understanding what does and  
doesn't work in youth FP/RH

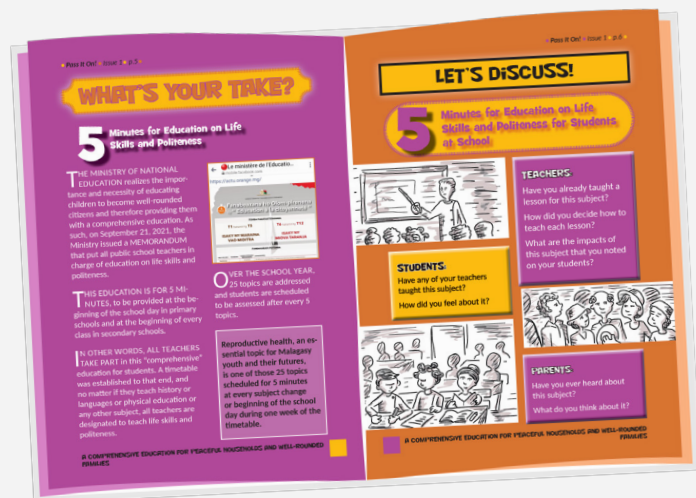
ISSUE 3 →  
Preventing and responding  
to violence in schools



← ISSUE 4  
Strengthening youth-  
friendly healthcare  
services

## BOX 3

### Issue Spotlight: 5-Minute Education



In 2021, Madagascar’s national Ministry of Education published a Facebook post meant to inform teachers that they were required to teach five minutes of “life skills” every day before class. The announcement was not accompanied by any guidance, curriculum, or implementation details, other than a list of topics – one of which was “reproductive health.” Even though both dissemination and implementation of this initiative has been inherently flawed, **we used it as an opportunity to open a discussion and gather community feedback** to build bottom-up commitment for more holistic education in schools.

As we ultimately found across all of the magazine’s topic areas, **comments from community members aligned with recognized high-impact practices**, helping us later develop key messages for decision-makers integrating both global best practice and local perspectives.



## COMMUNITY COMMENTS

“As parents, we want **even more** education about life skills and politeness in schools. **Time should be dedicated** to teaching this to youth now-a-days, for example, once a week, maybe even **a standalone course**.”

– Written note submitted by a parent (translated)

“The time slot is a constraint as five minutes is not enough for the teacher to reinforce the message.”

– Written note submitted by a teacher (translated)

“[Our teacher] exceeds the five minutes, and we love to listen, plus, it builds our knowledge.”

– Written note submitted by a student (translated)

“I think the kids really need this subject; however, I am afraid teaching it at the beginning of every class would be too much.”

– Written note submitted by a teacher (translated)

## Creative, Engaging, Contextually Responsive Content

We intentionally used **stories, articles, and questions** to inspire readers to recount their lived experiences with current programs and explain how they might feel about and respond to new solutions. We carefully **tailored our messaging** to pre-empt sensitivity and backlash around topics in youth sexuality.

We also intentionally **framed magazine content around human rights**. This was intentional for two reasons: 1) to ground sensitive issues like family planning in larger worldviews, and 2) to enhance youth and community readers' awareness and understanding of their rights related to FP/RH – something which is still lacking in Madagascar.

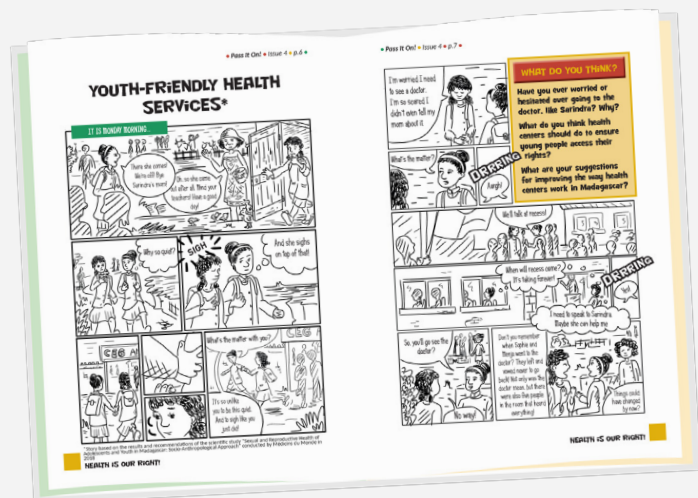
Through 'Ampitapitao's' unique format and content, we aimed to encourage **local readers' honest feedback and opinions** that could later help ground and contextualize issues and solutions for national decision-makers.





