EDITORIAL https://doi.org/10.4314/mcd.v20i1.7

Madagascar at the crossroads: Youth, governance, and the rosewood reflex

September 2025 witnessed Madagascar entering a new era, following the intensification of anger which had been bubbling beneath the surface for months. The subsequent eruption heralded remarkable action in which a new generation featured prominently. As Le Monde Afrique reported, the first protests emerged in the streets of Antananarivo as a response to prolonged power blackouts and water shortages, with a population exhausted by Jirama's collapse and a president travelling abroad to wax lyrical about "democracy" (Caramel 2025). The movement rapidly gained momentum as longstanding structural failures, entrenched corruption, and years of empty promises consolidated a deepening sense of injustice. The crisis expanded further when farmers to north of Antananarivo watched their rice fields being forcibly buried for a solar-farm project, effectively transforming localized anger into a national uprising that spread from rural areas to cities (Rémy 2025).

Currently, the country is governed by a military-backed transitional administration, installed after the collapse of the previous government.

This particular resistance was not an isolated Malagasy phenomenon. Rather, it was part of a broader movement sweeping across the Global South. In Nigeria (Dambo et al. 2022), Kenya (Tsevreni et al. 2023), Sudan and Senegal (Khalafallah et al. 2025), Sri Lanka (Rambukwella 2025), Thailand (Htong Kham and Ng 2025), The Philippines (Sumatra 2025), Chile (Somma 2021), and Colombia (Restrepo Sanin 2022), Gen Z has emerged as the principal force demanding accountability, equity, and the effective delivery of operational public services. Their grievances resonate across continents: corruption, unemployment, shrinking opportunities, degraded ecosystems, and governments failing to secure even the most basic rights (Figure 1).

Gen Z mobilization in the Global North, though powerful, tends to focus on thematic issues such as climate justice, women's rights, LGBTQ+ protections, gun violence, and student rights (Tsevreni et al. 2023). The difference is not one of values but of conditions. In the North, to a large extent, institutions still function; youth protest to improve systems (e.g., Dokoupilová et al. 2024). In much of the Global South, they protest because systems have already failed. Their struggle is existential.

Gen Z's digital life reflects this divide. In the North, technology is framed around identity, wellbeing, and online culture, while in the South it becomes a tool against structural inequalities. In Kenya, for instance, Gen Z used social media to drive a nationwide movement against IMF-driven austerity, corruption and rising costs, occupying parliament and facing brutal repression (Tsevreni et al. 2023).

In Madagascar, the urgency has been both chronic and acute. The uprising exposed the extent of deterioration of daily life for most citizens: unreliable electricity, protracted water shortages, rising food prices, and a political system unable, and at times unwilling, to guarantee even basic rights. These conditions, described by Le Monde Afrique in its meticulous reporting, resonated across both cities and rural areas, drawing Gen Z and older generations into a shared mobilization centered around dignity, equity, and survival (Caramel 2025, Rémy 2025).

Just as the nation voiced its demands for the abolition of old patterns, an all-too-familiar malfeasance reared its hydra head: the recurrent use of natural resources as a fiscal shortcut during moments of political volatility, marked by opacity, exceptional authorizations, and elite capture (Waeber and Wilmé 2013). On 24 November 2025, Madagascar Tribune reported that the State was once again considering the sale of rosewood stocks (Mandimbisoa 2025). The article triggered an intense public debate. Reader reactions revealed three dominant concerns: (1) disbelief that the "same old story" of exceptional authorizations was returning; (2) fear that reopening rosewood stock circulation would revive traffi-

