



**[Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI) Reflections:
Lessons from St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, West
Indies.**

Setting the Stage: St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines.

This Community Engagement and Involvement (CEI) reflection analyses the Global CFaH project's engagement with rural and peri-urban communities in the two Caribbean settings of St. Lucia, and St. Vincent and the Grenadines. At this phase of the Global CFaH project in the Caribbean setting, CEI activities focused on completing data collection and engaging the community using face to face and online modalities in the design and implementation of nutrition, agriculture and community-based interventions. The Caribbean team worked collaboratively with local NGOs such as Helen's Daughters and Richmond Vale Academy as service providers as well as national ministries of agriculture and health. The project's core focus was to promote food security through agroecological practices while empowering women and rural households.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, fieldwork spanned several communities on the Leeward side of the island, engaging smallholder farmers, home gardeners and women entrepreneurs, many of whom balance competing livelihood demands and limited access to digital tools or infrastructure. Farmers in these communities demonstrated a strong sense of resilience and longstanding tradition of resource sharing. In St. Lucia, CEI activities centered around Helen's Daughters and their network of rural women farmers illustrated a group who play a key role in advancing food security and community engagement.

Figure 1: Map of Saint Vincent and the Grenadines (showing the location of the communities of Chateaubelair and Barrouallie on the Northwest coast where face to face CEI activities took place).



Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/st-vincent-and-the-grenadines>

Figure 2: Map of St Lucia (the location of the FarmHer Market in the capital city of Castries is where some of the face-to-face CEI activities took place and online activities were recorded)



Source: <https://www.worldatlas.com/maps/saint-lucia>



Memorable Experiences from Researchers in the Communities.

1. The unexpected generosity of farmers

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, despite economic hardships, farmers freely offered fresh produce from fruit trees on their farms like five finger fruit and shared lemongrass water to help hydrate researchers. These acts of generosity left a strong impression, underscoring the communities' spirit of sharing.

2. Farmers' pride in their progress

During field visits, farmers proudly showcased their backyard gardens and poultry setups, sources from the Global CFaH. They enthusiastically shared their plans for the interventions. Their demonstrated pride in ownership and passion demonstrated the far-reaching impact of the project interventions at the grassroots level.

3. Overcoming travel hurdles

Researchers recalled experiences such as motion sickness while travelling through hilly countryside roads and a missed flight due to an early departure by the airline. This was an experience for them with the logistical unpredictability of working in small island settings.

4. Witnessing cultural connections to the land

Many farmers spoke of following in the footsteps of their parents and grandparents, revealing a deeply rooted, intergenerational relationship with agriculture. This emotional connection helped researchers better understand their motivations and traditions.

5. Data collection under pressure

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, data collectors faced time conflicts when scheduling meetings with participants because of their busy schedules. Despite the pressure, teams adapted quickly and completed the CEI activities on time, illustrating the importance of flexibility and collaboration.

6. Seeing the Farmer's Market as more than just a market

In St. Lucia, researchers observed how Helen's Daughter's *FarmHers Market* doubled as a space for community building, informal education and cultural pride. The market serves as a living example of how CEI and food systems intersect in daily life.

7. Impactful realisations

Researcher experiences St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines led to a deep reflection on the generosity of farmers. The realisation that food security cannot be separated from trust, culture and lived experiences highlighted that these soft skills might be underappreciated. Even though farmers had limited resources, they gave freely which challenged researchers' expectations and emphasised the social value of food beyond economics needs to be understood in design of CEI activities.



Women farmer members of Helen's Daughters weeding vegetables in Saint Lucia

Portraits of Our Communities: Insights and Context.

Areas: Peri Urban, Rural areas.

Participants: Women farmers, home gardeners, small-scale producers, and food retailing

Participants Responsibilities: Caretaking, Farming, Informal Trade and Community Leadership.

St. Vincent and the Grenadines

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, CEI activities engaged communities on the Leeward side of the island, specifically in the northwest and western areas of Chateaubelair, Barrouallie and Petit Bordel. Participants from these rural communities displayed strong intergenerational ties to the land and a culture of resource sharing and informal support networks. The research team collaborated with the Ministry of Health and data collectors conducting field visits in which they observed backyard permaculture gardens and chicken coops in operation.

