

Let Us Continue Learning: Lessons from Madagascar for improving access and retention of vulnerable children in secondary school

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KEY POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS

- 1. Strengthen adaptive instruction and remedial follow-on support to boost Catch-up Classes graduates' long-term retention and progression in school.** Reintegration of Catch-up Classes graduates immediately after completing the module was outstanding, with 90 to 99 per cent going back to lower secondary school. A year later, however, one in four learners left school again. Those who continued for a second year in school showed above-average repetition rates. Further calibrating course content, number of hours of instruction, learning materials and placement grade based on rigorously assessed learners' competence levels could generate learning gains, while reducing repetition and risk of dropout. Additionally, continuing remedial education for students who are struggling is key to enable recently reintegrated students to strengthen the foundational skills they need to keep up with their studies.
- 2. Increase monitoring efforts to devise targeted learning and socioeconomic measures to drive down dropout and repetition rates.** A more in-depth understanding of the characteristics of repeaters and of children dropping out of school again – including age, learning performance, years of absence from school, etc. – is key to determining who these learners are, why they are struggling, and which tailored solutions could provide the best mix of educational and parental support. Further unpacking the specific socioeconomic barriers leading to new dropouts or reduced attendance is fundamental to provide targeted economic support to vulnerable households.
- 3. Provide additional support to young mothers and learners who re-enrol in upper grades.** Over a third of girls aged 15–19 in Let us Learn (LUL) target regions are childbearing. The retention rate one year after completion of the Catch-up Classes for young mothers is considerably lower than for girls of the same programme cohort without children. Meanwhile, Catch-up Classes graduates who re-enrolled in higher grades of lower secondary school, especially in the final year, showed much higher repetition rates. Delivering remedial education at flexible hours and within the community can be an effective means of reducing distance to school and associated health hazards for young mothers and pregnant girls, while enabling older students who also work to participate. Referring young mothers to existing childcare services, where available, or supporting the local delivery of such services as part of the LUL package, can also help young mothers reconcile family obligations with their own schooling. Community-level sensitization can further reduce risks of harmful social practices such as early marriage and increase awareness on sexual and reproductive health.
- 4. Invest additional resources to serve a larger share of the out-of-school population in target areas.** Although the Catch-up Classes are being scaled up countrywide, their beneficiaries only covered an estimated 4–6 per cent of the total out-of-school children (OOSC) population in the target areas. Larger investments are thus urgent to re-engage a larger share of OOSC on the learning path before it will be too late, as evidence suggests that the longer a child has been away from school, the lower the chances of reintegrating. The specific accelerated or remedial education pathways should be adapted to the learner's ability and time spent away from school.
- 5. Leverage evidence-based findings to expand uptake and effectiveness of cash transfers for the most vulnerable.** Despite its relatively limited take-up, the LUL's cash transfer improved enrolment rates by 6 per cent for children aged 11–14.¹ Yet, rigorous research suggests that there is room to expand uptake of the transfer, especially among those families who stand to benefit the most from it. Adjustments to boost the cash transfer's reach and effectiveness may include revamping information campaigns around programme benefits and school enrolment procedures and requirements; moving from household targeting to individual targeting; removing conditionalities to make it a universal measure; and recalibrating the monetary amount of the transfers to make it more appealing, while keeping it scalable.

1 This difference is statistically significant.

ABOUT THE LET US LEARN PROGRAMME IN MADAGASCAR

Young adolescents face important challenges in accessing and completing lower secondary school in Madagascar. In 2019, only 27 per cent of adolescents in the official age group (11–14) nationwide were enrolled in lower secondary school (or higher grades), with wide disparities across income levels and urban and rural settings (INSTAT and UNICEF, 2019). Enrolment rates in urban centres (48 per cent) were more than double the 21 per cent in rural areas. Only 4 per cent of adolescents from the poorest quintile of households are in lower secondary school, compared to 67 per cent in the top wealth quintile (INSTAT and UNICEF, 2019). Only one in four student (26 per cent) completed the lower secondary cycle in 2018 (UNESCO UIS data, 2018).

In Madagascar, lower secondary schools suffer from chronic shortages of qualified teachers and school materials, particularly textbooks², which contributes to generalized poor learning outcomes (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2017). About 80 per cent of students at the end of primary school do not achieve sufficient grade-level competences in reading and mathematics (PASEC, 2020). Failing to achieve minimum competencies – and low education quality more broadly – is a salient predictor of school dropout (Inoue et al., 2015; Branson et al., 2014). Acknowledging this, the Let Us Learn (LUL) initiative delivers **tailored Catch-up Classes (CRAN)**³ to lower secondary school dropouts to build back the foundational literacy and numeracy (FLN) skills they need to reintegrate in school through an accelerated curriculum.

