

*Full Length Research Paper*

## A Focus Group approach to exploration of the dynamics of farmers' groups in Trinidad, West Indies

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As part of its agricultural development strategy, the Government of Trinidad and Tobago plans to promote the development of Producer Organizations. Historically, the sustainability of farmers' groups in Trinidad has been poor, with several unsuccessful interventions. This study seeks to do a preliminary exploration of some of the issues which could impact group sustainability, as perceived by the two main stakeholders - farmers and extension services staff. Purposive sampling was done to carefully select participants from pools of experienced farmers and extension officers. A single separate focus group session was conducted with samples from each of the two populations. The information obtained was subjected to thematic analysis to identify the key issues which resonated with both groups. The results of that study are reported in this paper, with important verbatim statements quoted in order to support findings. The major issues on which both stakeholders agreed were related to (i) the preconditions for group survival or failure and (ii) leadership. Recommendations include: The review and modernization of the existing constitution which governs groups, governance training for leaders and potential leaders, and the introduction of decision making procedures in which members can participate.

**Key words:** Extension officers, focus groups, farmers' group development, sustainability, thematic analysis.

### INTRODUCTION

According to Barham and Chitemi (2009), farmers' groups are social structures and successful collective action initiatives are influenced by group asset configurations, composition, and characteristics.

The interest in the creation of farmers' groups is not new. Over time, many farmers' groups have been formed in Trinidad and the Caribbean. However, most exist only for a short time, going out of existence for a host of reasons which have not been fully investigated. This

situation is not unique to Trinidad, but a reflection of what exists in the wider Caribbean. In a move to ensure the sustainability of farmers' groups, the Caribbean Farmers Network (CAFAN), the Technical Centre for Agriculture and Rural Cooperation (CTA), and the Caribbean Agricultural Research and Development Institute (CARDI) sought to work together to build and sustain farmers' groups (Francis, 2010). The Inter-American Institute for the Cooperation on Agriculture (IICA) also has an

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initiative aimed at promoting the sustainable development of farmers' groups in the Caribbean.

Notably, umbrella organizations for farmers' groups, such as the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago (ASTT), seem to survive but not the groups at the community or grass roots level. What then are the issues that cause farmers' groups to become dysfunctional after a time? Several studies, conducted elsewhere, have looked at this problem from the perspective of the farmers. Even so, the extent of intra-group dynamics has not been properly researched in developing countries (Liverpool-Tasie, 2012). It is the thesis of this paper, however, that the answers do not lie solely with the farmers, and that the role of other key stakeholders also may be important in farmers' group sustainable development.

The inefficiency of the public extension service, which was designed to support the agricultural sector in Trinidad, has led to farmers' ever increasing complaints about the lack of attention they receive from the Government. In most developing countries, the extension officer is the only face of Government a farmer ever sees. Hence, Governments are constrained to take action to improve the efficiency of the extension service so that many more farmers will have access to it. Indeed, the Trinidad and Tobago Government's strategic plan has stated clearly that Government, through its Ministry of Food Production, will work to develop farmers' groups (Ministry of Food Production Land and Marine Affairs, 2011).

Consequently, in this study both the producers and the service providers are assessed, although independently. At the same time, a focus is placed on both the commonalities and the differences in the views the two groups hold of the possible sources of and solutions for the dysfunctional dynamics of farmers' groups. In doing so, we use the theoretical background of social capital in terms of how it can help to strengthen collective work and group viability. Such an examination has the potential to shed more light on the issue and to distill some actions for attention by the policy makers, the extension organization, training providers, and the farmers themselves. The objective of the present study, therefore, was to elicit, evaluate, and compare the views of extension officers and farmers regarding issues which could impact the sustainable development of farmers' groups in Trinidad.

## LITERATURE REVIEW

### The importance of social capital and collective action

The relationship between social capital and collective action among farmers has been well documented in the literature (Svendsen and Svendsen, 2000; Uphoff and Wijayarathna, 2000; Chloupkova et al., 2003; Megyesi et al., 2010; Mishra et al., 2013). Gyau et al. (2012), in a

