

# CROSSROADS



Rice farmer at work in Indonesia - © Melissa Alamo

## *Our New CEO*

BY DANIEL SZCZEPANSKI

Our CEO hardly needs an introduction: Katja Vuori, formerly Programme Director, has been appointed effective immediately by AgriCord's Board of Directors to this role on March 28th 2024.

In the past, Katja has worked in numerous functions, including as a consultant in rural development, access to justice, human rights and education.

Her experience ranges from fundraising and donor relations, project development and management as well as communications and outreach.

She joined AgriCord in 2017 first as Programme Advisor, before becoming Programme Director.

While Katja performs her new function as CEO, in practice she will also continue to fulfill her previous responsibilities in charge of our Programme Management Unit (PMU).

We wish her the very best of luck with her role and trust in all our members' energies and good will to keep building up the alliance !



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# Adapt and Profit

BY DANIEL SZCZEPANSKI

External shocks can pose a significant challenge to the work of our FO partners. Faced with such arduous work, FOs must invest in their own resilience to withstand such shocks. AgriCord as an alliance plays a critical role in supporting our partners in doing so.

In the Philippines, the Coalition of Municipal Fisherfolks Association (COMFAS) in the Philippines (Zamboanga del Sur Province) – one of many FOs, supported by our agri-agency member AsiaDHRRRA in the context of the FO4Asia programme - . Previously, COMFAS' business model relied on providing high-value grouper to urban areas, restaurants and hotels. However, the COVID 19 crisis proved a huge test to this model, as the sudden and total collapse of the tourism sector implied that its focus had become completely redundant.

In the face of this challenge and the support of FO4A, COMFAS's rose to this challenge. Showing commercial agility, it shifted its production to meet more stable demand in local markets.



Seaweed drying - © AsiaDHRRRA

After exploring some options, COMFAS settled on seaweed and oyster production as well as oyster sauce processing.

In 2022, a new business plan was drafted accordingly to provide a roadmap for this transition. Securing additional financing was one the main priorities. In this vein, a marketing agreement was signed with AGROMAR, a well-established seaweed wholesaler. The agreement formed the basis for the consolidation and bulk marketing of seaweed from different FOs, including COMFAS. An institutional buyer was also secured: the Zamboanga del Sur Provincial Government requested COMFAS to supply around 50.5 tons of oysters for its annual Foundation Anniversary in February 2024. The advance fee of Ph 704,000 in late 2023 alone allowed COMFAS to expand its oyster plantation. Lastly, COMFAS managed to acquired public funds for machinery. The Department of Science and Technology granted PhP 980,000 (equivalent to 16,076.27€) for oyster processing equipment. Admittedly, the processing plant will only be constructed after the programme's end, as there have been delays in approving the plant's site. Nonetheless, this development did allow for FO4A funding to be reallocated to seaweed production.

In sum, COMFAS' story showed the importance of commercial adaptability and creativity in the face of external shocks.

These are key attributes in strengthening FOs' overall resilience.

## QUESTIONS?

PLEASE FEEL FREE TO GET IN TOUCH WITH OUR COLLEAGUE DANIEL OR DIRECTLY WITH ASIADHRRRA!

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## WITNESS TESTIMONIALS

*“These products allows us to improve our coffee production through loans specifically created for coffee farmers, at low interest rates and with advisory support throughout the production process. This allowed us to change our lives.”*

SAMUEL ALTAMIRANO  
PEDRAZA, MEMBER OF  
SAN FERNANDO

## QUESTIONS?

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# Supporting Access to Finance in Peru

BY DANIEL SZCZEPANSKI

Providing farmers with access to sustainable finance is a key aspect of AgriCord's work. Without it, farmers cannot continue with their daily work. In this sense, it is hardly surprising that our agri-agency members and FO partners are deeply engaged in crafting all sorts of financial products to ensure capital flow reaches those who need it most.

