

**Inclusive Neoliberalism?:
Perspectives from Eastern Caribbean farmers**

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Abstract: Banana farming in the Eastern Caribbean has gone from riches to rags since the 1990s. What used to be an economic and social mainstay in Dominica and St. Lucia has severely contracted. This paper reports on interviews conducted with about 150 current or former banana farmers in order to better understand two interrelated things: 1. The farmers' experiences with and responses to this severe contraction in the banana export industry; and 2. The extent to which current development policy supports farmers' livelihood needs. Indeed, many of the purported goals of the current development paradigm, referred to as "inclusive neoliberalism," align with the farmers' stated needs. We seek to understand the extent to which this development policy manifests itself at the grassroots level in the form of support that small farmers can actually use to help sell their products. Our interviews document multiple ways that banana farmers have been hurt by changes in international trade policy. The interviews also reveal a considerable gap between the stated desires and development priorities of farmers, on the one hand, and the impacts of development policy at the grassroots level, on the other. We conclude the paper with some suggestions on how to bridge the chasm between inclusive neoliberal development policy and the needs of small farmers, who historically have been the social and economic bedrock of Eastern Caribbean societies.

keywords: Inclusive neoliberalism, development policy, banana trade, dependency, Caribbean

Introduction

This paper examines the relationships between development and agricultural trade policies and the experience and challenges facing small export-oriented farmers. It begins with a brief review of neoliberal development policy, and its most recent incarnation in the form of inclusive neoliberalism. The paper then reviews the recent history of banana trade policy and the neoliberal factors leading to the decimation of Eastern Caribbean banana exporting. The paper then summarizes the empirical methodology protocol. The next two sections review the empirical findings drawn from interviews with banana farmers. The first provides a profile of banana farmers and the factors leading most of them to abandon the industry. The second presents their attitudes towards government agricultural policies. The paper concludes with a summary of the findings and a

list of priorities, if small farmers are to be listened to and supported, as inclusive neoliberalism alleges it does.

Inclusive Neoliberalism

The neoliberal policy era began around 1980 with the election of Reagan in the United States and Thatcher in Great Britain (Harvey 2005). Neoliberal development was explicitly implemented according to a top-down approach that prioritized national economic growth above all other concerns. As neoliberal architect Jeffrey Sachs describes it: international development agencies applied a 10-step program with few modifications from country to country. Sachs admits that this universal approach is too rigid to accommodate the needs of diverse populations (Sachs 1999).

Empirical evidence mounted throughout the 1980s that the dominant development programs had severe shortcomings. Critics of neoliberalism called for development priorities initiated from the “bottom up” that would take into account the needs of the world’s most vulnerable people. They argued that such development, which is “localized and contextually rooted, small in scale, flexible, culturally sensitive, democratic and participatory, and which centres on the empowerment of the poor” (Parnwell 2008: 113), would be both more ethical and more effective.

In response to the building pressure for reform, major International Financial Institutions (IFIs), including the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF), began an ambitious effort to reinvent themselves as sensitive and responsive to even their most vehement critics. As part of their new strategy, IFIs reoriented from an unwavering neoliberal focus on economic growth to include poverty reduction as a foremost goal of development (Porter and Craig 2004; Craig and Porter 2006). The new “inclusive neoliberalism” is an attempt to respond to critics by making development policy more “country driven” and “indigenously owned” (Fine 2001, 12; Craig and Porter 2003, 53). Though this inclusive neoliberalism has certainly changed the way these development institutions present themselves and their policies, critical scholars argue that they each continue to be run by small circles of bureaucrats and technocrats who, rhetoric aside, effectively work to retain and increase top-down control over the process of development (Plehwe 2007).

As Porter and Craig (2004) contend, the IFI’s push for reform “was driven by real Polanyian concerns, over security, failed states, and failed institutions, impacting capital security, economic growth and the poor themselves. Yet what happened was not Polanyian in the sense of a bottom up, broad movement of enlightened reactionaries concerned at the social disruptions of volatile market integration. Rather, this was in large a reaction led by major Development institutions (and their political backers), concerned about how failure undermined the legitimacy of

their institutions and the wider Liberal order” (Porter and Craig 2004, 250-1). This argument holds that the Bank’s new strategy may indeed be effective, but as a means to reinforce and augment neoliberal hegemony rather than truly improve development policy.

Observing the longer time frame, one finds that World Bank development policy has been in constant revision with regard to its stated aims. The World Bank is adept at absorbing outside critiques and embracing them in revised development policy (Peet 2007). Empirical work is sorely needed to identify gaps that may exist between the rhetoric of these policies and their reality on the ground. By examining the impact of inclusive neoliberalism in the Global South, we can determine whether it has in fact extended the benefits of development or merely extended its disciplinary reach.

Banana Wars

The recent demise of the banana industries of Dominica and Saint Lucia is the culmination of a long process of external dependence that began during the early colonial period. Both islands were ruled by the British and the French at various points in time but ultimately ended up as British colonies. Similar to what occurred elsewhere in the Caribbean, the economy of each was structured to suit the requirements of the colonial power, resulting in highly specialized economies that focused on just one or two export commodities at any point in time. In turn, each major export crop experienced difficulty with markets, costs, and profits, leading to its decline and eventual replacement with another commodity.

The banana was the last of these export commodities. Its introduction in the early 1950s resulted from a recommendation by the royal Moyne Commission, charged with studying the social conditions in Britain’s Caribbean colonies that generated unrest during the first four decades of the 20th century. Neither Dominica nor Saint Lucia had much experience with bananas before but the fruit was well suited to conditions – both geographic and social – in the eastern Caribbean. Bananas can be cultivated in a variety of landscapes and are adaptable to either the plantation or smaller family farm model of agriculture. The latter dominates the Eastern Caribbean and by the late 1950s, as a direct result of late colonial British policy, bananas were on their way to becoming the principal export of Dominica and Saint Lucia, along with St. Vincent, and an important commodity for Belize, Grenada, and Jamaica. A more detailed account of the establishment of the Eastern Caribbean’s banana industries can be found in Thomson (1987).

