Reimagining value, impact, and sustainability in comprehensive sexuality education
Income and expense reports, staff performance and growth, results from monitoring and evaluation... There is always a lot to reflect on after the school year.

Across this and more over the past 12 months, three particular moments have stuck with me.

First, there was the Director of the National Teacher Training Institute who visited a PJL Educator’s course in person for the first time: “Now I want to quit my job,” he joked, “and become a PJL Educator myself.”

Then, there was the school principal who grabbed the microphone during an annual symposium with 50 other partner principals, and directly addressed the national Ministry of Education officials in attendance:

“The impacts of PJL’s program that we’ve talked about today are very real. This is not something we made up just because you’re here from the capital. We are being completely sincere when we say that Projet Jeune Leader has transformed our schools.”
And last but not least, from across our 51 partner schools, there were the dozens of handwritten comments from students declaring their new goal in life: to become like their PJL Educators. As one student wrote to us:

“From now on, I am going to try really hard in school. Because one day I want to be a PJL Educator, too.”

These moments stuck with me because they exemplify how we are reimagining comprehensive sexuality education in Madagascar.

**Reimagining VALUE**
for students, schools, and communities, brought by the Educators who are on the frontlines, charged with creating change in some of the most difficult school environments.

**Reimagining IMPACT**
that is not only felt and documented, but also defined and owned by our most important constituents.

**Reimagining SUSTAINABILITY**
that is not just about policies and funding flows, but about the hopes and dreams of a generation of youth, who will demand and ensure that their future children have sexuality education in school, just like they did.

Thank you to our donors and other champions who have helped us think bigger and bolder. It has helped us get to where we are today. On behalf of the entire Projet Jeune Leader team, we are deeply grateful for your support.

MAIA RAMAROSANDRATANA
Executive Director, Projet Jeune Leader
Improving adolescent health, learning, and well-being in rural Madagascar
We’re working to ensure that every adolescent in Madagascar receives an education that helps them thrive throughout adolescence and into adulthood.

Through comprehensive sexuality education — mainstreamed in public schools — our specialized and integrated Educators equip adolescents with essential information, skills, and support they need to navigate puberty, succeed in school, and lead healthy lives.

A gender-transformative, age-segmented, year-long sex ed curriculum built into students’ school schedules

Confidential counseling services and referrals to nearby healthcare providers

Workshops for parents on puberty, supportive communication, and adolescent development

Constituent accountability and community engagement
2021-2022

in numbers

30,435 adolescents reached with holistic sexuality education information and services

56 full-time, paid, highly trained, and specialized PJL Educators

51 partner public middle schools

75% of partner schools in rural communities

13,535 one-on-one counseling cases requested by students

4,363 parents participated in workshops on how to effectively communicate with adolescent children about puberty and sexual health
Across the world, sexuality education still rarely reaches youth who need it most.

The same is true in Madagascar, especially for adolescents living in rural communities.

80% of Madagascar’s population lives in rural areas, where the household poverty rate is double that in urban areas. **Rural public schools are severely under-resourced and few to no other public services exist.** Educational outcomes are poor: only 19% of students finish middle school in rural areas, compared to 49% in urban areas. Our research has revealed that less than 5% of rural students have talked to a peer educator or teacher about sexual health issues, and only 10% have talked to their parents.

**We are bringing comprehensive sexuality education to schools in rural Madagascar for the first time.**

From students to teachers to school authorities, we are seeing that **our key constituents want Projet Jeune Leader in their schools** — and they want it to stick around.
What Students Value

Spotlight on PJL Educator Hery

Hery was the PJL Educator at Ambohimanjaka middle school this year. Located 50km from the nearest town, there are only 208 students at his small, rural school.

Zooming into the hundreds (!) of feedback comments Hery’s students sent us this year, we get a sense of how and why they value their PJL Educator.

He has made school exciting. He has made them feel empowered. He has given them practical health knowledge. He has been a young, fun role model.

“I’ve started to like studying since there has been a PJL Educator at school. I’m not shy anymore, and I take more responsibility. Thank you, PJL. You’re helping me think about my future.”

“I would like it if PJL could exist in other places where it doesn’t exist yet, for my friends who haven’t been able to experience it. I am especially thinking about young girls who are getting their periods for the first time and don’t understand what is happening to them.”

“I would like to become a PJL Educator. It’s only been a year that PJL has been here at Ambohimanjaka middle school. I am not the only one who appreciates PJL, it’s all of the students at this school. The school year has gone by so well and next year will be even better.”

“Before the PJL Educator came, I was shy and didn’t dare speak up or raise my hand in class. Now, I am brave because of the PJL class. With the arrival of the PJL Educator, I gained advice about leadership, self-confidence, and as a girl in particular, on preventing early pregnancy. Since I’ve participated in PJL, I learned how to talk with trusted adults.”

