

**“Implementation of Sustainable Farming Practices in Trinidad’s
Northern Range Communities”**

**Report on
First Stakeholder Workshop
Held at the Maracas St. Joseph Community Centre
Wednesday 10th November, 2010**

Submitted by

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BACKGROUND

The First Stakeholders Workshop was scheduled as an opportunity for the Project to engage the “Community of Actors” in the Caura/Tacarigua and Maracas/St. Joseph watersheds in reviewing the goals and objectives of the Project, **“Implementation of Sustainable Farming Practices in Trinidad’s Northern Range Communities”**. Specifically the Workshop allowed The Cropper Foundation to:

- Introduce the project details to the stakeholders;
- Present the findings of our Baseline Study;
- Present key aspects of the Project’s options for improved agricultural-based livelihood through sustainable farming practices in the watersheds;
- Allow for open discussion of these presentations
- Solicit the support and participation of the stakeholders.

The Workshop venue was obtained with the active support of the Maracas Valley Farmers’ Association and transportation was provided to farmers from the Caura Valley in order to facilitate their attendance. 32 participants attended the Workshop including”

- 8 – Maracas/St. Joseph
- 18 – Caura
- 6 – Special Guests

Among the special guests were a farmer/permaculture practitioner and teacher from Freeport; a farming couple from Michigan, USA, and three members of the Project Steering Committee.

Opening Session

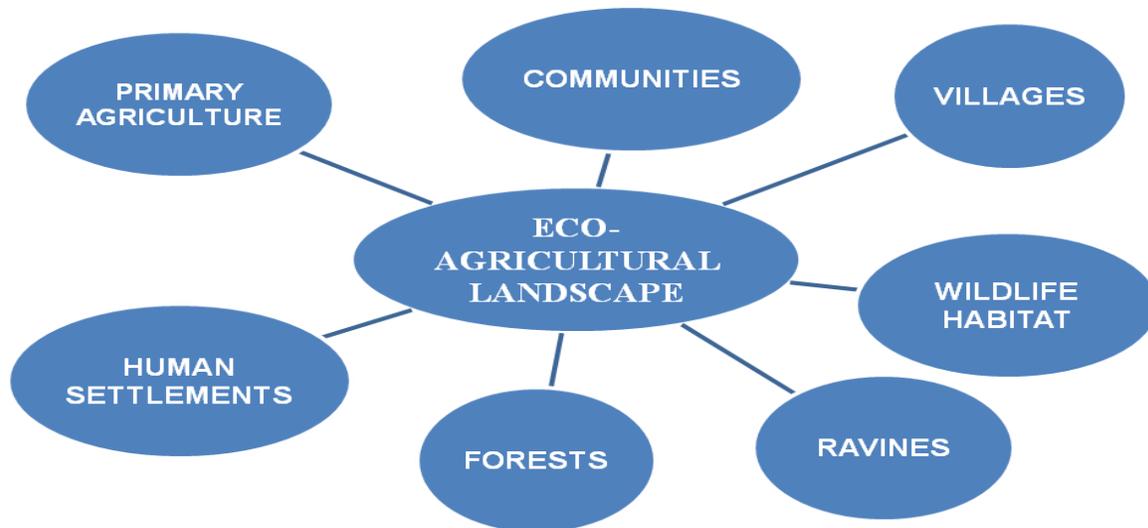
In his opening remarks the President of The Cropper Foundation, Mr. Winston R. Rudder, noted that this Workshop reflected the interests and concerns of The Cropper Foundation in the sustainability of livelihood opportunities for communities in the Northern Range. Out of this concern arose the Foundation’s interest to work with farmers who have the desire to maintain their livelihood as well as the natural resources of the area.

The Project Manager, Ms. Sarika Maharaj introduced the project to the participants. She stressed the aspects of sustainability, which includes livelihoods, their way of life and the natural resources. Ms. Maharaj pointed out that the starting point of the project was to understand the conditions as they currently exist in each watershed by conducting a baseline study. At this workshop, the Project was seeking to share findings of this study, present a preliminary design of possible interventions and hopefully with the active participation of the stakeholders, achieve sustainability in the farming practices of farmers in the area.

