

CROSSROADS



A portrait of a pineapple farmer in Labo, Camarines Norte, Bicol, in the Philippines. © Isabel Corthier/AgriCord

Busy months ahead

BY DANIEL SZCZEPANSKI

During the coming months, the AgriCord Secretariat will organize virtual workshops facilitate our joint program implementation and collaboration as an alliance within and beyond programs.

The Secretariat's Financial Management Unit (FMU) will organize virtual workshops on financial regulations and audit requirements and good reporting practices. Another set of workshops will look at the technical reporting with a focus on a) FO4ACP top-up target setting and additional indicators

and b) lessons learnt from last reporting round. Dates are yet to be confirmed, but stay tuned!

Our Working Group on Knowledge Management would require a new lead. In case you are interested, please us know (i.e. Daniel Szczepanski, daniel.szczepanski@agricord.org) know! This is also a general appeal for more active participants and colleagues in the Group.

Last but definitely not least, AgriCord's next Programme Commission will take place in Kampala (Uganda) between November 27th and 30th 2023. Many thanks to our colleagues in Trias Central Africa for hosting this event!

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Commercialisation of Local Seed Production - A Way Forward

The financial security of a family farm can be ensured in the same way as any other business, by diversifying its income. The production and sale of seeds provides access to a high value-added market; however, cultivation requires compliance with production standards that are much stricter than those for grain production, especially if the producer wishes to obtain certification from state-approved bodies. This local production, with the support of farmers' organisations, makes it possible to meet farmers' needs for improved seeds and to market varieties adapted to climate change.

Afdi, in conjunction with the Fédération des Unions de Producteurs (Fupro) and the Fédération nationale des Producteurs de Semences du Bénin (FNPS-B), has proposed a partnership with the Coopérative Communale des Producteurs de Semences de Maïs (CCPSM), a member of the FNPS. While the State has a strong presence in the seed market, farmers have succeeded in initiating a local group sale of their maize seed, which has been a complete success since 2019.

This first successful commercial experiment has helped to unite the members of the CCPSM, creating fertile ground for further development of the industry: increasing the production and direct sale of seeds (20 tonnes in 2019 - 250 tonnes sold in 2022), inspiring the Coopérative Communale des Producteurs de Semences de Savé (CCPS-S) to produce soya seed and developing a medium-term strategy to transform this initiative into a sustainable industry.

The two maize and soya seed production cooperatives have introduced a levy per kilo of seed sold to finance operating costs, such as sector consultation meetings and meetings with financial bodies (between 7 and 10 FCFA depending on the cooperative).

These co-operatives now want to set up a service providing access to seasonal credit and a rental service for cultivation and post-harvest equipment, in order to ensure that seeds are put into production under the best possible conditions and to limit post-harvest losses. To this end, the members of the cooperative received support from Afdi in the form of (a) management training, (b) assistance in drawing up a business plan and a market study, and (c) contacts with financial institutions.

Uniting the members of a cooperative around a common objective requires a long period of reflection on the services to be developed and their capacity to be sustainable, so that they are as well adapted as possible to needs.



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Contacts & Resources

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In case you want to know more, here is an interesting resource:

[Towards effective soybean seed systems in Benin: Current situation and prospects for production and delivery of good quality seed](#)



Some Take-Aways on Agroecology from the PAFO Knowledge Event

BY LUKAS HADASCH

In May, the AgriCord secretariat had the chance to organise and conduct one panel discussion during PAFO's Global Knowledge Management Event in Kigali, Rwanda.

During this panel discussion, we posed the question: *Can agroecology (AE) become a systematic alternative to conventional agriculture?*

A heated debate about the advantages and disadvantages and about what is feasible and desirable was sparked.

A major issue is the uneven distribution of risks in the value chains to the detriment of primary producers. The margins for productivity loss without endangering family livelihoods can be very slim and farmers are acutely aware of it. This reality leads to risk-averse attitudes - preferring the optimisation of production systems that are familiar and scaleable.

This concern has real weight and competes with the prospective long-term benefits of agroecology in the decision-making processes of individual farmers and FOs.

During the panel discussion it became clear that a potential shift to agroecology can only be successful on the wider front if it can be demonstrated that AE generates better yields, higher profits and proves to be smarter and more resilient. But these cases are hard to come by and often not sufficiently displayed to potential replicants.

So, how can agroecology work?

As you might suspect, there are no silver bullets and easy paths, but some rules of thumb emerged during the event:

- Consider AE as holistic approach that touches on all aspects of life
- Do not impose AE on farmers, it needs to work for them
- Channel means to the local level to support transitions when attempted
- Secure some form of continuous governmental support
- Mobilize financial and technical support
- Empower farmers to learn from their practices and to innovate them
- Establish necessary facilities, and
- Train farmers constantly and with persistence

Summarized: If we wish to go for a paradigmatic shift among smallholder producers, their core concerns needs to be addressed. Otherwise it's a non-starter. We can support the transition through conceptual clarity, through the mobilisation of public commitment and by working (as we do) on the capacities of farmers and FOs.