A banana culture emerged in Dominica, Saint Lucia, and St. Vincent in which a large number of independent, small-scale farmers raised bananas for export while, in most cases, simultaneously growing food crops for their own sustenance. Since bananas can be harvested throughout the year, they offered

a more regular paycheck than virtually any other export crop. Thus, despite the back-breaking nature of working with bananas, the crop proved to be quite popular with the farmers. By the late 1980s, Dominica and Saint Lucia were societies numerically dominated by banana farmers and their families. The influence of banana farming permeated the entire society of each country and was credited with being the bedrock of their democratic systems.

Geest, Ltd., a British firm, was designated as the company that would import the bananas from the Eastern Caribbean. It entered into a purchasing contract relationship with the banana grower associations (BGAs) on each island. The company also handled transportation with its fleet of refrigerated ships that called on all four of the British Windward Islands each week or fortnight to supply supermarket chains in the UK. The nature of the Geest–banana farmer contract was controversial, however (Grossman 1998; Trouillot 1988). The controversy centered on the establishment of the prices paid to the farmers for their fruit. Such contracts normally establish prices at the outset, but the Geest contract allowed for prices to be determined retroactively, dependent upon market conditions in the UK. Thus, the farmers “sold” their fruit to Geest without knowing what their remuneration would be each week.

Despite this problem, the Eastern Caribbean banana industries grew throughout the 1960s, 1970s, and 1980s. During that time, Dominica and Saint Lucia emerged as independent countries and the UK joined the European Community (EC, later the European Union or EU) in 1973, which led to the 1974 signing of the Lomé Convention, a treaty between EC members and many of their former colonies in Africa, the Caribbean, and the Pacific (ACP). Lomé’s keystone was its preferential treatment of many commodities exported by ACP states to the EC. Clearly a neo-colonial arrangement, ACP states nevertheless welcomed its guaranteed markets and non-reciprocal nature. Theoretically, at least, most of the benefits flowed in one direction, from the Global North to the Global South.

Several changes emerged during the 1990s that threatened the stability provided by the region’s banana industries. One change involved the deepening of the EU, with the creation of the Single European Market (SEM) in 1993, which changed the conditions under which ACP exports, particularly bananas, entered the EU. The SEM ended the 12 separate systems under which individual EC states could import bananas from former colonies as institutionalized in the Lomé Convention, purchase them from Latin America’s low cost producers, and/or produce bananas internally, usually in overseas territories.

The conversion to the SEM meant that such a fragmented system could no longer continue since products would be able to freely cross the EU’s internal boundaries. Instead, the EU adopted Council Regulation 404/93 as its new banana importation policy, implementing it on July 1, 1993. Briefly, the regulation established an annual two-million ton import quota for Latin American bananas. It also provided a guaranteed quota for each of the 12 “traditional” ACP banana

exporters to EU member states, and a limit to the quantity of EU banana production that would be eligible for subsidies under the Common Agricultural Program. Finally, the regulation implemented an import license system that favored EU firms over others, including the three major North American fruit multinationals – Chiquita, Del Monte, and Dole (European Council 1993).

A storm of protest, primarily from Latin American producers, greeted the new EU policy. Their protests coincided temporally with the conclusion of the Uruguay Round of GATT negotiations that led to great changes in the international trade system, all of them oriented toward facilitating freer trade and broader processes of globalization. Significant among the changes was the 1995 creation of the World Trade Organization (WTO), an organization with far stronger trade rules enforcement powers than those of the GATT. This had great ramifications for the global banana trade. Several Latin American states filed complaints against Council Regulation 404/93 with the WTO in 1996; they were joined by the USA, as the home base of the three affected fruit multinationals. A long struggle ensued until the dispute was resolved in 2001, when the EU agreed to phase in several changes to its policy that led to the end of ACP preferences by 2007. See Wiley (2008) for a detailed analysis of the banana trade dispute.

As the banana dispute raged on during the late 1990s, negotiations began for the renewal of the Lomé Convention, which was due to expire in 2000. The WTO banana case had a great impact on those negotiations, ultimately leading to the demise of Lomé itself and its replacement by a weaker Cotonou Agreement that did not specify ACP trade preferences for commodities like bananas (ACP Secretariat 2000).

The on-going battles in Geneva, Brussels, and elsewhere took a great toll on the banana farmers of Dominica and Saint Lucia. The Eastern Caribbean family farmer model of banana cultivation was not competitive on world markets. It was shielded from competition by the Lomé Convention and the trade preferences it offered. The removal of preferences has decimated the Eastern Caribbean banana industry (Table 1). Exacerbating these problems was the trend toward higher quality standards demanded by EU consumers that led to changes in the packing system employed in the Eastern Caribbean. This transferred more of the work and the costs to the farmers themselves. Farmers were confronted with the loss of their guaranteed market share in the UK, subjection to competition with large plantations in Latin America whose workers were poorly paid, and higher quality standards demanded by consumers.

Table 1: Eastern Caribbean banana exports[†]

		1990	1998	2006
DOMINICA	Value	EC\$82m	EC\$37m	EC\$18m
	Farmers	6,667	2,985	767
ST. LUCIA	Value	EC\$187m	EC\$92m	EC\$65m
	Farmers	9,700*	5,246	1,450**

[†]Note: The Eastern Caribbean dollar (EC\$) is fixed to the US dollar at 2.7 to 1.

On January 29, 2009: 1 US dollar = 0.6986 British pounds

*These data are from 1992.

** These data are from 2008.

On top of all the other concerns with the industry and its British market, the price of bananas in Great Britain has plummeted in recent years (Table 2). This has had a negative effect not only on conventional banana exporting, but also on the emerging fair trade industry, which cannot command a premium too much higher than the mainstream alternative.

Table 2: UK banana prices

2001	1.08 British pounds/kilo
2007	0.68 British pounds/kilo

Facing the demise of their most important industry, the governments of the two countries began attempts to diversify their agricultural sectors and other aspects of their economies. For an analysis of Dominica's efforts export diversification, see Wiley (1998). The search for alternative crops and other activities is not a simple matter, particularly given the high degree of dependence upon bananas and the fact that no new commodity would come with a transportation and marketing system in place to replace that associated with bananas.

