

# Higher Education Research to Generate Alternative Educational Models in View of the Inadequacies of the Formal Educational System: Cases Observed in Madagascar

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## **Introduction**

### ***Purpose of the report and proposed solution***

This report relates to the educational situation in Madagascar and through it, to the situation in several African countries. Madagascar's recent history shows that education was at the heart of many political movements that made their mark in its first 40 years of independence.

The early years of independence saw heavy investment in education with the aim of bringing about development in the country. The first generation to be born after independence has reached maturity and over 80% of the currently active population consists of people born after independence<sup>1</sup>, meaning that these people never attended colonial schools. Many efforts have been made to bring about "development", but the overall outcome may be viewed as weak. The country is still considered one of the poorest in the world.

Without wishing to join in this interminable debate, it may be posited that failings in education are among the causes of the current lag in development. Non-attendance and dropping out of school have for at least two decades been a flaw in the Malagasy educational system. Although the gross school attendance rate has since 1990 been over 90%, current statistics show that 40 to 50% of the overall population have no education. Non-attendance and dropping out have several acknowledged causes (such as poverty). However, the government's Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper (PRSP), 2003 version, acknowledges explicitly that *"parents have less confidence in the effectiveness of the education system because of various problems relating to it, such as inadequate parental education, inadequate scholastic and professional counselling, inappropriate curricula... That is why they think it more advantageous to have their children working... rather than to prepare them for school<sup>2</sup>".*

The mismatch between education and reality is nothing new, the international literature is full of material on the topic, but what is of note here is that it is highlighted in an official document.

According to the 2004 Report on priority surveys by household: breakdown of the Malagasy population by age.

Madagascar PRSP, 2003 version, page 34.

The matching of education to local realities and prospects is much written about, and there are numerous experiments with so-called alternative schools throughout the world and in Africa. They have different names from country to country and from period to period (e.g.: community schools). However, what they have in common is the search for a better match between curricula and local realities. These efforts often stem from development projects or initiatives by non-governmental organizations. The search for alternative education is a choice field which should, in our opinion, be prioritized in university research. However, it will be observed that, in the case of Madagascar, the subject has a low and sometimes non-existent profile. Nevertheless, the structures do exist because the Advanced Educational Colleges established in 1993 are intended both to train teachers and to promote research into education. The objective of this report is to present a few models of alternative education in which lecturers and researchers at the University of Fianarantsoa have been engaged. They can be grouped into three categories:

- Helping to improve alternative educational models set up by development organizations;
- Adapting for Madagascar models that have proved themselves elsewhere;
- Designing and setting up local alternative models in response to locally identified problems.

#### Presentation of essential facts and figures

This report includes a succinct presentation of the contribution made to a number of models:

- Study of a primary education scheme adapted to a particular environment: locally designed and implemented, the scheme was greatly developed in the 1990s in a district of Fianarantsoa, having been set up by a local development organization;
- Adaptation of an adult literacy programme, a standard adult literacy scheme which since 1999 is becoming widespread in Madagascar, based on a Burkina Faso scheme;
- Design and implementation of two alternative educational schemes:
  - A higher education programme for "generalist" students capable of making their way through the local socio-economic and cultural system. This can be viewed as an attempt to formalize the "improvised" education to which "thousands" of young people are in practice destined when they leave higher education, with or without a diploma. The experiment has been under way since 1992 and is constantly developing.
  - Remedial education for children who have dropped out or have never attended school, designed to bring illiterate children aged 11 or over to primary school leaving standard within one year; this has been under way since 2002.

These studies relate to essential common points in contemporary educational problems: inappropriate education, (re-)enrolling adolescents who are not in school, adult literacy and the ever more crucial questions of higher education.

## Context and purposes

The research practice of academics in higher education may be interpreted in two different ways:

- Research in structured teams and fields within the higher educational sector;
- Research in external fields.

