
WOMEN FARMERS

AND

COMMERCIAL VENTURES

Increasing Food Security in Developing Countries

edited by Anita Spring

DIRECTIONS IN APPLIED ANTHROPOLOGY

WOMEN FARMERS AND COMMERCIAL VENTURES

Increasing Food Security in Developing Countries

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Anita Spring

Directions in Applied Anthropology: Adaptations and Innovations

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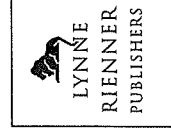
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Published in the United States of America in 2000 by
Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
1800 30th Street, Boulder, Colorado 80301
www.riener.com

and in the United Kingdom by
Lynne Rienner Publishers, Inc.
3 Henrietta Street, Covent Garden, London WC2E 8LU

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Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

Women farmers and commercial ventures : increasing food security
in developing countries / edited by Anita Spring.

p. cm. — (Directions in applied anthropology)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 1-55587-869-5 (hc. : alk. paper)

1. Women in agriculture—Developing countries—Case studies.

2. Agriculture—Economic aspects—Developing countries—Case studies.

3. Food supply—Developing countries—Case studies. I. Spring, Anita.
II. Series.

HD6077.2.D44 W65 2000

331.4'83'091724—dc21

00-021686

British Cataloguing in Publication Data

A Cataloguing in Publication record for this book
is available from the British Library.

Printed and bound in the United States of America

∞ The paper used in this publication meets the requirements
of the American National Standard for Permanence of
Paper for Printed Library Materials Z39.48-1984.

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The Importance of Gender Issues in Revitalizing Commercial Agriculture in Suriname

Gwen Smith and Della E. McMillan

Suriname, like many developing countries in the Caribbean, is at a profound turning point in terms of the structure and organization of its commercial agricultural sector. Earlier models of state-owned parastatal, plantation agriculture depended on high levels of support from foreign aid agencies and government subsidies. These subsidies, combined with Suriname's historically easy access to overseas markets in Europe (especially to its former motherland, the Netherlands) has enabled its products to compete despite antiquated technology and relatively high production costs. The combination of strict structural adjustment reforms, the imminent loss of the preferential access to European markets, and membership in the Caribbean Common Market (CARICOM) is precipitating the formation of a new commercial farming sector.¹ This process is a painful one in which a substantial portion of the population must be weaned away from a dependence on government employment. The same process is breaking up the large-scale parastatals that once dominated commercial agriculture, making certain crops less competitive internationally. This new approach to commercial agriculture means that a wider segment of the population—including women—is becoming involved in commercial agriculture.

In this chapter, we provide a brief overview of these major policy shifts and their implications for women farmers, based on an analysis of two recent pieces of research. The first study is a six-month survey of gender issues in Suriname's food production that was executed by the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) with financial support from the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB). This survey included (a) intensive survey research with 105 households representing the three major coastal ethnic groups (Javanese, Hindustani, and Creole); (b) a series

of less intensive surveys with group leaders of the two dominant interior ethnic groups (Maroons and Amerindians); and (c) group discussions with business and government leaders in four major urban centers (Saramacca, Commewijne, Wanica, and Paramaribo). The second study is the recent environmental and social impact analysis review of the Inter-American Development Bank's proposed agriculture and trade policy reform loan. This review included group and individual interviews with male and female farmers at Coronie, Nieuw Nickerie, Wageningen, Commewijne, Wanica, and the Surland banana operations outside Nieuw Nickerie and Paramaribo (Lichte et al. 1998).

The Modern History of Commercial Agriculture in Suriname

Suriname, once known as Dutch Guiana, is a former English colony that was traded to the Dutch for New York in 1667. It is located on the northeastern coast of South America, bordered by Guyana (formerly British Guiana) to the west and French Guiana to the east. In spite of its location, Suriname is viewed as part of the Caribbean rather than Latin America because of its early slave-based economy. In 1770, 400 plantations exported coffee and sugar (Hoeft 1995).

The country has a total estimated population of 420,000. A roughly equivalent number immigrated to the Netherlands just before or after independence in 1975. Nearly half the population live in and near the capital, Paramaribo. Suriname is often referred to as a "plural" society (Dew 1994: 61), with at least seven distinctive ethnic groups (Creole, Hindustani, Javanese, Chinese, European, Bush Negro or Maroon, and Amerindian) making up the country's population. The four largest groups are Hindustani (34.2 percent), Creole (33.5 percent), Javanese (17.8 percent), and Maroon or Bush Negro (8.5 percent) (Defares 1996:xv). A small population of Amerindians (1.8 percent) reside, along with the Maroons, in the interior rain forest. This ethnic and cultural heterogeneity is the direct result of the country's complex agricultural history. The same history has profound implications for current patterns of participation in commercial agriculture.