The findings of the Baseline Study were presented by Dr. Allan N. Williams, Technical Advisor to the Project. In his opening remarks, Dr. Williams noted that the baseline study pursued four objectives, namely:

- To encounter Farmers, Farming communities and their farming practices;
- To observe any changes that may be occurring in their lands;
- To take specific note of changes that may be occurring in the wider landscape; and
- To recognize the presences of institutions and organizations that can help.

In a graphical exposition he described what was found as a living example of “Eco-Agricultural Landscapes”



Within this “Eco-Agricultural Landscape” however, the Study found conditions of vulnerability. These were characterized by among other practices:

- Use of Harmful Pesticides creating
 - Pollution of water courses
 - Reduction of bio-diversity
 - Degradation of the soil
 - Reduction in soil fertility
- Slash & Burn methods of land clearing causing
 - Land erosion problems
 - Forest fires in dry season
 - Destruction of forest cover
- Cultivate on slopes
 - No hillside soil conservation techniques such as terracing, building wind breaks, check dams etc.
 - Potential of leading to erosion and soil loss on the hillsides.
- Cultivation in the Forests

The Report called on the Community of Responsible Actors to come together and collaborate in a project to introduce sustainable farming practices. Among the responsible actors identified were

Individual Farmers; Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs (Extension Services and Research); Ministry of Housing and the Environment (Forestry Division); active NGOs (e.g. Maracas Valley Action Committee); Farmers' Organizations; Supporting Institutions (e.g. TTABA; NAMDEVCO; UWI, CARDI, FAO, IICA).

The participants in responding to this presentation emphasized the presence of non-farming activities such as quarrying and residential development which affected not only the environment, but the potential of farmers in the area. The participants also brought attention to the fact that there have been community-based actions, particularly in the Maracas Valley in response to these emerging conditions. Three additional observations were made; the first with respect to what were the aspects of subsistence farming of concern to the project; the second was the need for a road network and the modalities that would be required to justify the development of such a network in rural areas as these; the third was that excuses should not be made for farmers failing to make the appropriate actions in their own plots of land.

The Chair summarized the Session by noting that although the project did not have the resources to respond to the issues raised, it still had the potential to both bring these issues to the relevant authorities as well as to build on the collaborative efforts of other parties who share the concern and the desire to act. Before proceeding, the Chair of the Workshop asked whether the attendees were satisfied with the basic elements contained in the Baseline Study and noted that he would accept the absence of any objection as indicating such.

Outline of Preliminary Intervention

The preliminary intervention objectives were introduced by Dr. Shango Alamu. The outline comprised the following:

- Building appropriate governance structures
- Training and empowerment
- On farm participatory research
- Review and analysis
- Testing and application of research findings among a boarder mass of practitioners
- Promotion to enhance broader adoption

The observations of participants were insightful:

- The first was whether there was any data on the amount of land not in use in the valleys that may be utilized in a meaningful way through the intervention of the project.
- The experience of organic farming on hillsides in Dominica (i.e. Andrew Royer) is an example of an approach that can be helpful. In addition, the University of the Southern Caribbean is adopting more organic approach to their farming activities and their efforts may have significant value if extended to the farming activities in the Maracas Valley.
- A third observation was the cost effectiveness of using on-farm inputs.

- A fourth observation was the need to have more local seeds available rather than to remain dependent on importation of seeds and other inputs

These observations were incorporated into the priority setting exercise. The Chair once more asked whether there was enough interest so far to allow us to proceed. In response to this question a vocalized “Yes” allowed the Chair to proceed to the next session.

