**ECONOMIC SHOCK, COPING STRATEGIES, AND COVID-19:**

**EXPLORING FOOD SYSTEM RESILIENCE WITH**

**RURAL WORKERS IN GRENADA**

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# Abstract

Focusing primarily on the challenges of food (in)security and economic shock, this article offers insight into the impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic on the island of Grenada from various stakeholders including farmers, fisherfolk, and rural workers. The piece also details the strategies employed by community members to cope with the pandemic’s multiple deleterious upshots. More specifically, via participatory action research and an exploratory rapid response pilot project provoked by coronavirus, we sought to discover how small island Caribbean governments can better assist people in marginalised agrarian communities whose lives were severely disrupted by the pandemic and subsequent lockdown and curfew measures. By prioritising the experiences of working-class food producers and wage labourers, the article identifies both policies that need to be (re)visited and potential solutions so that the type of crisis prompted by the coronavirus outbreak is less likely to shock the island’s economy and food system again. We also aim to contribute to scholarship on how small island states in the Caribbean can better assist people in 1) accessing immediate material needs in times of crisis; 2) securing food, nutrition, income, and daily life essentials; and 3) building more sustainable and resilient food systems. Ultimately, then, this piece seeks to amplify the voices of rural workers who are frequently overlooked in development of economic policy.

# Keywords

Caribbean food systems; COVID-19; food sovereignty; Grenada; participatory action research; rural transformation

# Introduction: Historicising Caribbean Food Systems

Across the Caribbean, small island states have historically experienced a host of interrelated development and dependency challenges that have coincided with low growth, unsustainable debt-servicing, and limited financial breathing room (Gahman and Thongs 2020; Green 2001). Agricultural and food exports, along with tourism, were the primary drivers of revenue across the region for decades. During the 1980s, economic growth averaged 5% per year throughout the Caribbean. Income and international trade, however, began to wane in the latter half of the 1990s, particularly because of the European Union’s withdrawal of preferential access for conventional food commodities, crops, and agricultural foodstuffs from the region (e.g. bananas, sugar) (Saint Ville, Hickey, and Phillip 2017). The 2008 financial crisis that struck the globe severely curtailed remittances, tourist visits, and commercial activity in the Caribbean as well, which led to the continued swelling of sovereign debt and financial disparities (Girvan 2012). From 2008-2013, islands across the Anglo-Caribbean logged an aggregate decline in gross domestic product (GDP) of 6% (Beckford and Campbell 2013), whilst simultaneously being negatively impacted by episodic climate disasters that eroded domestic infrastructure, weakened regional economies, and damaged historical sites (World Bank 2017). In addition, the FAO (United Nations Food and Agriculture Organization) reported that as of 2020, dependency upon extra-regional commodities and products continued to define Caribbean economies, with several islands importing nearly 80% of their food (Barry and Gahman 2020). More recently, in the latest report issued by the Economic Commission for Latin America and the Caribbean (ECLAC 2021), the region was predicted to have a GDP growth rate of 5.2% in 2021, following the negative growth rate of 6.2% in 2020.

Grenada, the island that is the focus of this research, has not been immune to these dynamics. In 2017, the World Bank (2017) reported poverty and unemployment rates in Grenada to be 37.7% and 28.9% respectively, with women and youth being most affected. Similarly, ECLAC (2021) noted that Grenada experienced a -11.2% growth rate in 2020 and was anticipated to only rebound in 2021 with a mere 4.7% growth in GDP, which is not sufficient to offset the shortfall prompted by the pandemic. In light of the above, it is crucial that research be undertaken to develop an understanding of the exigent need to attenuate Grenada’s high food importation bill and growing rate of food insecurity. Additionally, in the wake of climate catastrophes being faced by islands across the Caribbean, it is imperative that farmers, food producers, fisherfolk, and rural workers with grounded knowledge be heard and taken seriously in conversations aimed at sustainability and the amelioration of food system injustices (Werner 2019). Put differently, it is vital that the specialist knowledge and expertise of the region’s farmers, fishers, and workers be incorporated into both regional and national policies.