The Ethnic Origins of Commercial Agriculture

As Dutch Guiana, the country operated as a traditional plantation economy. This meant a heavy investment in the slave trade as the primary source of labor for monocrop agriculture. Suriname's indigenous population protected itself from slavery by hiding in the country's interior, where they still reside today. Amerindian groups were later joined in the dense,

inaccessible rain forest by escaped slaves, known as Bush Negroes or Maroons, who waged strategic acts of resistance against the plantations by liberating other slaves, food, and needed supplies (de Groot 1978, 1986; Kopytoff 1978; Price 1983; Goering 1995; McClaurin and Staphorst n.d.). Following the abolition of slavery, termination of the slave trade, and the opening of the Suez Canal in the 1860s and 1880s, the plantation system declined rapidly. Since the Creole population (of Afro-Dutch ancestry) tended to rebuff traditional agricultural pursuits associated with slavery, the country's postslavery plantations faced major labor shortages.

Desperately in need of a large, cheap labor pool, Suriname began the importation of indentured workers in 1878. Between 1873 and 1916, East Indians (today referred to as Hindustanis), entered Suriname, followed by the Javanese between 1890 and 1939. Indentureship has a long history in the Caribbean and parts of Latin America (Rheddock 1994; McClaurin 1996, 1997). Although described as distinct from slavery, indentureship bore a strong resemblance to the harsh conditions of slavery. Indentured workers usually worked on five-year contracts. They were confined to the plantation, where their food and other material needs were regulated and controlled by their employer. Hindustani indentured workers were usually of lower caste and extremely poor (Staphorst 1995). According to Rheddock's study of Hindustani women in Trinidad, the few who managed to immigrate to plantations in the new world were social rebels who chose indentureship to escape the consequences of lower caste status, widowhood, divorce or abandonment, undesirable marriage prospects, or on occasion, prostitution (Rheddock 1994).

Javanese migration overlapped with the period when the Dutch government heavily encouraged family immigration. Thus, most Javanese women came to Suriname as wives or as members of families. Women were forced to work as poorly paid laborers on the plantations or in wage-paying jobs in adjacent areas since their husbands' wages were seldom sufficient to support a family (Staphorst 1995:16).

In 1895, the Dutch government instituted a landholding program, modeled after one in British Guiana, designed to encourage indentured servants to remain in Suriname after the termination of their contracts (McClaurin and Staphorst n.d.). Basing the law on the Ordinance of 1895, the Dutch government provided indentured laborers with a plot of land for rent or purchase and monetary compensation for those who forfeited their option to return home (Staphorst 1995:18). This landholding program proved to be an effective response to the conditions that threatened to reduce the colonial government's supply of easily accessible cheap labor. At the same time, by targeting only two of the country's distinct ethnic groups (Hindustanis and Javanese), the ordinance contributed to the development of an ethnic pattern of landholding and commercial farming that continues to the present.

The Creoles' exclusion from the 1895 ordinance encouraged their pre-existing tendency to shy away from agricultural pursuits in favor of employment in nonfarm activities that first started as a reaction to plantation slavery. In general, the Indian population accepted the land but moved away from combining smallholder production with the full-time wage work on the colonial plantations that the ordinance was designed to increase. Over the next twenty years (1895 to 1913), the number of registered Hindustani landowners increased tenfold (from 545 to 5,093) with many producers in the Paramaribo region becoming highly successful commercial milk and vegetable producers. Commercial smallholders near the district of Nickerie and Saramacca grew rice (Staphorst 1995:18–19).

Hindustani men had advantages as small farmers, but whether Hindustani women reaped any of the social and economic rewards is unclear. Despite the harsh conditions of indentureship, the low wages paid directly to the Hindustani women (prior to the 1895 ordinance) had entitled them to a certain measure of independence from their families. An unintended consequence of the ordinance and the resulting expansion of Hindustani smallholder agriculture was to facilitate the resurgence of the "joint Indian family" in which Hindustani women were relegated to a subservient position within the household that reduced their role in farm and outside wage labor (Goede 1994; Khodabaks-Hasnoe and Habieb 1995). Only being from a higher social class permitted a Hindustani woman greater mobility (McClaurin and Staphorst n.d.).

In contrast to the Hindustani who used the land ordinance as a vehicle to expand smallholder commercial farming, the Javanese were more inclined to accept reindenture. Siegmien Staphorst (1995:19) attributes this to the fact that the Javanese culture accorded greater importance to "social security and social and religious factors . . . [than to] the economic factor of commercial production and the possession of a plot of land." This pattern of preferring employment on relatively self-contained plantations translated into a preference for living in concentrated government settlements associated with large-scale agricultural parastatals after World War I (Staphorst 1995:19). When these Javanese farmers started private farms, they tended to focus their production on producing crops, vegetables, and fruits for subsistence rather than for sale. The preference for isolated settlements set in motion a pattern of lack of access to education and paid employment that restricted Javanese social and economic mobility. The impact of this social and economic marginality fell especially hard on women, who had limited access to education or hope for a life beyond early marriage and subsistence farming (McClaurin and Staphorst n.d.).