Problems inherent in the higher educational sector are such that in Madagascar, and possibly in French-speaking Africa, there are few structured subjects and teams in the field of alternative education. One possible reason is that university research is relatively dependent on French universities that do not always include it in their disciplines. Moreover, it does not appear as such in the thematic fields of the Agence Universitaire de la Francophonie (University Agency of the French-speaking World). Consequently, some academics working in this field do so in non-university settings, but even when working outside the higher educational sector, they appear to remain lecturers and researchers and their status as "university staff" follows them everywhere.

So if the University is not always seen to be taking part in changing local educational systems to align them better with local circumstances, it takes part indirectly by allowing its human resources to undertake research programmes to that end.

The purpose of this research into alternative educational practice is to present models. If after more than 40 years of independence, Madagascar's local educational models are still profoundly marked by the original French model, one of the many reasons is the lack of a convincing and effective model or our failure to recognize one. In Madagascar's particular case, what is sometimes called the 1972 revolution was strongly critical of this "neo-colonial" education system as a very pale reflection of French education and very discriminatory and inappropriate for the Malagasy world. From 1972, Madagascar's educational policy was therefore directed towards seeking and establishing "alternative models", the most visible aspect of which was the use of the Malagasy language as a teaching medium. The experiment ended in 1993 with attempts to re-align education on the original model. And this can be viewed as a failure, a fairly important share of the responsibility for which lay in the lack of preparation and "a degree of haste". Moreover, an analysis of the official curricula of the 1980s shows a preponderance of French models, but using the Malagasy language. This made it structurally easier to go back to "the French system".

To have reasonable prospects of success and sustainability, the establishment of alternative models must be the subject of research which takes clear account of local realities (in their organizational, sociological, economic, etc., aspects). These models must not be based only on theoretical constructs and, like any innovation, they must be accompanied by great perspicacity and tenacity in order to counteract the inertia of educational systems. University academics have a role to play in this field, but structured teams and subjects should be developed in which this research can be

carried out and developed so that it flourishes and the people involved in it can move on from their current status as somewhat marginal pioneers to the status of innovators who can bring about the application of innovation in society.

The essential purpose of this report is advocacy for the field of alternative educational systems to be recognized as a fully valid university research discipline in the same way that cultural anthropology, mathematics or tropical diseases are recognized as such. That advocacy is addressed in the first instance to the world of universities, many of which, like those in Madagascar, are not even aware of the existence, the relevance and the importance of these problems.

In fact, unless this research is invested in and genuinely disseminated, its results cannot lead to coherent proposals, usable on a large scale and capable of effectively improving our national educational systems in which various external and/or internal pressures remain dominant.

### **Policies and programmes**

#### *Framework of education policy in Madagascar*

Education policy in Madagascar is governed by laws which change with the regime and with time. To this day, these laws provide the conceptual framework, but the practical realities may not always be reflected in the laws.

For example, during what is commonly called the Second Republic when the dominant doctrine was socialism, Education Law 78-040 said that education should lead children to become good socialist citizens. That law stipulated a structure of basic education lasting five years, basic secondary education lasting four years, specialized secondary education lasting three years, and higher education. After the regime change in 1992, a new law on education, the goals of which were greatly inspired by the Jomtien World Declaration on Education for All, designated education as a means of developing the personal capabilities of the adolescent child. The structure became: primary school lasting five years, secondary education college lasting four years, high school lasting three years and higher education. These were the terms in use before 1977. More recently, a new law was presented in 2004 to introduce the concept of elementary education, with primary school becoming first-cycle elementary school and secondary college becoming second-cycle elementary school. There is a current proposal to extend primary schooling to seven years, followed by three years of college and two years of high school. There is much talk about this reform but it has not yet been made law.

