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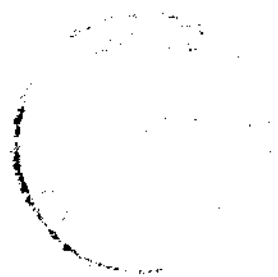
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WOMEN IN THE INTER-ISLAND TRADE IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE
IN THE EASTERN CARIBBEAN



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1. INTRODUCTION

The Women in Development Unit (WID) of the Subregional Headquarters for the Caribbean of the United Nations Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC) initiated activities on the subject of women traders in the Caribbean in 1984. The project is regarded as a priority area in the work programme, and has been endorsed by the member governments of the Caribbean Development and Co-operation Committee (CDOC), at its eighth session held in 1984, and further supported at its ninth and tenth sessions held in Trinidad and Tobago in 1985 and 1987.

In the initial stages of the project a pilot study was undertaken on female traders in the informal sector in Trinidad and Tobago.^{1/} Additional studies on the phenomenon were conducted in Guyana, the Dominican Republic and Jamaica.^{2/} This was followed by exploratory research in the Eastern Caribbean.

The research undertaken so far indicates the following:

1. Where women predominate in informal sector trading activities the trade is generally in: a) wearing apparel and light goods, popularly referred to as "the suitcase trade"; and b) fresh agricultural produce.

2. Data, especially hard data which would allow serious analysis on the situation of women engaged in this sector, are practically non-existent or inaccessible.

3. Hard data on traders who travel within the region to sell agricultural produce --the so-called "inter-island traders"-- are more accessible than data on the "suitcase traders".

4. The trading activity of the "inter-island traders" is confronting critical problems. Without remedial action it is threatened with disintegration. The implications of this might be:

- a) Loss of a vital service in the food supply for the region, and
- b) Loss of income for a large group of women in the sub-region who are sole providers for their households.

As a result, the project "Women in Development and Trade in the Caribbean", in conjunction with another project, "The Establishment of a Database on Women's Participation in Social and Economic Change", has concentrated since 1987 on women in the inter-island trade in fresh agricultural produce.

This document presents a general overview of the inter-island trade. It intends to throw some light on an economic sector in which a large number of women in the Eastern Caribbean operate, and on the effects it has on their lives.

2. INTRA-CARIBBEAN TRADE

Background

Trade in agricultural commodities among the Caribbean islands dates back to the pre-colonial period when the Amer-indians inhabited the region. The Caribs in St. Vincent and the Grenadines used to trade ground provisions and tobacco to Martinique before the end of the seventeenth century, and later on to different British islands.^{3/} Following the discontinuation of this practice during the period of enslavement, trading activities resumed with varying degrees of intensity and continue up to the present time.

The latter part of the 1960s saw rapid growth in inter-island trade. Between 1967 and 1971 total Caribbean Free Trade Area (CARIFTA) intra-regional imports rose from EC\$95 million to an estimated EC\$188 million --an average increase of 19% per year. This increase is especially significant in light of the fact that prior to CARIFTA the average annual growth rate was less than 6% per year.^{4/}

Acceleration in the growth of inter-island trade was mainly due to regional government policies which promoted the establishment of regional integration schemes such as the Agricultural Marketing Protocol, the Guaranteed Market Scheme, CARIFTA and the Customs Union, which subsequently evolved into the Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM).

By the end of the 1970s and beginning of the 1980s, however, inter-island trade experienced a drastic decline. A number of factors contributed to this decline, among them:

a) Problems of regional co-operation

In July 1983 an agreement was signed to abolish the Agricultural Marketing Protocol as a mechanism for facilitating intra-regional trade in agricultural produce. The gains from thus liberalizing the trade were primarily beneficial to the more developed countries (MDCs).^{5/} The original guaranteed minimum price set by the Agricultural Marketing Protocol (AMP) stimulated greater production in the MDCs, thereby further weakening the position of the less developed countries (LDCs).^{6/} These policies had the effect of undermining regional co-operation --a situation further compounded by the unsettled political climate accompanying the gaining of independence by virtually all the Eastern Caribbean territories in the early 1980s.

Recent (1988) agreements among Caribbean countries aiming to eliminate intra-regional trade restrictions are intended to reactivate Caribbean economic integration.

b) The economic crisis

The inflation that had begun in 1972 continued to accelerate and was compounded by an energy crisis that saw a fourfold increase in the price of oil and a food crisis which resulted in a rapidly growing regional food import bill. The LDCs were hardest hit: consumer and other import prices increased dramatically, and primary exports were subject to the usual unstable conditions.^{7/}

c) The decrease in agricultural production

Higher wages in the extractive, industrial and tourist sectors as compared with the lower earnings in agro-industry, together with the traditional disdain for agricultural work, have led to a significant decrease in the total amount of land under cultivation, and a movement of population away from farming areas.

Furthermore, the division of holdings by inheritance and parcelization has resulted in inefficient small-scale farming and low land productivity.

d) Increased international competition

International trading companies increased not only their exports of agricultural produce to the Caribbean region but also their imports of agricultural produce from the region. Thus, trade in agricultural produce was more and more directed to extra-regional markets.

e) The development of traditional export crops

Historically, emphasis by governments in the region has been placed on the development of traditional primary agricultural crops such as bananas, coconuts, citrus, mangoes, cocoa, arrowroot and nutmeg, to the detriment of the small-farmer-cultivated foodstuffs such as ground provisions, fruits and vegetables, which constitute the prime export goods within the intra-regional trade. Yet the majority of farm holdings in the Commonwealth Caribbean—an overwhelming 95% of the 350 000 farm holdings—are under 25 acres in size, and amount to less than 30% of the total acreage of farmland.^{8/}

Exporters of agricultural produce in the Caribbean

Presently exporters of agricultural produce in intra-regional trade may be categorized in three groups: 1) Marketing Corporations of Governments, 2) private organizations or individual exporters and 3) the inter-island traders also referred to as "traffickers" or "hucksters".

The involvement of those within the first two categories is very small.

Those of the third category, i.e., the traffickers/hucksters, dominate the trade. It is estimated that in Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines,

and Dominica their share in the inter-island trade in agricultural produce varies between 80% and 90%. The case of St. Lucia is markedly different since the traffickers' share there is estimated to be only 20%.

The activities of the traffickers provide employment and income for approximately 7 800 people such as harvesters, truck drivers, packers, carriers, brokers, shipping and airline personnel. Considering that there are approximately 1 300 traffickers, each generating employment for six persons,^{9/} a total of 9 100 people derive income directly or indirectly from the trade.

Women's participation in the inter-island trade in agricultural produce

Traditionally, marketing of agricultural produce has been a female activity. With limited employment opportunities (see table 1), and the necessity of providing for their families, some enterprising women have entered the inter-island trade.

The factors which made it easy for females to market agricultural produce beyond national boundaries were the following:

- a) Availability of agricultural produce with no local markets;
- b) The fact that entry into the trade requires small capital expenditure;
- c) The existence of established social networks among territories caused by massive seasonal and permanent migrations which facilitate the traffickers' operations;
- d) Technological improvements in travelling facilities, such as motorized vessels and the introduction of airplanes, which make it relatively safer for female traffickers to conduct their trade and have considerably reduced the time spent in travelling between ports of trade.