This move towards diversification, in effect ceding much of the banana industry to international corporations, has the support of many elected officials, farmers, and industry stakeholders. If successful, it could reduce dependence on bananas, build more stable markets for other crops, and allow for a more environmentally appropriate, multicropping farm system. However, these developments have hardly played out smoothly in recent years.

Our empirical research in the summer of 2008 took place one year after Hurricane Dean ravaged the Eastern Caribbean, almost completely destroying the estimated 970 hectares under banana cultivation. Banana growers have made a dramatic comeback since then, rebuilding their farms with government and outside assistance. A spokesman for the Windward Islands Development

and Exporting Company (WIBDECO) stated in July 2008 that Dominica, St. Lucia, and St. Vincent are now exporting about 1,800 tons of bananas a week – 50% more than before the August 2007 hurricane. However, the future is by no means clear for banana growers on the islands. Recent dramatic changes in the structure of banana exports from Dominica and St. Lucia have sparked controversy among stakeholders at every level.

Until the summer of 2008, there were four primary players in the islands' banana industry: 1) the farmers; 2) the national production management companies, St. Lucia Banana Company (SLBC) and Dominica Banana Producers Limited (DBPL); 3) the registered Fairtrade certifier, the Windward Islands Farmers Association (WINFA); and the regional marketer and distributor, WIBDECO. Over the past twenty years, SLBC and DBPL – limited in their influence and ability to innovate by their narrow business plan – have become increasingly less useful to WIBDECO as it seeks to target niche markets for bananas and compete in the cutthroat global market. As of June 16, 2008, WIBDECO handed all banana contracts over to WINFA, and also assisted them in gradually taking over SLBC and DBPL's role in providing farmers with inputs. The national companies have desperately sought to maintain relevance by expressing outrage over the airwaves, bringing lawsuits against WIBDECO, even refusing to sell boxes and fertilizer to the newly contracted Fair trade farmers. However, at least for the near future, Fair Trade is the singular face of bananas coming out of St. Lucia and Dominica.

There is no guarantee that these changes to the industry will improve the difficult economic situation in these two countries. Fair Trade promises accountability, community support, and a stable market for its contracted farmers, but thousands of farmers have already abandoned the industry over the past twenty years (Table 1). Agriculture continues to be the economic base in a region reliant on local food crops, but many farmers find themselves in dire straits with the diminishing returns from commercial production. Each country now sees emigration as an inadvertent development path, as increasing numbers of people leave but send remittances to family members at home. What follows is the result of an extensive effort to interview farmers in Dominica and Saint Lucia, providing an opportunity for them to articulate their stories and to explain how they are surviving in what, for most, is a post-banana world.

Empirical Research Methodology

This project seeks to understand the challenges faced by Eastern Caribbean banana farmers, given recent changes to international trade agreements governing banana exports, and evolution of neoliberal development policy. While theory may help us comprehend the macro level forces of political economy at play, an appreciation of the impacts of these forces at a local level requires detailed discussions with the banana farmers themselves. However, before

embarking on this empirical work, the researchers sought to establish a robust and ethical data collection methodology with which to find these farmers scattered throughout the banana regions, to obtain their permission, and to conduct in-depth interviews.

Ethical Research Protocol & Interviewee Confidentiality

This project has followed a strict protocol for conducting ethical research that involves human subjects as established by our university Institutional Review Board. This board follows national guidelines for ethical research articulated by the Collaborative Institutional Training Initiative, (<https://www.citiprogram.org/dev/aboutus.asp?language=english>). By complying with these guidelines, the researchers seek to ensure informed consent, avoid subjecting interviewees to any undue stress, and protect their confidentiality. Each interviewee received a written description of the research project, the confidentiality protections, and contact information for the researchers and for the university review board in case of any interest in follow-up.

We must protect participants in this research by ensuring that our data cannot be traced back to individuals, while at the same time communicating the details of our findings. This presents a formidable challenge when conducting research in such intimate and dense social networks as Caribbean farming communities. In our investigation of local economic activity, we documented banana farmers engaged in illicit activities including drug trafficking and violation of fair trade agrochemical and child labor regulations. Such factors are important to our understanding of political and economic forces at play but, for the sake of ethical and effective research, we must make certain this information cannot be traced back to individuals or groups of farmers. Our interviewees showed us immense generosity and we honor the trust placed in us by protecting their confidentiality as we share what we have learned.

Methods Used to Sample Banana Farmers to Interview

Attempting to interview a representative sample of the thousands of Eastern Caribbean men and women that have grown bananas for export during recent decades is a daunting task. As the industry has contracted, thousands of banana farmers have sought work in urban areas, or by leaving their home country entirely. Several interviewees indicated that many of the banana farmers they knew from the 1980s and 1990s had since moved away.

Between May and July 2008, we conducted 157 interviews – 116 in Dominica and 41 in St Lucia –with both current and former banana farmers, focusing on the rural areas where banana farming has historically been concentrated. These regions have been most negatively affected by the recent industry contraction, and we asked open-ended questions regarding the ways in which residents of

these rural regions have responded to the sharp economic decline, and the ways in which government agricultural policies affect them.

In addition to interviewing banana farmers, the researchers also sought opinions and insights from a range of other key stakeholders connected to the banana industry. These stakeholders included banana industry officials, Fair Trade organizers, Carib Council members in Dominica, school principals in agricultural regions, other government employees, hucksters (small-scale food exporters) and other village leaders. These interviews were open-ended, in order to accommodate the particular expertise and vantage point of each stakeholder.

The Banana Farming Experience: Interview Results

Our methodology targeted a wide range of individuals with experience in the banana industry and yields a fair representation of banana farmers past and present excluding, of course, those who have migrated off their home islands.

Eastern Caribbean farms tend to be quite small, averaging just a few acres each (Table 3). Most of the farms in the sample that are larger than 10 acres do not exceed 15 acres. And even those farms usually encompass mountainous terrain, so that fields are small. For several decades until the banana crisis, it has been possible for these small farmers to earn a decent living from just a few acres. While the gentler topography of St. Lucia allows for slightly larger landholdings than Dominica, the most common farm size in both countries is between two and five acres (Table 3).