Economic constraints coupled with significant school costs that households have to bear put in-school children from vulnerable families at severe risk of dropping out (Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale, 2017). The transition from primary to lower secondary is a particularly critical one in Madagascar, where in 2019 one in four primary school graduates did not enter the subsequent cycle (INSTAT and UNICEF, 2019). To ease these economic constraints and reduce the opportunity cost that vulnerable families face enrolling their children in secondary school, LUL provides a **conditional cash transfer (CCT)** to learners who complete the primary cycle that are identified as at risk of dropout. This CCT is linked to enrolment and attendance in lower secondary school.

This brief presents the key results of the Catch-up Classes and CCT programmes from 2017 to 2020, highlighting lessons learnt in accessing and continuing lower secondary education for young adolescents in vulnerable settings. It is part of a series of country briefs that aim to draw policy-relevant recommendations based on the experiences of the LUL initiative. LUL supports a broad range of projects to expand access to quality learning opportunities for disadvantaged children in five countries.⁴

Box 1: Let us Learn (LUL) within the broader Education Strategy in Madagascar

In Madagascar, LUL-supported programmes complement UNICEF's broader Education Strategy by extending its reach to out-of-school children (OOSC) and in-school at-risk children. Overall, the Education Strategy aims to improve access to quality education in formal schools through three pillars: adapted pedagogical materials, ameliorated on-site infrastructures and capacity-building for school governance. Government-approved teaching and learning materials in Malagasy have been distributed to all students in 496 lower secondary schools across the three priority regions of Atsimo-Atsinanana, Vatovavy-Fitovinany (V7V) and Analanjirifo. These students received bilingual French-Malagasy dictionaries, which will facilitate learning in a context where many children do not regularly speak French, the main language used for teaching, at home. The strategy also promotes the upgrading of sanitation facilities in schools, which has been shown to increase participation rates especially among girls; and the training of pedagogical advisers, teachers and school principals, including training on gender-responsive practices. Pedagogical supervision training was provided to 245 school directors in V7V and Atsimo Atsinanana, who in turn conducted support visits to 167 schools in Analanjirifo.⁵ LUL funds also supported the national remote learning response to the COVID-19 pandemic. They were used for producing and distributing self-directed learning manuals for Malagasy, Maths and French to 35,000 seventh-grade students, whose education was interrupted during school closures.

² According to 2014–15 EMIS data, the textbook/student ratio was 1/14 for Malagasy, 1/7 for French, English and Mathematics and 1/28 for Science. Source: Ministère de l'Éducation Nationale (2017).

³ CRAN : « Cours de Remise A Niveau », or catch-up classes.

⁴ Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Liberia, Madagascar and Nepal. Programme components vary based on each country's context but align to four pillars: access and retention; quality education; systems strengthening; and disaster risk reduction.

⁵ Direct pedagogical supervision training was not possible in Analanjirifo due to the COVID-19 outbreak and administrative challenges.

BRINGING ADOLESCENTS BACK TO SCHOOL: FINDINGS FROM THE CATCH-UP CLASSES

Catch-up Classes provide out-of-school Malagasy adolescents with a tailored learning pathway to reinforce the foundational skills they need to access the lower secondary curriculum.⁶ Participants are adolescents aged 11–20 who had dropped out of lower secondary school for less than two years at the time of enrolling in the programme. These out-of-school children are identified and recruited by a team of community mobilizers. In practice, more than half of the participants were aged 14–17, with younger children aged 11–13 not exceeding 11 per cent.⁷

The Catch-up Classes take place during the summer break for a typical duration of two months.⁸ The number of hours of instruction depends on the needs of the individual child, as determined through an assessment administered by teachers before the start of the course. Sessions are mostly conducted in small groups or through a mix of small-group and one-on-one tutoring in community-based facilities. To improve the quality of instruction, CRAN supports the training of local supervisors and teachers, who are remunerated and receive pedagogical monitoring and support. Teachers first administer the diagnostic assessment to evaluate the learning needs of participants, who receive school supplies and self-learning materials for their identified level. They participate in weekly meetings with programme teachers who provide follow-on support in person. On completion of the course, participants receive administrative support to reintegrate into formal school. End-of-programme learning assessments determine which grade they should enter. In some programme areas, regular schoolteachers also receive training as part of the programme activities to provide extra remedial support during the academic year to both former CRAN and non-CRAN students that are identified as struggling.⁹

CRAN reached a substantial number of out-of-school adolescents, but additional investments are needed to cover a larger share of the OOSC population in the target regions. CRAN's cohort size fluctuated based on

the resources available annually: the 2017–18 cohort included over 9,000 participants, the next one more than 11,000, while in 2019–20 the programme served 3,500 out-of-school adolescents. Overall, Madagascar counted over 760,000 out-of-school adolescents of lower secondary school age in 2019 (UNESCO UIS data, 2019). According to estimates elaborated from INSTAT and UNICEF data (2019), the LUL regions are home to approximately 370,000 lower secondary school age OOSC.¹⁰ Other estimates provided by programme staff found there were approximately 200,000 OOSC across the same areas in 2017–18. This means in that year, CRAN covered about 4.5 per cent of the total OOSC population. Scale-up of the Catch-up Class initiative, which has so far been delivered in seven regions¹¹ by the Ministry of Education with support from UNICEF, is already underway as part of the national education plan.