By the turn of the century, Suriname's commercial farming sector had assumed a distinctive ethnic pattern: the Creole population tended to dominate the civil service, and the Hindustanis were predominant in commercial

agriculture. In contrast, the Javanese smallholders tended to be concentrated in the rural zones and to combine smallholder agriculture with full and part-time employment on large commercial farms and government parastatals. These historical roots persist and continue to influence both ethnic patterns of participation and gender roles.

Structural Adjustment as a Response to the Modern Economic Crisis

During World War II, Suriname became the primary supplier of bauxite for the U.S. armaments industry (Lichte et al. 1998:4). As a result, the aluminum sector (mining bauxite and manufacturing alumina and aluminum) surpassed agriculture as the dominant sector of the economy. Revenues from bauxite enabled the colonial government to start a number of economic development programs that increased agricultural production and improved living conditions. Efforts were made to modernize the smallholder sector, including large investments in land reclamation, land settlement projects, and irrigation systems. The government established parastatal enterprises to increase production of important export crops like rice and fruits, and agricultural programs received strong support. Some of the new agricultural areas developed were allocated to parastatals; others were leased to individual farmers (Lichte et al. 1998:4).

Suriname continued to receive substantial support from the Netherlands following independence in 1975 (Lichte et al. 1998:4). The combination of Dutch foreign aid and high world prices for bauxite and aluminum contributed to an unprecedented increase in the average per capita income and living standards throughout the 1970s. A key turning point occurred in 1982, when the Dutch government froze almost all foreign aid over political differences with the new military government that took power in 1980. In 1983, the volume and value of bauxite and alumina exports declined sharply as the world aluminum industry went through a severe recession and restructuring. The value of exports from the aluminum industry did not return to 1980 levels until 1989 and then again declined continuously through 1994 (Lichte et al. 1998:4). Government revenues were generated largely from the aluminum industry and, from 1983 to about 1994–1995, fell in tandem with revenues from the industry. The severity of this fall was accentuated by the reduced flow of aid from the Netherlands and from the destruction and disruption associated with the civil war in the eastern part of the country from 1987 to 1989 (ended by treaty in 1992). The war damaged infrastructure, caused or aggravated the decline of the palm oil sector, and ended the export of fruits and vegetables to French Guiana (Lichte et al. 1998:4). Suriname's structural adjustment

program (SAP) was developed during 1989 to 1992 to help overcome the resulting economic crisis that included rapidly expanding budget deficits, rampant inflation, and unemployment.

One of the stated goals of the SAP was to revitalize the country's floundering agricultural sector by targeted investments and policy reforms in three major areas (IFAD 1993, Annex 1; Defares 1996:26-28; Lichte et al. 1998:6-9). The first reform, of macroeconomic policy, aimed to improve the overall incentive structure by (a) liberalizing trade and foreign exchange;² (b) deregulating controlled prices; and (c) reducing public spending.³ The second reform was designed to improve agricultural production services in order to increase crop productivity per unit land and per unit labor.⁴ The third goal was to implement a series of social mitigation programs to alleviate the negative equity impacts of government employment and service cuts by giving men and women greater access to land, credit, and income diversification. The primary mechanism for achieving these production goals was to be the Smallholder Support Project, designed by International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD), which was supposed to be jointly funded by the European Union (EU) and the Netherlands. Given the critical importance of rice and bananas as exports, these two crops were given special priority in the project design.

Direct and Indirect Impacts of the SAP Reforms and Economic Trends on Women's Participation in Commercial Agriculture

Proposed Macroeconomic Policy Reforms

Although the proposed structural adjustment package was adopted in 1992 and integrated into the Multi-Annual Development Plan (MADP) for 1994 to 1998, the Surinamese government did not have either the financial means or political support to implement some of its more ambitious initiatives. In July 1994, the multiple exchange rate system was replaced with a single, much higher, official exchange rate that eliminated the distortions associated with multiple and overvalued exchange rates (IDB 1997:11). In mid-1995, the central bank was able to stabilize the parallel exchange rate and thereby bring about a sharp deceleration in the rate of inflation (IDB 1997:11). These improvements boosted confidence in the economy and laid the basis for an upturn in private investment in all the productive sectors, including agriculture.

This improved macroeconomic climate for agriculture was coupled with a series of initiatives that decreased citizens' willingness and ability to rely on government employment. Consistent with the MADP, no new

civil service positions have been created, and salaries for existing positions were frozen. The same macroeconomic policy reforms stopped government subsidies and contributions to all state-owned foundations and projects (referred to as parastatals).⁵ Even the Stichting Machinale Landbouw (SML, Foundation for Mechanized Agriculture) rice parastatal that is engaged in an aggressive "privatization" and modernization program has had massive layoffs. Since the Surland banana parastatal (which is not slated to have large layoffs) is the only parastatal that has employed large numbers of women as regular (e.g., full-time) workers, relatively few women are expected to lose their principal source of employment due to the parastatals' closing. Instead, the more likely impact will be the loss of a male partner's income and benefits package. The majority of women are likely to respond to the economic downturn by seeking agricultural employment and/or by expanding the commercial operations in which their families already engage.⁶

Over the long term, these same parastatal closings create new opportunities for smallholders to obtain the types of improved peri-urban land that is suited to developing small-scale commercial agriculture. The IDB assessment team visited a Javanese woman, the leader of a nongovernmental organization (NGO), who had the political connections to negotiate a small 5-hectare farm deep inside the abandoned Marienburg parastatals. In 1998, she was farming this land with the help of one male laborer. Although this woman was not a government civil servant, her husband was a high-ranking agronomist and her part-time male employee was a livestock extension agent.

