

CHILD LABOUR IN VANILLA AND CENTELLA SUPPLY CHAINS IN MADAGASCAR

Evidence-based analysis

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Executive summary

Madagascar is a major global supplier of botanical ingredients used in the food, flavour, fragrance and cosmetics industries. This paper examines child labour in two important export supply chains vanilla and *Centella asiatica* through an evidence-based human rights analysis. Drawing on international and domestic legal standards, primary institutional data, and field documentation, it assesses the nature and extent of child labour risks, identifies key evidence gaps, and proposes a framework for future research and responsible business due diligence.

The analysis finds that child labour remains a structural feature of Madagascar's predominantly rural agricultural economy, driven by persistent poverty, barriers to education, informal labour arrangements and limited enforcement capacity. Agriculture accounts for the overwhelming majority of child labour in the country, making botanical supply chains an important area for human rights attention. While Madagascar has established a legal framework that broadly aligns with international child rights and labour standards, implementation remains constrained by limited inspection capacity, weak institutional reach into informal sectors, and insufficient social protection programmes.

The paper highlights an important asymmetry in the available evidence. Vanilla is Madagascar's best-documented agricultural export with respect to child labour, supported by the ILO/USDOL SAVABE baseline survey—the most comprehensive commodity-specific study currently available. That survey confirms significant child participation in vanilla production, including hazardous work associated with the crop's labour-intensive production cycle. By contrast, evidence relating to *Centella asiatica* is considerably more limited. Existing sourcing-side documentation and field observations indicate comparable structural risk factors, including household poverty, seasonal dependence on children's labour and limited educational opportunities, but do not permit reliable estimates of prevalence. The paper therefore argues that differences in available evidence should not be interpreted as differences in underlying risk.

Building on this evidence, the paper adopts a human rights-based analytical framework grounded in the PANEL principles and an intersectional approach. It distinguishes verified findings from documented testimony, plausible but unconfirmed claims, and recognised evidence gaps, thereby providing a transparent basis for analysis and future field research. Particular attention is given to the relationship between child labour and the right to education, the importance of age verification and birth registration, and the responsibilities of both State authorities and business actors under international human rights and responsible business standards.

The analysis concludes that addressing child labour in Madagascar's botanical supply chains requires more than compliance with legal standards or reliance on first-tier supplier audits. Effective prevention depends on stronger implementation of labour protections, improved traceability within complex supply chains, enhanced access to education and social services, and meaningful engagement with affected communities. For companies sourcing from Madagascar, responsible business conduct requires human rights due diligence that extends beyond direct suppliers to smallholder producers and informal collection networks. For policymakers and researchers, the paper identifies priority evidence gaps and proposes a field documentation strategy capable of generating robust, ethically grounded and policy-relevant evidence to support future interventions.

Chapter 1. Introduction

1.1 Background

Madagascar is a principal source of natural vanilla and of centella asiatica, both significant inputs into global food, fragrance and cosmetics value chains. This paper examines child labour in these two commodities.

Child labour in Madagascar is not confined to any single export crop; it is a structural feature of a predominantly rural, agrarian economy with limited social protection. UNICEF and the ILO report that 47 per cent of children aged five to seventeen work nationally, often in conditions inappropriate to their age, and identify Haute Matsiatra and Androy – neither a vanilla nor centella-producing region – as the most affected areas, at 65 and 62 per cent respectively¹. These figures originate in the MICS 2018 household survey², and the U.S. Department of Labor's 2024 findings, drawing on the same underlying ILO analysis, narrow the lens to younger children: 42.8 per cent of those aged five to fourteen work, 91.1 per cent of working children in that age band are in agriculture, and 11.0 per cent of fifteen-to-seventeen-year-olds are in hazardous work³. Agriculture, in other words, is not one sector among several where Malagasy children work; it is where the great majority of them are found.

1.2 Problem statement

The central problem this paper addresses is not an absence of legal standards. Madagascar's domestic law prohibits child labour and hazardous work in terms that, on paper, largely track international conventions. The problem is implementation, visibility and documentation. Work performed within smallholder households, collection-based supply chains and informal family labour arrangements is seasonal, dispersed and often indistinguishable, to an outside observer or a first-tier supplier audit, from ordinary family chores. The Department of Labor's 2024 findings report puts this plainly: limited enforcement resources impede the protection of children from the worst forms of child labour, and social programmes remain insufficient to the scale of the problem in agriculture and other affected sectors⁴.

The documentation gap between vanilla and centella is real and should not be flattened. Vanilla's evidence is survey-grade and commodity-specific; centella's is sourcing-side, locality-specific and, in the case of the field material discussed in Chapter 4, drawn from two collection sites rather than a representative sample. Treating the two as equivalent would misstate what is actually known about each.

1.3 Research objective and questions

This paper's objective is to provide a concise, evidence-disciplined analysis of child labour in vanilla and centella asiatica that separates verified findings from plausible-but-unconfirmed claims and from outright evidence gaps, and that translates this separation into a usable field research agenda for three district-level sites: Moramanga, Farafangana and Vangaindrano. It is organised around four questions: what legal standards bind Madagascar and the companies that source from it; what verified evidence shows about child labour in agriculture and in vanilla specifically; what can responsibly be said about centella without overstating sourcing-side evidence; and what primary data the three field sites must generate, and through what ethical procedure.