The different laws on education all imply that primary schooling is universal and that the completion rate of primary education is the maximum. Consequently, they make no explicit provision for the educational management of children who do not attend school or drop out early. However, they make provision for non-formal education comprising functional literacy, family and social education and, in the most recent law, civic education. As this non-formal education does not expressly stipulate the target population or age group, that is where any educational scheme outside the formal system may be classified.

More recently, in 2003, a policy for non-formal education was endorsed in the context of the development of non-formal education. This policy includes the national literacy and adult education policy and provides a more coherent framework for non-formal educational schemes. However, it has not been implemented to date.

Moreover, the 2003 Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper explicitly acknowledges that: "*The phenomena of non-attendance and early school leaving are among the essential causes of illiteracy. That is why the strengthening of non-formal education appears to be a credible alternative for meeting the populations' fundamental educational needs*<sup>3</sup>".

However, we should emphasize that the actions presented here mostly predated these periods of semi-recognition of non-formal education. The latter has conferred on them a relative and retrospective legal validation. This shows once again how difficult our societies find it to establish the education system most appropriate for our social context. There is the "recognized structural framework", but it is surrounded by a host of initiatives that lie outside that framework, but which are implicitly recognized because the formal structural framework cannot wholly discharge its responsibilities.

In fact the question that might be raised is whether a single educational mould is appropriate for all citizens. Often raised in advanced Western societies, it is rarely asked in developing countries although the latter have many alternative schools.

### **Presentation of the practical initiatives**

In view of the inadequacy of the education system, four contributions have been made towards improving the education system, in which university academics have played a part. Three of them provide answers for questions of inappropriate curricula.

The first, an alternative primary school called the *Life-oriented School*, is an initiative of the Fianarantsoa Catholic Diocese.

The second, named *Asama*, is a remedial teaching methodology for children who have not attended or have dropped out from school, enabling them to reach primary school-leaving standard in one school year.

The third is a university course named *VIMM*, originally set up for students refused admission to conventional universities.

The fourth helps to establish *AFI-D (Intensive Functional Literacy for Development)*, which improves the effectiveness of literacy programmes in Madagascar.

<sup>3</sup> PRSP, op. cit. P.34

### ***Life-oriented School***

*Original location:* Catholic district of Isorana in the Catholic Diocese of Fianarantsoa

*Current distribution:* Other districts of the Diocese of Fianarantsoa

*Problems:* Learning methodologies and policies inappropriate for the socio-economic context of the children, leading to repeated scholastic failure. This inappropriateness results in early school leaving and, especially, in parents and managers noting the relative lack of ability among former pupils unable for various reasons to get into secondary school.

*Solutions adopted:* An autonomous education system that follows the official curriculum subjects but with a methodology that takes account of the children's practical experience and draws heavily on the teaching methods of the French *Maisons Familiales Rurales*. Known as "Life-oriented Schools", these schools were set up in the late 1980s and early 1990s in the Catholic district of Isorana, a village 32km west of Fianarantsoa. They differ from ordinary schools in that:

- They use participatory methods integrated with the children's lives in transmitting content;
- They institute a structure of development activity in parallel with the education.

The schools applied the content of official curricula but followed their own methodology. The name "Life-oriented School" defines their entire ambition and policy. To that end the schools took part in the sub-region's development by being:

- An integrated system for the region's development;
- A factor for spreading new techniques;
- A factor for countering degradation;
- A factor for changing mentalities.

A descriptive outline of the Life-oriented School is supplied as an annex.

*Results:* During the years of observation (1992-1996), the network consisted of 25 schools with 1,200-1,700 pupils;

Reduced drop-out rate and improved results in the Certificate of Primary Studies.

*Contribution by academics:* Life-oriented Schools were conceived of and set up by people active in the Catholic diocese of Fianarantsoa. A French missionary who knew the French *Maisons Familiales Rurales* had a decisive influence in the choice of methodology. The academics' contribution was confined to an investment study done in 1996, which enabled the system to be given a positive appraisal and above all, induced the academics involved to take a closer interest in the various alternative initiatives in the formal system.

