

IS Academy

Human Security in Fragile States



From gardens to markets

A Madam Sara perspective

Talitha Stam

occasional paper #4



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2013

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CORDAID Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid

SOFA Solidarity of Haitian Women

FONKOZE Haiti's largest microfinance institution

ONAVC National Observatory of Violence and Crime

TROCAIRE Haiti

*FOKAL Foundation for Knowledge and Liberty
Institute of social work and Social Science*

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Table of contents

Objective	5
1. Introduction	7
2. Context	9
Rural-urban division	9
Markets	9
Formal versus informal	9
Gender	10
Madam Sara	10
Peyizan (farmer)	11
Revande (resellers)	11
3. Methodology	13
Participant observation	13
Surveys	13
Interviews	14
Case studies	14
Limitations	14
Locations	15
Time frame	15
Hurricane season	16
Video collaboration	16
4. From Gardens	17
Education	18
Capital	19
5. Vwayaj (The Journey)	23
6. To Markets	25
Sleeping options	25
7. Haitian Markets	27
8. Pratik	31
Madam Sara versus resellers	32
Income	33
9. Returning Home	35

10. The impact of the earthquake & hurricanes	37
11. Conclusion	39
Key strategies	40
Difficulties	40
12. Recommendations	43
Bibliography	45

Objective

This study was conducted on request of the Catholic Organisation for Relief and Development Aid (CORDAID), within the IS Academy Human Security in Fragile States. The IS Academy is a collaborative research program between the Special Chair Humanitarian Aid and Reconstruction and the Disaster Studies Chair at the faculty of social sciences, Wageningen University, the Humanitarian Aid and Stabilisation Department at the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs and five major Dutch NGOs: Cordaid, ICCO, ZOA, Oxfam Novib and the Netherlands Red Cross.

The aim of the IS Academy in general is 'to better understand the processes of socioeconomic recovery and the roles of formal and informal institutions in conditions of state fragility' (Christoplos and Hilhorst, 2009). The collaborative research program is built around several long and short-term research projects and aims to foster knowledge sharing and exchange amongst policymakers, practitioners and academics. In 2010, CORDAID decided to focus its participation in the IS Academy on Haiti and its fragile society, mainly because of the relief effort CORDAID is providing after the devastating 2010 earthquake that weakened the already fragile Haitian society. During the months August until November 2012 an 8-weeks field study assignment has taken place in Haiti, which forms the foundation of this report.

1

Introduction

“Madam Sara is a migratory bird; a bird with the instinct to travel. But we also know Madam Sara as a peasant woman. In rural Haiti, there are few families that do not have a Madam Sara. We call them heroines of Haiti’s economy. They are the pote mitan pillars of the economy, which many families depend on. They are bringing a new generation of doctors, engineers and lawyers into the world. Imagine, they walk like hell, transporting food, vegetables and plantains for us city-dwellers. It is true, we have neglected them, but we are trying to correct that.”

Madame Marie Yanick Mezile, Haitian Minister of Women Affairs



Madame Gerard with one of her daughters waiting at the truck station (by Talitha Stam).

Everyone who has been to Port-au-Prince, Haiti remembers the street scenes of market women sitting along the roads with their commerce hoping to earn some money. For some of these women, their hopes have become reality as they make more money than Haiti’s average. These are ordinary rural women who were able to rise above the rest. What makes these entrepreneurs

more successful than their colleagues? And what can we learn from these upcoming businesswomen in order to support others? This study identifies the major actors within Haiti's internal market system through which agricultural produce moves from producer [gardens] to urban consumer [markets], and describes the key strategies and manoeuvres which the various mostly female traders employ in their operations. These entrepreneurial strategies give insight in the ways in which these women have developed, and continue to have an indispensable role in the Haitian informal economy. In this, the focus is on a specific category of Haitian market women, namely Madam Sara, the key intermediary of the internal market system.

In fragile states such as Haiti, formal financial institutions are either lacking or not fully equipped to deal with the task of supporting smallholders in increasing their produce, the quality, obtaining credit, and access to and position in markets. Many within the chain have adapted to these circumstances by making use of other institutional arrangements, building on kinship, social networks, social institutions and others (Hiller et al 2012: 31). Producers and buyers heavily depend on their intermediaries to get access to inputs, but also to access markets, increase quality, and obtain information about market and quality needs. Thus, Madam Sara operates in fragile, insecure and dangerous circumstances: yet, through entrepreneurial strategies she is able to cope with some of the dangers and risks she faces, including state fragility, insecurity, and natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake and hurricanes.

After the 2010 earthquake in Haiti, the country was regarded as totally destroyed. Nevertheless, economic life did not come to a standstill. In fact, most market women continued to work immediately after the 2010 earthquake. However, this was not recognised enough by humanitarian agencies as many of these often only seek to provide relief during immediate phases of crisis and post-crisis. These efforts ignore market dynamics. Nourse et al (2007:6) claim that aid practitioners tend to wait for too long [between one to five years] before attention to market development comes in as an added objective. Market development could start together with emergency aid, and as such contribute to the conditions necessary for economic development (Hiller et al 2012:14). This study aims to strengthen rural entrepreneurship through market empowerment of female traders in order to integrate them into the national economy.

The report is structured as follows: it starts with the context in which Madam Sara operates; the rural-urban division, Haitian markets, informal economy, and gender aspects are taken into account, and main actors within Haiti's internal market system are identified. This is followed by a justification of the methodology. In the main section, the study surveys Madam Sara along her routes to transport agricultural produce from rural gardens to urban markets. It has a dedicated paragraph on the impact of the 2010 earthquake and other natural hazards, and concludes with key entrepreneurial strategies and difficulties, plus recommendations to support rural entrepreneurship and reduce the difficulties.

2

Context

Rural-urban division

Within agricultural value chains, rural-urban linkages are essential in order for farmers to sell their products and for consumers to buy products. Rural Haiti is home to 52 percent of Haiti's population, of which 88 percent are classified as 'poor', and 67 percent as 'extremely poor'¹. Rural people have a per capita income that is about one third of the income of people living in urban areas. Additionally, a large segment of the rural population has extremely limited access to basic services. Only ten percent have access to electricity, and less than eight percent have access to drinking water. The principal activities in rural areas are agriculture and commerce, which together employ more than 85 percent of the economically active rural population (IFAD 2012). Although agriculture is an important sector in the overall economy, Haiti does not produce enough food crops and livestock to feed its people. The country imports sixty percent of the food it needs, including as much as eighty percent of the rice it consumes.

Markets

There are several levels of Haitian markets, from large city markets, which are open every day, to regional markets that are open twice a week, and down to small local markets that operate weekly in remote areas. The market days are staggered in such a way that enterprising traders may walk from one place to another in a regular sequence, culminating in the Saturday market of Port-au-Prince, the largest market place in the country. On the markets, imported food highly dominates (eighty percent), versus locally produced food (USAID 2010: 18). Locally produced commodities such as rice are also more expensive for consumers. As may be expected, prices are higher on the urban market place than in rural markets (cf. Sylvain 1964: 398).

Formal versus informal

At the national level, 85 percent of all economic activities are carried out in the informal sector. The 15 percent in the formal sector includes the export-import sector, which predominantly falls within the formal economy (USAID 2006: 18). Thus, formal sector jobs are few. Ninety percent of the formal economy jobs can be found in Port-au-Prince. About

¹ Poverty is set at an income of US\$ 2.00 or less a day, and extreme poverty is set at US\$ 1.00 or less a day (World Bank 1990).

half of formal jobs are in the public sector, particularly in education, health, and justice. Other jobs are in state-owned enterprises, such as telephone and electricity companies, or in the police force and the tax and customs services. The rest of those with formal employment work in the small private sector, mainly in assembly factories, banking, commerce, and transportation (World Bank 2006: 28).

Some estimates suggest that two-thirds of the country's 3.6 million workers are without steady employment. It is however misleading to speak about 'unemployment' of those who have no formal or consistent jobs, given the large informal sector in Haiti, and the fact that informal labour is usually an important income source for households. Haitian households derive their income from a number of sources, the most important of which are self-employment (48 percent), transfers (25 percent), and wage income (20 percent) (FAFO 2004:12). The Haitian informal sector can be experienced as a durable activity where people enter to stay, as a permanent way of making a living; this is also known as 'bricolage' where multiple initiatives generate income.