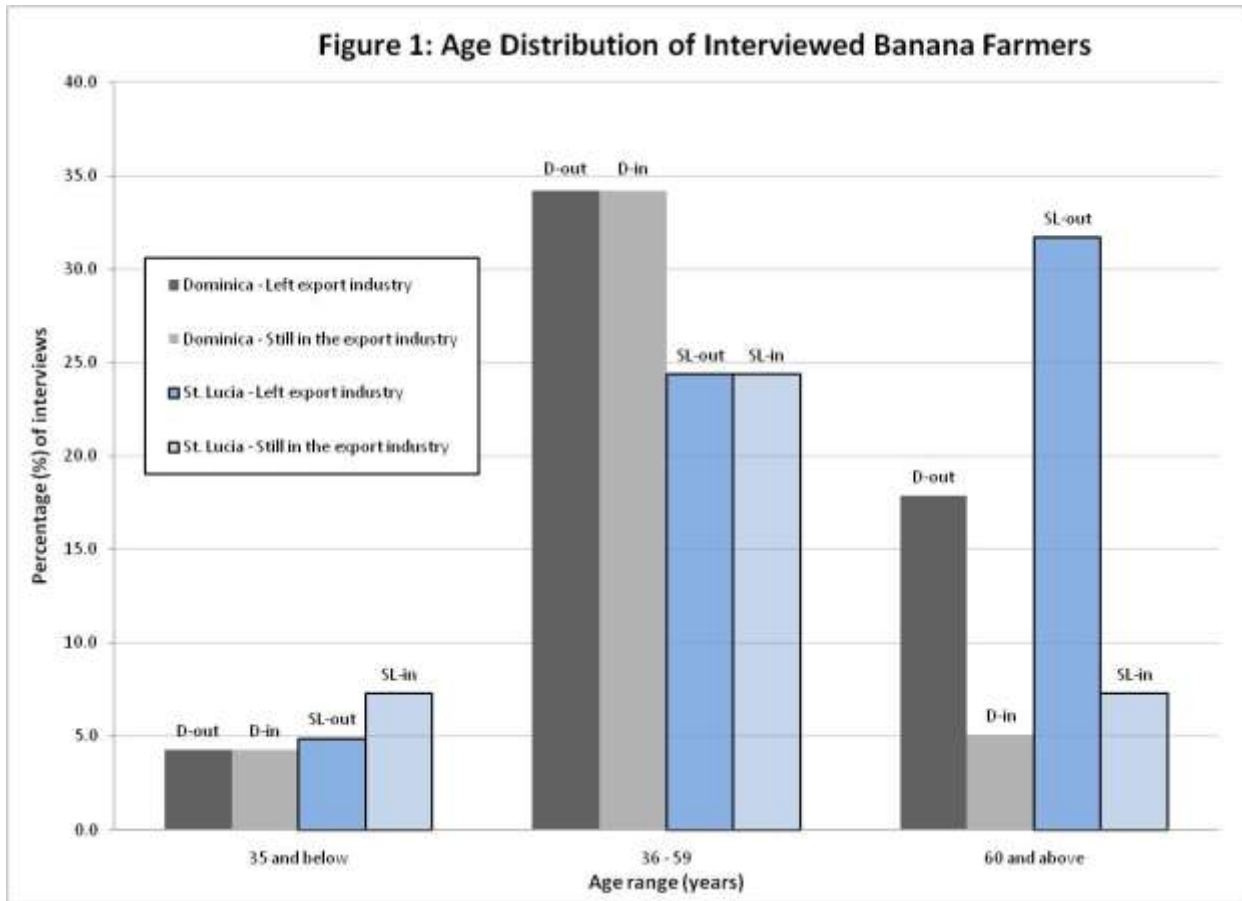
The similarities in farm size between former and current farmers in both countries suggests that it is not simply that neoliberal policies driving out the smallest farmers. Virtually all Eastern Caribbean farmers are relatively small by international standards, and recent policies have had a widespread negative effect. All of these smallholder banana farmers are at a structural disadvantage in an export market, for global neoliberal economic policy has systematically supported increasingly larger industrial, corporate agriculture. Yet, before the WTO ruling stripped UK support, bananas grown on these tiny farms provided almost half of all export earnings in the Windward Islands.

Table 3: Interviewee Farm Size*

Acres	St Lucia (n=41)		Dominica (n=114)	
	Former (n=25)	Current (n=16)	Former (n=63)	Current (n=51)
< 2	2	0	6	6
2-5	12	8	41	28
5.5-10	2	2	15	11
>10	9	5	1	5