The programme met the challenge of including out-of-school adolescent girls despite entrenched cultural norms discriminating against young women in the country. The practice of child marriage persists in Madagascar and over a third of girls aged 15–19 are childbearing (UNICEF Madagascar, 2018), limiting their chances of completing secondary education. Although countrywide girls show higher enrolment rates and similar completion rates than boys, in target regions such as Anosy the net adjusted enrolment rate in lower secondary school is 11 per cent among girls, as compared to 15 per cent for boys (INSTAT and UNICEF, 2019). In addition, the enrolment of lower secondary aged girls drops from 54 per cent in urban areas to 25 per cent in rural settings – a drop that is more marked than for boys of the same age (INSTAT and UNICEF, 2019). Despite this, the programme managed to include adolescent girls through extensive community mobilization, leading to an equitable participation of boys and girls. Overall, girls accounted for 49 to 51 per cent of total participants in the last three cohorts of CRAN learners, although some variation existed across geography and cohorts. In the abovementioned Anosy region, for instance, girls accounted for 48 per cent of total participants in 2018–19 but only 38 per cent back in 2017–18.

6 Foundational skills comprise basic literacy and numeracy skills.

7 Data refers to the 2018–19 cohort, for which there is available information on participants' age. Data is missing for about 11 per cent of this cohort, however.

8 Following the COVID-19 outbreak, programme staff are considering reducing the duration of Catch-up Classes to one month in order to fit within the disrupted school year. In 2019, the catch-up classes were also reduced to one month due to an unexpected change in the academic calendar.

9 This sub-component is still, however, left to the initiative of decentralized entities and is largely unmonitored in practice.

10 These estimates include all of the out-of-school children – and not just those who had abandoned lower secondary school for less than two years, i.e. CRAN's target population. Although it is not clear what share of this broader out-of-school population had dropped out within the previous two years, these figures testify to the large cohorts of OOSC in the 11–14 age groups.

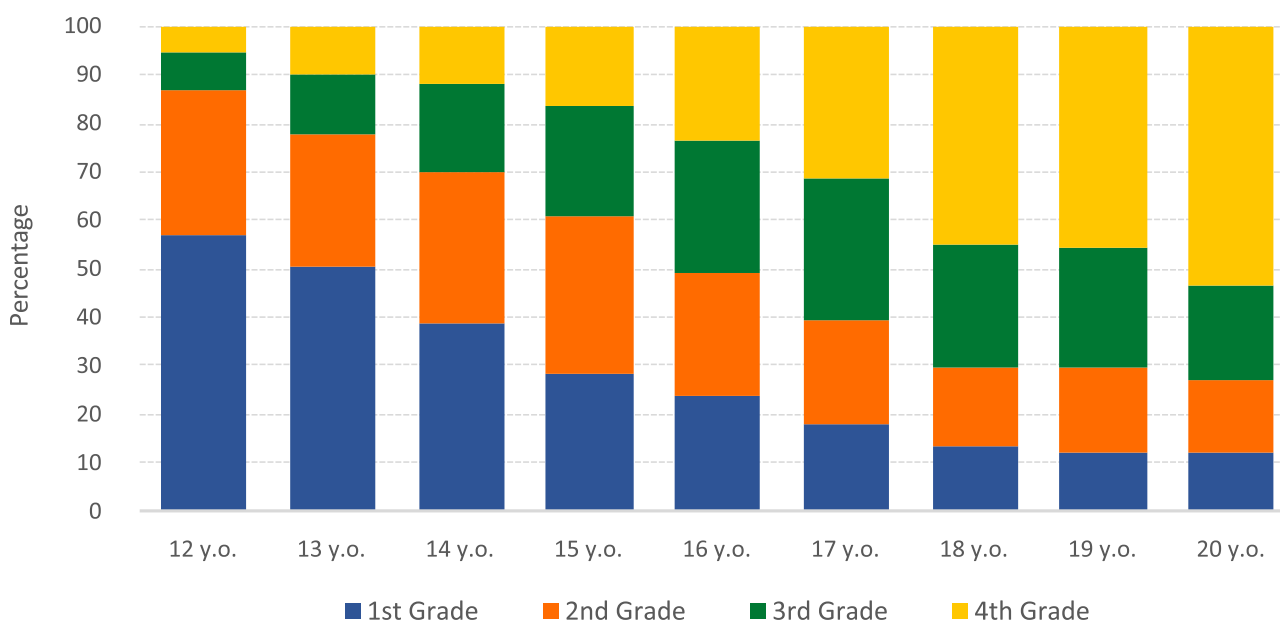
11 Analanjirifo, Androy, Anosy, Atsimo-Andrefana, Atsimo-Atsinanana, Boeny, Vatovavy-Fitovinany.