study in Cameroon, highlighted the significance of collective action specific to improving small-holder benefits in the value chain and enabling them to gain market access and bargaining power. They suggested that it was important to understand the farmers' attitudes, opinions, and motivation for collective action. The authors suggested that these would inform on the effective approaches needed to enhance farmers' decisions to participate in a group. Baah (2008) in a study of cocoa producer groups in Ghana indicated that the low resource base and managerial capacities of farmers were constraints for these groups. They recommended that the potential of farmers' groups could be enhanced through capacity building, inclusive of provisions for organizational financial management and advocacy skills. Hellin et al. (2009) proposed that collective action may be able to exist even in the absence of formal farmer organization. In such instances, individuals may come together not so much to form a group but for the purpose of accomplishing a specific task (a process called 'task cohesion'). They suggested that, once that task is accomplished, there is no need for any group development beyond that point. Farmers' organizations are considered to be the more formal expression of collective action while farmers' groups are considered to be the informal expressions of collective action, but one which can be sustained, given the right group dynamics.

The benefits to the groups, therefore, will be related to equity and collective working relationships among the members. Farmers within a community more than likely share similar attributes and problems. Coming together as a group has the potential to positively impact their livelihood. Agrawal (2001), in his review, identified a list of several common enabling conditions required for the successful outcomes of collective action. These conditions include: small group size; clearly defined boundaries; shared norms; past successful experiences; appropriate leadership; interdependence among group members; members with different material worth but common identities and interests; and low levels of poverty. These conditions fit the domain of resource-restricted farmers as are found in most developing countries. It is probably less likely in these countries for wealthy successful individuals to be interested in collective action since there would be no perceived personal benefit to them from belonging to a group.

Social networks throughout rural communities have been shown to play an indirect role in increasing agricultural productivity by knowledge sharing (Liverpool and Winter-Nelson, 2010). For example, a farmers' group which has experience with a certain pest in one geographic area can share the knowledge and information gained from those experiences with other groups. Social capital and collective action are highly compatible with the attainment of sustainable farming practice (Flora, 1998). According to Bijman (2008), farmers' groups can also be important to rural

**Table 1.** Sample guiding questions used in Focus Group protocols.

<b>Focus Group 1 (Extension Officers)</b>	<b>Focus Group 2 (Farmers)</b>
Farmers' organizations/groups are important to modern day farming communities. How do you feel about this statement?	Do you think that farmers' organizations/groups have a role to play /are important to modern day farming? What are your general feelings about farmers' organizations/groups?
What do you see as the main advantages of farmers' organizations/groups?	Any advantages/ disadvantages? What do you perceive are the characteristics of a successful farmers' organization /groups?
Based on what you think and what you have heard others say, what do you believe are farmers' general feelings about farmers' organizations/groups? Are they happy to belong to such organizations? Or, do they mostly feel that it is a waste of time?	Are you happy to belong to such organizations/groups?
What do you think is the general position of Ministries of Agriculture and of Government/s on Farmers' organizations? Do you have any stories of interactions with these bodies that show why you think as you do?	What are the main origins of conflict?
	Generally, why are farmers reluctant to form or belong to farmers' organizations/groups?

development through coordination of production systems, an action which can enable contract farming. The larger yields in produce which can be achieved through coordination are more appealing to certain niche markets. When farmers form groups, this can enhance their social capital and positively impact food security at both the individual and household levels (Martin et al., 2004).

In spite of what appears to be the obvious benefits from group formation because of the increased social capital and enhanced collective action therein, several studies have identified elements which work against group development. Toseland et al. (2004) stated that failure to understand group dynamics can lead to unproductive meetings and dissatisfied members while Afolami et al. (2012), in a study in South-West Nigeria, suggested that the absence of external support posed a serious challenge to the sustainability and ability of the group to survive. Our study has as its focus, therefore, the exploration of both those elements which favor group sustainability and those which promote failure in farmers' groups in Trinidad.

## METHODOLOGY

### Sample selection

This was a qualitative study using independent groups of the primary stakeholders. Purposive sampling was used to select participants. Two focus groups were conducted. In Focus Group 1 (FG1), nine (9) extension officers participated. The participants were carefully selected from a pool of extension officers pursuing further studies at the Eastern Caribbean Institute of Agriculture and Forestry (ECIAF) in Trinidad. The sample chosen consisted of experienced extension officers, who had significant previous involvement with farmers' groups. The eight (8) participants (only one of whom was female) in Focus Group 2 (FG2) were chosen

from four of the main farmers' groups in Trinidad – Orange Grove (4), Maloney (2), Manzanilla (1), and Cunupia (1) Farmers' Associations.

