

Implementation of Sustainable Farming Practices in Trinidad's Northern Range Communities

Final Stakeholders Workshop

January 18th, 2012
Auzonville Conference Centre, Eastern Main Road,
Tunapuna, Trinidad



Results and Findings of a Project to Implement Sustainable Farming Practices in Communities in the Northern Range, Trinidad



Multilateral Investment Fund
Member of the IDB Group

**THE CROPPER
FOUNDATION**

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1. Background

The final stakeholders' workshop for the project for "Implementation of Sustainable Farming Practices in Trinidad's Northern Range Communities" also known as EcoAgriCulture, was held on Wednesday 18th January 2012 at the Auzonville Conference Centre in Tunapuna, Trinidad. The workshop was attended by fifty-three persons with representatives from the Maracas Valley and Caura communities, farming organisations, government ministries and agencies, the private sector, research institutions and civil society organisations; see Appendix 1 for the full list of attendees.

The workshop was held to bring together stakeholders, to share and discuss the main findings and results of the project. The specific objectives were to:

1. Share the results of the project with a focus on the approach, opportunities, and challenges of the implementation exercise;
2. Provide an opportunity for stakeholders to share ideas on the approach used for implementing sustainable farming practices in this project, and to discuss modifications or alternatives to this approach;
3. Provide an opportunity for stakeholders to discuss research and capacity-building needs for mainstreaming adoption of sustainable farming practices;
4. Share information on follow-up initiatives of the EcoAgriCulture project.



In order to meet these objectives, the workshop consisted of a series of presentations by the project team, followed by discussions among stakeholders on the materials presented and on reflections of participation in the project; see Annex 2 for the workshop agenda. The meeting was co-chaired by Prof. John Agard of the University of the West Indies, and Mr. Gregg Rawlins of the Inter-American Institute for Cooperation on Agriculture.

2. Opening Session

The meeting began with remarks provided by:

- ✿ **Ms. Keisha Garcia, President of The Cropper Foundation** who welcomed and thanked participants for attending the workshop.
- ✿ **Ms. Vashtie Dookiesingh, Multilateral Investment Fund Specialist** who provided remarks on behalf of the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB-MIF).
- ✿ **Ms. Lisa Martinez** who provided remarks on behalf of the United Nations Food and Agricultural Organisation (FAO).
- ✿ **Mrs. Patricia LaBorde Grant, Director of the Agricultural Planning Division of the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs (MFPLMA)** who provided the feature address for the workshop. In her address Mrs. LaBorde Grant highlighted the Ministry's continued support of initiatives such as the EcoAgriCulture project which not only serve to provide technical and resource support to farmers in Trinidad and Tobago, but which also help to bring together a number of important stakeholders involved in agriculture, towards the formulation of 'a collaborative agenda in order to avoid duplication of effort and wastage of resources among the private sector, public sector and civil society'.

Click [here](#) to access video clips of remarks and feature address.

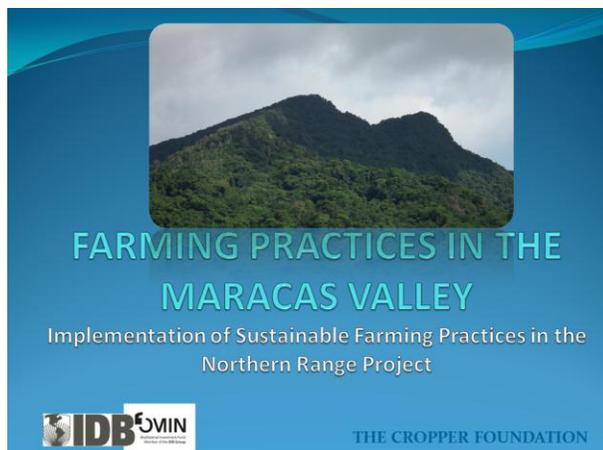
3. Overview of the EcoAgriCulture Project

Maurice Rawlins, project manager for the EcoAgriCulture Project, presented an overview of the EcoAgriCulture Project highlighting the rationale for developing and implementing the project, the main implementation activities, the main results, and the overall performance of the project. The quantitative objective set for the project was that 20% or more of the farmers in the Maracas/ St. Joseph and Caura/ Tacarigua farming communities would be implementing sustainable farming practices after the project's interventions. At the end of the project, 56% of farmers in Caura/ Tacarigua and 67% of farmers in Maracas/ St. Joseph were implementing at least one or more sustainable farming practice.