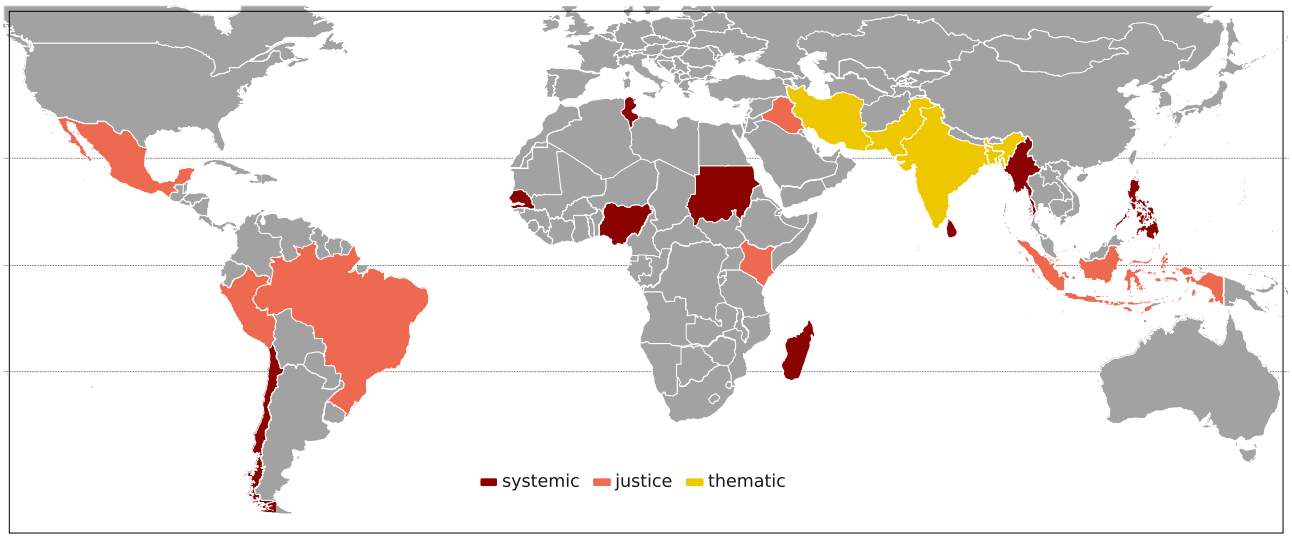

Figure 1. Selected countries illustrating Gen Z–driven mobilization within institutionally mediated political and civic systems. Countries shown represent contexts where youth mobilization operates through, or in sustained interaction with, formal political institutions. Contexts in which mobilization primarily substitutes for weak or contested state systems are intentionally excluded to avoid false comparability.

Citation Citation: Wilmé, L., Schuurman, D., Waeber, P. O. 2025. A new generation, old temptations: Madagascar's future and the return of rosewood. Madagascar Conservation & Development 20, 1: 3–5. <https://doi.org/10.4314/mcd.v20i1.7>

Madagascar Conservation & Development is the journal of Indian Ocean e-Ink. It is produced under the responsibility of this institution. The views expressed in contributions to MCD are solely those of the authors and not those of the journal editors or the publisher.

All the Issues and articles are freely available at https://journalmcd.com/

Contact Journal MCD
info@journalmcd.net for general inquiries regarding MCD
funding@journalmcd.net to support the journal

Madagascar Conservation & Development
Institute and Museum of Anthropology
University of Zurich
Winterthurerstrasse 190
CH-8057 Zurich
Switzerland

Indian Ocean e-Ink
Promoting African Publishing and Education
www.ioeink.com

Missouri Botanical Garden (MBG)
Madagascar Research and Conservation Program
BP 3391
Antananarivo, 101, Madagascar

cking networks; and (3) outrage that the forests would once again serve as a budgetary shortcut while the population demands long overdue structural reforms. The detailed investigation of the 2009–2010 crisis by Randriamalala and Liu (2010) illustrated that political instability instigated massive, largely informal rosewood extraction. They documented how "exceptional" decrees authorizing forest access were systematically timed around political turning points and election cycles, so that revenues were effectively channeled toward strategic elites. During the 2009–2010 political fallout, trafficking reached an unprecedented level, far beyond that which took place during previous cycles, with hundreds of thousands of trees devastatingly felled inside national parks such as Masoala and Marojejy. While Malagasy political, military, and business elites* secured most domestic gains, the largest profits were reaped abroad, by buyers in China, which dominates the international market (Schuurman and Lowry 2009, Randriamalala and Liu 2010, Innes 2010). A decade later, the systemic risks remain. It has been demonstrated that the very existence of rosewood stockpiles fuels speculation, laundering, and thereby exacerbates pressure on remaining trees. Their analysis showed that all stockpile management options involve risk, but international trade carries the highest probability of reigniting illegal logging, corruption, and ecosystem degradation (Wilmé et al. 2020). The authors emphasized that Madagascar still lacks species-level inventories, non-detriment findings, clear traceability, and secure centralized stockpile management, all of which are core requirements of CITES.

More recently, Roberts et al. (2024) illustrated that Madagascar's proposal to withdraw 30,000 logs from CITES control for "domestic use" would create a high-risk laundering pathway if not strictly supervised by an independent third party. Their article warned that opening national circulation under current conditions would set a dangerous precedent for other countries and could directly undermine the CITES system itself (Roberts et al. 2024).