Gender

Traditionally in rural Haiti, men cultivate the land and work gardens, while women trade the agricultural production in the marketplace for other essentials not produced by the household or manufactured, and this constitutes the source of income with which the woman feeds and cares for her children (USAID 2006). Although there are women who cultivate and men who market, this division of labour in rural Haiti is still valid, and has existed for many years (cf. Mintz 1961). It is crucial to understand how Haitian peasants deal with the economics of everyday life. Women hardly cultivate, for the same reason that men hardly market, and each task carries particular social messages (Mintz 1964). Being a 'housewife' includes this marketing responsibility, and young girls learn it from an early age. From the household level up to the national level, the domestic market moves fundamentally through women.

Madam Sara

Haiti's best-known intermediary is Madam Sara; she has a long history as key mediator within the Haitian market system. The term 'Madam Sara' originates from a migratory bird, which 'flies from place to place and never fails to find the food, wherever it might be'. Madam Sara performs the same role. The spelling of the name Madam Sara, Madame Sarah, Madanm Sara, may differ in literature; however, definitions are generally equivalent. Intermediaries are the living links between the two aspects of the economy. On the one hand they bulk produce when buying it up. On the other, they break bulk in resale (cf. Mintz 1961). Concessions in the form of price, quantity, credit, or otherwise are made by intermediaries both to producers and to consumers, and to other intermediaries. The key to understanding the behaviour of Madam Sara is understanding that she focuses on rural produce, and specialises in whatever commodities are seasonally available in her activity zone. The actor

seems unique to Haiti and is considered unusual within most developing country contexts. Currently, Madam Sara is the one upon which the redistribution of produce from Haiti's some 700,000 small farms depends (Schwartz 2012).

Many studies on Haitian markets, value chains, and agricultural labour have included Madam Sara, which indicates her essential role in the Haitian economy (e.g. Bouchereau 1957, Mintz 1960,1961,1964,1971, Murray and Alvarez 1975, Plotkin 1989, Charles 2010, IRC 2010, USAID/Haiti 2010, Schwartz 2012). However, the more recent the reports, the less attention there is to these actors. Instead, these findings focus on market systems, value chains, import-export or the entire Haitian economy. On the contrary, the emphasis of this study is on the actors, and specifically on Madam Sara, the Haitian intermediary, in order to understand how we may empower rural entrepreneurship through market empowerment of female traders in order to integrate them in the national economy. For the term Madam Sara, there exists no English translation such as for farmers or resellers, the other main actors in the study, therefore the Haitian Creole term will be used. Madam Sara specialises on a specific route well known to her, and brings produce available on her route from gardens to markets. There are various kinds of Madam Saras, such as rural, urban, ti (little), and gwo (big), including some who travel by plane and make an average of 100,000US\$ per year. This study does not make use of the above-mentioned sub categories, but rather focuses on a certain route, just as Madam Sara², since she also specialises in a certain route known to her. In this way, several categories of Madam Sara are included in this study.

Peyizan (farmer)

Other key players in this study are peyizan (farmers) and revande (resellers). A peyizan in this study is a male or female farmer whose main activity is working on the/their land, and selling produce from the land. Men usually, but not exclusively, cultivate the land, while the women separate the harvest into a part for consumption and a part to be processed and sold in the market or to madam Sara. In some literature this female peyizan is referred to as a rural Madam Sara.

Revande (resellers)

A reseller, often female, who sells at the same market where she buys, and does not travel long distances with her products, as opposed to Madam Sara. She is the one who cleans, cuts and resells the locally produced agricultural produce in small packages to the consumers. In this way she makes her profit.

The roles described above are not necessarily restricted to one person. In other words, the over 250 women who have participated in this study are not automatically just one of these actors: the same woman could be both a farmer and a Madam Sara. Therefore, these explanations are best observed as roles associated with certain activities.

² See paragraph 'location'.

3

Methodology

This study has adopted a multi-method ethnographic approach in order to identify the major actors through which agricultural produce moves from producer to urban consumer, and to describe the key strategies and manoeuvres, which the various mostly female traders actually employ in their operations. The 8 weeks of fieldwork form the fundamental basis of this study that entailed both descriptive and quantitative methods.

Participant observation

The leading method used is participant observation. The researcher followed several women as they went to Port-au-Prince in their trading activities, and she travelled along the same routes as the women, by foot, by motor taxi, in camions (public trucks) and in a private car, observing the main locations along the way from gardens to urban markets.

Surveys

The quantitative approach during this research consists of a survey, in which the focus was on the three major types of actors identified, Madam Saras, resellers and farmers. The survey concerned their basic information (e.g. financial and family situation) as well as behaviour (e.g. social relations and trading activities). These surveys were carried out with support of the Department of Anthropology at the Institute of Social Work and Social Science (Enstiti pou Travay Sosyal ak Syans Sosyal³) in the form of logistical support (e.g. arranging interviewers, and survey instruments) and expertise on conducting surveys.

In total, the following statistical surveys were conducted:

Madam Saras, n=163

Reseller, n=67

Farmer, n=25

The Madam Saras that participated in this survey were selected at local, and city markets and at the collecting centres; the resellers at urban and semi-rural markets, and the farmers at the farmer's and rural markets.

³ With special thanks to independent anthropologist/consultant Timothy Schwartz (PhD), and Athena Kolbe, researcher and co-director of the institute.

Interviews

The interviews conducted during this study were done with experts from various professional backgrounds. The interviews were all semi-structured in which there was a framework of themes to be explored, but also room for pursuing unexpected and new aspects within the themes.

In total, the following expert-interviews were conducted:

- Marie Yanick Mezile, founder of Association of Merchants of the Informal Sector (ACSI) and current Haitian Minister of Women and Women's Rights.
- Ludmia Garraud, program manager of Fonkoze's Madam Sara microfinance program.
- Timothy Schwartz (PhD), Haiti-based American Anthropologist.
- Dr. Gerald Murray, associate professor in Cultural Anthropology specialised in the Caribbean and Latin America.
- Carole Jacol, director of the women's organisation Solidarité Fanm Ayisyen (SOFA).
- Focus group with six rural women, all member of SOFA.

Case studies

The previously mentioned methods for data collection and analysis provided interesting quantitative data; yet some in-depth details were still missing. Case studies are designed to bring out the details from the viewpoint of the participants by focusing on a few issues that are fundamental to understanding the Haitian domestic market system being examined. Case studies on the three Madam Saras in various settings provided an inner perspective, and gave faces to the numbers collected from the surveys. The researcher also informally kept 'financial diaries' of each of the three case studies, in which their household finances (income and expenses) were regularly observed for over a period of a month, in order to identify often-overlooked strategies of financial management, such as the use of informal borrowing and lending with neighbours and family members.

Case studies:

- Madame Gérard 56-years-old, no formal education, borrows money from friends.
- Madame Eduard 30-years-old, finished Primary School, borrows money from Haiti's largest microfinance institution Fonkoze⁴.
- Madame Jusline 17-years-old, in high school, borrows money from family.

Limitations

The researcher/author was born in Haiti, has previous research experience in the country and communicates well in the local language, Haitian Creole. Therefore, restraints during the fieldwork were not necessarily found in getting access to women, or language and cultural barriers. However, the sole presence of the researcher in the field did influence the participants' behaviours. This 'researcher involvement' revealed itself best while conducting case studies when the Saras felt the responsibility to protect the safety of the young female

⁴ Fonkoze was not involved in selecting any of the case studies. The researcher met these women during their trading activities.

researcher by taking additional measures such as sending her oldest sons and daughters along with the researcher, or paying a security guard during the overnight stays at markets in Port-au-Prince. In the field, Madam Sara often introduced the researcher as her ‘daughter or sister living abroad’.

Locations

This study follows Madam Sara along her path between rural Seguin – above Jacmel – over the mountains via Furcy and Kenscoff to the port road of Boulevard La Saline in Port-au-Prince where the largest street market of the country, Croix-des-Bossales, is located. This particular route was chosen because of earlier assessments that were conducted on the rice and beans value chains in Madam Sara was briefly referred to (USAID 2010, Schwartz 2011).



Time frame

The eight weeks of fieldwork took place in stages of two and four weeks between August 11 and November 10, 2012. During the remaining period the researcher coordinated and supervised the implementation of additional studies completed by one international and two Haitian students.

Hurricane season

Haiti is prone to hurricanes, and the hurricane season is from June to November. At the time of the fieldwork, two cyclones passed by, causing major damages; Hurricane Isaac by the end of August 2012, and Hurricane Sandy during late October 2012. On October 30, 2012, the Haitian government declared a state of emergency throughout the national territory for a period of one month, following continued destruction by Hurricane Sandy. The State of Emergency was extended until December, at the time of writings.