## BOX 4

### Content Spotlight: Sarindra's Story



In the issue on youth-friendly health services, we developed an illustrated story about Sarindra, a young girl nervous about seeing a doctor, structuring dialogue around the barriers to accessing health care we commonly hear from youth in rural Madagascar and that are supported by published research. We asked questions such as:

*Have you ever worried or hesitated over going to the doctor, like Sarindra? Why?*

*What do you think health centers should do to ensure young people access their rights?*

*What are your suggestions for improving the way health centers work in Madagascar?*

These prompts provoked direct, honest, and insightful responses from readers.



## COMMUNITY COMMENTS

“ Yes, I was hesitant to go to the doctor like Sarindra because I was **afraid of being talked about and looked at by other people** and that maybe someone will hear what is being said.

– Written note submitted by a student (translated)

“ The reason for my doubts is that I am **afraid and shy to tell the doctor my problem**. The doctor should visit each community, or they should read the ‘Ampitapitao.’

– Written note submitted by a student (translated)

“ I am **afraid of what the doctor will do to me** and that’s why I hesitate to go to the doctor. Health center workers should be **well trained** and they should not hesitate to welcome people who come to them. [In the story] I was satisfied because the doctor gave suggestions to both girls and asked Sarindra many questions and suggested what she should do. My suggestion is to ensure that **all health workers have a satisfactory relationship with everyone** and the doctor should not be irritable. People will be more open to answer their questions **if they can communicate well with each other**.

– Written note submitted by a student (translated)

## 2 • Dissemination of Local Magazines and Sensemaking

### Distributing the Local Magazines

Because PJL's sexuality Educators are **fully integrated** in the schools where they work, they were able to use **timetabled class time** to read all the issues with their students. This means upwards of 20,000 middle school students read and discussed the magazines.

PJL Educators also used **dedicated community gatherings** a direct dissemination and discussion strategy in rural villages of our partner communities. In addition, the Educators directly shared magazines with teachers and principals of their partner schools.

Blank sheets of paper were included in every magazine issue and distributed at every venue for readers to write back their comments, questions, and suggestions.

**Readers expressed that they liked the magazines because they received information, as opposed to just providing feedback.** People in one village said they regularly completed surveys and interviews for development research projects, but **this knowledge management tool was the first time they gained new knowledge and saw the potential for how their feedback was going to be used and responded to.** In their comments, readers also frequently expressed that they appreciated the rights-based content.

43 PJL Educators **circulated over 4,000 copies of the magazines** to students, parents, and community members across 51 schools during May and June 2022.



## Compiling and Analyzing Local Perspectives

In just two months, we received, read, and analyzed **8,498 written comments** from community readers.