“Since PJL Educator Hery has been here, I like school. Please say hello to Hery from me! Hi, Hery!”
“I sometimes get comments from other teachers at the school that my class is a waste of time; or that because it’s not on the national exams, it’s not as important as their subjects.

I’m not discouraged when I hear this, because I see it as a good challenge to explain why I’m passionate about my work.

I explain that our goal is to help young people as they go through puberty, to reduce school dropouts, to protect our kids from early pregnancy, and to discourage them from using violence. I explain that we have a curriculum that has been approved by the Ministry of Education, which is adapted to students’ ages.

I say, yes, I know that sometimes my classroom gets noisy when we do icebreaker activities, but this helps me get closer to my students, so that they trust me and aren’t afraid to come to me if they need advice.

In the end, these teachers actually become good friends and colleagues.

When I explain it clearly, they understand my basic message: PJL is complementary to your class. If a student doesn’t know how to take good care of herself, the math formulas that you teach her won’t matter. That’s why it’s so important that we teach life skills to every student.

The other teachers see that I work hard, I am integrated in the community, I have the same goals as them for our students. The principal at my school believes in me, and I can ask him for advice. Maintaining a good relationship with him is important, since the parents and teachers trust him.

Since I started working here, I increasingly see that people understand what I am trying to convey. They are happy to see the positive difference in how students act. So, they support me and my work.”
When Value “Trickles Up”

A Pioneering Partnership with Madagascar’s National Ministry of Education

Back in 2020, after strategic efforts to share the widespread community support and demand for Projet Jeune Leader’s program, we secured a two-year partnership agreement with the national Ministry of Education. Excitingly, this partnership agreement cleared a path to deliver our program in any public middle school across the island.

Building on this momentum, we formed a two-person advocacy team comprised of two of our most dynamic staff members, both former PJL Educators (and proudly two women in their late 20s and early 30s, often the only representatives of this demographic at the table...).

They held dozens of meetings, site visits, and co-creation workshops with government partners at all levels throughout the last year — gaining vital insights into how we could build out the value of our impact for key education sector actors.

The team’s efforts paid off.

In 2022, we signed a breakthrough partnership agreement with the National Ministry of Education that established Projet Jeune Leader as the education system’s lead technical partner on comprehensive sexuality education.

Value for our program — harnessed from the grassroots up — has been a key driver of our growth.

One of our national champions, when presenting the new agreement to a room full of colleagues and peers, explained it best:

“The activities carried out by PJL are very interesting and beneficial and have positive impacts on the education of children. This encouraged the National Ministry to continue to collaborate and widen the scope of the partnership for a sustainable and impactful program.”
Sexuality education helps adolescents make informed decisions about their sexual and reproductive health. But it also does so much more.

This past year, we generated exciting and innovative evidence showing that, in addition to addressing sexuality and reproductive health issues among adolescents (including reducing early pregnancy), our program also has spillover effects that positively impact students, schools, families, and the community at large.

We are most proud that our efforts are grounded in community-defined evidence.

Rather than a top-down approach to studying sexuality education, we value a co-learning and participatory process that centers constituents’ opinions, priorities, and lived experiences.
Imito middle school is nestled in the rice valleys of Amoron'i Mania region. A first year PJL partner, Imito is one of the most remote schools we have worked in. It takes about two hours to travel to Imito from PJL’s office in the town of Ambositra — first by public “taxi-brousse” bus then six kilometers on foot or bicycle. As in most of our rural sites, there is no electricity. The school serves about 500 young adolescents, with an average classroom size of 43 students.

In recent years, we have adapted our model to be able to reach schools like Imito: rural, hard-to-reach, where few to no other services or programs exist.

In these small schools, our impact in numbers may be smaller — but in every other way, our impact has been immense.

“This school year, looking at results from the first trimester, there have been very few school dropouts. Yet, usually during this time of the school year, there are already 20 or more students that have dropped out.

I think it’s because of the presence of the PJL Educator.

When I check in on them, I see that the PJL Educators have specialized skills to engage students and keep them excited about school. They motivate the students to learn. They make school a more welcoming environment.

I’ve noticed that the students are more forthcoming about their ideas and opinions. Now, they feel ‘at-home’ here.

You know, living in a rural area, parents and teachers are often embarrassed to talk directly with students about certain things. Something I have seen many times is that a student has blood on their uniform, and they end up dropping out of school because they are so embarrassed and ashamed. If only parents or teachers had told them beforehand about menstruation!

MRS. VOLAMALALA
Principal, Imito Middle School

Now I really believe in informing kids clearly and early, especially here in rural communities where kids might not have a lot of information. It’s important to give our youth a comprehensive education so that they are prepared for life.”
Our Participatory Research

In 2020, we first began partnering with two researchers — Dr. Sara Baumann and Dr. Jessica Burke — in the Department of Behavioral and Community Health Sciences (BCHS) at the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health.