Video collaboration

In addition to this written report, an introduction video was created on one of the case studies, Madame Gérard. In this video we see a glimpse of her life as a Madam Sara. Video producer Patricia Borns who reports for the Miami Herald and Boston Globe has produced the video in collaboration with the researcher. Borns' multimedia project about the women of Haiti's informal economy is launching soon at madamsara.com.

5 Last checked on December 5th 2012 at the Montreal Gazette.

4

From Gardens

Approximately 66% of Haitian livelihoods depend on farming. Most Haitians depend on farming out of necessity. They grow what crops they can for both survival and economic gain (2010 Amanda Edwards, Rosalie Germond and Sheena Sokolowski). As cited before, the gender roles in rural Haiti are clear; a man is responsible for crop production while his wife sells their produce and other goods at the market. At the same time, rural families purchase most of their food, even given the prevalence of agriculture; rural households purchase 20-60% of their food (USAID 2010).

In table 3 the top-5 crops are listed mostly bought and sold in this specific area, during this time period, as harvest is seasonal and region-specific: carrots (37%), French beans (22%), leeks (20%), plantains (17%), and potatoes (16%).

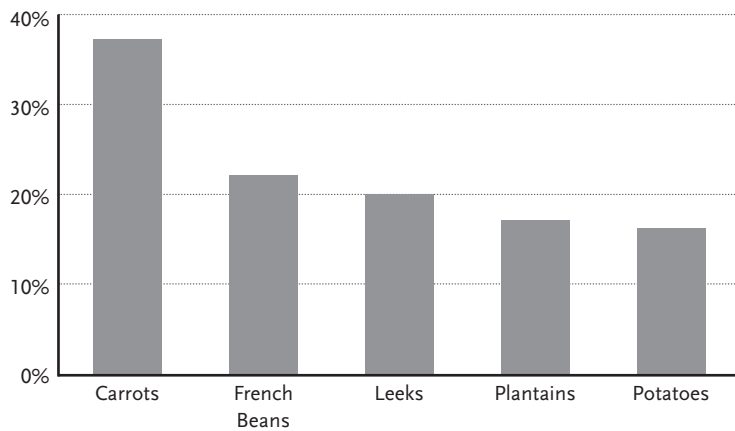
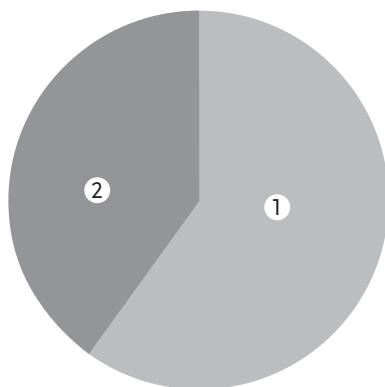


Table 3. Most buy-sell products.



1. Madam Sara 60%
2. Anyone 40%

Table 4. Suppliers – to whom do farmers sell their products.

Farmers have the option to sell their produce from their homes and gardens, at the farmer’s markets, or at an arranged location. Sixty percent of the farmers that participated in the survey claimed to sell their produce to Madam Sara at an arranged location along the route. And forty percent stated to sell the harvest at the farmer’s markets, to anyone who wants to buy.

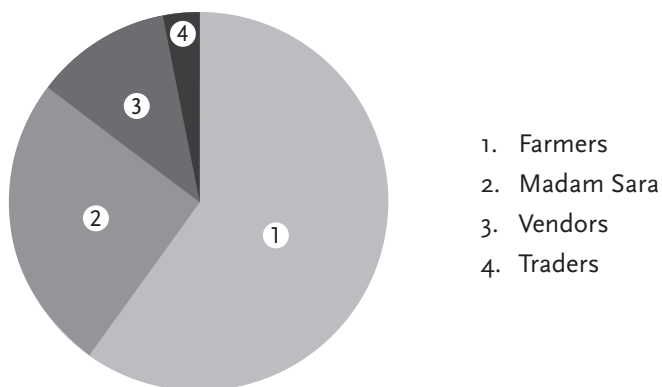


Table 5. Suppliers – from whom Madam Sara buys her products.

Moreover, Madam Sara buys her merchandise from farmers, but also from other Madam Sara, as well as shop owners who are called vendors, and depot owners also known as traders.

Education

“When I was young, my mother sold water at the markets, because we were very poor. One day I asked my mother if I could join her to the markets. She taught me how to put a bucket of water on my head, and I copied every move she made. For a long period of time I sold water together with my mom, until I had enough of it. Then I met my husband, he lives in the same neighbourhood as me. I was 20 and he was 22-years-old when we got married. My husband had a sister who was a Madam Sara, and she introduced me into this. At first she bought for me and did all the negotiations, later I did all myself. 36 Years ago I moved in with my husband, and we still live in the same house. Together we had nine children, but three of them died. There are still three children living with us, two daughters study in Port-au-Prince, and our oldest daughter got married and has three children of her own. We also took in two children from the neighbourhood who have lost their parents, so sad. Yes, all of our children are going to school. Unfortunately, my husband and I never had the chance to go to school, that’s why it is so important for us to send our children to good schools. We absolutely do not want our children to become Madam Sara; it’s too dangerous, and too trying. If I had wanted that my daughters would do the same as me, I would not have invested so much in their education.”

Madame Gérard, 56-years-old

Madame Gérard is not the only Madam Sara who has not been to school. 54 percent of the Madam Sara that participated in this study have never been to school. And only 10 percent

have attended at least one year at high school level. In 2006, the World Bank estimated Haiti's literacy rate, the population age fifteen and above who can, with understanding, read and write, at 49 percent. This means that Madam Sara is only a few percent behind the national average.

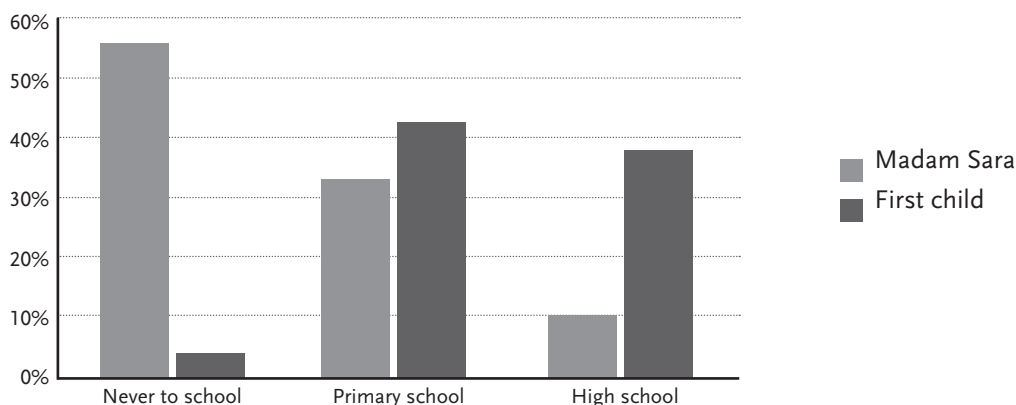


Table 6. Education level of Madam Sara compared to her first child.

Furthermore, Madam Sara is determined to educate her children, preferably in the metropolitan areas. Table 6 illustrates this significant difference in the education level of Madam Sara versus her first child. Even though more than half of the Madam Sara have never been to school, almost all of her children go to school. Children who are not going to school, are perhaps to young to attend school.

Only 4 out of 163 Madam Sara that participated in our survey do not have children, and one Madam Sara has the maximum of 12 children. On the average, Madam Sara has four children, and her average oldest child is 20 years old. She is between 15 and 75 years old, with an average of 39 years old. In this way, Madam Sara has at least one child old enough to take care of itself, and, if needed, also of its younger siblings, when she is on the move.

Madame Gérard continues:

“At 3 o’clock in the morning I wake up, and make breakfast for my family. I leave the house around 4 a.m., as it is at least a two hours walk to where I buy the produce.

At 7 a.m. my husband goes to the gardens, together we have several plots, two inherited, one bought, and the rest we rent. He cultivates the lands with six other men from the community, because it’s simple too much to do this on his own. We pay these men 100 gourdes (2,37 USD) cash per day. I do sell the crop my husband is tilling, but it’s simply not enough to make profit, so I buy most of the harvest I resell from other farmers.”