The recruitment strategy for participant selection involved initial screening for eligibility using a questionnaire. A background check was done for all participants. Participation was voluntary and participants were free to discontinue participation at any point. The nine (9) extension officers in the study were between 30 and 35 years of age and all had at least five years previous experience working with farmers' organizations. The eight (8) farmers ranged in age from 25 to 61 years, with an average of 26 years of farming experience. Guide questions for FG1 and FG2 were developed and evaluated for face validity by two academic subject matter specialists, one public service extension expert and one qualitative research expert (Table 1).

Note that the questions in Table 1 were used only as a guide since additional questions were put to the participants based on responses given. Additional questions which arose are not reflected within this table but contributed to the analysis of the information from both FG 1 and FG 2.

### Information collection

The focus group exercises FG 1 (extension officers) and FG 2 (farmers) were conducted at the main conference room of the ECIAF. The facilitator was supported by two note takers, who recorded the discussions and kept field notes, including non-verbal responses among participants, distractions, expressions of satisfaction and dissatisfaction etc. The group was assured of confidentiality and anonymity and made aware that the session was being audio recorded. Notes were also taken regarding participants' reactions to each other's comments. Each focus group session lasted for approximately 2½ h. An immediate debriefing session was done with the facilitators to make a preliminary identification of the main issues that emerged. Detailed field notes were later transcribed and compared with recordings for verification and elaboration. The audio files were uploaded to a computer and also fully transcribed by the researcher. The field notes taken by the facilitator, whose responsibility was to observe non-verbal communications, were cross referenced and linked with the transcribed document to determine the level of non-verbal concen-

**Table 2.** Themes emerging from the focus group discussions with extension officers and farmers

Emerging themes	
Focus Group 1 ( Extension Officers)	Focus Group 2 ( Farmers)
(1). Group Survival Sub-themes: (a).Triggers of failures (b). Possible solutions	(1). Negative issues related to farmers' groups
(2). Group elements Sub-themes: (a).Composition (b). Benefits/Advantages (c). Disadvantages (d). Leadership/administration	(2). Importance of farmers' groups
(3). Group formation	(3). Leadership in farmers' groups
(4). Governmental support	(4).The Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago in farmers' group development
(5). Women's groups	(5). Team building

sus with expressed views among verbal participants.

### Thematic analysis

QSR NVivo<sub>8</sub> software was used to manage and organize the data, facilitating identification of emerging themes. In reporting the emerging themes, illustrative verbatim quotations are used to highlight the perspectives of the participants and some indication is given of the level of agreement among them.

## RESULTS

The emerging themes identified in the analysis of FG1 and FG 2 are summarized in Table 2.

### Focus group - extension officers

The themes which were dominant, in terms of the most discussed, in the focus group session with the extension officers are shown in Figure 1. In order of decreasing frequency of references, these were: *Group Survival, Group Elements, Group Formation, Government Support, and Women's Groups*. These emerging themes and sentiments, expressed by the extension officers, are detailed in Table 3 but are coalesced into three issues, discussed subsequently.

#### **Issue 1: Composition, leadership, and administration**

There was consensus among the participants in this focus group for the statement that, "*Successful farmers are least motivated to form groups or attend meetings since they have no issues that impact them. The smaller*

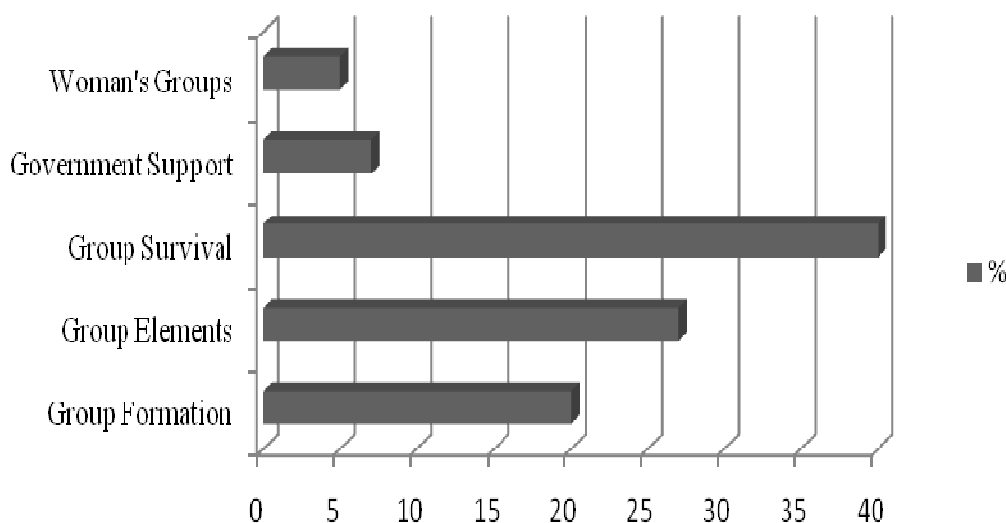
*farmers who are resource poor, however, tend to be motivated to group formation and participation.*" It was further stated, with some agreement from others, that, "*In my opinion it is a lack of vision on the part of successful farmers to not want to be motivated to be involved in farmers' groups.*" The lack of interest of successful farmers in farmers' groups can retard the advancement of the group with respect to capacity building through resources and knowledge sharing.