*Lessons learned:* That specific action can be taken to counter the failings noted in the formal education system. In fact, academics generally confine themselves to observation and to study and research programmes, and the conclusions they reach are not always considered or taken into account by society. There is indeed a theoretical possibility of taking specific action, but academics often consider that not to be their role.

***ASAMA: in Malagasy 'Asa Sekoly Avotra Malagasy', or Supplementary Teaching Action for Malagasy Adolescents***

*Original location:* Fianarantsoa

*Current distribution:* In the country's large towns

*Problems:* Statistics indicate that there are around one million illiterate children aged 10 to 14. These are children who have never been to school or who dropped out early. These children exist and are known to exist, but there are virtually no educational courses designed for them. There are remedial programmes but they consist of enrolling the children at whatever age they are and having them follow the regular five-year primary school cycle. That seems inappropriate for their psychological maturity and development.

*Solutions adopted:* ASAMA showed that adults could "acquire" in five months the necessary knowledge to reach the primary school-leaving standard, which is seen as the minimum requirement to prevent a relapse into illiteracy. On the basis of that experience, researchers prepared a methodology to enable mature adolescents to acquire the skills needed in primary school in one school year. Designed in the University of Fianarantsoa with the collaboration of an association called Malagasy Mahomby, the pilot class started in the 2002-2003 school year and the pupils who graduated (the pass rate was 50%) obtained the Certificate of Primary Studies. Since then, the methodology has been disseminated across the island, again through the Joint Programme.

*Results:* ASAMA has enabled a thousand children who had not attended school or had dropped out early to be enrolled in school; more than half of them have obtained their Certificate of Primary Studies and have been able to enrol in secondary college. ASAMA is now recognized in Madagascar as a means of combating non-attendance and early dropping out by enabling children to enrol in school at a lesser cost.

*Contribution by academics:* The methodology was in its entirety devised and designed by a research group led by academics.

*Lessons learned:* The research initiative itself originated with academics (as did the VIMM) but when put into practice, it adopted as its success indicator a socially-recognized qualification, the Certificate of Primary Studies, which facilitated its adoption and rapid dissemination, unlike in the case of VIMM. What is happening elsewhere in Africa shows that the ASAMA experience overlaps with other models such as the so-called community schools or the non-formal basic education centres. However, the attendance required at those schools is longer and they are not as well integrated into the formal sector as is ASAMA.

***VIMM: in Malagasy 'Vatsy Ifampitana ho Malagasy Mahomby', or "Promotion of Malagasy Initiatives for Mutual Development"***

*Original location:* Fianarantsoa

*Current distribution:* Fianarantsoa, Antananarivo, Toamasina

*Problems:* Since 1993, a selection system has been in place for university admission, based on grades obtained in the Baccalaureate and sometimes on a qualifying examination in which advanced knowledge of French is a major selection criterion. Many young people are disadvantaged from the start. Additionally, Malagasy

university courses drew heavily on French courses that were considered suitable for preparing young people to make their way in a completely different "modern" world. This could explain the inappropriateness of some university training and the endemic under-employment of university graduates, a phenomenon that has not yet been studied.

*Solutions adopted:* An educational programme has been designed and established to develop the students' capabilities and sensitize them to local opportunities. The course design rests on the following hypotheses: there will never be enough jobs for young people leaving higher education, whether they graduate or not, because on the one hand the cost of job creation is high in view of the number of students, and on the other, the number of young people coming onto the job market each year significantly exceeds the market's ability to absorb them because of demographic increase: if the country is not sufficiently developed, then professional jobs and careers are what is lacking. Those careers tio

*Problems:* Illiteracy is an endemic evil in our countries. Madagascar currently has over 40% adult illiteracy although literacy programmes have been conducted in the country since independence. A single literacy programme may last for three years and apart from the many drop-outs, there may also be relapses into illiteracy that negate the efforts of the programmes.

