

Community Erosion, Conflict, and the Politics of Water Scarcity in Southern Madagascar

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Abstract

The regions of Southern Madagascar have long suffered amongst the poorest in Madagascar and at the margins of state intervention and capacity. The 2020-2023 period proved to be decisive as the population was pushed to a breaking point. Multi-year drought and resultant famine that has engulfed nearly the entirety of the region with three million people impacted and over one million facing dire conditions. The region has shifted from over two-thirds identifying farming and/or animal husbandry as their primary livelihood to less than one-third with no labor replacement with desperate consequences. While part of long-term climate change, responses have been slow and regional interventions to confront water scarcity even slower. The social, economic, cultural, impacts on this level of water scarcity has long-term consequences, are highly destabilizing for communities, and have long-term impacts on households.

To unpack the drivers and impacts, eight rounds of a panel survey (n=720) across nine communes have been conducted by the author between August 2020 and January 2023 in collaboration with the World Bank. This makes it possible trace drivers of change in community water needs and strategies over time. In July and August 2023 focus groups will be conducted in the same communes plus six communes to help understand the drivers of decision-making and potential policy interventions and investments.

