



When a piece of paper determines the future

A birth certificate allows children in Madagascar to access their fundamental human and civil rights.

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What it means to officially not exist

Many children in Madagascar have never been issued a birth certificate. This means they cannot graduate from school, get a formal job, or have any political say – and are most likely doomed to live in poverty.

One in four children born in Madagascar is not officially registered. The reasons vary: some parents cannot make the long journey to the civil registry office, while

others are not aware that their children need a birth certificate or do not want any contact with the authorities for cultural reasons. No birth certificate means their children's futures are largely predetermined: they cannot finish secondary school, are not entitled to health care, and cannot vote or legally inherit from their parents. Unregistered children cannot enter into formal employment or travel abroad. They are essentially denied their inalienable human rights.



The citizens of tomorrow

The “Citizens of Tomorrow” project provided thousands of children with a birth certificate, giving them a legal personality. It facilitated the registration process and raised the awareness of parents in rural regions to the importance of applying for birth certificate at the register office within the allotted time. Young mothers were trained as peer educators. A newly developed app now simplifies the registration process. The project was one of the

winners of the “Agents of Change – Child and Youth Rights in German Development Cooperation” competition and implemented by the Sector Programme Human Rights on behalf of the German Federal Ministry for Economic Cooperation and Development (BMZ) in cooperation with the “Communal development and decentralisation” (ProDéCID) project from the Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit (GIZ) in Madagascar.

“No birth certificate means no opportunities”

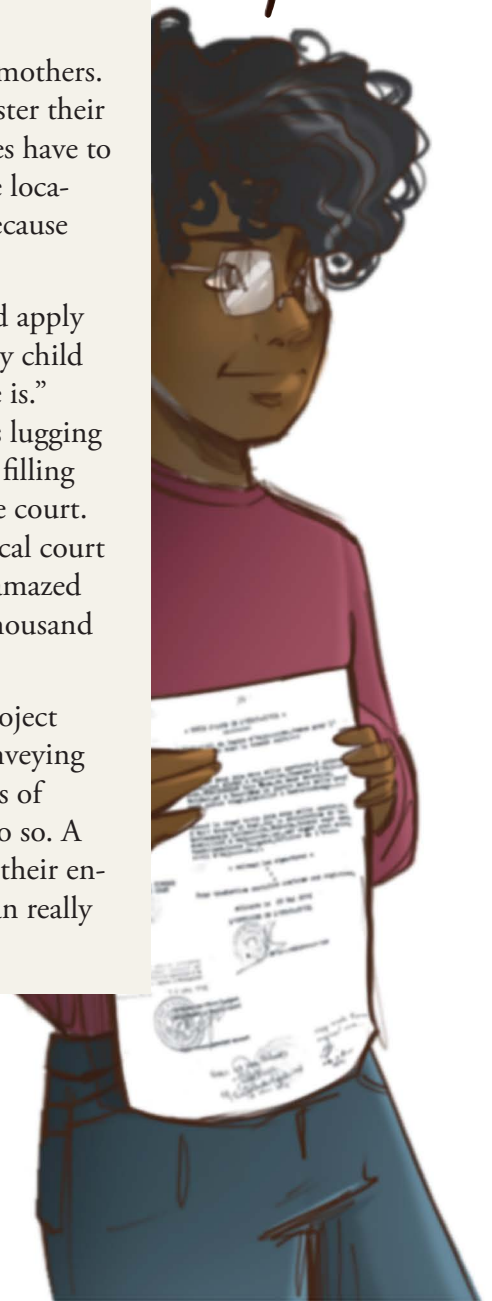
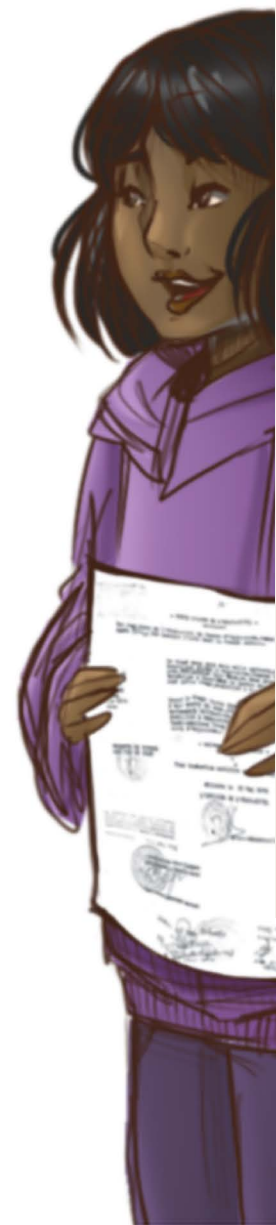
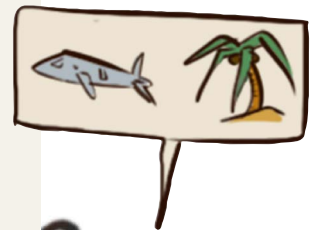
Poetry slammer Génériqua, 27, wrote a song featured at informational events illustrating the importance of registering a child's birth:

I was shocked to learn that so many children in Madagascar do not have a birth certificate. This country ignores many of the rights of children, but the birth certificate issue concerns me the most. I am a mother, and for me it was a matter of course – when a child is born, you get the papers from the midwife and submit them. I came to understand that this is not always the case in rural regions. That's why I immediately said yes when the GIZ and the SAMEVA non-governmental organisation asked if I would be interested in supporting the project.

