

ABSTRACT

Domestic Food Production and Hazard Vulnerability in Jamaica:
Adaptation and Change in Southern St. Elizabeth

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This dissertation focuses on the impact of global environmental and economic change on domestic food production in Jamaica, using a case study in southern St Elizabeth. The area is one of the principal small farming regions in the country and supplies both the domestic market and the tourist industry. Farmers in this rain shadow region are susceptible to multiple environmental hazards and have suffered from an upsurge in food imports as a result of trade liberalization. In the last decade, they have been badly affected by a series of hurricanes and droughts and, on occasion, bush fires. In recent times, the plight of these farmers has deteriorated significantly which raises important questions such as; what are the specific impacts of these changes on the livelihood sustainability of poor rural dwellers; how are they coping and what adaptive strategies exist; and what factors best explain their peculiar vulnerabilities.

The research uses detailed behavioural and ethnographic studies of farmers' local knowledge, adaptations and coping mechanisms to provide answers to some of these questions. A detailed quantitative household survey was

complemented by qualitative surveys, focus group discussions and participant observation. In dealing with the various challenges they face, St. Elizabeth farmers make use of their own observations and interpretations to offset negative impacts. These farmers have demonstrated considerable fortitude by proactively introducing a number of damage-reducing coping strategies to lessen their exposure to droughts and hurricanes in particular. The negative effects of increased climate variability have been superimposed on an already marginalized farming system, which has complicated the livelihood of many farmers. The results also show significant variations in the livelihoods vulnerability among small farming households according to specific socioeconomic factors. An overall erosion of local knowledge, coping and adaptive capacity was also discovered.

Keywords: Hazard vulnerability, food security, domestic food production, Jamaican agriculture, adaptation