It is unlikely that the disposition of this "abandoned" parastatal land will have a positive impact on either smallholder agriculture or women farmers unless it is coupled with a series of major changes to simplify smallholders' access to land. Despite the fact that women and men have the same right to lease government land, few women have exercised this right, which is generally attributed to women being less familiar with the cumbersome procedures by which land is obtained.⁷

At present, the most immediate short-term impact of the reduced opportunities for parastatal and civil service employment and the improved macroeconomic environment for agriculture has been to strengthen the earlier tendency for salaried workers to diversify their income by investing in agricultural enterprises that they or a family member operate. The same trend is being encouraged by the higher product prices that have resulted from the cessation of urban food price regulations.

Although the resulting reemergence of smallholder agriculture resembles earlier trends in many ways, it can also be distinguished by the much more active role that women play. Women respondents in the IICA-IDB survey indicated that they were much more actively engaged than men in

the major cultivation tasks associated with vegetable, cassava, and peanut crop production across all the major ethnic groups (Table 16.1). Rosemary Defares (1996) attributed this pattern to the fact that a higher percentage of women than men (51 percent of women versus 23 percent of men in the 15 to 60 year age group) listed farming as their primary activity (Table 16.2). One important finding of this study was the extremely high percentage of certain crops that were being sold in regional markets (99, 80, 98, and 80 percent of the estimated total production of coconut, cassava, oranges, and peanuts, respectively; see Table 16.4).

The study showed important interethnic variations in terms of the dominant agricultural system and percentage of crops sold. The Javanese and Hindustani women were more active in crop production and sold a higher percentage of their crops (see Table 16.4). Although all households cultivated a high percentage of borrowed land, a higher percentage of the Creole women (19, or 54 percent) were performing production activities on land acquired through inheritance or squatting (Defares 1996:73).⁸

A different pattern of participation was observed among Amerindian and Maroon women in the interior (Defares 1996:77). These women have been the primary agriculturalists, with production oriented toward short-term shifting cultivation of subsistence food crops using hand tools and no inputs. Although many Maroon women plant root crops for their own subsistence, only a small portion is sold, except in a few less isolated commercial zones.

Sixty-eight percent of the women in the survey listed lack of inputs (e.g., credit, improved seeds, fertilizer, or pesticides) as their primary constraint on production, followed by poor drainage, package costs, diseases, pesticides, lack of transportation, lack of access to land, and lack of regional markets (Defares 1996:92). Because most women do not have land titles that they can use for collateral, they have little access to formal credit from banks or other lending institutions.

Proposed Initiatives to Improve Agricultural Production Services

A second group of SAP policy reforms focused on improving agricultural production services by improving financial and administrative agricultural infrastructure and institutions (to be financed by a U.S.\$90-million-dollar project to rehabilitate irrigation infrastructure and a U.S.\$37-million mechanization project focusing on the rice sector). Also included was continued support for traditional export crops (rice, bananas, fish, shrimp, and palm oil) and improvement of the institutions and physical infrastructure pertaining to agricultural research, extension, and training (through IFAD's proposed Smallholder Support Project and a U.S.\$15-million Agricultural

Table 16.1 Participation of Women and Men by Type of Crop and Activity, Suriname 1993 (in percent)^a

Crop	Vegetables		Cassava		Peanuts	
	Women	Men	Women	Men	Women	Men
Purchase and preparation of planting material	46	0	43	2	26	0
Land preparation	58	1	49	18	31	4
Planting	47	1	49	18	34	7
Care	69	1	45	15	33	7
Purchase and use of fertilizer and chemicals	66	2	33	11	30	7
Harvesting	66	3	46	18	34	9
Postharvest processing	52	3	28	9	32	9
Marketing	47	3	35	113	32	9

Source: Defares 1996: 127.

Note: a. Based on recollected activities for the previous agricultural season for key female respondents in 105 households representing the three principal ethnic groups involved in agriculture in the coastal zone (East Indian, Creole, and Javanese).

Table 16.2 Activities of Men and Women in Suriname's Coastal Zone, 1993 (in percent)^a

	Income-Producing Activities		Nonincome-Producing, Subsistence Activities
	On-Farm	Off-Farm	
Primary activities			
Men	23	42	35
Women	51	13	36
Secondary Activities			
Men	15	3	83
Women	7	4	89

Source: Defares 1996.