Table 1

PERCENTAGE DISTRIBUTION OF ECONOMIC INACTIVITY BY COUNTRY, BROAD AGE GROUP AND SEX

| Age | St. Lucia | | Grenada | | Dominica | | St. Vincent and the Grenadines | |
|-------------|-----------|------|---------|------|----------|------|-----------------------------------|------|
| | M | F | M | F | M | F | M | F |
| 15 - 19 | 5.7 | 27.4 | 9.2 | 38.6 | 8.9 | 40.9 | 4.9 | 42.9 |
| 20 - 24 | 2.5 | 33.4 | 5.3 | 33.8 | 4.0 | 37.5 | 2.5 | 44.1 |
| 25 - 44 | 2.4 | 46.0 | 5.0 | 41.6 | 3.3 | 46.8 | 2.1 | 49.0 |
| 45 - 64 | 10.0 | 62.8 | 10.3 | 57.7 | 10.3 | 60.5 | 8.3 | 59.4 |
| 65 and over | 49.3 | 86.4 | 45.7 | 86.6 | 52.8 | 86.6 | 45.3 | 87.9 |

Source: Preliminary analysis of the 1980 census data, tables C4.

Means of transportation of agricultural produce

Transportation for the marketing of the agricultural produce is mostly by sea. Since emphasis is placed in the region on the extra-regional export of agricultural produce, extra-regional shipping links are more developed than intra-regional ones. Within the region, the West Indies Shipping Corporation (WISCO) ^{10/} serves Trinidad, Miami, Jamaica and Barbados. The absence of a St. Vincent and the Grenadines-Grenada-Trinidad and Tobago run represents a noticeable weak link in the service, especially as it is from St. Vincent and the Grenadines and Grenada that the majority of the fresh food trade within the Eastern Caribbean is conducted. Thus there is a gap left in the intra-regional shipping route that schooners and other small ships are virtually duty-bound to fill. The CARICOM Inter-Island Shipping Survey, 1977, reveals that the small vessel fleet was responsible for not less than 55% of the inter-island sea-borne freight trade.

The small vessel fleet consists of privately-owned vessels. The smallest has a capacity of approximately 32 tons, and the largest 200 tons.

At present, four to six small vessels operate out of each island where the traffickers conduct business.

Geographical movements of the inter-island traders

One of the characteristics of traffickers is their flexibility and their capacity to adapt themselves to new situations. They often have to change the countries with which they trade when the economic need to do so arises. Traders' movements are also restricted by the availability of ships, whose routes, in part, determine the geographical movements of the traders. The absence of a regular and reliable shipping line to the Netherlands Antilles, for example, has obviously restricted traders in expanding their market there.

At present there is a distinct pattern of movement of agricultural produce between the islands of Anguilla and St. Thomas in the North and Trinidad and Tobago in the South. Dominica, Guadeloupe, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Thomas and St. Maarten constitute the upper circuit of that trading flow, while St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, Barbados and Trinidad and Tobago make up the lower one (see annex, map 1). At times some islands of the upper circuit enter the lower circuit and vice versa.

The primary importing countries within these two circuits are Trinidad and Tobago, Barbados, St. Maarten and Guadeloupe.

3. CHARACTERISTICS OF INTER-ISLAND TRADERS

Definition of a trader

The majority of the traders are female, do not work in the formal sector, and are of rural origin.

Traffickers operate within the informal trade sector --that is, that sector which comprises all unregistered commercial and non-commercial enterprises or economic activities, which are usually family-owned, small-scale and labour-intensive, and which rely heavily on indigenous resources.

The traffickers purchase and often grow some of their produce in their home territory, and sell in export markets within the region. Their business, which is not officially registered, employs simple technology, and is organized and supervised solely by them. When they need additional help, the traffickers usually depend on family members or other temporary unskilled labour, frequently contracted under informal arrangements. These helpers will often accept payment in kind rather than in cash.

After purchasing and/or collecting their goods --mostly ground provisions (tannias, yams, sweet potatoes, dasheens, eddoes, etc.) and fruit and vegetables from small farmers-- the traders transport them for further handling, and then ship them to the country of dispatch where they are marketed. In the performance of this economic activity traders make use of the services of carriers, truck drivers, crate makers, brokers, shippers and other technical intermediaries, most of whom are male. Because of the individual nature of the trade the working relationships established to facilitate the activity are very personalized.

Types of traders

Within the group of traffickers it is important to make a distinction between traders who travel to market their produce overseas, and those who do not. Not all traders travel to the ports of dispatch with their produce. The percentage of those who do not travel varies from territory to territory. In St. Vincent and the Grenadines as many as 27% of the traffickers and up to 30% in Grenada utilize alternative means of marketing their produce overseas.^{11/} The latter group depends upon intermediaries to trade and market the produce overseas.

The majority of Dominican traders, whose activity cycle is more complex ^{12/} than those of other territories within the region, accompany their goods to ports of dispatch but depend on intermediaries in some ports to help market the produce.

A second important distinction to be made is between traders who operate full time and those who do not. The St. Vincent study seems to indicate that women operate more as full-time traders than do their male colleagues.^{13/} The number of part-time traders in the region is highest in St. Lucia, for the

obvious reason that the inter-island trade there is not a vital and active one. Most traders in St. Lucia are farmers involved only seasonally in the inter-island trade.

A third category of traders comprises those who operate solely as importers, employing the services of intermediaries in the exporting country to organize the purchasing and shipping of the produce to the importer/trader.

It should be noted that there is an overlap among these three categories.

The size of the trading population

The total number of traffickers in Grenada, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, St. Lucia, Dominica, Barbuda and Anguilla is estimated at approximately 1 300 ^{14/} (see table 2). Indications are that this estimate represents a considerable reduction from the trading population operating only a few years ago. In Dominica, for instance, figures show that the number of traders was reduced from 1 089 in 1985 to 467 in 1986, and interviews conducted in St. Vincent and the Grenadines indicate that a large number of traders involved in the practice before 1983 have stopped trafficking.

Table 2

ESTIMATED NUMBER OF TRADERS TRAFFICKING OUT OF SOME CARIBBEAN TERRITORIES

| | |
|--------------------------------|--------------|
| Grenada | 275 |
| St. Lucia | 60 |
| St. Vincent and the Grenadines | 462 |
| Dominica | 467 |
| Barbuda and Anguilla | 20 |
| <u>Total</u> | <u>1 284</u> |

Social characteristics of traders

Exploratory research undertaken suggests that in Antigua and Barbuda approximately 90% of the traders are women.^{15/}

More reliable findings from research carried out in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and in Dominica indicate that, at present, there are in St. Vincent and the Grenadines 70% female traders as against 30% male ones, while 55% ^{16/} of the traders in Dominica are females.^{17/}

Traders range in age between 17 and 70. The traders of St. Lucia form the oldest group. The average age of the traffickers in Grenada is 38 years, while

the age of those in St. Vincent and the Grenadines averages 45 years. In Dominica at this moment 70% of the traders are under 30 years of age.^{18/}

There is a trend towards the entry of younger people into the trade. This may be related to the increasing tendency for more members of any one family to be involved in trafficking. There is also the probability that young people, more so than the older group, are able to utilize non-tangible qualities such as sex appeal in facilitating their operations.

The educational level of traders is relatively low. Basically, although they have secured formal education, this has only been at the primary and incomplete secondary levels. Younger traders tend to have had more formal education than the older ones.

There is a trend towards the entry of relatively more educated persons into the trade as other avenues of employment have become closed. In Dominica, for instance, 30% of those entering the activity in 1981 came directly from services which had ceased operations.^{19/}

Research ^{20/} indicates that at least 44% of the traffickers are not married but have children and other relatives in their care. In the case of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, a pilot study carried out in 1984 indicated that 20% of female traffickers were married, 40% had common-law relationships, 25% had visiting relationships and 15% had no male companion. On an average, these women had 5 to 10 children.

