

Food Security, Small-scale Women Farmers and Climate Change in Caribbean SIDS

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Both long-term climate change and immediate-term economic crises are bringing the issue of food security into sharper relief, particularly in those Caribbean countries where food security is already volatile and faces a series of risks and challenges. Climate change, in particular, adds urgency to the call for renewed focus, prioritisation and integrated adaptation approaches to natural resource management, land use policies and long-term macro-economic frameworks and where these intersect.

Through participatory research and interviews with women in farming communities in Dominica and Antigua, Tandon (2013) argues for small-scale, ecologically sensitive farming and fishing as a critical way to anchor local food security of rural populations, shelter domestic food markets and secure the natural bio-diversity of Caribbean Small Island Developing States (SIDS). Women play a core role in articulating what food security looks like to them—and have a keen appetite for peer-to-peer networks of training, technical knowledge sharing and distribution of information to support sustainable livelihoods and the long-term viability of their communities.

Women involved in farming and fishing alike are important contributors to both national and household food security, though unrecognised, undervalued and undervalued in a sector that is still one of the most depressed sectors in society. Representatives of both these constituencies expressed consistent concerns about their food security, defined less by consumer considerations and more by production capacity and maximised nutritional content.

When asked about climate change in the context of their local environments, women shared their personal experiences and perspectives based on daily and seasonal activities. They framed the issue around timescales of immediate needs and seasonal harvest cycles. In interviews and conversations it is apparent that their understanding and articulation of the phenomenon of climate change is inexact, one common observation being the unprecedented seasonal changes and the difficulty of relying on weather patterns. However, none of the farmers interviewed drew a link between climate change, rises in sea level, increases in sea surface temperatures, coral bleaching or coastal erosion. Unlike the Pacific islands, where the rise in sea

level is visible and immediate, in the Caribbean islands this change is not yet recognised as such—what is most salient is the recurrence of climate-induced storms. The human and social dimensions of climate change are yet to be fully developed and understood in this Caribbean context.

In the country studies, challenges facing agriculture remain: finance, land availability, local or regional marketing infrastructure and labour costs. The societal stigma attached to farming is changing—and there is now a generation of young professionals (women and men) returning to the primary sector as the new income security. What is not quite clear is whether these emerging professional security concerns and/or whether there is a genuine desire to learn about farming and a less resource-consumptive approach.

The economic crisis and its lingering effects have forced a transition to alternatives and a return to multi-source income approach to livelihoods. This opportunity for more positive investment and attitudinal shifts towards farming and fishing clearly exists but needs additional support for adaptation to, and management of, climate change. Survey participants in Dominica identified concurrent action to combat climate change on three fronts (Table).

Furthermore, gender concerns are still peripheral to discussions on livelihoods and climate change. The mix of climate change, livelihoods and cyclical crises has largely had negative effects on livelihoods and well-being. Calls for consistent attention to the needs of both men and women, particularly in vulnerable rural communities, are an obvious part of the solution. Political will and leadership to ensure that each country's economic development is inter-locked with environmental and gender issues is needed more than ever.

In 2013, agricultural thinking in the region still continues to be dominated by preserving a commodity-based agriculture value-chain framed by trade preferences. "While various attempts have been undertaken to harness the capacity for domestic consumption or to turn crops or agricultural waste into bio-ethanol, as yet none of this is about creating regional food security" (Jessop, D. (2009).

Concurrent Action on Three Fronts

(a) Restoration and Regeneration Plans	(b) Sustainability and Viability Plans	(c) Contingency and Strategic Plans
Halting degradation through unlearning destructive processes and relearning restorative processes: "we have to stop raping the soil" by over-exploiting it, over-fertilising it and using bad rotation practices (Hans Herren quoted in IFAD 2009)	Adapting cultivation and harvesting methods to local contexts in ways that enhance the diversity of the local gene pool and local food and water sources	Protection for the future and for future generations, includes: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> conservation of forests and watersheds; preservation of seed varieties; fishing methods that promote long-term fish stocks; and sequestering soil carbon to enhance future productivity. It combines risk reduction with the creation of safety nets and contingency plans for smallholder farmers.

Reference:

Jessop, D. (2009). 'The View From Europe: Caribbean Agriculture & Food Security', Shridath Ramphal Centre website, 11 May 2009, <http://www.shridathramphalcentre.org/index.php?option=com_content&view=category&layout=blog&id=22&Itemid=100014&limitstart=10>. (accessed 11 July 2013).

Note:

IFAD 2009 Proceedings of the Governing Council Round Tables in Conjunction with the Thirty-second Session of IFAD's Governing Council, February 2009.