REINTEGRATION OF GRADUATES IN SCHOOL¹²

Catch-up Classes graduates largely returned to secondary school on completion of the module. Over 11,000 participants of the 2018–19 cohort went back to school for the academic year that started immediately after the Catch-up Classes. For the 2019–20 cohort, reintegration achieved a rate as high as 99 per cent (UNICEF Madagascar, 2020). Overall, Catch-up Class participants reintegrated evenly across all four lower secondary grades, based on their post-test results: 26 per cent enrolled in the first grade, 24 per cent in the second grade, 23 per cent in the third grade and 27 per cent in the last grade. Monitoring data show that **there was substantial gender parity among reintegrated CRAN participants**: 51 per cent were boys and 49 per cent girls in the 2018–19 cohort. Among reintegrated girls, 5 per cent were young mothers. High reintegration rates suggest that beneficiaries acquired the motivation and self-confidence to go back to school after completing the Catch-up Classes. In addition, the mobilization conducted by programme staff in target communities played a role in influencing parents’ decisions on enrolling their children who were previously out of school.

In the 2018–19 cohort, **a minimum of 60 per cent of reintegrated participants were over-age by at least 3 years vis-à-vis the official grade-level age** – a pattern that was slightly more marked for boys than girls. Over-age enrolment is an important barrier to continuing school, because older children may lose motivation, or even face stigma, when joining classes largely composed of younger students. As Figure 1 shows, however, older CRAN participants were more likely to reintegrate in higher grades than their younger counterparts. It remains unclear whether this is because older learners had accumulated more competences prior to CRAN than younger ones, or because they progressed faster through the curriculum. Another hypothesis is that older learners may tend to be placed in upper grades to avoid transferring CRAN graduates in classrooms with much younger students, for the abovementioned reasons. Collecting learner-level data on pre- and post-tests and longitudinal data on school progression for a sample of CRAN graduates could shed light on this trend.¹³ In all cases, the risk of underperforming and leaving school again as a result of being over-age remains an issue.

Figure 1. Lower secondary school grades in which participants were reintegrated, CRAN cohort 2018–19, by age



Source: CRAN monitoring data 2018–19. N=10,067. Note: age information is missing for about 10 per cent of the full sample; these observations were accounted for but are not visualized in the graph.

¹² In this brief, reintegration refers to CRAN graduates going back to school right after completing the programme, i.e. in the school year that starts immediately after the summer course. Re-enrolment and retention, which are used interchangeably, are defined as continuing school for a second school year.

¹³ At the time of finalization of this brief (June 2021) such data was unavailable.

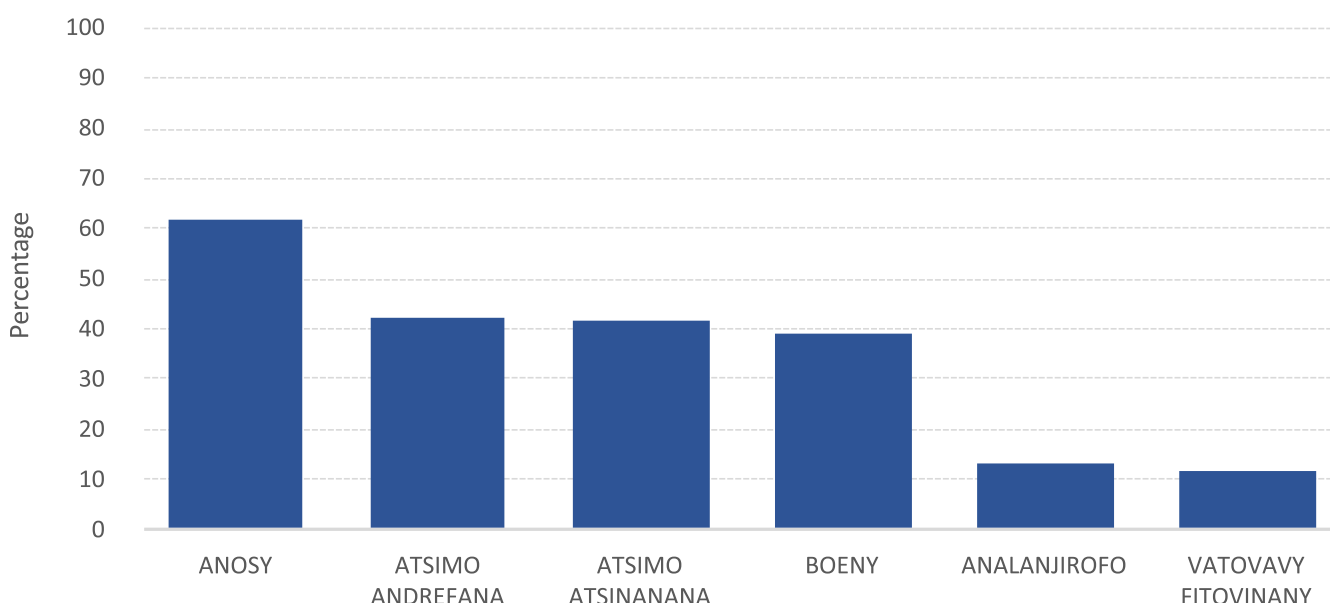
LONGER-TERM RETENTION AND ADVANCEMENT IN SCHOOL