Researchers encountered several logistical challenges such as early airline departures, car sickness and scheduling conflicts between data collectors and participants. Despite facing economic constraints, farmers often shared produce freely with neighbours and researchers alike. These experiences reflected not only resilience of rural households but a grounded ethic of generosity and self-reliance.

St. Lucia

In St. Lucia, CEI activities were centered around Helen's Daughters and their extensive network of rural women farmers. Helen's Daughters is a St Lucian NGO focused on improving the livelihoods of Caribbean women in agriculture through training, advocacy and market access initiatives. Their members, many of whom are women who are filling multiple roles from agricultural producers, processors, food retailers and household decision-makers. Additionally, they are engaged actively in HD capacity building and training programs, community markets and policy discussions. Their FarmHers Market serves not only as a space for economic activity but also as a hub for nutrition education, social marketing, pride and confidence-building, reconnecting farmers to consumers, farmers to farmers through much needed community connections.

CEI involved participatory workshops where diverse stakeholders came together through facilitated group model building sessions and on-site engagement. Through this approach, stakeholders shared and went through co-learning activities that revealed the mental models that undergird the food system challenges and uncovered opportunities for change. This process of looking past the behaviours of various food system actors to see how structures reinforce these behaviours is seen as an important part of highlighting the human dimensions of complex systems. As a result, the research team gained valuable insight into how deeply stakeholders prioritise local food production and national food sovereignty.

Another component of the CEI conducted during this period included directly engaging with the women farmers not only on through farm visits, stakeholder workshops but also as food retailer and small-scale processors. The research team attended Helen's Daughters' bimonthly farmers market, where an average of 30 stalls showcased a diverse array of locally grown fresh fruits, vegetables, roots and herbs, pre-cooked foods, and handmade products. Notably, 18 (more than 50%) of the vendors in attendance had signed up to be part of the ongoing global CFaH intervention; a strong indicator of community interest and engagement.

However, these efforts of women farmers, while resilient and showing noted innovations in small-scale processing, shifts to high value crops, increased pre-cooked food options, handmade product choices, they shared existing constraints. These included: limited policy support from relevant ministries, capacity gaps that limited their expansion options, and competing priorities among stakeholders who supported the food and agricultural system. Despite these challenges, researchers found that women who were members of Helen's Daughters NGO demonstrated strong commitment to long term transformation to a more sustainable and nutritious Saint Lucian food system. They shared their confidence and pride in the work of the HD organization in bringing pride and visibility to their work as women farmers. HD's quantity of posts, quality of images, wholesomeness of storytelling and visually uplifting framing serves to highlight how CEI can be supported through an online presence and high-quality digital content.



As part of CEI activities showing the short value chains of Helen's Daughters women farmers from farm to the farmer's market.

From Hillside to Riverside: Women Leading Change in Caribbean Food Systems.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, women farmers cultivate resilience and resourcefulness across the Leeward side of the island, from the hillside plots of Chateaubelair to the peaceful communities of Barrouallie and Petit Bordel. After the impact of the category 4 Hurricane Beryl, farmers are in the post-recovery and rebuilding stages of their livelihoods. The majority have bounced back and grounded in strong intergenerational ties to the land; they have restored their backyard gardens supported by the project interventions. The post-recovery work while mentally and emotionally taxing has been mostly completed. Farmers now work to maintain backyard permaculture gardens; share produce freely and work together through informal support networks that reflect a deeply rooted ethic of generosity and self-reliance.

In summary, despite natural disasters, economic and logistical challenges, women and rural households on both islands in the Caribbean setting displayed a collective effort which embodies the spirit of community driven change. Across both islands, they are not only sustaining agriculture but also cultivating a more just, inclusive and resilient food system. CEI serves as a two-way process that gives farmers a platform to share on these experiences and helps researchers better understand the context, prioritize with the community their needs and co-develop farmer-facing interventions.