Want to know what agroecology is?

[Click here for FAO's 10 Elements of Agroecology.](#)

Interested in PAFO's KM event?

[Click here for the PAFO's event summary.](#)



QUESTIONS?

GET IN TOUCH WITH
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Why do we need partnerships and what do we need to consider?

BY MARTIN AGBOTON

To reflect on the quality of partnerships in the context of farmer led research and innovation, AgriCord organised a first round of virtual meetings in June and July 2023 with some of the FO-RI action research partners and Alessandro Meschinelli from GFAR. The work on partnerships is a longer-term trajectory. Next steps will explore this question together with regional farmers' organisations and PAFO. They address the issue on more strategic level, e.g., by influencing and steering agricultural research policies and promoting good practices.

Partnership is a crucial aspect of agroecological principles, which emphasize the cocreation and sharing of knowledge. It is at the core of the success or failure of multi-stakeholder processes. For a long time, farmers have been seen as recipients of aid, advice and adopters of technologies innovated by others. The approach has been linear: technology is developed by researchers and transferred to farmers by extension services. In many cases, this approach has led to a low or non-adoption, as it does not valorise farmer knowledge about their realities. A change is needed towards co-research and co-innovation recognising different knowledge systems to increase impact. That is why quality of partnerships matters. In the first round of FO-RI sessions on research-farmer partnerships, Alessandro Meschinelli from GFAR introduced a possible set of criteria that could be used to frame and assess partnerships.

Here some of the principles which are inspired by the 11 principles of the Swiss Commission for Research Partnerships with Developing Countries, KFPE):

- Decide on the objective/priorities together: Have the problems and objectives been defined, mobilizing different knowledge systems, and including different stakeholders' views and interests?
- Sharing benefits equitably: Equitably means that there might be some partners that have the bigger share of the pie, but this must be agreed upon in transparent and fair discussions.
- Sharing responsibilities and negotiating them: Is this agreed in discussion amongst equals or imposed by some? Also patterns for decision-making, mutual accountability and resolving conflicts need to be jointly agreed upon.
- Transparency and easy access to information: For example, are all the actors holding a copy - in an understandable form - of the project description with the full budget? Or do only some partners have access to this information.
- Capacity building, trainings: The partnership is structured to translate the personal knowledge acquired by some participants into broader sustainable capacities within the stakeholder institutions.
- Dissemination of the results: Is it an effort that is carried out together and in forms that encourage and allow application?
- Outcomes are relevant, scientifically credible, secured and sustainability of the processes is sought.



QUESTIONS?

PLEASE FEEL FREE
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Our Impact

BY DANIEL SZCZEPANSKI

Over the past few months, agri-agencies and FO partners in Latin America have worked hard to collect stories about the impact of the FO4LA programme, co-implemented with COPROFAM. These stories provide an unique insight into the lifechanging results well functioning FOs can produce for their members. Also, they demonstrate what AgriCord's member agri-agencies can do in places where it matters.

In Brazil, Joara Oliveira and FO Cooperbac decided to convert into organic coffee production. This transition presented significant challenges, as it required a holistic approach: "We had to re-learn how to do the processing and organise space and hygiene only for organic food, including the transport vehicles. It is a great responsibility. If one bag from the load is contaminated, all the work of the farmer will be lost." Farmers were accustomed to the use of pesticides and chemical fertilisers, and felt insecure in case a disease would affect their crop. Also, the certification of their organic coffee processing plant took a long time.



Joara Oliveira © Trias

The project brought in specialised technical assistance for organic production and certification for twenty one coffee producer families.

Together with the technicians, the farmers created standards to facilitate joint purchases of inputs, such as green manure and other organic products.

Joara's and her peers' efforts are already bearing fruit. This year, Joara has already started to commercialize coffee beans with the cooperative's brand. She has also registered five new brands of gourmet products with the cooperative. "In 2022, we bought coffee from two farmers already certified and launched it on the market. We paid 2600 reales per 60kg bag and sold it for 100 reales per kg. This generated desire and confidence in the project farmers to stand firm in their process... We have made a business plan and our expectation is to increase the cooperative's revenue by 40% next year. We have partnered with an exporter who will pay a premium of 20 reales (3.80 euro) per bag to farmers, who are transitioning into organic."

It seems these successes have also reverberated among youth and women farmers. "I notice several young cooperative members participating and learning to love the cooperative. We had the largest participation of members in our history at our Assembly, with twenty new members joining, eleven of them women".

Change has been profound in several respects. The first is to have achieved the long-awaited goal of reducing the exodus of young people.

Intergenerational succession seems now more of a worry of the past. The project has also generated greater confidence among farmers in sustainable agriculture. There is a change in paradigms towards more biodiverse production planning and the expansion of areas with agroforestry crops.



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QUESTIONS? WANT TO SHARE YOUR STORY? A FRIENDLY CHAT?

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AgriCord is a global alliance of agri-agencies mandated by farmers' organizations. The mission of the AgriCord Alliance is to promote and help to build strong, democratic, inclusive and professional farmers' organisations and cooperatives and in that way to spur development.