



# How do stakeholder interactions influence national food security policy in the Caribbean? The case of Saint Lucia



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## ABSTRACT

Increasingly, multi-stakeholder processes have been recognized as being necessary to the development of public policies seeking to promote systemic innovation in response to complex and multidimensional challenges, such as household food security, rural development, and environmental change. Saint Lucia, a small island developing state located in the Caribbean, has been grappling with a wide range of agriculture, food and nutrition security challenges with varying degrees of policy success. Recognizing the significance of the challenge, this paper explores the nature of the stakeholder interactions surrounding the development of Saint Lucia's 2009–2015 National Agricultural Policy and considers some of the implications for food and agriculture-related policy outcomes. Results reveal a general lack of supportive conditions for effective multi-stakeholder processes, including low stakeholder participation levels, conflicting roles of different forms of social capital in the interactions between stakeholders, and missing “boundary” organizations capable of facilitating a transition towards more flexible and adaptive institutions, enhanced knowledge exchange and learning, and greater trust among stakeholders in the policy network. Future avenues for research and development are subsequently identified.

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## 1. Introduction

Food and nutrition security presents a significant challenge for member states of the Caribbean Community (CARICOM), an economic grouping of fifteen former colonies of Europe (Lowitt et al., 2015a). Within CARICOM, the island nation of Saint Lucia offers a typical example of the food security policy challenges facing national governments in the region. Farms in Saint Lucia are generally less than two hectares in size, with rain-fed agricultural production dependent on seasonally distributed cyclonic rainfall (Cox et al., 2005). The historic dominance of sugar estates on flat flood zones has pushed smallholder farms into the sloped interior (Cox et al., 2005), with 87% of the farms located on slopes considered unsuitable for conventional agriculture (Rojas et al., 1988), resulting in high rates of soil erosion (Cox and Madramootoo, 1998). Farming in St. Lucia is also heavily exposed to frequent hurricanes (Poncelet, 1997; Michel-Kerjan et al., 2013).

Despite the many challenges facing the agri-food system in St. Lucia, national agricultural policies, initially structured under colo-

onial rule, have not significantly evolved since the country gained independence in 1979. Monocrop (banana) plantation agriculture for commodity export continues to dominate the national and regional agricultural psyche, with minimal policy attention being directed towards developing more locally-oriented food systems involving agricultural diversification and the reduction of farmer vulnerabilities to external shocks (Welch, 1994; Leys, 1996; Grossman, 1998; Klak et al., 2011; Barker, 2012). The general lack of domestic agricultural diversification, coupled with declining export markets for bananas grown in St. Lucia has raised important policy questions. Similarly, rising food imports and consumption of processed, energy dense foods (CARICOM, 2010) have contributed to increasing rates of obesity and non-communicable diseases (NCDs), such as diabetes and hypertension among the population of St. Lucia (World Bank, 2011; Samuels et al., 2012), raising further questions for government. There has subsequently been an increasing recognition by various stakeholders of the urgent need to realign domestic agriculture and food policy (CARICOM, 2007).

## 2. Background

The Caribbean Community (CARICOM) has struggled with devising regional policies in support of developing domestic food

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systems capable of improving the nutritional outcomes of its citizens, particularly in the context of promoting micronutrient-rich foods. As early as 1990, the Prime Minister of Antigua and Barbuda, in the feature address at the first sub-regional project hosted by the Organization of Eastern Caribbean States (OECS) Vegetable Development Projects (IICA, 1990), noted that it had taken an “extremely long time to focus on vegetables (p.42)”. In Saint Lucia, earlier policies aimed at increasing production and consumption of local fruits and vegetables proved unsuccessful (Singh et al., 2005) due to what can be best described as an export policy “rigidity trap” (Carpenter and Brock, 2008). Historically, agricultural policies and food system innovation supported export production that hindered domestic agriculture and favored the importation of cheaper processed foods (Saint Ville et al., 2015). While the word ‘trap’ suggests a situation of stasis, Carpenter and Brock (2008) defined a rigidity trap as a “persistent maladaptive (p. 40)” situation that occurs when the intensive management of a single dimension (often by rigid bureaucracies unable to integrate and respond to new information) of a social-ecological system results in extreme fluctuations in other dimensions. In the case of Saint Lucia, this situation can be seen through policies that often appear to pursue a “technological transformation” of the local agriculture-food system (Singh et al., 2005), and enhancement of structural efficiencies (IICA, 2010) rather than responding to local contexts.