Capital

A common way to invest for a Madam Sara along this particular route is to have her own harvest; either by acquiring her own gardens, or paying someone to work on a rented plot

in order to grow her produce. Half of the Madam Sara that participated have someone working in gardens that are not their own. Most (54 percent) of these workers are paid per day; 26 percent of the paid workers are her husband; and 20 percent are non-paid relatives and friends working in the gardens through sharecropping called konbit. Sixty percent has a husband who lives in the same house with them, and only half of these husbands contribute financially to the household. It has been said that rural women rarely own plots or inherit land from their families. Yet, the surveys conducted on 163 Madam Sara revealed the opposite; 75 of them do own a piece of land independently from her husband. She claims per personal land is mainly from inheritance (82%), and 18 percent through purchasing and renting, in other words: investment.

In the early morning when it's still dark, Madame Gérard meets her good friend Madame Arlette (35-years-old) on her way. Together they walk and climb very fast on the steep and remote paths in the highlands. At this point no vehicles or motorbikes can come here, only experienced human beings and animals.

Once Madame Gérard and Madame Arlette have arrived at their arranged location along the route, they sit down and wait. Here they wait for mostly female farmers to come along with the harvest to sell. 'Ou vann?' ('Do you sell?') is the sentence Madame Gérard asks whenever she sees female farmers with loads of food on her head passing by. If the female farmer hasn't sold her crops yet, she stops and with great effort she lifts the heavy bags off her head and she puts this down in front of the feet of the Saras. Suspiciously the Saras check the vegetables. It's carrots straight from the gardens, not cleaned, packed or cut at all.

Based on the price Madame Gérard previously has sold carrots for, she sets a price; 15 gourdes (\$ 0,36 USD) per ten carrots. The female farmer agrees. Madame Gérard helps the female farmer to put her heavy bags back on her head, while Madame Arlette writes down the quantity of carrots for her friend who cannot read or write, and hands this piece of paper over to the female farmer. Without reading the paper, she puts the paper together with the money in her pockets, and walks towards the camion station two hours down the road. This buying process repeats itself a countless number of times.

In the meantime, at the camion station, also a collecting point, her young niece waits for the items Madame Gérard forwards. For this, she receives 100 gourdes (\$ 2,37 USD) per day. By the end of the morning Madame Gérard walks to the collecting point. It's crowded here; over thirty Madam Saras are working from this camion station. Meanwhile, the children taken in by family Gérard after the death of their parents bring cooked meals to the husband and his workers at the gardens. Madame Gérard often buys prepared food at the camion station. With her niece she counts the crops she bought from numerous farmers. Madame Gérard has two female assistants (non-family), who she directs to get the more exclusive products that haven't been offered by farmers in large amounts along the roads, for her kliyan (special clients).

The male assistant (non-family), who works for several Madam Sara, arrives in the early afternoon at the camion station. His job is to bulk the produces in large burlap sacks for which he receives 50 gourdes (\$ 1,16 USD) per sack. When in the late afternoon the camion arrives at the camion station, all Madam Sara are packed and ready to load. Today, Madame Gérard has seven large bags ready, purchased for 7.400 gourdes (\$ 175,56 USD).

Summarized investments of Madame Gérard

Costs: $2,37 + (1,16 \text{ USD} \times 7 \text{ sacks}) 8,12 = 10,49 \text{ USD}$

Purchased: 175,56 USD

Total costs: 186,05 USD

From field notes (August 2012, Route Seguin, Haiti)

The survey conducted among 163 Madam Sara demonstrates that Madame Gérard has bought well above the average of 2.000 gourdes (47,45 USD) this time. Yet, she was not the biggest buyer, with a maximum of 30.000 gourdes (711,74 USD) reported by two other women. How do these women acquire access to such volumes of money?

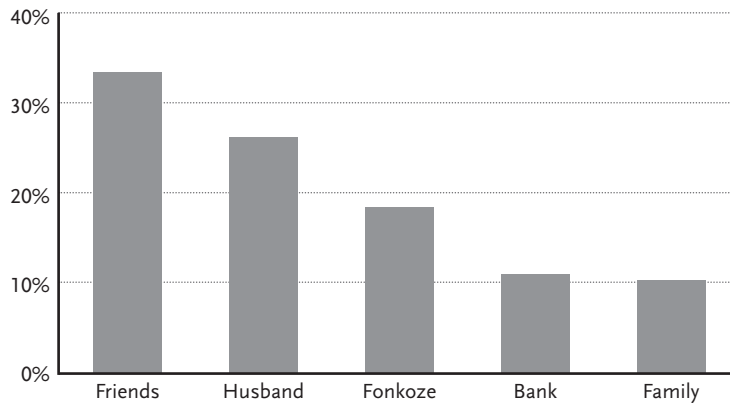


Table 7. How to get money to start this business?

Table 7 clarifies that most Madam Saras started their trading activities with rented money. She prefers to borrow capital from her friends (34%), or her husband (26%), Fonkoze (18%), Haiti's largest microfinance organisation with special programs for Madam Sara. Some do go to private banks (11%), and the least chosen is asking family (10%) for cash.

The informal money lending system with friends, relatives, neighbours, colleagues, and customers basically works in two ways. The first one is called Eskont, and is used by 55% of Madam Sara who participated in our survey. It is borrowing money one-on-one at flexible interest rates that vary between ten and twenty percent. The other approach is named Sol, used by 21% of the women who participated in our survey, whereby a group of Madam Sara, occasionally including drivers, deposit a fixed amount of money, and one or two members of the group may borrow the total at a high interest. The revenue is then distributed among the participants. In this way Madam Sara capitalizes her money. Other strategies for empowering her capabilities done by Madam Sara are buying, and when needed selling of livestock, plus investing in personal gardens.

In the field the researcher encountered numerous female farmers calling the names of Madam Sara, selling to her or not, and vice versa, but that does not mean they know each other well enough to indicate her as a friend. If Madam Sara does not know her name, she does not know her at all, but calls her politely *sè m* (my sister) or another given family name.

The sol approach is a good indicator that Madam Sara rarely works alone. During fieldwork the researcher barely saw Madam Sara working unaccompanied, yet the meaning of working together would be explained differently. When Madame Gérard was asked if she works together with Madame Arlette, her answer was 'no': even though they buy at the same place, and Madame Arlette was very helpful to her, each of them buys for herself. Thus, working together here means shared investments (labour and/or money) and shared revenues. In this perspective the following results are interpreted; merely 36 percent of the women that

participated in our survey stated that she works together with someone, including Madame Gérard, who stated that she works with her oldest daughter. Out of the ones working together, Madam Sara prefers to collaborate with her female friend (39%), or to pay someone (20%), or with her sister (10%). Furthermore, when Madam Sara is not able to work for a few days, over half (54%) of them have a replacement in the form of her sister (16 out of 54%), her daughter 11%, her female friend (8%) or her husband (7%).

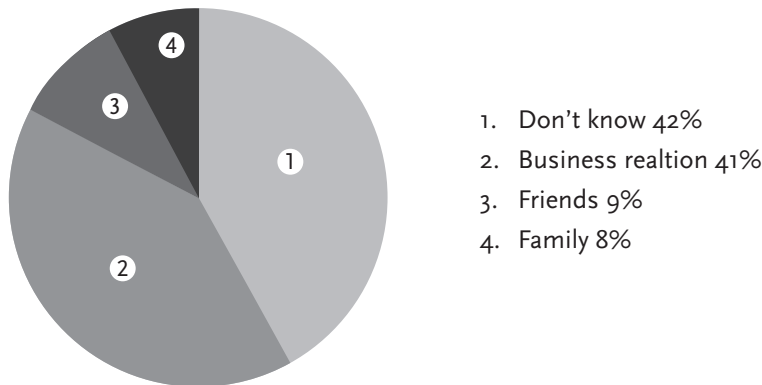


Table 8. Kinds of relationships with whom she buys from.

One of the camion drivers is the husband of Madame Arlette. They agreed that she doesn't have to pay anything. Madame Gérard pays 250 gourdes (\$ 5,93 USD) per sack plus 100 gourdes (\$ 2.37 USD) to the men who are putting the overloaded sack on têt (on top) of the camion. If there is still some space left, Madam Sara is allowed to board the camion as well. Madame Gérard, however, is not coming on the camion today. Quickly, she rips an old red t-shirt into strips, and puts these visibly on each of her sacks. Her oldest daughter Madame Davide (32 years old) waits for the camion further along the road, and will be selling at the market for her mother from Mondays to Fridays. When the camion leaves, Madame Gérard calls her daughter to say that her seven bags have red bits.

