

Finding her own way: the story of **Samantha**



Samantha and Jessica.

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Samantha is 20 years old, and she has a two-year-old daughter named Jessica. Jessica's biological father does not support Samantha as he has another woman and other children. She finds him troublesome and does not want to ask for his help. Samantha met another man, David, with whom she briefly lived in Port-au-Prince. However, when she realised that David had had

an affair with another woman, she left him and came back to Gwo Figè, a small village up in the mountain in Mable, where her mother, Judith, and her stepfather live. David came after her to convince her to move back with him, but at the time, the Chemen Lavi Miyò (CLM) programme was searching for and recruiting members. Samantha decided to take part, but David called

it 'the devil's work' to discourage her from staying in Gwo Figè. Samantha refused to listen to his stories, and she joined the CLM programme, leaving him for good.

Samantha received support from the CLM programme while still living at her mother and stepfather's house in Gwo Figè. However, as the CLM programme was coming to an end, Samantha moved to a bigger town in the valley called Lascahobas with her friend Tania, who is also a CLM member seeking more and better economic opportunities. We met with Samantha and Tania in Lascahobas.

Participation in the CLM programme

Samantha became an official member of the programme in 2017. When the time came for her to decide the main CLM activities, Samantha chose livestock over commercial activities. Trading and going to markets from Gwo Figè was too difficult for her. Through the CLM programme, she received a pig and two goats. Unfortunately, her livestock-keeping did not last long. Her first pig died in less than six months. She received a second pig, but it also died of disease in a week. The two goats that she received became pregnant initially. Her goats gave birth to three kids, but despite the promising start, all of the goats died suddenly of disease (diarrhoea) in less than three months. She received another goat to rebuild the stock, but it is also struggling to stay healthy.

Samantha had difficulties working on CLM activities, and her progress was slow.¹ For instance, she had trouble completing building her house and goat shed, and she found the training hard to follow. Most crucially, she struggled to work with her case manager in the beginning as she found his coaching style strict.

Nonetheless, there were many immediate improvements that the CLM programme brought to her and Jessica's life. For instance, the cash transfer enabled her to buy food and a new goat when she struggled to keep her animals alive. There is no electricity in Gwo Figè, but thanks to the solar lamp that she received from the CLM programme, Samantha can safely move around and use her time more productively.

Positive or negative effects on her children

There are various direct contributions from the CLM programme that have improved their living conditions for the better. For instance, the cash transfer helped Samantha to purchase food for Jessica when her home garden had very little to offer. Samantha credits the CLM programme for providing the financial and physical security that Jessica and she can enjoy. Moreover, the housing, the modern toilet, and the clean water filter not only protects against ill-health but prevents it, as well as promoting healthy and good living habits for Jessica.

The positive experiences from community savings, managing livestock, and improving self-confidence through CLM training and coaching has bolstered Samantha's determination to move out of her village and attempt to start a business in a more prosperous town. Her motivation is not purely for economic reasons; she is also in search of a better living environment for Jessica. When her village friend, Tania, who is also a member of the CLM programme, wanted to bring her child to school in Lascahobas, Samantha decided to join her. Tania and Samantha rented a room in Lascahobas. They plan to pool their shares of the community savings, which will come to maturity in a month's time.

In the meantime, Jessica is staying with Judith, Samantha's mother in Gwo Figè. Judith takes care of Jessica in all aspects – feeding, bathing, and washing her laundry. Jessica has visited and stayed with Samantha twice since she moved to Lascahobas. While Samantha is waiting for the community savings to end and living away in Lascahobas, it is better for Jessica to stay with Judith. There, she eats well and is looked after. However, once Samantha starts her business in Lascahobas, she will bring Jessica from Gwo Figè to her town. Samantha wants to send Jessica to a better school.

Samantha completely trusts that Judith is taking good care of Jessica, but she would like to show Jessica how to count and read herself because Judith is illiterate and will not be able to teach Jessica.

¹ The CLM programme evaluates the rate of progress as slow versus fast. Their six-month evaluation survey sets the cutoff point at 70 out of 100 points, where below 70 would be slow, and 70 and above, fast. For example, a beneficiary receives a high score when their animals reproduce successfully; they purchase an animal on their own; they improve the household diet by increasing protein consumption; they have clean clothes and shoes to go out in (to church, for instance); and they keep the house and children clean; among other criteria.



On the way up to Gwo Figè.

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Challenges

Samantha felt that her efforts in business and trade in Gwo Figè would be in vain in the long term. Even with a draught animal, she could not have physically walked (climbed) the long distance to the markets, day in, day out. Her health, in general, is good, but she is quite frail and would suffer from feeling out of breath and having headaches when climbing up to Gwo Figè.

Commercial activities in the village were met with an unexpected problem. There was a concern amongst the CLM members that the villagers (their non-CLM neighbours) would not pay back the money to them, because the non-CLM neighbours perceived that the CLM money was given freely, and therefore, they felt less obliged to pay it back. None of the CLM members in Gwo Figè chose the commercial activity option.

Samantha's animals suffered from disease and premature death, despite having recourse to local para-veterinarians

and the CLM case managers who treated animals. It is difficult to assess whether the quality and timing of medical interventions were adequate, but it is clear that the costs and risks of livestock asset transfer and rearing could be costly for some individuals living in a precarious environment.

Also, initially, there was some tension between the CLM members and the rest of the villagers. However, many people who were initially hostile and jealous changed their minds to be more positive after the programme began. Nonetheless, the peer pressure from non-CLM neighbours and their resistance to new ideas made some aspects of the plan more difficult to accept and implement. For example, case managers asked their members to build a goat shed to protect the goats from the harsh weather. However, making a shed for goats was unheard of in the local area, and other people ridiculed those CLM members who were building a house for goats.

Hopes and aspirations for the future

Samantha is not working in Lascahobas at the moment. Judith supports her financially, sending money for food provisions and rent. Samantha is waiting for the community savings to end so that with the money that she will receive, she can start a joint business selling cosmetic products with Tania. Despite her current unemployment and lack of income, Samantha is full of optimism and ambition. Samantha does not mind the uncertainty and has found comfort in saying that 'God would not allow both of us [Tania and her] to be thrown out in the street'.

Samantha is hopeful that she will manage to buy a goat and eventually, by rearing and selling, in turn, she will buy a cow. Samantha also wants to buy land to build her house in Lascahobas. Samantha explained her plan: 'The livestock are important; as soon as they breed, I will try to buy a piece of land, and my children will always have the possibility to go to school.'

She will still have family ties in Gwo Figè, but she envisages that her work and Jessica's education will mainly take place in Lascahobas or elsewhere in another urban area.



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