Multi-faceted impacts of Projet Jeune Leader:

Understanding what matters most to educational authorities

This brief describes the participatory research process we employed with educational authorities in Madagascar to understand their priorities and values—important feedback for Projet Jeune Leader (PJL)'s efforts to build public support for and scale comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) in the public education system in Madagascar.



SUMMARY

In July 2022, PJL conducted a data validation exercise with district, regional, and national educational authorities to explore which multi-faceted impacts of Projet Jeune Leader's CSE program are most important to our government partners in the education system.

Educational authorities rated PJL's impact on **improving students' behavior and self-confidence** as highly important. Authorities also selected **enhanced parent-student relationships, improved parental engagement at the school, decreased student pregnancies, and gaining a community** role model as the most important multi-level impacts of the program.

This activity gave us new insights for our dissemination and evaluation efforts as we refine Projet Jeune Leader's strategy for scale and sustainability alongside government partners.

Context

Background

Comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) is an often sensitive and morally imbued topic, traditionally viewed exclusively through the lens of youth sexuality. Yet, as a holistic intervention, CSE extends beyond sexual health-related outcomes. More evidence on these multi-faceted impacts and more dissemination of that evidence is needed to help stakeholders understand the potential benefits of and needs for CSE—particularly within the education system and among government officials.

At Projet Jeune Leader (PJL), we have found that amplifying the evidence offered by local stakeholders on the positive impacts of our CSE program is a powerful way to build political will and commitment.

Evidence Gathering

In 2021, with support from researchers at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health, we generated evidence on the multi-level, multi-faceted impact of our CSE program in Madagascar. Using a two-phased participatory approach and qualitative human-centered design (HCD) methods, we asked school principals from our 51 partner schools to assess and explain Projet Jeune Leader's influence on students, families, schools, and communities.

Collective Sensemaking

In July 2022, we convened 18 government partners from the district, regional, and national levels for a day-long symposium to strengthen relationships and co-envision scale and sustainability strategies. **As one symposium activity, our team led a data validation exercise to review and prioritize findings from the 2021 study conducted with local school principals.**

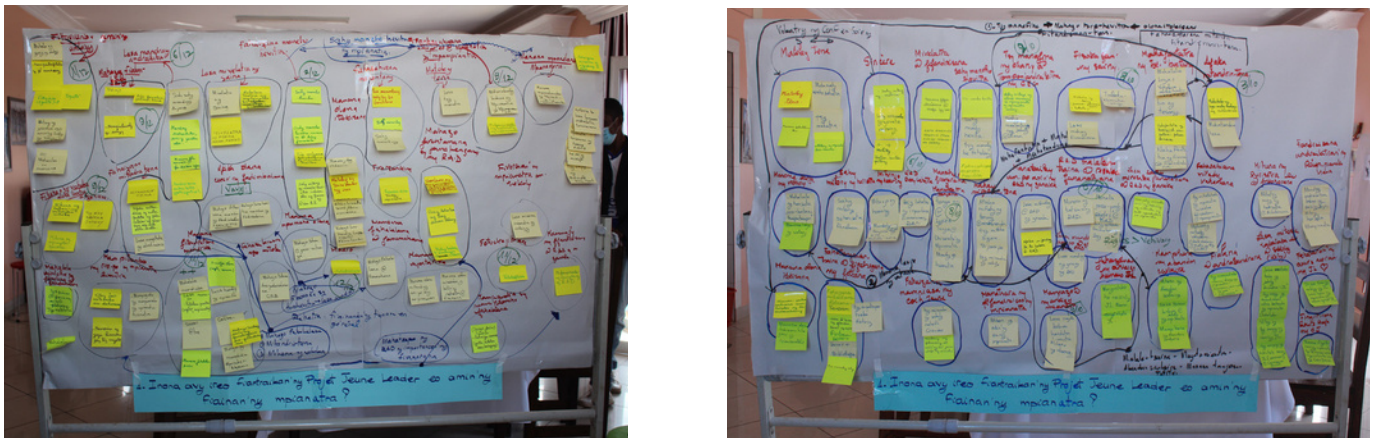
THE EXERCISE

In advance of the symposium, PJL synthesized and visualized (on a "data placemat"—see Annex II) the 2021 study outcomes (the multifaceted impacts of PJL's CSE program, as defined by partner school principals) by level: student, families, schools, and communities. The 18 participants reviewed the outcomes; then, for each level, they "voted" on the top three outcomes that were most important to them. After voting, the group collectively reviewed the results, and our team facilitated a dialogue for participants to explain their top choices.