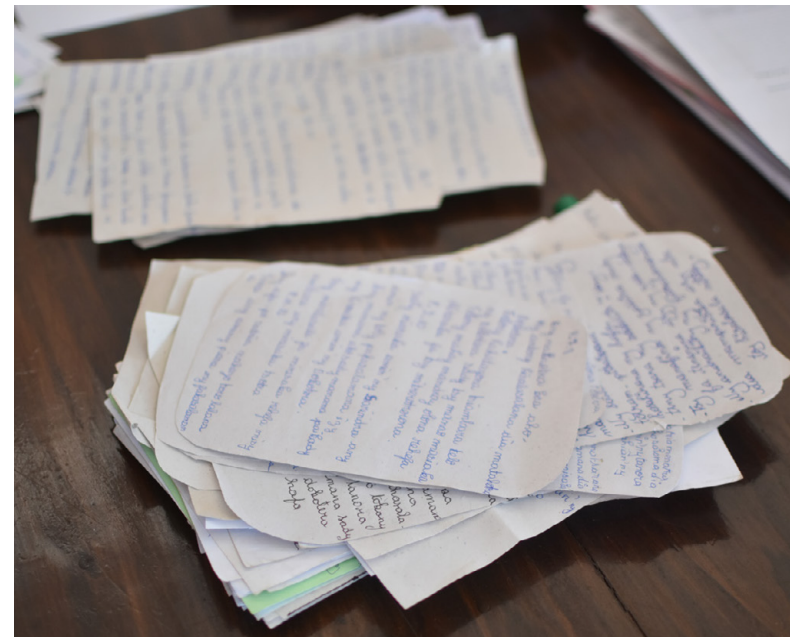
Our team first triaged the comments by magazine issue, then by the most **recurring and relevant themes**. We then inputted the triage comments into an internal virtual database where they could be tagged and sorted by theme.

Our team reviewed comments and discussed the problems and solutions related to the magazine “hot topics” that appeared most relevant, feasible, and pressing for communities. We also reflected on our own **institutional knowledge** about the “hot topics” to begin to formulate a content and dissemination strategy for the nationally oriented magazines.

Finally, we reflected on several knowledge inquiry activities we conducted – including focus groups with government officials from local to national levels and meetings with youth and SRHR development organizations in Madagascar – to bolster our understanding of what is known, who to approach, and how to approach stakeholders to achieve desired change in this context.

“ I would like to thank Projet Jeune Leader because my children and I are going through what is mentioned in this magazine. Before, I thought that violence was defined by visible and physical acts whereas there are different forms of violence. And my family and I **discovered their definitions** in this magazine. This magazine is useful and enriching. **It should be disseminated widely so that people know the rights and laws** that apply to them, and so that they have the freedom to choose how to manage their conduct, life, health, and goals.

– Written note submitted by a parent (translated)





### 3 • Decision-Maker Oriented Magazines

#### The Format and Focus

The PJL team created four issues of a nationally-oriented magazine series targeting decision-makers complementary to the “hot topics” covered in community-oriented magazines.

Key messages in each issue were centered around “The Thing” we want decision-makers and technical advisors to do differently in their work related to the youth-focused FP/RH “hot topic.”



“**The Thing**” is a program, practice, process, or policy (or some combination) that has a strong evidence base and is supported by local knowledge, values, and priorities which were identified from the locally oriented magazine feedback and comments.

Similarly to our approach to the community-level magazines, **we carefully tailored language for the target audiences** of the national magazines. For instance, while Issues #2 and #4 – targeting health-sector decision-makers and technical advisors – more traditionally covered FP/RH, Issues #1 and #3 were more subtle in their linkages to FP/RH as they were designed to reach officials at the Ministry of Education.



[Explore the collection of ‘Ampitapitao’ magazines on our resource library.](#)

**ISSUE 1 →**  
Mainstreaming  
sexuality education



**← ISSUE 2**  
Understanding what does and  
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**ISSUE 3 →**  
Preventing and responding  
to violence in schools



**← ISSUE 5**  
Strengthening youth-  
friendly healthcare  
services

## Content and Tone Choices

We made a number of intentional changes from standard knowledge management and advocacy approaches.

### ■ Evoking Positive Emotions First

We know that people respond with emotions first, and intellect second. We wanted to activate readers' emotions and values, including *positive* emotions and aligned values. For this reason, we often started the magazines with **positive language and consensus statements** designed to do just that, rather than statistics or other forms of intellectual knowledge. By invoking positive values in language and imagery, we aimed to **help readers make sense of the issue in their existing worldviews**. This opened the door to a narrative (and eventually, facts) about the problem and solution.