That said, any comprehensive analysis of the current state of the agricultural sector in the Caribbean must consider the historical trajectories and lasting repercussions of race, enslavement, and imperialism (Barry et al. 2020; Green 1995; Thompson 2015). The pervasive impacts of dispossession, abduction, and colonisation––alongside the ongoing influence that plantation relations has had on societies and economies in the Caribbean (Mintz 1985; Timms 2008)––cannot be overstated (Jackson 2012). As a mode of industrial production and a social force, the plantation became the bedrock upon which colonial agriculture and markets were built (Beckford 1999; Best and Levitt 2009). In turn and over time, both plantation relations and patriarchal cultural mores (Barriteau 2001) shaped political institutions, socialisation processes, economic dependency, and the day-to-day interactions and operations that took place across the Caribbean’s agricultural landscape and food systems (Barry and Gahman 2021).

Plantation relations, as many argue, continue to reverberate across the region’s Westminster-modelled state bureaucracies and civil societies (Girvan 2015; Lowitt et al. 2015). As Saint Ville, Hickey, and Phillip (2017, 198) note, ‘as a fully integrated institution that ruled over every facet of life in the region, the plantation was more than an economic phenomenon.’ In short, enduring colonial and plantation relations (Lamming 2002), alongside the class stratifications they generated, continue to be major impediments to sovereignty regarding the region’s institutionalised norms, development agendas, and food systems (Levitt 2005). Likewise, studies on environmental, economic, and gender justice have all demonstrated how industrial agribusiness and corporatised monoculture are key forces in shaping both ineffectual food policies and exploitative multi-scalar market relations (Ellis 2003; Laven and Pyburn 2012; Shiva 1999). The COVID-19 pandemic and multiple crises it aggravated exposed just how profoundly damaging the power and resource imbalances that define the contemporary status quo are for working people in the Caribbean. The rapid spread of coronavirus and attendant protracted tragedies also cast a critical light upon the deep flaws and failures of the globalised ‘corporate food regime’ (Clapp and Moseley 2020; Wilson 2016). Even though there is now widespread awareness that the extractive mistreatment of nature for profit is culpable for the degradation of the planet––which also results in the proliferation of novel viruses (Lister Pirtle, 2020)––global and national solutions to COVID-19 continue to be oriented towards rescuing multinational business as a means to preserve existing trade flows, international divisions of labour, and global value chains (Carducci et al. 2021).

During the pandemic, there have remained ever-intensifying disturbances to daily life and large-scale disruptions to global-local food systems, combined with profound erosions of material and psychological wellbeing because private capital and the accumulation of wealth have been given precedence over the needs of working people (Stevano et al. 2021). This has been the COVID-19 (and capitalist) state of things in the Caribbean and beyond. With this reality as backdrop, the present moment offers us a crucial opening for collective discernment, dialogue, and action related to carving pathways out of the dilemmas, disparities, and crises that continue to plague the region’s prevailing economic and food system injustices. Notably, social crises like persistent poverty, food insecurity, and economic shock––as well as their subsequent solutions––necessitate critical awareness about the pivotal roles played by history, context, and the political agency of people who are being impacted by any given crisis or shock. On this point, we suggest that the data in this case study on Grenada and the insights offered by Grenadian workers in this article are applicable to other nations throughout the English-speaking Caribbean. Meaning, despite concentrating on Grenada in this piece specifically, there is high likelihood that this research, in particular the experiences articulated by participants and practical and policy solutions recommended therein, will be germane to other countries and islands across the region with similar histories.

# Regional Food Security and COVID-19: Latin America and the Caribbean

In 2018, it was estimated that hunger affected 42.5 million people in Latin America and the Caribbean (LAC) and that 188 million were facing food insecurity (FAO and CELAC 2020). Just a year later, in 2019, the Food Security Information Network (2020) reported that 18.5 million people in the region were facing acute food insecurity caused by economic and climate-related factors. As concerning as these factors may seem, the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) has stated that the COVID-19 pandemic is resulting in both increased hunger and poverty levels across the region, which are expected to limit access to essential goods and services, including food and nutrition (FAO and CELAC 2020).

Amidst the continuing crisis, the FAO has detailed a litany of ways in which the pandemic is expected to adversely affect food security. While the FAO reports that domestic and local demand and supply are being encumbered, they also stress how international food systems and global trade are being severely disrupted (FAO and CELAC 2020). This is especially relevant in the Caribbean considering how many countries in the region rely upon imported foods, as well as just how devastating the consequences of COVID-19 have already been. Small Island ‘Developing’ States (SIDS) in the Caribbean, for example, have faced massive blows to their respective GDP due to the negative effects of COVID-19 on tourism and agriculture. We note here that we approach the use of the term ‘development’ critically, as it is a politically loaded, oft-colonial moniker that is widely and rightly contested. That said, it is still expected that the pandemic will lead to record amounts of revenue losses for SIDS that do not have alternative sources of income. Due to this, regional economists are suggesting that SIDS across the Caribbean will need nearly six billion US dollars to counteract the respective aftermaths of the pandemic on their economies - money that will be needed in addition to debt suspension and the rollout of other relief programmes (FAO and CELAC 2020).

