

Community Banking for All: Rural Women's Savings and Loan Scheme in St. Vincent and the Grenadines

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Abstract

This paper presents a model for an indigenous community-based banking system that also provides microcredit for rural women in the small remote village of Fancy, St. Vincent and the Grenadines. This model of a savings and loan scheme, the Fancy Help Group Loan Scheme, was established in 2003 by the women of the community-based women's organization the Fancy Community Help Group as a strategic response to the economic realities in St. Vincent and the Grenadines, which include the difficulties rural women face in accessing loans and credit from financial institutions in the formal banking sector.

The only known example of its kind in the English-speaking Caribbean, the Fancy Help Group Loan Scheme has also been an innovative way for women to assist each other to achieve some measure of economic independence through their own efforts and industry on the basis of mutual support, mutual trust, and mutual sharing.

Key words: Caribbean; Fancy, St. Vincent and the Grenadines; Fancy Community Help Group; microcredit; rural savings and loan schemes; rural women

1.0 Introduction

1.1 Informal Savings Schemes in the Caribbean

Grietjie Verhoef (2002) correctly argued that "societies are constantly adapting to changes in their social and economic environment, because human societies are made from the conflicting interactions between humans organised in and around a given social structure ... when that structure changes, so must the interactive human behaviour in that society" (p. 1). Verhoef (2002) made this point in discussing the history of voluntary savings organizations in South Africa where the social and economic environment of the 19th century "transformed the

primarily rural and agriculture societies in a revolutionary fashion demanding from them to adapt to the emerging mineral/mining and industrial social formation” (p.1). In this instance, the erosion of the independent traditional chieftdom and the replacement with capitalist forms of production, distribution, and exchange forced local Africans to find ways and means to cope in a world of imposed values and culture and one in which the material benefits of that society was based on private ownership of the means of production and the exploitation of wage labour. In other words, it was a system founded on a relationship between capital and hired labour.

This analysis has relevance for the evolution of English-speaking Caribbean societies that have their roots in African slavery, which began in the 17th century. Slave societies, which were, for the most part, nonmonetized societies, were held in place by a social, economic, and political order based on coercion and force.¹ With emancipation in the 19th century and the transformation of slavery into capitalism and a world of alien values, culture, and ideology (Curtin, 1955) came the transformation of the African population into a social group of peasants, and the existence of a unique system of wage labour in which the erstwhile labouring population could now sell their labour power to the highest bidder, the planter (Curtin, 1955). Caribbean societies were, therefore, based on a system in which there was a skewed distribution of land, income, and wealth, and the resources and rewards of societies were based on private property, the private ownership of the means of production, the exploitation of wage labour, and “a grateful hardworking peasantry” (Curtin, 1955, p. 159). It was a system in which the population of ex-slaves was condemned to marginalization, poverty, and deprivation, since the benefits of social growth were reaped by the planter class, a section of which emerged as the present-day production capitalist class (Beckford, 1972).

Emancipation also meant the formal and extended monetization of Caribbean economies in which both appropriators and producers of profits were forced to recognize both the relevance and value of money. As Brown (1989) stated,

the Emancipation of the African slaves ... necessitated the monetisation of Caribbean economies since wages had become a regular feature of plantation accounting and services which had perhaps been the responsibility of the planter became the responsibility of the state. Not only did wages and salaries bill of the plantations increase, so did those of the public sector. In addition, ex-slaves had to purchase their own goods and services in cash as these were no longer provided by the planters. (pp. 220–221)

Ferguson (1998) strengthened this point when he wrote, “Whereas slaves had necessarily been limited consumers, a free peasantry or wage-earning working class needed to buy clothes, pots, pans and farming implements” (p. 173). And since the ex-slaves were not allowed to use the formal finance and credit system, established in the post-Emancipation period from 1838, they created their own survival strategies, which included a variety of informal activities and savings

schemes to supplement their meagre incomes to cope with their changing circumstances (Brown, 1989).