SAMEVA is a women's association that mainly supports single mothers. They told me that some parents needed to be persuaded to register their children. It is hard to blame most of them, since they sometimes have to walk very long distances, up to 40 kilometres depending on the location. Some parents also don't know what a birth certificate is because they were never registered either.

Project staff travelled to rural villages to talk to people there and apply for birth certificates for unregistered children. Their goal: “Every child will be brought a certificate, no matter how remote their village is.” Some villages are so isolated that they had to walk several hours lugging cases full of heavy documents. Locally, they went door to door, filling out applications with the parents and submitting the files to the court. Once the paperwork had been processed, they returned with local court clerks, registrars and chiefs to have the papers notarized. I was amazed that civil servants agreed to make the trip! Ultimately, several thousand minors were issued a birth certificate.

I am absolutely committed to continuing this work after the project ends. Art forms like the poetry slam can be very effective in conveying messages because people enjoy them. I have addressed the rights of children in my lyrics for some time now and will continue to do so. A birth certificate is a top priority for children because it impacts their entire future. There are so many injustices in life; this is one we can really change.



The situation in Madagascar

Children with no identity

According to the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, every person has a right to be officially registered and given a name and a nationality. Nevertheless, the paperwork for an estimated 25 to 40 percent of all new-borns in Madagascar is not submitted on time, so they are never registered with the proper authorities. This impacts children from rural areas in particular, where poverty rates are high and infrastructure is poor. Long distances to the nearest registry office are a frequent obstacle for parents, though lack of awareness, concerns about high costs and cultural barriers also play a

role. In Madagascar, two-thirds of young people and adults over the age of 14 cannot read or write. This means they are often less well informed about things like the birth registration process and are more prone to fear contact with the authorities.

Registering a child gets more difficult if it is not done within twelve days after birth, and parents have to officially apply for late registration in court. This makes it extremely unlikely that some children will ever get an identity document during their lifetime, which also means they will have little chance to improve their living conditions.

The project

A document secures civil rights

For many children and young people in Madagascar, not having a birth certificate is a major obstacle to shaping their own lives. This is reflected in the country's low literacy rate, since a child needs official documentation to complete secondary school. The simple act of registration can empower them to exercise their rights as children and as citizens. This is where the ProDéCID project comes in.

Over 13,000 children from 14 rural communities in northern Madagascar received birth certificates through the project. The SAMEVA women's organisation helped families complete the paperwork, submitted it to the court, and then travelled to the villages with court staff and municipal registrars to have the applications notarized and transferred to the birth registry. Around 83,000 people attended workshops and events where vid-

eos, plays and songs highlighted the importance of registering the birth of a child. At the start, the project also successfully lobbied government officials and parliamentarians to extend the deadline from 12 to 30 days after birth. To keep parents from having to travel long distances right after the birth of a child, the Habaka IT organisation helped create a SMS service for birth registration. Parents can now use "Service Plus DIANA" to inform the local authorities of the birth of their child from home. The mobile phone application is currently being successfully used in five municipalities, and others are planning to introduce it as well. In the next phase, ProDéCID will continue its work with partner organisation SAMEVA in nine additional municipalities. Plans for the future include enabling municipal staff to register births directly at health centres in close cooperation with midwives and local chiefs.

Pilot projects

The GIZ Sector Programme Human Rights worked with international GIZ projects and local non-governmental organisations to roll out a number of pilot projects in 2018-2020 as part of the Human Rights Innovation Lab. Innovative approaches to mainstreaming the human rights-based approach (HRBA) emerged in a wide range of thematic areas, such as digitalisation, birth registration, and health. The pilot projects detailed in the “Human

Impact Stories” show how the “human rights, gender equality and disability inclusion” quality criteria can be anchored in various core and initiative areas in projects in partner countries and yield innovative solutions for current development policy challenges. Even in conflict situations and politically sensitive contexts, the HRBA promotes the development of new instruments and approaches, strengthening human rights on the ground.

The human rights-based approach

Every human being is born with inalienable human rights, and the dignity of every human being is inviolable. Human rights enable every human being to live a free and self-determined life in community with others. These rights are enshrined in international and regional human rights treaties signed by most of the world's states.

Human rights include the right to education, health, an adequate standard of living, and freedom of opinion and information, as well as protection from violence and respect for a person's private life. Violations of the rights of individuals or social groups impede the social, economic and political development of an entire country. Conversely, upholding human rights is an essential prerequisite for sustainable, inclusive development.

This is why human rights and the “leave no one behind” (LNOB) principle feature prominently in the United Nations' 2030 Agenda. LNOB focuses on people living in extreme poverty, as well as severely disadvantaged people and population groups, and is designed to

ensure that everyone can participate equally in development processes.

Human rights are a guiding principle of German development cooperation (DC) with all its partner countries. Human rights, gender equality and disability inclusion together comprise one of German DC's six cross-cutting quality criteria. The HRBA not only promotes the safeguarding of individual rights; it also helps to realise the human rights principles of participation, empowerment, non-discrimination and equal opportunity, as well as accountability and transparency in all thematic areas and fields where development cooperation is active.

DC projects that employ the HRBA address the structural causes of inequalities and discriminatory practices, such as the marginalization of women or ethnic minorities in educational systems. They support state institutions and stakeholders in protecting and guaranteeing their citizens' rights, educate civil society and citizens about their rights, and encourage them to demand them.

The citizens of tomorrow

Project duration	10/2018 – 09/2019
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Partner project	GIZ “Communal development and decentralisation” (ProDÉCID) project
Partners	SAMEVA, HABAKA, ZOLOBE theatre group, local authorities, court staff, health care workers and teachers
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SDGs addressed



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