Summarized investments of Madame Gérard

Purchased: 175,56 USD

Costs at truck station: $2,37 + (1,16 \text{ USD} \times 7 \text{ sacks}) 8,12 = 10,49 \text{ USD}$

Transportation costs: $(5,93 \times 7 \text{ sacks}) 41,51 + 2,37 = 43,88 \text{ USD}$

Total costs: 234,93 USD

From field notes (August 2012 at Camion station, Route Seguin)

5

Vwayaj (The Journey)

Camions are used as public transportation to accommodate up to eighteen people, but they are habitually overcrowded. Each camion to the bigger urban markets usually runs twice a day, and also picks up other passengers. Truck drivers and the Madam Sara are very important to each other, and the economic well-being of each of these groups depends on the establishment of ties with the other group (cf. Murray 1973: 109). At the camion station many Madam Sara wait until they can hop on. She wears a skirt over the pants, covers her hair with a wrap, and has a jacket or sweater against the chilliness in the mountains. She also carries a denim cloth with pockets around the waist, where the money and other valuables go. On a particular day two of them, Madame Eduard, 30 years old, and the 17-year-old Madame Jusline, who is just named Jusline because she is not yet married, expressed snapshots of their stories while waiting.



Rural women on the move to urban markets, Route Seguin Haiti (by Talitha Stam).

“I’ve just bought for 30,000 gourdes (711.82 USD); wi se anpil anpil anpil (yes, that’s whole lot of money). But all borrowed though. Shortly after the earthquake,

my house collapsed, and I also could no longer work at my previous job as a cashier at the supermarket. My chief advised me to go to Fonkoze to see if I could get a personal loan to start my own commerce. At first Fonkoze gave me a donation to renovate my house. With the remaining money, I bought a piece of land. Now, for the fourth time, I've received 50,000 gourdes (almost 1,200 USD). Whenever I can, I additionally lend money to other Madam Sara in the area."

Madame Eduard, 30-years-old

"I'm one of the youngest around here. I started three years ago, when my parents died. I still go to school, sometimes. I'm in 6th grade at high school in Port-au-Prince, but I live with my uncle near the farmer's market in Seguin. Every day I buy harvest for 1,000 gourdes (23,27 USD) at the farmer's market, and walk with the bulk on my head to the camion station. It's a long walk, but the cheapest option. I sell at Tet Dlo market where I sleep at my niece's place, that's also near my school. Yes, it very hard, but respectful work. In this way I can take care of myself, and that's what makes me proud, and why I wanted to do this."

(Madame) Jusline, 17-years-old

For her trading activities, Jusline walks four hours, and then takes a camion for another 60 minutes; thus her main manner of transportation is by foot. In general, and on this particular path along the Seguin – Kenscoff – Port-au-Prince route, most Madam Saras take a camion (70%), after that she mostly walks (14%), uses animals (11%), or gets a motor taxi (6%) to transport agricultural produce from producers to consumers. Young boys aging 8 to 14 commonly direct the animals. On the question how long she walks from her home to the camion station, her answer varies between 10 minutes up to 300 minutes. The longer she needs to walk to get to the camion station, the more remote the rural area she lives in. The mean is a 75 minutes walk.

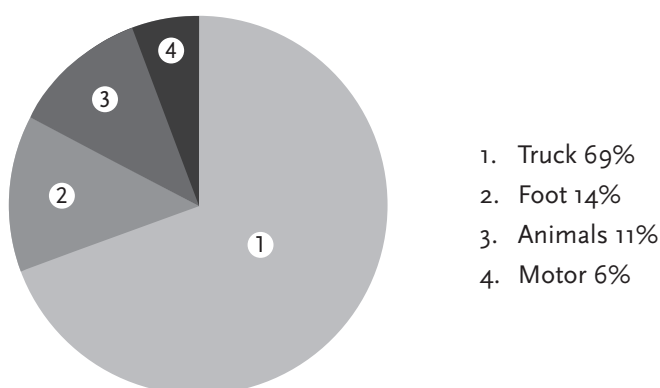


Table 9. Types of transportation.

Transportation costs depends on the type of transport that is used, the route, plus the amount of produce she brings along. For example, Madame Gérard has to pay 1,750 gourdes (41,51 USD) for transporting her seven sacks, while Jusline only pays 150 gourdes (3,56 USD). The mean for Madam Sara that participated in the survey spends 635 gourdes (15 USD) on transportation.

6

To Markets

“Madam Sara operates in extremely difficult circumstances. She conveys merchandize, perhaps on a donkey. The roads are poor. If she has collected the harvest, she puts this in the camion. She herself often sits on top of the camion, because there is no space left. Due to the many road accidents, some Madam Sara have even died along the way. She sometimes travels 2 to 3 days to arrive in the city. When she arrives in town, she is not welcomed at all. She sleeps poorly, she eats badly, and she lives between the dirty water and garbage. She is moreover frequently a victim of robberies and rape. This is all very problematic.”

Madame Marie Yanick Mezile, Haitian Minister of Women and Women’s Rights

It is pitch dark as the overcrowded camion arrives at the open-air market named Croix-des-Bossales in downtown Port-au-Prince. On the top of camion sits Madam Sara, because the regular seats are filled with her produce. When the camion stops, men immediately start unloading. Meanwhile, Madam Sara walks to the ‘Furcy’ section of the market, looking for a suitable place to spend the next few days.

Madame Eduard waits at the camion for her bags to be unloaded, while Madame Davide roams the market looking for a colleague who can shoot her camion fare. Madame Eduard goes with her bags to her usual spot in the market. She has a self-created place to sleep. The bed consists of several shelves, a used mattress and parts of an old tent.

When Madame Davide gets back at the camion, she panics because she is missing one of her bags. A few phone calls later, Madame Davide has found her seventh sack, and prepares herself for the night as well. She has taken linens, an extra thick sweater and a wrap for her hair to keep herself warm during the chilly nights. She places her linen over her dirty burlap sacks and lies on top of them. Many Madam Sara do the same.

From field notes (September 2012, Croix-des-Bossales market, Port-au-Prince)

Sleeping options

Madam Sara operates under very precarious, unhealthy and challenging circumstances. Staying overnight at Port-au-Prince markets is the one of most threatening parts of her activities, as both the quote of the Haitian minister of Women Affairs and the field notes confirm. Not only are city markets located in unsafe and poor areas, she often (47%) lies

exposed in the streets without any protection, just as Madame Davide has demonstrated. Madame Eduard, including 47% of Madam Sara, rents a depot at the market where she has made herself a bed to sleep in. Resting at a friend's or family's house, like the 17-years-old Jusline, is the least chosen option (3%), together with the one-dollar hotels (3%). The researcher has visited a one-dollar hotel in Kenscoff named Kapesika where Madam Sara and other market women sleep for one Haitian dollar, which is similar to 5 gourdes (0,12 USD). It is a dark room in the basement of a building where rows of bunk beds are placed next to each other. There is also a shower area, and a kitchen where volunteers from the neighbourhood prepare cheap home-cooked meals. Between 8 p.m. and 6 a.m. the doors are closed. Beyond the strict opening hours, the major drawback of the hotel is that there is no space to store produces. Additionally, the one-dollar hotels are not near the major markets. Thus, only on her way home, she may use these facilities.

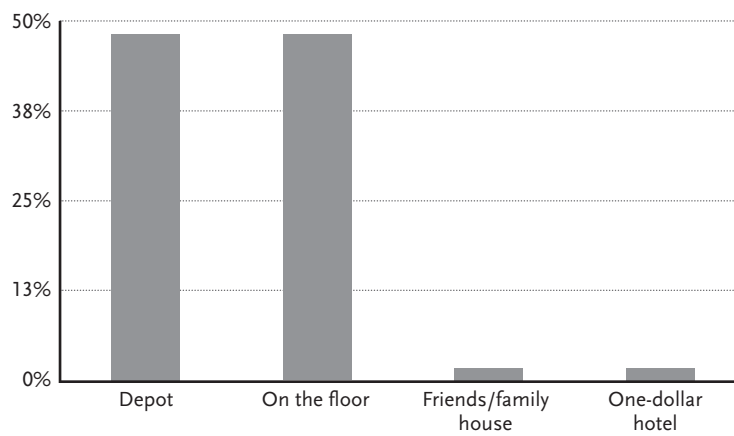


Table 10. Type of sleeping options at/near markets.