*A few farmers did not reveal acreage, so the total is less than 157

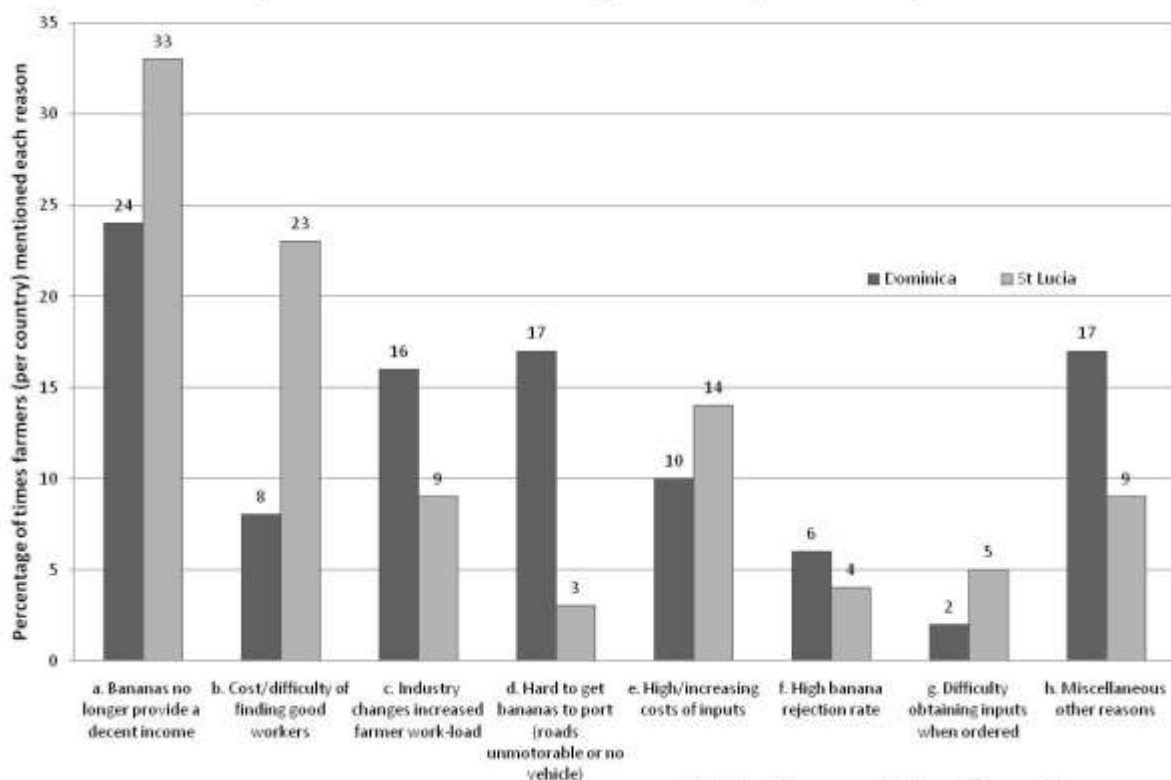
The age distribution of our interviewees (Figure 1) reveals many of the socioeconomic factors at play in the industry. Very few young men and women are venturing into bananas these days. The dearth of banana farmers under 35 years old testifies to the industry's dire situation. Though veteran banana farmers describe at length how rewarding a career it can be, the current low prices and market uncertainties have effectively dissuaded the younger generation. In both islands, most current and former banana farmers are in the middle age range. Dominica has a slightly higher percentage of middle-aged farmers, possibly due to the wider range of job opportunities available in St Lucia. Dominica was the more banana-dependent of the two during prior decades.



Among farmers 60 years or older, we found that the vast majority in both countries had left the banana industry. In a country with strong social welfare programs for the elderly, this pattern might indicate a retirement trend. In our interviews, however, the concept of retirement was scarcely mentioned. Dominica and St Lucia have no pension program for independent farmers, and one tends to work until no longer physically capable. Of the myriad reasons given for leaving the banana industry (Figure 2), mere retirement age does not explain why so few older farmers remain in the banana industry.

Figure 2 presents the reasons given by former banana farmers as to why they left the industry. Our data identify a variety of challenges, some of which are consistent, and others of which which differ significantly, between the two islands.

Figure 2: Reasons for Leaving Banana Export Industry*



*Note: Each farmer was able to mention more than one reason.

In both countries, the marked reduction in income from banana exports appears to be the dominant factor driving farmers from the industry in recent years (column a). Out of the 88 farmers interviewed from both countries who are no longer exporting bananas, half of them point to declining income in response to an open-ended question regarding their reasons for leaving the industry. Respondents mention a variety of changes, including price. Declining incomes is slightly more often mentioned in St. Lucia than Dominica. This may be because St. Lucian farmers are more sensitive to income reductions, because they have a few more income generating options than their Dominican counterparts. In other words, it is likely that a greater share of Dominica farmers remain in the industry, despite the severe income contraction. As one Dominica farmer who has exported bananas since 1987 explains: “I get less money every year, [but] bananas is all I know. I won’t hold my breath, but I’m continuing for now. I don’t have a choice, but I’d never tell my children to take up bananas”.

In St. Lucia, with its greater range of employment opportunities, the lack of available workers is particularly severe, though it is a frequently mentioned factor in both countries (column b). Dominican farmers who left the banana industry are likely to cite diminishing returns for increasing labor requirements (column c). In one regard the two islands stand in contrast to one another. Dominica is much more rugged, has poorer road infrastructure, and is generally less economically

developed. As a result, it is far more common for Dominica farmers to complain that they were not able to get their bananas to port reliably due to inadequate (or nonexistent) roads or lack of transportation (column d). A considerable number of former farmers in both countries pointed to the increased cost of inputs as a reason for their exit from the industry (column e). In the array of challenges discouraging farmers from growing bananas, a significant number of our interviewees also mentioned the high rejection rates of harvested bananas (reflecting stricter standards in the pre-fair trade UK import market; column f), lack of access to inputs (due to import restrictions as well as political conflict between local distributors; column g), and the strikingly high rate of work-related injuries among banana farmers.

Note that there is no response category associated with the idea that banana farmers, after reaching 60 years of age, decide to retire from the industry. There is no doubt that banana farming takes an increasing toll on the elderly. But, in the absence of national pension plans or social security, the need for cash income continues as one ages in the Eastern Caribbean. The pattern in our data which shows farmers leaving the industry is more likely indicative of the industry crisis than of aging farmers moving to less strenuous occupations. The creation of a social safety net would empower farmers to make retirement decisions with dignity, and also reward them for decades of contribution to the national food base and economy. Instead, the increasing costs and challenges of the banana industry, combined with falling incomes for the past twenty years, has been driving farmers out.

Farmers' Views of Development Policy

In this section we evaluate the extent to which inclusive neoliberal development policy is actually inclusive in terms of the perspectives and needs of small Eastern Caribbean farmers. Our data come primarily from the following two interview questions: 1) To what extent does government policy support you as a farmer? 2) How could government policy better support you as a farmer?

Farmers in Dominica and St Lucia argue passionately that the current political economy does not offer them an opportunity to make a living. For example, one Dominican with over twenty years in the business states that his long-term experience demonstrates the failings of the system. Whereas he used to be able to support a family of six by exporting his bananas, farming has become an increasing struggle in recent years: “Now I sell more bananas, but I make less money than I used to.” A former banana farmer in St Lucia describes his experience this way: “Bananas became less profitable – it no longer paid well..... Costs went up, prices went down.”