The extension officers indicated that the leadership of a farmers' group was important to the group's future survival. One participant indicated that, "*When leadership is not strong and the personality is not attractive, it makes the group ineffective and eventually the group dissolves.*" Additionally, leadership qualities such as leadership effectiveness, stability, good governance attributes and trust were major issues the extension officers felt were impacting farmers' groups. Another statement, for which there was strong agreement among the officers was that "*Farmers are unfamiliar with how to hold meetings and how to handle membership dues and how to govern a group effectively.*" Ineffective administration of a farmers' group can retard advancement and prevent the group from achieving its objectives.

#### **Issue 2: Specific triggers of failure of farmers' groups**

The issues affecting farmers' groups which have contributed to failures are in many instances common among the countries, represented by the extension officers in the focus group. Participants pointed to several reasons why groups failed - the lack of trust in leadership; poor internal communication; too large groups; too many aged farmers in the groups; the absence of

### Relative Numbers(%) of References made to Different Themes during the Extension Officers' Focus Group



**Figure 1.** Frequency Distribution for the relative number (%) of references for each theme – extension officers' Focus Group (FG1).

accountability; groups with memberships spread over different classes; concerns about whether members were indeed farmers; membership issues related to the payment of dues; competition and conflict within the group; and the absence of Extension personnel trained in group work. The following are some illustrative verbatim statements from the extension officer participants. These highlight some of the triggers of failure for which there was agreement among the other participants:

1. "Competition is a real issue, members of the group may feel that the leader of the group gets everything and keeps information."
2. ".....being the leader, everything comes to you first and sometimes benefits do not go down the chain to other members or there may be bias in the leader selection as to who receives benefit."
3. "Groups can be too large and the disputes among them can make the group fall apart."
4. "Poor communication in the sharing of information accounts for the failure."
5. "It is hard holding the group together if they are not getting what they want. It just eventually becomes a talk shop and farmers become fed-up with that."

#### **Issue 3: Governmental support**

All the extension officers in the group were in agreement with the view that there should be a role for Government's involvement in farmers' groups. There

was consensus among the participants for the need for financial support by the Government directed towards farmers' groups. The participants were all in agreement that Government has no choice but to become involved in farmers' group formation to ensure that the group obtains donor support from external agencies. There was the general perception among the majority of participants that the involvement of Government with farmers' groups can make the groups vulnerable to political interference and discrimination. In spite of this, the participants were of the view that Government should provide funding incentives to farmers' groups. Several verbatim statements support this view of the Government's responsibility for farmers' groups:

1. "Governments have no choice but to support farmers' groups since donor agencies are not going to support individual farmers. FAO, for example, will not work with an individual farmer."
2. "Funding from the Government for farmers' groups is important beyond incentives offered for individual farmers. That is, there should be an incentive for the group as a unit."

#### **Solutions to the issues as proposed by the extension officers**

The extension officers in the focus group proposed several possible solutions to the issues impacting the sustainability of farmers' groups. Among these solutions