Regarding the impact on demand across the LAC, the pandemic is expected to continue to lead to a variety of economic disruptions and shocks due to high levels of variation related to purchasing power. FAO and ECLAC (2020) reported a contraction of the Caribbean economy in excess of 2% for 2020, which coincided with an increase in unemployment levels. These shifts are reducing resilience and increasing the vulnerability of members of the population who require steady daily income to procure basic necessities for their household and family’s wellbeing. Furthermore, a reduction in formal employment is likely to increase jobs being taken in the informal sector, which are far more volatile, precarious, and inconsistent (Mendes 2019), meaning that poverty levels are expected to steadily rise until and even after everyone is vaccinated. More specifically, FAO and ECLAC (2020) estimates that for 2020 the number of people living in poverty across the LAC rose to approximately 215 million, while those experiencing extreme poverty (living on less than $1.90USD per day) is estimated to have increased to nearly 85 million.

As was reported by the farmers, fisherfolk, and agro-processors in our research, the pandemic ushered in significant disruptions to regional supply chains across the Caribbean due to the implementation of lockdown, social isolation, shelter-in-place, physical distancing, curfew, and mobility restriction measures. Across the world, whilst necessary to prevent spikes in infection rates and community spread, many of these measures impeded livelihood strategies, caused food prices to fluctuate (Blazy, Causeret, and Guyader 2021), and were associated with escalations in gender-based violence (Mittal and Singh, 2020). Several of the lockdowns were also not without controversy and contestation given some political activists have argued they were arbitrarily passed and/or enforced inconsistently (e.g., instances in which states used the pandemic as a pretext to repress demonstrators) (Reyes and Gahman 2021). Well over a year into the outbreak, the pandemic and ways in which countries have responded to COVID-19 has led to increasing food price volatility in both the medium- and long-term, particularly for perishable products (Díaz-Bonilla, Piñeiro, and Laborde 2021). It is also important to note that these impacts are taking place against the backdrop of an existential climate emergency in the region (Barclay 2019; Sealey-Huggins 2017).

Indeed, Caribbean countries were already dealing with multiple crises and disasters related to climate, not to mention odious debt (Sheller 2018), meaning the pandemic has placed an even heavier economic and ecological burden on societies across the region (Rhiney 2020). Moreover, considering that climate-related dilemmas can be a key contributor to the creation of food supply/demand shocks, one must be mindful that there remains a high probability for future intensifications of food insecurity and erratic market fluctuation (Smith and Rhiney 2016). Negative outcomes and financial struggle for families and communities across the Caribbean are also being experienced differentially, due to the region’s disparate levels of income and persistent inequality. The FAO and CELAC (2020) have underscored how these disparities are related to energy markets, debt-servicing, and the global food system, with others suggesting that the deprivation inherent in colonial-capitalist economies are a factor as well (Gahman, Thongs, and Greenidge 2021). It was within this geopolitical context that our project on the realities of daily life, food (in)security, and adapting to COVID-19 with local farmers and rural workers from Grenada unfolded.

# Research Design and Methodology

Our research on the food security and food system effects of the pandemic in Grenada began in July 2020 and remains ongoing. The initial exploratory phase of our work, which this article represents and is based upon a rapid response urgency project we designed as an intervention into the crisis Grenada was experiencing at the outset of the pandemic, employed both digital and physically-distanced participatory action methods that were tailored to isolation measures and lockdown regulations. Given the hardship and stress generated by COVID-19 for rural communities across the country, the primary aim of this research was to explore how rural workers in general were coping with the pandemic and what solutions they felt were needed in the long- and short-term. In turn, the rapid response portion of our broader research agenda and the fieldwork we conducted for this pilot study prioritised offering support to and outreach with rural households, as well as designing a grounded project that was deemed relevant and beneficial to the participants involved as a means of offering solidarity and putting research in the service of community members.

