

ABSTRACT

**Sugar, Land and Livelihood in St. Kitts:
Global Change and Local Vulnerability in St. Kitts**

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Coupled with poor management and high debt, the impacts of a liberalized international market and regular storm related crop losses, led to the demise and 2005 closure of the St. Kitts sugar industry, after a 357year history. The economy gradually shifted from agriculture and sugar to a service-based economy focused on tourism. This closure was a major shock to then employees forced to transition to alternative industries. Tourism initially provided the largest re-employment opportunities, though agriculture was deemed the most fitting transition. However, agriculture's failure to attract workers was not only due to government policies but more so to workers' unwillingness to engage in self-employed farming. Female former sugar workers have not coped well with the end of sugar because of limited re-training, low skill levels and basic educational qualifications, and a general resistance to government training programmes. Evidenced through: failed adaptation strategies; lengthened period of dependence on government assistance, as well as poor transition rates, female vulnerability in sugar is severe. Vulnerability is examined using sustainable livelihoods as an analytical and conceptual framework, in combination with a variety of qualitative and participatory methods, including a detailed questionnaire survey, focus groups and livelihood trajectories and vulnerability and asset indices, which together, underscore female vulnerability. Women in rural areas like the sugar belt parishes are dependent on land-based assets. Although willing to work in agriculture, they have been generally unwilling to engage in the current national approach to small farming which focuses on group farms. Others argue for non-agricultural livelihoods. The research questions the potential of farming as the national policy solution for livelihood sustainability and resilience building for unwilling female former sugar workers. Policy proposals are for building rural resilience by reframing government initiatives, promoting asset usage and transformation and providing rural, community and home-based farm income earning opportunities.

Keywords: Joyelle Trizia Clarke; gender; sustainable rural livelihoods; Resilience; assets; vulnerability; global change; asset index