The majority of the St. Lucian traders originate from rural areas, with most of them owning their own farms.

In Dominica, 77% of the traders live in rural areas.^{21/}

In Grenada, the traders live mostly in the parishes of St. George and St. Andrew, where the ports are situated (see annex, map 2).^{22/}

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the majority of the traders also live in the parish where the port is situated (St. George) (see annex, map 3).^{23/}

Economic position of traders

The majority of the traders depend solely upon the revenue gained from trafficking. Research indicates ^{24/} that revenue for maintaining themselves and their dependents is hardly sufficient to adequately support the individual trader, and even less so her family.

Pilot research in Barbados ^{25/} indicated that the profits of traders vary between US\$17.50 and US\$35.00 per week (case studies 1 and 2 below are illustrative of this). In those calculations the costs incurred by the trader in her home country are not included.

Despite this, the image persists that traders earn substantial amounts of money and, therefore, do not need any organized assistance. While it is true that some traders seem to have expanded their operations, the success stories

are limited to merely a few. There are indications that the majority of traders face financial losses and that, as a consequence, the numbers of dropouts have been extremely high. Those traders that have remained in the trade are considered a marginalized group.

Case study of a small trader

Ramona, a thirty-nine-year-old St. Lucian, has been trading for two years. She has five children and lives with her common-law partner. She reached standard four in primary school. She grows bananas on rented land in St. Lucia and says that she started trading because she could not get a job. She trades in grapefruit, mandarins, oranges, plantains and coconuts. While the boat MV Stella S is in dry dock she buys peanuts in Barbados for resale. She goes to Barbados every four to five months. She usually spends about four weeks in Barbados --never shorter than this-- and sometimes stays as long as seven weeks. Ramona indicates that she won't make a profit if she goes and returns with each boat trip.

When in Barbados, she lives with her brother who himself gets assistance from their mother in St. Lucia. Ramona brings food. She does not pay for accommodation.

Ramona usually spends about US\$148.00-US\$185.00 on produce in St. Lucia. She brings two wooden boxes of citrus (about 500 grapefruits), two or three cardboard boxes of plantains and three bags of coconuts. While she is in Barbados, her partner sometimes sends more produce to her. Her passage on the boat costs US\$83.00 return, and she pays about US\$24.00 to the Captain for the transport of their goods. In Barbados, transport from the dock to the market totals US\$15.50. Ramona rents neither a stall nor a cage to store her produce in the market. She sells more than half of her produce to vendors and the remainder from the roadside. Based on the figures given by Ramona, her expenditure is as follows:

| | |
|-----------------------------|----------------|
| Cost of goods: | US\$185.00 |
| Return passage: | 83.00 |
| Documentation: | 7.50 |
| Freight: | 24.50 |
| Stamp duty: | 10.00 |
| Phyto-sanitary certificate: | 0.75 |
| Transport: | 24.50 |
| Total costs: | US\$335.25 |

Ramona was not able to say how much she made from her sales, but she did give some details regarding the revenue she takes back to St. Lucia. She takes back US\$250.00 in cash and US\$150.00 in groceries, as well as things like shoes for the children. She does not buy clothing in Barbados as it is cheaper in St. Lucia. On her last trip she took home a stove for Christmas. Presumably, when she returns home her living expenses have already been covered. Based on

this assumption, Ramona's profit is less than US\$75.00, but she has spent at least four weeks in Barbados, during which time her minimum earnings averaged US\$37.50 per week.

Case study of a large trader

Veda of St. Vincent is a large trader. She is 36 years old, divorced with seven children. She left secondary school at 17, having reached the third form. She has been trading for nine years. She trades in mangoes, plantains, coconuts, oranges, grapefruit, tangerines and sometimes nutmeg and eddoes. She travels to Barbados often by LIAT while her goods are shipped there. She usually spends three days in Barbados living with her Barbadian boyfriend who is the father of her last child. She stores her goods at her boyfriend's house.

On her last trip, Veda spent US\$352.00 to purchase 4 000 oranges and 700 lbs. of plantain. Her passage by LIAT costs US\$111.00 return and she pays US\$7.50 for the documents. Freight charges for her goods by boat are US\$150.00. In Barbados she pays US\$46.00 stamp duty and US\$50.00 transportation cost from docks to storage. Veda sells her goods to a variety of supermarkets and pays US\$37.50 for transport to these destinations. Based on the figures given by Veda, her expenditure is as follows:

| | |
|---------------------------------------|----------------|
| Cost of goods: | US\$352.50 |
| Passage: | 111.00 |
| Documents: | 7.50 |
| Freight: | 111.00 |
| Stamp duty: | 46.00 |
| Transport-dock to storage: | 50.00 |
| Transport-storage to supermarkets: | 37.50 |
| Total costs: | US\$715.00 |

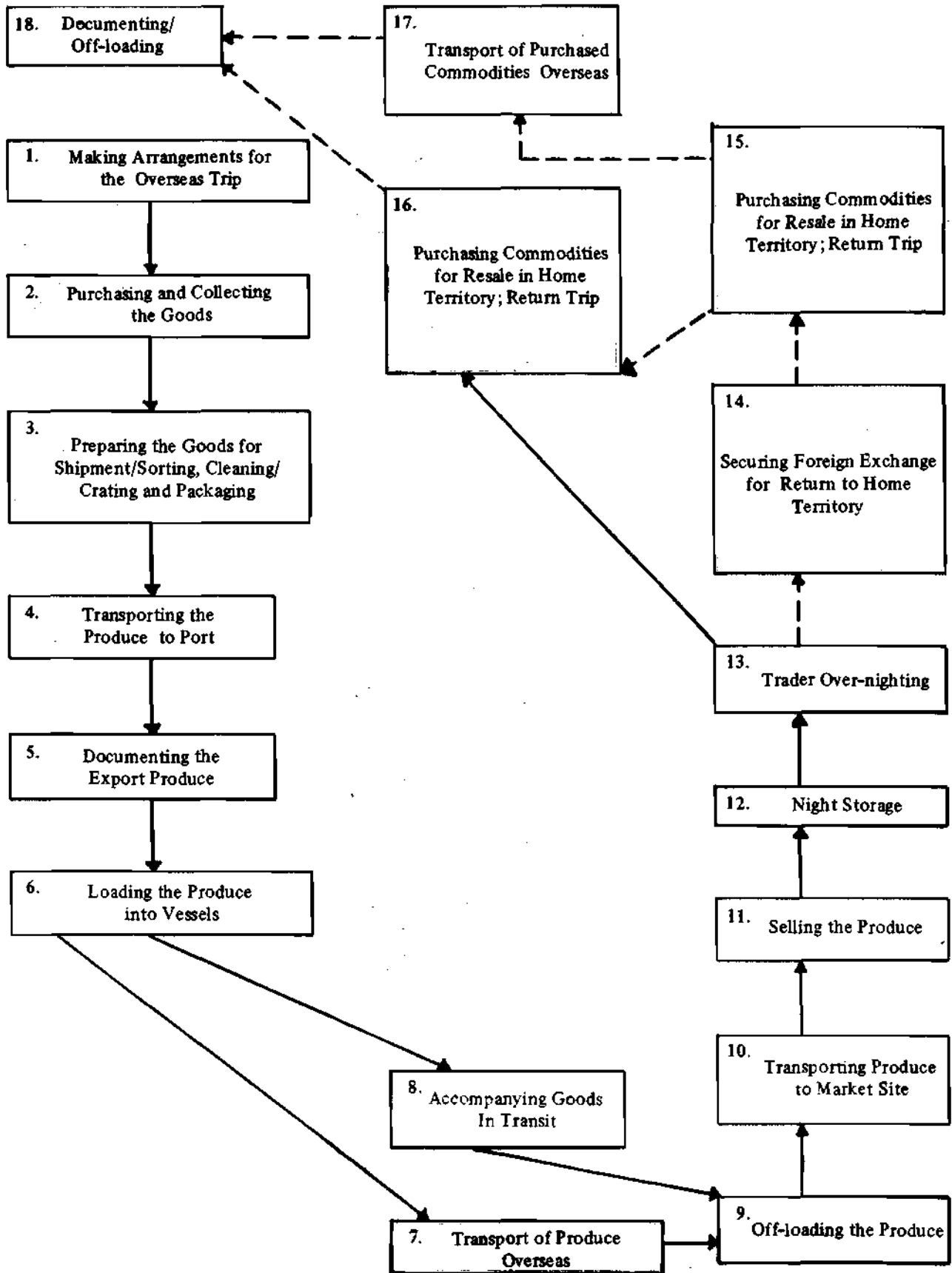
Veda says that she received about US\$750.00 for the sale of her goods. Based on these data, Veda's profit cannot be more than US\$35.00 and is likely to be less.

