



Integrated Country Strategy

Madagascar and the Union of the Comoros

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Table of Contents

1. Chief of Mission Priorities 2

2. Mission Strategic Framework 4

3. Mission Goals and Objectives.....6

4. Management Objectives..... 13

1. Chief of Mission Priorities

Held back by cycles of political instability, Madagascar is the only non-conflict country to have become poorer since its independence. GDP per capita is equal to that of 1980 and the country ranks 158 out of 188 on the 2016 Human Development Index. As this strategy is being drafted, Madagascar is approaching perhaps its most important election. If it is successful, it will be Madagascar's first peaceful transfer of power between two elected governments, and the only successful election preceded by a crisis.

Madagascar approaches this presidential election while facing a wide range of challenges. Rampant corruption at all levels of government is hampering the advancement of Madagascar's economy and infrastructure. Inequality and pervasive corruption perpetuate poverty and prevent meaningful development. Although reliable figures do not exist – Madagascar is conducting its first census since 1993 – World Bank 2010 estimates suggest that at least 78 percent – with some estimates as high as 92 percent – of Madagascar's people live in extreme poverty. Per capita consumption has declined steadily since independence, and today stands at just over 40 percent of what it was in 1960. Madagascar "achieved" only one Millennium Development Goal (MDG) – gender parity in education – and this was already the case before the MDGs were conceived.

Only 52 percent of the population has access to safe drinking water, and only 12 percent to improved sanitation facilities. Recurrent shocks of drought, cyclones, flooding and pest infestation contribute to Madagascar's status as one of the world's most food insecure countries, where poor nutrition and inadequate sanitation have left 47 percent of children under five physically stunted and cognitively delayed. Home to many of the world's most biologically unique ecosystems, the country's growing population and organized crime are increasingly depleting the island's natural resources.

The state is unable to address these challenges or provide security and basic services for the majority of Malagasies. Corruption, persistent poverty and the lack of economic, human, and infrastructural development, combined with a weak judiciary system have resulted in insecurity and desperation among the country's poorest, making them vulnerable to child labor, human trafficking, child sexual exploitation, banditry, and mob violence.

The priorities of the U.S. Mission to Madagascar are to assist Madagascar in achieving the political stability required to facilitate Madagascar's economic and human development, combatting corruption that prevents investment or market development and facilitates organized crime, and to assist Madagascar in becoming a viable economic and security partner in the Indian Ocean region. This includes helping Madagascar develop its human potential, primarily by reducing the threat of disease and malnutrition; helping Madagascar address security concerns including, but not limited to, international criminal networks; and assisting Madagascar in preserving and sustainably exploiting its vast natural, mineral, and ecological wealth for future generations.

The Comoros faces similar challenges. After experiencing over 20 coups or attempted coups since its independence in the mid-1970s, the Union of the Comoros has experienced relative stability since its 2002 presidential election and the implementation of a rotating presidency. As this strategy is being drafted, however, Comoros is contemplating changes to this rotation, which may threaten the small island nation's stability. As in Madagascar, corruption at all levels is a serious issue, along with a weak judiciary.

The current priorities for the United States in the Comoros are to encourage respect for the rule of law and the country's constitution and to assist the Comoros in addressing corruption. Given the lack of an in-country presence, the United States is limited in its pursuit of foreign policy objectives. However, Comoros has requested, and the United States supports, programs that prevent radicalization and extremism, and various forms of security assistance, to include professionalism of the military, police, border control, and judiciary. Finally, the United States is working to discourage increasing intolerance of religious minorities as part of its strategy of preventing radicalization but also in its own right, along with supporting programs that address child labor, trafficking in persons, and respect for human rights in general.