Click [here](#) for the presentation on the Overview of the EcoAgriCulture Project

A video on farming practices in the Maracas Valley was shown as part of the dissemination of results and findings of the project. This video was produced by Dr. Shango Alamu and copies are available from The Cropper Foundation.



Main points arising from Discussion of Results and Findings of the EcoAgriCulture Project

- ❧ Lack of farmland tenure is a major issue for farmers in both target areas. In many instances farmers have applied to the Commissioner of State Lands for regularisation of tenure but with very limited success in the processing of the applications. The MFPLMA is working with the Commissioner of State Lands to try to fast-track farmer's applications for land tenure.
- ❧ Farmers called for more activities and projects centred on the preservation of the Northern Range ecological systems that are designed in collaboration with farmers and communities, and which are implemented through partnership arrangements involving farmers and communities. On farm demonstration could be a useful component of such projects and activities. It was suggested that activities and projects need to be undertaken in a programmatic way, such that there is dovetailing of initiatives and a reduction of duplication of efforts. A programmatic approach may better influence change on a larger scale than initiatives undertaken on an ad hoc, projectised basis.
- ❧ Some organic farm inputs are more expensive than conventional inorganic farm inputs and in order to be financially beneficial, organically-grown crops are usually sold at a higher price. It was suggested that one of the focal areas of agricultural intervention should be the development of markets for the sale of organically-farmed produce, along



with the development of certification for farming practices and produce to support such markets. On the issue of substituting organic inputs for inorganic inputs as an approach to sustainable farming, Dr. Shango Alamu highlighted that input substitution is not a sustainable approach, and that what was needed was a cultural change to reverse many of the unsustainable practices that have been inherited across generations.



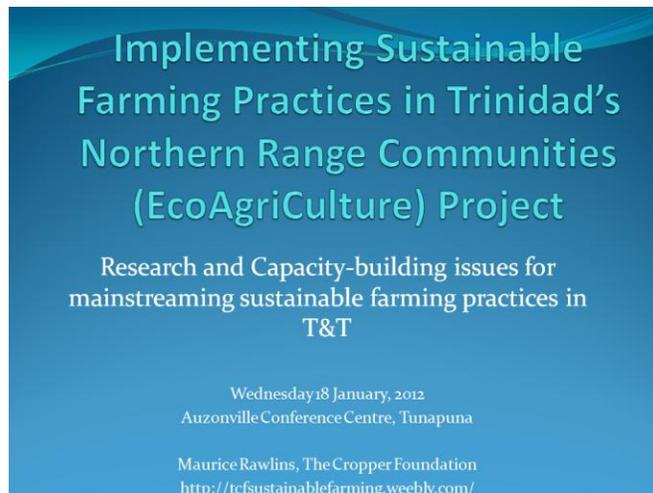
🌿 The transfer of information from research institutions to farmers needed to be more efficient, as in some cases farmers are not aware of the current practices and technologies available for sustainable small - scale hillside agriculture. It was acknowledged that extension services of the MFPLMA need to be improved, however farmers need to take an active role in seeking out information and keeping themselves up-to-date in advances in farming technology. The Farmers Training Centre of the MFPLMA was highlighted as a key repository of information for farmers.

A video presentation of the presentation and discussion of the Overview of the EcoAgriCulture Project is available [at this link](#).