In total, 69 Grenadians, several of whom readers will hear from in this paper, were interviewed (via Zoom, WhatsApp, telephone conversations, etc.). Interviewees also completed a bespoke questionnaire related to livelihood strategies, food insecurity, and what life was like for them in the political-economic and socio-cultural context of both Grenada and the Caribbean during the pandemic. Our fieldwork was based and conducted in the rural parish of St. Andrew, and while the participants were predominantly from the area, their work and services extended to other parts of the island, which enabled recruitment to expand beyond the local parish. Participants were purposively selected in an effort to collect and generate data and insight from a wide cross-section of occupations. Convenience sampling and chain-referral recruitment were also utilised, meaning we gathered suggestions for additional potential participants when discussing the project with those who responded early. Chain and word-of-mouth recruitment proved beneficial given the complicated and fickle nature of conducting physically distanced fieldwork during the pandemic. The survey shared with participants consisted of sixteen questions that sought to capture basic demographic information, the ways in which participants were being impacted by the pandemic, their coping strategies and mechanisms, and suggestions they had on what should have been done differently, better, or beforehand to prevent the hardship that emerged amidst the outbreak and during lockdown.

Participants represented a wide array of stakeholders including farmers, fisherfolk, agricultural extension officers, bus drivers, hotel staff, tourism workers, community shopkeepers, seamstresses, taxi drivers, and local vendors. Of the 69 participants, 47 were men and 22 were women. Most of the participants interviewed fell within the age range of 50-59 (31.9%; n = 22), while 23.2% (n = 16) were aged 40-49 and 21.7% (n = 15) were 30-39 years old. Only 7.2%, (n = 5) of the participants were within the age range of 20-29 and 15.9% (n = 11) were above 60 years old. Notably, the age ranges of 40-49 and 50-59 represented more than half of the participants (55.1%) in this project and represent a demographic with a considerable amount of socially reproductive, economic, and familial responsibilities. Regarding levels of education, more than half the participants were at the secondary (29%, n = 22) and primary (26.1%, n = 18) level of education combined, while another 26.1% (n = 18) had college experience at the island’s post-secondary academic institution. Only 6.9% (n = 5) of the participants attained an undergraduate (4.3%, n =3) or a postgraduate (2.9%, n = 2) degree.

Most of the participants (26 in total) obtained their income from operating community shops and small businesses within rural communities, including retail shops, community bakeries, hair salons, and construction works. Other sources of income included farming (livestock and vegetables), tourism (hotel workers, taxi operators), bus drivers, and vending, which involved selling agricultural produce at either local markets or on the street. Some obtained income from operating as seamstresses and tailors, while a small number of participants earned money by working within the public sector as officials with the Ministry of Agriculture. Notably, lower education levels corresponded with higher vulnerability to economic shock exacerbated by the pandemic as these respondents were typically making minimum wage or lower.

**Table 1: Demographic details of the 69 participants.**

|  |  |  |  |  |  |
| --- | --- | --- | --- | --- | --- |
| **Age** | **20-29** | **30-39** | **40-49** | **50-59** | **60-69** |
| 5 | 15 | 16 | 22 | 11 |
|  |
| **Gender** | **Women** | **Men** |
| 22 | 47 |
|  |
| **Education** | **Primary** | **Secondary** | **College** | **Undergraduate****/ Postgraduate** | **Skills Training** |
| 18 | 20 | 18 | 5 | 8 |
|  |
| **Occupation** | **Farmers****(crops, livestock)** | **Fisherfolk** | **Vendors****(produce)** | **Small Retail Shop Owners** | **Hospitality (hotel)** |
| 11 | 3 | 4 | 26 | 4 |
| **Public Sector Workers** | **Seamstresses and Tailors** | **Taxis, Public Transport** | **Other** |  |
| 4 | 5 | 11 | 1 |

After collecting the data, participant responses were entered into SPSS version 24 for basic descriptive analysis. NVIVO was used to organise and code the responses participants offered related to pandemic ‘challenges,’ ‘struggles,’ ‘strategies,’ ‘coping,’ ‘solidarity,’ and ‘solutions,’ to name a few of the key themes we used. This paper’s goal, in particular the forthcoming sections, is to foreground and amplify the perspectives and intimate knowledge of the participants, as well as elaborate upon some of the immediate to long-term solutions they offered, alluded to, and shared.