Although most graduates re-enrolled for the academic year immediately after the Catch-up Classes, over one quarter dropped out in the following year. According to monitoring data and UNICEF Madagascar (2020), 71 per cent of the 2017–18 cohort and 75 per cent of the 2018–19 cohort were retained in school for a second year following CRAN.¹⁴ This suggests that some sources of vulnerability leading to dropout in the longer term persist. Programme staff highlighted households’ economic constraints in covering school-related expenditures, limited school supplies, distance from school and early marriage and pregnancy for girls as the main reasons behind dropout in the second school year after the completion of the Catch-up Classes. Further data is nonetheless necessary to understand the characteristics of children who dropped out (e.g., age, gender, learning performance, socioeconomic profile), in which grade they leave school and for which specific reasons. Regular analysis of this data would enable programme staff to formulate more tailored learning, economic and service support to learners and their families with a view to minimize dropout in the medium to long term. Similarly, data on school progression and dropout beyond the second year after programme completion could help inform programming for longer-

term retention of vulnerable children in secondary school.

School dropout rates at one year after participation in CRAN varied widely across regions. As Figure 2 shows, the dropout rate ranged from 61 per cent in Anosy to 11 per cent in Vatovavy-Fitovinany. While regional poverty rates do not seem to be correlated to this differential, UNICEF Education Staff in Madagascar put forward several preliminary hypotheses to explain this varying performance across regions. These include for instance the differing entry requirements at school across regions, which may affect school progression and dropout and internal migration that may disrupt children’s attendance in some specific regions, especially in the South. Migration can be driven by the search for seasonal job opportunities (more marked in regions such as Atsimo-Andrefana) or linked with cultural norms (e.g., in southern regions some ethnicities migrate to a different location when a close family member dies). This variation across regions needs further investigation to highlight the specific local- and household-level barriers that hindered continuing secondary education. Qualitatively analysing the experiences of the good performers can similarly help identify success factors in terms of learning environment (at the household and learning centre level), and of implementation (from a programme

Figure 2. Dropout rates, 1 year after CRAN, cohort 2017–18, across regional education directorates



Source: CRAN monitoring data 2017–19. N=7,231. Androy is not shown as data on retention in that region is missing for over 60 per cent of learners. In all other education directorates, missing data is between 0 and 3 per cent.

¹⁴ For the 2017–18 cohort, monitoring data on retention is missing for 5 per cent of programme participants.

design perspective), that can be applied to similar settings.

There was substantial gender parity in retention among CRAN graduates, but young mothers need additional support to continue school.

In the 2017–18 cohort, 74 per cent of participating girls were retained in a second year of formal schooling – a similar rate as the 76 per cent of boys. However, for the 13 per cent of CRAN graduates who were young mothers in 2017, less than half (42 per cent) continued formal schooling for a second year, as compared to 79 per cent of CRAN girls who did not have children. Wide disparities in the participation of young mothers existed across regions, with more than half of girls in Atsimo Atsinanana being young mothers compared to less than 1 per cent in Analanjirofo or Vatovavy-Fitovinany.