4. THE TRADER'S ACTIVITY CYCLE

Background

Throughout the region, informal inter-island trade practice includes a number of activities which are repeated in the same order with each trading transaction. These activities thus constitute a cycle (see figure 1).

Figure 1
THE TRADERS ACTIVITY CYCLE



The activities extend over a period of anywhere between a few days and two months. The Barbudan and Anguillan traders have a short cycle lasting three to four days. Traffickers from Grenada and St. Vincent and the Grenadines have a cycle lasting a week. The activities of the Dominican traders vary depending on the countries with which they trade: those trading exclusively in Guadeloupe usually have an activity cycle lasting a week, while those going to Barbados or several Leeward islands within one trading trip have an activity cycle lasting about two weeks. The St. Lucia trader's activity cycle is the longest, varying between two and eight weeks. These traders, however, are involved only in seasonal trading. By the end of the long activity cycle a large percentage of goods have been lost through theft and spoilage. Different studies 26/ indicate that at least 15% of the exported produce suffers spoilage.

As indicated by the activity cycle (see figure 1), the trafficker's workload is very high. Those interviewed estimated that on an average they worked at least 10 hours a day, and some even worked during the last week of pregnancy. From interviews with traders conducted in Dominica 27/ it was indicated that the heavy work schedule and adverse working conditions contributed to a significant amount of aborted pregnancies.

Activity 1: Making arrangements for the overseas trip

These arrangements are made with: a) suppliers, for the supply of produce; b) helpers, for collection and transport of produce to the port; and c) family members and others, for the care of the traders' children while the traders are on a trip.

For each trip, the traffickers have to make arrangements with different farmers, carriers, truck drivers and crate makers. Communication with them has to be nurtured in order to promote good business. Since traders have no formal working relations with these people they are powerless when they deviate from informal agreements or when they do not adequately fulfill their tasks. To renege on any of these informal agreements might mean for the trader that her goods are not supplied, that the quality falls below standard, that the truck driver damages or steals some of the produce or does not deliver. For this reason personalized contacts must be nurtured to ensure that the required services are performed.

A large group of traffickers are the sole supporters of their children and dependents, and often have to arrange for their care during the traders' absence. Often they must pay for such service. Personal and family problems, physical or otherwise, always bear upon the female trader. As the trafficking business thrives on special arrangements and personalized relationships which the trader cannot jeopardize, she cannot easily delegate work. Postponing a business trip is difficult or often impossible, since she trades in perishable goods.

Activity 2: Purchasing and collecting the goods

Origin of the produce

Although a large number of traders are small farmers themselves, they still need to purchase additional produce since their production capacity is too limited to supply market demands for all the trips they undertake. Here again, personalized relationships with suppliers are of enormous importance. Traffickers living in the same area as their suppliers have more opportunities to foster these relationships than those residing further away. Moreover, traffickers often guard from others the names of their suppliers and the price at which they buy, in order to safeguard against competition.

The majority of the traders travel to remote areas to purchase produce by the bag or sack. Each trafficker generally deals regularly with anywhere between three and ten small farmers. Sometimes a middleman purchases the produce from other farmers for the trafficker. This middleman is often himself a produce supplier.

Traffickers often deposit name-labelled sacks or bags with farmers', with whom they make prior arrangements for the collection of the produce. Incidentally, some traders assume responsibility for carrying the produce to the main road from the farm, but more often than not farmers or middlemen perform this duty. Time constraints do not allow the traffickers to check the produce when it is collected. It is not uncommon, therefore, for them to end up with very poor-quality produce. When this happens the trafficker as an individual has no guarantee of reimbursement from the supplier. To safeguard against the supply of poor-quality products and to reduce purchasing costs some traders arrange to harvest the produce themselves, especially the more perishable items.

Sometimes traders buy all or some of their produce at the local market or dockside. Only a very small minority buy produce from the Growers' Associations or Marketing Boards.

Choice of produce

The traffickers trade in a variety of products. Each trafficker trades four to six products on average. Choice of produce depends on availability, market demands, hardness of the produce, and whether or not there are trade restrictions governing entry into any particular import market. For example, since the occurrence of "mango seed weevil", the Grenadian and Dominican traders are no longer allowed to bring mangoes into countries such as Barbados, Trinidad and Tobago, Antigua, United States Virgin Islands, St. Kitts and Nevis --countries which comprised the main receiving markets for this item.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines the traffickers purchase mostly ground provisions: eddoes, sweet potatoes, dasheen, tannias and yams, but also christophenes, golden apples, plantains, pears, coconuts, fresh ginger, limes, plums, pawpaws, oranges, grapefruits, pumpkins, mangoes and bananas.28/

Grenadian traffickers purchase mostly fruits: avocado, soursop, golden apple, sapodilla, sugar apple, plums, limes, bananas and coconuts. During the first quarter of the year some root crops are chosen as well.

The range of goods purchased by the Dominicans includes grapefruits, dasheens, pumpkins, tannias, christophenes, avocados, pears, mangoes, limes, plantains, bananas and fresh cut flowers.

Goods purchased by St. Lucians are limited to plantain, grapefruits, oranges, mandarins, bananas, plums, coconuts and, sporadically, ginger.

Quantities of produce purchased

Figures on the volume of the trade are not reliable. The export figures to Trinidad and Tobago for example, are inflated. Inflated amounts imply inflated proceeds which means that more currency can leave Trinidad and Tobago than is actually received there by the traders. In the case of Barbados the opposite occurs. Export figures are deflated as traffickers attempt to escape burdensome taxation. A tentative estimate of export produce per shipment for each trader ranges between 500 and 7 000 kg,^{29/} with Dominica occupying the lowest and St. Vincent and the Grenadines the highest points within this range.

Figures on quantities shipped by each trader are also not always reliable, because there are traders who often transport other traffickers' goods into the importing markets.

Quantities shipped per month fluctuate enormously, reflecting not only seasonality in production of agricultural produce but also the different trading patterns of the traffickers. A sample of two months for St. Vincentians trading in Barbados revealed that an average of 5 168.4 kg were transported per trader in January 1987 as compared with an average of 2 298 kg in February 1987.

Prices and payment of produce purchased

The purchase price of goods fluctuates a great deal and is determined by various factors such as the degree of competition, the quantity of supplies, and the retail market price of the goods.

Often farmers extend credit to traders, but this service depends entirely upon the farmers' willingness to undertake such risks.