# The Differential Impacts of COVID-19

All of the participants reported being impacted by the measures taken by the authorities to combat the effects of COVID-19. The impacts they experienced, however, were manifested in different ways for various individuals. A number of factors led to the loss of income for many given their typical jobs (i.e. main sources of revenue) were entirely derailed. Some respondents lost their jobs, while others had to shut down small businesses. The price of consumer goods, foodstuffs, and fuel also increased, thereby compounding difficulties, as now individuals had less disposable income to buy higher priced foods. The restriction of movement of citizens affected transport service workers significantly. One taxi driver stated, “with the restriction of movements of people there was no need for taxi service resulting in loss of jobs and little or no income.” The participants who were engaged in production and sale of perishable items noted severe spoilage of goods as they were unable to move to places of sale freely. Additionally, there were inadequate storage facilities, which intensified the situation and decomposition of foods, with one local grower noting the domino effect by explaining “the closure of hotels caused loss of sales; the hotels were our main markets.”

Not all participants reported being impacted negatively. Some even reported an increase in their income, for example, a handful of locally owned small-scale community shop-owners and seamstresses. The shopkeepers and cottage industry owners who reported increases in income stated that the lockdown and curfew, which resulted in the restriction of movement, meant that more customers chose to purchase from smaller establishments that were closer to home, rather than taking public transport to main shopping areas. In one sense, slowing down and shopping locally meant that small business owners saw more customers patronising their establishments. Seamstresses recorded an increase in income, too, which can be attributed to the mandatory wearing of masks directed by the authorities. The vast majority of participants noted that they purposively looked to use masks designed by local seamstresses who were putting their own creative spins on the mask designs they were fashioning.

Despite the silver-linings reported by seamstresses and select shopkeepers, the pandemic created no shortage of turmoil and hardship for most. Of the 69 participants, workers in the tourism sector and farmers were the two groups hardest hit. Specifically, hotel/tourism workers (31.9%, n = 22) and farmers/food producers (20.3%, n=14) reported experiencing the most difficulty during the pandemic, due to a number of reasons. The curfew and, in particular, associated restricted mobility, was identified as a significant reason. One small business-owner who sold local foods, in what was common testimony throughout our research, stated, “I lost income because business days were cut drastically and because my shop is not close to where I live, I couldn’t tend to it and so I had a lot of spoilage of onions and things of that nature, also like others because of the reduced hours of operation I lost sales which affected my income.”

Closure of the regional and national borders magnified the negative impacts. According to several poultry farmers, “due to the closure of the airport, replacement for broilers was not readily available,”which contributed to an “increase in the price of feed and chicks.”Most of thefarmers felt the government took too long to make agriculture and agricultural services essential, which limited food producers and growers and reduced revenue streams during the initial stages of the pandemic. All the farmers noted that the lockdown resulted in loss of produce and spoilage. Capturing the sentiment of the vast majority of the farmers, one vegetable grower concluded, “some essential businesses such as agricultural shops could have remained opened with proper management to keep COVID-19 off.” In short, that farming and local agricultural production was not designated essential and seen as a priority meant hardship for rural growers.

# Government Assistance and Community Coping Strategies

In addition to speaking to the challenges posed by the pandemic, participants identified ways the state assisted communities during the lockdown. Despite the public aid offered, however, over 70% (n = 50) of the participants reported that, at the time of the interviews in July-October 2020, they had received no assistance. Those who did receive government support stated it took the form of cash benefits that were part of a stimulus package, National Insurance Scheme (NIS) benefits, or farm labour assistance. The farm labour assistance was offered as a way to help cut costs. The cash benefit was offered to bus drivers, and the stimulus package to hotel workers. Notably, only 5.8% (n = 4) of the respondents indicated receiving the stimulus package, while 7.2% (n =5) received labour support and 8.7% (n = 6) received cash.Given the government-imposed restrictions to mobility, participants reported coping in a variety of ways. Some resorted to individual coping strategies, whilst other participants relied on communal support and community solidarity. Respondents indicated they had made every effort to obey the protocols implemented in order to stay safe and mitigate infection rates. However, as individuals with reduced income, and in some cases no jobs, the austerity meant many participants felt they were operating in ‘survival mode.’ More than half the participants indicated they had returned to and relied upon home gardening to feed their families, with numerous respondents noting they “occupied [themselves] by spending time in the garden” as a means of coping mentally, spiritually, and materially (e.g., feeding their families).

