

# PROJECTS ADOPTED BY 4CITIES4DEV

ACCESS TO GOOD, CLEAN AND FAIR FOOD: THE FOOD COMMUNITIES' EXPERIENCE

## Madagascar Mananara Vanilla Slow Food Presidium



© Paola Vitesi

Slow Food Presidium adopted by the city of Riga



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## PROJECTS FOR THE SAFEGUARD OF BIODIVERSITY

Slow Food Presidia safeguard small-scale, endangered local productions, promote specific areas, and recover traditional trades and processing techniques. Currently, there are over 300 Presidia projects around the world, which involve more than 10,000 producers: farmers, shepherds, fishermen, artisan processors... To safeguard these products also means to preserve high-mountain pastures and tropical forests, to ensure a sustainable future for small-scale producers - from the Andes to African coastlines, to preserve hundreds of animal breeds, and to give future generation a clean planet with a rich biodiversity. Presidia are promoted and coordinated by Slow Food. The association is active all over the world, but has a specific focus on developing countries, where the safeguard of biodiversity is not only important to improve the quality of life, but to ensure the very survival of local people.





## THE CONTEXT

### MANANARA NORD BIOSPHERE RESERVE, MADAGASCAR

The Aztecs were the first to use vanilla, and today it is still cultivated in the tropical forests of Central America. But some of the world's best vanilla is grown in Madagascar, far from its homeland. Introduced to the island by French colonists in the 1840s, vanilla flourished in the rainforests in the north of the island. Known as Bourbon vanilla, it soon became famous for its intense fragrance and distinct notes of plum, dried fruit and cloves. Madagascar currently produces over two-thirds of the world's vanilla, with cultivation concentrated in the humid northern region. Large plantations are replacing the traditional cultivation methods, but in the Mananara Nord Biosphere Reserve, created by UNESCO and ANGAP in the far northeast of the island, the Presidium producers still grow vanilla in the shade of rainforest trees, a few meters above sea level. The *Vanilla planifolia* orchid has long, thin, flexible climbing stems, with few branches. Mananara vanilla grows up living supports, namely the native forest trees. Once the plants reach human height, the stems are folded over (*bouclage*) to encourage the development of flowers along the descending part of the stem. In vanilla's native regions, stingless *Melipona* bees pollinate the flowers, but in Madagascar, as in other countries, the flowers are pollinated by hand. The plant flowers between September and January, and every dry morning the producers delicately pollinate the buds by hand, using a little stick. After pollination, the flowers develop into long pale-green pods, odorless and full of seeds, similar to fresh green beans. The black, soft, vanilla-scented pods are obtained after a lengthy production process. As soon as they are harvested, the green pods are immersed for a few minutes in hot water, then left to sit for two days in a wooden box, lined with a woolen blanket called the *drape à vanille*. The pods are then dried in the sun: every day for a whole month, the pods are laid out on the *drape à vanille* over cane or wood racks and exposed to the sun for 2 to 3 hours, then wrapped in the drape and left for another couple of hours in the sun before being brought back into the house. The pods give off moisture and endemic enzymes free vanilla's main aromatic component, vanillin. The vanilla's processing finishes in special storerooms, where the pods are arranged on wood or cane shelves and regularly checked and sorted. From the moment the pods are dried until the end of the process, the producers work the individual pods by hand, massaging them with their fingers to stretch them out.



## THE PROJECT

The Presidium was created in collaboration with the NGO Intercoopération, the operator DEC (Development Environmental Consultant) and ANGAP (Association Nationale pour la Gestion des Aires Protégées Malgaches). With the support of the Presidium, around 900 producers have organized themselves into a cooperative. They are working together to improve the cultivation and processing techniques and to promote the vanilla on the international and national market. The villages' remote position and the single unpaved, rough road have severely hindered direct sales. Even though vanilla is one of the world's most expensive spices, the growers usually receive only a tiny share of its market value and most of the profits go to intermediaries. By creating a cooperative and facilitating certification and direct sales, the Presidium wants to guarantee the producers a better profit margin, which can then be reinvested



into the local community. The project also has an important environmental aspect: Madagascar has an extraordinary wealth of biodiversity and the vanilla producers live in one of the country's few national parks. Working in collaboration with the Mananara Biosphere park authorities, the Presidium producers are committed to respecting the forest, avoiding "slash and burn" agriculture or the indiscriminate cutting of trees for timber.