2. Mission Strategic Framework

Mission Goal 1:	Madagascar and the Comoros are politically stable and provide reliable and effective governance that supports U.S. interests in the region.
Mission Objective 1.1:	Madagascar and the Comoros institutions improve their ability to deliver services, counter corruption, and reduce extremism and instability by increasing accountability, effectiveness and cooperation.
Mission Objective 1.2:	Madagascar and the Comoros increasingly institute the rule of law, meeting international and bilateral obligations and treaties.
Mission Objective 1.3:	Madagascar and Comoros civil society engage populations and serve as their advocates.
Mission Goal 2:	Madagascar and the Comoros are stable trading partners that serve as markets for U.S. goods and services.
Mission Objective 2.1:	U.S. companies have an improved ability to compete and engage in Madagascar and the Comoros.
Mission Objective 2.2:	Madagascar and the Comoros purchase more American goods and services.
Mission Objective 2.3:	Madagascar conserves its biodiversity and secures its natural resources.
Mission Goal 3:	Madagascar and the Comoros are able to control their own borders and resources while facilitating legitimate travel, and provide public services to eliminate disease, insecurity, and transnational crime that threaten U.S. citizens, investments and interests.
Mission Objective 3.1:	U.S. security is improved through effective Malagasy and Comorian health systems and enhanced food security for their populations.
Mission Objective 3.2:	Madagascar and the Comoros create an inhospitable environment for transnational crime.
Mission Objective 3.3:	Madagascar and the Comoros increase cooperation to strengthen U.S. border security, protect the lives and interests of U.S. citizens, and facilitate legitimate travel.

Management Objective 1:

Provide the management resources and policies to support mission personnel, TDY visitors, and in-country travel in support of Mission Goals in Madagascar.

Management Objective 2:

Support expanding Mission Goals in the Union of Comoros by providing a facility, equipment, and other support for Locally Employed Staff and TDY visitors to Comoros.

3. Mission Goals and Objectives

Mission Goal 1 Madagascar and the Comoros are politically stable and provide reliable and effective governance that supports U.S. interests in the region.

Description and Linkages: A politically stable country is a predictable and reliable partner on security and economic issues with whom the United States can negotiate partnerships and security arrangements, conduct trade, and engage in mutually beneficial investment. A politically stable country is more likely to be able to prevent terrorism, crime, disease, and conflict, issues which affect American security and prosperity, and is more likely to follow through on internationally agreed accords and mutually agreed obligations. Political stability forms the basis for Post to be able to support all of the objectives in the Joint Regional Strategy, the Joint Security Plan, and the National Security Strategy.

Mission Objective 1.1 Madagascar and the Comoros institutions improve their ability to deliver services, counter corruption, and reduce extremism and political instability by increasing accountability, effectiveness, cooperation and democratization.

Justification: In both Madagascar and the Comoros, corruption acts as a brake on development as it diverts resources from the services the government is expected to deliver. Weak judiciary systems and a failure to hold officials accountable for corruption have increasingly led to a sense of impunity.

Both Madagascar and the Comoros possess institutions designed to combat corruption, but they are underresourced. The relative lack of services, accountability, and responsiveness by the governments is frustrating citizens, decreasing their faith in government, and ultimately undermining stability. In some cases, this frustration may lead to violence and/or extremism on the part of the citizenry or create opportunities for external influencers to manipulate the situation. Poor infrastructure and weak institutions (including a weak judiciary) cause these frustrations to be compounded in the case of natural disasters and changing environmental conditions – to which both Madagascar and Comoros are increasingly vulnerable – and undermine the peoples' ability to meet the basic needs for survival.

Mission Objective 1.2 Madagascar and the Comoros increasingly institute the rule of law, fairly and effectively implementing domestic law, and meeting international and bilateral obligations and treaties.

Justification: The Department is congressionally mandated to report on adherence to internationally recognized standards in child labor, trafficking in persons and religious freedom in Madagascar and the Comoros. The Embassy also facilitates and helps oversee programs to help Madagascar and the Comoros advance efforts to eliminate human rights abuses, child labor, trafficking in persons and discrimination on the basis of religion. The Embassy is directed to promote religious freedom in Madagascar and the Comoros. In Madagascar, there are few religious freedom issues, but in the Comoros, the government and society have increasingly targeted minority religions despite constitutional guarantees.

In addition to Congressionally mandated reporting requirements, the United States has an interest in encouraging countries around the world to respect specific freedoms and rights codified and guaranteed by international agreements. Examples include freedom of expression, freedom of assembly, labor rights, the rights of children, women and ethnic minorities, the rights of LGBTI persons, persons with disabilities, the rights of refugees and asylum seekers, and many others. Promoting respect for human rights globally is not only a long-standing practice by U.S. embassies, it helps protect American citizens when they travel abroad.