The goals of the data validation and prioritization exercise were to:

1. Gain insights into locally defined impacts that PJL should amplify to build political will and commitment for PJL's CSE program, especially within Madagascar's education system.

2. Identify areas for PJL to focus on in future evaluation efforts that would be most relevant for educational authorities.

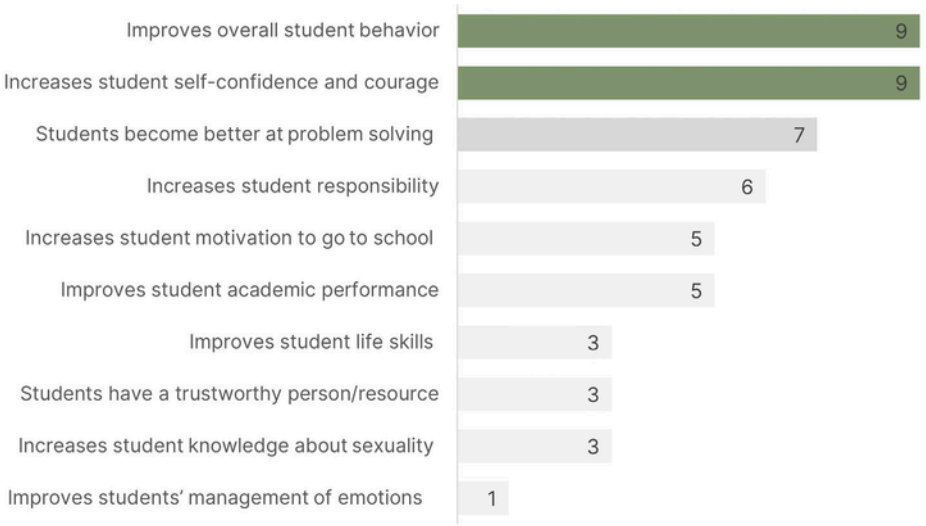


Snapshots of the brainstorming and affinity clustering exercise conducted in 2021 with school principals.

Key Results: What CSE outcomes mattered most to educational authorities?

Impacts of the CSE program on students

Participants felt that improvements in behavior and self-confidence are two of the most important impacts PJL has on students.



During follow-up discussions, all participants agreed that improvement in students' behavior is an important impact of PJL's program for obvious reasons.

A Regional Authority chose to elaborate, instead, on the importance of students' self-confidence and courage:

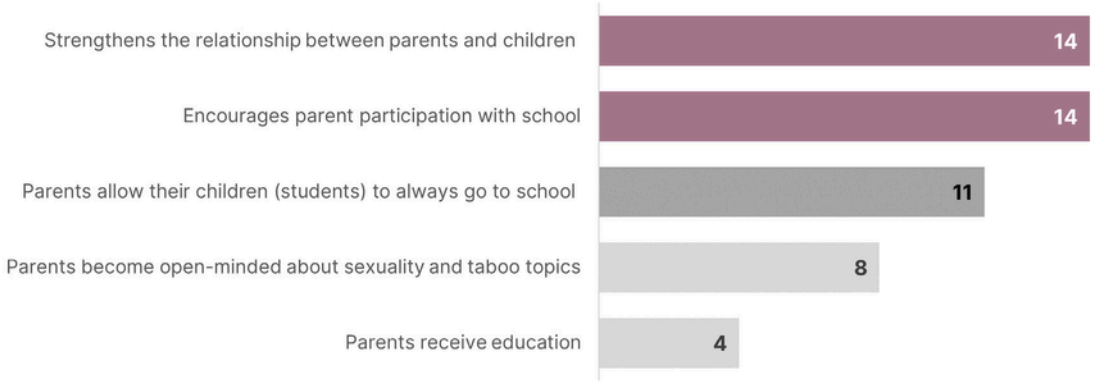
> "Courage and motivation are the most important. As the saying goes, 'before you can succeed, you must be motivated.' When students are motivated and **have courage, they will always return to school. When students are lazy, they run away from school. When there is something that motivates them at school,** they will want to go to school and they themselves will be the ones to say, 'I will go to school.'"[1]

A School District Superintendent explained why they prioritized improvements in problem-solving skills: "Children become more open, and they know how to solve their problems. So, if they face a problem, they will no longer feel defeated; they will be able to find a solution. They know who to ask for help: the doctor, an elder, their **parents, or teachers, using to the information provided [by PJL] at the school."**

[1] All quotes translated from Malagasy

Impacts of the CSE program on households

At the household level, participants said that strengthening relationships between parents and children and encouraging parental participation at school are two of the most important impacts of PJL's program.