Over one-third of the participants stated that they began planting gardens not only to feed their families, but as another source of income. The participants who were employed as bus drivers, taxi operators, hotel workers, and small business-owners all indicated that gardening was a primary livelihood and coping strategy, with respondents from each profession offering comments like, “I reverted to the land to plant food for my consumption as well as for sale.” Another common coping mechanism adopted was being more attentive to budgeting and economising on limited finances. Given that most of the participants were working-class, living in rural areas, and unable to travel to shops frequently, it became necessary to purchase only essential items. Participants indicated that spending more time at home with family members served as a coping strategy for the stress they experienced. Here, in offering insight into the role kinship played in maintaining mental health, several participants recorded statements like, “I spent quality time with my family––this helped me to cope with the added stress.” Small business owners detailed how cutting back on production costs allowed them to sustain their ventures, citing increasing prices and loss of customers as primary burdens.

Whilst several established businesses were negatively affected by both the lack of mobility and rising prices of imported products, several new micro- and small businesses were also initiated. One participant started her own sewing business, stating, “I made more money working at home during the lockdown period than at my usual job working for another person.”In addition to taking care of each other and spending more time in their yards gardening, about one-quarter of the respondents reported reaching out to various parliamentary representatives for support and assistance, both for themselves and other members of their community. Other individuals indicated supporting neighbours and families they knew who were struggling by running errands and/or providing groceries. The vast majority of participants noted that, despite the challenges and turmoil that came with the pandemic, they saw something in the community that harkened back to solidarity they were familiar with from times past. “I saw people sharing with each other,” and “community people share with each other,” are only two of the dozens of statements participants offered about the solidarity, camaraderie, and mutual aid that emerged amongst the rural communities and working-class participants during the lockdown.

# Participant Solutions and Recommendations

In addition to sharing accounts of coping, struggles, and strategies for socially reproducing their families during the pandemic, participants offered a variety of grounded and practical solutions. In so doing, most respondents prioritised and often spoke first about offering solidarity and support to marginalised and disadvantaged families. When asked what interventions the state could make to better assist the populace, assertions like, “food hampers to the needy and vulnerable” and “food baskets and finance for the needy”appeared frequently. Several participants believed allocating more days for shopping during the lockdown period would have alleviated the negative impacts and several others noted that, “the government should have reduced taxes on selected goods,” with others suggesting a tax waiver.

Several comments related to the distribution of the stimulus package. The majority of the participants felt a more thorough assessment of individuals and families in need should have been put in place to ensure transparency and fairness in the allocation of the stimulus packages. An indicative quote offered by one respondent is as follows, “[a] stimulus package should have been distributed evenly, not only to those who have but also those who needed it,”with another participant suggesting to“do a survey to find out what exist and the needs … vouchers could have been given to get foods from farmers and fishermen.”The argument from participants here is that the government should have collaborated with farmers and fisherfolk to purchase goods from them to avoid spoilage, then use the goods that were purchased as part of the distribution packages for those in need. All the participants from farming communities agreed this would have been an effective strategy to assist farmers in gaining an income, prevent the spoilage of produce, and aid the most vulnerable all at the same time. Nearly all the farmers and fisherfolk we spoke with offered a quote like, “government could have purchased from farmers and fisherfolks and distribute to the neediest”when the topic of solutions and recommendations was broached.

Participants also spoke about longer-term and structural changes that needed to be made. The vast majority, and all of those who were farmers and food producers, thought the government should place more emphasis on local crops, self-sufficiency, and developing the agriculture sector in order to prevent the food insecurity and economic shock the pandemic caused. One bus driver even noted, “government should invest more in agriculture and local foods and crops now, and less in tourism because the industry is not stable presently,”which is a sentiment that was echoed by many participants. Participants noted the state should develop policies directed at food security, local foods, and encouraging young people to get involved in farming. In advocating for youth in agriculture to become a national priority, respondents offered statements to the effect of,“young people should be assisted and encouraged to get into farming, especially local foods.”

Participants also identified the need for a more concrete and committed national food security policy as a top priority. Speaking to the inefficacy of national policy, contributors offered statements like, “I think there is a National Food Security Policy, this should be revisited and if there isn’t an existing one, then one should be put in place and not just in name but ensure that is implemented.”In keeping to the topic of local food systems, nearly all the respondents advocated the creation of manufacturing industries that would encourage increases in domestic production as a means to reduce food imports. They also believed that more should be invested in small businesses and cottage industries for self-sufficiency. Many emphasised the need for proper management structures, transparency, and mechanisms of accountability to be put in place as a means to ensure that the practical implementation of polices was seen as being just as important as having the policies in place on paper.