Together, these analyses indicate a clear pattern: every time Madagascar experiences political instability, rosewood operators re-emerge to exploit any potential vacuum. Reopening the stockpiles today, even under the label of "domestic sales," would follow the same routine and create the very conditions that fueled the 1992, 2002, 2009, or 2025 constitutional crises. The cost is immense: weakened institutions, lost revenue and damaged protected areas.

Today, however, the political setting is profoundly different. Madagascar's Gen Z articulated demands that are fundamentally incompatible with another return to extractive crisis management. They push for functioning governance, transparency, equal opportunities, and a future in which natural resources are protected rather than liquidated to maintain the privileges of a limited elite. They have asked for the right to live with dignity, not to inherit a system that recycles corruption under new slogans.

The temptation to reopen rosewood stockpiles is characteristic of this political system. But rosewood is more than a commodity: it is a mirror that reflects power dynamics in Madagascar. Every crisis has triggered the same reflex: exceptional decrees, opaque networks, elite capture, and institutions sidelined or bypassed. Yet this dysfunctional *modus operandi* ignores a fundamental reality: the ecosystem services provided by Madagascar's forests, from water regulation and pollination to soil protection, carbon storage, biodiversity, and the subsistence needs of millions, are worth far more to the nation than any short-term liquidation of timber. The forest's long-term values are national; the gains from rosewood extraction have always been private.

The question before the transitional authorities is clear: will Madagascar finally break with the detrimental political reflex, in which natural resources serve as a financial shortcut and a tool of patronage? Or, will the country once again, liquidate its most iconic species, signaling to a new generation that nothing has changed? The legitimacy of the current transitional moment will depend on that choice.

If the government aligns itself with demands of the people, Madagascar could finally exit the destructive cycle documented repeatedly over the past three decades. This would require enforcing the protection of natural resources, securing stockpiles under independent oversight, and refusing any return to so-called exceptional timber authorizations.

If, however, it turns again to its forests as a budgetary shortcut, the same, farcical political script will be reenacted: institutional decay, ecological loss, elite capture, and yet another generation betrayed. Madagascar's Gen Z has spoken with stark clarity. The country must now decide whether to heed to their impassioned pleas, or to repeat its past.

REFERENCES

Caramel, L. 2025. Madagascar : en négligeant la jeunesse, les gouvernements successifs ont fabriqué une "bombe à retardement". Le Monde Afrique 2 octobre. <https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/10/02/madagascar-en-negligeant-la-jeunesse-les-gouvernements-successifs-ont-fabrique-une-bombe-a-retardement_6644094_3212.html>

Dambo, T. H., Ersoy, M., Auwal, A. M., Olorunsola, V. O., Olonode, A., et al. 2022. Nigeria's #EndSARS movement and its implication on online protests in Africa's most populous country. Journal of Public Affairs 22, 3: e2583. <https://doi.org/10.1002/pa.2583>

Dokoupilová, L., Cogiel, A. and Fero, M. 2024. Values as motivating factors for representatives of generation Z in the Czech Republic and Slovakia within the European context. Frontiers in Psychology 15: 1404354. <https://doi.org/10.3389/fpsyg.2024.1404354>

Htong Kham, S. and Ng, F. S. I. 2025. Discretionary empowerment: a comparative study of youth-led/initiated social movements in Thailand and Myanmar in 2020 and 2021. Journal of Youth Studies. <https://doi.org/10.1080/13676261.2025.2575967>

Khalafallah, H., Ojewale, O. and Oosterom, M. 2025. Youth protests and political imaginaries: Insights from Nigeria, Senegal, and Sudan. Institute of Development Studies Bulletin 56, 1: 113–148. <https://doi.org/10.19088/1968-2025.128>

Innes, J. L. 2010. Madagascar rosewood, illegal logging and the tropical timber trade. Madagascar Conservation & Development 5, 1: 6–10. <https://doi.org/10.4314/mcd.v5i1.57335>

** Note:* Beyond astonishing, is the sudden, public return of three notorious key figures who were extensively documented during the 2009–2010 rosewood catastrophe: Jean-Pierre Laisoa, Johnfrince Bekasy, and Jaototo Chantal Rhona (Randriamalala and Liu 2010). Laisoa alone exported 81 containers of rosewood, worth an estimated USD 16.2 million (making him one of the highest-earning operators of that period). Bekasy moved 21 containers (worth about USD 4.2 million), while Rhona, who appeared in the 2010 files as Jaototo Chantal Bhana, had 25 containers prepared for export. None of them showed the slightest concern whatsoever for the origin of the logs they had moved. Their paperwork was questionable; the source localities conveniently vague, and the aforementioned national parks of Masoala and Marojejy were disconcertingly well represented in the supply chain.
In 2025, these same three individuals resurfaced in the press as spearheading a newly created association, "SOS Bois de rose" (R.O. 2025), presenting themselves as champions of "development," "transparency," and even national credibility. The audacity of this rebranding is as striking as it is nauseating. It rests on a callous faith in collective amnesia. That recognized architects of timber trafficking now claim to safeguard Madagascar's reputation and present themselves as custodians of conservation is deeply lamentable.