### ■ Framing Key Messages Positively

We tend to see knowledge management strategies in Madagascar center around the grim reality of the FP/RH situation. **Focusing on these negative data points can perpetuate fatalism**, where people feel too overwhelmed by problems to act, or **defensiveness and finger-pointing**, where no one is implicated in or takes responsibility for solutions. From the onset, we aimed to keep the messaging and design of magazines positive and inspirational, projecting a different way of doing things.

### ■ Culturally Sensitive Advocacy

We were careful to **avoid direct language** – a major faux pas in Malagasy culture. While this may seem at odds with best practices in advocacy messages (i.e., direct, firm calls-to-action), we were able to find a balance with **clear, contextually appropriate “asks”** in the magazines that would not trigger defensiveness or offense.

These strategies to ease decision-makers into the content were important to our ability to reach and influence our target audiences. From the start of this effort, we knew that a major barrier to dissemination would be the **power dynamics inherent between our youth-led organization and decision-makers**. Direct calls-to-action would too abruptly challenge the power dynamics and decision-makers may be insulted, choosing not to read further.

## BOX 5

### Issue Spotlight: School-Based Violence



Violence is a deeply-ingrained, systemic issue in Madagascar. For magazine Issue #3 on violence in schools, it was important to find a meaningful entry point that was **non-confrontational**, as worldviews are still in favor of violence in Madagascar. As one high-level national education technical advisor told us, “Sure, hitting students is violence, but without it, there is no way for teachers and principals to control the kids.”

One of the pillar content items we developed for the magazine was “Mr. Fetra’s Story”: a spin on a very popular and nostalgic Malagasy song. We intentionally created this story to **evoke reader emotions** (from its reference to the original song), while also **signposting concrete actions that can be taken and providing an interpretive framework** for the problem.

The story was long and narrative-driven, including stage-setting paragraphs and dialogue – certainly not the type of content found in policy briefs or infographics. But, again, this was intentional, as these “superfluous” details helped readers relate to Mr. Fetra on a personal level and remember the story (as well as the important messages against violence contained within).

“The superintendent appreciated our use of ‘Ampitampitao’ to know the community’s point of view, because he said that the government sometimes acts blindly and **does not consider the answers brought to them by typical messengers**, so that is why he is interested. He will read the magazines. **‘I will read this at home,’** he said, ‘I won’t do what I usually do with books and reports where I tell my personnel to read it and then summarize it to me in a meeting.’

– P.J.L. staff member visit report

“I am thoroughly interested in this magazine issue # 3 because I am stressed about what to do: every time I pass by the elementary school near here, I notice one teacher using violence on students and I have received many complaints. This teacher is taking drugs, and now he is starting to sexually harass the students. I am really stressed about how to make a decision so **luckily there is this magazine ‘Ampitampitao’ for me to get some ideas.**”

– Regional Director of Education  
(verbal comment, translated)



## Dissemination

PJL's team shared the magazines with dozens of decision-makers and technical advisors during existing events and conferences and during one-on-one and small group meetings. Target audiences ranged from government stakeholders to INGOs to bilateral and multilateral agencies.

Our team tailored their language during their explanations of the magazine for each type of audience. They also aimed to move beyond one-way, transactional dissemination approaches – centering our commitment to building meaningful, trusting, and lasting relationships, especially with government partners, at all levels. Distributing the magazines face-to-face often helped spur on-the-spot conversations about the topic and our work. PJL's staff also checked back in with many of the recipients a few weeks later to understand if they had read the magazines and their reactions.

Readers of the national magazines appreciated the **novelty and utility** of our approach of connecting local knowledge to national decision-making processes.

Many high-level actors expressed that they wanted to **immediately use the national magazines in their work** – whether in advocacy to colleagues or to inform implementation.

Some national readers expressed that the magazines provided their **first source of “contextual data”** needed for their advocacy work. Other decision-makers, many at the regional level, said that magazines responded to a pressing need in their day-to-day work. Some actors also expressed they wanted to use, discuss, and share the magazines with their colleagues.