Whatever the price conditions, traders are prepared, because they have usually no bargaining power, to pay higher prices for the produce than do larger export companies or the hotel sector.

Activity 3: Preparing the goods for shipment: sorting, cleaning, crating and packaging

The unsatisfactory conditions under which sorting, cleaning, crating and packaging are carried out often lead to poor presentation and spoilage, which further restrict the markets available to the trafficker.

These activities are done at the traders' homes, the yards of friends, rented spaces near the port or at the wharf. All of these places have inadequate accommodation for such perishable produce. Poor sorting practices, whereby goods are often not graded by size or levels of maturity and are usually sorted in the open air, damage the produce.

Packaging itself is non-standardized. Traders use poorly-made, non-standard wooden crates and baskets, bags and sacks, usually second hand, all of which are unsuitable for transport and create handling problems in the loading and off-loading of the goods (see table 3). Projects to improve packaging have met with resistance from traders. The Dominican Hucksters' Association introduced a new packaging material, but it was initially rejected because of its high cost and low resistance to weather conditions.

Table 3

TYPES OF PACKAGES USED BY TRAFFICKERS OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES FOR AGRICULTURAL PRODUCTS

| Product | Bags | Boxes | Cartons | Sacks | Crate |
|----------------|------|-------|---------|-------|-------|
| Apples | x | x | x | | x |
| Bananas | | x | x | | |
| Christophene | | x | x | x | |
| Coconut | | x | | x | |
| Dasheen | x | | | x | |
| Eddoes | x | | | | |
| Golden apple | | | x | x | |
| Ginger | | | x | x | |
| Limes | | x | | | x |
| Pears | x | x | x | x | x |
| Plantain */ | | x | x | | |
| Plums | | x | | | |
| Sweet potatoes | x | | | x | |
| Sugar apple | x | x | | | |
| Tannia | x | | | | |
| Yams | x | x | x | x | x |

Source: These data are based on a survey of the produce carried on all the ships from St. Vincent and the Grenadines entering Trinidad and Tobago in October 1987.

*/ Plantain is often transported by stem.

Since freight charges are not standardized, traders tend to commit irregularities such as under- or over-packing of containers, which is perceived as advantageous in terms of reduction in taxation for the trader.

Activity 4: Transporting the produce to port

Most traders have no transport facilities, hence the need to contract middlemen to transport the produce to the port. The produce is transferred many times to different packages and vehicles before reaching the port for final shipment. Poor conditions of roads and vehicles, as well as irregularities occurring during transportation of the produce, result in damaged or stolen goods.

Activity 5: Documenting the export produce

Except for Dominica, there is currently no system in the territories whereby licenses are granted to traders allowing them to conduct their trade. Each trafficker must incur additional costs in applying for many of the numerous documents such as shipping bills, invoices, CARICOM certificates and (depending upon the countries with which they trade) visas, before shipping can take place. The process of application for documents is usually lengthy, incurring delays, and requires the help of brokers and checking by government officials such as customs and phyto-sanitary officers. Documentation requirements and checking procedures usually take an entire day to complete. There is no formal provision for the safekeeping of the goods while traffickers proceed with the requisite formalities.

- Activities 6, 7 and 8: (6) Loading the produce into vessels
 (7) Transport of produce overseas
 (8) Accompanying goods in transit

Upon payment of freight charges and approval of shipping bills, traffickers take the produce to the vessels, where it is loaded --usually manually and roughly-- by crew members. Vessels are poorly ventilated and consequently unsuitable for the transportation of fresh produce. They are also unreliable as sea carriers and offer no insurance against damage to or loss of goods.

Proper stacking of the produce is not possible, and as a result goods are often damaged by top pressure. Baskets are frequently stored on the open deck, thereby exposing their contents to sun and salt spray.

Some traders use their own boats to transport their produce overseas, but these vessels are usually faulty.

Traditionally, traffickers accompany the cargo on the vessel to the ports of entry. By and large this practice persists among traders from Dominica and St. Lucia. Travelling by boat necessitates the trafficker's arrival at the docks several hours before departure time in order to board the vessels, which are generally ill-equipped for passenger accommodation. There are generally no

sleeping facilities, and men, women and children are obliged to bunk together on the floor.

Others who are unwilling to do this or who, like traders operating in Trinidad and Tobago, are unable because of government prohibition to accompany the produce by boat, are obliged to incur additional expenses through air travel.

There are no special arrangements with airlines for travel of this nature. Traders complain that despite having to pay regular passenger fares they are treated disrespectfully and with discrimination by airline personnel.

Activities 9 and 10: (9) Off-loading the produce

(10) Transporting produce to market site

At the port of entry the trader assumes the role of importer. As the consignees of the goods, traffickers must meet the necessary payment and legal obligations before they can off-load. These procedures often require the services of brokers and take as much as half a day for each trader to complete.

Grossly inadequate docking and off-loading facilities encourage stealing. A recent survey 30/ indicates that approximately 60% of traders operating in Trinidad and Tobago suffer theft of their produce.

From the wharf traffickers hire trucks to transport goods to the market site. Sometimes they have prearranged agreements with the drivers, and assistance with transportation is usually forthcoming from the many "hands" milling around the wharf seeking casual work.

Activities 11, 12 and 13: (11) Selling the produce

(12) Night storage

(13) Overnighting by the trader

Market penetration by traders is restricted not only by government regulations of each importing country but also by the poor product presentation. Only very few traders, usually male, have penetrated the extra-regional markets. Usually the traders sell only to individual consumers or wholesalers at prices determined largely by supply and demand, and in substandard market facilities where they are often subject to assault by robbers.

Except for the case of Barbados, where storage facilities are available, traffickers are forced, at the end of a market day, to leave the unsold produce at the market site without adequate protection, or to transport the goods to places where they overnight. Some traders, such as those from Dominica, are allowed to sleep overnight on the trading vessels. Others who are unable to do this often group together to rent cheap accommodation. Still others make use of accommodation provided by relatives and friends.

Activity 14: Securing foreign exchange for return to home territory

Since Trinidad and Tobago currency is not legal tender in other territories, traders operating in Trinidad and Tobago must make the necessary conversion to home currency in preparation for the return journey. This transaction is in two parts, since the Central Bank distinguishes between the so-called CIF value (the cost of goods, insurance and freight) and the profit value. Processing time for foreign exchange approval for profits ranges anywhere between one and eight weeks. This has a direct bearing upon the trader's credit rating with farmers and middlemen in the home territory, since prompt repayment of loans cannot be relied upon.

Activities 15 and 16: (15) Purchasing commodities for resale in home territory (16) The return trip

Reverse trading activities are not undertaken on any substantial scale, primarily because the heavy activity cycle, poor financial returns, and the vicissitudes of the voyage do not encourage this. When reverse trading occurs, however, the commodities dealt in are usually determined by the shortages currently prevailing in the importing country. Reverse trade also occurs if there are perceived advantages to be gained. For example, traders operating in Guadeloupe purchase commodities for resale since this allows them to reduce losses otherwise accrued by conversion of the foreign-earned currency into French francs.

Traders do, however, purchase items abroad for personal use upon return to their home territory.

The return trip, which marks the end of the trader's activity cycle, is fraught with as many problems as the initial trading trip, since the necessary customs clearance and other arrangements have to be undertaken upon entry into the home port.

5. LEVEL OF ORGANIZATION AMONG TRADERS

Associations of traders in the Caribbean

There have been a number of unsuccessful attempts by traders throughout the region to organize themselves into associations. At present there are several associations of traders in the region, though only one --the Dominican Hucksters' Association-- is operational.

