

Vôla Manganika Vôla: Money Creeping on Money

An ethnographic study of vanilla exportation in the Northern region of Madagascar.

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Introduction:

From ice cream to body lotion, everyone knows the taste and scent of vanilla, but where does it come from and what is the real cost? This study examines how vanilla production involves a variety of interests, mixed mitigation attempts, and ultimately questions the role we play as consumers.

Did you know:

- ◆ Vanilla is produced in at least 18 countries¹
- ◆ Vanilla originates in Mexico, but the best quality is from Madagascar
- ◆ 60% of the population of SAVA (See Map 1) rely on vanilla exportation²
- ◆ Vanilla is responsible for murder, fraud, sabotage, and corruption in the SAVA region



Map 1: SAVA Region of Madagascar in Red³

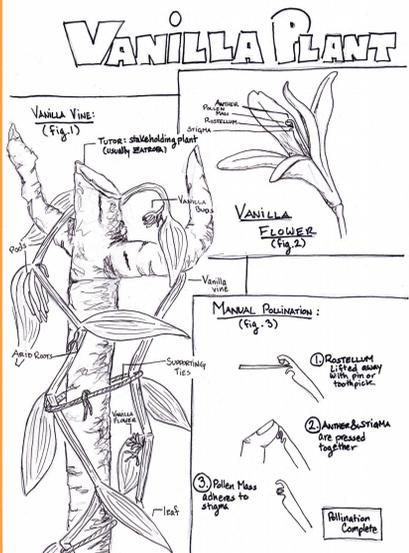


Figure 1, 2, 3 : Vanilla vine, flower anatomy and pollination

How does vanilla get here?

In the SAVA region vanilla exportation is organized in a pyramidal system. Individual growers cultivate vanilla beans. Beans are sold to be cured and prepared. Exporters ship beans by boat across the sea. Importers finally distribute or transform to ice cream or extract. Prices magnify at each step; 8\$ buys 1kg of beans from the grower but only 4oz at the store.

Methods

- ◆ Interviews with thirty stakeholders in the main port city and regional capital
- ◆ Participatory Action Research in the SAVA region
- ◆ Historical and statistical analysis of vanilla production
- ◆ Analysis of materials about production of vanilla

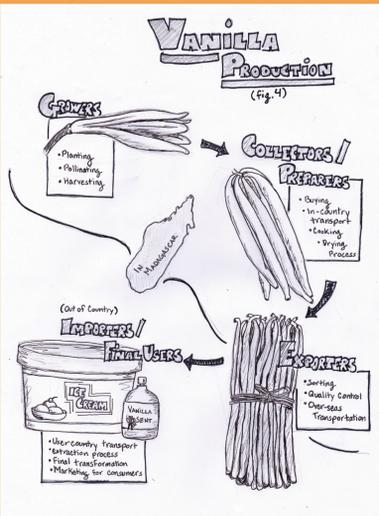


Figure 4: Vanilla Production Diagram

Stakeholders and Concerns

Growers



- Cheated by buyers
- Vulnerable to bandits
- Exposed to Environmental hazards and changes
- Tension between generations
- Distrust amongst neighbors
- Lack of means to produce/collect/export

Producers/Collectors



- Navigating regulations/standards
- Inconsistent quality from growers
- Competition with thieves and bandits
- Fraud and tricks by competitors and growers⁶
- Corrupt officials
- Negotiating with exporters

Exporters



- Cost of transportation by air and boat
- Implementing international regulations
- Competition with Synthetic vanilla
- Upholding Madagascar's reputation
- Intense competition abroad
- Competitors falsely advertising other products as "Madagascar Vanilla"

Importers & Consumers



- Maintaining American standard business model with less infrastructure
- Cost of packaging and storage
- Supply & Demand in consumer country
- Reaching standard quality vanilla products



Vanilla's Impact:

Environmental Vulnerability:

Frequent typhoons; climate change; erosion; irrigation; sterile soil

Power Inequality:

Political inequality; Social divisions between Urban and rural, capital and provincial; Extreme economic disparity

Economic Uncertainty:

Fluctuation and speculation; inability to pay for basic needs; inflation and international competition

Political Instability:

Inefficient bureaucracy; inconsistent of enforcement; corruption and instability

Distrust amongst Actors:

Conspiracy; intentional sabotage of product and equipment; cheating and fraud

Limited Alternatives:

No major universities; Few opportunities for educated youth

Decline in Quality:

Little incentive to cultivate well; frequent fraud; picking early; curing in vacuum seal bags

Mitigations & Complication:

International Aid:

International projects historically targeted priorities of importers and exporters exclusively⁷

Diversify Production:

Growers turn to other cash crops like coffee, cloves, and cinnamon to supplement income

Vertical integration

Madecasse represents one of few attempts to produce finished product in country⁸

Fair Trade Practices:

Fraudulent claims of fair trade, and limited partial implementation⁹

Relabeling/Substitutes:

False labeling with "Madagascar Vanilla" and synthetic substitutes

Regulations/Associations:

Attempts to professionalize stagnated by political scandal, and strategic intervention by outside parties

Farmers co ops:

Limited effectiveness in areas with existing communal cooperatives

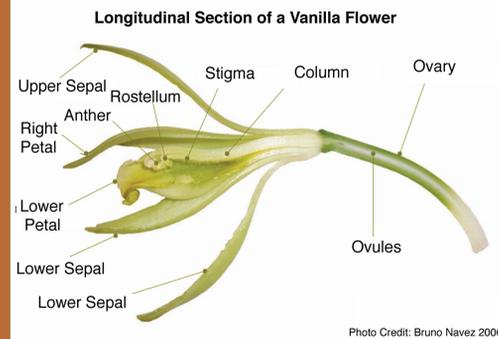
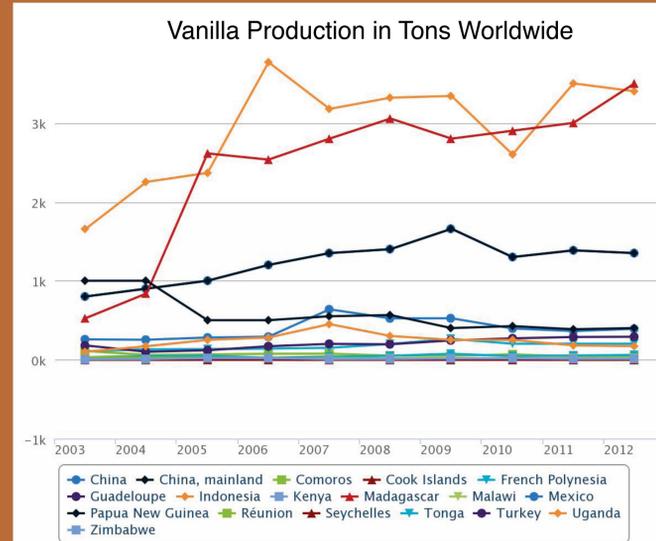


Photo Credit: Bruno Navez 2006

Analysis:

Colonial laws and trade practices which favored French export of Malagasy Vanilla largely continued to be practiced after Madagascar's independence in 1960. Periods of nationalization, market fluctuation, natural disaster and political crisis have created instability in the vanilla market.

Efforts to deal with some of the negative impacts have been created on all levels, however conflicting interests and investment in the current system hinder progress. Stakeholders and actors used language or discourse of blame to describe potential causes of negative impacts. Each saw himself as incapable of changing the attitudes or actions of others actors and therefore helpless to solve issues. As a result many interventions were instituted at the level of a single actor, and were thus limited in their effectiveness.



Graph 1: Malagasy vanilla (red) increases though price fluctuates drastically (Graph 2)¹⁰



Conclusions

- ◆ Vanilla brings significant economic activity to Northern Madagascar
- ◆ Historically great possibilities for economic development have not resulted in cooperation between actors
- ◆ Growers bear the brunt of negative impacts from exportation

- ◆ Attempts to mitigate negative impacts are stagnated by the exportation power structure and remain at one level of stakeholders
- ◆ Growers, Collectors, Exporters continuously strategize and negotiate for needs, but are largely trapped by legacy of colonial extraction
- ◆ Diversification may reduce dependence on the international market for growers, however more opportunities must be made available



Further Questions to Consider:

- ◆ Who is culpable for negative impacts of the current exportation model?
- ◆ What other strategies could be available for mitigating exportation?
- ◆ Where should efforts be focused in the future to make the greatest impact?
- ◆ How has exportation changed since 2015?

Madagascar's Exported Vanilla Value 1961-2011¹¹



Citations:

¹All photographs and figures by Caellagh Morrissey unless otherwise indicated¹ Ecott, T. (2004). Vanilla: Travels in Search of the Ice Cream Orchid. New York: Grove/Atlantic Inc.² Levita, R. (2013, November 7). Director of Communication for the Region SAVA. (C. Morrissey, Interviewer) Sambava, Madagascar. SAVA. ³Map of Sava Region - (Monographie SAVA - October 2011, 2011) ⁴Rain, Patricia.(2004). *The Cultural History of the World's Favorite Flavor and Fragrance*. New York: Penguin. ⁵Tyler-Herbst, Sharon and Ron Herbst. (2007) *The Food Lover's Companion*. New York: Barron's Educational. ⁶Randria, A. (2013, November 20). Collector of Vanilla. (C. Morrissey, Interviewer) Sambava, Reynolds, L. (1994). *La Vanille de Madagascar: La culture exigeante d'une espèce d'exportation*. Independent Study Project, School for International Training, Antananarivo. Retrieved November 30, 2013. ⁷STABEX. (1998). *Manuel de Vulgarization de la Culture semi-intensive de la Vanille*. Antananarivo, Republic of Madagascar: European Union. Retrieved November 30, 2013. ⁸Document Cadre de Politique Economique 1996-1999. (1996). Antananarivo: Republic of Madagascar. Retrieved November 19, 2013. ⁹"Our Impact." *madecasse.com*. Retrieved on May 2, 2015 from <http://www.madecasse.com/our-impact/> ¹⁰Randriamiharsoa, G. J. (2013, November 15). Vanilla Beans Curer and Exporter. (C. Morrissey, Interviewer) Antalaha. ¹¹Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations. (2012). FAOSTAT. Rome, Italy: FAO. Retrieved from <http://data.fao.org/ref/coc9cae-15ef-45e4-ac06-3b41109559b2.html?version=1.0>.