Participants noted that child-parent relationships are generally lacking or strained in Madagascar, and that PJL's program is therefore addressing a critical need. One National Official explained that "The main problem nowadays is that there is no communication between parents and children." A School District Superintendent elaborated that poor **parent-child relationships are a key contributing factor to poor outcomes among youth:**

> "The relationship between parents and children is very important. One of the reasons why a child falls behind is because they have a problem and there is no communication between them and their parents; they face their problem all alone… So, this child is forced to share their problems with their friends, who may give them bad advice and it may even lead to an early pregnancy or drug addiction."

Participants also said it is important that PJL involves parents in our program, as this improves **overall parental engagement with the school** system. School District Superintendents across all three regions alluded that this helps to alleviate tension between the government and local households, the latter of which must significantly subsidize education costs in Madagascar.[2]

> "When parents see that there are good **things in school, they come to see that their contributions are not in vain, and it's the** factor that makes them more eager to take responsibility."

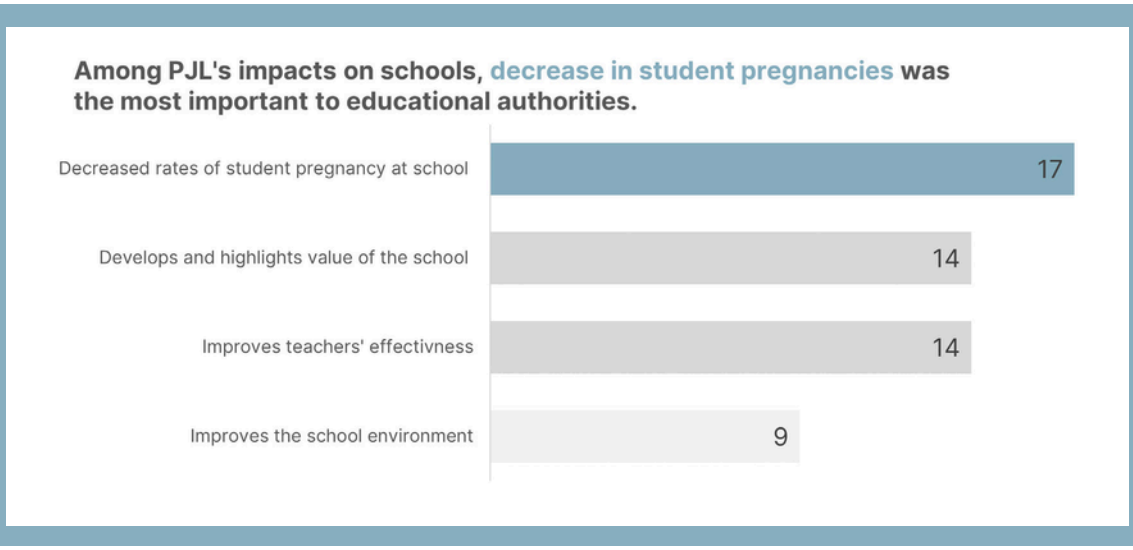
> "Now, if there is something to do at the school, parents feel that they want to help. They start to **have a sense of ownership and participate."**

> "[With PJL here] parents no longer think that just the government owns the school, but that they also own it, and they also take part in improving the school."

Finally, participants recognized the critical role of **parents in sending their children to school. As** the highest-ranking National Official in attendance emphasized, "One of the problems in our country is there are still a large number of children who do not go to school." Further validating the results of the original study, a Regional Authority explained that **they believed "the presence of the PJL Educator convinces parents of the importance of sending their children to school."**

[2] Families support at least 40% of recurrent costs of the education system. (UNICEF Madagascar, 2020)

Impacts of the CSE program on schools



During the follow-up dialogue, almost all participants shared that the importance of preventing early pregnancy was obvious and did not require more explanation, with a Regional Authority **stating, "It is very important because it is one of the factors that lead to children not completing middle school."**

Another Regional Authority argued that improved perceptions of the schools' value "is very important because when school becomes important, parents are motivated to send their children to public schools. They are motivated because they see the effectiveness of public schools." A School District Superintendent further endorsed the impact of PJL's program, saying:

> "The public middle school has become very well known for its effectiveness and its wonderful program; so different from how it was before. **Previously, the public schools had no value, the community thought that they were not of good quality. But when the PJL Educator started working, everyone started to send their children."**

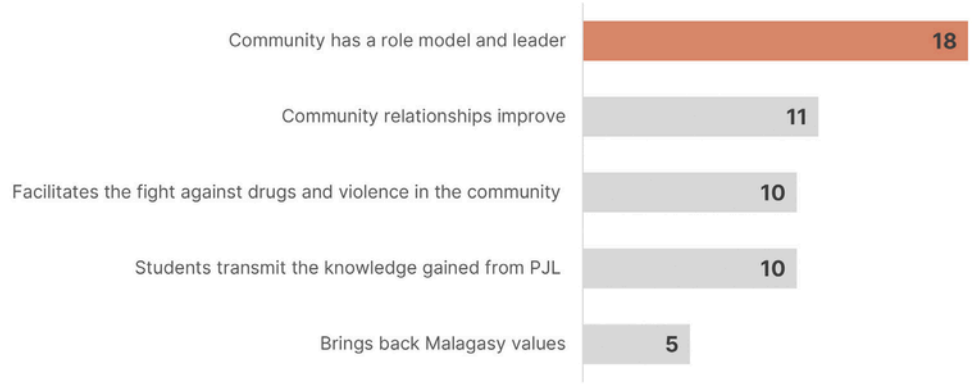
All participants also agreed that there is nothing more important than the improved effectiveness of teachers, as "it's the basis of a functional education system" (Regional Authority). "Because it is the program, itself, that improves the experience of teachers [through conversation, through observation of the PJL Educator]," further explained a Regional Authority, "whcih causes them to become more effective." Another School District Superintendent attributed this change to PJL's positive influence on students:

> "It is logical that the teachers are more effective **because children who have received the PJL program have more confidence in themselves** and do not hesitate to express themselves at **school; they go to the school with motivation, they know the importance of going to school, they are more engaged with the teachers** because they participate."



Impacts of the CSE program on communities

Participants felt that gaining a community role model was the most important impact of PJL on communities.



Participants expressed that the presence of a community role model and leader "improves the community," without providing further explanation. However, two School District Superintendents described improved community relationships as important because this "facilitates the exchange of knowledge between members of the community" and that "when the relationships at the community level improve, exchanges are easier, and we can **talk to each other about all things."**

Another School District Superintendent explained that improved community dialogue about sensitive subjects was a result of students sharing knowledge they gained from PJL:

> "For example, a School Principal came to complain to me that this [PJL] program talks about obscene subjects; yet, a few months later, the same School Principal completely changed their mind, telling me, 'Wow actually this PJL Educator is really great.' I think this change **happened because of the things the students said and did in the community. Even community** leaders and members became convinced [about PJL]."

In their final comments, a School District Superintendent also emphasized that it is important for students to transmit their knowledge from PJL **because "young people who do not go to school also receive the knowledge necessary for life; it naturally spreads."**



Discussion

Through this data validation and prioritization exercise, we gained new insights into the priorities of district, regional, and national educational officials when it comes to the intended and observed impacts of PJL's CSE program.

Beliefs and ideas around CSE and early pregnancy

Notably, impacts related to sexuality among students and families ("Increase students' knowledge about sexuality" and "Parents become open-minded about sexuality and taboo topics") were generally rated lower in importance.

However, group consensus showed that "decrease in student pregnancies" was the most important school-level impact of PJL's program. This opened the door to broaching the concept of adolescent sexual and reproductive health in follow-up dialogue. Although there was not much discussion around this result during the data validation exercise, mixed ideas around youth sexuality and pregnancy prevention resurfaced throughout the day-long symposium.



For example, National Officials put forth their own narratives for the causes of early pregnancy and rationale for CSE in their presentations. They heavily focused on the (sexual) violence that children experience at school, further explaining that, in most cases, it is the teachers who are perpetuators of violence. They also shared how they noticed that many girls have relationships with older men in exchange for money. The National Officials explained that these reasons are why there are many pregnant children in schools.