Specifically relating to financial strategies, friendly societies were introduced in the late 19th century, but such societies were a type of mutual insurance association in which members subscribed to provide benefits in the event of sickness or death, and for burials (Brown, 1989). The introduction and development of the Penny Bank, mainly for professionals, was to provide funds for starting businesses with funds obtained from savings. In this regard, accounts were encouraged with initial deposits of as little as one penny, hence the name Penny Bank (Brown, 1989). However, these schemes did not fully meet the social and economic requirements of the ex-slave population and so they developed their own indigenous forms of voluntary savings, which blossomed throughout the Caribbean in the post-Emancipation period.

In 1845 in British Guiana (now Guyana), for example, “freed slaves managed to pool resources, obtain credit and even buy large parcels of land from plantation owners” on which to make a living (Ferguson, 1998, p. 173). However, also significant in this period was the establishment of voluntary savings schemes, mainly by lower-class African women (Harewood & Henry, 1985) who had stopped working on the plantations and become informal traders in agricultural produce, thereby needing large sums of cash outlay to invest in business and to ply their trade (Mintz, 1971). Money was needed to address their subsistence needs, and there was a lack of access to any form of financial institutions from which they could get credit (Brown, 1989). In addition, burdened with family responsibilities, these women were to establish regular savings networks involving other women and requiring regular contributions. This saving scheme, which assumed both prominence and popularity as both income and microcredit in the post-Emancipation period, was known by various names: *sou sou* in Trinidad and Tobago and the Eastern Caribbean, *meeting turn* in Barbados, and *partner* in Jamaica. Through these African-derived schemes,² women were, therefore, able to maintain their families and their economic independence and to distance themselves from the plantation, which had theretofore held them in subjugation under the lash of the whip. For the women of African origin, then, this informal institution of financial cooperation provided a mechanism to cope with uncertainty and the vagaries of capitalism and reduce risk.

1.2 Rotating Credit Schemes

In the evolution of Caribbean societies, as in any other society, a link between the present and the past persists through culture and systems of values and beliefs that inform behaviour and practices in the new dispensation. It is no surprise then that this informal savings scheme was handed down in the collective consciousness of a marginalized people and continues today as the most popular form of savings among all classes of people in the Caribbean, particularly marginalized and low-income earners and women. In this arrangement, as it was in the early development of capitalism, a group of individuals commit to pooling an agreed sum of money daily, weekly, fortnightly, or monthly as a form of compulsory savings by providing a repository for small sums of money that would have been used otherwise (Appel, 2008). It is a way of saving to supplement family income, pay for a special event, save toward the purchase of a car or a house, attend to medical situations, prepare children for school, pay

tuition and examination fees, and use as microcredit for investment in income-generating ventures, as financial institutions are sidestepped in favour of what could be called traditional savings schemes. Brown (1989) explained how this system works:

The sou-sou is a rotating credit association formed on a core of participants who agree to make regular contributions to a fund which is given to each contributor in rotation.... It can be monthly, weekly or daily. Since the banks do not service the black lower class in terms of loan and credit arrangements, this class resorted to the sou-sou in order to overcome that hindrance. It is in this way that some were able to accumulate the resources they required to do house repairs, build pirogues or purchase livestock. (pp. 92–93)

In his work *Sou Sou Banking in Trinidad: Example of an Informal Mutual Aid Society*, Holcomb (2006), whose work can also be generalized throughout the Caribbean, described the characteristics of this informal, voluntary saving scheme as having common interests and similar conditions, while functioning to provide economic assistance and mutual protection to ensure cultural preservation and encourage social interchange. The criteria for joining a *sou sou*, as outlined by Holcomb, basically involves need, trust, and the avoidance of a loan or bank hassle.