7

Haitian Markets

Marketplaces are an ancient Haitian institution. The early origins of the Haitian market system are French. The colonial government of Saint-Domingue (former Haiti) in the eighteenth century enacted that slaves were allowed to meet at certain rural crossroads for the sale of items they produced in addition to what they owed their masters (Sylvain 1964). In 1954, there were 294 officially recognized and controlled marketplaces (Moral 1959: 74).



Early morning at Croix-des-Bossales market (by Talitha Stam).

'Official' here means that land and structure were provided by the government, and administration was typically placed under the jurisdiction of the communes in which they were located, but nowadays they are often neglected by the government. In contrary, spontaneous markets are not under the control of any authority. Markets officially and unofficially are the intersection points in the trade network by which the bulk of Haiti's

marketed agricultural product, and its imports reach their consumers. Retail stores are much less important than the marketplaces, even in the large towns; in the countryside such stores are of little significance in economic life (cf. Mintz 1961). Marketplaces then as well as now, tie the country together economically.

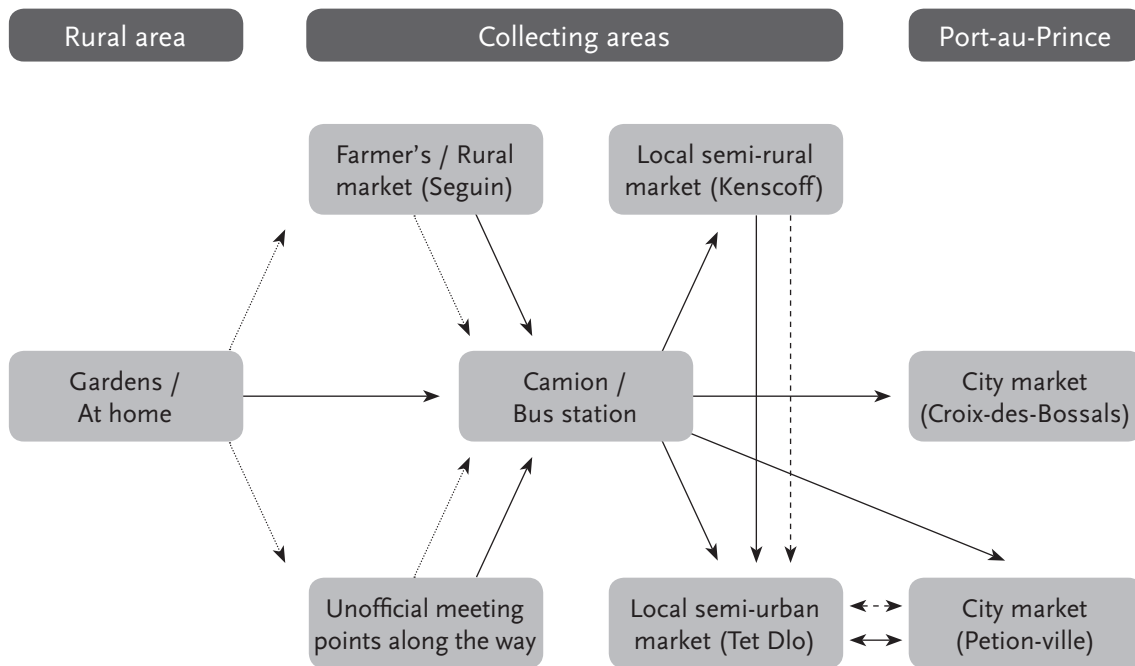
The four key destination marketplaces at the particular itinerary followed for this research are Kenscoff market in Kenscoff (used by 21% of the participating Madam Sara), Tet Dlo market (in French: *Marché tête de l'eau*) in Pelerin (used by 11%), Petion-ville Route Frere market (used by 39%) in Port-au-Prince, and Croix-des-Bossales market (used by 29%) also in Port-au-Prince. The Kenscoff market is an official market located in the village of Kenscoff, and is under the jurisdiction of the local authorities. The market can be classified as semi-rural. Madam Sara operates in front of the market, and prefers not to sit down in order to avoid paying for a market seat. Tet Dlo market is located on the outskirts of Port-au-Prince in Pelerin, and is classified as semi-urban. Madam Sara uses this market as a passageway, and not necessarily as a market place where she sits and sells for a whole day. In the early evening she arrives here, and waits until the middle of the night. Between 2:00 a.m. and 4:00 a.m. she trades with mostly resellers, and urban Madam Sara in order not to have to pay for a market seat. After her sales she takes the earliest bus back home. During the day resellers vend at this market, while Madam Sara is on her way buying new produce.

The district Petion-ville in Port-au-Prince has many markets of which the majority is unofficial. Informal sections function on overcrowded sidewalks and pavements of main avenues and back streets. At these off-the-record places Madam Sara, and other market women are at risk to be removed by the Haitian police. She reports that these removals could occur violently by demolishing her merchandize, and taking all her capital. During the earthquake, countless market women have lost their identity card needed to receive an official seat at one of the official markets. One of the official markets in Petion-ville is besides the road called 'Route Frere'. The enormous fresh fruit and vegetables department of this market has a special section for Madam Sara originating from Jacmel, and the Kenscoff area. Yet, the Croix-de-Bossales market in Port-au-Prince is the largest market in the country, handling about two-thirds of the food and manufactures consumed in the capital. Various studies have underscored the fact that agricultural product prices on most Haitian markets correlate strongly with the prices observed at this market (Fews net 2007:9). This market in a sense plays the role of a 'reference market,' as the day-to-day prices on the Croix-des-Bossales market set prices for all of the exchanges in the country (Fews net 2007: 15).

During the research it became clear that the major purchases and sales are made elsewhere, without having entered a public marketplace.

Around 4h00 a.m. when it is still dark, but pleasant weather, market women start selling breakfast to other market women, including Madam Sara. Coffee, thee, hot chocolate with a piece of bread or spaghetti with eggs is served as breakfast. Meanwhile Madame Davide opens her bags and places the crops nicely in front of her. She keeps the bag with special items for her kliyan (special buyer) hidden. Around five o'clock in the morning, the first customers enter, and Madame Davide and others start selling.

From field notes (September 2012, Croix-des-Bossales market, Port-au-Prince)



Overview of the movements of agricultural produce from producers to resellers, and the main market actors between main locations along the Seguin - Kenscoff - Port-au-Prince route.

Farmers ———>

1. Land → farmer's market
2. Land → unofficial meeting points → Camion station
3. Land = selling from their gardens/homes

Madam Sara>

1. Unofficial meeting points → Camion station → city markets/local markets
2. Rural markets → Camion station → city markets/local markets
3. Land → Camion station → city markets/local markets

Resellers ----->

1. Within city and rural markets
2. Local markets → city markets (12 out of 20 self, 8 out of 20 use Madam Sara to transport their products)
3. City markets → local markets (half of them transport themselves and half use Madam Sara to transport for them)



Pratik

Sidney Mintz (1961) was one of the first researchers who studied the behaviour of market women in Haiti. Mintz found that female traders established more or less permanent business ties with other individuals by making economic agreements in terms of price, quantity and credits (1961:57). These institutionalized personal economic relationships are referred to in Haiti as pratik. However, statements made by more recent reports saying that Madam Sara heavily relies on her 'social relationships', 'family ties', 'long-term relations' and 'trust' by claiming that she mostly sells to her kliyan (special costumers), are not fully elaborated by this study (Christopher, Pienaar and Sacks 2012, HAÏTI: Plan d'investissement pour la croissance du secteur agricole, USAID/Haiti 2010, Schwartz 2012). This report argues that although the personal element in economic activity is crucial, the rational behind the establishment of pratik is profit, and thus social ties are used for economic interests.

Between 5h00 and 6h00 a.m. Madame Davide has sold to fifteen customers, out of 25 who showed interest at her merchandize. In general, Madam Sara has four categories of buyers; resellers including machan ti-panie (little basket merchant) who sell in detail to consumers; owners of depots who vend in wholesale to stores and supermarkets; urban Madam Sara who trade at other markets; and consumers. Despite the fact that all Madam Sara at the Furcy section of the market more or less sell the same produce, they also use more or less the same price. This is an unwritten rule known by most of them. After one of the Madam Sara reduced her price in order to sell more, neighbouring Madam Sara did not accept this, and forced her to increase her price to standard rates, or she had to move to another location.