The loan products for coffee farmers, developed by COOPAC Los Andes in Peru in support of coffee cooperatives San Fernando and La Florida, are just such examples. These products are unique in that they were created in close cooperation with a credit cooperative (i.e. Los Andes), tailored to the needs for individual coffee farmers and in close cooperation with local FOs.

At first, a diagnostic survey was conducted to identify these products. The products were then piloted, rolled out, monitored and evaluated through a multi-level participatory methodology, facilitated by Cresol Agri-Agency. This involved 1) the farmers themselves, 2) technical experts at COOPAC Los Andes, and 3) a Project Management Unit, during which members of San Fernando, La Florida and Los Andes, which met periodically to evaluate the situation. Supporting promotional activities (e.g. through assemblies, trainings, workshops as well as radio programs and virtual platforms) were then organized to disseminate news of the products to the farmers.

In addition, a software program, called “System for the Economic and Financial Evaluation of Automated Loans and the Digitization of Loan Files” (SIEPA) was developed in 2022 to make cooperative and administrative services more efficient and responsive to the real needs of members and the cooperative itself. This allowed for timely and fast loans, in turn improving the quality of service and member satisfaction. Supplementary trainings in financial capacity building were also provided to hone farmers' skills to manage loans.

These loan products proved highly successful. 256 farmers benefited from loans, 103 were women. Loan amounts increased from 29,000 in the first semester of 2022 to 203,000 euro in the corresponding period in 2023. These micro-credits were used to finance supplementary agricultural activities, livestock activities (such as breeding livestock and fresh milk production), primary transformation or commercialization. Farmers could also save more: in 2023, savings amounted to over 210,000 euro.

In short, demand-driven financial products and close involvement between a local credit institution, FOs and our agri-agency member proved important factors in ensuring the success of this venture. Though there are many different approaches to access to finance, such insights are critical in understanding how the alliance can learn and improve the way farmers can acquire capital.



Some of the coffee products - © CRESOL Agri-Agency

# Highlights from Nepal

BY KATJA VUORI

As a partner in Forest and Farm Facility, with FAO, IIED and IUCN, AgriCord was delighted to co-organize [an International Conference on Agrobiodiversity](#), together with LiBird, MoFE, FECOFUN, Agroecology Coalition and IIFB. The event took place between 9-12 April in Pokhara, Nepal.

The conference gathered over 200 representatives from FOs and IPLC groups, governments, local and international civil society organizations and other stakeholders from 30+ countries from Asia, Africa, Latin America and Europe to discuss common challenges in maintaining agrobiodiversity and how to adapt their own models from lessons learned to benefit their members' livelihoods. Katja Vuori moderated a session on "How policies shape agroecology approaches that help to protect and manage agrobiodiversity?". AgriCord was also the coordinator for the session on "Seed and Farm Management Techniques and Innovations to Sustain Agrobiodiversity",



Participants hard at work - © Katja Vuori

during which Hamidou Traore, UNCPM, Mali presented learnings from their FO-RI project on improving farmers' vegetable seed production and management in Mali ([for more about FO-RI, consult our project factsheets](#)). PAFO provided a continental framing to the topic of seed production and management.

Some key learnings from our session: Diversity in seeds and seed systems are vital for sustaining agrobiodiversity. A pluralistic seed system approach that integrates and recognizes farmer-managed seed systems has the ability to meet the diverse seed demands of smallholders.

Despite the critical role of farmers' seed systems, global policies and programs are favorable towards formal seed systems that promote uniform varieties of a low genetic base.

Community seed banks are a proven farmer seed system model, which can be scaled up to improve smallholder access to seeds of diverse crop varieties in marginal and risk prone rural areas.

Nepal offers an example to learn about decentralized and relaxed seed policy provisions and practices, recognizing farmer-led breeding and seed registrations by FOs.

## Savoir-Faire & Links

One more interesting resources to share with you all!

The International Institute for Environment and Development has published [this interesting piece](#) on the role of forest and farm producer organisations (FFPOs) in mobilising internal finance.



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

CONTACT US!

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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.