Against this background, we present a qualitatively new form of informal savings and microcredit along the continuum of voluntary savings schemes, which can be understood as a derivative of the *sou sou* arrangement. It is a community banking project that was conceptualized and implemented by rural Caribbean women whose creativity led them to set up a collective savings and revolving loan scheme as a 21st-century coping strategy. The Community Banking for All Project is meant to assist in meeting the financial, economic, and social needs of the members of the Fancy Community Help Group (FCHG), and all the women of the wider community. In this sense, we also find it unique because our experience has shown that it is very unusual for women organized in community-based organizations to extend their group's privileges to women of the wider community.

Also worthy of note is that this Fancy strategy builds on and is a part of the Caribbean low-income and rural communities' response to the need for savings and access to microcredit. It also illustrates, once again, the point made by Verhoef (2002) that societies constantly adapt to change, which when it occurs compels people to respond in particular ways to changing circumstances.

2.0 Methods

Fancy is a small, remote rural community at the northernmost tip of St. Vincent and the Grenadines. With approximately 140 households and a population upwards of 500, Fancy is an agricultural community where both women and men are involved in cash-crop farming. Given the nature of agriculture, women have to find ways and means to supplement their income.

In addressing their community needs, the women of Fancy set about to focus on concrete measures to address the critical areas of their concern, one of which was the establishment of an income-generating project. In this effort, they were guided, assisted, and funded by the Women and Development Unit (WAND) of the University of the West Indies, whose mandate it is to promote and support the social advancement of the region's women through informal education, community intervention initiatives, research, and documentation. Working with the women of Fancy, therefore, synchronized well with WAND's thrust to uplift women both socially and economically. Also, WAND's emphasis on development from below and its commitment to participatory research as a tool to positively transform social relations and to create social change provided both the context and the methodology for its intervention in Fancy. WAND has been involved in community development in Fancy since 1997.

For community banking to be introduced, WAND, within the context of its mandate, had worked with the women of the FCHG to establish and fund an income-generating project, a pig-rearing project discussed later, the proceeds of which provided the funds that became the core of the bank's operations. It was, therefore, not difficult for WAND to obtain the necessary primary data for this study.

Our methods of research for this case study included informal interviews with members of the FCHG and with the WAND community consultant; research and documentation of project reports; minutes of FCHG meetings; and observer participation at FCHG meetings.

3.0 A Case Study

3.1 The Fancy Community Help Group

The FCHG is a community-based women's organization comprising 22 women ranging in age from the late teens to over 60. They are typical rural women who are mostly mothers and homemakers and small farmers and vendors. Income from such activities is used to meet the basic needs of their families. But, despite their engagement in these economic activities, some women, who do not have a steady flow of income, still find it difficult to meet the basic needs of feeding their families, providing for the further education of their children, and securing health care for their families not provided by the local health clinic (Ashton, 2007).

FCHG is laterally organized along the lines of a collective. In practical terms, it means that before any decision is taken, the matter is fully discussed among the membership and all members are allowed to voice their opinions freely.³ At the end of the discussion, the final decision is made, usually on the basis of majority vote. There are, however, instances when decisions are taken unanimously.⁴

Based on need and the absence of commercial banks and nonbank financial institutions such as credit unions (WAND, "Community Profile," 1996) and, hence, no practical access to formal sector finance or savings, the women of the FCHG were forced to creatively develop their own savings and loan bank as a microfinance organization and a community development bank. This so-called bank has made and is making funds available for the provision of unsecured loans to both members and nonmembers who do not contribute to the collective savings plan. In this sense, it is remarkably different from other informal savings

plans in the Caribbean. It is also different from other Caribbean savings and loan plans because it represents a model of banking based on an extension of the principles of democracy, collective ownership, and collective management on which the organization and administration of the FCHG is also based (WAND, 1996). Below, we detail the Community Banking for All Project.

3.2 An Informal Revolving Loan Scheme

The Community Banking for All Project is a model of banking that provides credit for all socially disadvantaged women devoid of collateral base and the privileges of their male counterparts. It has its genesis in an income-generating project that started in 1997. At that time, the women of the FCHG, after careful consideration and extensive discussions in four meetings, decided to invest in a pig-rearing project to supplement their income and to establish their economic independence (Ashton, 2002).