4. Research and Capacity-building issues for mainstreaming sustainable farming practices in T&T

Maurice Rawlins presented some of the key research and capacity development issues for mainstreaming sustainable agricultural practices. The information presented was a culmination of the ideas shared during discussions between farmers and the EcoAgriCulture technical team, discussions with the Project's Steering Committee¹ and the reflections of the technical team's experience on the project. The main issues presented had to do with farming practices, sharing and networking among actors and agricultural policy; see Annex 2 for the presentation on research and capacity development issues for mainstreaming sustainable agricultural practices.

¹ The Steering Committee comprises representatives of the MFPLMA, IICA, FAO, UWI, CARDI and the Trust for Sustainable Livelihoods.



Click [here](http://tcsustainablefarming.weebly.com/) for the presentation on research and capacity development issues for mainstreaming sustainable agricultural practices

Main points arising from the Discussion of Research and Capacity Development Issues in Mainstreaming Sustainable Farming Practices

- ❧ Participants endorsed the suggested multidisciplinary approach for research in small-scale farm agricultural practices, and encouraged research projects that involve farmers in the research and demonstration of outcomes.
- ❧ The benefits of sustainable farming practices need to be better articulated and supported by evidence. Some evidence exists but in a form that is inaccessible to the farmer; there is need for greater effort by extension agencies and research institutions to translate the research output into meaningful information for the farmer. It was suggested that on-farm research partnerships could be developed between farmers and tertiary students to assist in documenting the benefits (economic, social and environmental) and challenges involved in implementing sustainable farming practices.
- ❧ The risk associated with the transitioning of farms to sustainable farming practices was raised as a key issue for research. Further to that, participants enquired if donor agencies would be willing to absorb the financial risk to the farmer associated with transitioning to sustainable farming practices.
- ❧ It was suggested that one way of increasing the importance of agriculture was to revisit the historical paradigm of agriculture as being central to societies. Agricultural communities could become involved in agro-processing and marketing of produce, as a



way of deriving more income from the agricultural value chains, diversifying livelihoods and building capacities within communities.

- Land use planning was raised as a major issue, particularly in the Maracas/ St. Joseph Valley, and it was reiterated that farmers were not the sole cause of environmental degradation in those areas. It was suggested that a more holistic and watershed-based approach was needed to address the planning issue and that engaging the Ministry of Planning and the Economy is crucial in this respect. Projects for sustainable land management could access the Green Fund for funding.



- Mr. Wayne Clement of the Water Resources Agency (WRA) alerted the meeting of the launch of a public - private partnership programme called 'Adopt a Watershed' which is implemented by the WRA. It was suggested that a payment for ecosystem services project could form a component of the 'Adopt a Watershed' programme, and farmers practicing sustainable farming practices could be targeted for receiving payments for farming in a manner that helps to provide ecosystem services.
- A concern was raised that agriculture is not attractive as a career option, and that the agricultural sector in Trinidad and Tobago is becoming increasingly characterized by an aging population of workers. It was stressed that in order for agriculture to be more attractive to young people it needs to be more economically attractive. Research needs to critically review the agriculture value chains towards the restructuring of chains so that

farmers can derive higher returns from farming. In addition, research needs to be directed towards identifying niche markets that farmers can target.

- Some farmers were critical of farmers organisations (FOs), highlighting that FOs tended to be fraught with power relations issues, corruption, mistrust, and nepotism. It was suggested that a more loose arrangement was needed for networking farmers in communities. Lessons for the networking arrangements could be drawn from fisher folk networks in Trinidad and Tobago; these lessons are well-documented by The Centre for Resource Management and Environmental Studies (CERMES) at the UWI in Cavehill Barbados, and the Caribbean Natural Resources Institute (CANARI).
- Participants endorsed the need for revision of the national agricultural policy in order to provide greater support to small-scale farmers, and for mainstreaming sustainable farming practices. The process of revising the policy should be undertaken in a fully participatory way, and that the voices of farmers should be reflected strongly in the discussions.

A video presentation of the presentation and discussion of the Research and Capacity Development Issues for Mainstreaming Sustainable Farming Practices is available [at this link](#).

5. Reflections on the EcoAgriCulture Project

The afternoon session of the workshop focused on farmers' reflections on their experience in participating in the EcoAgriCulture project. Video footage of their reflections can be accessed from the links below.