¹UNICEF Madagascar, "Combating child labour in Madagascar: a strengthened commitment with the support of ILO and UNICEF," 22 April 2025.

²UNICEF Madagascar / Institut National de la Statistique, Multiple Indicator Cluster Survey 6 (MICS 2018), child labour module.

³See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

⁴See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

1.4 Methodology and evidentiary standards

The analysis combines legal interpretation, a structured desk review and a field-research design. The legal component draws on the Convention on the Rights of the Child, the African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, ILO Conventions No. 138 and No. 182, and the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and OECD Guidelines as the relevant business and human rights standards. The desk review relies principally on UNICEF, ILO, U.S. Department of Labor and SAVABE primary materials, each cited to its original source rather than to a secondary summary. Throughout, four evidentiary tiers are used and named explicitly in the text: a finding is verified where it is drawn directly from a primary survey or government report; it is recorded as documented key-informant testimony where it derives from a named field interview with an identified institutional actor, in which case it is treated as a single, attributable source rather than as representative or generalisable evidence; it is flagged as requiring field confirmation where it is plausible but unsupported by Madagascar-specific data; and it is recorded as an evidence gap where no credible basis for a claim currently exists.

The field component itself draws on two distinct categories of material. The first is a structured interview with a labour controller of the Comité Régional de Lutte contre le Travail des Enfants (CRLTE) for the Alaotra Mangoro region, presented in Chapter 5 as documented key-informant testimony⁵. The second is a situation note on centella asiatica collection in Farafangana and Ampasimpotsy, drawing on audit observations and picker interviews, presented in Chapter 4 alongside the other available centella evidence⁶. Consistent with standard child-protection research practice, the interviewee is identified by role and institution rather than by name, and no village, employer or child is identified in any specific or locatable way.

1.5 Limitations

- Evidentiary scope: every quantitative figure in this paper is cited to a primary or sourcing-side source named at the point of use; where no such source exists for a claim, the claim is not made.
- Commodity asymmetry: strong survey evidence exists for vanilla and for agricultural child labour generally; for centella, sourcing-side and locality-specific material allows this paper to describe risk factors and documented findings, but not to assert a prevalence rate comparable to vanilla's.
- Fieldwork status: Moramanga, Farafangana and Vangaindrano can generate rich qualitative and mechanism-level evidence, but unless sampling is statistically designed for representativeness, findings from these sites should be read as case documentation, not as district or national prevalence estimates.

⁵Field interview with a labour controller, Comité Régional de Lutte contre le Travail des Enfants (CRLTE), Alaotra Mangoro region, conducted 3 February 2026. Unpublished field document held by the research team. Cited as documented key-informant testimony: single-source and not representative of the wider region.

⁶Situation note on child labour in centella asiatica collection areas (Farafangana and Ampasimpotsy), including audit observations, picker declarations and focus group material. Unpublished field document held by the research team.

Chapter 2. Legal and policy framework

2.1 International child rights and labour standards

Article 32 of the Convention on the Rights of the Child establishes the operative international standard: children have a right to protection from economic exploitation and from work likely to be hazardous, to interfere with their education, or to harm their health or development⁷. The African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child reinforces this at the regional level and is, if anything, more exacting in the African context because its protection extends expressly to informal as well as formal work⁸. ILO Convention No. 138 supplies the minimum-age architecture, distinguishing ordinary employment from permissible light work for adolescents⁹, while Convention No. 182 requires immediate, prioritised action against the worst forms of child labour, a category that includes hazardous work regardless of whether the work in question would otherwise fall below a general minimum-age threshold¹⁰. The Department of Labor's 2024 findings confirm that Madagascar has ratified the principal international child labour conventions and that its domestic legislation is, in the Department's assessment, in line with the relevant international standards¹¹ – a conclusion this paper treats as significant precisely because it shifts the analytical weight away from norm-setting and onto implementation.

2.2 Domestic legal framework

Madagascar's domestic framework sets the minimum age for work at fifteen and the minimum age for hazardous work at eighteen, grounded in Article 24 of the Constitution, Article 147, of the Law 2024-014 (Labour Code), and Articles 2 and 19 of Decree No. 2007-563 as amended by Decree No. 2018-009^{12,13}. Both instruments enumerate specific hazardous occupations and activities prohibited to children, and both meet the Department of Labor's assessment of international-standard compliance. In 2024, Madagascar ratified a new Labour Code that strengthened several labour protections, including administrative procedures governing inspections of private homes employing domestic workers, and the Ministry of Labour subsequently ran nationwide training for inspectors on its new provisions¹⁴. UNICEF separately reports that Law No. 2024-014 of 14 August 2024 extends labour inspectorate competence explicitly into the informal sector and into domestic work¹⁵ – a jurisdictional extension of direct relevance to botanical supply chains, since collection-based and smallholder agricultural labour is, almost by definition, informal.

2.3 Enforcement capacity and institutional architecture

The enforcement gap is the framework's most consequential weakness, and it is now possible to state its scale with some precision rather than in general terms. In 2024, Madagascar had 235 labour inspectors; the Department of Labor's own recommendation is to raise that figure to 307 in order to provide adequate coverage of a labour force it estimates at roughly 12.2 million people, and it further recommends dedicated funding for transport so that inspections can reach rural and informal worksites rather than remaining concentrated in urban, formally registered enterprises¹⁶.