The project started with three piglets, a pig pen,⁵ and feed for this first batch of piglets. In practical terms, a small core of individual FCHG members was given the piglets to raise for their own benefit as well as for the benefit of the collective and, by extension, the community. In the spirit of the collective, it was the policy that when the original piglets reproduced at maturity, the newborn piglets would be distributed to the neediest women in the first instance, and later, alphabetically by surname to members of the group. All members of the group signed an agreement stating that this policy would hold (Ashton, 2002). This revolving approach to project development served the project well, and by 2000 all 22 women were owners of pigs (Ashton, 2002).

During the period of the project, the group moved beyond just raising and butchering the pigs for domestic consumption to selling the pigs on the external market. The agreement (FCHG, 1997) mandated that 100 Eastern Caribbean dollars of the proceeds from the sale of the pigs would be saved by the FCHG for further collective action and community enterprise. The money saved was the start of an informal revolving-loan scheme to provide interest-free and unsecured loans to members to promote income-generating activities and to supplement family income. Up to 2002, this informal loan scheme had served the women of the FCHG well. A number of loans were given mainly for back-to-school preparations and medical emergencies and for investment in cash-crop farming (FCHG, 1997–2003). This high demand for loans, due to less favourable economic conditions in Fancy and St. Vincent and the Grenadines, and the understanding that all women in the community were experiencing economic/financial difficulties, led the membership of the FCHG to agree, unanimously, at a regular meeting to formalize and extend the banking activity to all women in the community. These women, they claimed, automatically qualified for financial assistance under the new system. Hence, the one criterion for loan qualification for those women external to the group was simple and straightforward: any woman in the community who needed financial assistance.

According to the current FCHG treasurer,

“Everybody in the group agrees: Any woman who comes to us will get help as long as she needs it. If they want it, they will get it. They don’t

have to be a member of the group, and the same rules apply to them. We are not turning anyone away. If them ask for it, them get it.”⁶

This policy makes the project unique in the sense that it is not usual for women organized in community groups to extend banking facilities to women external to the group.

3.3 Community Banking for All

In a community of disadvantaged women and in the context of socioeconomic advancement of women, the inclusion of all women in the FCHG banking project was based on trust, mutual support, and mutual sharing. For the FCHG, community development was not restricted to any one group or any one person. It was a collective effort to ensure that women could be provided with credit to engage in their own economic and personal activities (Soares, 2007).

For three main reasons, it was not difficult to reach a unanimous decision to extend the lending policy to the women of the wider community. First, the decision was not out of keeping with the development thrust of the FCHG. Theirs was to develop a loan scheme, based on a development model that was inclusive, participatory, equitable, and self-reliant: one that would encourage economic independence for women and help to ensure sustainable livelihoods for themselves and their families (WAND, 1993). Second, and very important, Fancy is a socially cohesive community built on notions and practice of the African tradition of the extended family, strong kinship ties, and the economic independence of women (FCHG members, personal communication, January 2009). This means that sharing among themselves as women and as families is at the core of their existence. The treasurer explains, “We have a cohesive family system. We get our ideas of family from our mothers, who were part of the extended family system. It is a custom from Africa which still live (*sic*) on” (J. Baptiste, personal communication, January 2007). And the FCHG president explains,

“Here women are networking to help each other. For example, in farming, women knit together and help each other as well as the extended family, and women are close to each other. We look after each other’s children; we counsel each other’s children; we talk to the child and advise the mother.” (W. Michael, personal communication, June 2008)

It is within this context that W. Michael, current President of the FCHG, would agree that extending loans to nonmembers is not a problem for them and the one qualification is that she is a woman. Third, the women of Fancy are held together in a system of communal land ownership. That is to say, Fancy boasts a land tenure system in which all women (and all men) have equal access to the land. It means, then, that all women (and all men) have land on which to farm to make a living and to build their own houses.⁷ This system is a part of the basis of notions of equality, kinship, and social cohesion within a community in which there is little or no social discord between and among women (M. King, personal

communication, January 2007; FCHG President W. Michael, personal communication, June 2008).

