FIRM-UP: a 5-year-long journey across the lives of Malagasy women and the RG Implementation Research

In 2020 we kicked-off FIRM-UP, a study which represented a lot of "first times" for Madagascar and our team! With FIRM-UP we managed to bring attention to female genital schistosomiasis (FGS) in Madagascar – and thanks to FIRM-UP, Madagascar has become a partner of two of the main studies ever conducted for FGS: MAP-FGS and WINGS4FGS. Additionally, thanks to FIRM-UP, we launched initiatives for the prevention of cervical cancer (CC) in the country, supporting the initiation of the HPV vaccination campaign as well as being among the first teams conceptualising integrated services for FGS and CC. Last but not least, FIRM-UP was the first grant ever of our research group paving the way for the establishment of our independent research group and the initiation of many more studies on FGS and HPV.

Midwife conducting colposcopy, CSB Ankazomborona, Boeny, Madagascar (Lassmann, 2026).

But what is FIRM-UP about?

Originally funded by CORNTD, it had the idea of assessing the impact of an awareness raising initiative on the uptake of a diagnostic package offered at the primary level of care. Initially, a screening was offered to 500 women that were then followed-up for five years thanks to the additional fundings that we managed to secure through the EKFS and DZIF. During the course of these five years, we were able to produce nine scientific publications from the project and organise twice an international colposcopy course training with a total of 42 healthcare workers from five European and ten African countries. We delivered 2148 praziquantel treatments and performed 2504 HPV screenings supporting the improvement of women's health in rural communities of Madagascar. Thanks to FIRM-UP, the team could contribute to the establishment of the novel national program for schistosomiasis in Madagascar, having FGS as a top priority for the management of the disease in the country. The study also allowed us to understand the epidemiology of HPV in the country, helping to shape the national strategy for the vaccination program.

CSBs Ankazomborona, Marovoay and Antanambao-Andranolava, Boeny, Madagascar (Lassmann, 2026).

And much more is to come! Thanks to the samples collected during these five years, we will be able to describe the dynamics of FGS and HPV resolution and incidence in Madagascar which will further contribute to expand knowledge locally and globally on two major diseases related to women's health.