

*Developing a Research Agenda for the Caribbean Food System to respond to
Global Climate Changes.”*

BRIEFING PAPER – PLANNING AND POLICY

The economic vulnerability of Caribbean states is being more and more exposed (1) preferential terms of trade for traditional export crops in Europe and North American markets are being progressively reduced as a result of trade liberalization (2) market preferences under new or revised trading arrangements are likely to disappear in the not too distant future, leaving CARIFORUM exports subject to powerful competition from more efficient producers from both the developed and developing world outside the Region. (3) In addition trends in the negotiations of participation in new or revised arrangements have been based on inclusion of the principle of reciprocity.

The potential outcomes of these developments on the economy in general, and on food security in particular, already impacting in the case of bananas, is perhaps the single most critical policy situation facing the CARIFORUM countries today. The combined threat of loss of foreign exchange earnings and Government revenue; and a reduced capacity to supply food from domestic sources, and increased competition from cheaper imports poses calls for urgent (and perhaps far-reaching) individual sector (food system) and economy wide policy options and measures.

THE FOOD SYSTEM AND POVERTY ISSUES IN CARICOM COUNTRIES

The role of the food system is to guarantee food security either by way of production supply, or by way of income to purchase food. A country's ability to import food is determined by its overall trade and current account balances and levels of indebtedness. Most CARICOM countries face: (1) increasing debt service to total exports of good and services; (2) have run current account deficits in recent years. CARICOM as a whole has been facing an increasing trade deficit for foodstuff during the last two decades. In relation to food supply, between the early 1980's and today, there has been a significant decline in food self-sufficiency. With few exceptions, food production has been unable to respond at competitive prices to demand, in terms of volume of production, and quality of produce. The agricultural sector, including agri-processing, faced with low productivity and high costs has found it difficult to defend itself against strong competition from cheaper imports.

Food system policy issues in CARIFORUM countries are thus rooted in some important concerns, inter alia : (1) resulting in a reduced ability to purchase food due to declines in foreign exchange earnings from traditional export crops, (2) the erosion and threatened loss of trade preferences for traditional export crops, the earnings of which are utilized for the purchase of imported food; (3) the very high dependence on imported food, and the recent uncertainty of food arrival associated with the September 11 incidents in the United States; (4) increasing incidence of pockets of poverty in many countries, implying that significant portions of the population have difficulty in accessing sufficient food; (5) concerns over the potential association of the high use of imported food and the growing incidence in the region of food related diseases such as obesity; hypertension, cancer and diabetes; and (6) an apparent overall decline in productivity of land, labour and management in the agricultural sector, and a weakened capacity to supply food competitively.

Government's Sectoral Objectives, Policies and Programmes

CARIFORUM member states have among their priorities three national food system related objectives: i) higher levels of food self-sufficiency; ii) increased agricultural productivity; iii) increased diversification of agricultural production, processing and export – all geared towards greater competitiveness for both domestic and export production.

MAJOR CHALLENGES AND STRATEGIC ORIENTATIONS

National strategies and policies for the food system must therefore focus on a number of these objective, and inter alia, the following strategies:

1. creation of a conducive macroeconomic, trade and sectoral policy framework for agricultural production growth, with an appropriate structure of incentives; private sector participation, public investments in physical infrastructure, and improvements of the institutional infrastructure.
2. The defense of the markets for traditional exports in the short to medium run by reducing costs and improving their quality, presentation and timeliness, while examining the long run feasibility.
3. Increased focus on the development of non-traditional exports supported by a regional marketing and food safety strategies, and a research programme for product development and production techniques.
4. Specific strategies to define and defend 'sensitive industries'.
5. Increased focus on Fisheries and Aquaculture.
6. Strengthening and increased administrative efficiency of programmes for vulnerable groups.
7. Measures to facilitate greater intra-regional trade including joint venture investments and marketing.
8. New farming systems for food production and exports - integrated technologies for livelihood diversification; IPM, farm enterprises interactions, increased system productivity vs, improved individual crop productivity; role of biotechnology; improved small farm competitiveness
9. Promotion of the values and variable use of domestic foods within the context of food security policies.

The basis of the above, apart from its intrinsic worth of 'being of immediate concern', is that these developments evoke responses which have had, are having and will continue to have impacts on the physical environment. Indeed, physical environmental issues and responses cannot be fully put in perspective without consideration of occurrences in the social and economic environments – governance, population, economics, technology, culture, etc.

GECAFS, CLIMATE CHANGE AND RESEARCH IDEAS

CONTEXT

“ Much of the environmental change that will occur over the next thirty years has already been set in motion by past and current [policy decisions] and actions. Many of the effects of environmentally relevant policies put in place over the next thirty years will not be apparent until long afterwards.”

The logical approach seems then to one of alternatives to current damaging practices, finding new systems and approaches, and mitigating the impact of human actions and natural forces.

“ Uncontrolled forces, both human and natural, will contribute to the course of events”.
Research, in providing for better informed decision-making has a role to play in shaping the future.

Quotes are from - “Global Environmental Outlook 3 – Past, Present and Future Perspectives”, UNEP, 2002.

RESEARCH IDEAS

1. Issue: Economics, trade, incomes, poverty – state of the economies, will dominate economic policy making for the next decade as governments grapple with these issues and pressures from outside. Performance may be linked to poor performance of major trading partners; or even if major trading partners are doing well, there may be trade diversion to other more developed countries suffering from the impact of climate and other changes. Solution choices impact on systems and people, and through them on environmental and other physical habitats.

Research Idea: What are the solution options; how will these react on the environment and fragile ecosystems; how to incorporate socio-economic concerns with physical and natural science concerns.

2. Issue: Hunger and poverty are closely related. Hunger reduces labour capacity and productivity, educational achievement, and resistance to diseases.

Research Idea: Concerns over poverty now, and anticipations on the future should lead to the examination of agricultural farming systems which reduce poverty – sources; interventions and focus (small farmers).

3. Issue: Structural adjustment and the liberalisation of markets and trade is probably the dominant forces which might govern evolution of farming systems, and by implication, hunger and poverty within the region.

Research ideas:

- What are the possibilities and implications for food systems of a reversal of trade liberalisation - e.g., on farming systems possibly geared to shifts towards self sufficiency, tariffs; impact on small producers?
- What are the possibilities and implications of intensification of liberalisation?, e.g. for farming systems adjustments, for poverty; for demography.
- What has been the impact of structural adjustment policies with particular regard to private

sector involvement or lack thereof in:

- Services to the agricultural sector, including information
- Utilisation of labour
- Research
- Basic food crop production support
- Export crop production and processing

Will the trend toward private sector participation be reversed. What factors may bring this about? New modes of partnership between governments and the private sector.

4. Issue: past development philosophies, policies and activities have led to the fragmentation of natural ecosystems. The UNEP Global Environmental Outlook referred to earlier was based on scenario analysis under four orientations – Markets first; Policy First; Security First; and sustainability first. These all reflect development philosophies. These approaches and associated actions produce quite different results, especially without effective controls.

Research idea : Probably using the same or similar scenario analysis, to assess development philosophy of Caribbean countries; how these have impacted on climate and environmental change; and how same may be impacted by the predicted climate changes. Use this research for advocacy for policy adjustments, mitigation measures, and directions.

5. Issue: Information and Advocacy.

Research idea: development of a detailed knowledge base on natural resources, and their characteristics within various farming systems. Linking such knowledge to planning tools and appropriate resource management approaches. Include impact of population growth, economic development and changes in climate on resource (land, water) demand, and on land and environmental degradation