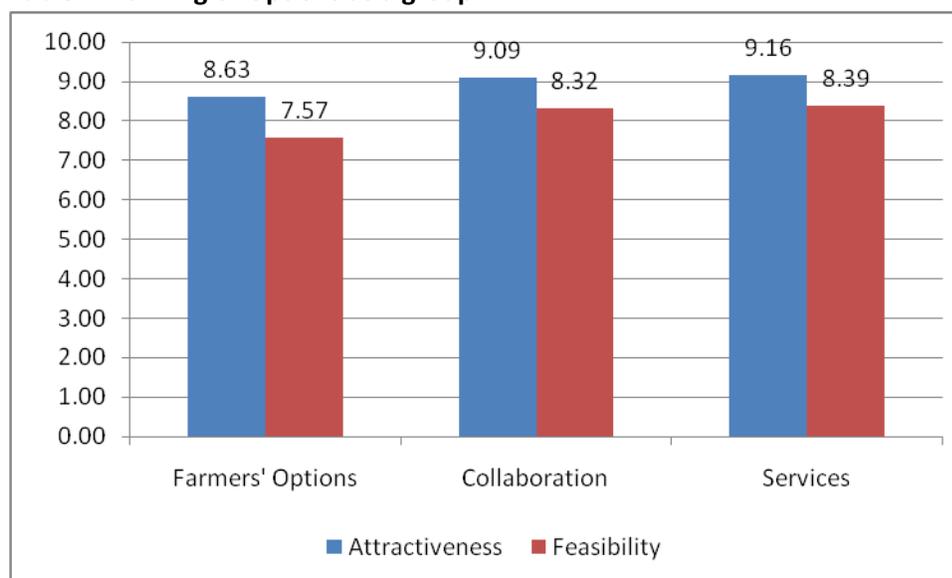
The Priority Setting Exercise

The priority setting exercise was conducted by the Technical Advisor of the project. The exercise sought to capture the preferences of participants re: Attractiveness and Feasibility of three sets of options, namely:

- Options for individual farmers
- Options for collaborative action
- Options for getting better services

In general, the responses to these options were very positive. Participants found all options to be very attractive (ranking >7) and very feasible (ranking >7)

Table 1: Ranking of Options as a group

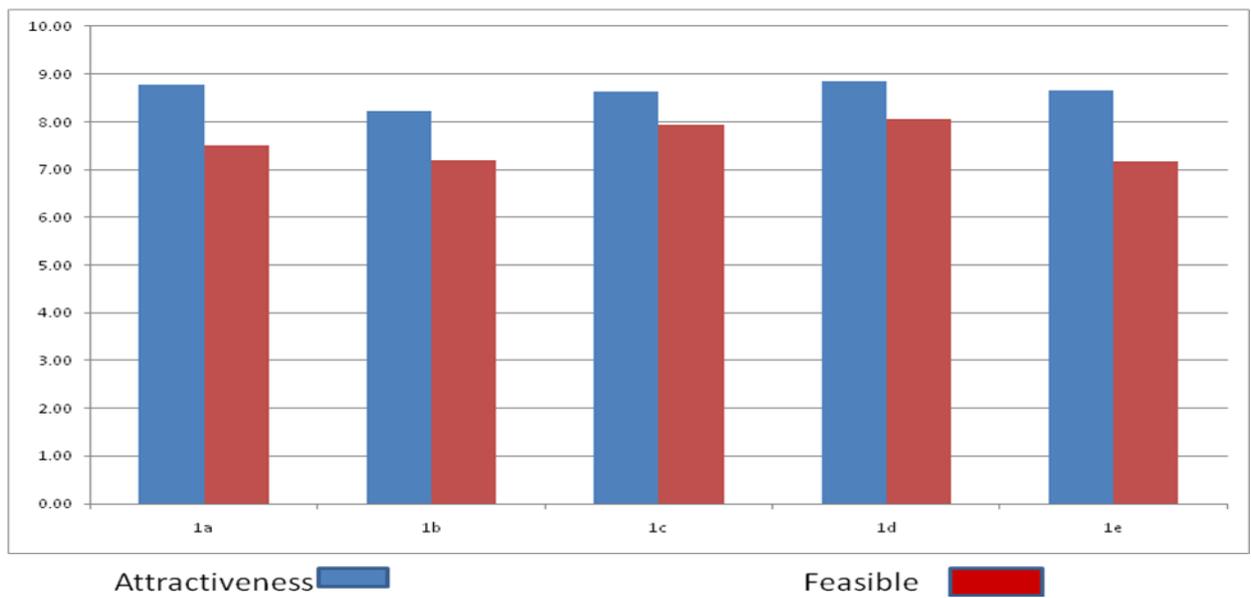


Within this context differences in the feasibility ranking gave some indication of the qualitative differences in preferences.