The formation of traders into associations has generally been hindered by a number of factors:

- 1) Traders are difficult to mobilize as a consequence of their mobility and widespread geographical distribution and their lack of available time, due to their heavy workload.

2) Traders have an individualistic modus operandi, developed by them as a mechanism for survival.

3) Traders are reluctant to form themselves into associations, since these tend to define parameters within which the trader must operate and so limit their operations. Moreover, they fear that once they are organized into associations government interference will increase.

4) Traders have a very low status in society, and this negative perception is internalized. They do not perceive themselves as important and are consequently reluctant to seek any assistance.

The Traffickers' Small Business Association in St. Vincent and the Grenadines

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines efforts have been made to bridge the gap between traders and farmers by trying to include both groups in an association.

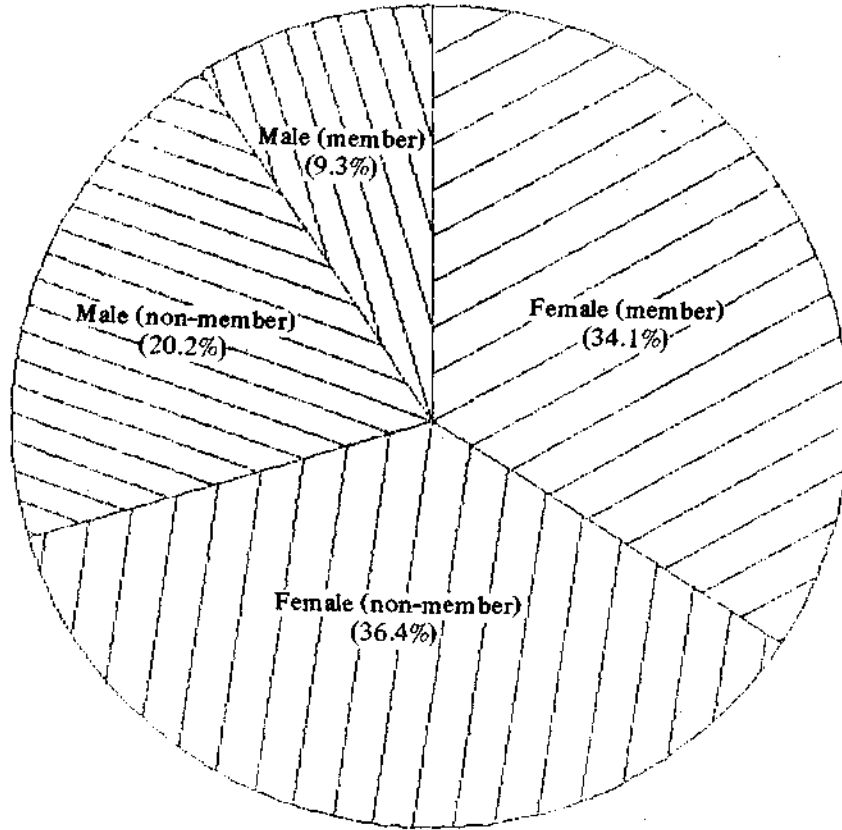
In 1983 some traders organized themselves into the Traffickers' Small Business Association. This came about as a result of the many problems the traders were facing at that time.

The Association's main concern has been to secure a profitable income for the traders. To this effect it has addressed the problem of weekly flooding of the market in Trinidad and Tobago by trying to restrict the number of traders and the quantity of goods shipped to that country. Initially some success was recorded, but this attracted newcomers, and the resulting increased competition caused a decline in the revenue of each trader. Failure to increase the earnings of its members and to unify them has contributed to the weakening of the Association.

Of special significance is the fact that the majority of the traders are young and female, but are represented by an Executive Committee of mostly elderly males.

The Association started with 143 members, and by 1985 membership had grown to 250. Records of registration of new members are no longer made available. The female/male membership ratio indicates a predominance of women: 77% of the member traders are female and 23% are male (see figure 2). From a small survey in 1983 ^{31/} it was estimated that 28% of traders were not members of the Traffickers' Small Business Association. Since then, the trend has accelerated, thus reinforcing the idea that the Association remains non-operational. Of all the female traders operating in the month of January 1987, 66% were not members of the Association, and of the active male traders 91% were not members. It should be noted that it is only recently that male traders have re-entered the trading business, and as the Association does not keep proper records, male membership is probably under-recorded in the figures above.

Figure 2
TRADERS OF ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES
(Breakdown of active traders, 1987)



Current efforts to form an association in Grenada

There is no formal association at present in Grenada. On 2 January 1987, the Division of Women's Affairs in Grenada and UN ECLAC/WID held a joint meeting with 51 traders who outlined their problems and expressed the wish to organize themselves into an association. Ninety percent of the participants were female. A steering committee was elected and a male trader was made president. Efforts to get a formal association started are still progressing.

The Dominican Hucksters' Association

The Dominican Hucksters' Association (DHA) was launched on 27 July 1981 and is the first independent and voluntary organization of its kind in the Caribbean. At its inception it had 152 registered members and in 1987 the total number of members registered was 360, 65% of them being women.^{32/}

The aim of the association is to promote the interests of the hucksters by providing technical and financial assistance. To date, the association (often in co-operation with the Ministry of Agriculture) has developed several activities such as a project in basic costing and pricing, and a pilot project on collective purchasing and post-harvest services. The association also provides credit facilities and insurance coverage for its members, and has initiated an outreach public relations programme through the use of radio, The Weekly Chronicle Newspaper, and its own newsletter.

Noteworthy among facilities offered by the Dominican Hucksters' Association is a specific credit scheme whereby members of the Association can get a sixty-day short-term loan of US\$300.00. This credit scheme is administered by the AID Bank. Interest on loans is 8%, with 4% interest paid to the Bank for covering administrative costs, and 4% to DHA. Of this, 47% goes back to the revolving fund (see table 4).

Table 4

LOAN APPLICATIONS BY HUCKSTERS IN DOMINICA

| Year | Number of applicants | | |
|------|----------------------|------|-------|
| | Female | Male | Total |
| 1984 | 8 | 3 | 11 |
| 1985 | 118 | 36 | 154 |
| 1986 | 203 | 63 | 266 |
| 1987 | 74 | 28 | 102 |

Source: Hucksters Credit File, Dominica.

All reports on loan activities have been favourable as regards use of loans, funds and repayment.

The impact of the credit scheme has not been studied or evaluated to determine how effective it has been in terms of improving the trading operation and to ascertain whether or not farmers and other persons providing services are receiving prompt payment, or helpers are receiving a wage.

An important point to note is that the Dominican Hucksters' Association is attempting to control the trade and to improve the trading practices of traders to enable them to enter and compete in the formal trading sector. This development, while it may be good for the agricultural trade in general, is detrimental to female traders, who are generally less able to enter the formal sector.

6. CONCLUSIONS

1. The informal inter-island trade in agricultural commodities is of economic importance for the Caribbean.

The traders are the main exporters of agricultural produce in intra-Caribbean trade. They provide a significant service to the small farmers by marketing, and to the receiving countries by supplying, fresh produce.

Trading offers an opportunity for self-employment and for the development of entrepreneurial skills to 1 300 traders, the majority of whom are women with dependents and small chances on the job market. Each trader provides work for others, such as farmers, carriers, truck-drivers, crate makers, customs brokers, and shipping and airline personnel.

2. The work that the traders perform is physically heavy and the work pressure is high.

The working conditions are deplorable: the traders have to work many hours in uncovered areas exposed to dust, sun and rain, and the marginal traders work especially long hours.