Note: a. Based on recollected activities for the previous agricultural season for female respondents in 105 households representing the three principal ethnic groups involved in agriculture in the coastal zone (East Indian, Creole, and Javanese).

Census Project). To date, not one of these proposed initiatives has been funded. As a result, part-time and full-time small- and medium-sized commercial farmers find themselves with almost no access to government-sponsored credit or extension services. Even extension services that were to be offered on a cost recovery basis stipulated under the macroeconomic reform have not been available.

One unintended consequence of the government's weak ability to offer production services has been to increase women's interest in joining NGOs and women's groups that facilitate their access to information, training, and resources. Especially important has been the rapid growth in the formal NGO sector, with the number of NGOs increasing from thirty-seven in 1991 to 100 in 1995 and 150 in 1997 (IFAD 1993; NGO Forum 1997). This trend has been given impetus by the NGO Forum, a Surinamese umbrella organization that has benefited from several large grants from the Dutch and Canadian governments.

Official figures underestimate the numbers of NGOs, since the vast majority are in the early stages of organizing and remain unregistered. An example of the speed with which the NGO phenomenon is spreading and transforming women's willingness and ability to develop commercial crop and nonfarm employment is the Foundation for Agrarian Women (SAV), which developed eight years ago in the Paramaribo suburb of Commewijne with assistance from the Progressive Women's Union. In January 1998, the SAV had eighty-five members (including fifteen women who made up a subgroup on marketing), of whom 53 percent were Javanese, 45 percent were Hindustani, and 2 percent were Creole. Sixty-eight percent were older than forty years of age. SAV succeeded by facilitating member

Table 16.3 Characteristics of the Women's Crop Production Systems for a Sample of the Three Major Coastal Ethnic Groups, 1993^a

	Javanese (N = 35)	East Indian (N = 35)	Creole (N = 35)
Households headed by:			
Males	23 (63%)	21 (60%)	25 (71%)
Females	11 (32%)	14 (40%)	10 (29%)
Total	35	35	35
Size of farm			
0.4-2 ha ^b	16	15	16
2-10 ha	19	15	15
10 and over	0	5	4
Total	35	35	35
Average plot size	1.1 ha	0.6 ha	1.5 ha
Land tenure			
Privately owned	1	7	7
Rent	2	1	—
Lease	32	22	16
Family land	—	1	9
Squatting	—	3	2
Other	—	1	1
Total	35	35	35
Distance from house to plots			
Under 2 km	35	30	30
2-4 km	—	1	3
4-10 km	—	2	2
10+	—	2	—
Total	35	35	35
Crops produced and marketed (in order of kg sold)	Cassava	Coconut	Callaloo
	Orange	Orange	Cassava
	Peanut	Plantain	Bora
	Citrus	Green banana	Melon
	Plantain	Sweet banana	Plantain
		Okra	
		Tomato	
		String bean	
		Bora	
		Corn	

Source: Defares 1996:73-75, 124.

Notes: a. Based on survey of 105 households from the three major ethnic groups involved in commercial agriculture.

b. Ha = hectares.

access to new ideas for group and individual marketing of fruit and vegetable products and developing new production techniques and accounting skills. This early success encouraged other groups to organize, including those focused on producing rice (fifty members), growing flowers (forty

Table 16.4 Total Annual Production and Production Sold by Women in Three Ethnic Groups, 1993

	Javanese (N=35)		East Indian (N=35)		Creole (N=35)	
	Total Production (kg)	Production Sold (kg)	Total Production (kg)	Production Sold (kg)	Total Production (kg)	Production Sold (kg)
U.S. Soybean	1,020	949,000	—	—	—	—
Mung bean	24	20	275	250	—	—
Bitter bean	—	—	—	—	242	115
Red peas	—	—	800	790	—	—
Peanuts	23,306	18,096	3,365	3,330	1574	1,159
Cabbage	1,400	1,365	12,700	12,420	40	30
Callaloo	—	—	—	—	55,362	53,777
Bitter greens	—	—	2,300	2,280	620	460
String beans	—	—	2,000	1,480	1,016	435
Bora	2,507	2,455	25,760	24,968	9,748	8,204
Eggplant	1,535	1,511	20,700	20,305	1,729	1,415
Okra	—	—	33,150	32,855	—	—
Tomato	1,823	1,700	21,275	21,085	84,00	36
Cucumber	—	—	7,200	6,940	30	20
Pumpkin	505	462	1,000	880	2,980	2,330
Shallot	49	48	—	—	—	—
Hot pepper	208	195	9,260	8,840	475	235
Sweet pepper	—	—	—	—	30	—
Green banana	—	—	47,200	46,000	—	—
Plantain	6,230	5,575	53,090	50,990	6,190	5,000
Orange	24,180	24,900	101,000	99,300	—	—
Pineapple	—	—	—	—	200	150
Grapefruit	1,590	1,500	—	—	—	—
Citrus	16,385	16,000	—	—	200	110
Carambola	520	500	2,200	2,125	—	—
East Indian bean	—	—	500	480	—	—
Pomegranate	—	—	—	—	1,600	1,000
Melon	—	—	1,200	1,050	6,750	6,420
Paw paw	—	—	4,000	1,950	—	—
Corn	250	—	9,000	8,850	300	240
Sweet potato	—	—	1,200	1,190	75	40
Napp	—	—	1,200	1,190	75	40
Cassava	42,417	39,765	11,800	11,305	33,012	18,660
Coconut	—	—	135,000	134,500	—	—