**Table 3.** Consensus opinions of participants in the extension officers' Focus Group (FG1).

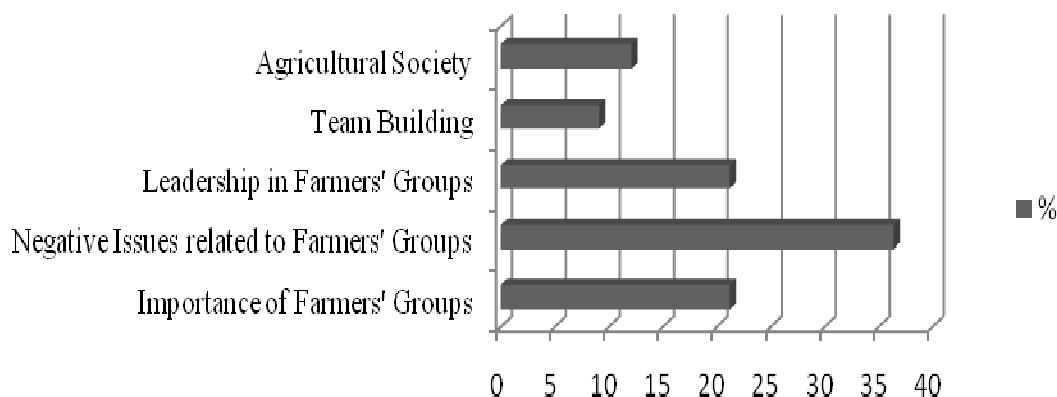
<b>Themes and associated sentiments (FG1)</b>
<p><b>Theme 1: Group survival</b> Triggers of failure include: Mistrust of leadership; Greed; Aging members; and inexperienced leadership.</p>
<p><b>Theme 2: Group elements</b> Sub-theme 1 composition: Most of the group members are resource- poor farmers; successful farmers are not motivated to join; and Farmers' groups are aging. Sub-theme 2 benefits/advantages: Shared expertise; Help from donor agencies Sub-theme 3 disadvantages: Too much competition; Uneven distribution of benefits; Potential for theft by leadership. Sub-theme 4 leadership /administration: Everything comes to the leader first; Group Effectiveness is connected to leader's strength and personality; Stable leadership leads to a stable group; Leader needs good governance training; and There is less trust when leader is non-farmer.</p>
<p><b>Theme 3: Groups formation</b> Groups are formed Because of needs/benefits; Just for existence sake; Because they prove more effective than individuals alone, Based on geography; Based on geography and commodities; To share and complement knowledge ; To attract donor agencies; With no procedural manual; and When extension officers bring together serious farmers</p>
<p><b>Theme 4: Government support</b> Governments must support groups to get aid from external agencies; Government incentives should be for the group and not for individual farmers; Farmers may not trust the Government; and Governments will practice political favoritism</p>
<p><b>Theme 5: Women's Groups</b> Women's farmers groups are more committed than men</p>
<p><b>Proposed solutions</b> Implement monitoring mechanisms for group activities and finances. Ensure transparency of group functioning. Use a procedural manual for group formation. Provide training for farmers Provide training for extension officers</p>

was the need to change the perceptions that the leadership of farmers' groups will always be untrustworthy. There was agreement among the participants that there should be some procedural manual for group formation. Monitoring of farmers' groups by Government agencies to ensure transparency and accountability will resolve some of the trust and financial mismanagement issues. There was consensus for training farmers and extension officers in the areas of good governance, communications skills, and conflict management as a possible solution to some of the

negative issues in farmers' groups. The illustrative verbatim statements below reflect the views of the extension officers for the possible solutions to address the issues impacting farmers' groups:

1. *"We need to change this perception that the leaders' in farmers' groups will take everything, once the mechanisms are in place to prevent such an occurrence. Things are changing and we cannot base the success of the group on past experiences."*
2. *"Monitoring is the key also in Trinidad. The cooperative*

### % References made to different themes during the Farmers' Focus Group



**Figure 2.** Frequency distribution for the relative number (%) of references for each theme – farmers' Focus Group (FG2).

*model for farmers' groups is more transparent (here)."*

3. *"There should be some procedural manual for group formation."*

4. *"Farmers' groups need to be trained in good governance and communication skills".*

5. *"We, the Extension Officers, also need training in group formation, governance and conflict management."*

#### Focus group - farmers' groups

The themes which dominated the focus group session among the farmers, in descending order of most discussed, were *negative issues related to farmers' groups*, the most dominant theme, followed by the *importance of farmers' groups*, *leadership in farmers groups*, *role of the Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago*, and *team building* (Figure 2).