With the incorporation of nonmembers not a part of the savings scheme into the banking scheme, the FCHG, as we shall illustrate, successfully met the challenge of providing low-cost loans for production and consumption purposes. To achieve this, the banking activity, in 2003, was given a formal structure with its own policy, rules, and regulations, which were decided on collectively and circulated to all members so that they would be constantly reminded of the way in which the scheme functioned (FCHG, 2003). At that time, the informal microfinancing scheme became the more formal Fancy Help Group Loan Scheme, which can be seen as an indigenous bank. In many ways, it resembles and functions as a commercial bank.

4.0 The Fancy Help Group Loan Scheme: A Model

With a sum of \$1,400 in Eastern Caribbean dollars in reserve,⁸ and in a document titled “Proposed Rules for Governing Fancy Help Group Loan Scheme,” the Fancy Help Group Loan Scheme (FHGLS) came into existence (Ashton, 2003; FCHG, 2003). The FHGLS is administered by the women themselves, who put to use the training they had received in four WAND-sponsored workshops: (1) Financial Management and Budgeting; (2) Conflict Management; (3) Organizational Management and Behaviour, Accountability and Transparency; and (4) Evaluating a Project. This training provided them with the basic skills to mobilize their savings and manage their own resources and affairs as they moved toward establishing a permanent system of savings and credit.

To operationalize the bank, an accounting system to keep track of loans and repayments and to allow for transparency and fairness in lending was put in place. Under the rules of the scheme, decisions on loans are made by an approval team set up to manage the fund. Its tasks include reviewing applications and deciding on amounts that can be disbursed. When a member of the approval team applies for financial support, an alternate member serves on the team. Loans, which are unsecured, are made quarterly, and loan applications have to be made at least one week before approval meetings. Funds are given for (a) small investments in crop and animal farming; (b) educational purposes, to invest in their children’s education; and (c) to provide emergency assistance. However, according to the treasurer (J. Baptiste, personal communication, 2009) most of the loans have been for seed capital for farming projects.

The maximum amount one can borrow is \$300, which “would be increased when the total amount [in the bank] increases to approximately \$2,500” (Fancy Community Help Group, 2003, p. 1). Under flexible terms of repayment, which are decided on by both lender and borrower, loans which are expected to be repaid from returns on investments would fetch a small interest. As the document points out, “members would repay an additional \$5.00 on the smallest of loans under \$100.00 and \$5.00 on every \$100.00” (Fancy Community Help Group, 2003, p. 1). In this scheme, it is mandatory that at least \$200 be kept in the collective coffers at all times. And, in terms of security, accountability, and transparency, the savings and loan funds are deposited in the name of the FCHG in a commercial bank in the country’s capital, Kingstown, which is some 36 miles from Fancy. Three persons, the president, the secretary, and the treasurer sign on this account.

Specifically, the proposed rules of the Fancy Help Group Loan Scheme are as follows:

Purpose for Lending

1. Loans are given for (a) small investments (crop and/or animal farming), (b) education, and (c) emergencies, such as medical help.
2. The maximum amount that can be borrowed is \$200 to \$300 (this limit would be increased when the total bank holdings increase to approximately \$2,500).⁹
3. At least \$200 must be kept in the savings account.
4. The terms and conditions of repayment are that
 - loans are paid on returns from investment,
 - the approval team decides with the borrower the terms of repayment, and
 - members repay an additional \$5 on the smallest of loans under \$100 and \$5 on every \$100.
5. Loans are approved by a team. When a member of the team requires a loan, an alternate member serves on the approval team.
6. Loans should be made quarterly. Applications should be made at least a week before approval meetings.
7. Records must be kept of all loans and repayment records. (*Source*. FCHG, 2003, p. 1).