These sessions revealed that more exploration on educational authorities' beliefs and ideas ("mental models") around CSE and pregnancy prevention is needed. Furthermore, the mixed and conflicting worldviews we saw illustrate the difficulty of using sexuality-related narratives to describe and promote CSE in schools—even if preventing student pregnancies is agreed upon as very important. It seems likely that the true motivating factor for educational authorities in preventing early pregnancies is related to preventing school dropout, as the one Regional Authority alluded to during the exercise ("It is very important because it is one of the factors that lead to children not completing middle school.").

Importance of education-related impacts

As with PJL's impact on student pregnancy, participants frequently explained their reasons for highly ranking non-education-related outcomes by linking back to educational impacts and outcomes ("When students are motivated and have courage, they will always return to school…").

PJL's outcomes on schools' value, teacher effectiveness, and school attendance were reinforced later in the symposium by the highest-ranking National Official in attendance during his own presentation on a new partnership agreement between the Ministry of Education and PJL. In his presentation, the National Official explained that "the activities carried out by PJL are very interesting and beneficial and have positive impacts on the education of children, which encouraged the National Ministry to continue to work and collaborate with PJL" and "to seek ideas to widen

the dimension of the partnership in order to have a sustainable and profitable project." He mentioned during his presentation that the main objective of the National Ministry is to improve the quality of education and that the PJL brings our expertise and skills in the field of comprehensive sexuality education as technical support.

These results provide support for an advocacy and dissemination approach for PJL's scale and sustainability with key messaging centered around quality education and school strengthening.

Value of parental engagement

Improved parental connections to both their children and school were also important to participants. Educational officials are aware parents are pervasively disappointed in the quality of their schools especially since they must substantially fund them (sometimes 100%). We know that national officials use the "rights of parents" as an argument against in-school CSE in many contexts. We may
be able to flip this narrative by demonstrating how much parents value PJL's program in these most difficult contexts and highlight their rights (as major benefactors) to demand CSE in their schools.

Limitations

Responses during the exercise did not seem to differ between district, regional, and national officials. However, it is very possible that some authorities—especially School District Superintendents—were not comfortable sharing their ideas due to the inherent hierarchical power dynamics between the different levels of authority. To address this, we can leverage our strong relationships with all participants and employ key informant interviews to follow up on our unanswered questions and new insights from this activity.

Furthermore, in hindsight, it would have been helpful to view and prioritize all the programs impacts as one group—not separated by level (students, families, schools, communities)—to be able to further narrow down what authorities' priorities are. We can revise our approach at future convenings exploring locally defined evidence.

Next steps

We plan to continue to use data validation prioritization exercises with existing and new evidence as one partnership-building strategy with national and decentralized education authorities. Rather than a top-down approach to studying CSE, we value a co-learning and participatory process such as the one we employed. In this way, we can facilitate common understanding across different types of stakeholders and contexts as to what CSE programming and evaluation efforts in Madagascar should encompass.

Annex 1 List of Participants

- 3 senior representatives of the National Ministry of **Education**
  - — Head of M&E
  - — CSE Focal Point
  - — National CSE Coordinator
- **3 Regional Directors of Education ("DREN") (regions** of Amoron'i Mania, Haute Matsiatra, and Vakinankaratra)
- **15 School District Superintendents ("CISCO")**
  - — Amoron'i Mania: Representing school districts of Ambositra and Fandriana
  - — Haute Matsiatra: Representing school districts of Lalangina, Fianarantsoa 1, Vohibato, Ambohimahasoa, Ambalavao, and Isandra
  - — Vakinankaratra: Representing school districts of Antsirabe 1, Antsirabe 2, Ambatolampy, and Antanifotsy