Regions with high ratios of young mothers require specific support measures to enable them to continue secondary education, including community sensitization on girls' rights and protection to reduce harmful practices such as child marriage. Promoting childcare services to look after their children during learning hours can help young mothers reconcile studying and family obligations. Ability-based remedial or accelerated instruction delivered within the community – or through accessible distance learning solutions¹⁵ – are effective ways to mitigate learning loss, at least in the period immediately before and after childbirth and facilitate future reintegration in school. Teachers and community actors should be engaged and equipped with adequate pedagogical capacity to support both in-person and remote learning initiatives. Finally, gaining a more in-depth understanding of young mothers' specific reasons for dropping out and expectations about schooling would be key to orient them towards the most appropriate learning track.

Among the 2017–18 CRAN graduates who reintegrated into the first three grades of lower secondary, **between 50 and 64 per cent progressed to the next school year, while 30 to 44 per cent ended up repeating** (see Figure 3). Meanwhile, for CRAN graduates who had reintegrated into the final, fourth grade of the cycle, the **advancement rate was a mere 8 per cent and the repetition rate was 82 per cent**. Although evidence on school advancement is fragmented, with 6–10 per cent of data missing and some inconsistencies in the raw data set, this trend sheds light on the need to provide

further follow-up support to upper-grade students, including delivering remedial education at the right level, providing continued economic support to households and raising awareness about caregivers' role in a child's education.

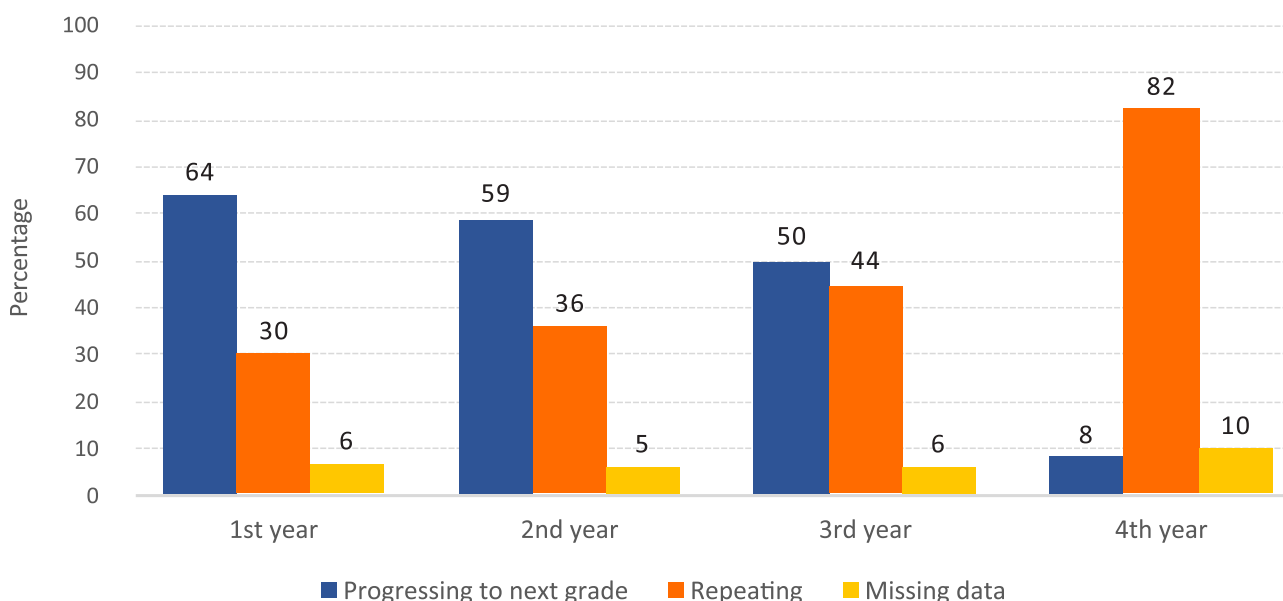
Repetition rates among CRAN graduates who went back to school were high compared to national averages, especially for the final grade of the lower secondary cycle.

Repetition rates increased along the cycle, rising from 30 per cent in the first year to 44 per cent in the third before peaking at 82 per cent in the last grade of lower secondary (Figure 3). At the national level, as is common for final grades of cycles when there is an examination, repetition rates also show a surge at grade 4 but were comparatively much lower than for CRAN participants across the board. For instance, repetition at grade 4 nationally is at 20 per cent, as compared to 82 per cent in the 2017–18 CRAN cohort. One hypothesis behind this trend is that fourth-graders may be in large part older students who had been out of school for longer and thus had more catching up to do than younger learners to achieve the foundational skills that are necessary to keep up with the curriculum. This may call for providing additional remedial support during the regular school year to these older learners, or more generally to those who stayed out of school for longer. Gathering additional data on the profile of these learners is however necessary to verify this hypothesis and devise appropriate support measures. The remedial support should be adapted to the level of ability demonstrated by the student, which similarly requires conducting regular and rigorous learning assessments in the classroom.

