Rural markets in the Centre-West of Côte d'Ivoire: between socio-economic object and territorial issues

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Abstract : In rural Côte d'Ivoire, the market is a hub for the supply of food products, but also for manufactured goods from the city. It is a place for socialization and resource mobilization, where the methods of redistribution of these products are organized. Markets in the Center-West region of Côte d'Ivoire are shaping new dynamics. This paper provides a functional analysis of rural markets in the Center-West region of Côte d'Ivoire in a post-crisis context. The results of this study are based on the use of secondary data obtained from specialized organizations and primary data. The primary data, both qualitative and quantitative, were collected during a socioeconomic survey conducted in five (05) localities selected according to economic, demographic, and spatial representativeness criteria. It appears that the Center-West region of Côte d'Ivoire has rural markets of varying sizes and economic potential. The size of the markets is determined by the number of weekly operators (74%) and the number of permanent operators (26%). Rural markets are important providers of financial resources to various actors, including local authorities. The areas of influence of the markets are uneven and decrease from east to west of the area under study.
Keywords: Côte d'Ivoire, Supply, Rural markets, Huff model, Territory

Résumé: En milieu rural ivoirien, le marché est un nœud d'approvisionnement en produits vivrier, mais aussi en produits manufacturés en provenance de la ville. C'est un lieu de socialisation, de mobilisation de ressources où s'organisent les modes de redistribution de ces produits. Les marchés du Centre-Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire structurent de nouvelles dynamiques. Cette contribution fait une analyse fonctionnelle des marchés ruraux du Centre-Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire dans un contexte post crise. Les résultats de cette étude reposent sur l'exploitation de données secondaires acquises auprès de structures spécialisées et de données primaires. Les données primaires, à la fois qualitatives et quantitatives ont été recueillies lors d'une enquête socioéconomique menée à l'échelle de cinq (05) localités sélectionnées selon des critères économiques, démographiques et de représentativité spatiale. Il ressort que le Centre-Ouest de la Côte d'Ivoire dispose de marchés ruraux aux tailles et aux potentialités économiques variées. La taille des marchés est déterminée par le nombre d'opérateurs hebdomadaires (74%) et le nombre d'opérateurs fixes (26%). Les marchés ruraux sont des pourvoyeurs importants de ressources financières à divers acteurs dont les collectivités territoriales. Les aires d'influence des marchés sont inégales et vont décroissante d'Est vers l'Ouest de l'espace d'étude.
Mots clés : Côte d'Ivoire, Approvisionnement, Marché ruraux, Modèle de Huff, Territoire.

Introduction

The global economic crisis that occurred during the 1980s led to upheavals in the agricultural production system in rural areas. From an agricultural system primarily focused on export crops as a cash crop, there was a gradual shift to a system where food and market gardening crops became the cash crops. This dynamic gave rise to the vitality of central locations such as rural markets.

The rural areas of the Centre-West of Côte d'Ivoire have markets that constitute structuring elements of the territory. These rural markets are hubs and weekly convergence points. The market is a place of exchange, regular attendance and social interactions which, being also positively connoted and perceived, appears as the "high place" of the space lived in rural Africa. As such, it plays a decisive role in the organization of rural space and is, due to its dynamism, a factor of attraction, socio-collective facilities and justification of the flow of vehicles coming from the city (K. Kabamba and K. Ntumba , 1999, p. 93). In rural areas, the market is a supply station for food products but also for manufactured products from the city. It is the place where the methods of redistribution of these products are organized. The market, more generally a place of exchange and social interaction, is an important determinant in the organization of geographical space. In rural Ivorian areas, the market is a hub for the supply of food products, but also manufactured goods. It is a place of socialization and resource mobilization where the modes of redistribution of these products are organized. The markets of the Center-West of Côte d'Ivoire, part of whose territory was under occupation during the military-political crisis from 2002 to 2011, are developing new dynamics in a post-crisis context. In this context, how do rural markets, as a geographical unit, constitute both social and economic objects in the development of the Center-West of Côte d'Ivoire? This contribution provides a functional analysis of the rural markets of the Center-West of Côte d'Ivoire. The results are structured around the analysis of the variety of economic potential of rural markets, then the analysis of the attractiveness of rural markets based on Huff 's gravity model. Finally, the study addresses the constraints to the functioning of rural markets.

1. Materials and methods

1.1. Data collection equipment and tools

This study on the socio-economic and geographical analysis of rural markets uses two main materials. The equipment used consists of a digital camera which was used for field photography, and a Global Positioning System (GPS) which was used for geo-location of survey locations and rural markets.

The tools used in this study include a questionnaire for collecting data from traders, an interview guide used to conduct interviews with market managers, and a focus group that brought together wholesale, semi-wholesale and retail traders, as well as transporters. An observation grid to document the infrastructure and environment of rural markets.

