

PROJECT UPDATE

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

January 2011

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Papaya farm in the Caura Valley



Photo Credit: Beaumont Celestain

- d) Demonstrate the feasibility of identified alternative farming practices with participating farmers; and
- e) Replicate the approach and disseminate learnt lessons stemming from the project

Introduction

In 2009, the Cropper Foundation (TCF), with financial support from the Inter-American Bank (IDB), engaged in a project called **EcoAgriCulture** that would seek to mitigate negative impacts on the environment and downstream communities by piloting alternative farming practices that can assist in improving the returns and sustainability of agriculture for farming communities in two valleys of Trinidad’s Northern Range: Maracas/ St. Joseph and Caura/ Tacarigua valleys.

Through working closely with the farming communities in these Valleys, the Foundation and its project partners, seek to build capacity within farmers and community organizations to be able to adapt and modify existing best farming practices in a manner that would be suitable for their farms and economically viable for them.

The experiences generated and lessons learnt from the EcoAgriCulture Project will be used to develop a community based model for sustainable hillside farming that can be replicated in other hillside communities in Trinidad and Tobago and across the Caribbean.

Reflecting on Project Goals

Piloting alternative farming practices in two watersheds of the Northern Range - the Tacarigua/ Caura and St. Joseph watersheds – can be challenging.

The specific objectives have been to:

- a) Collect valuable baseline information to facilitate present and future participatory applied research and analysis;
- b) Examine how livelihoods based on hillside agriculture within the Northern Range may be sustained, through use of alternative or modified farming practices that also maintain or enhance the provision of ecosystem services, and alleviate downstream impacts;
- c) Design an approach – using the results of research and analysis - to identify feasible alternative farming practices that promote environmental sustainability, and maintain and improve livelihoods;

The Major benchmarks in our process are:

- Base Line Assessment Report
- Workshops on Priority Setting
- Intervention Design Model
- Demonstration plots
- Evaluation and Dissemination of the model

These benchmarks are equivalent to:

- Collecting data and experiences as a guide
- Negotiating priorities with beneficiaries
- Defining the Ways and Means of Intervention for implementation of alternative farming practices
- Proof of Concept activities
- Sharing the experience

The Approach

While the target areas were regarded as critical watersheds, the Project carrier was encouraged to regard the target areas as **landscapes**. The landscape approach requires that we consider the physical and biological features of the area together with the institutions and people who influence the area and the cultural and spiritual values of the area.

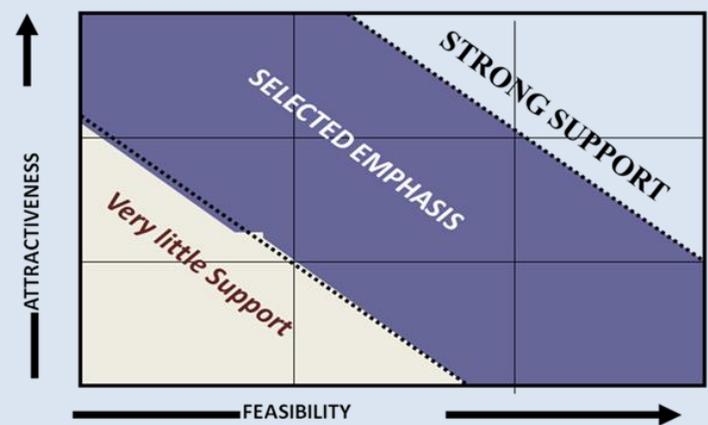
Hopefully the lasting impact of the project would be to inspire farming communities to use strategies that would increase productivity, stabilize farmers' incomes and contribute to maintaining the eco-system services of the area.

- Allow for open discussion of these presentations
- Solicit the support and participation of the stakeholders

A Workshop exercise was undertaken to capture the preferences of participants with respect to the Attractiveness and Feasibility of three sets of options, namely:

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

Ranking the Expressed Preferences



Given that all of the options fell within the 'Selected Emphasis' zone, efforts will be concentrated on providing details that would move options into the zone of strong support.

