

Self-directed learning materials create equity among students

Léonie (9th grade) and Melonie (8th grade) live with their parents in Toliara, Madagascar. Their father is a community health worker and their mother is a saleswoman in the neighborhood grocery store. They live in a corrugated aluminum house that has a big dining table in the middle. The table is also where the girls do their homework.

Like more than 7 million other children in Madagascar, Léonie and Melonie had their learning interrupted in March 2020 when their schools were closed as a result of the COVID-19 pandemic.

“At the beginning, with the confinement, I was very scared for the future of my children, especially since they were already well into the second trimester of the school year,” the girls’ father explained.

“In our school, there is no library. Our school is very far from Tulear, as well. We have no books or other resources to help us in our studies,” said Melonie.

“I was always bad at math, and I struggled to keep up. And I thought it would only get worse with when the school closed,” states Léonie.

The school closure not only changed their way of living but also their way of studying. In May 2020, UNICEF worked closely with the Ministry of National Education, Technical and Professional Training (MNETPT) to provide every lower secondary school student with self-directed learning manuals for math, Malagasy and French. Léonie and Melonie were among the over 434,000 students to benefit from these high-quality educational materials.

“With this booklet, I am able to do two exercises a day without looking at the answers. It is like homework but better. The book with the correction section at the end is very practical and helps me to be stay focused on my studies at home,” Melonie explains.

Léonie admits, “Even if I felt like I will never master mathematics, I am beginning to



Sisters Léonie and Melonie had their learning interrupted in March 2020 when the COVID-19 pandemic forced schools to close. Now, along with 434,000 students, they are benefiting from high-quality educational materials provided by UNICEF. (© UNICEF Madagascar/2020/Andry Nirina)

have a clearer understanding. This book encourages me to study wherever I am. Even on my way to school, I can study and check my answers at the back. This helps me be more confident. I can do the exercises on my own and not ask other students for the answers like I used to with my regular homework. Now that school has reopened for the 9th grade, we even use the book at school and the teachers help with the explanations.”

The Mahavatsy Lower Secondary School received books for all of its students. According to the school Principal, “It is a good initiative to help the students in this period of confinement. It also helps the teachers in the follow-up and preparation of lessons and exercises.

“This is the first time that such help exists. With this strategy, there is equity for all students, those who live in remote areas and the students in the city.”

According to the principal, there are parents of students who come to the college to ask teachers to explain what is in the materials, so that they can work with their children at home.

Indeed, the learning materials give

Léonie and Melonie’s father new hope in this difficult time: “School has reopened for students taking national exams and teachers are providing homework for the 8th grade. With these booklets, I am very happy because I see that my children are actively studying at home. Studying at home also gives me the opportunity to follow a little bit of what they are really doing.

“What has made me happy is to see them helping each other with their homework. It’s a good thing, this booklet. It gives me hope that my daughters will finish the school well this year.”

Support from Zonta has mitigated the risk of learning losses due to interrupted schooling and has allowed UNICEF to be a major contributor to Madagascar’s national COVID-19 response plan, the national learning continuity plan and Back-to-School campaign. The materials to facilitate the at-home learning of over 63,000 lower secondary school students across the country have been delivered to school district offices by UNICEF transport and distributed by schools to all lower secondary school students in grades 7, 8 and 9 across the country.