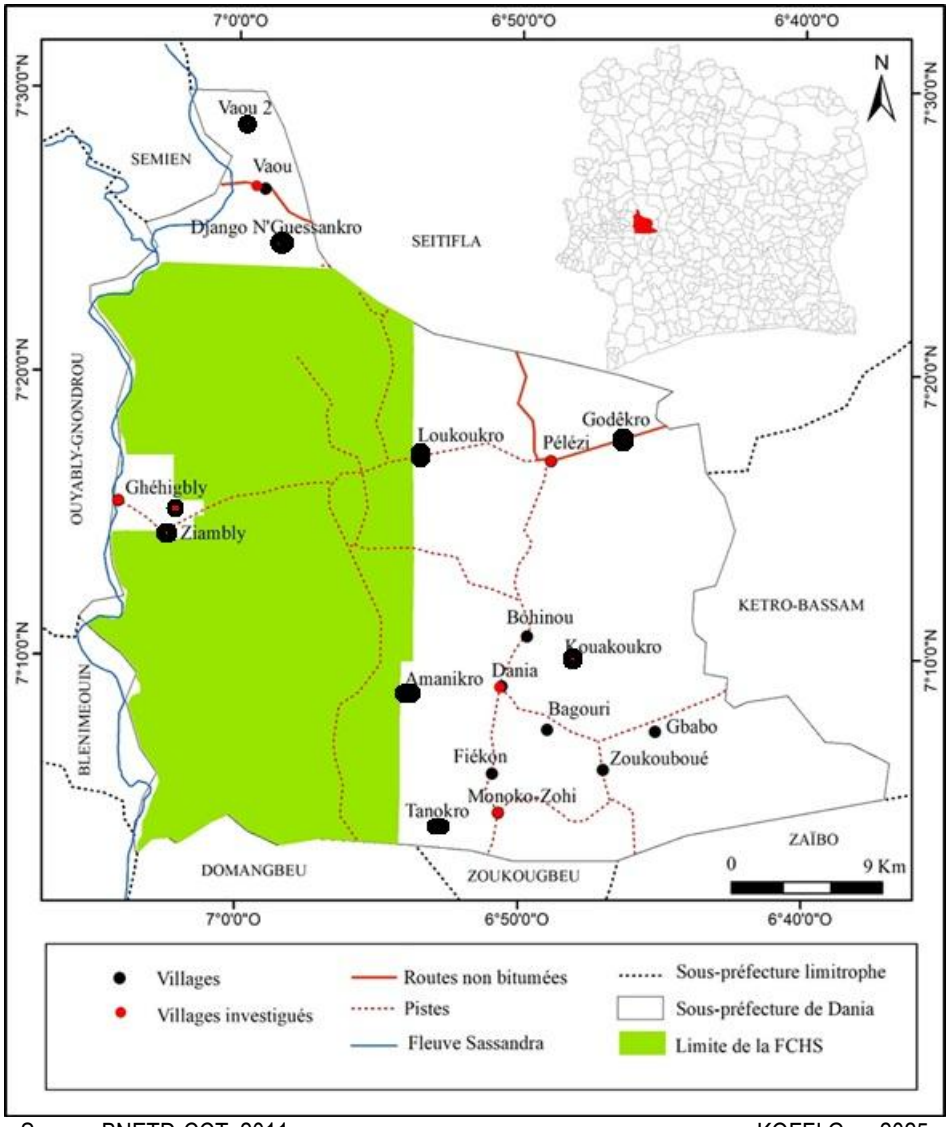
1.2. Constitution of the sampling

1.2.1. Presentation of the study area

The territory of the Center-West of Ivory Coast, selected within the framework of this study on rural markets is the sub-prefecture of Dania. This administrative district was established as a sub-prefecture by decree n° 97 – 18 of January 15, 1997. The sub-prefecture of Dania, which extends over an area of 1350 km², is located between the meridians 6°40'00" and 7°00'00" of West longitude and the parallels 7°10'00" and 7°30'00" of North latitude. The choice of this study territory is justified by the presence of a multitude of rural markets maintained by the importance and

dynamism of agricultural activities. To conduct this study, economic and temporal factors require the identification of localities across the study area in order to ensure better representativeness of the sampling. The five (05) localities were chosen according to geographical criteria of spatial representativeness, and the criterion of the provision of a weekly market. Thus, we opted for the choice of villages which house a weekly market according to a criterion of representativeness following the North, South, East, West and Center directions. This classification meets the need to induce socio-spatial inequalities in the study of rural markets at the scale of the sub-prefecture of Dania. Map 1 shows the selected localities.

Map 1: Location of the study area



Source: BNETD-CCT, 2011 KOFFI Guy, 2025

1.2.2. Selection of target populations

In order to gain a better understanding of the realities of how rural markets operate, we identified the key players in these sales areas. The process of identifying target populations made it possible to identify traders (wholesale, semi-wholesale, and retail) and transporters, who were given a questionnaire.

To establish the sample size, we opted for the quota method due to the prevailing statistical vacuum regarding the availability of data on rural markets across the study area. Thus, we decided to survey twenty (20) traders and five (05) transporters per village or per study market, i.e. a total of one hundred (100) traders and twenty-five (25) transporters.

1.3. Collection, processing and analysis of data

Data collection combines both the quantitative method for the acquisition of quantitative data, and the qualitative method for the acquisition of qualitative data. The study is based on data from documentary research, observation, and field surveys.