The participants indicated that *farmers' groups are important* (Emerging theme 2) for the development of the agriculture sector in Trinidad. They pointed to benefits such as mutual support and sharing of information. They commented that the group as an entity was stronger than the individual, and that Government support for farmers in a group is easier than for individual farmers. They all agreed that *team building* (Emerging theme 5), through farmers' interactions at social events, and mechanisms to resolve issues for the benefit of the group were all important for the future survival of the group. There was agreement among the farmers that the *Agricultural Society of Trinidad and Tobago* (Emerging theme 4) was responsible for encouraging farmers to form groups. Emerging themes 1 and 3 were two main themes also mentioned by the extension officers but are detailed now from the farmers' perspective. These are the negative

issues which impact the success of Farmers' Groups in Trinidad (theme 1), specifically the role of the group leadership (theme 3). The main themes and sentiments are outlined in Table 4.

#### Issue 1: Negative issues related to farmers' groups

There was general consensus among all participants on the negative issues related to farmers' groups. These issues included perceptions of stealing and corruption; bias and inequity in the distribution of benefits; lack of transparency and accountability; poor communication; and issues related to the group leadership. It was pointed out that, when farmers come together in a group, there are still issues regarding competition, since the market for agricultural produce is relatively small.

The farmers can come together for issues regarding infrastructure, subsidies and threat to production but when it comes to pricing and competition it's a different matter. In instances when the executive acts in isolation and does not communicate with the members, there is a breakdown in the level of trust. The participants indicated that the group leader has the responsibility of holding the group together. It was suggested that disrespect of the leader for members along with lack of trust among members themselves are the two main issues impacting the success of farmers' groups. The following are selected verbatim statements, made by participants in the farmers' focus group, illustrating the negative perceptions related to farmers' groups:

1. *"The perception of stealing and corruption is a major challenge impacting the success of farmers' groups"*
2. *"In the early stages of the group's existence there are*

**Table 4.** Consensus opinions of participants in the farmers' Focus Group (FG2).

<b>Themes and associated sentiments (FG2)</b>
<p><b>Theme 1: Negative issues related to farmers groups</b></p> <p><b>There are perceptions that:</b></p> <p>There is stealing and corruption;            There is bias in the distribution of benefits;            Group founders have a sense of entitlement;            Less active members are disadvantaged            Lack of procedure is discouraging;            There is competition in general;            There is competition because of quality produce;            There is no transparency and accountability;            There is poor communication; and            There is poor leadership</p>
<p><b>Theme 2: Importance of farmers' groups</b></p> <p>Groups are important because:</p> <p>They aid in development of the agricultural sector;            They provide a context for mutual support;            They offer more opportunities for shared information;            Groups are stronger than the individual;            Government support is easier for groups than individual;            Farmers' groups help the community, and            Farmers, as a group, can maximize aid received</p>
<p><b>Theme 3: Leadership of farmers' groups</b></p> <p>There is a need for a procedure in the constitution for dealing with a bad leader;            A lot of power is invested in leadership; and            The leader determines the success of the group.</p>

issues. Since the executive have a say they may be biased in, for example, the lobby for certain access roads for some farmers. Also, since the leadership is responsible for directing resources, the opportunity for bias creeps in."

3. "Some members feel that, since they were responsible for the group formation and did all the work in the beginning, they ought to benefit more."

4. "The executive not speaking to the members, poor information sharing and lack of cooperation are some factors which negatively impact farmers' groups."

### **Issue 2: Specific leadership issues in farmers groups**

The quality of leadership is intertwined with the negative issues related to farmers' groups. The type and style of leadership is fundamental to the success of the group. The leader of the group is vested with the power of acting on behalf of the group. The membership will lose confidence in a group if the leadership is poor and this loss in confidence will be compounded if there are trust issues in addition. The focus group discussions revealed

that all felt it imperative that there be a constitution with provisions for taking action against the leadership in circumstances of poor leadership and management. There was no dissent on this particular sentiment. All participants felt strongly that passionate, strong leadership was essential to the success of farmers' groups. The selected verbatim statements below illustrate the participants' views with regard to the role of leadership in farmers' groups:

1. "There are situations where the group leader becomes a dictator. However, once there is a constitution there are ways to remove him in a democratic manner".

2. "Elections and a constitution are important and are used to guide the membership in matters concerning leadership."

3. "Power is part of human nature and sometimes it can cause issues in a group."

4. "A group is only as good as its leaders. The leaders determine the success of a group."

5. "You must have passion to want to be a leader in a farmers' group. It does not have a monetary reward and it takes up a lot of time. If you do not have the passion, it



would not last.”

