Rice, a food of the poor, was first introduced in the Americas from West Africa in the long period of slavery. This history of proliferation of rice culture and rice communities in the Americas is well documented – From the late 1800s until the early 1980s, rice, one of the staple foods of working peoples in South America, has been produced primarily on miniscule patches of land by small-scale farmers (approximately 75% of rice producers). Today, many of these communities and cultures are being marginalized by the changing structure. A massive shift in control between small (marginalized) and large-scale farming (individual and corporate) over the rice industry in Central and South America and Guyana since 1985 is of immense value to understanding the new and deepening vulnerabilities for poor and marginal communities. In the wake of new global processes, primarily the implementation of “free trade” in agriculture under the aegis of the WTO, small farming and rural communities are being culturally and economically reshaped. Large-scale farming is replacing small-scale farming. For instance, in Guyana between 1970 and 2009, the number of rice farmers has undergone a steep decline—from 45,000 to 5,500 respectively. This shift has unleashed deep changes in the patterns of land ownership, employment and unemployment, migration flows, increased poverty, and loss of distinct rural cultural traditions. This paper examines the social crisis with respect to how small-farmer communities have been affected and how they are adjusting to the
deleterious aspects of such changes brought on by neoliberal economics within the world system or world economy.