The collected data were statically processed using Sphinx Plus² (v5) and Excel software. Cartographic processing was performed using ArcGIS 10.8, and text processing using Word. The data analysis in this study has a dual character. On the one hand, there is an analysis inspired by empirical research derived from the exploitation of field data, and on the other hand, an analysis inspired by theoretical research based on the Huff model, which uses empirical data to test its validity.

2. Results

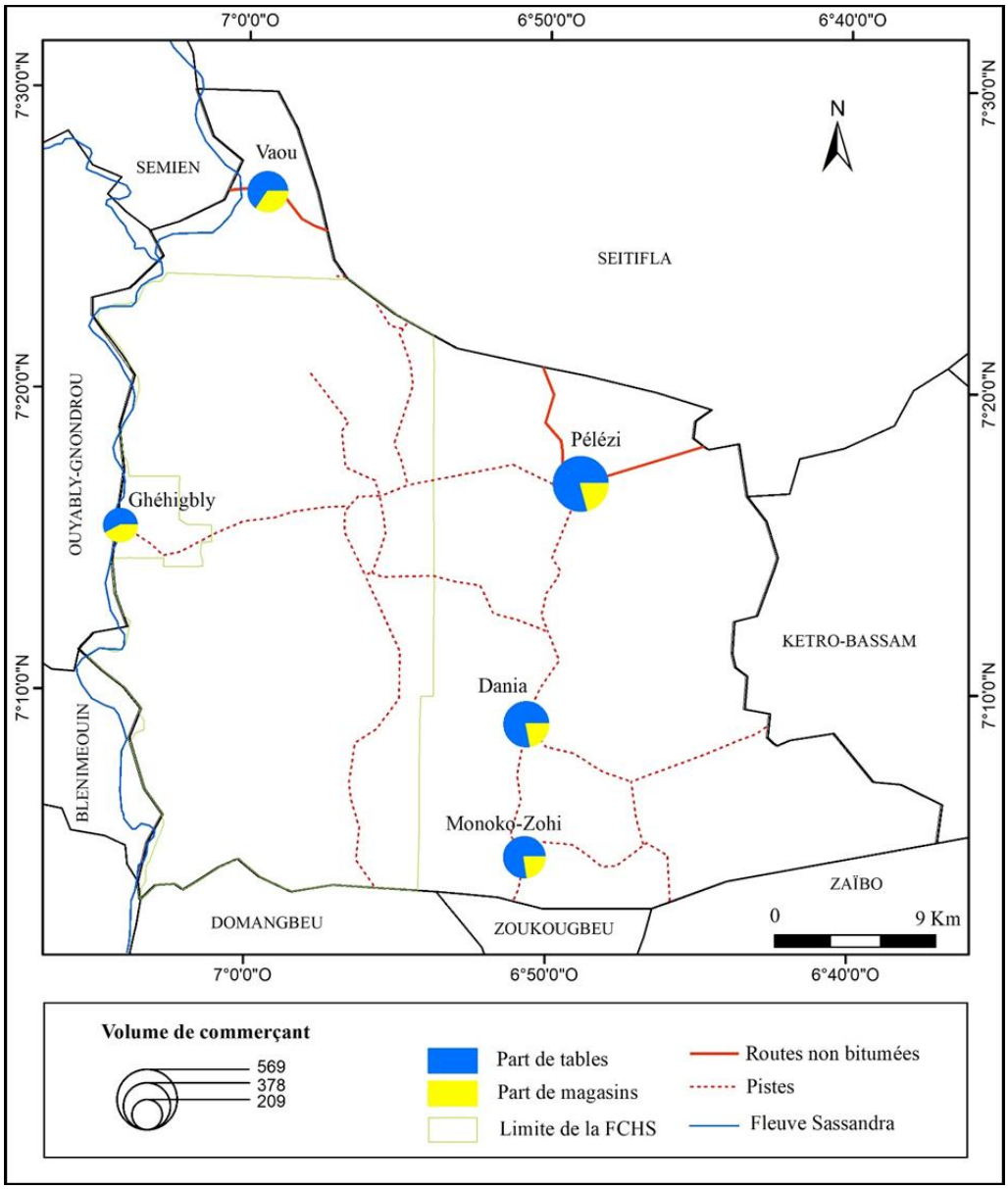
2.1. Dania, a sub-prefecture of rural markets with varied economic potential

This section highlights the spatial distribution of markets and their economic potential.

2.1.1. A spatial variation in the size of markets

Markets are a key element in structuring rural areas. The markets in the Dania sub-prefecture experienced significant growth from the 1980s to the early 2000s. This growth was evident in the availability of products, the diversity of stakeholders, and their relationships with markets in surrounding areas, as well as with major cities such as Abidjan, Daloa, Bouaké, Bamako, and Ouagadougou. With the passing of the decade of military-political crisis, the dynamism and influence of the rural markets in the Dania sub-prefecture declined somewhat. However, some markets do exist, but the level of interest they generate varies from one location to another. Map 2 illustrates this.