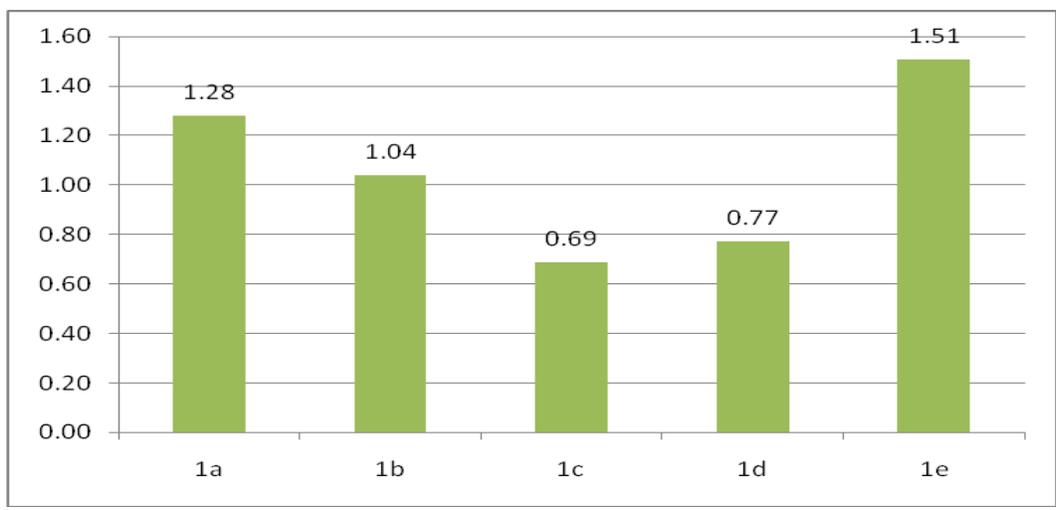
Within the group of individual farmer options, participants showed more hesitancy in feasibility with respect to three questions, namely 1a: Setting up Demonstration Plots on selected Farmer’s plots, 1b: Private Farmer Investments in Hillside Stabilization and 1e: Promoting indigenous species. In all three

cases, while the attractiveness was ranked above “8” (almost a must-do) the expectations with respect to feasibility were all below “7”.

Individual Farmer Options



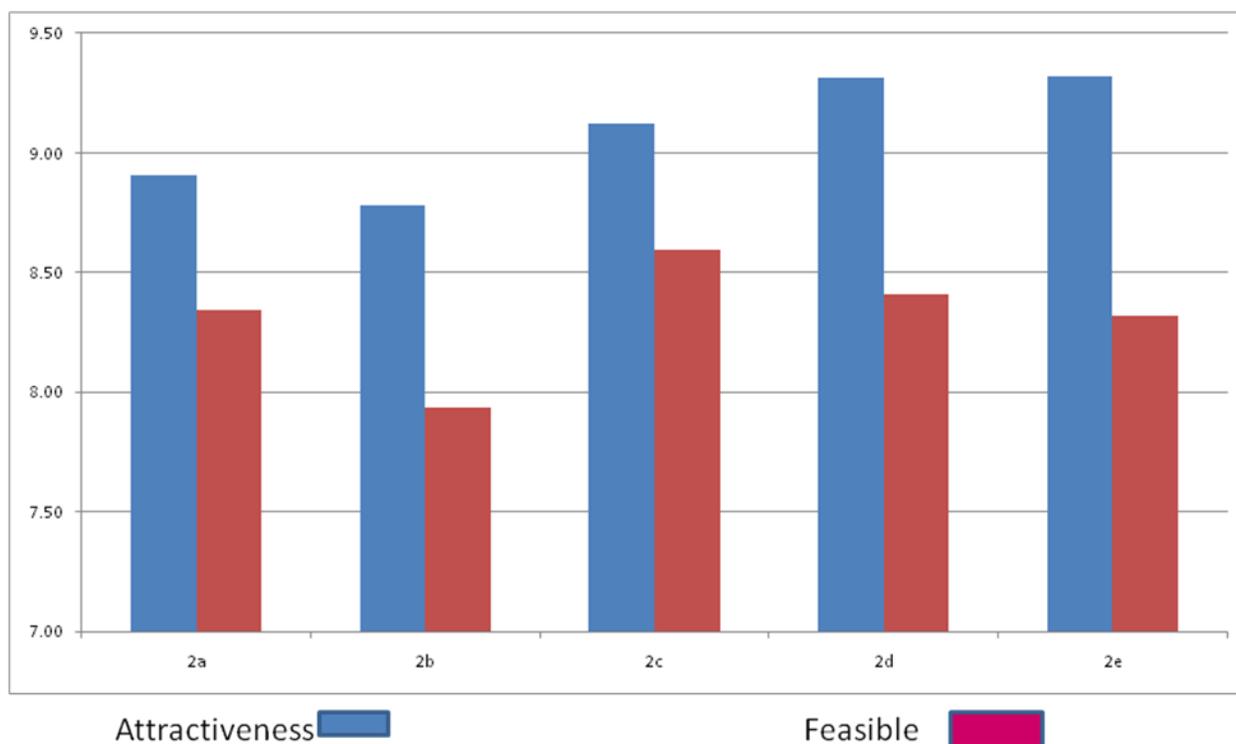
Differences between Attractiveness and Feasibility