Kevin Balgobin
Farming in the Caura Valley

"I use more organic stuff, most of the time, and it works out pretty good"

Click [here](#) to view reflections by Kevin Balgobin

Terrence Audain
President of the Maracas Valley Farmers Association
Farming in the Maracas Valley

"Farming in an organic way is a means of giving back to the community"



Click [here](#) to view reflections by Terrence Audain



Yusuff Herbert
Farming in the Maracas Valley

"...The mountain was steep like that. So what we did was to put in contour drains and terracing, and right now you could access the whole land walking through without breaking a sweat."

Click [here](#) to view reflections by Yusuff Herbert

Stephen Gabriel
Farming in the Maracas Valley

"I try my best, to the best of my knowledge, to use good agricultural practices in my farm. I am really interested in getting to know some more of the things that we could do and things that we could use instead of synthetic chemicals".



Click [here](#) to view reflections by Stephen Gabriel



Quddus Muhammed
Farming in the Caura Valley

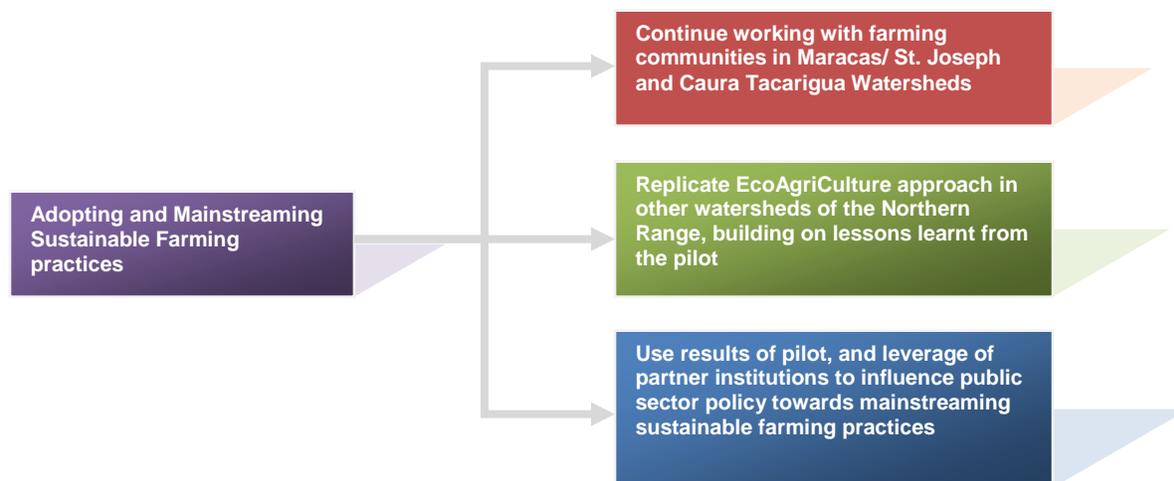
"It may have been harder work doing this type of farming (organic), but at the end of the day it pays off – health wise etc."

"Need to involve the schools in initiatives like this...at the end of the day who would take it forward? We are getting down, getting old. We have all the information packed up and doing what? The youth are the ones to take it forward"

Click [here](#) to view reflections by Quddus Muhammed

6. The Way Forward

A short presentation was made by Maurice Rawlins on the likely mode of follow up by The Cropper Foundation to the EcoAgriCulture Project. It was emphasized to participants that the conclusion of the EcoAgriCulture project should not indicate that efforts are no longer needed to support farming communities in transitioning to more sustainable farming approaches. In fact, the investment made by the Inter-American Development Bank and the EcoAgriCulture Project Partners will likely be of little value if the support to farming communities is terminated. A three pronged approach will be the framework for adopting and mainstreaming sustainable farming practices in the Northern Range Communities; see figure below.