Map 2: Spatial inequality of rural markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania



Source: BNETD-CCT, 2011 KOFFI Guy, 2025

Analysis of the map reveals that market sizes vary by location. This variation reflects the popularity of the various markets. The markets in the Dania sub-prefecture are primarily held weekly. As such, their size is determined by the number of weekly and permanent operators. Permanent operators are owners of stores or shops of all kinds. They are located in the localities and operate daily. Weekly operators, on the other hand, are traders who operate only on market days. They are composed of transient traders, but most of them are occasional traders. Occasional traders are mostly women from the villages, but especially from the surrounding camps. Their commercial specialty is based on the current agricultural availability.

Thus, the village of Pélézi has the largest market in the sub-prefecture of Dania. It brings together 569 operators, 20.9% of which are fixed operators. This status as leader of the rural markets of the sub-prefecture of Dania, Pélézi owes it to this crossroads. Indeed, to come or go to the

departmental capital, Vavoua, Pélézi is the only essential point. In addition, to reach Dania (sub-prefectural capital) from a northern position, Pélézi is also essential. Finally, with the road that connects it directly to the classified forest of Haut Sassandra, Pélézi is the delivery point for most of the products resulting from the exploitation of the classified forest. This geographical location, which makes Pélézi the convergence point for most of the mobility movements, justifies its status as the first hub of the rural markets of the sub-prefecture of Dania.

The second market is Dania, the sub-prefectural capital. This market brings together 378 operators consisting of 21.7% fixed operators and 78.3% weekly operators. Dania holds this position due to its status as the capital of the sub-prefecture. Indeed, Dania houses the only urban health center in the sub-prefecture. It is also the headquarters for the establishment of administrative documents. The Monoko-Zohi market is made up of 22.7% fixed operators and 77.3% weekly operators. The Vaou market brings together 299 operators divided between weekly operators (65.6%) and fixed operators (34.4%). The market with the lowest reputation is Gbéhigbly. It concentrates 209 operators for 42.1% fixed operators and 57.9% weekly operators. However, it is important to note that this market has the largest number of fixed operators and the smallest number of weekly operators. Indeed, Gbéhigbly is an enclave located between the eastern bank of the Sassandra River and the western edge of the classified forest of Haut Sassandra. It therefore has the classified forest of Haut Sassandra as a natural border with the other localities of the administrative district of Dania.

The presence of the forest, which limits the possibilities of creating camps, as well as the difficult conditions of crossing the classified forest of Haut Sassandra, limit access to the market to outside traders. The weekly operators who operate are mostly locals and, to a lesser extent, traders from Piébly, a locality located on the eastern bank of the Sassandra River.

2.1.2. Rural markets in the mobilization of financial resources of local authorities

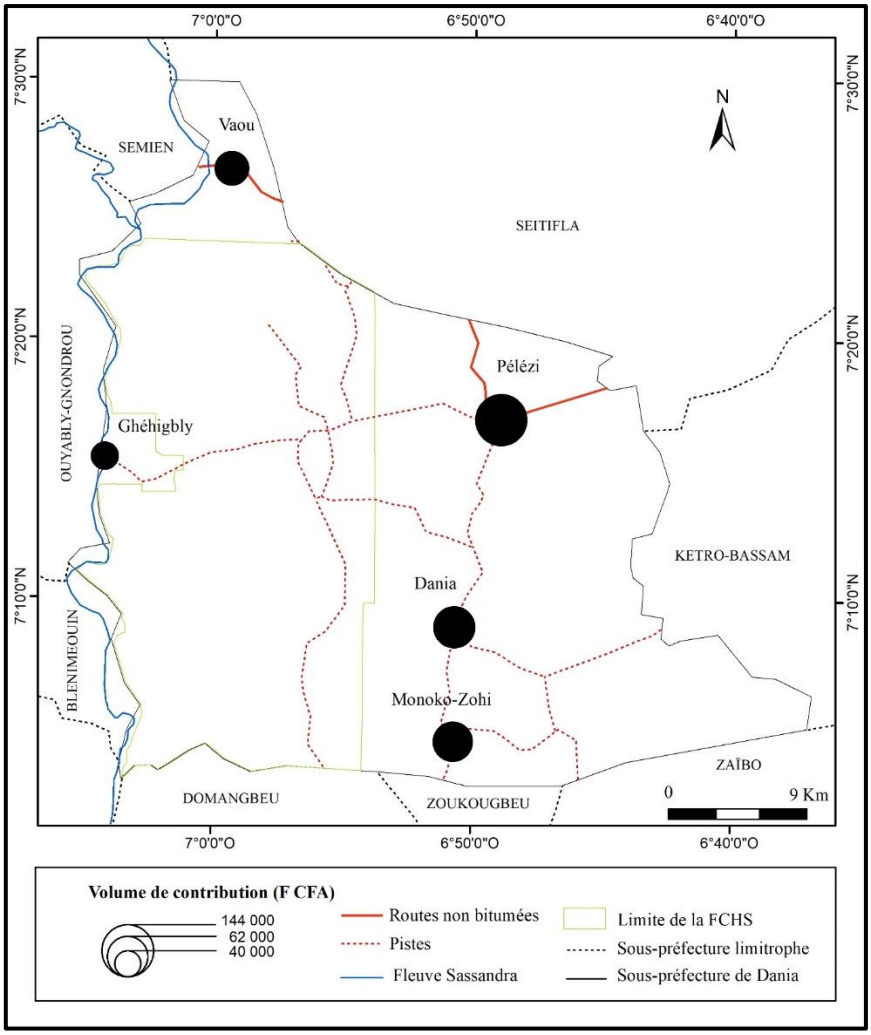
Although long-standing and of timid and reserved use, decentralization policy truly began in Côte d'Ivoire in the wake of the economic crisis of the 1980s. Decentralization came about to turn the page on interventionist policies. It gives pride of place to the participation of populations in the national effort of development and promotion of democracy at the grassroots level. It has therefore raised many hopes among the population. Because, apart from the establishment of democracy at the local level and the rapprochement of the administration with the citizen, it also allows the development of basic equipment and infrastructure.

