

Country Profile: Madagascar

Most of the Malagasy people live as subsistence farmers, their extreme poverty driving deforestation as they clear land to grow crops. Some 70% of the population live under the poverty line of a dollar a day.

HISTORY

The Malagasy are thought to be descendents of Africans and Indonesians who settled on the island more than 2,000 years ago. Malagasy pay a lot of attention to their dead and spend much effort on ancestral tombs, which are opened from time to time so the remains can be carried in procession, before being rewrapped in fresh shrouds. After sometimes harsh French colonial rule, which included the bloody suppression of an uprising in 1947, Madagascar gained independence in 1960. The military seized power in the early 1970s with the aim of achieving a socialist paradise. This did not materialise. The economy went into decline and by 1982 the authorities were forced to adopt a structural adjustment programme imposed by the International Monetary Fund. The island is heavily exposed to tropical cyclones which bring torrential rains and destructive floods, such as the ones in 2000 and 2004, which left thousands homeless.

RECENT SITUATION

The World Bank has estimated that 70% of Malagasy live on less than \$1 per day. Poverty and the competition for agricultural land have put pressure on the island's dwindling forests, home to much of Madagascar's unique wildlife and key to its emerging tourist industry. The island has strong ties with France as well as economic and cultural links with French-speaking West Africa. Many areas suffer food shortages. Madagascar is to benefit from a G8 pledge to write off debts of 18 poor countries.

After losing support of the military and under intense pressure, President Ravalomanana resigned on 17 March 2009. Ravalomanana assigned his powers to a military council loyal to himself headed by Vice-Admiral Hyppolite Ramaroson. Rajoelina had already declared himself the new leader a month earlier and has since assumed the role of acting President. Rajoelina announced that elections would be held in two years and that the constitution would be amended. Plans by Rio Tinto to start coastal strip mining in the south-east have alarmed environmentalists. Madagascar is the world's fourth biggest island after Greenland, New Guinea and Borneo. Because of its isolation most of its mammals, half its birds, and most of its plants exist nowhere else on earth.

FACTS

- **Full name:** Republic of Madagascar
- **Population:** 19.7 Million (UN 2007)
- **Capital:** Antananarivo
- **Area:** 587,041 sq km (226,658 sq miles)
- **Internet domain:** .mg
- **International dialling code:** +261
- **Major religion:** Christianity
- **Major languages:** Malagasy (official), French
- **HDI value*¹:** 145. Madagascar (0.543) [1. Norway (0.971)] (2009)
- **Human Poverty Index (HPI-1)*²:** 145. Madagascar (36.1) [21. UK] (2007)
- **Life expectancy at birth (years) :** 59 (UNICEF 2007)
- **Probability of not surviving past 40 (%):** 24.4%
- **Under-five mortality rate (per 1,000 live births):** 112 (UNICEF 2007)
- **HIV prevalence (% aged 15-49):** 0.1 (UNICEF 2007)



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Education

- **Combined primary, secondary and tertiary gross enrolment ratio (%):**
 - 134. Madagascar (59.7) [1. Australia (113.0)] (2005)
- **Adult Literacy Rate: (% ages 15 and older): 71** (UNICEF 2006)

Economy and Trade

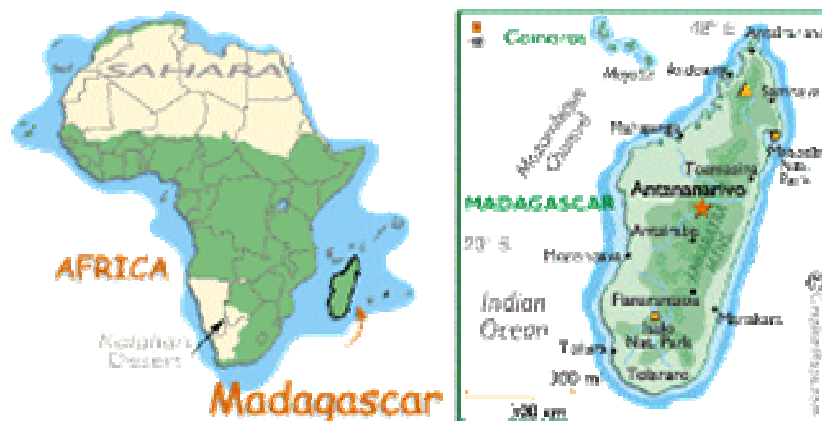
- **GDP per capita:** No. of people lived below the national poverty line. (PPP US\$):
 - 167. Madagascar (923) [1. Luxembourg (60,228)] (2005)
- **GNI Per Capita:** US \$290 (World Bank, 2006)
- **Gini Coefficient** *³: 30. Madagascar (47.5) [126. Denmark (24.7)] (2007)
- **Monetary unit:** Ariary
- **Main exports:** Vanilla, coffee, seafood, cloves, petroleum products, chromium, fabrics
- **CO₂ emissions share of world total (%): 0.0 (2004)** [0.0 (1990)]

Water, sanitation and nutritional status

- **People without access to an improved water source (%): 53** (UNICEF 2007)
- **Population using improved sanitation (%): 12 (UNICEF 2007)** [14 (1990)]
- **Population Undernourished (% of total population): 38 (2002-2004)** [35 (1990-1992)]

Politics

- **Government:** Tiako-I-Madagasikara (TIM)
- **President:** Andry Rajoelina
- **Year Women received right to vote:** 1959
- **Internally displaced people (thousands, 2006): n/a**



*¹ The HDI provides a composite measure of three dimensions of human development: living a long and healthy life (measured by life expectancy), being educated (measured by adult literacy and enrolment at the primary, secondary and tertiary level) and having a decent standard of living (measured by purchasing power parity, PPP, income).

*² The Human Poverty Index for developing countries (HPI-1), focuses on the proportion of people below a threshold level in the same dimensions of human development as the HDI.

*³ The **Gini coefficient** is most prominently used as a measure of inequality of wealth distribution. A value of 0 represents absolute equality, and a value of 100 absolute inequality.

*⁴ Rankings are out of a total of 177.