Three-pronged approach for a follow-up programme to the EcoAgriCulture project by The Cropper Foundation and its partners

7. Closing Remarks

Closing remarks were provided by Gregg Rawlins. In his remarks, Mr. Rawlins highlighted the following points:

- 🌿 Technical and resources support was needed by farmers in order to assist with the adoption of more sustainable farming practices
- 🌿 Partnerships for research and for dissemination of information are the likely vehicles for helping to mainstream sustainable farming practices. Partnerships should strive to involve farmers, and to have their views represented in decision- making.
- 🌿 There is need for a national agricultural policy that promotes and supports the use of sustainable farming practices. There are a number of incentives and policy support tools

that are used in many other parts of the world, and can be adapted to fit our local context.

- There is need for scaling-up of interventions from a project by project basis, to more programmatic type interventions. A programmatic approach is more likely to avoid duplication of effort and gaps in research and implementation.

Mr. Rawlins thanked participants for attending the workshop and adjourned the meeting thereafter.

8. Acknowledgements

The Cropper Foundation wishes to express their thanks to all of the participants for attending and enthusiastically participating in the workshop. We are grateful to all of the participating farmers; Prof. John Agard and Mr. Gregg Rawlins for chairing the workshop; the MFPLMA, FAO, IICA, UWI, CARDI, Trust for Sustainable Livelihoods, the project's technical team, and the IDB-MIF for their inputs to the workshop. Financial support from the Inter-American Development Bank Multilateral Investment Fund is gratefully acknowledged.



Annex 1

List of Workshop Participants

	<u>Name</u>	<u>Telephone</u>	<u>E-Mail</u>	<u>Affiliated organization</u>
1	Dr. Mark Wuddivira	662-2002 EXT. 4412/4295 (w)	Mark.wuddivira@sta.uwi.edu	The University of the West Indies
2	Rewtee Hernandez			Maracas St Joseph Farmers Association and Agricultural Society of T&T (ASTT)
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4	Andrea Reyes			Farmer
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7	Quddus Muhammad			Caura Valley Council
8	Vivian Howard			Farmer, Caura Valley
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Annex 2

"Results and Findings of a Project to Implement Sustainable Farming Practices in Communities in the Northern Range, Trinidad"

Date: January 18th, 2012
Venue: Auzonville Conference Centre,
Eastern Main Road, Tunapuna

Chairs: Prof. John Agard and Mr. Gregg Rawlins

Programme

- 9:00 – 9:10** Opening remarks by the Chair of the EcoAgriCulture Project
Prof. John Agard
- 9:10 – 9:15** Welcome Remarks by the President of The Cropper Foundation (TCF)
Ms. Keisha Garcia
- 9:15 – 9:20** Remarks by the Inter-American Development Bank
Ms. Vashtie Dookiesingh, Multilateral Investment Fund Operation Specialist
- 9:20 – 9:25** Remarks by the UN Food and Agricultural Organisation
Ms. Lisa Martinez, FAO
- 9: 25 – 9:50** Feature address by the Ministry of Food Production, Land and Marine Affairs
Mrs. Patricia LaBorde Grant, Director Agricultural Planning Division
- 9:50 – 10:15** Overview of the EcoAgriCulture Project
Maurice Rawlins, Project Manager
- EcoAgriCulture Mini Documentary
- 10:15–11:00** Question and Discussion on Main Findings of EAC Project
- 11:00 -11:15** **Break**
- 11:15 -11: 35** Research and Capacity-building issues for mainstreaming sustainable farming practices in T&T
Maurice Rawlins, Project Manager
- 11: 35 - 12:45** Response and Discussion on research and capacity-building issues for mainstreaming sustainable farming practices in T&T

12:45 – 13:45 Lunch

13:45 – 14:55 Reflections on the EcoAgriCulture Project: Farmers/ Participants Perspective
Facilitator: Mr. Gregg Rawlins, IICA

14:55 – 15:10 Follow-up initiatives of the EcoAgriCulture Project

15:10 – 15:25 Synopsis of Day
Mr. Gregg Rawlins

15:25 – 15:30 Closing Remarks
Mr. Gregg Rawlins