Thus, to effectively carry out these missions, many powers were transferred to local authorities according to Law No. 2003-208 of July 7, 2003, on the transfer and distribution of powers from the State to local authorities. It covers 16 areas including development planning, urban planning and housing, communication routes and various networks, transport, health, public hygiene and quality control, environmental protection and natural resource management, promotion of economic development and employment. In 2014, Law No. 2014-451 of August 5, 2014 on the orientation of the general organization of the Territorial Administration recognizes in its Article 32, two categories of territorial community: the region and the municipality (Official Journal of the Republic of Côte d'Ivoire, August 18, 2003, p. 22).

These communities enjoy legal personality and financial autonomy. Beyond the promotion and achievement of local development, one of their main missions is the modernization of the rural world and the improvement of the living environment. Thus, the regional council of Haut Sassandra is committed to the development of the rural area that constitutes the sub-prefecture of Dania. It takes over the management of rural markets, which were previously the responsibility of village

committees. Depending on their dynamism, the markets provide a level of financial contribution to local authorities. Map 3 shows the distribution of monthly financial contributions according to the markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania.

Map 3: Distribution of monthly financial contributions according to the markets of the sub-prefecture of Dania



Source: BNETD-CCT, 2011 KOFFI Guy, 2025

Financial contributions from markets vary considerably depending on the locality. Generally speaking, the rural markets in the Dania sub-prefecture provide the Haut Sassandra regional council with a monthly financial contribution of 422,000 FCFA. Specifically, the Pélézi market is the largest contributor in the Dania sub-prefecture, with a monthly amount of 144,000 FCFA. This is followed by the markets of Dania (92,000 FCFA), Monoko-Zohi (84,000 FCFA), Vaou (62,000 FCFA) and Gbéhigbly (40,000 FCFA). The spatial variation in the levels of financial contribution is aligned with the socio-spatial determinants of the reputation of the rural markets in the Dania sub-prefecture. The mobilization of financial resources, which is done on a weekly basis, relies on young people chosen from the local population. The latter, who act as agents of the Haut Sassandra regional council, are responsible for collecting fixed taxes and then forwarding them to the financial department of the said council. The level of financial contribution of the localities has the effect of influencing the level of maintenance of the markets as well as the level of investment in

infrastructure and basic social facilities. The level of financial contribution of the markets determines their attractiveness which is studied in the following section.

2.2. Huff 's gravity model as a tool for measuring the attractiveness of rural markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania

2.2.1. Analysis of the area of influence of rural markets: from the Réilly model to the Huff model

The gravity model is intended to formalize, study, reproduce and predict interactions. Indeed, the distribution of interactions in a set of places depends on their configuration, that is to say, the forces of attraction and the difficulties of communication between each place. The emergence of the gravity model in spatial analysis is notably linked to questions of an economic and commercial nature. Indeed, in 1931, Reilly formulated a law concerning the organization of commercial attraction zones which takes up the formulation of Newton's gravitational model. This law is based on empirical observations which quantify commercial attractions between different cities. It is now called "Reilly's law". The statement of Reilly's law, applied to commercial gravitation is as follows: " two centers (located in two different cities) attract the purchases of the populations located between them in direct proportion to the total number of inhabitants of the cities considered and in inverse proportion to the square of the distance that must be traveled to get there " (S. Lhomme, 2012). The initial formulation of Reilly's law relates to the force of attraction. For Reilly, the force of attraction exerted by a city j on a place i is proportional to its size (Mj) and inversely proportional to the square of the distance (Dij) between i and j.

Reilly's Law: A $\vec{}$ij=Mj/(Dij^2)

Several authors have criticized the deterministic nature of Reilly's law, which assumes that consumers are in a homogeneous environment, fully informed and rational. According to Huff, rather than corresponding to precise lines, the limits of the areas of influence must correspond to more or less blurred transition zones. Huff, who worked on the attraction of shopping centers, proposed a probabilistic formulation of Reilly's law that allows modeling the market share that different competing centers theoretically hold at each point in a given territory. This approach of Huff 's our attention insofar as it matches the purpose of this section of the work, which is to determine the share of influence of each rural market in the sub-prefecture of Dania. Thus, Huff 's model is formulated according to the protocol below.