Source: Defares 1996:124.

members), building houses (seven members), making clothes (seven members), processing food (seven members), and creating an improved local market (twenty-five members). All but the processing, gardening, and marketing groups are still in the early stages of becoming organized and registered.

Women belonging to SAV reported that the amount of money earned from these activities varied with location, as well as with the interests, child-rearing responsibilities, and ambitions of specific women. In general,

crops in the Paramaribo market sold for a much higher price than those sold at the local suburban markets. In January 1998, one woman leader, who worked as a full-time elementary schoolteacher in Commewijne, reported earning an average of about SF20,000 (U.S.\$50) per month from the sale of produce from her backyard garden during the previous twelve-month period; her Hindustani neighbor, who did not hold a wage-earning job outside the family, reported an average monthly income of SF40,000 (U.S.\$100) during the same period, which is the equivalent of a minimum civil servant salary at that time. Another woman leader (the wife of a high-level civil servant) had progressed from working a small house garden to developing a 5-hectare commercial farm on the abandoned Marienburg parastatal and a commercial poultry house at her home. Each of these women reported that the production and marketing information received as members of SAV contributed to their ability to develop these profitable income sources.

Most of the women farmers interviewed saw marketing as the key constraint. Although the organization of small marketing stands in peri-urban markets helped, the women noted that it did not give them the exposure that they needed. Another constraint was the low level of refrigeration in urban stores. The net result was that the peri-urban women farmers were constrained with regard to how much they could grow, unless they organized among themselves.

Suriname's poorly developed food technology hampered efforts to preserve the fruits and vegetables produced for export to regional markets. There are only a few canning factories, which operate at low levels of productive output. Most of the women NGO leaders concurred that improved food-processing technology and more comprehensive information networks and skills in the area of marketing are essential to opening up more profitable export markets to Suriname's commercial fruit and vegetable producers. Cooperative structures to market pesticide-free crops (which are becoming a large potential "niche" market in Europe) are necessary, since individual producers cannot market their crops profitably. Few Surinamese businesspeople have been trained in agribusiness or have the skills to access the abundant Internet trade information networks. This pattern of underdeveloped agribusiness skills—especially among women—perpetuates smallholder dependence on domestic markets and exploitation of the country's primary agricultural and nonagricultural products by foreign or expatriate business people.

Although many NGOs are now active in agriculture, few of the original NGOs originally addressed this topic. Hence, they are often criticized for dispensing inappropriate technical knowledge. It is also important to emphasize that the current trend toward increased participation in farmer organizations and cooperatives is recent and largely confined to major

towns and peri-urban belts. Defares (1996:90) and Khoesial (1996), for example, found that although fifty of the 105 rural women respondents in the coastal zone were active in either a social or a religious organization, only six of these women were members of farmers' organizations. Although many of the isolated interior Maroon and Amerindian communities have been the focus of a large number of international and national conservation programs, the concept of routing extension aid through women's groups is new.

Specific Policy Reforms Concerning Rice

A major portion of the proposed structural adjustment macroeconomic policy reforms and initiatives to improve agricultural production services focused on commercial rice production, traditionally the principal export crop. To date, the consequences of the rice producing area's degraded agricultural infrastructure and services have been cushioned by Suriname's preferential access to European markets that allowed its rice to be imported without duty. These preferential markets are slated to end in the year 2000, and Suriname's rice producers will be forced to compete with the lower priced rice produced by their Caribbean neighbors, as well as by Pakistan, India, and the United States.

Private and public sector leaders are proposing a series of technological innovations, credit programs, and marketing reforms to make Surinamese rice more competitive. These are likely to force most of the smallholder rice producers (about 5,540 households) into extinction.⁹ The Smallholder Farmer Association (OKPP) estimates that the current system of marketing has already forced about 60 percent of its members into a system of having to borrow at steep interest rates (40 percent per year) to finance the next crop. One result is that only farm families with enough income from a second source (civil service employment, trade, and equipment rental) are able to afford the cost of new inputs and interest payments. Even if policy reforms are implemented that target both macroeconomic trade policies and technological innovations, it is unlikely that they can bolster smallholder agriculture. In January 1998, only one-third (845 out of 2,200) of the group's registered members were able to plant.