Lastly, Madagascar's prisons are overcrowded and its detainees are housed in life-threatening conditions, including malnutrition. More than two-thirds of Madagascar's prison inmates are in pretrial detention, despite a constitutional mandate that pretrial detention should be a measure of last resort, and minors are frequently housed with adults. Madagascar's judicial system is inadequate, resulting in unequal access to a speedy trial. The Embassy works with international and nongovernmental organizations to advocate for better conditions and practices, along with technical training for judges and lawyers. These efforts not only improve adherence to human rights standards for citizens of Madagascar, but also improve conditions for American citizens who might be detained.

Mission Objective 1.3: Madagascar and Comoros civil society engage populations and serve as their advocates.

Justification: Malagasy and Comorian citizens face profound challenges in holding their government leaders accountable, particularly due to the weakness of civil society. Political dynamics are driven almost entirely by rivalries between political elites. Despite strong evidence implicating numerous government officials in illegal activities, these elites enjoy a sense of impunity. Failing to address this situation will allow cyclical crises throughout both Madagascar's and Comoros's recent political histories to continue, further warping many citizens' understanding of democratic principles.

Civil society organizations (CSOs) are critical to holding the Malagasy and Comorian governments accountable to the public with regard to the delivery of public services and responsible management of public resources. CSOs can help citizens organize and advocate more effectively for greater accountability and responsiveness to citizens' needs or advocate to government on their behalf. CSOs have an important role to play in ensuring citizens have increased awareness of their inherent and legal rights and a strengthened their capacity to mobilize and advocate on behalf of those rights. In addition, given many citizens' negative experience with democracy and political processes, CSOs could address their disillusionment and misperceptions of what democracy can and should be in order to drive enthusiasm for participation in governance. The U.S. Government would provide technical assistance to help interested civil society organizations address citizens' needs.

Mission Goal 2: Madagascar and the Comoros are stable trading partners that serve as markets for U.S. goods and services.

Description and Linkages: Engaging in mutually beneficial trade supports the livelihoods of both the American people and those in Madagascar and the Comoros. A level playing field allows U.S. companies to invest and compete abroad, which supports wealth creation abroad and at home, creates jobs, and generates income for Americans. This is in support of the Joint Regional Strategy's goal "increase mutually beneficial economic growth, trade and investment;" the Joint Strategic Plan's goal "renew America's competitive advantage for sustained economic growth and job creation," and the National Security Strategy's goal "promote American prosperity."

Mission Objective 2.1: U.S. companies have an improved ability to compete and engage in Madagascar and the Comoros.

Justification: American companies currently face a number of challenges in Madagascar and the Comoros, beyond cultural barriers. In Madagascar, corruption results in numerous barriers to fair trade. Local companies have avoided paying taxes, and have avoided paying customs and duties by mislabeling raw materials and bribing officials to look the other way. This results in higher costs for American companies, inhibiting their ability to compete. Potential investors are also sometimes pressured by local operators or authorities for a stake in the project as a condition for receiving permission to operate. In the case of legal disputes, foreign companies have reported the justice system as biased against the outsider, unfairly favoring the Malagasy party. In addition to these factors, the lack of infrastructure can be challenging for all companies – poor roads, port delays, unreliable or unavailable electricity – and often adds additional costs as companies are forced to construct roads and power plants to protect their investments.

In Comoros, shortages in skilled labor and bureaucratic challenges, in addition to infrastructure (power, water, roads) are obstacles to investing.

Mission Objective 2.2: Madagascar and the Comoros purchase more American goods and services.

Justification: Clearly the purchase of U.S. goods and services benefits the United States by creating jobs and supporting general prosperity. However, the difference in GDP per capita for both countries (approximately \$800 for the Comoros, \$400 for Madagascar) compared to that of the United States means that for this to happen, Americans must also buy goods and services from Madagascar and the Comoros. To that end, this objective focuses on stimulating two-way trade, fostering partnerships and information sharing through institutions like the American Chamber of Commerce, and providing technical assistance to help both countries qualify for programs such as the American Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA), and to correctly apply food safety standards – which also protects the American consumer.

Mission Objective 2.3: Madagascar conserves its biodiversity and secures its natural resources.