Huff Model:

Let us consider a set of k competing centers 1.. j..k of respective masses M1..Mj… Mk

Let a consumer be located at a point i situated at distances D1i .. Dij … Dik from these centers.

What is the probability pij for the consumer located at i to frequent center j?

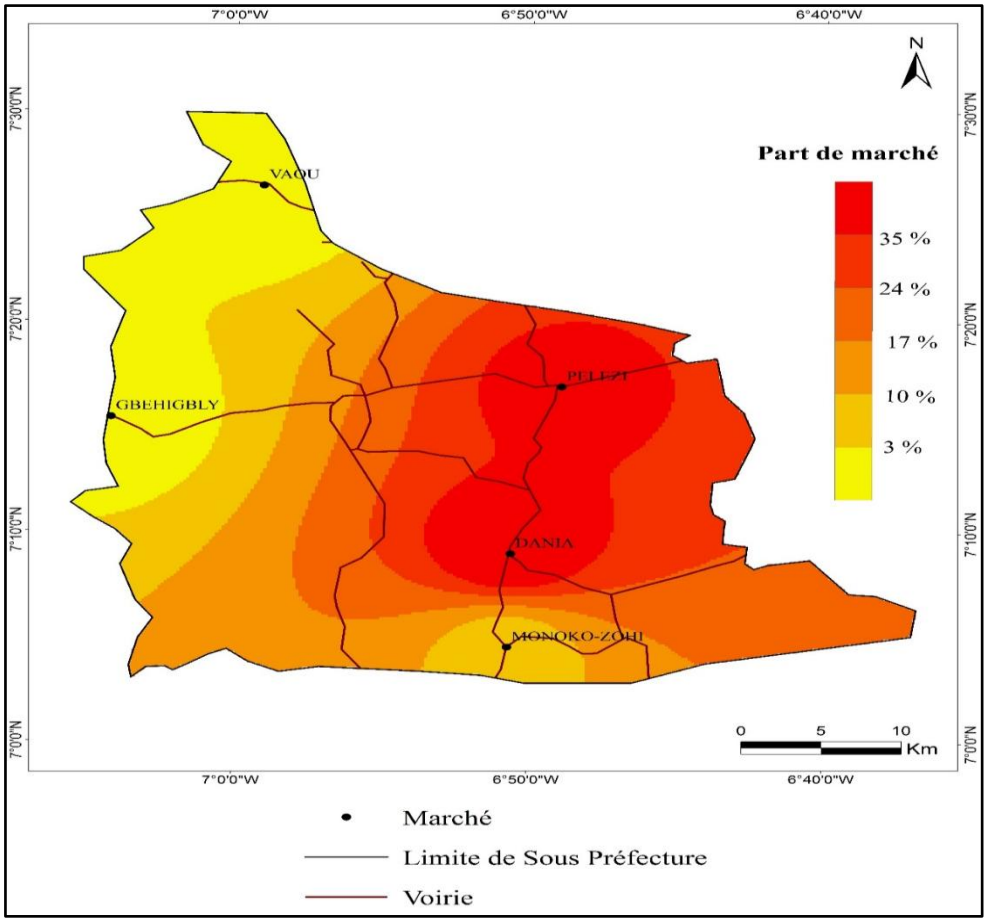
- Each shopping center j represents an opportunity for the consumer that can be evaluated using Reilly's formula: Oij = Mj / (Dij)α
- The relationship potential for a consumer located at i is equal to the sum of all destination opportunities: Poti = ∑k Oik
- The probability of choosing a destination is equal to the opportunity of that destination divided by the total sum of destination opportunities: pij = Oij / ∑k Oik

Huff 's law will make it possible to determine the area of influence of the markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania and to identify the exclusive zones (where a center dominates) and the zones of indifference (where consumers have no influence).

2.2.2. The areas of influence of rural markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania in the light of the Huff model

The rural markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania are economic centers of attraction located in the central villages. On a weekly basis, these markets are in turn the place of convergence of populations from the camps but also from the city, mainly from Daloa, Vavoua , Zoukougbeu and Guéssabo . This section is devoted to the analysis of the influence of the different rural markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania. The analysis of the areas of influence of the rural markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania is intended to formalize, study, reproduce and predict the interactions between these trading centers. It will make it possible to establish the hierarchy of the rural markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania. The influence of rural markets has a spatial dimension. Map 4 offers a spatial reading of the radii of influence of the rural markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania.

Map 4: Radii of influence of rural markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania



Source: BNETD-CCT, 2011 KOFFI Guy, 2025

The areas of influence of the markets decrease from East to West, Northwest, South and Southwest. The most influential markets in the sub-prefecture of Dania are the markets of Dania and Pélézi . Each of these markets is included in an area of influence that concentrates more than 35% of the market share in the sub-prefecture of Dania. As one moves away from these centers,

the market share decreases. Thus, the market of Monoko-Zohi concentrates 10% of market share while those of Gbéhigbly and Vaou are found in an area that concentrates only 3% of market share. The application of the Huff model in the study of spatial interactions and areas of commercial influence in spaces such as the rural space of the sub-prefecture of Dania reveals limitations. The first limitations of the model lie in its statement based on the law of gravitation. The statement of the law of " commercial gravitation" is as follows: "two centers (located in two different cities) attract purchases from the populations located between them in direct proportion to the total number of inhabitants of the cities considered and in inverse proportion to the square of the distance that must be traveled to get there." This law is based on two postulates:

- The two poles (centers) are equally accessible to the consumer, the space is therefore homogeneous;
- Both businesses have the same efficiency.