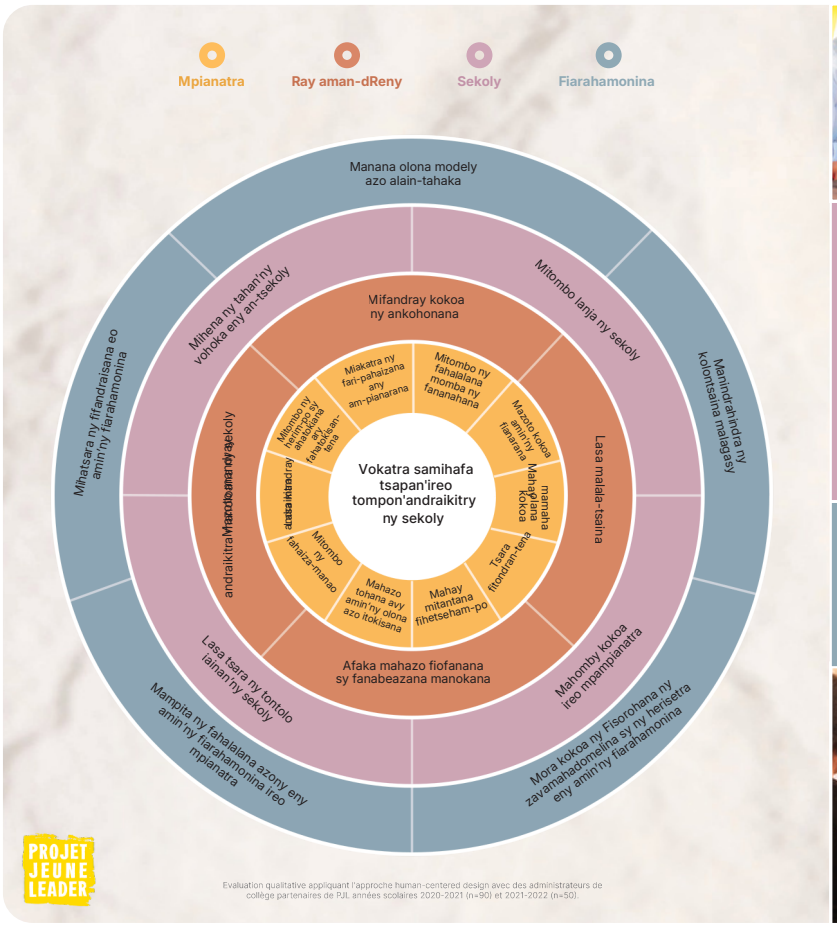




July 2022 Sympoisum with government partners.

Annex 2 Data Placemat

All participants received this data placemat that show the different levels of impacts school principals described in 2021, along with a few illustrative quotes. During the actual exercise, the PJL team used A4 paper that had one impact per sheet and grouped the impacts by level throughout the meeting room. Participants placed sticky notes on the top three impacts they viewed as important per each level.





"Lasa mazoto mandeha andakilasy ny ankizy. Misy section tsy misy cours fa morana foana ny andro rehefa anjaran'izy ireo manao cours dia ny ankizy mihitsy no mangataka amin'ny Tale hoe mba omeo fotoana izahay hanaovana cours JL satria tena tian'izy ireo ny manatrika cours JL."
(CEG Anjoma)

"Tany aminay no tena nahitana an'izay vohoka aloha loatra izay teo aloha, fa hatramin'ny nisian'ny JL dia lasa mahazo torohevitra ny rehetra satria betsaka ny fifampiresahana mahakasika an'ilay vohoka aloha loatra sy ny fifanampiana hoan'ny mpianatra sy ny mpampianatra ao amin'ny sekoly hany ka foana mihitsy amin'izao ilay vohoka aloha loatra vokatrin'ny zava-misy satria hita porofo tamin'ny fizahana ara-pahasalamana tamin'ny fifaninanana ara-panatanjahan-tena (BEPC) dia tsy nahitana mpianatra be vohoka ny tao amin'ny kilasy 3ème."
(CEG Andriambilany)



"Lasa mahay mifanaja ny ray aman-dreny sy ny zanaka, mifanaja ny profs samy profs."
(CEG Lovainjafy)





"Te hifindra amin'ny sekoly misy JL daholo ny mpianatra manodidina. Aho manko manan-janaka mianatra amin'ny sekoly Prive, dia manotany ahy foana io zanako io isan'andro hoe inona no atao ao amin'ny JL ao, ny namany koa mitantara amin'ny foana hoe mianatra mikabary anay ao amin'ny JL, mianatra miresaka, manao kilalao, dia mangataka amiko io zanako io isan'andro hoe mba afindrao ao amin'ny CEG aho dada dia novaliko hoe ao fa amin'ny heritaona dia afindrako ao ianao."
(CEG Ankaramena)

Since 2013, Madagascar-based NGO **Projet Jeune Leader (PJL)** has refined an evidence-based, multi-component comprehensive sexuality education (CSE) program for very young adolescents in Madagascar's government schools. The program consists of a rights-based, gender-transformative curriculum, youth-friendly counseling services and healthcare referrals, and programming for parents and school leaders. To realize impact at scale, PJL is working alongside Madagascar's Ministry of Education to mainstream our CSE program into the country's education system.

See other resources & learnings

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