- 1a Setting up Demonstration Plots on selected Farmer’s plots
- 1b Private Farmer Investments in Hillside Stabilization
- 1c The use of new cost-effective inputs and new technologies

- 1d AESA: Promoting solutions based on Farmers' interpretations and experiences
 1e Promoting indigenous species

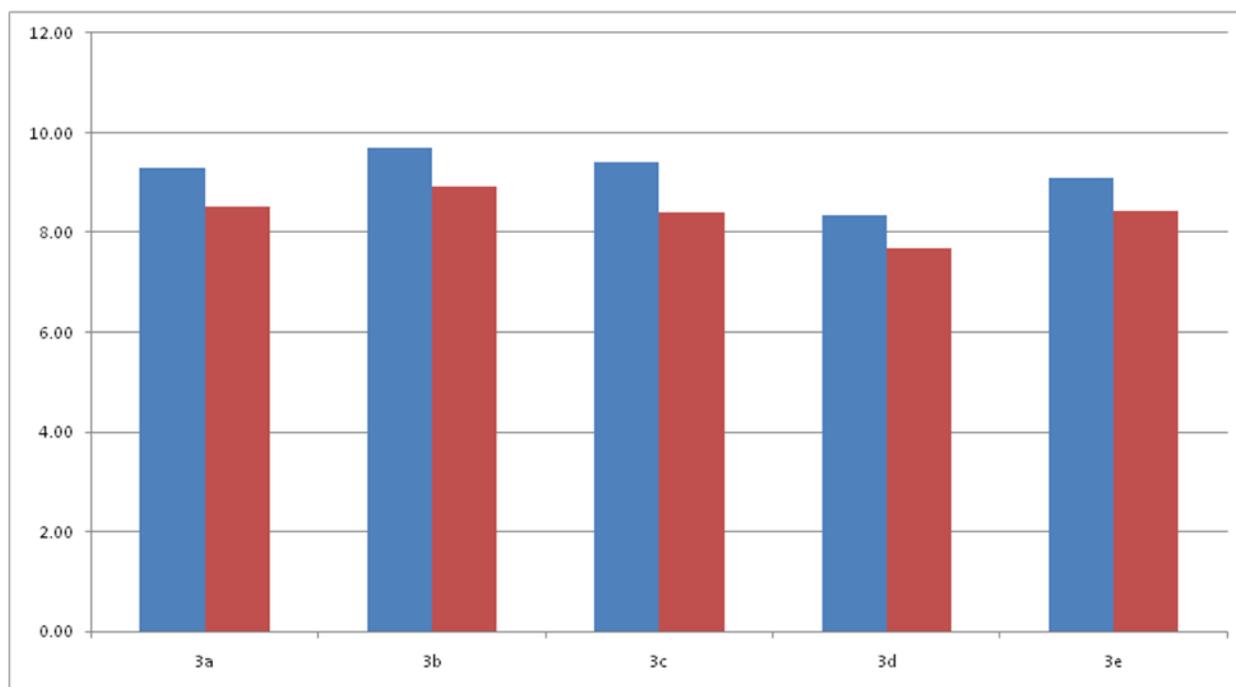
Collaboration Options



- 2a Collaboration to change some current farming practices that challenge effective ecosystem management;
 2b Collaboration to change Attitudes to Hillside farming;
 2c Testing research results that improve managing the effects on the watershed
 2d Using Farming technologies to Attract younger farmers into the sector
 2e Getting abandoned estates involved

In the efforts for collaboration, all of the options ranked very high (above 8) in attractiveness and in feasibility with one exception, **Question 2b: Collaboration to change Attitudes to Hillside farming**. The discussion that pursued suggested that participants believed that farming attitudes were very strongly linked to the private circumstances prevailing.