⁷Convention on the Rights of the Child, adopted 20 November 1989, entered into force 2 September 1990, art. 32.

⁸African Charter on the Rights and Welfare of the Child, adopted 11 July 1990, entered into force 29 November 1999, arts. 11 and 15.

⁹ILO Convention No. 138 concerning Minimum Age for Admission to Employment, 1973.

¹⁰ILO Convention No. 182 concerning the Prohibition and Immediate Action for the Elimination of the Worst Forms of Child Labour, 1999.

¹¹See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

¹²Republic of Madagascar, Labour Code, arts. 147; Constitution of Madagascar, art. 24.

¹³Decree No. 2007-563 (Madagascar), as amended by Decree No. 2018-009, on the prohibition of hazardous child labour.

¹⁴See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

¹⁵UNICEF Madagascar (2025), citing Law No. 2024-014 of 14 August 2024 extending labour inspectorate competence to the informal sector and domestic work.

¹⁶See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

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This is the single fact in the entire evidence base most directly relevant to vanilla and centella supply chain governance: production and collection sites for both commodities are, almost without exception, rural, dispersed and outside the inspectorate's practical reach.

Enforcement is not confined to labour inspection. Madagascar's Ministry of Justice prosecuted eleven individuals for sex trafficking in 2024 and secured four convictions, including of a French national, while the country's approximately 765 child protection networks – of which an estimated 455 currently provide functioning assistance through public hospitals and health units – represent the principal social-response infrastructure for child victims more broadly¹⁷. Targeted social programmes exist but are narrow in scope: the Ministry of Labour's Manjary Soa Center provides educational support to child labour survivors, a separate emergency shelter in Antananarivo (Centre d'Accueil d'Urgence) receives police-referred children, and the Mavitrika Mianata school canteen programme, run with Catholic Relief Services, Global Communities and U.S. Department of Agriculture funding, fed more than 80,800 children in the country's southern and south-eastern regions during the reporting year¹⁸. None of these programmes is sized to the scale of the underlying problem, and the Department of Labor's report is explicit that they are not.

2.4 National policy direction

UNICEF and the ILO report that Madagascar is developing Phase 2 of its National Action Plan to Combat Child Labour, covering 2025 to 2040, with support directed to the Ministry of Labour, Employment and the Civil Service, and that the country became an Alliance 8.7 Pathfinder Country in 2018¹⁹. The Committee on the Rights of the Child, in its 2022 concluding observations, recommended that Madagascar accelerate adoption of a renewed national plan, expand public awareness efforts, and increase the number of labour inspectors²⁰ – a recommendation that anticipates, almost to the figure, the Department of Labor's subsequent 235-to-307 calculation. Notwithstanding this momentum, the Department of Labor's 2024 report states without qualification that Madagascar does not currently have a comprehensive national action plan for the elimination of child labour²¹. The honest policy conclusion is that planning is in motion but unconsolidated, and that the country's institutional commitments currently outpace its funded delivery capacity.

2.5 Business and human rights standards

Companies sourcing from Madagascar carry responsibilities under business and human rights standards that do not depend on whether child labour occurs within their own direct employment. The applicable standard, under the UN Guiding Principles and the OECD Guidelines, is broader: a company should identify, prevent, mitigate and account for adverse human rights impacts connected to its operations, products or services through its business relationships, including relationships several tiers removed from direct contractual privity^{22,23}. For botanical supply chains built on smallholder production and multi-tier collection networks, this means that assurances obtained from a tier-one exporter – even assurances obtained in good faith – do not discharge the underlying responsibility, because the exporter itself typically has limited visibility into conditions at the farm or collection-point level. The relevant due diligence question is therefore one of traceability and grievance access reaching below the first tier, not a question that first-tier auditing alone can answer.

¹⁷See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

¹⁸See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 200 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

¹⁹See note 4 above (UNICEF Madagascar, 22 April 2025).

²⁰Committee on the Rights of the Child, Concluding Observations on the Combined Fifth and Sixth Periodic Reports of Madagascar, CRC/C/MDG/CO/5-6 (2022).

²¹See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

²²United Nations Human Rights Council, Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights, A/HRC/17/31 (2011).

²³OECD, OECD Guidelines for Multinational Enterprises on Responsible Business Conduct (Paris: OECD Publishing, 2023).

Chapter 3. Analytical framework

3.1 Defining child labour for this research

Not all work performed by children is child labour, and the distinction is load-bearing throughout this paper. Child labour, in the sense relevant here, means work prohibited because of the child's age, work that is hazardous by its nature or conditions, work that interferes with education, or work that harms health, safety, morals or development. The SAVABE survey operationalises this with particular care, classifying a child as in child labour if the child is engaged in a worst form of work; works twelve consecutive hours without rest; is under fourteen and engaged for at least one hour a day in an economic activity producing a good or service for external consumption; or is under fourteen, or aged fifteen to seventeen, and engaged in abusive or hazardous domestic work²⁴. Field documentation in this paper's three district sites should apply an equivalent task-level test – recording the child's age, the specific task, its duration and timing relative to the school day, the tools and conditions involved, the payment arrangement, and who directed the work – rather than relying on a household's own characterisation of an activity as helping out or as employment.