Implementing partners, alongside LUL teachers, may also need to re-assess the end-of-programme test's reliability in placing learners in a grade that is adequate to the level of competences they achieved after CRAN – in a way that does not put excessive demands on newly reintegrated students in following the curriculum. Similarly, the teaching 'at the right level' component, which has been widely documented to contribute to learning gains (Pershad et al., 2020; Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab, 2019), can be further reinforced. The course contents, number of hours of instruction and learning materials could be more systematically tailored to a learner's initial level of proficiency in any given subject, as measured by the pre-test. Depending on

¹⁵ Adopting low-technology solutions such as feature mobile phones and printed learning sets is a promising practice to reach marginalized learners amid school closures, including in remote areas. See e.g., Chávez et al., 2021.

Figure 3. Progression and repetition rates of CRAN graduates who re-enrolled for a second year after the programme, by lower secondary school grade. Data refers to the cohort 2017–18. The x-axis indicates the grade at the start of the 2017–18 school year, upon enrolment right after CRAN.



Source: CRAN monitoring data 2017–19. N=5,188. Note: missing data ranges from 6 to 10 per cent of total depending on the grade, as indicated by the grey bars in the chart.

class size and operational feasibility, CRAN staff may also consider grouping learners by competence level, for a portion or even the entirety of the coursework, or for some specific subjects seen as a priority. This would allow them to provide more individualized and ability-based pedagogical support to learners than would be possible in a group with highly heterogeneous competence levels.

According to programme staff, socioeconomic barriers were a key factor affecting attendance, repetition and dropout in the second year following CRAN, especially for these older learners. Granular data on such barriers remains limited, however. Further investigation of the household-level socioeconomic barriers could shed light on ways to provide more targeted support to these upper-grade learners, who may for instance need to devote more of their time to income-generating activities than younger students. Promoting linkages between Catch-up Classes beneficiaries and social protection services and programmes may be a way to extend economic support to these vulnerable families.

PROMOTING CONTINUED EDUCATION THROUGH CONDITIONAL CASH TRANSFERS

While building foundational skills and motivation is crucial to re-engage OOSC on a learning pathway, many Malagasy families face economic constraints that limit the chances of continuing their children’s education beyond primary. Household out-of-pocket expenditures account for about 40 per cent of education recurrent expenditures in Madagascar (Ministère de l’Éducation Nationale, 2017). Dropout is common at the transition from primary to secondary, when one in four students ends up leaving school.

The main goal of LUL’s conditional cash transfer (CCT) is to facilitate learners’ transition to and continued enrolment in secondary education by tackling income constraints of vulnerable families. The LUL CCT augments an existing nationwide cash transfer scheme, the Monetary Transfer for Human Development (TMDH), which provides financial support to eligible households to promote younger children’s primary school

participation and adequate nutrition.¹⁶ Families receiving the TMDH may sign up for the LUL cash transfer ‘top-up’ for older siblings aged 11 to 18. Households with a child in the final year of primary school receive a 10,000 ariary (US\$2.70) lump sum per child at the beginning and the end of the school year. Households with a sibling attending lower secondary school receive monthly transfers of 10,000 ariary per child.¹⁷ LUL transfers are conditional on the child attending school at least 80 per cent of the time.

Since October 2016, this LUL supplemental transfer has been rolled out in 27 beneficiary communes that have been randomly selected within six priority districts.¹⁸ The randomization of beneficiary communes was designed to support a rigorous impact evaluation, which compares the effectiveness of the CCT across three groups: one that receives the LUL CCT on top of the TMDH, one that receives the TMDH only and a control group that receives none. This section draws from the midline results of this impact evaluation.¹⁹

Uptake of the LUL’s CCT among eligible households was relatively limited, especially among those households that may have benefited the most from the transfer. Almost 9,000 children – 70 per cent in secondary school and 30 per cent in the last grade of primary – benefited from the LUL CCT for the 2019–20 school year. Of these beneficiaries, 51 per cent were girls. However, households that signed up to receive the top-up transfer did not exceed 62 per cent of the total eligible households in target areas, with some variation across districts. Although these districts were identified based on the prevalence of food insecurity and the candidate households selected through community-based assessments, the evaluation found that the households that registered for the LUL top-up would have likely enrolled their children in school even without the transfer. At baseline, eligible families who signed up for the transfer already showed higher enrolment rates, grade completion and education spending than eligible families who did not sign up. This means that those households that could have benefited the most from CCT did not take up the transfer, making it more difficult for the evaluation design to detect all the benefits of the CCT. Further research is underway to investigate the

specific reasons behind the low uptake and the resulting insights will be crucial in recalibrating the programme design to effectively reach those eligible households who did not register for the CCT despite having lower enrolment rates.

