



# ENHANCING CHILD WELL-BEING THROUGH SCHOOL AND COMMUNITY PLAYGROUNDS

**in Madagascar**

**CASE STUDY 2024**

Title page: Houses in the Commune of Ambatoabo, Madagascar, 2021. Photo credit: Caren Ramanantoanina, IFRC.

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Houses in the Commune of Ambatoabo, Madagascar, 2022. Photo credit: Caren Ramanantoanina, IFRC.

## Background

Child protection and education considerations were seamlessly integrated into a shelter project spearheaded by the Malagasy Red Cross and IFRC. This initiative culminated in the creation of safe spaces for children, encompassing playgrounds and rejuvenated community areas, tailored specifically for the children of a rural community in Madagascar. Nestled adjacent to their primary and secondary school, these spaces fill a critical void, addressing the absence of safe gathering areas in the village of Mananjary. This endeavor also mitigates risks associated with narrow local huts, where children lack adequate space to play safely and are susceptible to potential harm, particularly from fires—a concern previously overlooked in the community.

Acknowledging the paramount importance of providing children with environments that are not only safe but also nurturing and invigorating, the shelter team displayed ingenuity by integrating child-friendly playgrounds, equipment, and sheltered areas into their program. This initiative marks a significant shift for the community, where the concept of designated play spaces is relatively novel.

## Benefits of Playgrounds for Children

Playgrounds serve as vital safe havens where children can engage in diverse activities, fostering cognitive, physical, social, and emotional development. They promote free play, physical activity, imagination, environmental understanding, and socialization, thus enriching children's educational experiences and classroom performance.

Situated directly in front of the community's primary and secondary public schools, the small parcel of land was secured through advocacy efforts with municipal authorities, aiming to repurpose an unused area. Transformed into a park and outfitted with popular slides, swings, an agility course, and



Children's playground built by the Malagasy Red Cross in the village of Mananjary, Madagascar, 2023. Photo credit: Andrianina Rakoto, IFRC.



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a sandbox— based on suggestions from a small group of children and caregivers consulted informally at the project's onset—the space now offers children a place to unwind and enjoy outdoor activities during breaks between classes.

This initiative not only enhances the educational experience by infusing elements of fun but also contributes to improving classroom performance. Additionally, recess plays a vital role in addressing disciplinary issues and promoting impulse control, fostering a calming effect among students.

Furthermore, ongoing discussions revolve around the purpose of a model hut established within the same vicinity, intended for use as a community library. This initiative, especially tailored for children, aims to expand their access to educational resources, fostering opportunities for learning and personal growth.

## Environmental considerations

Environmental sustainability was integral to the project's planning and execution. Given the region's susceptibility to severe weather, the project employed cyclone-resistant building techniques and utilized recycled wood scraps to minimize environmental impact.

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***Sourcing materials posed challenges, particularly due to the unavailability of neoprene foam locally. Despite this setback, the team explored alternative materials with a focus on safety. For instance, in the absence of suitable material for creating pilot holes, spikes were used instead of bolts, with careful attention paid to filing their tips to ensure child safety. Additionally, wood was hand-planed to meet construction requirements,***

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elaborates Andrianina Rakotoarivelo, shelter officer for the IFRC, emphasizing the project's commitment to sustainability and safety.

## Safety and inclusion

Strategically located at the heart of the community, adjacent to the community center, the park and child-friendly equipment cater to children of all ages and backgrounds, fostering diversity and inclusion. Positioned opposite the schools in a secure area, shielded from hazards such as roads, the playground offers easy supervision, especially with the nearby community center serving as a watchful hub.

Meticulously crafted woodworking prioritized child safety, ensuring that play equipment was robust, secure, and firmly anchored. Every precaution was taken to cover hooks, nails, and bolts, eliminating sharp edges, splinters, or protruding parts that could pose risks to children.

Moreover, the refurbishment of the neighboring community shed addressed its structural weaknesses, fortifying its ability to withstand adverse weather conditions. Previously, despite being covered, it was unable to repel rain and wind infiltration. Through diligent work, the structure was reinforced, with posts and beams replaced to bolster its solidity.

Repurposed into a multifunctional area, the shed has transcended its original purpose as a mere shelter during adverse weather conditions. It has evolved into a vibrant hub for community engagement, hosting a diverse array of activities. These include serving as a recreational haven for children during inclement weather, facilitating food distributions, conducting nutrition courses, and spearheading health awareness campaigns. This transformation not only fosters community cohesion but also creates an inclusive environment where all members, including children, can actively participate and thrive.



Community in Ambatoabo, Madagascar, 2021. Photo credit: Caren Ramanantoanina, IFRC.

## Community ownership

The initiative garnered support from local authorities who facilitated the availability of space. Carpenters from the community participated in construction and upkeep through a cash-for-work program facilitated by the Malagasy Red Cross. This backing highlights the project's strong community support. Moreover, adaptations such as the renovation of the nearby shed for multipurpose use further solidified community ownership and utility.

Continuing efforts are evident as the community self-organizes to identify hazards, conduct regular checks on play equipment for wear and tear, and ensure the overall safety and maintenance of the area.

## Future Prospects and Inspiration

While a designated library space awaits activation, ongoing partnerships and discussions aim to sustain the center and establish a village usage committee. Moreover, this initiative has inspired similar endeavors by the Red Cross of Madagascar, promoting child-friendly spaces during distributions.



Community in Ambatoabo, Madagascar, 2021. Photo credit: Caren Ramanantoanina, IFRC.

## Key Takeways

- Integration of child protection and education into shelter programming enhances child well-being.
- Child consultation ensures tailored solutions to meet children's needs and preferences.
- Community engagement and partnership with local authorities bolster project sustainability.
- Climate change considerations and environmental sustainability are integral to project success.