Madam Sara is also known to be a lender, mostly in the form of selling her produce on credit. The study confirms this statement, as 65 percent of Madam Sara who participated provide credits to her buyers. On average, she gives credit to four individuals at a time. However, the suggestions made in the previously mentioned reports that she knows her buyers, and those who she provides credit to very well by establishing intense relationships with them, has not been found. On the contrary, 80 percent of the 163 Madam Sara that participated in this study, affirm that she does not know her customers, and those who she provides credit to at all. Of course Madam Sara does have her kliyan, but her commerce is not entirely constructed around these special relationships.

From field notes (September 2012, Croix-des-Bossales market, Port-au-Prince)

Madam Sara versus resellers

A bit further on the markets, there are the resellers also known as small market women of whom 77% buy from Madam Sara. These small market women resell the crops after they have cleaned them extensively in consumer packaging sales. Even though the aforementioned destination markets differ greatly from each other, they all have separate parts for Madam Sara, and resellers. Overall, Madam Sara ‘stands’, so to speak, in front of the market and sells an gwo (wholesale), while resellers have a seat on the markets, and trade in detail primarily to consumers. At the largest markets Petion-ville Route Frere and Croix-des-Bossales, Madam Sara is seated as well, and vends in both detail as wholesale, but still trades in another section as the resellers. Resellers do not travel long distance with their products as opposed to Madam Sara, but rather buy and sell at the same markets.

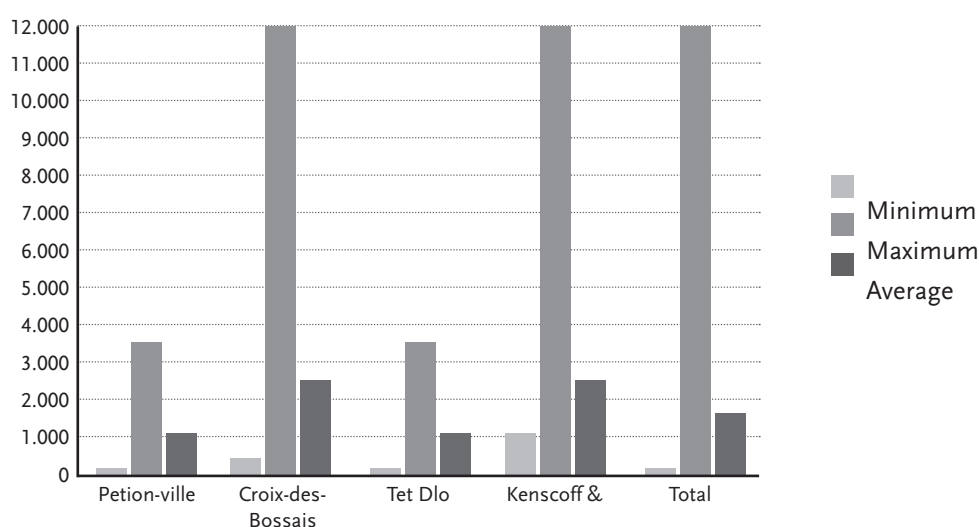


Table 11. Amount of buying and selling by resellers at different markets.

In general, resellers have less capital than Madam Sara; the maximum amount of buying by a reseller is 12,000 gourdes, while for Madam Sara 30,000 gourdes is reported. But the means of buying and selling by both categories of market women do not differ much;

Mean	Buy	Sell	Profit
Reseller	1.317	1.765	448 (\$10,63)
Madam Sara	1.831	2.477	645 (\$15,30)

However, resellers' profit on a day could turn out higher than Madam Sara's, as they do not have a lot of expenses.

It is 11am and bloody hot at the open-air market. Madame Eduard goes to the shower area of the market, and asks the woman who sells next to her to watch her belongings. After showering she goes to the market woman who sells lunch. Rice with beans, some boiled vegetables and fried chicken has been prepared for 50 gourdes (1.16 USD). Meanwhile Madame Davide is dealing with a customer who wants to get the crops on credit by postponing her payment. Yet, another Madam

Sara prevents this from happening. She says that this customer has received credit before, but has not paid yet. Disgraced, the customer walks away. “*She won’t come here anymore*”, says the other Madam Sara.

Mid-afternoon, Madame Eduard and Madame Davide have sold out.

From field notes (September 2012, Croix-des-Bossales market, Port-au-Prince)

Income

Madame Eduard and Madame Davide have sold their produce within one day. Compared to other Madam Sara who participated in this study, half of them needs more than one day to sell the produce she bought at a time. The amount of days Madam Sara needs in order to sell her bought produce at once varies between two to three days (27%), and four days or more (23%). Normally Madame Gérard buys five times per week. This is possible because her oldest daughter Madame Davide sells for her the produce she buys at the market. Madame Eduard does not have someone to sell for her, and therefore she is only able to buy and sell three times per week. In total 36 percent of the Madam Sara in the study claim that she buys and sells three times per week. 28 percent buys and sells two times per week, including Jusline. Only 19 percent buys and sells four times and more.

Madam Sara’s level of income partly depends on how many times per week she buys and sells.

<i>Examples</i>	<i>Buys</i>	<i>Sells</i>	<i>Expenses</i>	<i>Frequency</i>	<i>Weekly profit</i>	<i>In USD</i>
Madame Gérard	7.400	10.500	2.600	5	2.500	59,30
Madame Eduard	30.000	35.000	4.700	3	900	21,35
(Madame) Jusline	2.000	2.800	600	2	400	9,49
Mean	1.831	2.477	614	3	93	2,21

Expenses include: transportation, seat at market, and salary of helpers. Madame Eduard pays much less for transportation, as her bulk is much larger. And Madame Gérard shares her profit with her daughter, 50/50.

In Haiti, the gross national income per capita (GNI) is 686 USD, which equates to 13,19 USD per week. The average (\$ 2,21 per week) of Madam Sara who participated in this study is significantly below national standards. But at the same time, performing as Madam Sara could also be an opportunity to improve her livelihood standards, like Madam Gérard and Madam Eduard have shown. Nevertheless, Haiti’s GNI is extremely low, at less than two dollars a day; also compared to the neighbouring country, Dominican Republic, where the GNI is \$ 4,391.10 (twelve dollars a day), and the United States of America, where the GNI is \$ 44,999.50 USD (135,35 dollars a day, UN Data 2009).

9

Returning Home

The single greatest barrier for Madam Sara is the violence that mostly happens during their journey, especially her return home. With a lot of cash that can vary from 2.000 gourdes (47 USD) to outliers of 35.000 gourdes (830 USD), she takes public transportation such as taptaps, and camions. These public transportation means take on other passengers, and Madame Sara reported that most violence was perpetrated by male passengers whose only reason for boarding the truck was to rob, and sometimes even rape them. Detailed facts on this violence towards Madam Sara and market women in general should be further investigated.

“Bandits know exactly at what time and where Madame Sara arrives. With weapons they are waiting for them, and under much violence Madam Saras are forced to give all their money, other valuables, and sometimes that’s not even enough and men forced themselves on these powerful women.”

Rural women

“There are men who only come to the market to observe you. They see how much you sell, and by the end of the day they take the same transportation, and they enclose you. One of them says: give all your money! If you say that you only went to the market to buy some products, they say: That’s not true, I have been watching you selling. I know you have lots of money with you. So what can you do?”

Madam Sara

Madam Sara tries to protect herself by taking alternative routes in order to avoid routine. Alternatives need to also be devised for the safekeeping of money during the return journey, and at the city markets. Some Madam Sara indicates that when the harvest is less, especially in the months of April to June, more imported products such as rice, oil, and corn are brought from the city markets back to the countryside for reselling purposes. This also shows that Madam Sara is not particularly specialized in certain products, but rather works with the commodities that are currently available. Struggles reported by Madam Sara are; working environment (49%), especially in the sun and in the dirt; loss of produce during transport (33%); and it is demanding to find capital in order to maintain her commerce (15%).

Back at Croix-des-Bossales market; Madame Davide counts the money, and phones through the amount to her mother, Madame Gérard. She won't return home today, but stays at the market for the rest of the week. Madame Eduard is ready to go home, and with all her cash on her she takes a taptap. The journey back home scares her the most: "*When they attack you, all your hard work has been for nothing.*" Fortunately Madame Eduard safely arrives home. The next day, very early in the morning Madame Eduard walks into the mountains again, collecting her produce to sell at the market the next day.