*Solutions adopted:* The literacy education strategy known as AFI-D was tried and tested in Burkina Faso and the Central African Republic and was proposed for adaptation in Madagascar. It was decided to design a holistic strategy. A team of resource people led by academics from the University of Fianarantsoa drew up the handbooks and guides and piloted the programme with the help of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP). The pilot was conclusive and the methodology was developed throughout the country under the non-formal education section of the Joint Programme for the Promotion of Education for All, a programme financed by the United Nations system and with technical support from UNESCO. Two essential elements distinguish AFI-D from previous methods:

- The attendance requirement imposed on course participants, but with their cooperation, to attend daily courses of at least five hours' duration (previously, courses were run according to the participants' wishes);
- The choice of teaching based exclusively on basic characters and thus on recognition of shapes, and not on recognition of images as was previously the case.

*Results:* Since it was piloted in 1999-2000, AFI-D has enabled over 50,000 illiterate people to learn to read and write in a period of at most five or six months. Moreover, literacy education has become a module at the University of Fianarantsoa. The eradication of illiteracy is now recognized as one of the major challenges in the Madagascar Development Programme known as the "Madagascar Action Plan" (MAP), in which AFI-D is presented as a conclusive experience.

*Contribution by academics:* The adaptation and design of the methodology were entirely piloted by academics. Based on the adaptation of the Burkina Faso model, the design was completed in quite a short period (three to four months). The design of the handbooks took account of studies into the Malagasy language, especially its sounds and the frequency of their occurrence.

*Lessons learned:* Carrying out the pilot led academics to take interest in the field of non-formal education and adult education. This is a very wide field, but the lack of references and working contacts in the field means that studies may well be carried out in a closed circle. Literacy education has now become a discipline for study at the University of Fianarantsoa (Master's module) and students intend to write doctorate theses on it. This recognition of how big a handicap illiteracy is for development is quite recent in Madagascar, where illiteracy has always been considered as only a "social disadvantage".

## **Results**

### Methodology applied

The experiments set out here are presented not as alternative education experiments but as experiments in involving university researchers in setting up such forms of education. In reality, these alternative education experiments, which are aimed at so-called "disadvantaged" groups, are very often considered wrongly not to have a

place among the concerns of the university, and those who study these fields sometimes find it hard to have any dialogue with their colleagues.

These research projects are design projects. The methodologies used in their application are very simple:

First came a thinking process that consisted of putting together the literature, largely in the light of the desired results and of group thinking. Then, with an initial curriculum established theoretically, the live pilot followed. In the case of the VIMM, AFI-D and ASAMA schemes, the first pilot was regularly enriched by monitoring the build-up of knowledge. In the case of AFI-D and ASAMA, which are essentially aimed at acquiring measurable skills such as reading, writing and arithmetic, the benchmarks of progress are quite simple and any shortcomings can be remedied. This explains their relative popularity as seen in their rate of acceptance and spread. In the case of VIMM, the situation is more difficult, because there are no such visible benchmarks for it. In this case, the method used for applying any "corrections" to the initial literature consists of inviting many people to visit the project and to observe the behaviour and views of students attending the course. A small-scale evaluation was carried out in 2003 and brought out varied opinions of the pilot.

It should be noted that, with the exception of AFI-D which was proposed by UNDP technical officers in Madagascar with the assistance of an African (Burkina Faso) expert, the three educational models presented here stem from wholly local initiatives. They were developed outside the pre-established programmes of the government or other external partners. That has created problems as regards their funding. The fact that they exist means that the public sees them as evidence of academics' ability to find appropriate solutions for specific problems, but their voices are not always clearly heard.

### ***Principal results***

The principal outcome of these schemes is that non-formal education as a subject has become of interest to academics in Fianarantsoa and from there, throughout Madagascar. The visible impact, which is the most important, was the establishment of two diploma courses that can be considered unique in Madagascar:

- A specialized Master's degree in development education;
- A Higher Specialized Studies Diploma (DESS) in adult education.