The IDB social assessment research suggests that nonfarm employment of the wives of smallholders is likely to play a key role in determining the social impact of the decline of smallholder use. In the 1970s, an unintended consequence of rice mechanization underwritten by heavy government subsidies was to eliminate the need for women's direct assistance with planting, weeding, and harvesting (Bisambilhar 1985). Once a household was fully mechanized, the women's activities became focused on domestic chores and supervising their children's education. This same "golden age" of highly profitable Surinamese rice production was characterized by important changes in Hindustani household consumption patterns, including

increased investment in (a) improved housing, water, and sanitation; (b) labor-saving domestic appliances (stoves, refrigerators, washing machines) and transportation that reduced women's labor burden; (c) elementary, high school, and university education for both girls and boys; (d) more elaborate costly weddings;¹⁰ and (e) a diet with higher portions of meat and oil. Household investment in educating boys and girls increased as well. This pattern of progressive withdrawal from agriculture differs dramatically from the Hindustani pattern observed in non-rice-producing areas (Defares 1996; Khoesial 1996; Lichte et al. 1998).

Although the golden age of rice production started to wane by the mid-1980s, the impact on gender roles within the rice-producing Hindustani households was less immediate. The most important short-term impact was to encourage massive out-migration of educated men and women to Holland. More recent changes, still largely unrecognized by the district government, include the growing number of women who are developing business opportunities on family farms (e.g., fish resale businesses, a small grocery store, vegetable trade, etc.). Most of the Hindustani women interviewed by the IDB social assessment team built their businesses with small amounts of start-up capital from their husbands. Women in the poorer households without startup capital expressed a strong desire to enter such businesses or to do commercial farming.

A second unintended consequence of the current economic threats to smallholder commercial rice production has been to encourage Hindustani and Javanese women to organize. One of the best indicators of this is the rapid expansion of women's baseball clubs among some of Suriname's most conservative Hindustani populations. In the last five years, one area, Nickerie, sprouted sixty women's baseball clubs (with thirteen members each). Women of all ages are involved, including many women in their forties and fifties; this activity has the social endorsement of husbands. Related to this is a growing interest in the organization of formal women's foundations and groups. As of January 1998, three women's groups, one focused on rice (Javanese), one on fishing (Javanese), and one for the general development of the region (Hindustani) were formally registered with the government. In 1996, twenty women associated with these three groups and other informal groups attended an NGO Forum training workshop on group organization. One Hindustani woman leader associated with the Hindustani women's group also attended a national-level leadership workshop in Paramaribo.

Specific Policy Reforms Concerning Bananas

Bananas are Suriname's second most important export crop and, like rice, have preferential access to European markets that is slated to end after the year 2000. Unlike rice, the vast majority of commercial exports derive

from one single parastatal, Surland, with two bases of operation—one at Jarikaba near Paramaribo and one near Nickerie in the far west (Table 16.5). Surland, like the SML rice parastatal, is retooling as a private company, aided by a large grant from the EU to expand mechanization and introduce better management.

The company currently employs 723 female workers, including a small cadre of female managers and technicians with bachelor of science degrees from the University of Suriname's Agriculture Department (Table 16.5). This represents 24 percent of the total labor force employed at the Nickerie plantation and 33 percent of the workers at the Jarikaba plantation. The IDB social assessment team's interviews with managers and workers indicate that a solid majority of the women workers are widows and divorcees with dependent children who do not have the educational level needed to find easier, more lucrative government jobs (see also Khodabaks-Hasnoe 1995). The jobs at Surland are considered good ones that include both health and retirement benefits.¹¹ Although male managers were applauded for their efforts to promote women managers (21 percent of the senior staff, Table 16.5), these women encountered problems in dealing with subordinates, who often resent being managed by a woman. Both workers and administrators argue that the gender sensitivity component of management-training courses needs to be strengthened. This same investment in training is likely to increase Surland's productivity, since 21 percent of the crop loss is attributed to damage during maintenance and packing—two operations almost exclusively under the control of women.

Table 16.5 Surland Employment Figures by Sex for the Jarikaba and Nickerie Plantation Operations, January 1997

Position	Jarikaba Operations			Nickerie Operations		
	Male	Female	Total	Male	Female	Total
Top management	2	0	2	1	0	1
Senior staff	9	3	12	6	1	7
Undersupervisors	41	4	45	15	0	15
Supervisors	13	0	13	35	0	35
Full-time field workers	500	133	633	179	264	433
Part-time fieldworkers	69	288	357	501	1	502
Other	270	16	286	142	13	155
Total	904	444	1,348	879	279	1,158
Percent of total	67	33	100	76	24	100

Source: Surland Administration, January 13, 1998.

These policies may also reduce the high rates of absenteeism of part-time and full-time workers (30 percent), which seem to be a major source of the company's problems.

Surland's women leaders—in particular the four university-educated Hindustani and Javanese women working as senior staff—are playing a major role in trying to change the attitudes of male line workers and improve women's conditions. Their success would provide a model to other agribusiness establishments such as the newly privatized rice parastatal, where women are sparsely represented.