3.2 Why agriculture is the central focus

The decision to centre this analysis on agriculture is not a framing choice; it follows from the data. The Department of Labor's 2024 figures show that 91.1 per cent of working children aged five to fourteen are in agriculture, against 3.1 per cent in industry and 5.8 per cent in services²⁵. This does not mean every agricultural commodity carries equivalent child labour risk, and the commodity-by-commodity analysis in Chapter 4 resists that flattening explicitly. It does mean that any serious child labour strategy for Madagascar's botanical sector has to engage family farms, informal collection arrangements and processing tasks as its primary terrain, rather than treating formal plantation or factory employment as the relevant unit of analysis.

3.3 Why schooling is central to the analysis

Child labour and the right to education cannot be analysed separately in the Malagasy context, because the two outcomes move together in the data. The Department of Labor reports that 70.1 per cent of children aged five to fourteen attend school nationally, while 31.8 per cent of those aged seven to fourteen combine work and school, and identifies informal school fees, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching staff, food insecurity, limited rural transport, and the absence of sanitation and menstrual hygiene facilities as the principal barriers keeping children out of school and, correspondingly, more exposed to labour²⁶. The SAVABE survey's school-attendance findings for the SAVA region add useful texture to this national picture: overall attendance in the surveyed communes stood at 88.3 per cent, including 67.9 per cent among children who had already reached the minimum working age, and girls attended at a notably higher rate than boys, 91.5 against 85.0 per cent²⁷. The survey also found that combining work with school was the norm rather than the exception among economically active children below fourteen – almost 95 per cent of economically active five-to-thirteen-year-olds were still enrolled – but that the proportion fell sharply at fourteen, the age at which supervised light work becomes legally permissible, suggesting that legal eligibility to work, more than any single economic shock, is itself a driver of withdrawal from school. For field research, the operative question is accordingly never simply whether a child works, but whether the work measurably affects attendance, punctuality, homework completion, repetition rates or the transition into lower secondary school.

²⁴See note 1 above (SAVABE baseline survey).

²⁵See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

²⁶See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

²⁷See note 1 above (SAVABE baseline survey).

3.4 Why birth registration and age verification matter

Reliable age verification underwrites every other protection in this framework, and the SAVABE survey's own findings on legal working status illustrate why it so rarely functions in practice. Only 7.7 per cent of economically active children in the sample – 1.6 per cent of all children – met the survey's definition of a legally working child, and even within that small group, no case involved documented authorisation from a labour inspector, the formal precondition for permissible work by a fourteen-year-old²⁸. Less than four per cent of household heads surveyed could correctly state the minimum working age, and only 4.3 per cent of children themselves could do so. In the absence of accessible civil registration and a functioning permit system, a child's age becomes, in practical terms, unverifiable to any collector, employer or labour inspector who might otherwise apply the law. Any monitoring system this paper's findings inform should therefore connect age assurance to civil registration support rather than to punitive exclusion of undocumented children, who are already among the most vulnerable to begin with.

3.5 PANEL and intersectionality as organising lenses

This paper organises its analysis around the PANEL framework (participation, accountability, non-discrimination, empowerment and legality) together with an intersectionality lens, while treating both strictly as structure rather than as a substitute for evidence. Participation requires methods capable of safely eliciting children's own views, which this paper addresses in Chapter 5. Accountability requires enforceable duties running to both State and corporate actors, addressed in Chapter 2 and Chapter 7. Non-discrimination requires sustained attention to girls, to children with disabilities, to children in households without two resident parents – a category the SAVABE data shows are markedly more likely to work than children in two-parent households – and to children excluded from services by distance or lack of documentation. Empowerment requires concrete, funded pathways back into school or into safer household arrangements, not aspirational language. Legality requires that every task identified in the field be classified against the specific domestic and ILO thresholds set out in Chapter 2, rather than against an intuitive sense of what counts as exploitative.

²⁸See note 1 above (SAVABE baseline survey).

Chapter 4. Commodity analysis

4.1 Vanilla

Vanilla cultivation is concentrated around the four SAVA districts of Antalaha, Sambava, Vohémar and Andapa in Madagascar's north-east. The region covers 25,578 square kilometres and is home to roughly 1.1 million people, fifteen per cent of them urban, with Sambava functioning as the regional hub and seasonal labour market²⁹. Vanilla exports from the region reached 1,500 tonnes in 2017; 89.7 per cent of SAVABE's sampled households named agriculture as their principal income source, and 82.7 per cent reported that at least one household member owned a vanilla plot. Poverty in the surveyed communes was estimated at approximately 75 per cent against a national consumption threshold of around 125 US dollars a year, and more than a third of households fell into the survey's two poorest wealth quintiles. This is a densely vanilla-dependent regional economy in which household income, school calendars and the pollination and harvest cycle are tightly interwoven, and that interdependence is the frame this paper uses to interpret the child labour statistics that follow, rather than treating them as a matter of individual household choice.

Vanilla is, without qualification, the most thoroughly documented commodity within this paper's scope, and the SAVABE survey's granularity rewards a more detailed treatment than the other commodities can currently support. Among the 895 sampled children, 21.5 per cent had worked at least one hour in the seven days preceding the survey, rising to 30.3 per cent over the preceding twelve months – a gap the survey attributes to the reference week falling before the vanilla harvest season, when many households temporarily draw additional labour, including children's, into the workforce³⁰. Economic activity varied sharply by district, from 11.8 per cent in Sambava to 39 per cent in Vohémar, and overall child labour – the survey's stricter classification – ranged from 9.9 per cent in Sambava to 26.1 per cent in Vohémar.