Despite the limited uptake, the LUL CCT programme improved enrolment rates and time spent studying for children aged 11–14. The LUL transfer increased enrolment rates by 6 percentage points among children aged 11–14 who were either in the final year of primary or in secondary school vis-à-vis the TMDH-only group. At baseline, 95 per cent of LUL-eligible children were already enrolled in school. As this rate was already high, the room for improvement on this indicator was only marginal (so-called ‘ceiling effects’). Within the 11–14 age group, the cash transfer also resulted in a modest increase of 14 minutes per day in the time spent studying. Nonetheless, no statistically significant impact was found on the ability of children aged 11–14 to advance to the next grade level.

The evaluation could not detect any significant impacts of the supplemental cash transfer on schooling outcomes for older children (15–18), or in the domain of health and child labour.²⁰ No tangible effects were found in terms of enrolment, progression to the next grade and time spent studying in the older age group. Besides the issue of limited uptake, especially among those most in need, and ceiling effects, a potential explanation for the lack of detectable impact on schooling for the 15–18 age range is that these young adolescents typically have greater potential to earn money for the household than younger children, so their opportunity cost of going to school may be higher. The health status of eligible households was solid to begin with, and the CCT did not yield meaningful results on the likelihood of visiting a clinic or of getting sick. As for child labour, the transfer does not appear to replace income earned by children, or to reduce the time spent on domestic or other unpaid work. This may also partially explain why children’s time spent studying increased only by a modest amount.

¹⁶ TMDH is a monthly cash grant to households that are identified as in need by community-based committees and who have children aged 10 or younger. It provides an unconditional transfer to households with young children not yet in school and a transfer to households with primary school-aged children conditional on school attendance.

¹⁷ Capped at two children per household.

¹⁸ Mahanoro and Toamasina II in the East; Vohipeno in the Southeast; Betioky in the South; and Faratsiho and Ambohimahasoa in the Central Plateau.

¹⁹ Morey and Seidenfeld, 2018. Endline results will become available in the second half of 2021.

²⁰ The evaluation design also investigated impacts for the 5–10 age range, although these are not directly targeted by the LUL CCT. As for the 15–18 age range, impacts on this cohort are not statistically significant across all the key outcome-areas.

CONCLUSIONS

In Madagascar, vulnerable children and adolescents still face severe challenges in accessing and completing basic education. Thirty-six per cent of adolescents aged 11–14 are not enrolled in any education level (INSTAT and UNICEF, 2019). Challenges range from poverty and high school fees to limited education quality, through to early marriage and pregnancy for girls. Monitoring data shows that the Catch-up Classes delivered excellent results in reintegrating adolescents who had dropped out from lower secondary school, including girls, into education immediately after completion of the programme. Between 90 and 99 per cent of CRAN graduates enrolled in lower secondary education right after completion. However, programme participants' vulnerabilities re-emerged for some in the longer run, as over a quarter dropped out again one year later. Young mothers were at a particular disadvantage. Repetition rates of CRAN graduates were high compared to national standards and increased progressively in upper grades.

If building foundational literacy and numeracy skills and engaging communities contributed to re-engage out-of-school children, at least in the short term, economic barriers threatened the continuity of education for children in vulnerable households. LUL's supplemental CCT aimed to ease such economic barriers and facilitate the transition from primary to secondary – a critical point at which one in four students in Madagascar leaves school. Despite its relatively limited uptake, especially among those families who would have benefited the most from it, this cash transfer improved enrolment rates by 6 per cent for children aged 11–14.

Further emphasis should be placed on CRAN's longer-term retention and advancement of its graduates, building on a more in-depth understanding of the characteristics of those children who end up repeating or dropping out again (age, learning performance, time spent away from school, reason for leaving school, etc.). Further reinforcing teaching at the right level and providing continued remedial education during the school year should be two centrepieces of the education support package. Ability-based instruction is now more relevant than ever as the pandemic resulted in differentiated learning loss and dropout, disproportionately affecting the most vulnerable children (Taulo et al., 2020). Young mothers specifically need additional dedicated services such as childcare at the community level to be able to reconcile family obligations and schooling.

Social protection schemes such as the CCT are critical to relieve economic constraints. Research on the impact of CCT has for its part highlighted there is room to further improve targeting, expanding the reach to the most vulnerable households. Potential corrective measures may include the following actions: step up the roll-out of targeted information campaigns about enrolment in and benefits of the programme, including in remote areas; moving from household targeting to individual targeting; removing conditionalities to make the programme universal, in line with UNICEF's new Social Protection Framework (2019) and recent research on the effectiveness of universal child benefits; and recalibrating the amount of the transfer to maximize its appeal while keeping it scalable.

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