4.1 Repayment of Loans

According to the treasurer of the FCHG (personal communication, 2009) the repayment period for loans is dependent on the amount borrowed and the reasons for which it was borrowed. Loans for investment in agriculture have a longer amortization period than loans for emergencies or for investment in children's education. For example, a loan of \$100 for emergencies has a repayment period of 5 months. This period was agreed on because 5 months is considered a reasonable time in which to settle that debt from household income or income received from other commercial activities, such as buying and selling goods like sweets and novelties. For a \$200 loan to be used for investment in farming, the repayment period is 9 months. This policy was adopted because those who borrow for farming purposes are expected to repay their loans from the sale of their crops at maturity. This is usually a period of 9 months.

Repayment of loans is the sole responsibility of the borrower, although the group and the approval team monitor borrowers to ensure that they behave responsibly in terms of their commitment to the bank. While there is collective monitoring in this system, there is no form of joint liability. That is to say, members of the FCHG or the approval team are not obliged to settle a defaulting borrower's debt. If there is delinquency in the repayment of loans, and there have been instances of such behaviour, the borrower is sent a letter from the approval team reminding her of her commitment. If there is no response, the borrower is invited to a meeting with the approval team to discuss a reasonable repayment plan (FCHG Treasurer, personal communication, January, 2009). When questioned on the measures in place to reduce any challenge of continuing delinquency on any one

loan repayment, if it occurs, the treasurer indicated that neither the FCHG nor the approval team has ever had to deal with such a situation. “That has never happened,” she said, implying that payments are made after meetings with the approval team. Nonetheless, the slow pace of repayment is the main challenge facing the bank.

4.2 A Successful Banking Scheme

The women of Fancy have successfully met the challenge of setting up a community bank. They have set up a system that is different from the traditional savings systems in the Caribbean because it offers microfinancing used as a coping strategy and to leverage agricultural production. The project is now in its 6th year and there are no signs that it is facing demise.

Based on discussions with members of the FCHG and the community development consultant, Christobel Ashton (2009), we can safely conclude that the project is sustained precisely because it belongs to the women as individuals and as a collective. It involves their savings as well as their expenditure. They generate their own financial and physical capital, thus giving them ownership and hence a stronger interest in the project and its outcome. In addition, the general feeling among the women is that the scheme is here to stay because, as two members of the FCHG and beneficiaries of loans said, “the interest rate is small and there is no form of security [and it does good] because we are all farmers” (FCHG Executive member, personal communication, 2009). To date, more than 10 women have been assisted to meet their financial commitments.¹⁰

5.0 Conclusions and Impact of the Scheme

The impact of the scheme must be seen at two levels: at the community and the FCHG. For the women of the community, it has both economic and social impact. In terms of economic support, it allows community women to independently undertake small economic ventures and agricultural investments, which they own and control, reaping in the process the benefits and profits of their labour. This economic independence has given them not only more control over their resources but also more control over their lives and their destiny (Ashton, 2009; Soares, 2007). In terms of social impact, the financial scheme has served to further strengthen social ties and create a oneness and solidarity among women, who were already closely knit, on the basis of kinship and family ties (Ashton, 2002; Soares, 2007).

For the women of the FCHG, there is a sense of pride and self-satisfaction that they could use the funds from their investment to provide not only an income source for meeting their own financial obligations but also assistance to nonmembers and their families and the community as a whole. Underlying this dimension is the strong sense of self-worth and self among the women of the FCHG arising from the fact that they, as ordinary rural women, could introduce, manage, and sustain a process of self-reliance that incorporated all women on an equal basis (Ashton, 2002). However, the greatest impact, as expressed by the treasurer (personal communication, January 2009) on behalf of the other women, is the intrinsic value of the project: “It builds self-esteem and motivates them to move ahead.”