Within this working population, vanilla itself accounts for a meaningful but secondary share. Among children economically active in the reference week, 12 per cent worked in the vanilla sector specifically (2.6 per cent of all children), while 61.6 per cent worked in other agriculture; among children meeting the stricter child-labour threshold, the comparable split is 10.5 per cent in vanilla against 58.6 per cent in other agriculture³¹. The same asymmetry holds for hazardous work: 67.1 per cent of working children, and 11.1 per cent of all children in the sample, were in conditions the survey classifies as hazardous, and within that group 51.6 per cent were in non-vanilla agriculture against 15.2 per cent in vanilla itself. Three-quarters of all hazardous-work classifications were driven by working conditions rather than by sector alone, and nearly half involved excessively long hours; boys were classified as doing hazardous work roughly twice as often as girls, 17.9 against 8.7 per cent.

The survey's task-level detail on the thirty-four children identified as working directly in vanilla over the preceding twelve months is, on its own, a strong basis for hazard classification independent of any prevalence claim. Plantation preparation – weeding, tilling and irrigation performed by hand with machetes, hoes and spades – accounted for 88 per cent of these children's activities and is treated by the survey as hazardous wherever the tools are used unsupervised. Hand-pollination was the second most common task and pod harvesting the third, followed by drying, night-time guarding of curing beans outside acceptable working hours, transport of heavy loads, scalding with boiling water during bean preparation, and steam-curing with hot liquids – each independently meeting the survey's hazard criteria³². Compensation data reinforces the picture: just over half of working children received no pay at all, and among those who were paid, 97.9 per cent received

²⁹See note 1 above (SAVABE baseline survey).

³⁰See note 1 above (SAVABE baseline survey).

³¹See note 1 above (SAVABE baseline survey).

³²See note 1 above (SAVABE baseline survey).

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less than the legal minimum wage; computed on an hourly basis, 85.3 per cent of paid children earned below the minimum hourly rate, with median pay equivalent to a few US cents per hour.

An earlier ILO-IPEC assessment, conducted in 2011 and published in 2012, estimated that roughly a third of children aged twelve to seventeen worked somewhere in the vanilla supply chain, though predominantly in the fifteen-to-seventeen age band where supervised light work is more readily permissible³³. That figure is now considerably dated – it predates the 2015–2018 vanilla price boom entirely – and the SAVABE figures, current to 2018 and methodologically far more granular, should be treated as the operative baseline. For fieldwork outside SAVA, the central methodological caution is that SAVA's patterns should not be assumed to transfer automatically; the appropriate question for Moramanga, Farafangana and Vangaindrano is whether vanilla cultivation exists at all in those sites and, where it does, what its specific task and seasonal profile looks like.

4.2 *Centella asiatica*

Centella asiatica supplies cosmetic extract markets and differs structurally from vanilla: the principal risk pathway, where it exists, runs through wild or semi-wild collection by pickers paid by weight through intermediaries, rather than through plantation labour. This structure is inherently harder to monitor, because collection can occur away from any fixed farm site, and household members – including children – may be drawn in informally to increase the volume collected against a low per-kilogram price.

Centella's geography is supported by sourcing-side and academic material rather than by a household survey, but it remains usefully specific. People and Plants International records that wild collection of centella in Madagascar involves an estimated 50,000 pickers, the great majority women, concentrated mainly in the Alaotra-Mangoro region – the same region in which Moramanga, one of this paper's three field sites, is located – over a collection season running from October to May, with pickers selling through intermediaries to approximately ten Malagasy exporting companies, and with collection itself requiring a permit from the regional water and forest administration³⁴. The Union for Ethical BioTrade adds sourcing-side detail consistent with this picture: prices paid for centella are generally too low for pickers to reach the equivalent of Madagascar's minimum wage for the hours worked, traceability is scattered in a sector that remains largely informal even where formal buyer programmes exist, and where families lack the means to send children to school, women pickers report bringing their children with them to collection areas³⁵.

This is a materially thinner evidence base than SAVABE's household survey, and this paper does not treat it as equivalent. It does not establish a prevalence rate, a hazard classification, or an age profile of affected children in the way the vanilla figures in section 4.1 do. What it does establish is that centella collection in Madagascar is geographically concentrated rather than diffuse, that Alaotra-Mangoro is the area in which fieldwork is most likely to encounter it, and that the underlying economic mechanism reported by both sourcing-side sources – low per-kilogram pay creating pressure to mobilise additional household labour – is the same mechanism described in general terms above. Field teams working in or near Moramanga should treat centella collection as a commodity meriting deliberate investigation rather than as one to be discovered only if it happens to surface unprompted, and should record, in addition to the minimum evidence set out in Chapter 5, whether collection coincides with the October-to-May season identified above and whether pickers in the area sell to one of the small number of exporting companies this literature identifies or through a more informal, unaffiliated channel.

A situation note prepared on centella collection in two specific localities, Farafangana and Ampasimpotsy, illustrates concretely what such field documentation can look like, while

³³ILO-IPEC, *État des lieux du travail des enfants dans la filière vanille dans la région SAVA* (Geneva: ILO, 2012), citing fieldwork from 2011.