While corruption among individual company and government officials is regularly lamented among Eastern Caribbean farmers, many also look beyond individual

actors in the banana industry to identify broad forces at play in the political economy. Quite a few farmers, while making no explicit connection to theories of development, articulate perspectives that resonate with dependency theory. They evoke key concepts including structural inequality and capital flight, and describe the active underdevelopment they experience through engagement with the global market. For example, one Dominican who stopped exporting bananas in 1988 recounts why he had to leave the banana industry: “I was just putting money in someone else’s pocket who I don’t even know. If my family got the money from my sweat I would still do it, but I won’t work as someone else’s slave. Slavery has been abolished, but they have fancy techniques to keep us enslaved.” He later explained that, by “they,” he meant those who profit from Caribbean banana exports, including the export companies, retailers, and stockholders.

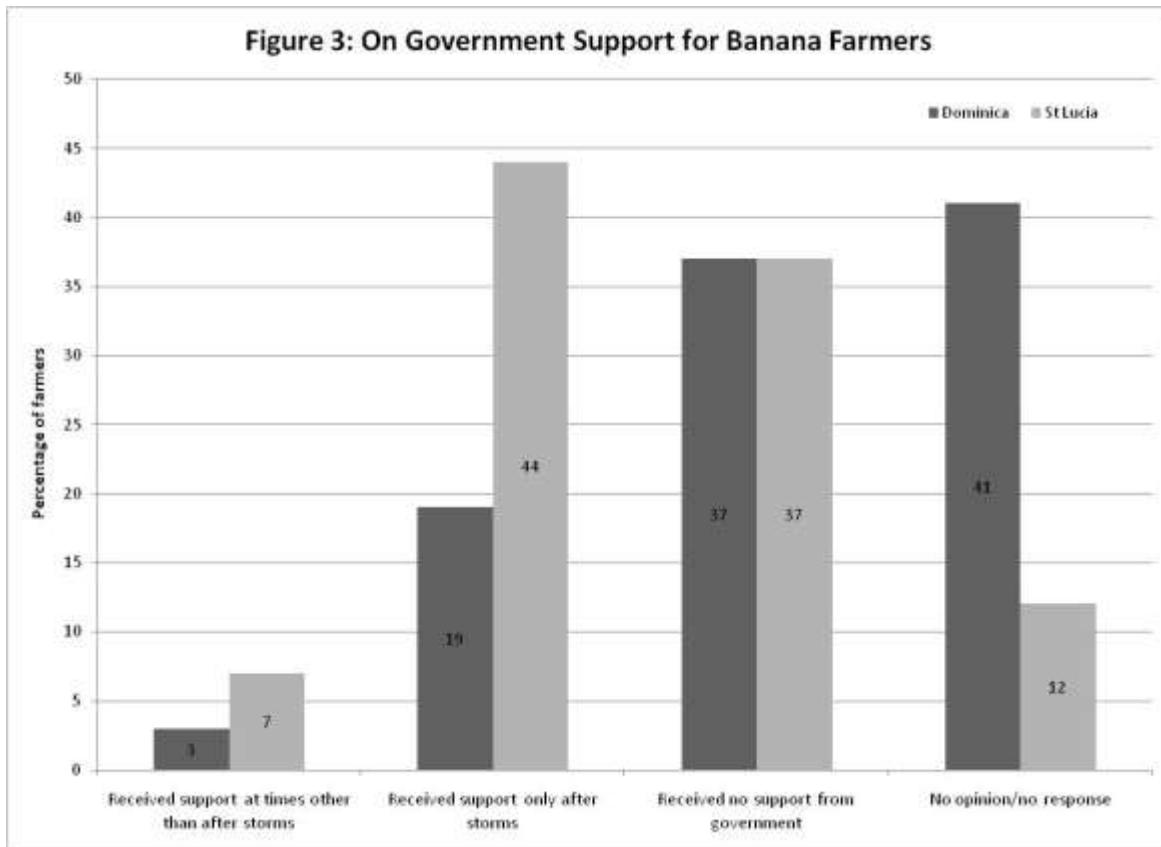
Many farmers expressed similar dependency theory-compatible frustration at bearing such great risks while receiving so few benefits. A Dominican farmer who currently contracts with Fair Trade points to the economic and technological treadmills currently trapping farmers in a vicious cycle of diminishing returns: “When we have to keep paying more and more for the things we buy, but get paid less and less for what we sell, something is wrong.” A St Lucian farmer, also still farming bananas, articulates a clear understanding of structural aspects of the industry and relates them to the limited respect for farmers: “The disrespect of farmers by the society, by the world, by the market, nobody respects farmers.....The people who purchase the bananas don’t respect the person who provided it for them.....Every loss goes to the farmer. Nobody else experiences a loss.....My dream is to establish an organization with lawyers, doctors, everybody to look into these things [the problems with the industry today].”

As Eastern Caribbean farmers identify the multiple problems they see with the structure of the banana industry, they consistently suggest that the state has a central role to play. This contrasts pointedly with the market-focused approach of the World Bank. One interviewee currently farming bananas in a marginalized hamlet of the Carib Territory argues that state involvement has the potential to channel market opportunities for the benefit of small farmers. She laments that the current approach to development leaves them without adequate income, and places responsibility squarely on the state’s shoulders: “If the government supported farmers more, helped them get the supplies they need and their share of the profits, then people would still be in bananas because there is money there.” According to this perspective, government support could give Dominican banana farmers a competitive edge.

Neoliberal theory posits the state as an inhibitor of development, encouraging private actors to replace government while eliminating regulation of economic activity. However, the experiences of Eastern Caribbean farmers illuminate the damage done to vulnerable social systems when the government withdraws. The farmers with whom we spoke argue compellingly that the state must play a much

more significant role in facilitating local development. As a woman from northern Dominica describes, her declining livelihood during thirty-seven years exporting bananas has correlated with decreasing government support for farmers: “I would like to see the government put in place a way to get enough inputs to the farmers, sufficient boxes to sell all of our fruit, and better prices.” St. Lucian farmers similarly would like government to play a role in helping farmers with inputs. As one farmer laments: “Inputs too expensive. There should be a price subsidy to help us. I paid EC\$80 a bag for fertilizer last year. This year, I pay EC\$160 a bag. Boxes are now EC\$5.20 each. We used to get these free from the company.”

Our findings with regard to government support that farmers have received (Figure 3) reflect the above sentiments: banana farmers feel essentially abandoned by government. The principal exception to this view is in the aftermath of hurricanes, most notably in St Lucia, when governments do disseminate aid in response to storm damage. It is also worth noting that the interview responses may not reflect certain ways in which the government is supportive of agriculture that may not be directly perceived as such by farmers. Government efforts on road maintenance, port facilities, and at generating external markets may not be fully appreciated as support at the grassroots level. Nonetheless, these farmers are very aware of the structural components of their industry and the overall impression from them is that they are not a government priority. Despite the influence of neoliberalism, individual farmers in St Lucia and Dominica hold their government accountable in the struggle to confront political and economic challenges.



Some interviewees argue that the state has a broader role and responsibility in economic development beyond agricultural support, and that it is woefully neglecting these tasks. One Dominican woman with twenty-eight years experience growing bananas articulates the sentiments expressed by many farmers: “I don’t think the government has much control over what the industry does, the corporations make all of those decisions. I wish the government would stand up and fight for us, but I don’t see it.” In addition to demanding effective representation, she contends that her economic interests are in direct conflict with the corporations that currently dictate the international banana industry. Statements such as “the government isn’t paying attention” and “the government never helped me” are commonplace throughout our interviews. Another Dominican woman, who stopped exporting bananas over ten years ago after crushing disappointment with the industry, says she had given up all hope for government support, while also making parallels to slavery: “I look to God for help now, I never again vote for a man to whip me on my back, I finish with them.”

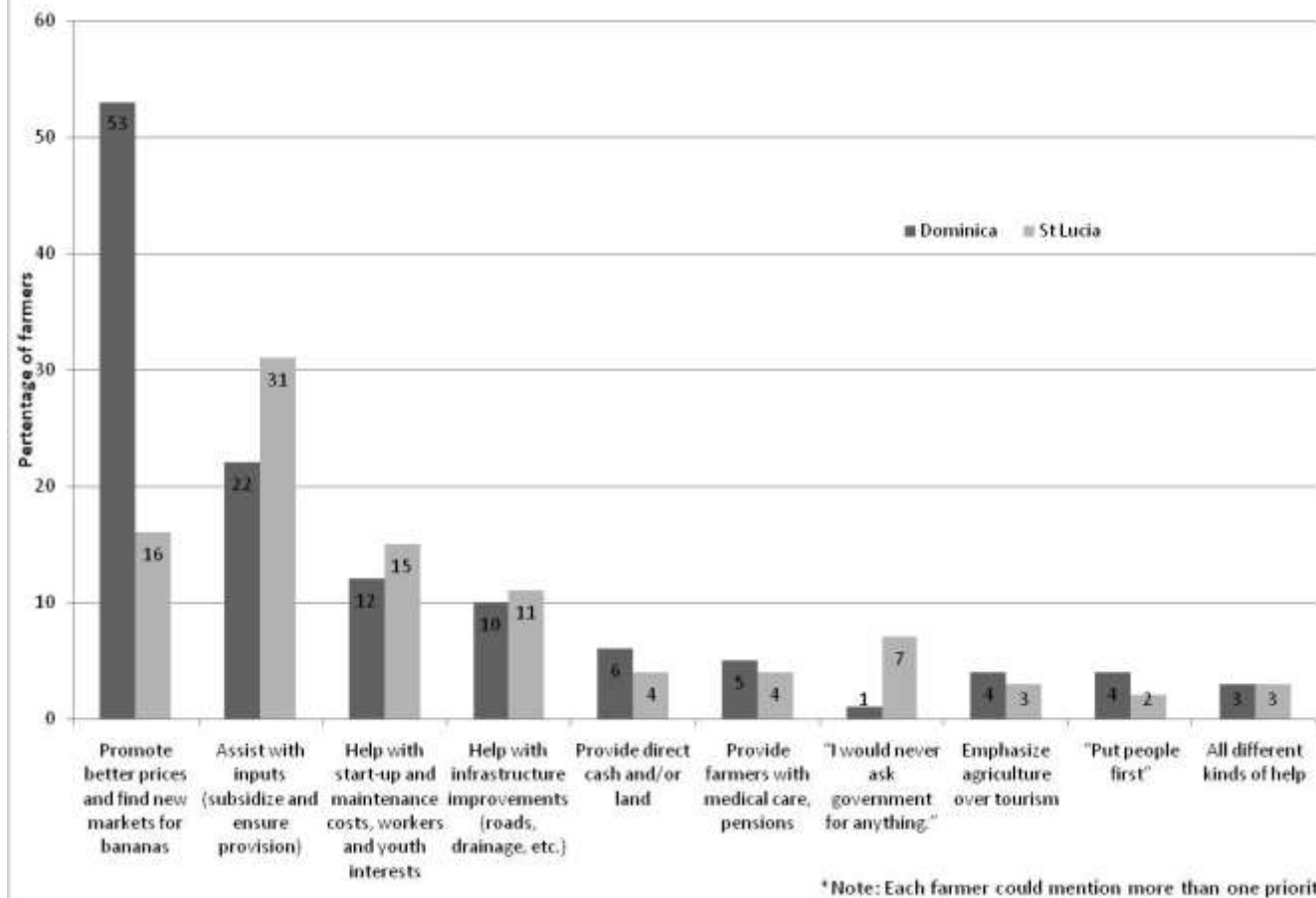
Though our data suggest that St. Lucian farmers feel supported to a greater extent by their government (Figure 3), they express negative sentiments about government policy as strongly as did their Dominican counterparts. Even farmers who have received direct benefits in the aftermath of hurricanes emphasize that government does not listen to farmers’ concerns, and that government does not

do all it could to help the agricultural sector. After exporting bananas for over 26 years, one St Lucian man finally left what he saw as a failed industry. Though he had regularly received government support after storms, he describes feeling disrespected: “As a government, you should see the interests of your people as the top priority... I would never personally go begging to them.” The benefits distributed seemed token rather than part of broad government agricultural support program. In our interviews, the farmers offered a wide range of suggestions for ways in which their state could requite their hard work. As another St Lucian, a forty-year veteran of the industry, explained, farmers only want “government to give us what we deserve.”

Other interviewees extend their arguments about government accountability and responsibility to encompass social services as well. For example, one Dominican farmer describes her loss of livelihood after a devastating work-related injury, for which she received inadequate hospital care and no pension or government assistance: “We work so hard and support our country but when we cannot work anymore... [The government has] abandoned me... those of us who have worked so hard have no security. They don’t help those who need help. To get help you must show you have already.” Stories like this one suggest a social contract between citizen and state, but one that is breached as a direct result of neoliberal practice.

Although inclusive neoliberalism emphasizes the importance of listening to those at the grassroots, it does not appear to translate into effective practice in the Eastern Caribbean. A woman who farmed in Dominica for 7 years before becoming a nurse describes the situation as follows: “I think [the government] should be better organized, they talk all this but never get anything done and ever ask us what we want them to do”. When asked what they would like government to do, most farmers are very thoughtful and outspoken. It is obvious they have previously contemplated what government could be doing to support them in making a living off the land. Most interviewees are quick to provide several recommendations for agricultural policy and have clear ideas as to how agriculture can make a more positive contribution to national development. Farmers on both Dominica and St Lucia describe similarly negative experiences regarding government support, or lack thereof (Figure 3), and this is reflected in the parallel trends of policy recommendations from each island (Figure 4). Farmers most commonly express a desire for the government to work to make imports more affordable, prices more stable and reasonable, and export markets more secure and diverse.

Figure 4: Policy priorities farmers recommend to government*



Conclusion

Our discussions with Dominican and St Lucian farmers suggest that the World Bank and IMF’s “inclusive” version of neoliberalism is still far too top-down and one-size-fits-all to adequately address local development needs. For the rural small farmers deemed by the IFIs to be impoverished (Dominica 2006), development policy is disconnected from their needs and desires. These are not isolated results; note the parallel between these Eastern Caribbean countries and one of the model countries for inclusive neoliberalism: “The irony is that in the local Ugandan context, where there are many simple things the local state can do to support agricultural production, the focus in poverty reduction is almost entirely elsewhere” (Porter and Craig 2003, 66). These same authors aptly characterize the problem of universal neoliberal policies applied in local contexts as “the tunnel vision inherent in inclusive liberal frameworks applied at a distance” (Porter and Craig 2003, 66).

Eastern Caribbean farmers have been hurt by falling incomes and rising insecurity, particularly in bananas, and they feel that their governments have abandoned them. Many have given up. It's too easy from a Global North perspective that places so much emphasis on technology and efficiency to write them off as backward and marginal. But Eastern Caribbean farmers are hard working and capable of greater exports if provided development policy support. Farmers' expressions of bonds to the land and to bananas punctuate our interviews. As one St Lucian farmer puts it: "I have my own land. You wouldn't leave the land bare....I have a passion for bananas that I learned from my parents." Another explains that banana farming "keeps you healthy. Working hard, you stay young." A third tells us: "I love to work on my field. Especially the kind of treatment I give my bananas, I love it. I can't stay away two days."

But the Eastern Caribbean agricultural landscape has been decimated by development and trade policies. We believe that it makes more sense that that agricultural landscape be revived through authentically inclusive policies. Small farmers and the associated village communities have for decades formed the economic and social bedrock of the region. There is bitter irony in the logic of the global food market: as food shortages increase, tons of produce rot on the banana and other fruit trees and in the fields of the Eastern Caribbean because export opportunities are so limited. Renewed investment in these farmers could yield wide-ranging benefits, but it is no small task to reconstruct an agricultural sector after it has seen such contraction.

Given the tensions between the market logic of neoliberalism and the social logic of inclusion, effective measures of accountability would be needed in order for the IFI's new strategies to amount to anything more than rhetoric. Our interviews with farmers offer insight into recent development policy as it is experienced on the ground by those said to be targeted by the World Bank's poverty reduction strategies. They are among the people to whom development policy ought to be accountable, and their testimony poses a formidable challenge to the inclusive neoliberal regime. Farmers declare repeatedly that current development priorities are in fact undermining their livelihoods, and that they are not receiving the support and assistance that they need. Moreover, many farmers clearly emphasize that they hold their government to be responsible for the deteriorating conditions with regard to their social and economic welfare. This view from the grassroots is a direct contradiction of the central neoliberal prescription to reduce the role of the state in order to facilitating private enterprise.

Farmers articulate policy priorities that could go a long way toward reversing the biases against agriculture. One St Lucian farmer depicts this situation this way: "That government we have there, they was supposed to be for farmers but the Prime Minister [Compton] died. This government now just pushing tourism like the last government.....They just floating around agriculture like they don't know what they doin'. They don't have a real program.....90% of the hotels in the country are all-inclusive and they pay overseas and where the money going?"

That money ain't reaching Saint Lucia.....They should marry tourism and agriculture together and help to feed the nation." Another St Lucian farmer identifies the following policy priorities: "...do better for the farmers. More money for the crops, better conditions, better arrangements to sell crops, better markets, better arrangements with hotels." Yet another offers a positive note about government and youth that indicates his belief that the state does have a role to play: "Government here does a lot. It provides incentives to farmers to keep young people farming."

By drawing together what the small farmers we interviewed suggest that they need to be more successful, we can conclude with a succinct statement of a more authentically inclusive development policy. Our recommendations for Eastern Caribbean agricultural policy, arranged from local to global scale, are as follows:

- Support youth to choose farming
- Provide more farming production support
- Reduce farmers' burdens and risks
- Enhance agriculture-tourism linkages
- Prioritize agricultural development
- Maintain remaining EU-ACP trade preferences
- Diversify Eastern Caribbean export markets

We hope that this research has clarified some of the flaws of inclusive neoliberal development policy, and has suggested a better way forward.

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