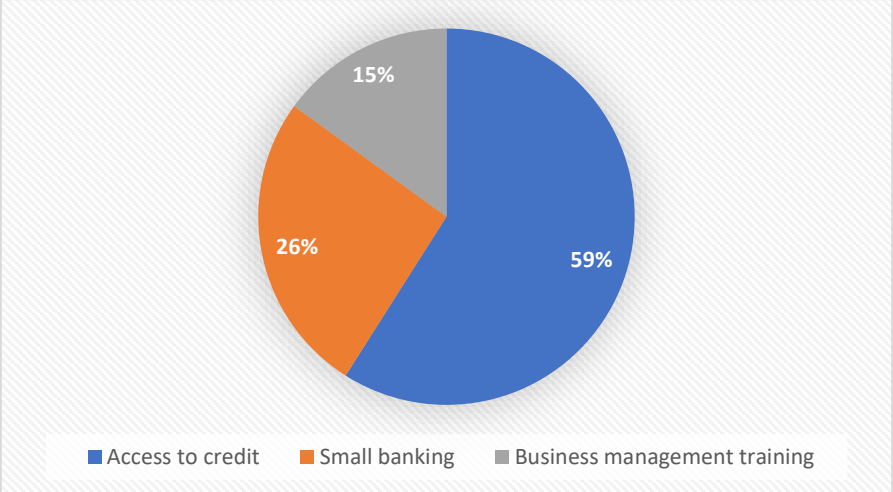
Rural areas like the Dania sub-prefecture are heterogeneous. Each locality has its own physical distance from the consumer and the state of its communication routes. The model does not capture the psychological distances and logics that underpin individual choices (social relationships, cultural taboos, etc.). The model does not integrate differentials in terms of potential and service offerings. The judicious application of gravitation models should tend towards considering heterogeneous but above all intangible variables.

2.3. Constraints on the functioning of rural markets

2.3.1. Constraints related to training and the financial environment

Markets in rural Ivorian contexts are, beyond places of exchange and commercial transactions, geographical nodes, that is to say points of emission and reception of flows. The development of rural markets is constrained by factors, some of which are linked to the training of actors and the financial environment (Figure 1).

Figure 1: Perceived constraints on market functioning



Our surveys, 2024

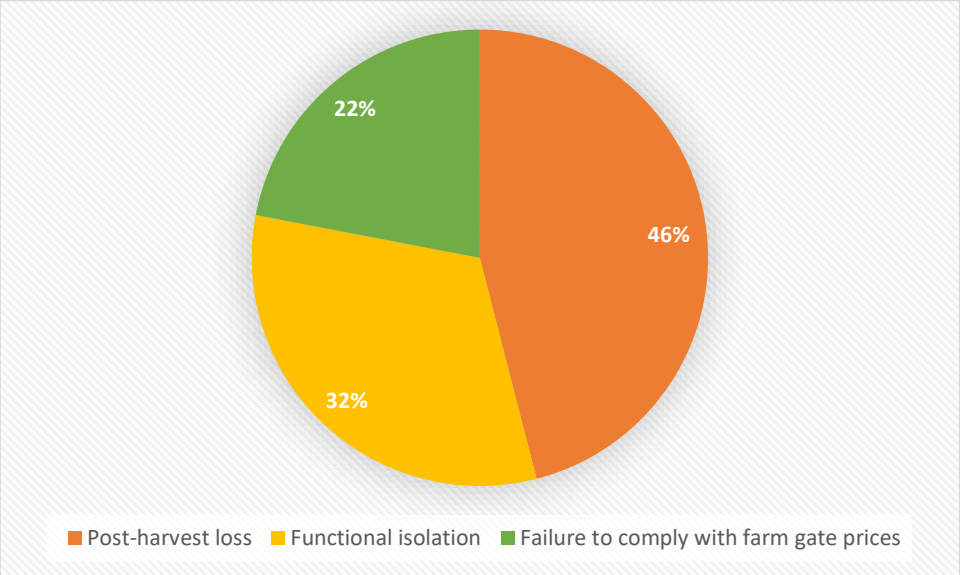
The analysis of the figure reveals that the constraints related to training and the financial environment that hinder the functioning of rural markets are linked 59% to the lack of access to credit, which is compounded by the lack of risk insurance for traders. It is noted that the lack of training in business management is perceived as a constraint at 15%. Indeed, the actors are not

always imbued with all the actions aimed at controlling, planning, directing and optimizing financial resources. Similarly, negotiation skills and good practices in this area are ignored. Finally, the low level of banking mentioned by 26% of those surveyed turns out to be significant. Both producers and traders do not have formal bank accounts. This constraint limits the level of transactions and creates an environment of insecurity to the extent that transactions are made in cash or liquid currency, thus giving rise to frequent thefts and robberies.