³⁴People and Plants International, "Centella asiatica," <https://www.peopleandplants.org/centella-asiatica>.

³⁵Union for Ethical BioTrade, "Centella asiatica: Towards supply chain transformation in support of female pickers and biodiversity in Madagascar," 7 February 2023, <https://uebt.org/ingredient-stories/centella>.

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underscoring why it cannot be generalised beyond the sites visited³⁶. In Farafangana, pickers interviewed for the note denied minor involvement in collection, citing awareness of buyer standards and the economic risk of having produce rejected by the principal buyer; the audit team nonetheless observed one concrete case of a child engaged in collection in a peripheral zone, away from the main collection routes, which the note treats as an isolated but factual observation that partially contradicts the interview testimony and points to a higher residual risk in less-monitored areas than declarations alone would suggest. In Ampasimpotsy, by contrast, pickers operating within a buyer-supervised collection framework reported no comparable case, a difference the note attributes to daily supervision and explicit training on legal obligations; the same material records one informal protective practice worth noting on its own terms, namely that breastfeeding mothers travelling to collection areas are expected to be accompanied by a third person to look after the infant, which is not a written rule but indicates community-level awareness that very young children should not be exposed to field conditions, distinct from the exclusion of working-age children from collection itself. Both sites also recorded occasional, unsupervised family assistance outside the formal buyer framework, particularly during school holidays – a pattern consistent with the structural, payment-driven mechanism described above and with the UEBT and PPI material already cited.

These observations are presented here for what they are: documented findings from two specific localities, not a representative picture of centella collection across Madagascar, and certainly not a basis for a prevalence estimate. Their value lies in showing that supervised, buyer-led collection frameworks and unsupervised peripheral or informal collection can coexist within the same commodity and produce materially different child labour risk, which is precisely the kind of mechanism-level finding Chapter 5 calls for and that a national or commodity-wide statistic could not reveal on its own.

Field research should otherwise proceed as already specified: establishing who collects, how far children travel to do so, whether collection occurs before or after school, how payment is structured, and whether intermediaries impose quotas or pricing pressure that would tend to mobilise additional household labour. Centella remains, notwithstanding the regional and structural detail now available, a commodity for which no Madagascar-specific child labour prevalence study exists.

³⁶See note 9 above (Centella situation note, Farafangana and Ampasimpotsy).

Chapter 5. Field documentation strategy for Moramanga, Farafangana and Vangaindrano

5.1 Why the three field sites matter

Moramanga, Farafangana and Vangaindrano can move this analysis beyond national aggregates and SAVA-specific vanilla evidence to directly document how child labour manifests across different agricultural and botanical contexts. The purpose of fieldwork at these sites is to document mechanisms: specific tasks, their timing relative to the school calendar, the hazards involved, how children are recruited or drawn into work, and where supply chain pressure from buyers or intermediaries intersects with household decisions.

5.2 Minimum evidence to collect

For every child interview, field teams should record, at minimum: age band and sex; current schooling status and recent attendance pattern; district and commodity; the specific tasks performed; days worked in the preceding seven days and hours per day; the timing of work relative to the school day; any hazard exposure observed or reported; the payment or in-kind arrangement, if any; who requested or directed the work; and whether the child perceives an ability to decline it. For every adult interview, teams should record the commodity and production stage involved, household labour arrangements during peak periods, the role of intermediaries or collectors, the payment system in use, known conflicts with the school calendar, and awareness of any referral mechanism available to the household.

5.3 Ethical handling of children's evidence

Children's evidence cannot be collected on the same terms as an ordinary supply chain audit. CRC Article 12 establishes a right to be heard that this paper treats as a procedural floor, not an aspiration³⁷. Interviews must be voluntary, conducted in child-appropriate language, and confidential; questions should focus on activities, time use, safety and support needs rather than on eliciting an admission of wrongdoing, whether the child's or a parent's. Guardian consent and the child's own informed assent are both required, with the assent process making explicit that the child may decline or stop at any point without consequence. Where a child discloses violence, coercion, trafficking, sexual exploitation or immediate danger, the interviewer's obligation is to stop probing for research purposes and activate a referral protocol, not to continue the interview as planned.

In the resulting research output, children's own words should be used sparingly and only where they add genuine analytical value, and should be presented under a coded identifier – for example, a notation such as “child, girl, twelve to fourteen, district code, case code” – rather than under a name. Exact village names, the names of specific collectors or employers, and any other detail that would allow a child or household to be identified should be removed from the written record, even where this means sacrificing some narrative specificity.

5.4 Documented key-informant testimony: Moramanga

A structured interview with a labour controller of the CRLTE for Alaotra Mangoro, the region in which Moramanga sits, illustrates the kind of institutional account this paper treats as documented key-informant testimony: real, attributable to a specific institutional role, and informative, but neither generalisable to the wider region nor a substitute for the survey-grade evidence available for vanilla³⁸. The interviewee identified agriculture and family-based farm labour as the principal sector of concern, consistent with the national pattern set out in Chapter 3, but also identified a second,

³⁷See note 10 above (Convention on the Rights of the Child, art. 32).

³⁸See note 8 above (CRLTE Alaotra Mangoro field interview, 3 February 2026).