The marginal and often fluctuating income derived from the trade, and the constant threat of loss of produce without insurance coverage, are other factors which heighten the pressures under which traders operate.

3. The situation of the traders is steadily deteriorating.

The revenues of the traders have decreased as a result of the shrinking markets in the food importing countries and the increase in competition in the agricultural exporting sector. This has serious consequences for the female traders, who have very limited employment opportunities outside of the trade and who are often solely responsible for the maintenance of their children.

4. The traders are less able than before to adjust and adapt themselves successfully to the hostile trading environment, since national and regional trading requirements have become more restrictive.

The traders, and especially the women, face severe difficulties in penetrating new markets. The poor quality of the produce, the high percentage of spoilage, the poor product presentation, and the small and fluctuating quantities the traders are marketing make it difficult to compete with the exporters in the formal sector.

5. The services and facilities provided for the trade and the traders are inadequate.

Facilities at the wharves, on the boats and in terminal markets are very inadequate and there are few incentives to improve the working conditions and the trading practices of the traffickers.

6. Without incentives and government support to upgrade the trading sector, the traders are going to disappear, since they are not able to survive on their own and are not in a position to upgrade their trading practices.

7. RECOMMENDATIONS

The following recommendations are made with a view to reversing the pattern of decline in the inter-island trade in agricultural produce:

1. Governments and the general public in the Caribbean should be sensitized to the importance of the inter-island trade in fresh agricultural produce for the region.
2. Efforts should be made to promote associations of traders. The full participation of woman traders in this formation process should be actively encouraged.
3. Facilities should be provided for the traders to upgrade their trading practices.
4. In-depth research into the operations of traders should be undertaken in order to determine remedial measures to address the existing problems.

Notes

1/ Daphne Phillips, "Women Traders in Trinidad and Tobago" (LC/CAR/G.151), May 1985.

2/ Yvonne Holder, "Women Traders in Guyana" (LC/CAR/R.200), November 1986. Magali Pineda, Consultant Paper, "Las Comerciantes en la República Dominicana". Alicia Taylor, Consultant Paper, "Women Traders in Jamaica, a Report on the Informal Commercial Importers", April 1988.

3/ Kirby and Martin, The Rise and Fall of the Black Caribs of St. Vincent, St. Vincent, 1872, p. 18; and Shephard, An Historical Account of the Island of St. Vincent, 1971, p. 32, quoted by A.St.A. Frazer in: Development of a Peasantry in St. Vincent, 1846-1912, p. 70.

4/ W. Andrew Axline, Agricultural Policy and Collective Self-Reliance in the Caribbean, 1986, p. 24.

5/ The following countries are considered MDCs: Trinidad and Tobago, Jamaica, Guyana, Barbados and the Bahamas.

6/ The following countries are considered LDCs: Antigua, Dominica, Grenada, Montserrat, St. Kitts/Nevis, St. Lucia, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and Belize.

7/ W. Andrew Axline, Agricultural Policy and Collective Self-Reliance in the Caribbean, 1986, pp. 33-34.

8/ W. Andrew Axline, Agricultural Policy ..., op. cit., p. 51.

9/ Hannah Clarendon, Consultant Paper, "Constructing a Data Base on Women Traders in Dominica", August 1987, p. 32.

10/ WISCO is owned by the Governments of the English-speaking countries of the Caribbean (CARICOM), but recently Belize, Dominica and St. Vincent and the Grenadines decided to withdraw from it.

11/ ECLAC, draft report on women traders in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, 1988.

12/ Pancho Geerman, Consultant Paper, "Explorative Research on the Inter-Island Traders in the Leeward Islands", 1987, pp. 10-13.

13/ ECLAC, draft report on women traders in St. Vincent ..., op. cit.

14/ ECLAC, draft report on women traders in Grenada, 1988; draft report on women traders in St. Vincent ..., op. cit.; Hannah Clarendon, Consultant Paper, "Constructing a Data Base ...", op. cit., p. 11; Pancho Geerman, Consultant Paper, "Explorative Research ...", op. cit., p. 15.

15/ Pancho Geerman, Consultant Paper, "A Preliminary Overview of the Informal Trade in the Leeward Islands", 1987, p. 15.

16/ There are indications that registered male members often are not real traffickers but register themselves as traffickers and become members of the Dominican Hucksters' Association in order to help other traffickers to maximize benefits such as loan facilities provided by the Association.

17/ ECLAC, draft report on women traders in St. Vincent ..., op. cit., and Hannah Clarendon, Consultant Paper, "Constructing a Data Base ...", op. cit., p. 10.

18/ Hannah Clarendon, Consultant Paper, "Constructing a Data Base ...", op. cit., p. 12.

19/ Hannah Clarendon, Consultant Paper, "Constructing a Data Base ...", op. cit., p. 12.

20/ Daphne Phillips, "Women Traders in Trinidad and Tobago" (LC/CAR/G.151), May 1985, p. 21.

21/ Hannah Clarendon, Consultant Paper, "Constructing a Data Base ...", op. cit., p. 10.

22/ ECLAC, draft report on women traders in Grenada, op. cit.

23/ ECLAC, draft report on women traders in St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

24/ Theresa Ann Rajack, Consultant Report, "Exploratory Research of the Activities and Experiences of the Inter-Island Traders Operating in Trinidad and Tobago", 1988, p. 6.

25/ Christine Barrow, Consultant Paper, "Women and Inter-Island Trading with Barbados", March 1988, pp. 17-23.

26/ Commonwealth Secretariat: First Consultative Meeting on Post-Harvest Losses in the Caribbean, 19-24 July 1981, UWI Campus, St. Augustine, Trinidad and Tobago: "Report of Post-Harvest Losses Consultative Meeting, Volume 1 and 2, 1981", and Tropical Development and Research Institute (R1173): "Report on a Fruit and Vegetables Packaging and Handling Development Project in Dominica and the Eastern Caribbean", by P. A. Hughes and J. H. New, 1983.

27/ Research conducted for the ECLAC video production "God Give Us the Talent, the Hucksters of Dominica", November 1987. See also "Transcription of the Video 'God Give Us the Talent, the Hucksters of Dominica'", p. 2, ECLAC, 1988.

28/ The bananas marketed in the region are usually rejects from the GEEST Company which cannot be marketed in the United Kingdom. In the winter months when the U.K banana market is very slow, the regional banana market picks up.

29/ ECLAC, draft reports on women traders in St. Vincent and the Grenadines and in Grenada, 1988.

30/ Theresa Ann Rajack, Consultant Paper, "Exploratory Research ...", op. cit., p. 5.

31/ Report by the Central Planning Unit of St. Vincent and the Grenadines, "A Storage for the Traffickers of St. Vincent and the Grenadines", Appendix 5 (1984).

32/ ECLAC, draft report on women traders in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, op. cit.