Over the past two years, they have supported us to conduct a participatory research effort using qualitative human-centered design methods to explore the multi-faceted impacts of our program.

In Phase 1 of the research effort, 90 school principals and administrators from 45 schools participated in participatory research workshops held across six regional cities. Phase 2 took place a year later with 50 principals from partner schools, and focused on expanding and validating the findings from Phase 1. The findings identified broad-reaching effects of our program (see at right and on the following page).

We have collaboratively presented our findings at the Human Centered Design Spark Summit in 2022, the UNESCO and UNFPA Global Partnership Forum on CSE in 2021, the Consortium of Universities for Global Health Annual Conference in 2022, and the International Conference on Family Planning in 2022.
On an individual level, school principals shared that PJL’s CSE programming improves sexuality knowledge and behaviors, courage and confidence, and mental health and social support. Students gain a trustworthy adult and role model in their CSE educator. This translates into students’ improved motivation, retention, and achievement at school.

“Children who have received the PJL program have more confidence in themselves and do not hesitate to express themselves at school. They go to school with motivation. They know the importance of going to school.”

“The presence of the PJL Educator convinces parents of the importance of sending their children to school.”

“Now, if there is something to do in the school, the parents feel that they want to help. They start to have a sense of ownership and participate.”

“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.”

Numerous school principals reported decreases in rates of student pregnancy — critical to improving girls’ educational attainment.

“Children who have received the PJL program have more confidence in themselves and do not hesitate to express themselves at school. They go to school with motivation. They know the importance of going to school.”

“The number of students per classroom here is 80, 90, 75. And yet, just in the first trimester of PJL being here, we are seeing improvement in students’ grades. Your program works because it makes children like school. The number of dropouts is down. That’s the result of you being here.”

“It brings us joy to say that the pregnancy rate has been 0% during the three years that the PJL Educator has worked at our school. The Educator’s lessons about sexuality are one reason for this, especially because they are practical.”

These impacts translate into more enabling and supportive communities and parents that are more engaged with their children’s education. They feel more invested because PJL’s program strengthens school value and systems.

“The presence of the PJL Educator convinces parents of the importance of sending their children to school.”

“Now, if there is something to do in the school, the parents feel that they want to help. They start to have a sense of ownership and participate.”

“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.”
Understanding our Longer-Term Impact

How Past Participants Assess PJL’s Effect on their Adolescence

For the first time, we conducted a qualitative retrospective study of our program which elucidated longer-term, nuanced outcomes among the adolescents we serve. Our team conducted in-depth interviews with 34 youth who participated in Projet Jeune Leader when they were in middle school, two or more years prior.

Most former participants expressed that Projet Jeune Leader positively contributed to their transition to adulthood.

They reported that participating in the program influenced them to:
- delay sex
- use safer sex practices.
- refrain from drug and alcohol use
- increase their school attendance
- improve their relationships
- apply leadership skills

Participants highlighted the relevance of the timetabled PJL classes to their lives and needs, the pedagogical skills, accessibility, and youthfulness of the dedicated PJL Educators, and the engaging and empowering academic and skills enrichment enabled by PJL’s classroom and extracurricular activities.

Read our blog post about the study
We work so that the value and impact of Projet Jeune Leader lasts.

From local communities to decision-makers, our efforts are grounded in relationships.

We believe that if we are to sustain the impacts of Projet Jeune Leader, we must build meaningful relationships in everything we do. This includes cultivating trust, addressing power dynamics, centering equity and social accountability, and sharing decision-making.

These are not add-ons; rather, they are the foundation for all of our other sustainability strategies.
Sustainability Through Resilience

Our Collaborative Filmmaking Research Effort

Our Educators are our most effective messengers and advocates for sexuality education. We know this from the countless messages and testimonies we receive from our constituents.

We wanted to better understand how and why our Educators are so effective at influencing public attitudes about comprehensive sexuality education. To answer the question, we embarked on an exciting research effort in collaboration with Drs. Sara Baumann and Jessica Burke, two researchers from the University of Pittsburgh School of Public Health.

We used collaborative filmmaking, a creative participatory research methodology pioneered by Drs. Baumann and Burke, to gather insights from PJL Educators themselves as both researchers and research subjects.

Through collaborative filmmaking, our young adult Educators were able to express and document nuanced trust- and relationship-building mechanisms we likely would never have uncovered nor understood with another method.

Through their films, the Educators highlighted how parents, teachers, school administrators, and community leaders end up supporting sexuality education and demanding more of it after experiencing Projet Jeune Leader.

Changing these mindsets both within and beyond the education system is what drives the sustainability of our model.