First Workshop sets stage for Action

The First Stakeholders Workshop was held on November 10, 2010, at the Community centre in Maracas/St. Joseph. 32 participants attended the Workshop including 8 from Maracas/St. Joseph; 18 from Caura; 6 Special Guests, and members of The Cropper Foundation.

The Workshop was held to:

- Introduce the project details to the stakeholders
- Share some of the conditions of vulnerability found in the Base Line Study, such as:
 - Use of Harmful Pesticides
 - Slash & Burn methods of land clearing
 - Cultivation on slopes
 - Cultivation in the forests
- Present key aspects of the Project's options for improving agricultural-based livelihoods through sustainable farming practices in the watersheds



Farmers sharing information at the First Stakeholders Workshop

Photo Credits: The Cropper Foundation

Introducing Intervention Objectives

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



Photo Credit: The Cropper Foundation

Draft Final Report on Intervention Model

The Draft Final Report on the Intervention Model was submitted on January 14, 2011. Some guidelines are explicitly expressed in the draft Intervention Report. They are:

- Plan skillfully to buffer any negative impact during the transition from conventional approaches. There is need for development of a package of incentives and freeing up of investment capital to encourage this transition;
- A transitioning strategy should allow farmers to participate in the planning and organization of on-farm research geared towards the development of these alternative production systems, and should address the provision of relevant information and access to alternative agro-inputs;

- Try to address the following concerns directly when we have the capability or through our influence:
 - Insecure Tenure
 - Poor Infrastructural development
 - Escalating Cost and Availability of agricultural inputs
 - Inadequate Marketing arrangements;
- Be part of a network with the capability to facilitate transformation at all levels;
- Recognize the value of folk practices and tailor our training agenda to be one of exchange;
- develop a strategy to involve youth in agriculture;
- Prove the reliability of alternative approaches;
- Provide relevant information and access to alternative agro-inputs.

Profile of Needed Action

One guide towards this approach is to identify within our intervention model the following:

a) Possible Cost items:

- Demonstration on farmers' plots;
- Supporting Structural On-farm Investments;
- Introducing new technologies;
- Hillside Stabilisation investments.

b) Collaborative Efforts needed for promoting:

- Research and Information Sharing;
- Contour Planting;
- The Use of new Cost effect inputs;
- Methods to increase Farm-output values.

c) Intended Impacts including:

- Changing Farming Practices;
- Changing Attitudes to Land Degradation;
- Capacitating Farmer Organizations;
- Testing research results;
- Attracting Younger Farmers;
- Validating the need for improvements in access roads;
- Raising the urgency of regularizing tenure;
- Involving civil representatives of the farming communities (Village Councilors; Regional Corporation representative, Parliamentary Representatives).

Setting our Sights on Critical goals

In essence we are obliged to conceptualize our intervention activities to achieve certain critical goals. These are to:

- build a common understanding among stakeholders;
- identify leverage points for interventions;
- analyze different scenarios;
- form the basis of decision support systems;
- assist in stakeholder negotiations;
- identify systems performance indicators; and
- establish measures to evaluate impact.



Photo Credit: Beaumont Celestain

Schedule of Activities

January 2011:

- Completing survey for farmer participation
- Compiling list of farmer participants
- Identification of farmer participants
- Identification of targeted farm practices
- Decision on first steps for intervention
- Team mobilization

February - June 2011:

- Researching and disseminating critical farm practices information
- Initial farm practices intervention
- Enlisting supportive research action
- Meeting of the project's steering committee
- Workshop for consensus building

June - December 2011:

- Implementation of interventions
- Implementation of research plan

For more information on the EcoAgriCulture Project, The Cropper Foundation or any of the Project Partners, visit www.thecropperfoundation.org or <http://tcf sustainable farming.weebly.com/>

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