## **OBJECTIVES**

For many other traditional products, attention is focused on the local market. However, in this case, Slow Food's development of the Presidium has concentrated on bringing

the vanilla up to the quality standards demanded by the export market. This decision was dictated by the fact that vanilla is an export crop for which there is little local demand. The emphasis is therefore on improving the product's quality and preserving traditional techniques, which have developed out of an age-old culture. Through this work, the project hopes to obtain a fair return for the producers, who are often crushed by the multinationals that control the market for these "colonial" products.

At a practical level, the project's objectives are to support the producers so that they can manage direct sales, and to promote the product on the international market.



## SOCIAL IMPACT

By promoting a sustainably grown and processed product, the Presidium wants to protect the environment and also give the local population an opportunity for development and increased income. Through the improvement of cultivation and initial processing techniques, the strengthening of an internal control system and the promotion of the product on the market, the local cooperative's producers can obtain a much more profitable price for their product, increasing the share of added value produced at a local level.

## BENEFICIARIES

### 918 GROWERS

joined in KOMAM (Koperativa Mpamboly Ambanivolo Mananara)

### THE COOPERATIVE OF GROWERS FROM MANANARA VILLAGES

living in 36 villages in the Manarara-Nord Biosphere Reserve, in the northeast of the country.

### CURRENT PARTNERS

### EUROPEAN UNION









## PROJECT STAGES

### 2004-2005

The association of Mananara growers is formed, with the aim of improving the quality of products grown in the reserve (vanilla and cloves) and encouraging their commercialization. The association is closely connected to the authority that manages the Mananara Nord Biosphere Reserve, and thanks to the collaboration with Slow Food, the Mananara Vanilla Presidium is created. In 2005 it receives an organic certification from Ecocert, according to CEE and US NOP standards. The association initially has 138 members, spread around five villages in the reserve.

### 2006-2007

In 2006 Slow Food funds the participation of delegates from Mananara in the 2006 Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre, publishes promotional materials, supports the search for new market channels and builds a headquarters for the producers' association. In 2007 the product receives Fairtrade certification (Fair Trade, Max Havelar) from Flo Cert. The number of members in the association of Mananara growers reaches 585.



### 2008-2009

The Presidium works to strengthen the internal quality control system, to make sure that organic certification standards are met, and funds the acquisition of materials for processing and storing the vanilla.

In 2008, five Presidium representatives attend the third Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre in Turin, where they sell 20 kilos of their product. The proceeds are used to fund the next year's activities. The week before the event, the five delegates are hosted by the Slow Food Forlì and Bologna convivia and visit some local producers (Presidia and food communities), as part of the on-going exchange between producers from around the world that is at the center of Slow Food's activities. At the end of 2009, the association has 644 producers and has a cooperative statute.

### 2010-2011

In October 2010, four Presidium representatives participate in the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre. During the event, they sell 30 kilos of vanilla, imported directly without intermediaries with the help of the other Madagascar Presidium, for Lake Alaotra Dista rice. The operation allows them to experiment with direct sales, without the interference of large-scale international distributors. The following year, photographer Paola Viesi visits the Presidium to shoot the vanilla production chain, meet the producers and collect useful information about the project's development. The resulting images and stories are used to promote and publicize the product.









## PLANS FOR THE FUTURE

In summer 2012, Slow Food organized a technical visit to evaluate the Presidium's circumstances and talk to the producers about the priorities for strengthening the Presidium. The producers noted the need to strengthen the cooperative's organization so that it can manage sales more autonomously. Work will continue on promoting the vanilla and there will be further research into distribution and sales channels that can guarantee fair returns to the producers.







#### **4CITIES4DEV FOR THE PRESIDIUM**

The *4Cities4Dev* project involves various activities in support of the Mananara Vanilla Presidium, carried out by Slow Food in collaboration with the City of Riga.

- 1** Technical visit by an agronomist and Slow Food representatives to evaluate developments and plan future activities for the vanilla Presidium.
- 2** Official visit by representatives from the City of Riga, to launch diplomatic and commercial relationships between the two municipalities.

- 3** Improvement of the internal control system and of communication between the various villages involved in the project.

- 4** Publicizing the product using promotional materials (photostory, brochure, website), labeling and packaging.

- 5** Participation of the Presidium in the Riga City Festival in Riga, Latvia, from August 16 to 19, 2012, and the Salone del Gusto and Terra Madre in Turin, Italy from October 25 to 29, 2012.



Slow Food Presidium adopted by the city of Riga as part of the *4Cities4Dev* project



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