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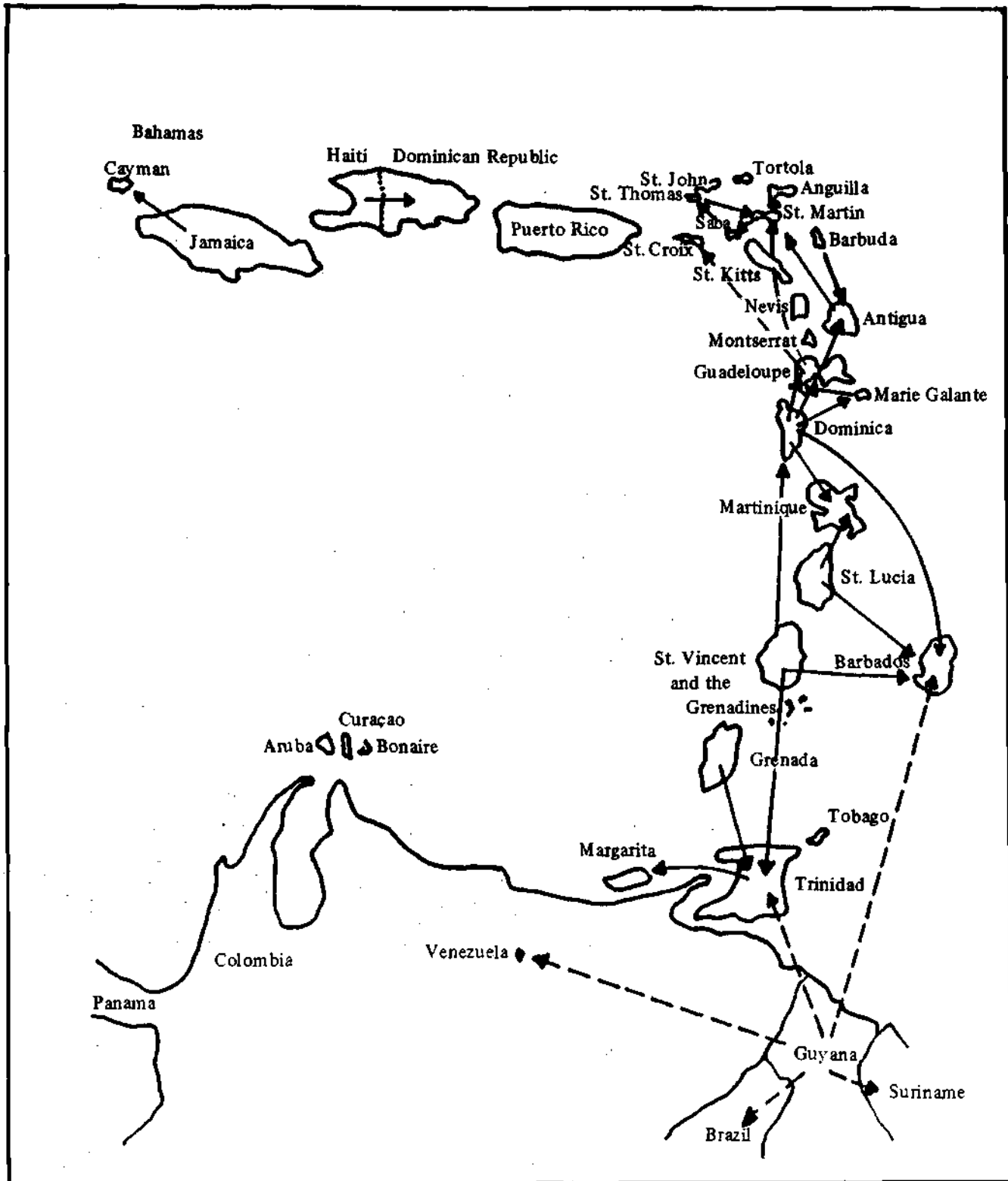
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A N N E X

Map 1

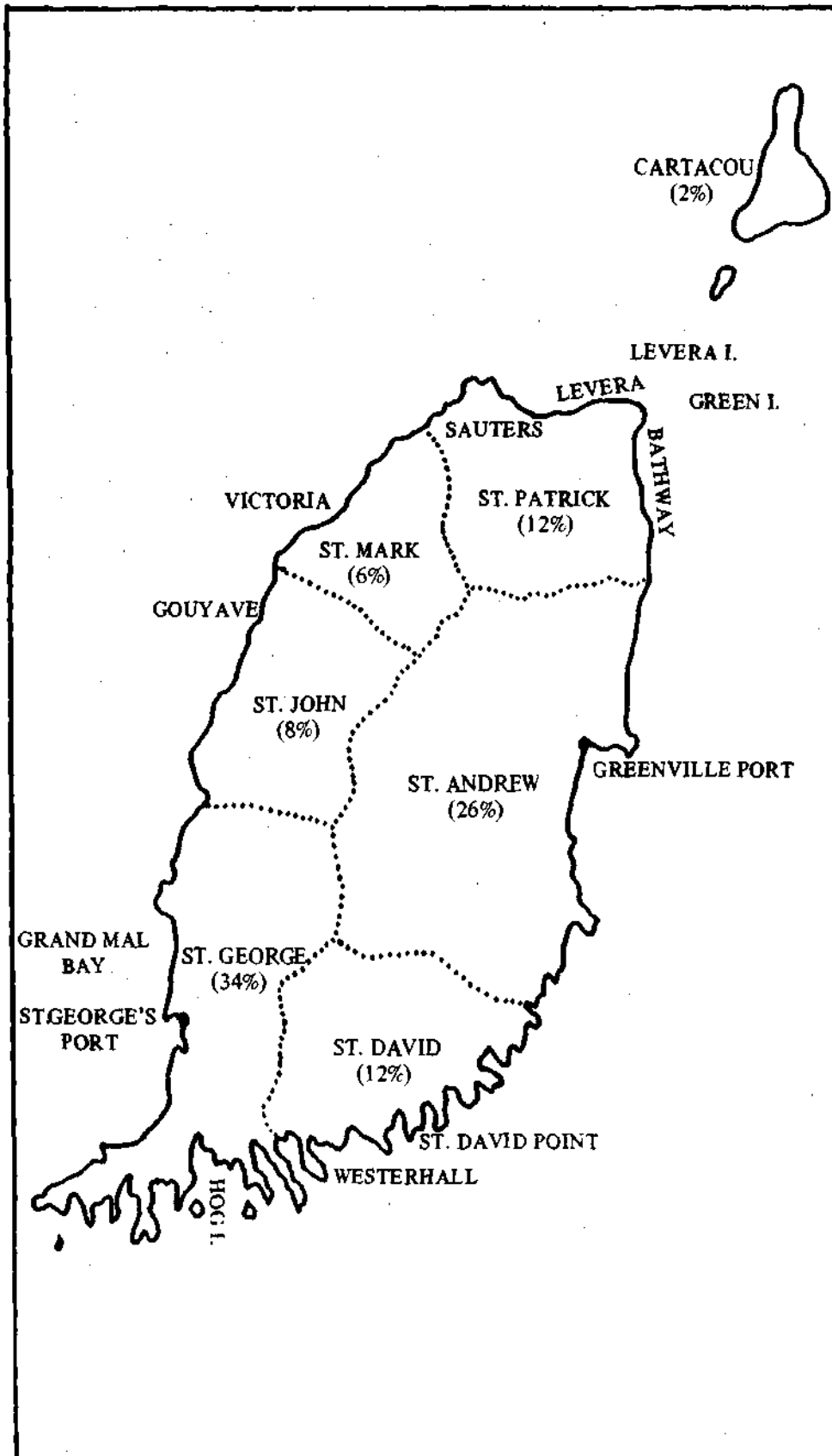
GEOGRAPHICAL MOVEMENTS OF THE INTER-ISLAND TRADERS IN AGRICULTURAL PRODUCE



The designations employed and the presentation of material on this map do not imply the expression of any opinion whatsoever on the part of the Secretariat of the United Nations concerning the legal status of any country, territory, city or area or of its authorities, or concerning the delimitation of its frontiers or boundaries.

Map 2

GRENADA: RESIDENCE OF TRAFFICKERS



Map 3

**ST. VINCENT AND THE GRENADINES:
RESIDENCE OF TRAFFICKERS**