Justification: Conserving Madagascar's biodiversity and natural resources is crucial for the country's future economic development. Madagascar's natural resource capital (without mineral assets) represents 49 percent of the country's total wealth and much of its predominantly rural population depends directly on natural resources for their livelihoods. Unfortunately, environmental degradation – largely stemming from slash-and-burn agriculture, fuelwood collection, unsustainable harvesting of wildlife, and rampant deforestation – are quickly decimating that capital. Madagascar's prospects for becoming a more prosperous and stable partner to the United States are closely tied to its management of its natural resource endowments. Madagascar provides important natural resources for U.S. businesses that generate economically viable ways to move people out of illegal trade and into key agricultural commodities of high value to U.S. markets, such as vanilla and other spices. From a global perspective, the loss of one hectare of forest in Madagascar has a larger effect on biodiversity than forest loss anywhere else on Earth and so this is arguably the highest biodiversity priority on the planet.

The U.S. Government will provide technical assistance in key areas, such as community forest management, ecotourism development, coastal communities and marine conservation, conservation friendly livelihoods, and carbon inventories and measurement. In the first annual report to Congress as required by the Eliminate, Neutralize, and Disrupt (END) Wildlife Trafficking Act of 2016, Madagascar was identified as a "focus country" (i.e., a major source, transit point, or consumer of wildlife trafficking products or their derivatives). As such, the Embassy is engaged in a process

of collaborating with the Govt of Madagascar to develop an assessment of the wildlife trafficking threat and, then, a strategic plan with recommendations to address wildlife trafficking.

Mission Goal 3: Madagascar and the Comoros are able to control their own borders and resources while facilitating legitimate travel, and provide public services to eliminate disease, insecurity and transnational crime that threaten U.S. citizens, investments and interests.

Description and Linkages: To the extent that Madagascar and the Comoros are able to control their own borders and prevent communicable disease, their efforts help protect the American people, the homeland and the American way of life (National Security Strategy). This also helps protect the safety of American tourists and American businesses operating in both countries – protecting America’s security at home and abroad (Joint Strategic Plan). Finally, theft of Madagascar’s natural resources is also linked to international crime and trafficking in illegal goods, and thus the protection of Madagascar’s resources helps contribute to the previously mentioned goals.

Mission Objective 3.1: U.S. security is improved through effective Malagasy and Comorian health systems and enhanced food security for their populations.

Justification: Though there have been some limited improvements, the effects of Madagascar’s recent political crisis on economic and social outcomes have been devastating. During the period of political instability, Madagascar suffered from a rapid deterioration of essential health services, primarily due to reduced domestic and external resources and poor predictability and implementation of the budget. As a result, key health indicators are still troubling, with only 38 percent of births taking place in a health facility; one-third of children under five dying from easily-preventable diseases such as diarrhea and pneumonia; and a recent re-emergence of polio.

Madagascar also faces significant deficits in potable water supply and improved sanitation. Only 52 percent of the population has access to safe drinking water, and only 12 percent have access to improved sanitation facilities. Currently, Madagascar has 90 percent of the world’s bubonic plague cases largely due to poor sanitation; a severe outbreak of plague in 2017 caused global alarm.

Exacerbating the situation are cultural norms, poverty and inadequate nutritional education that leave many Malagasy people overly reliant on a diet of rice, cassava or maize. These factors are key contributors to Madagascar’s high rates of chronic malnutrition. Half of all Malagasy children under five suffer from stunted growth and cognitive delays, undermining the economic potential of the country’s future workforce. In addition, reliance on traditional, rain-fed agriculture (which is highly susceptible to climate change) has produced increasingly frequent crop failure and subsequently a high prevalence of severe acute malnutrition in many parts of the country.

Not addressing these challenges raises the security risk of pandemic disease outbreaks and fosters continued sub-optimal health, creating conditions unfavorable to the country's economic growth and attractiveness as a U.S. economic partner. The U.S. Government will continue its work at the national and subnational levels to strengthen health care and nutrition in Madagascar. Enhancing the health and food security of vulnerable Malagasy populations would significantly improve the country's standard of living and accelerate reductions in mortality, and minimize the risk of severe disease outbreaks being transmitted beyond Madagascar's borders.