From field notes (September 2012, Croix-des-Bossales market, Port-au-Prince)

10

The impact of the earthquake & hurricanes

The 2010 earthquake appears to have influenced the trading activities of Madam Sara. Most of them (85%) reported that post-earthquake, she makes less money. There are several explanations for this. There is an increased competition at retail level due to a large influx of petty traders and petty retailers who were previously engaged in other professions (USAID 2010:120). Combined with a decline in consumers' purchasing power, smaller retailers now trade lower volumes, which ultimately decreases these traders' incomes (USAID 2010:120). Also, the mass distribution of food aid that immediately followed the earthquake manipulated the prices of local agricultural commodities (HAÏTI: Plan d'investissement pour la croissance du secteur agricole 2010-2016). Besides making less money, Madam Sara informs that there is more violence (9%), and that the roads have become worse (3%). The damaged roads into Port au Prince make her trade routes more dangerous. Insecurity in markets also means that Madam Sara must travel farther to pick up their stock. In addition to effects from the earthquake, regular risks to livelihood security in this region include hurricanes.

It's Friday morning, the only day in the week that Madame Gérard does board the camion, and sells at the Croix-des-Bossales market on Saturday. But since a few days it has been raining, and today it is very extreme. Hurricane Sandy has passed by. Madame Gérard therefore decides to stay home. *"There won't be anyone in the streets to sell these days."* Her husband is not going to work today either. For four days they sit inside their house waiting for the rain to stop.

On Tuesday, her husband goes back to the gardens, and he sees the devastation that the storm has caused. All the seeds have been destroyed. Also Madame Gérard and Madame Arlette continue their work on Tuesday. This time they have to walk much further than they used to; they even go to the top of the largest mountain in the area, something Madam Sara along this route rarely do, because it's too tiring. But they have to in order to get closer to the farmer's gardens. Some Madam Sara even go all the way to the Farmer's market in Seguin; a four-hours-walk, one way. The farmers have increased their prices due to their considerably lower harvest.

Whenever a farmer walks by, she hears: *"these crops are already sold"*. Especially with those Madame Gérard has established personal economic relationships with, a discussion follows on why the female farmer has already sold her produce to someone else. It appears that female farmers often have multiple Madam Saras as klyan. By the end of the morning Madame Gérard returns with half the amount she normally buys to the camion station.

From field notes (October 2012, Kenscoff, Haiti)

11

Conclusion

In Haiti, there exists a unique way in which agricultural products from rural gardens informally arrive at urban markets. In this, Madam Sara plays an essential role. Eighty per cent of the resellers and small market women buy their fresh vegetables from intermediary rural women, called Madam Sara, and half of the Haitian farmers sell their harvest to Madam Sara, which assigns to her an essential role in the Haitian informal economy⁶. Although the exact number of women operating as Madam Sara is still unknown, it is estimated that nowadays upon 700,000 small farms depend on these female intermediaries (Schwartz 2012).

The circumstances in which these women operate are fragile. Due to political turmoil, misrule, institutional weakness, inequality, widespread poverty, lawlessness and violence, the Haitian government is not able to provide basic services to its population, nor a healthy economy with sufficient secure job opportunities. Although, iusually performed out of necessity to compensate the lack of formal employment, some of Madam Sara have become successful businesswomen making significantly more than Haiti's average. It is therefore seen as a proper profession. Every woman who has the courage, physical strength, someone to teach her the basic skills, and the initial money to start with, can execute the profession of Madam Sara. Her successes are proudly shared following an overall encouraging image of Madam Sara as 'heroines of Haiti's economy', '*poto mitan*', and 'pillar of the economy which many families depends upon'⁷.

Madam Sara's paths and methods were fundamental to this study, as it has shown us how these women use entrepreneurial strategies in order to deal with uncertainties under the conditions of state fragility, insecurity, and natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake and hurricanes. Commissioned by Cordaid for the IS Academy Human Security in Fragile States, this study has tried to uncover who is Madam Sara, what role she plays in agricultural value chains, what successful strategies she has developed, but also what dangers and difficulties she encounters during her trading activities, in order to understand where support could be offered, and how her successes may expand to a larger group of rural women. Cordaid believes that rural entrepreneurship can significantly contribute to efficient domestic food chains that can stimulate local economic development, job and income generation, and poverty alleviation (Cordaid/Ron Delnoye 2012).

⁶ Based on surveys conducted during this study amongst 255 Haitian market women.

⁷ Interviews with Fonkoze, SOFA, rural women, and Haitian Minister of Women.

Key strategies

The 163 intermediaries that participated in this study successfully managed to avoid the public marketplaces in many of their transactions. Her major purchases were made at unofficial meeting points along the route; the distributions took place at camion stations; and thus the bulk of her stock reached Port-au-Prince while she stayed out of sight of the tax plaintiffs. In addition, she did her buying and selling with countless customers in order to maintain her independence. With a selective number of her clients she used pratik (personal economic relationships) in order to establish fixed consumers. This was mostly effective when pratik was only applied to her business relations, rather than to her family, community and social contacts.

Madam Sara also invested her successes in several manners. The most common way is through informal money-lending systems with friends, relatives, neighbours, colleagues, and customers; namely Eskont, one-on-one borrowing at flexible interest rates; and Sol, whereby a group of Madam Sara deposit a fixed amount of money, and one or two members of the group may borrow the total at a high interest. The revenue is then distributed among the participants. These informal money-lending systems are also used to become entrepreneurs.

Another strategy of Madam Sara is buying, and when needed selling of livestock, plus investing in personal gardens independently of her husband. Intermediaries stated that their personal land is mainly from inheritance (82%), and through purchasing and renting (18%) plots in order to grow their own produce. In this way, she was less dependent on farmers for the harvest, and she could occasionally offer a unique off-season product to her kliyan (fixed clients who she has pratik with).

During her trading activities Madam Sara employed several people; at her personal gardens to cultivate for her, assistants who help her with buying out-off-season products for her kliyan (special buyers), strong men who up-and off-loaded the heavy bags from the camions (trucks), drivers and assistants who transported her produce to the markets, and so on. Therefore her success did not only benefit her family, but also the families of people she paid to work for her. In addition to these investments, most of her profit was spent on the education of her children, even though more than half of the Madam Sara has never been to school; almost all of Madam Sara's children went to school.

Difficulties

There are successes, as described above. However, this does not make 'Madam Sara' in itself a success formula as this study has revealed that the average of these business women still live below Haiti's average of less than two American dollars a day. This could be explained through the risks, dangers and difficulties Madam Sara is exposed to on a daily basis, such as: poor road conditions that have led to several truck accidents and losses of produce during the voyage; abuse of, and bribes by the police when traveling by truck; insecurity in cities due to the lack of sleeping places, and possibilities to store and safely return home with a lot of cash (ranging from fifty to eight hundred American dollars), such that they fall prey

to threats, violence, thieves, murder, and rape. These dangerous circumstances are directly linked to state fragility.

12

Recommendations

Studying the behaviour of Madam Sara, what socio-economic strategies they have developed in order to deal with uncertainties under the conditions of state fragility, insecurity, and natural disasters such as the 2010 earthquake and hurricanes, the following recommendation are suggested:

1. First of all, overall improvements of the roads, not only where the trucks and busses drive, but also along the more remote paths high up in the mountains, to the gardens. After hurricane Sandy in October 2012, most roads become impassable, and as consequence Madam Sara could not carry out any of her activities, which means that there were no revenues for almost a week.
2. Although most market women have adapted to the lack of sleeping options at city markets by simply sleeping out on the dirty streets, or in selfmade beds at the markets, this is not sustainable. One-dollar-hotels as mentioned in this report could be a desired outcome if they were built at or near the major city markets, and with free storage place for the produce the women carry with them.
3. Once the women arrive at the city markets, they work in extremely unhealthy settings. Often they have to sit in the trash, and under the burning sun. There is a lack of safe places for depositing cash money they earn, and there is a need to upgrade the security at city markets, especially at night.
4. Lastly, these women greatly want more possibilities to obtain credit without the impossible demands posed to them, such as participating in many trainings without getting paid for the days they have to invest, and their having the ability to read and write.

To conclude, the researcher believes that Madam Sara could strengthen best by teaming up as a powerful group. As an organised group they could perhaps rent their own truck, hire a personal security guard at night, demand their rights to a safe and healthy working environment from their government, and ask for additional support from international organisations.

After two intensive months working with Madam Sara, the researcher has learnt so much from them. The researcher has tried to write down the knowledge they were willing to share with her, in order to give these courageous women the recognition they deserve, and to discover opportunities for supporting market women in Haiti.

Mèsi anpil.

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