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distinct risk that this paper's commodity chapters do not otherwise capture: a number of large retail businesses in Moramanga reported employing children under fifteen who had come from other regions, with these employers presenting the children as dependants in their care rather than as employees. Domestic servitude was reported as a frequent case alongside agricultural work. Among identified cases, the interviewee estimated that roughly sixty per cent involved girls aged twelve to fourteen; no disability was reported among the children identified, although one case involving self-harming behaviour was recorded, which the interview treats as an indicator of the harm such situations can cause rather than as a separate category of work.

The interview also described the referral pathway in practical terms. A report originates with the community or the Fokontany chief, who completes a standard reporting form; it then passes to the mayor and on to the labour inspectorate for child labour cases, to the Ministry of Population for cases of sexual violence, or to the police for harassment, with referral to a tribunal as the final step. The interviewee stated that only one case had, to date, proceeded through this pathway as far as the tribunal; the remainder stopped at the labour inspectorate stage. This is consistent with the national enforcement capacity constraints set out in Chapter 2 and indicates that the referral chain, although procedurally complete on paper, is not currently producing case outcomes beyond the inspection stage in this region. On resourcing, the interviewee identified a single mining-sector company as the CRLTE Alaotra Mangoro's only financial partner, supporting a response currently limited to cases of sexual violence in partnership with the regional hospital, and contrasted this with another region the interviewee described as benefiting from a substantially larger number of partners. By way of illustration of business-side risk, the interview cited a food-processing business whose relatively undemanding tasks were described as the kind of work that could make a company susceptible to engaging children, including those above the minimum working age.

Chapter 6. Cross-cutting findings

6.1 Child labour is structurally linked to rural poverty and weak education access

Across every source reviewed for this paper, child labour in Madagascar resists explanation as a series of isolated household decisions. It tracks rural poverty, the direct and indirect costs of schooling, weak transport and sanitation infrastructure, and food insecurity with a consistency that is itself a finding. The Department of Labor identifies informal school fees, inadequate infrastructure, insufficient teaching staff, food insecurity, limited rural transport and inadequate sanitation, including menstrual hygiene facilities, as the principal barriers to education that correspondingly elevate exposure to child labour³⁹, and the SAVABE survey's district-level variation – economic activity ranging from 11.8 to 39 per cent across four districts within a single, relatively homogeneous region – suggests that even quite local variation in these structural conditions produces measurable differences in outcomes.

6.2 Agriculture is the central sector for documentation

Because 91.1 per cent of working children aged five to fourteen are in agriculture⁴⁰, any serious strategy has to centre rural agricultural systems (family farms, informal labour, collection chains, aggregation points and processing) rather than formal employment relationships, which capture only a small fraction of the relevant population. The SAVABE data sharpens this further: even within vanilla-saturated SAVA, the majority of child labour identified was in agriculture other than vanilla, a finding with direct implications for how narrowly any due diligence programme should be scoped.

³⁹See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

⁴⁰See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

6.3 Vanilla and centella are documented to different standards

The SAVABE survey provides Madagascar's only methodologically rigorous, commodity-specific child labour evidence base, and it is specific to vanilla in the SAVA region⁴¹. Centella's evidence is real but materially thinner: sourcing-side and locality-specific, not survey-grade. Treating the two as equivalent would misstate the strength of what is actually known about each.

6.4 Enforcement remains insufficient for dispersed rural supply chains

The Department of Labor's recommendation to raise labour inspector numbers from 235 to 307, paired with dedicated transport funding for rural and informal-sector inspections, is the single enforcement fact most directly relevant to vanilla and centella supply chains⁴². In dispersed rural production and collection systems, child labour monitoring cannot depend on labour inspection alone; it requires schools, community-level child protection actors, producer organisations and buyers themselves to function as additional, complementary monitoring channels.

6.5 Corporate due diligence must reach below the first supply chain tier

For companies, the operative risk is not direct employment of children but the foreseeable presence of child labour within smallholder, family and intermediary-based systems that a tier-one supplier audit will not detect. Due diligence consistent with the standards set out in Chapter 2 requires supply chain mapping below the first tier, commodity- and district-specific risk assessment, production planning that accounts for the school calendar rather than working against it, grievance mechanisms accessible in Malagasy and relevant local languages, and remediation designed to support continued schooling and household stability rather than to simply exclude a child from work without addressing the underlying economic pressure.

⁴¹See note 1 above (SAVABE baseline survey).

⁴²See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labor: Madagascar).

Chapter 7. Recommendations

7.1 *For the Government of Madagascar*

- Finalise and adequately fund Phase 2 of the National Action Plan to Combat Child Labour (2025–2040), with a distinct agricultural and botanical supply chain component and a published implementation budget.
- Increase labour inspector numbers from 235 toward the Department of Labor's recommended 307, with dedicated transport funding to extend inspection reach into rural and informal worksites, consistent with the Committee on the Rights of the Child's 2022 recommendation⁴³.
- Strengthen regional and local child labour committees, and link them formally to schools, the child protection network system, and commune-level authorities, with particular attention to under-resourced districts that currently rely on a single financial partner.
- Resource the referral pathway beyond the labour inspection stage. Documented testimony from Alaotra Mangoro indicates that cases routinely stop at the labour inspectorate without reaching the tribunal, not for lack of a defined procedure but for lack of capacity to carry a case further; closing this gap is a resourcing question, not a redesign of the pathway itself⁴⁴.
- Extend labour inspection attention explicitly to urban retail and domestic work, where documented testimony suggests employers may present working children as dependants rather than employees; this practice should be treated by inspectors as a documentation claim to be tested against the child's actual activity, not as a status that removes a case from the inspectorate's mandate⁴⁵.
- Address the specific education-access barriers identified by the Department of Labor – informal fees, infrastructure gaps, food insecurity and sanitation, including menstrual hygiene facilities – as a child labour intervention in its own right, not solely as an education policy matter.