Getting Better Services



Attractiveness ■

Feasible ■

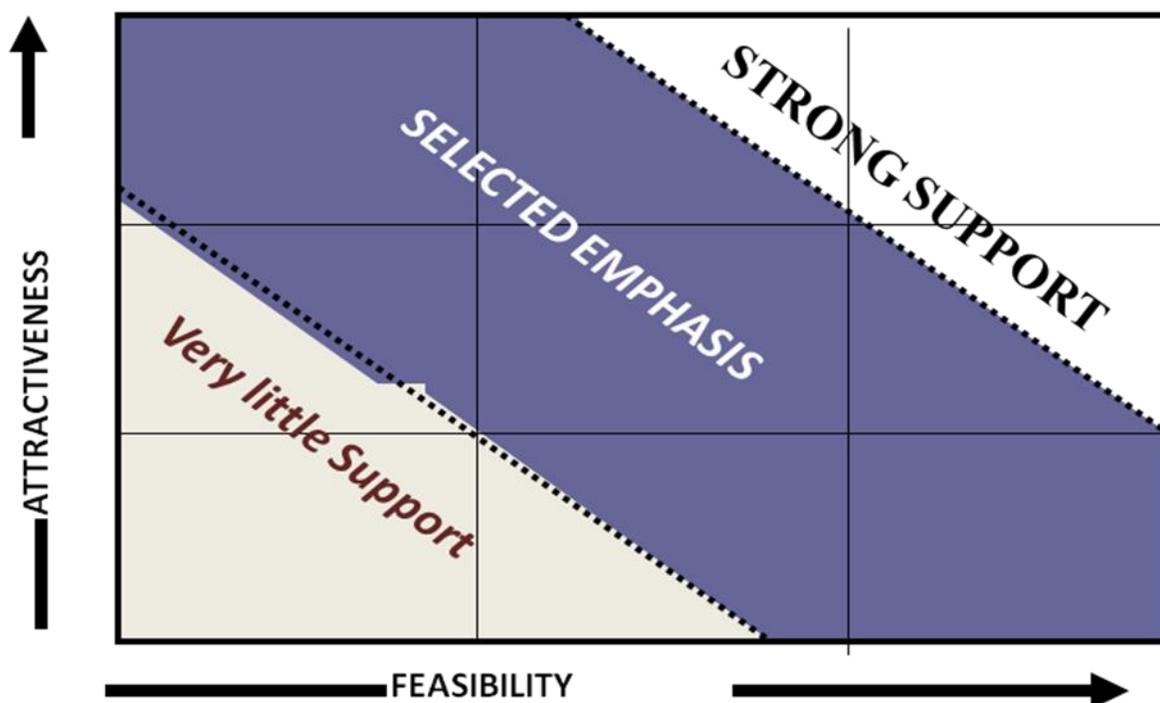
- 3a Validating the need for improvements in access roads
- 3b Raising the urgency of regularizing tenure
- 3c Capacitating Farmer Organizations to deliver farmer support
- 3d Involving Village Councils in representing farmers' interests
- 3e Cooperation among various communities on common goals

In the area of obtaining better services all options were scored very high (above 8) with the exception of the involvement of Village Councils in representing farmers' interests.

Follow-up Action

The summation of the exercise was conducted by Dr. Allan N. Williams. He expressed appreciation to the participants for their patience and cooperation in the exercise. Confidence was expressed in the fact that none of the options fell into the category of very limited support.

HOW WE RANK THE PREFERENCES EXPRESSED



Given that all of the options fell within the range of Selected Emphasis zone, our efforts will be to provide details that would move these options into the zone of strong support.

The Chair thanked the participants and also the members of the Steering Committee who were present during the exercise, namely:

- The Trust for Sustainable Livelihood;
- The Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs and
- The Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture.