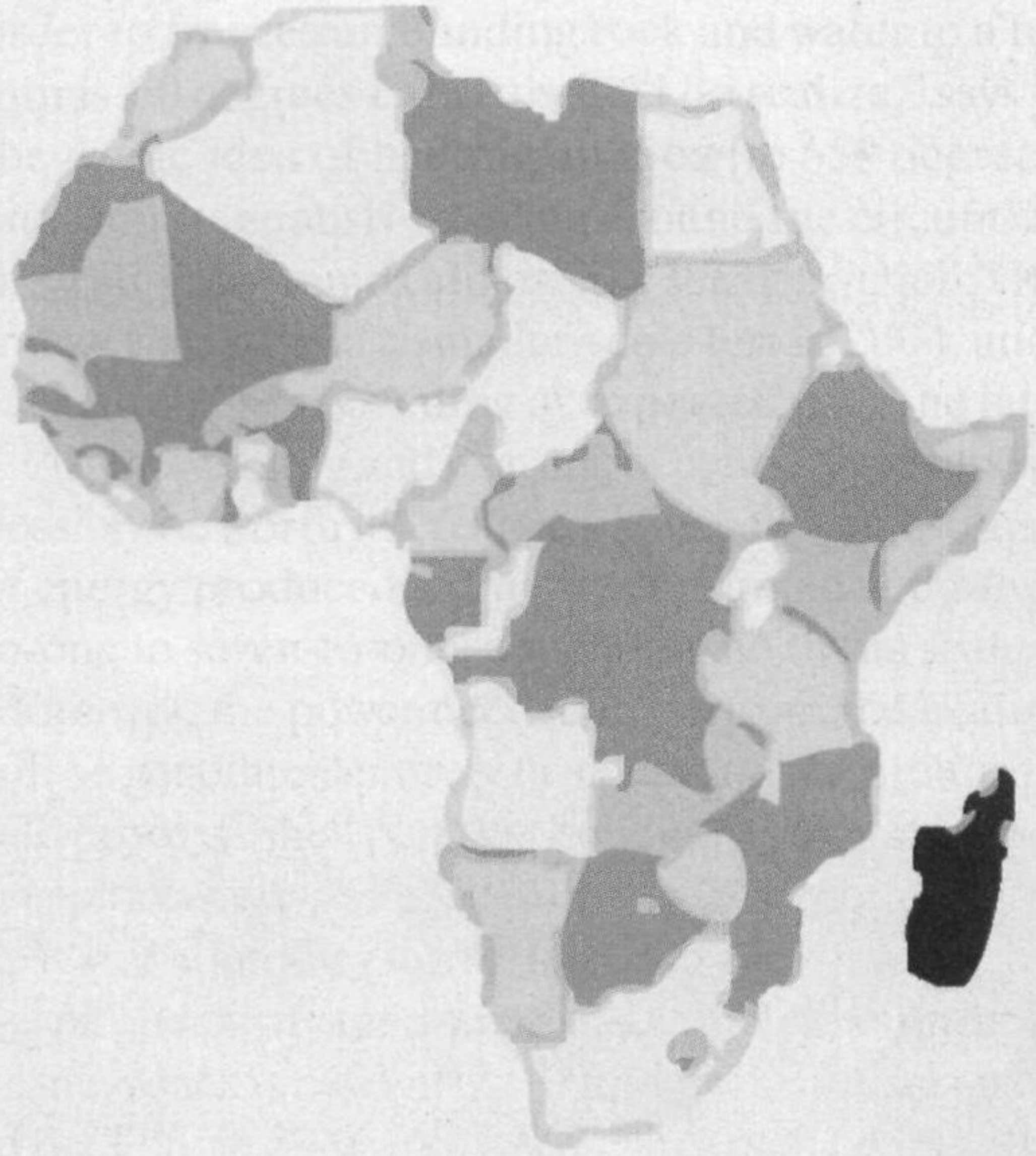


Mapping a Path to Prosperity

Though just a few miles off the Mozambique coast, Madagascar feels much closer to Asia than Africa. The faces could be Malaysian, Indian, or Indonesian, and culturally too, people are softly spoken and sanguine in their outlook.



In its peaceful history Madagascar has seen several colonial influences, but by far the strongest remnants belong to the French and their legacy can be appreciated in the classic architecture and fine gastronomy.

The people of Madagascar describe their own approach to life as *'mora mora'*, meaning 'slowly slowly'. But President Marc Ravalomanana has other ideas. Madagascar's vision for socio-economic development is enshrined in the MAP (Madagascar Action Plan). This document is the President's roadmap to a better life for his people, and the brainchild of Australian consultants brought in especially for the task.

"We created the MAP after speaking with our people and establishing what it is that they need," says Ravalomanana. "This will be our roadmap for the next five years; how we will move from the current state of poverty through economic growth to a better life."

The MAP's model begins by taking an honest look at where Madagascar stands on a set of development indicators. It then establishes a mission statement for where it wants to be by the target year of 2012, and lists quantifiable targets for success in each area. Perhaps most strikingly, the responsibility for completion of each target is explicitly assigned to an individual—be it the Governor of the Central Bank, the CEO of EDBM (Economic Development Board of Madagascar), or one of the President's recently rationalized portfolio of Ministers.

President Ravalomanana is keen to emphasize the crucial role that private enterprise will play in the success of this transition: "It is the engine of economic growth, and we are creating the best conditions for promoting growth in the private sector, to allow our exports to succeed and bring down trade barriers."



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Madagascar is a member of COI, Community of the Indian Ocean, which opens up trade access to the EU through French Réunion. It has further benefited from trade with the US through the AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) system. Madagascar has low-cost manpower and its relationship with China, and direct trade route, provides access to cheap materials, leading to it being described as a natural 'bridge between Africa and Asia'.

There are still infrastructural teething problems that need work—electricity and post are expensive—but there have been improvements in transport costs as roads are gradually improved. The most visible change has been in communications where liberalizations have brought competition, wider coverage, and new services, and uptake has been swift.

Prime Minister Charles Rabemananjara is also keen to emphasize the country's peaceful history, and points to last year's elections as further evidence of the political stability and transparent democracy that exists in Madagascar. ■