From Dialogue to Impact: Engaging Communities in Action

The CEI process in both St. Lucia and St. Vincent and the Grenadines moved beyond consultation into active collaboration. What began as stakeholder discussions lead to group model building sessions, market engagements and

field visits, which evolved into a shared sense of ownership over interventions.

Farmers were not merely respondents; they were co-creators, offering insights, shaping adaptations and driving the momentum of the work on the ground. Their participation ensured that food security efforts were not only relevant but also rooted in lived realities. From managing backyard gardens to navigating digital barriers, community members demonstrated that meaningful impact stems from trust, inclusion and sustained presence. CEI transformed dialogue into action thereby innovating community driven change.

A cooking demonstration led by a local vegan chef, owner of Grassroot Vegan Cuisine in St. Lucia, showcased this collaborative spirit in practice. The chef prepared three nutritious, plant-based dishes using ingredients sourced directly from the farmers at the HD market, reinforcing the connection between local food production, healthy eating and community empowerment.

In St. Vincent and the Grenadines, two workshops were conducted to build participants' knowledge and confidence around poultry farming. As part of the training, participants received care booklets, and a demonstration chicken coop was constructed for hands on planning and learning purposes. The workshops also included site visits to three local poultry farms, including the Richmond Vale Layer Chicken Farm, where participants observed large scale poultry operations and learned practical management strategies. These experiential learning opportunities provided valuable insight into effective poultry production and helped participants envision how to adapt these practices to their own contexts. Through CEI activities, farmers shared on their interest in using the poultry farm as a stepping stone to commercial production.



Farmers in Saint Vincent and the Grenadines setting up small poultry farms

An Impactful Story: One Farmer's Vision for Children's Health and Community Well-being.

As part of the CEI engagement, one story stands out. Among the vibrant network of women farmers in St. Lucia, one innovator, a member of Helen's Daughter's stood out. A farmer who is not only cultivating the land, but she is also actively cultivating change. From her crops, she crafts jellies, cheesecake toppings and kombucha (a fermented local tea beverage). One of the challenges she described was the systemic barriers that many small-scale operators and food entrepreneurs face; the high cost of accessing a certified commercial kitchen, a requirement for supermarket distribution. This gap hinders the path to scaling up production and broadening sales.

Despite the challenges, this farmer continues to invest her energy in a bigger project. As part of a community-based initiative through Helen's Daughters, she is leading a nutrition focused

project that embodies the essence of Community Engagement and Information (CEI).

This project's goal is to provide alternative, locally made, healthy snacks for children aged 3-7 years old. Her vision, which has been supported by the project, involves developing and offering healthier snacks to replace ultra-processed, calorie-dense, nutrient-poor snacks marketed to children. Through the Global CFaH project, this initiative brings together farmers, nutritionists, pediatricians, community health professionals, and early childhood development specialists as part of this collaborative effort grounded in shared knowledge and local expertise.

Through her research, the farmer identified the herb known as *Bacopa monnieri* (L), which is a traditional sub-tropical herb known for supporting memory and focus. Through the project CEI activities, the farmer shared her activities developing a functional drink made with the herb, designed to benefit children with ADHD and other attention related challenges. With support from experts, she is building a culturally relevant, evidence-informed product that could be served in schools, bridging the gap between agriculture, health and education.

This collaboration reflects the Global CFaH and Helen's Daughter's collaborative CEI approach, where community knowledge, farmer led innovation, and multisectoral partnerships are brought together to create locally rooted solutions to systemic issues. Through CEI farmers were brought together with experts and they were empowered to drive projects that respond to real needs in their own communities based on their local traditional knowledge.

This innovative farmer who is concerned about children's health and creating a beneficial drink to improve memory, shows that CEI is not just a process but in the Caribbean setting it is a platform for transformation. In these cases, farmers are not just making fermented beverages with healthy probiotics or using nutraceuticals to help children; but they are helping build a future where adult and children's health are valued, traditional herbs are integrated into modern diets and rural households and women farmers are centered as central actors supported by local and global experts in creating sustainable and community led change.



Using local products in small-scale cottage industry food processing



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