A key suggestion on policy review emanating from the research was the need for policies that control price increases. Several participants felt that the economic shock was exploited by certain actors, which heightened an already difficult situation, with one interviewee capturing the common sentiment of respondents when they stated, “I think the government should revisit the price control act and enforce it so that in times like these no one will suffer or be taken advantage of.”In addition, there was a call by several participants for the government to take a closer look at the policies guiding the country’s ‘Marketing and National Importing Board,’ which they believe could assist greatly in proper guidelines for the storage and distribution of produce as a means to secure food and provisions. A participant explained this when stating, “we need to revisit the role of the Marketing and National Importing Board (MNIB) as a better job could be done in purchasing, storing, and distributing food, which will help with food security, especially during times of crisis.”Notably, this argument was echoed by all the farmers and fisherfolk who participated in the research. There was consensus amongst the participants that adequate food storage, particularly in *‘tough conditions*’ like the pandemic, was a key factor for the island’s food insecurity. One participant succinctly summed this up stating, “there is this old saying to ‘make hay while the sun shines,’ meaning, food should be stored for hard times, which is something government should looked into.”

Finally, participants suggested that national investment in local crops and backyard gardening would help mitigate dependence upon imported foods, which many clearly stated was a grave detriment to both the island and the Caribbean at large. In arguing that the state should prioritise and devote resources to local agroecological production and free the country from foreign commodities and interests, participants offered statements like, “invest more in agriculture by helping farmers, encourage more backyard gardening to reduce importation,” and “there should be a national backyard gardening programme.”Across the board, respondents felt a national policy that supported backyard gardening and local produce would be more environmentally sustainable; reduce dependency upon foreign products; make the island’s food system more resilient; benefit small-scale producers, family farmers, and workers; and improve both domestic diets and health outcomes. In many respects, the participants were calling for more time, resources, and energy on the part of both the government and civil society to be dedicated to 1) self-sufficiency and food sovereignty; 2) the production of local crops and foods, teaching/training on agro-ecological farming practices; and 3) reinvesting in and scaling up domestic production. All of the participants, in one way or another, explicitly noted these elements as being necessary to enable Grenada to build a more sustainable, resilient, and independent food system that not only secured food for all and was more ecologically and culturally appropriate for their unique Caribbean context––but would also lead to a healthier and more just society.

# A Coda on––and Call for––Food Sovereignty in the Caribbean

Our concluding argument, based upon a historical reading of the Caribbean, our shared but unique lived experiences in the region, and the insights of the rural workers who informed this piece, is that both Grenada’s and the Caribbean’s ability to achieve food sovereignty has been severely hindered by imperial-racial violence, enduring colonial legacies, the ongoing upshots of the plantation system and patriarchal norms, and the imposition/adoption of neoliberal structural adjustment policies in the years after independence. Deeply embedded capitalist rationales, bourgeois respectability politics in state institutions, and the classist marginalisation and exclusion of local small-scale farmers, food producers, fisherfolk, and workers have also been impediments to exercising collective self-determination over both food and governance. In short, this constellation of dynamics has conspired to set the Caribbean up for crisis and foreclosed possibilities for both emancipatory politics and food sovereignty, which is especially true for the Anglo-Caribbean (Thompson 2019). Even so, as one of the largest social movements in history, *La Vía Campesina* (LVC 2013) explains that “food sovereignty of the people is the best defence against any economic shock” (Kim and Pokharel 2020).