7.2 *For companies sourcing from Madagascar*

- Commission child-labour-specific human rights due diligence for Madagascar sourcing that maps suppliers down to the production or collection level, not merely to the exporter or first intermediary.
- Identify seasonal peaks – the vanilla pollination and harvest windows being the clearest documented example – that create predictable child labour pressure, and assess whether purchasing practices, including price and volume terms, contribute to that pressure.
- For centella specifically, sequence due diligence measures deliberately rather than introducing them simultaneously: establish governance and a trusted, non-punitive reporting channel before introducing independent verification, so that verification does not generate under-reporting in communities that do not yet trust the system; extend training and unannounced checks specifically to peripheral collection routes and to pickers operating outside any formal buyer framework, where documented field observation found a case of child involvement that buyer-led, supervised collection did not⁴⁶.
- Establish grievance and referral mechanisms accessible to rural households without requiring literacy or digital access, and avoid zero-tolerance responses that penalise households or displace child labour into less visible, less safe arrangements; remediation should prioritise continued schooling and household resilience.

⁴³See note 23 above (CRC Committee Concluding Observations, 2022).

⁴⁴See note 8 above (CRLTE Alaotra Mangoro field interview, 3 February 2026).

⁴⁵See note 8 above (CRLTE Alaotra Mangoro field interview, 3 February 2026).

⁴⁶See note 9 above (Centella situation note, Farafangana and Ampasimpotsy).

7.3 For civil society and research actors

- Document child labour through child-safe methods that triangulate children's accounts with adult interviews, direct observation, school attendance records and supply chain documentation, rather than through extractive testimony collection alone.
- Maintain and publish an explicit evidentiary reliability classification for every figure used in advocacy or reporting, distinguishing verified findings from documented key-informant testimony, from claims requiring field confirmation, and from acknowledged evidence gaps, rather than presenting all figures with uniform confidence.

7.4 For donors and development partners

- Fund district-level child labour research in Moramanga, Farafangana and Vangaindrano capable of identifying commodity-specific task profiles, school interference and hazard exposure, designed from the outset to the ethical standard set out in Chapter 5.
- Fund referral systems, school retention support, birth registration and civil documentation support, and targeted social protection for households in the highest-risk agricultural supply chains, treating the 765 existing child protection networks and the gap between that figure and the roughly 455 currently functioning as a starting point for resourcing decisions⁴⁷.
- Diversify the partner base of regional child labour committees. Documented testimony indicates that at least one regional committee currently depends on a single funder for even its narrowest social response, a fragility that a wider donor base could address directly and relatively quickly compared with the longer-term reforms described elsewhere in this chapter⁴⁸.

⁴⁷See note 3 above (U.S. Department of Labor, 2024 Findings on the Worst Forms of Child Labour: Madagascar).

⁴⁸See note 8 above (CRLTE Alaotra Mangoro field interview, 3 February 2026).

Conclusion

Three conclusions follow from the evidence assembled here, and each is deliberately narrower than a more sweeping claim would be. Child labour in Madagascar is widespread, and agriculture is overwhelmingly the sector in which it occurs; that finding rests on national survey data robust enough to bear the weight placed on it. Vanilla is supported by a commodity-specific, methodologically transparent survey, and that survey shows a more layered picture than a simple prevalence figure could convey: significant hazardous work, concentrated more in general agriculture than in vanilla itself, with vanilla nonetheless accounting for a real and specifically documented share. Centella is supported by a thinner but usable sourcing-side and locality-specific evidence base, sufficient to identify a structural mechanism and a geographic concentration, but not a prevalence rate.

The position this paper takes is accordingly neither alarmist nor dismissive. It takes Madagascar's high overall child labour burden as established, treats the country's legal framework as substantially compliant with international standards while its enforcement capacity is not, and recognises that vanilla and centella each carry documented risk of a different kind and a different evidentiary weight. Companies sourcing from rural, smallholder and intermediary-based systems cannot treat exporter-level assurance as sufficient. The task that follows from this position is not to declare the problem solved or unsolved in the abstract, but to document it carefully, to protect children throughout that documentation process, and to convert the resulting findings into due diligence, education support, referral pathways and remediation that reduce harm rather than simply displace it out of view.

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Appendix

This comparative learning note is one of a suite of documents prepared as part of a research project on child labour in vanilla and centella asiatica supply chains in Madagascar. Whilst the companion research paper and risk brief examine what is documented and what remains to be evidenced within those two supply chains, this note looks outward: it draws on the experience of Ghana's cocoa sector (the commodity that has generated the most substantial body of child labour evidence and monitoring practice of any smallholder agricultural export) to ask what Madagascar can usefully learn, and where direct transposition would be a mistake. It is addressed to the same audience as the rest of the research suite: companies, exporters, cooperatives, civil society organisations, local authorities, donors and practitioners engaged in responsible sourcing, child protection or human rights due diligence. It should be read alongside the evidence assessments in the companion documents.