In an interview WAND Outreach and Community Development Consultant Christobel Ashton (2009) summarized the essence of the value of the project:

Apart from addressing some immediate needs, the Fancy Help Group Loan Scheme has contributed to the building of collective self-esteem, self-pride, and self-confidence among the women of the Fancy Community Help Group because they feel valued by being able to do something for each other in a positive way. Their thinking has now been reoriented because they now see themselves as thinkers who have the ability to conceive workable ideas and put them into action, and leaders who can render assistance in a practical and altruistic way. They are proud to know that they were able to develop a savings and credit scheme and apply their own formalized rules to a system they themselves had conceptualized and structured on the basis of collective decision making. To provide assistance in a structured way is normally associated with the formal banking sector and other formal organizations, but the women of Fancy did it, they set up their own community bank for all women, and they did it in a very professional way. Their professionalism was remarkable. But what is more, they did it in a way that was fair and just.

It is noteworthy that this project recently won the Women's World Summit Foundation (WWSF) Creativity in Rural Life award. The WWSF, headquartered in Geneva, Switzerland, and with United Nations consultative status, is an international nonprofit, nonsectarian empowerment NGO. The Fancy Community Help Group was among the 13 laureates worldwide who received this award and one of the 2 who received it in the Americas. The others were from Africa, Asia, Oceania, and Europe. In commending the FCHG, the WWSF stated, "Income-generating activities are at the core of the group's project and in the absence of a bank in the community, the women have developed an indigenous banking system suited to their own situation" (WWSF, 2008).

The words of the WWSF are instructive. They indicate that women, particularly rural and low-income women, have the capacity and the creativity as well as the determination to address their own issues in a way that is relevant to their socioeconomic situation, to work in their own interest to create appropriate strategies of economic independence, and to pull themselves up in the face of national neglect. There is a project that can be replicated throughout the Caribbean with equal success.

6.0 Notes

1. It must be noted that during the time of slavery, slaves who wanted to save money hoarded it. This was particularly true for women, who would sell their agricultural produce at Sunday markets, which were allowed by the planters who

allowed slaves to farm lands on the margins of the plantations. In order to protect their money, intended to buy their freedom or to prepare for freedom, some women resorted to burying their savings underground. In the pre-1838 period, there were no banks.

2. The *sou sou* was derived from the Yoruba *eesu* or *esusu* in both name and nature.

3. The Fancy Community Help Group was set up under the guidance of the University of the West Indies' Women and Development Unit (WAND) in 1997. WAND had intervened in the community as part of its outreach program to initiate, promote, and work toward the social advancement of women in the English-speaking Caribbean. Since 1997, the work of the FCHG has been guided and funded by WAND. Much of this work is therefore based on primary knowledge and participant observation.

4. The group was set up to function in this way. In addition, WAND's head and community consultant, Christobel Ashton, made regular project visits to meet with members of the FCHG from 1997 until 2009. Her participant observation included listening to discussions among the women and providing relevant guidance.

5. It must be noted that this income-generating project was guided and financed by the University of the West Indies' WAND as part of its community outreach program intended to support and promote social advancement of the women of the Caribbean. It must also be noted that funding agencies and donor organizations do not enter into partnerships with community-based organizations, because they perceive such organizations as lacking the management and financial skills necessary for project management and reporting. WAND negotiates funds for community development work in Fancy.

6. J. Baptiste interview, January, 2009.

7. Fancy was once a plantation. With the end of plantation agriculture in the early 20th century the then-owner gave the estate to the former workers and residents to be owned as common property.

8. Interest received from loans is saved in the loan fund.

9. At the end of June 2005, the FCHG had maintained a savings balance of more than \$EC2000. See Christobel Ashton, "Brief Report: Fancy Community Help Group," 2005. Please note that both members of the FCHG and nonmembers are subject to the same rules and regulations as outlined in *Proposed Rules for Governing Fancy Help Group Loan Scheme* (Fancy Community Help Group, 2003).

10. According to the 2001 Housing and Population Census, St. Vincent and the Grenadines, the number of women in Fancy was 269.

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