“ Very few take the ideas of the community at the grassroots level, especially about health, so this is really good.

– Technical Advisor, Ministry of Health (verbal comment, translated)

“ The initiative you took on is great because you can see the reality at the grassroots level, enabling us to improve existing programs or create new programs.

– Senior adolescent SRHR advisor, INGO (verbal comment, translated)

“ This problem is very visible and this is exactly what the competent authorities should know (Issue #4). I can always talk about the ideas in this magazine when there is a meeting; it is very good and everyone should know.

– Technical Advisor, Ministry of Health (verbal comment, translated)

Because the magazines and their content are non-confrontational, they are **acceptable for delicate, political situations and topics**. Decision-makers can engage with them and explore new perspectives and possibilities in a way that isn't directly tied to their past public positions or political talking points.



“ He said that our approach to this research is really good, because the Ministry [of Education] is not able to keep up with such research, but **it is really needed to improve their work and get feedback**. They are really grateful for our efforts as a partner of the Ministry because it **helps strengthen the relationship between civil society and the Ministry**.

– Report from PJL’s Advocacy Manager after meeting with a senior official at the National Ministry of Education

“ Sometimes decision-makers do not know the opinions of youth and the school community but having that really improves the education system... There is **knowledge and data that the decision-maker cannot imagine contained here** [in the magazine]; for example, the 5-minute discussion on life skills and politeness, the Minister did not think that there might be a problem in its implementation. But **you have brought these results which are significant and can be accepted [by the Minister]** – that there are teachers who do not know clearly what they are going to talk about but they are asked to do the 5 minutes...

– Senior official at the National Ministry of Education.  
(verbal comment, translated)

# Lessons Learned

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The 'Ampitapitao' magazine series was designed to support our mission-driven work to push back against traditional social, cultural, professional, and institutional boundaries in knowledge management and create a critical loop between local knowledge on youth FP/RH and national-level decision-making processes in Madagascar.

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## **Key takeaway: Audience segmentation and tailored language**

As we expected based on our past successes with the EKO magazines, our long-term partners at the Ministry of Education found the 'Ampitapitao' magazines relevant, useful, and engaging. We heard positive feedback from a number of other national decision-makers, even some who had less familiarity with Projet Jeune Leader.



By taking time to fill in our own knowledge gaps about other **decision-makers' and technical advisors' knowledge, values, and priorities** before and during the magazine development process, our team was not only able to tailor the content of the magazines, but also their approaches to presenting the magazines to these newer partners. As our Technical Manager explained in one example of a meeting with a multilateral agency technical advisor, "Among the first things I did was show him the first page and 'name-drop' the research about youth spaces and peer education – his eyes become wide and I knew he was hooked onto what I was going to say next."

## Key takeaway: Relationships and power dynamics

Many of our successes were based on our **deep understanding of power dynamics and our reputation as a credible, trustworthy civil society partner**. As a local, grassroots, community-based organization with strong relationships with our local stakeholders and a good view into national policy and political discourses, we were able to **mitigate risks by using carefully crafted language and key messages around FP/RH tailored to different audiences**.

Sometimes, the status quo in knowledge management is at odds with innovation in terms of relationships and power dynamics. Grounded civil society organizations understand what might resonate and what probably won't. We understand the unintended consequences of status quo, one-directional knowledge management approaches: at best, apathetic audiences; and at worst, defensiveness, finger-pointing, and retribution.

We encourage civil society organizations to persevere with testing and refining their own knowledge management innovations, because their institutional knowledge and deep connections with local communities are valuable, much-needed assets in the knowledge management space.



# 'Ampitapitao! Closing the Gap Between Community Perspectives and National Decision-Making in Madagascar

MARCH 2023



Explore the collection of 'Ampitapitao' magazines on our resource library.



[www.projetjeuneleader.org](http://www.projetjeuneleader.org)

