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## Madagascar unveils 'cartoon constitution'



The characters are meant to relate to young people's lives

By Christina Corbett  
BBC News, Antananarivo

**Amid the violent protests and wrangling that has marked Madagascar's recent history, the constitution has been changed several times. Worried that the public has not noticed, officials have come up with a novel way of explaining the changes - using cartoon characters.**

For most people in Madagascar's capital, Antananarivo, trips to see friends and family in the countryside start at the bus station.

And this is where the characters in a new cartoon book designed to illustrate Madagascar's constitution begin their holiday.

Their journey is the inspiration for a project that seeks to show young people what the constitution really means to them.

Tahina Ramaromandray, a resident of the capital, has read the book and says it does give young people a chance to develop their own understanding of their rights as Malagasy citizens.

"I'm not saying that I understand it fully, but at least I got the points, the key points," he says.

"And as a citizen I think it's very important. In the end we as Malagasy people, and we as taxpayers, we do not often realise that we have so much powers. Until you read this book you never know that. So I'm really happy."

One of the pictures depicts a dilapidated office of the local government.

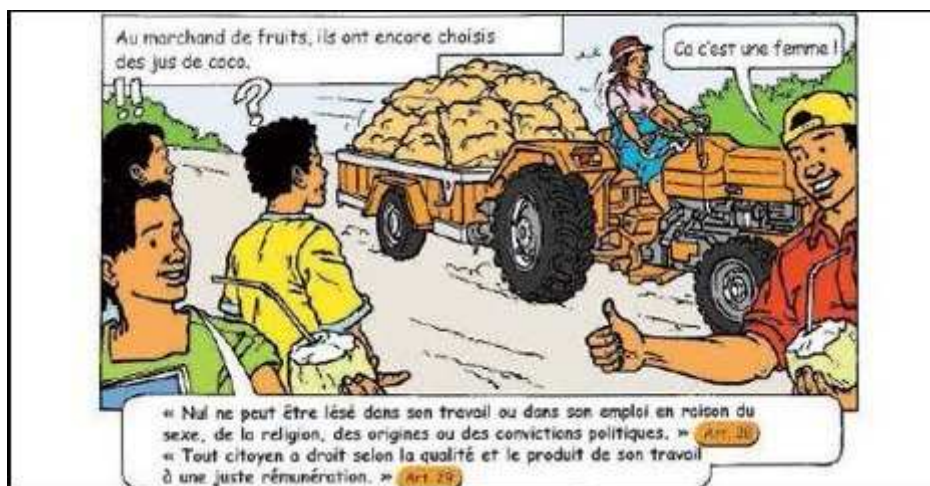
The roof is not right and the windows are broken and the people are asking why.

Jean Amie Raveloson, from the Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung which organised the project, says the idea was "to leave the legal and intellectual level and step down to the level of everyday life for a normal citizen".

### No easy task

"In the cartoons, we have illustrated the constitution within the context the lives of young people," he says.

"So there is a small group who go on a journey in a bus, and who, along the route, talk about their lives - their perspectives of the country."



The cartoons are full of idealised images of Madagascar

He says elements of the constitution are dramatised through their thoughts.

But in a country where the constitution changes with almost every change of government, explaining the alterations has not been an easy task.

Work started late last year but before it was finished there was a military-backed coup and talk soon followed of the constitution being rewritten.

But Mr Raveloson has not been deterred.

"We have already changed the constitution officially three times. In fact it has been changed perhaps five times already," he says.

**“ You have to lose yourself in the constitution to find the main points ”**

Patrick Rabohavy  
Cartoonist

"But despite the changes we've made, if you consider the salient points of the constitution - they never change.

"For example, the constitution talks of the unity of the state - and that is the same in the text for the first republic, the second republic and the third republic."

For Mr Raveloson, the challenge was identifying the points that were most relevant to the lives of young people and that could be illustrated by the cartoons.

### **Lawyer, reader, artist**

This was a problem that the book's artist, Patrick Rabohavy, had to solve.

"You have to lose yourself in the constitution to find the main points. But the most difficult thing was to interpret the main points in order to be able to illustrate them," he says.

"Especially the scenarios - that was the most difficult.

"You have to take the place of a lawyer to understand the contents of the constitution but at the same time you have to put yourself in the position of the reader."

With another change of Madagascar's constitution on the horizon, some are asking if the fundamental law on which the state is built is used to benefit only those with the power to change it.

And until the country's politicians solve the political crisis, it is hard to convince people otherwise.

But this ambitious project seeks to promote discussion and debate - and ultimately to help people claim their rights as Malagasy citizens.



The president is the protector of the state, says Article 44

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