Mandimbisoa, R. 2025. L'État envisage la vente des stocks de bois de rose pour renflouer les caisses. Tribune.com 24 novembre. <https://www.madagascar-tribune.com/La-vente-des-stocks-de-bois-de.html>

R. O. 2025. SAVA : Les opérateurs lancent un « SOS Bois de rose ». Midi Madagasikara 5 décembre. <https://midi-madagasikara.mg/les-operateurs-lancent-un-sos-bois-de-rose/>

Rambukwella, H. 2025. The cultural life of democracy: Notes on popular sovereignty, culture and arts in Sri Lanka's Aragalaya. South Asian Review 46, 1–2: 11–26. <https://doi.org/10.1080/02759527.2024.2380179>

Randriamalala, H. and Liu, Z. 2010. Rosewood of Madagascar: Between democracy and conservation. Madagascar Conservation & Development 5, 1: 11–22. <https://doi.org/10.4314/mcd.v5i1.57336>

Rémy, J.-P. 2025. Madagascar : "Le mouvement a commencé dans les rizières, et puis, de fil en aiguille, on est allés en ville chasser le président". Le Monde Afrique 26 novembre. <https://www.lemonde.fr/afrique/article/2025/11/26/madagascar-le-mouvement-a-commence-dans-les-rizieres-et-puis-de-fil-en-aiguille-on-est-alles-en-ville-chasser-le-president_6654834_3212.html>

Restrepo Sanin, J. 2022. Colombia 2021: Between crises and hope. *Colombia 2021: Entre la crisis y la Esperanza.* Revista de Ciencia Política 42, 2: 255–280. <https://doi.org/10.4067/S0718-090X2022005000118>

Roberts, M. W., Schuurman, D., Lowry II, P. P., Wilmé, L. and Waeber, P. O. 2024. Madagascar's proposed domestic rosewood trade undermines species protection and exposes fatal flaws in the CITES regime. Madagascar Conservation & Development 19, 1: 20–26. <https://doi.org/10.4314/mcd.v19i1.3>

Schuurman, D. and Lowry II, P. P. 2009. The Madagascar rosewood massacre. Madagascar Conservation & Development 4, 2: 98–102. <https://doi.org/10.4314/mcd.v4i2.48649>

Somma, N. M. 2021. Power cages and the October 2019 uprising in Chile. Social Identities 27, 5: 579–592.<https://doi.org/10.1080/13504630.2021.1931092>

Sumatra, E. J. B. 2025. Examining how candidate attributes shape Gen Z perceptions for the 2025 Philippine senate elections using conjoint analysis. Journal of Interdisciplinary Perspectives 3, 1: 172–183. <https://doi.org/10.69569/jip.2024.0573>

Tsevreni, I., Proutsos, N., Tsevreni, M. and Tigkas, D. 2023. Generation Z worries, suffers and acts against climate crisis—The potential of sensing children's and young people's eco-anxiety: A critical analysis based on an integrative review. Climate 11, 8: 171. <https://doi.org/10.3390/cli11080171>

Waeber, P. O. and Wilmé, L. 2013. Madagascar rich and in-transparent. Madagascar Conservation & Development 8, 2: 52–54. <https://doi.org/10.4314/mcd.v8i2.1>

Wilmé, L., Innes, J. L., Schuurman, D., Ramamonjisoa, B., Langrand, M., Barber, C. V., et al. 2020. The elephant in the room: Madagascar's rosewood stocks and stockpiles. Conservation Letters 13, 4 : e12714. <https://doi.org/10.1111/conl.12714>

Lucienne Wilmé
Missouri Botanical Garden
Madagascar Research & Conservation Program
Antananarivo 101, Madagascar
Email: lucienne.wilme@mobot-mg.org

Derek Schuurman
London, UK
Email: derekschuurman7@yahoo.co.uk

Patrick O. Waeber
Sarnen, Switzerland
Email: powaeber@gmail.com