In 2009, Saint Lucia, launched the draft of a new “National Agricultural Policy 2009–2015” (the policy), that was subsequently endorsed by the Saint Lucia Cabinet of Ministers. A Strategic Management Plan accompanied the policy to help improve institutional coordination for more effective policy implementation (IICA, 2010 p. 16). The policy had a strong focus on both the technological and market conditions required to foster agricultural innovation, with little consideration of how existing institutional arrangements may also need to evolve in support of innovation. For example, the policy promoted a value-chain approach to increase agricultural effectiveness and competitiveness (Policy Objective 1). It was assumed that this proposed approach would integrate all stakeholder groups into decision-making, supported by the establishment of a special National Advisory Committee (NAC), and the strengthening of producer organizations. In contrast, efforts to enhance national food security (Policy Objective 3) were based on pro-production activities that involved mobilizing local and community actors to reduce food losses and promote the consumption of local foods in collaboration with other ministries.

### 2.1. The policy challenge: Interlinking food security, food policy and innovation

Many of the food and agriculture system challenges facing Caribbean nations likely stem from the relatively poor levels of connectivity between the various institutions responsible for food security, agriculture and food policy and a generally heavy bias towards technological and market-based approaches to promoting innovation in the agri-food sector (Zilberman et al., 2012). As a result, public food policy has generally assumed that markets are the most efficient institutional mechanism for ensuring food security, focusing on either producer-oriented (i.e., higher food prices that could stabilize the long term livelihoods of producers) or consumer-oriented (i.e., lower food prices to ensure short term access for consumers) approaches (Timmer, 1980). Caribbean food policy has subsequently rarely focused beyond actors in commodity supply chains. However, significant changes to global food systems, primarily associated with globalization processes (Conway, 2013; Conway and Barbie, 1988; Gómez et al., 2013), have led to changes in how government understand food security (World Food Summit, 1996) and highlighted the need to better coordinate an increasing number and diversity of stakeholders (Pinstrup-

Andersen, 2009). Recognizing the complexity of the challenge, agricultural innovation systems (AIS)<sup>1</sup> thinking has emerged as a useful way to help policy makers broaden their focus from technological innovation towards enhancing interactions between actors and how their institutional and policy contexts might create enabling environments to foster innovation (Klerkx et al., 2012).

In light of recent research suggesting that the food policy choices available to national governments remain relatively limited (Benson et al., 2013), exploring stakeholder engagement issues in food and agriculture policy processes becomes a critical research gap. Improving the quality of such interactions has the potential to better inform and empower key actors in the agri-food system, while also producing more pluralistic and inclusive public policy capable of delivering desired outcomes (see Mockshell and Birner, 2015 on food policy outcomes with stakeholders of differing beliefs).

This paper explores the nature of stakeholder interactions in Saint Lucia’s agri-food system and considers some of the implications for food security-related policy outcomes (see illustration in Fig. 1). We broadly define stakeholder interactions as involving the coming together of actors to: identify common goals, question existing arrangements, promote interactive learning toward joint action and, create new products/services, processes or organizations (Saint Ville et al., 2015). Previous research in the Caribbean has already raised important questions concerning the socio-political challenges affecting policy innovation in the context of: NCDs (Samuels et al., 2012); biodiversity conservation (Watts and Wandesforde-Smith, 2006); and education (Lam, 2011). There has, however, been little to no research published in the context of domestic food security policy. Focusing on the multi-stakeholder process of Saint Lucia’s *National Agricultural Policy 2009–2015*, we seek to: (1) identify the nature of the interactions among different stakeholders in the development of national agri-food policy with a view to understanding how such interactions might better support policy innovation; and (2) consider how multi-stakeholder processes might better support the reorganization of national agri-food systems in support of domestic food security.

## 3. Methods

### 3.1. Research design

Following a case study research design (Glaser and Strauss, 1967; Yin, 1994), Stakeholder Analysis (SA) was used to assess stakeholder interactions in the agriculture-food system, focusing on their characteristics, actions and interests, and roles in affecting outcomes (Brugha and Varvasovszky, 2000). This analysis method has been previously used to: (1) identify actors affected by policies and to influence outcomes (Reed et al., 2009); (2) highlight gaps to improve institutional effectiveness (Brugha and Varvasovszky, 2000); (3) identify resources available to stakeholders to affect outcomes (Archer et al., 2007); (4) describe diverse and potentially conflicting interests; and (5) understand the dynamic nature of stakeholder needs and priorities (Reed et al., 2009). The SA method is generally used to identify actors affected by, or affecting, the decision-making process (Friedman and Miles, 2006); and it has been widely applied in natural resource management (Newman and Dale, 2005; Bodin et al., 2006; Bodin and Crona, 2009; Bodin and Prell, 2011; Rastogi et al., 2010). Stakeholder Analysis is appropriate for studying food security policy in Saint Lucia because: (1) the issue crosses-over natural, social and economic systems (Weis, 2007; Isaac et al., 2012); (2) there are diverse stakeholders with a

<sup>1</sup> AIS are defined by Hall et al. (2006) as “networks of organizations or actors” that work together to influence outcomes through interactive learning (p. 12).

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