Any isolated adverse influence (like a change in school leadership, or criticism from a religious leader) cannot undermine the new reality: communities at the grassroots value and want comprehensive sexuality education.

“A School Principal came to complain to me, saying that this Projet Jeune Leader program talks about obscene subjects.

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].”

– SCHOOL SUPERINTENDENT

Check out our interactive findings brief
"I first started working at Projet Jeune Leader in 2014 as an Educator.

I taught my adolescent students about their bodies, about healthy relationships, and about how to achieve their goals. As I gained experience and confidence as an Educator, one of my favorite parts of the job became counseling. It always touched me deeply that students felt comfortable enough with me to share their problems and their aspirations. There was also a period when I taught PJL’s curriculum at a religious school for blind youth, working with adolescents that otherwise would not have received sexual health information. All of these experiences as an Educator helped me learn to relate to youth with a broad range of backgrounds.

After three fulfilling years as a PJL Educator, I moved into a Monitoring and Evaluation role at Projet Jeune Leader. I started to engage not only students, but for the first time, adults: parents, teachers, school principals, and our Educators.

My day-to-day work varies a lot. One day, I might be calling our school principals to collect and respond to their feedback. The next day, I could be sorting through the hundreds of handwritten comments sent to us from students, parents, and teachers. Sometimes, I am at our partner schools for days at a time — listening to our Educators and the school communities they serve.

One of the things I love most in my role is being the “link” between our constituents and our team — collecting and analyzing feedback from communities to help our team make strategic decisions that shape our organization.

I’ve come to realize that I’ve built a lot of unique, and maybe untraditional, knowledge and skills — the kind of knowledge you wouldn’t find in reports or databases, and the kind of skills you wouldn’t necessarily assume from my CV. As I have grown within Projet Jeune Leader, I have learned to relate to a diversity of people, be empathetic to different perspectives, and understand how to share, use, and collect knowledge in different ways.

CONTINUED
This last year, for the first time, I saw how I could use these skills even beyond the organization to influence our wider Malagasy society. I led our “Ampitapitao” project, in which we combined knowledge from international experts, knowledge from local communities, and our own institutional knowledge at Projet Jeune Leader to create engaging, relevant, and useful magazines on best practices in youth health programming and policy.

I relied on my experiences and insights from throughout my career at Projet Jeune Leader to carefully craft the magazines’ content and design, so that the magazines would resonate with national policymakers, all while centering the voices of local communities. Even though it has only been a year, we have already seen that the magazines have shifted the minds and hearts of those in power.

I am most proud that I am helping to grow a program and a movement for sexuality education that is valued by students and school communities.

There’s nothing I want more than for Projet Jeune Leader to reach all adolescents across Madagascar, and to still be here for my children and future grandchildren to benefit from.”
Redefining Engagement for Lasting Change

Shaping Inclusive Policy Decisions

8,498. That’s the number of handwritten messages we received from youth, parents, school officials, and other local constituents through our “Ampitapitao” initiative.

Selected as a Champion Knowledge Management Innovator of the global competition The Pitch, we set out to change how decisions on youth health programs and policies are made in Madagascar — more specifically, to open up a familiar space to new voices.

Through “Ampitapitao” (Malagasy for “Pass it On!”), we created a critical loop between local knowledge and national level decision-making processes in Madagascar — using a series of magazines.

We circulated our Ampitapitao magazines in local communities where we work. Each centered around a key “hot topic” in adolescent health and education.

The magazines contained blank pages and prompts to solicit readers’ perspectives.

We collected and read these thousands of messages and used them to develop magazines around the same topics destined for regional and national decision-makers.

Many decision-makers told us this was the first time they had heard perspectives from local and rural constituents on these topics (or any topic). It was the first time they had received knowledge and opinions in such a creative, accessible format. Many told us it inspired them to broach the problem with colleagues and conduct further research.

The magazines also served as a tool for us — as a youth-centered NGO — to traverse traditional boundaries and power dynamics and grow our legitimacy in spaces where we otherwise would not have been invited.

We are on a mission not only to improve the lives of rural adolescents across Madagascar through our direct program, but also to change the broader systems and conditions around them so that meaningful change lasts.

Our “Ampitapitao” initiative highlights how we achieve this purpose: Centering community voices. Facilitating dialogue on complex and sensitive issues such as sexual and reproductive health, education, and rights. Inspiring decision-makers and partners to take action. Embedding more inclusivity and equity in everything we do.

Read the magazines and learn more about our process!
DONORS and FINANCES

Donors Supporting Us in 2021-2022

[Logos and images of donors]
Finances

INCOME
(in USD)

EXPENSES
(2021-2022)

Personnel 37%
Programs 24%
Indirect 12%
Advocacy and Partnership-Building 3%
MEL 14%
Administration 10%


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Photos by former PJL Educator Marc Negane