The fact that these diploma courses exist within a state university turns non-formal education into a practical research field for writing final dissertations. The Master's course has had around 100 students enrolled every year since 2003, and the DESS course has had around 20 a year since 2000. These qualifications were set up with the technical support of the Faculty of Arts and Human Sciences of the University of La Reunion. Proposals are often floated to set up a "real" research group in this field, but the day-to-day constraints of higher education have always delayed its introduction.

The AFI-D and ASAMA methodologies are officially recognized as convincing methodologies for adult literacy education and (re-)enrolling children who have

dropped **out**. They are cited in the Madagascar Action Plan (MAP), which is the current roadmap for Madagascar's development.

VIMM was developed through the establishment of a complete five-year cycle which reinforces the theoretical competencies that support the practical skills learned, but it remains relatively marginal to the world of Malagasy higher education. Nonetheless, the fact that 14 years on, it still has paying students may be seen as proof that it has a role to play in that system.

This report underlines the fact that African academics constitute a resource that is often neglected, but one that can make great innovations in a country's education system. Universities do not always support the dynamic role that these academics can play. In the case of Madagascar, which has been trying to eradicate illiteracy and to send all its children to school, the AFI-D and ASAMA methodologies are expressly cited in the MAP. Those methodologies were devised on their own initiative by academics in university research teams. However, the university as an institution has problems in defining its positioning in this campaign to eradicate illiteracy and attain universal primary education. Efforts must be made by universities and by society at large to combat the old forces of inertia which have confined universities in "ivory towers", remote from social concerns. Universities have the advantage of having human resources focused on research and thinking. This makes it even more important to ensure that the research and thinking are better aligned with the country's real problems.

## **Recommendations**

### *Education policy*

Madagascar's education policy has difficulty in distancing itself from the original imported models. Education policy also appears to be subject to quite strong external pressures, which makes it very contradictory. Those external influences result in policies that do not always reflect the country's realities, but rather anticipate a future that may be ideal, but is still hypothetical. The principles of compulsory attendance and free elementary education obscure the practical fact that hundreds of thousands of children remain outside the system, and the decades of effort to make primary education universal make literacy programmes appear only temporary and marginal actions. Recognition of the need for non-formal education is sometimes seen as an admission that the existing system is ineffective, and such an admission is not always readily acceptable. However, in view of the inadequacies of the education system, various alternative schemes have been developed, but those schemes are, strictly speaking, of marginal legality. And often, it is the extent of social recognition that justifies their existence. Being outside the formal structure nonetheless weakens schemes which could otherwise resolve various known problems. The VIMM scheme in Madagascar was one of the first private educational courses in the tertiary sector. Its opening

Consequently, efforts should be made at country level to provide non-formal education with a structural framework for action. There are documents (such as Madagascar's "Non-formal Education Policy") which deal with the situation of "disadvantaged groups, adults and illiterates", but they remain little publicized and little known, sometimes because the authorities wrongly believe that education means only the education of children enrolled in the formal system. That may appear normal in developed countries where the attendance rate is close to 100%, but it is far less normal in African countries where, despite the efforts made, many children are still outside the school system.

Furthermore, a special place should be reserved for national university research. Education is a sensitive area in which there are many external structures involved in bilateral and/or multilateral relations. The strong demographic pressure gives an ever increasing responsibility to these countries because the number of school-age children is rising very quickly and the requirements of high-quality education tend to appear "unbearable" for national budgets. Consequently, education becomes a prime field for international cooperation and external experts are sometimes listened to more carefully than domestic ones. Those experts, in theory very gifted, often have a very extensive knowledge of what happens in many other countries. As similar problems exist in those countries, they tend to transpose solutions that have proven valuable elsewhere, often without having the time to examine local constraints.