Mission Objective 3.2: Madagascar and the Comoros create an inhospitable environment for transnational crime.

Justification: Madagascar's central location along major sea-lanes in the Western Indian Ocean coupled with a porous 3,000-mile coastline and ongoing capacity deficits in maritime domain awareness, maritime patrol capacity, and port security make it difficult for the government to discourage transnational criminal organizations from using Madagascar as an operational hub for illicit trafficking in the region.

In addition, Madagascar is one of the world's highest priority countries for biodiversity conservation due to its exceptional species richness, high degree of endemism, and the magnitude of threats facing these ecologically, culturally, and economically valuable resources. Given the extreme levels of poverty in Madagascar, high demand for illegally traded wildlife products, and deep corruption at all levels of government, that biodiversity fuels an extensive, lucrative and exceedingly destructive trade in these products. There is evidence that movements of these products are associated with people and smuggling routes connected with other forms of transnational crime such as the illicit drug trade.

Allowing this trade to flourish risks bolstering transnational criminal networks that pose a threat to America's security and undermine regional stability. Efforts to restrict illicit trafficking and protect Madagascar's biodiversity will benefit U.S. regional security interests and generate long-term economic benefits for the people of Madagascar.

The U.S. Government will provide technical assistance in key areas, such as maritime domain awareness, maritime patrol and interdiction, port security, community forest management, ecotourism development, coastal communities and marine conservation, conservation friendly livelihoods, carbon inventories and measurement, counter-wildlife trafficking measures, and environmental law enforcement. This work may include opportunities for participation of project beneficiaries in regional and international interagency initiatives led by these sister agencies to address illicit trafficking of all varieties and regional fisheries management.

Mission Objective 3.3: Madagascar and the Comoros increase cooperation to strengthen U.S. border security, protect the lives and interests of U.S. citizens, and facilitate legitimate travel.

Justification: Post's consular district includes Madagascar (the world's fourth-largest island), the three-island archipelago of the Union of the Comoros, and the French-administered island of Mayotte. After the democratic elections of 2013 in Madagascar, social and economic situations are still precarious. Madagascar still has a long way to recover from the 2009 Political turmoil and chronic poverty. The Comoros face similar challenges, though not as severe, as a result of over 20 coups or attempted coups since independence, though none have occurred since 2001.

The safety and protection of U.S. citizens overseas is among the U.S. Government's highest priorities. With an estimated 1,200 U.S. citizens visiting or residing in Post's consular district per year and the lack of reliable medical facilities, we must be prepared for unforeseen events such as civil unrest, medical emergencies to include global health threats such as bubonic and pneumonic plague, as well as natural disasters. During such crises, we must locate, assist, and, if necessary, evacuate U.S. citizens, and be prepared to take actions to prevent these threats from affecting U.S. security.

Consular officers issue nonimmigrant visas to foreign visitors and immigrant visas to foreign nationals who intend to immigrate to the United States. By accurately and efficiently adjudicating U.S. passport and visa applications, Post ensures that the most coveted travel documents are kept out of the hands of those wanting to do harm to the United States and her citizens. Deterring, detecting, investigating citizenship and visa fraud, and limiting terrorist mobility are essential to protect the integrity of consular processes and safeguard our national security.

4. Management Objectives

Management Objective 1: The mission has the management resources, policies and procedures to support mission personnel, TDY personnel, visitors and in country travel in support of Mission Goals.

Justification: With the expanding travel requirements within Madagascar, management must provide services far outside of the capital region. To meet this demand, Post will create a unified and coherent travel policy. Given poor medical resources throughout the country it is vital that our medical unit has local contacts and understands how to best meet emergency medical demands in major transport hubs. Finally, with an increase in LE and Direct Hire staff, management must improve processes and push new technology to meet the expanding demand within the current budget environment.

Management Objective 2: Support expanding Mission Goals in the Union of Comoros by providing a facility, equipment, and other support for LE staff and TDY visitors to Comoros.

Justification: Post expects TDYers and program staff to remain in Comoros for longer periods of time to promote development, strengthen democratic institutions and advance peace and security. The two LE staff in Comoros do not have a safe, secure or comfortable environment from which they can perform their work. The minimal essential level of support, is an appropriate facility.