Conclusion

Commercial agriculture is unlikely to replace primary mineral products such as bauxite as Suriname's major source of export earnings. Similarly, local people are unlikely to return to the earlier pattern of heavy dependence on government employment. The government's goal of revitalizing commercial agriculture complements the growing local aspiration for diversifying household income by developing women's income from commercial farming. Many women are developing successful, small-scale commercial enterprises. The same process is catalyzing a massive growth in women-dominated NGOs designed to strengthen the women producers' ability to obtain the technology, management skills, and market access needed to expand crop production and processing enterprises. At the same time, women appear to constitute the majority of actors involved in the vegetable and fruit sector, which is considered one of the most favorably placed production sectors for the post-year-2000 international market environment. More detailed longitudinal data on specific women's groups will be required to convince the national government and supportive donors about the need for changes in national land laws, extension services, and lending policies to support women farmers. The current trickle of donor aid and loan initiatives filtering into Suriname through NGO and state organizations offers an unprecedented opportunity to reinforce these positive trends. The situation is especially complicated, given the complex interweaving of the different ethnic groups with past and present patterns of commercial agriculture.

Notes

1. Suriname's membership in CARICOM as of July 1985 and its accession to the Caribbean Common Market in January 1996 were the country's first two regional arrangements. During the past two years, CARICOM has been responsible

for (a) reducing tariffs on nonagricultural products to a maximum of 35 percent, with a target of between 5 and 20 percent; (b) adopting measures that will make the region more competitive and increase access to new markets and other trading blocs; and (c) strengthening relations with neighboring countries through the creation of the Association of Caribbean States (ACS) in July 1994 (IDB 1997:8-9).

2. This goal includes elimination of the retention requirements for exporters and making foreign exchange available at subsidized rates for the purchase of agricultural inputs by smallholders.

3. This goal was to be achieved by (a) restructuring the government's direct involvement in agricultural production and the privatization of some agricultural enterprises; (b) eliminating the highly subsidized rates at which agricultural inputs are made available to some farmers; (c) introducing cost-recovery mechanisms for services provided by the government, possibly including privatization of some of these services; and (d) retrenchment of the civil service, requiring the absorption of labor in other sectors of the economy, including agriculture.

4. The subobjectives of this goal included (a) improving agricultural infrastructure and institutions responsible for their administration; (b) continuing support for traditional export crops (rice, banana, fish, shrimp, and palm oil); and (c) improving the institutions and physical infrastructure pertaining to agricultural research, extension, and training.

5. The World Bank and IDB estimate that there are thirty to thirty-five non-financial state enterprises, of which about seventeen are involved in agriculture, and that nonfinancial state enterprises employ 10,000 persons. Many of these parastatals have consumed enormous subsidies and are being gradually phased out. For example, although the Marienburg sugar parastatal (which last cultivated approximately 2,400 hectares of sugar cane) closed in 1991, the government continued to meet some of its payroll obligations and operating costs through 1997. All but a small number of the larger, more efficient parastatals, such as SML Wageningen, which produces rice, and the banana parastatal, Surland, have already closed.

6. Khodabaks-Hasnoe's (1995) case study of Jarikaba, the peri-urban community adjacent to Surland's Paramaribo operation, showed that only 9 percent of the adult population had some other type of government employment; 17 percent of the population worked for Surland. Four out of ten adults appeared to have no formal sector employment at all. Small-scale agriculture was characteristic of most families.

7. Of the 105 farms surveyed in the IICA-IDB study of rural women food producers, seventy farms (67 percent) were leased from the government (Defares 1996:87). Forty-eight (69.6 percent) of the lease holdings were in the name of the male companion, compared with three (4.3 percent) in the name of the woman respondent, nine farms (13 percent) in the name of the woman's family, and five (7.2 percent) in the name of the man's family. The total number of respondents having a title with their name on the contract was only six (5.7 percent). Women were the legal owners of four (11.2 percent) of the thirty-five Javanese farms in the IICA-IDB survey (Defares 1996:87). All thirty-five of the Hindustani women rural food producers in the survey farmed land that was held in their spouse's name. Of the thirty-five Creole-owned farms, only two women had their names on the title; ten worked on land that belonged to their families.

8. Defares (1996:73) argued that often, after the indentureship system was terminated, the East Indian and Javanese migrant families in particular made use of the opportunity to rent or lease land from the government. The land the Creole women now work is, in most cases, part of the plantation land that was inherited by former slave families after emancipation in 1863.

9. IFAD (1996) estimated that there were 5,540 rice producers in Suriname, of which approximately 98 percent were small to medium-sized farms (1 to 50 hectares); only 2 percent had farms over 50 hectares.

10. In 1998, the cost of a wedding was estimated to be as high as 3 million Surinamese guilders.

11. Full-time jobs offer good benefits packages. Although part-time jobs do not, the part-time schedule (four long days on, thirteen days off) enables women to develop small farms and nonfarm employment on the side. The same schedule is compatible with women's child-rearing responsibilities. All workers receive free transportation to the plantation.

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