2.3.2. Constraints related to access to agricultural products

Access to agricultural products is a key condition for the dynamism of rural markets. Agricultural products are the fruits of agriculture. In the Central-West of Côte d'Ivoire, there are export agricultural products such as coffee, cocoa, cashew nuts, and rubber. On the other hand, food crops are more diversified. These include rice, corn, cassava, yams, bananas, and various market garden products (tomatoes, cabbages, etc.). Figure 2 presents the constraints on access to agricultural products.

Figure 2: Constraints on access to agricultural products



Our surveys, 2024

Access to agricultural products is compromised 46% by post-harvest losses, 32% by functional isolation, and 22% by non-compliance with farm gate prices. Post-harvest losses are characterized by a qualitative and then quantitative deterioration of the harvest. This deterioration occurs in the supply chain, whether during harvesting, transport, packaging, processing, or marketing. Functional isolation is linked to the failure of the transport system. It includes both the state of degradation of communication routes and that of means of transport. Functional isolation negatively influences service and negatively compromises the evacuation of products. Finally, the non-compliance with farm gate prices by buyers is favored by the two previous factors. Buyers, on the grounds of functional isolation and product quality, devalue the purchase cost, keeping producers in a kind of agricultural harassment.

3. Discussion

Rural markets in the Centre-West of Côte d'Ivoire represent an economic potential for the development of villages. Beyond the employment opportunities they generate, the level of financial contribution that markets mobilize through taxes has the effect of contributing to the maintenance of markets, but also encouraging investment in infrastructure and basic social facilities. This reality contrasts with that reported by J. Degand (2003, p. 14) who indicates that in Burundi as in Rwanda most rural markets exist regularly, but operate informally.

As a result, there is no payment of patent or taxes. This system of rural markets is strongly linked to social life where people come to the market to also meet and exchange information on all aspects of social life and not only on the products they want to sell or buy. From this perspective, markets promote and strengthen sociable relationships. H. Ahishaklye (2003, p.36) for his part, gives a fundamental place to rural markets because they represent a platform for confronting supply and demand. He indicates that the market has the function of guiding the producer in his choices of cultivation and agricultural investment by providing, through prices, a clear indication of the relative scarcity and profitability of products. V. Zoma et al., (2022, p. 14), reports that the main function of rural markets is the collection of cereals and cash crops, as well as the sale of imported or manufactured products to households. However, during the "lean" period, the markets change their vocation and essentially become a source of supply of cereals to households S. Sow et al. (2011, p. 8).

They recognize three (03) essential functions of rural markets. These are the economic function because they promote commercial transactions and ensure food security, the social function because they constitute meeting places for individuals and contribute to maintaining important social ties by circumstantially associating rural and urban populations (I. Diarra et al., 2017, p. 34; K. Grijol , 1996, p. 299). According to R. Kadjegbin et al., (2012, p. 71), markets are perceived as real sources of development and fulfillment through their contribution to social life. They state that markets have become important infrastructures for attracting and structuring space. Finally, R. Mbella Mbong and VY Mawo (2023, p. 192-193) present agriculture through rural markets as a factor that effectively contributes to strengthening the income of all farmers. Indeed, they explain that the sale of agricultural products in local rural markets provides urgent income that helps to resolve specific needs. Several constraints prevent the proper functioning of rural markets. J. Kyale Koy et al., (2020, pp.29-55) discuss constraints related to access to agricultural products and the market. They also discuss constraints related to material and financial resources, which highlight difficult access to credit and low levels of banking.

Finally, they denounce constraints related to the poor possession of legal documents, administrative red tape (L.M. Morris et al., 2011, p. 74) and the weak managerial capacity of stakeholders. These constraints are a reality shared by the Centre-West of Côte d'Ivoire, as highlighted by our results. To improve access to rural markets, C. Broutin et al., (2014, p. 23-55) recommends improving the regularity of the supply of agricultural products through the development of infrastructure such as communication routes. They also recommend developing small- scale processing of agricultural products, improving product quality, working towards structuring sectors and consultation between stakeholders, and finally developing public policies to support the development of agricultural sectors.

Conclusion

The market, more broadly a place for trade and social interaction, is an important determinant in the organization of geographical space. From a theoretical perspective, Huff's model was applied to analyze the spatial interactions of market areas of influence in rural areas of the Center-West.

Rural areas in the Center-West of Côte d'Ivoire have markets that are key elements in the structure of the territory. These rural markets are hubs and weekly meeting points. They combine both an economic function, which promotes the restoration of households' financial vitality through commercial transactions, and a social function, as markets are community meeting places and help to maintain important social ties by bringing rural and urban populations together in a circumstantial manner. In addition to helping to restore vitality to rural areas, markets provide local authorities with a financial contribution that varies considerably from one locality to another. Beyond these contributions, the functioning of markets faces constraints related to difficult access to agricultural products, lack of access to credit, low levels of banking services, and low levels of training for stakeholders. In light of these constraints, the development of infrastructure such as roads, agricultural product collection centers, and storage and packaging facilities could significantly contribute to improving the rural market environment in the Central-West region of Côte d'Ivoire.

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