### ***Suggested actions***

Despite the lesser importance often attached to higher education, it is nonetheless a sphere in which vital initiatives can be undertaken, analyzed and replicated. Therefore, the university world should engage a little more with these alternative education systems. Our frame of reference is often derived from the university world in developed countries where alternative schemes are marginal because universal primary education is already fully established. The references and networks needed for alternative education systems to develop as a university research topic can only be found in Africa. However, as research funding is still entirely dependent on sources outside the continent, intense efforts must be made to encourage funding bodies to help support more local research into the development of education, and especially of non-formal education. Moreover, existing models, however imperfect or inadequate they may be, should be publicized so that they are better known and widely recognized as viable solutions, even by our local, regional and national authorities. In the public imagination, the education that was brought by European colonialism is a means of freeing oneself from living conditions that are seen as onerous. Education is a passport to the future and you need a reliable passport that has passed the test. It is often forgotten that the elite education of the colonial times cannot be the mass education required by the current objectives of universal education.

### ***Mutual support among African universities***

African universities and academics sometimes have their eyes fixed on the research laboratories of the North. The existing communication structures strongly support that fixation. However, this tie to the North results in indigenous African problems being minimized or even obscured. One example is illiteracy, which is prevalent

throughout Africa but seems not to interest African universities and academics as a "serious" problem. Efforts should therefore be made to develop exchanges among African academics. The development of such exchanges will induce universities to themselves create new centres of research more appropriate for African problems. Without that mutual support, the initiatives listed here may well become mere

development of the alternative education schemes presented above was made possible by a conjunction of several temporary factors and opportunities. For instance the non-formal section of the Joint Programme for the Promotion of Education for All did a great deal to promote both AFI-D and ASAMA. It also enabled UNESCO to put both these methodologies on a website.

The development of alternative education schemes makes the inadequacies of the formal education system plain to see. And that is why they sometimes create "problems", especially for certain technicians in authority. Universal primary education cannot be achieved without the complete support of parents. When viable alternatives to the normal five-year school programme are proposed to parents, might that not lead them to expect their children to be able to enrol in, those alternatives? That is the crux of the question, and it is not for the technicians to decide because the question is eminently "political".

It is also noticeable and that is quite normal that the more closely a "form of alternative education" resembles the corresponding formal type or the pre-existing type, the more readily it is accepted by society. Thus, the Life-oriented School is an adaptation of formal school and gives rise not to controversy but to a great deal of sympathy for the brave effort to adapt to local realities. It is supported by an association known as Land for the Future. On the other hand, many people find ASAMA disturbing because it seems to call into question the need for five years of primary school.

#### *Suggestions*

These problems are not confined to Madagascar. Illiteracy, inappropriate primary education, dropping out and non-attendance, the lack of relevance of higher education are questions that are very often raised throughout Africa and in other developing regions. However, except for the higher education problem, the other questions are rarely discussed among academics. In order to attain the objectives of Education for All, there needs to be widespread and focused exchanges and dialogue so that alternative schools can be promoted. The development of such schools must not be left solely to the many NGOs working with under-privileged groups. Universities, which have more advanced human resources and methodological tools and a greater structural capability for research, should also study this issue to assist decision makers to establish a truly relevant, equitable and effective education system. To this end, universities should not wait to be invited to take an interest; they should lay claim to this domain as a key part of realizing their own potential. And since the European references to which Africans and African institutions are sometimes so attached are lacking in this domain, universities engaged in these problems should be able to unite to create and endorse this body of reference literature. That is essential for national education systems which, like that of Madagascar, are still seeking to define themselves after 46 years of independence.

#### References

Our ideas for research into the need for alternative education sprang from reading Rene Dumont's famous book, *False start in Africa*, and especially the chapter entitled

*If your sister goes to school your next meal will be your pen.* Much later, Howard Gardner's theory of multiple intelligences strengthened the view that so-called "school failure" is in fact a mismatch between the child or