Defined in 1996 by LVC, food sovereignty is “the right of peoples to healthy and culturally appropriate food produced through sustainable methods and their right to define their own food and agriculture systems” (Martinez-Torres and Rosset 2010). Put differently, food sovereignty organises food systems according to local needs and consumption patterns while concurrently being aimed at protecting domestic and local markets and food producers from the importation and dumping of lower-priced commodities and subsidised agricultural surplus from other countries and multinational corporations (Patel 2012). In a joint effort with other organizations gathered in Nyéleni, Mali in 2007, LVC (2007) expanded the concept of food sovereignty by outlining six basic pillars that define it in practice: 1) food for people; 2) valuing food providers; 3) localising food systems; 4) putting control locally; 5) building knowledge and skills; 6) and working with nature. In addition, the Nyéleni Declaration (LVC 2007) recognised that “food sovereignty is only possible if it takes place at the same time as the political sovereignty of peoples.” Notably, whilst not using the term “food sovereignty” specifically, Grenada’s New JEWEL (Joint Endeavor for Welfare, Education, and Liberation) Movement (NJM) implemented agricultural, health, women’s empowerment, and youth programmes (Grenade 2015) that were all dedicated to self-sufficiency and local agroecology, many of which mirror the anti-capitalist ethos of LVC and echo the principles of food sovereignty. Regrettably, lateral hostility and an imperialistic eventual invasion by the United States military thwarted the anti-colonial gains the NJM was making with respect to liberatory praxis and self-determination in Grenada. Nevertheless, we would still propose that there remains much to be learned––and returned to in the Anglo-Caribbean––apropos the policies, principles, and politics of the NJM, not to mention LVC.

When looking at the LVC membership list as a proxy, it is obvious that organised movements for food sovereignty against neoliberal thinking and corporate agri-imperialism have been more prevalent in Latin America and the Hispanophone Caribbean than in the English-speaking Caribbean. Currently, almost every South and Central American country has various groups represented in LVC. Furthermore, in the Caribbean islands, the countries of Cuba, the Dominican Republic, and Puerto Rico all have multiple individual member groups in LVC, as does Haiti. Whilst food sovereignty is not being promoted as much across the Anglo-Caribbean, particularly in government ministries, state policies, and education systems, there is some pride in the fact that Dominica, Grenada, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines are all a part of LVC via the Windward Islands Farmers Association (WINFA), which was established in 1987. Markedly, one of WINFA’s member organisations, the Grenada Cane Farmers Association (GCFA), has actively been pursuing food sovereignty for the island. One of the organisation’s key goals is to transform Grenada’s sugarcane sector through “the refinement of traditional intercropping techniques and collective labour methods of their forebearers” (Kopka 2013). Along the way, the organisation has experienced a series of internal and external challenges to this stated mission, though, including but not limited to the government’s focus on tourism ‘development,’ cuts in public spending for local agricultural and agroecological initiatives, and both the state’s and global economy’s tendency to look for neoliberal solutions to local and regional food (in)security challenges (Kopka 2013). In turn, while the GCFA has had a positive impact on food justice and the wellbeing of small farmers, they have been unable to get food sovereignty mainstreamed and taken seriously in national discussions and policies related to the agricultural sector and economic development. This means that, while some local farmers in Grenada continue to advance the cause of food sovereignty, government policy continues to prioritise corporate agricultural, tourism, and industrial commercial farms over small-scale, subsistence, and family farmers and landworkers.

In concluding this piece and reflecting upon our time with the participants who contributed to this research, it is patently obvious that the COVID-19 pandemic has prompted numerous societies to acknowledge both the importance and exigency of endorsing and achieving food sovereignty. There is also a need to develop economic policies that account for disaggregated data along lines of gender, socio-economic status, and dis/ability. Given the results in this article are preliminary and stem from an exploratory rapid response pilot project, future publications will include more detailed intersectional analyses and participant accounts of the differential experiences of the pandemic. Despite the limited scope of this study, more meaningful participation in policy design and a deeper commitment to democratic process and collective self-determination on the part of political officials were common themes that emerged throughout our fieldwork. And, whilst often unnoticed or even a non-starter at the level of national development and state policy across the Anglo-Caribbean, the freedom and support (or lack thereof) communities have to determine their own agricultural, nutritional, and food systems is one of the region’s most pressing and urgent challenges.

Indeed, the people of the Caribbean’s right to food sovereignty must be enshrined in national constitutions and the concept and its principles, alongside local agro-ecological training and knowledge, need to be incorporated into the curricula of schools and universities. When it comes to food sovereignty, the Caribbean­­––especially given the region’s rich biodiversity and vibrant plurality of regional-local food cultures––is primed to become a shining example of what possibilities exist and just how innovative and resilient formerly-colonised, now-independent nations like Grenada can become if they are able to let go of enduring colonial institutions, ways of thinking, and class stratifications. The reality of the crisis at hand, be it exacerbated by a pandemic or not, is that the rural workers of Grenada we spoke to not only have solutions to, but are addressing in their everyday lives, despite the seemingly impossible circumstances posed by COVID-19, colonial-capitalism, and the corporate food regime.

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