## DISCUSSION

Challenges to farmers' groups have made some of them prone to failure. Authors of several previous studies have reported on both triggers of failure and elements which could promote success. Danida (2004) suggested that (i) capacity building of farmers' groups was a slow and uneven process and that the outcomes are often determined as much by factors of social behaviour and cultural norms as by economic logic and (ii) farmers' groups also suffer from problems concerning the accountability of their leaders and the group's legitimacy as representative membership organizations for poorer farmers, for rural women, and for other marginalized groups among farmers. Norbu (2008), in a study in Bhutan, pointed to the issues of transparency and accountability, misuse of authority and group finances by the leadership, which consequently induces mistrust among the group's membership.

Many of these issues of group dynamics and, in particular the role of leadership, were raised in both focus groups in this study. Some of these issues predispose farmers' groups to failure while others act as triggers to hasten the collapse of functioning groups. Both extension officers and farmers felt that issues such as mistrust of leaders; associated greed; the inexperience of both members and leaders; the aged membership; members' perceptions of corruption and bias existing among leaders; lack of transparency in procedures; poor communication; and the prevailing expectation of entitlement by group founders are some of the major reasons that set groups at serious risk of failure.

The issue raised here of the threat to group sustainability caused by poor communication has been touched on often in the literature. Deosaran (1980) in his study of food-producing agricultural groups of Trinidad and Tobago revealed concerns related to the lack of confidence by the membership of these groups, ineffective communication, and the disregard for the promotion of a team spirit beyond that shaped by financial self-interest.

Ostrom (1990), writing about farmers' groups in general, took a similar view. She reported on the internal and external factors impacting farmers' groups in their attempt for collective action. The internal factors included lack of capacity to communicate with each other, inadequate mechanisms to develop trust and no sense that they share a common future. Alternatively, powerful individuals who stand to gain from the current situation, may block efforts by the less powerful to change the rules of the game. Ostrom (1990) suggested that external factors could take the form of authorities, who are indifferent to the internal group problems and who may resist the group's attempts at making constructive

changes either because of that indifference or because they stand to profit from the *status quo*.

Fortunately, most of these issues can be corrected over time. Issues such as lack of transparency and accountability require some re-organization of governing principles as well as training. Perceptions of corruption and bias can be treated with adequate mechanisms to monitor the actions of leaders. Inexperience can be addressed through directed continuous training. The aged membership suggests that there is the need to promote group development much more among the emerging cadre of young farmers. Extension would have an important role in this regard since a prime role of extension is group development.

Both the extension officers and the farmers, participating in this study, believe that communication would have to be improved and enabling technologies would have to be utilized on a wider basis if younger persons are to be encouraged to join groups. The way meetings are conducted should also be modernized to appeal to young farmers. The sense of entitlement by group founders has to be addressed if young persons are to become active members of the group. The introduction of pathways for participation in the group decision-making process could go a long way toward lessening the hold of the older members in the group while at the same time giving more active roles to the younger members. The entire group governance process needs attention. This may require intervention by the Government of Trinidad and Tobago or even external assistance to reorganize governance procedures and make them up to date with modern best practices around the world.

Concerns were articulated by focus group participants in this study about the strength of the group leaders, the extent of the training in governance they receive, whether the leader is an active farmer or not, the role of the leader under the constitution, and the assigned powers of the leader. Leadership makes or breaks an organization. As such, clear roles and responsibilities must guide leadership. For the proper governance of groups, leaders must be trained in governance procedures and management. The strength and power vested in leaders must be rationalized. As such, in circumstances where these issues are present, opportunities exist to provide management training to leaders. Improving the leaders' communication skills must also be an important component of such training.

While many of the issues which impact group sustainability worldwide, as detailed in the literature on studies conducted elsewhere, have been found to be relevant to the group development efforts in Trinidad, some other unique issues have been found to be important as well in the Trinidad context. Along with attention being paid to the factors identified above in this study, constitution reform and good governance to include participatory procedures have been identified as needing special attention. These have the desired effect

of greatly improving social capital among groups, a key ingredient for the development of sustainable farmers' groups.

The information from the research described in this paper was used to guide and design deeper and broader studies in which the perceptions of extension officers and farmers in Trinidad, on the issues revealed here among others, were collected via the administration of structured survey instruments. In these later studies, the samples consisted of almost all (123) of the extension officers in Trinidad and approximately 20% (293) of farmers in farmers' groups. The results of those studies will be detailed later.

### Conflict of Interest

The authors have not declared any conflict of interest.

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