Fostering Member Engagement for Resilient Cooperatives: Lessons from COOPSSUR

Prepared for the Cooperativa Agraria de Servicios Múltiples Sur Oriente (COOPSSUR) and Cáritas Madre de Dios by the University of Notre Dame's Regenerating Ecologies and Economies for Livelihoods (REEL) program

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Executive Summary

Madre de Dios, Peru, is a region of extraordinary biodiversity facing pressure from deforestation, illegal gold mining, and climate change. In response to these challenges, the Cooperativa Agraria de Servicios Múltiples Sur Oriente (COOPSSUR) was founded in 2018 with the support of Cáritas Madre de Dios to provide smallholder farmers with a sustainable, market-driven alternative through organic and conventional cacao and copoazú production. COOPSSUR's growth represents an important cultural and economic shift toward environmental stewardship and rural development in a historically extractive landscape.

This research was conducted by the University of Notre Dame's Regenerating Ecologies and Economies for Livelihoods (REEL) program as the first part of a multi-year partnership with Cáritas Madre de Dios. The project aimed to assess how COOPSSUR's internal organizational structures influence member motivation, cohesion, and engagement, and to identify strategies to strengthen governance, transparency, and operational resilience as the cooperative grows.

The research employed a qualitative ethnographic approach, incorporating five focus group discussions (FGDs) and nine key informant interviews (KIIs) with cooperative members across five agricultural zones. These were complemented by 21 member surveys and seven KIIs with COOPSSUR's strategic partners. A benchmarking analysis of successful cooperative models in Peru, Honduras, and Ethiopia was also conducted to inform practical recommendations.

The analysis revealed that while localized community ties within COOPSSUR remain strong, cooperative-wide communication is fragmented and member engagement with leadership is limited. Members expressed concerns about unequal access to resources, lack of transparency in decision-making, and unclear governance structures. Nevertheless, members recognized COOPSSUR's vital role in securing market access, providing technical training, and linking them to public funding opportunities. Strategic partners view COOPSSUR as a promising but capacity-constrained organization in need of stronger internal management and cohesion to fully realize its potential.

Key recommendations include (1) Defining clear engagement expectations and transparent benefit distribution criteria to strengthen fairness and accountability, (2)Improving internal communication through the launch of a monthly bulletin and consistent quarterly general assemblies paired with technical workshops, (3) Investing in technical support, post-harvest infrastructure, and management capacity to improve product quality and organizational resilience, (4) Expanding access to financial tools and working capital to support production cycles and reduce liquidity challenges.

Future research and technical assistance should focus on evaluating COOPSSUR's business model sustainability, refining pricing strategies for value-added products, modernizing quality control and disease management systems, and establishing robust internal monitoring and evaluation frameworks. Strengthening these areas will be critical to ensuring the cooperative's long-term viability and scaling its impact across Madre de Dios.

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I. INTRODUCTION

Introduction

Cooperatives play a vital role in empowering small-scale producers and advancing sustainable development by fostering collective action, market access, and resource sharing. In Peru, they have become key instruments for rural inclusion, supporting economic growth, social cohesion, and environmental stewardship[1].

COOPSSUR, located in Madre de Dios, Peru, was founded in 2018 with the support of Cáritas Madre de Dios. It is a cooperative focused on organic and agroforestry-based cacao and copoazú production that brings together 125 smallholder farmers to strengthen market access, improve production quality, and promote sustainable agricultural practices.

This report, prepared for COOPSSUR, examines how the cooperative's internal organization influences member motivation and commitment. As the cooperative grows and evaluates its performance, understanding these internal dynamics becomes critical to strengthening its ability to serve its members effectively. Member commitment will affect the cooperative's overall functionality, operational coherence, and long-term sustainability.

The research team employed an ethnographic research methodology, composed of focus group discussions (FGD), Key Informant Interviews (KII), and surveys conducted across COOPSSUR's main agricultural zones. The analysis followed a two-level thematic approach to examine both internal member experiences and external stakeholder perspectives on COOPSSUR's organizational dynamics.

[1] Funes, M. & Global Communities for OCDC. (2019). The Cooperative Context in Peru: A review of the historical, legal and regulatory environment.

II. KEY FINDINGS

How does COOPSSUR'S internal organization influence members motivation and commitment

Key Findings

Communication

While intra-community communication remains strong, communication across zones is inconsistent and often mediated by intermediaries, limiting broader cohesion within the cooperative.

Board of Directors: Governance and Engagement

Although COOPSSUR's governance structures are in place, members seek deeper involvement, transparency, and connection with leadership.

Transparency

Members raised concerns about unequal access to support, limited transparency of internal processes, and the need for more inclusive decision-making.

Member Benefits

Farmers join COOPSSUR primarily to access better markets, secure fairer prices, receive technical support, and qualify for financial and government programs.

Technical Support and Crop Management

Persistent challenges continue to hinder farmers' ability to maintain quality and fully capitalize on market opportunities. They emphasize the need for more technical support and resources to overcome these obstacles.

Post-harvest Collection

Unreliable cacao collection–ranging from missed pickups to long waits for the cooperative due to unprepared product–has led members to sell elsewhere, undermining cooperative loyalty and operational efficiency.

External Partner Perceptions

COOPSSUR benefits from strong external credibility, largely due to its association with Cáritas, but must strengthen its managerial capacity, internal coordination, and technical expertise to ensure long-term success.

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Key Findings

1. Communication

While intra-community communication remains strong, communication across zones is inconsistent and often mediated by intermediaries, limiting broader cohesion within the cooperative.

Communication within COOPSSUR reflects a cooperative that is socially cohesive in pockets but fragmented at scale. While members in certain zones like Lucerna and Santa Rosa maintain strong interpersonal ties and regularly communicate through WhatsApp and informal visits, these connections do not extend across the cooperative as a whole. The cooperative has not consistently created or strengthened communication across different zones, limiting the development of a shared cooperative identity. Many members report encountering others only during occasional meetings and often feel unseen by cooperative leadership. Contact with the board is limited, and most interactions take place through technicians and collectors. Members expressed a desire not just for more information but for meaningful engagement and recognition as part of COOPSSUR.

2. Board of Directors: Governance and Engagement

Although COOPSSUR's governance structures are in place, members seek deeper involvement, transparency, and connection with leadership.

The cooperative is governed by a Board of Directors elected by the General Assembly. Although formal elections were held in December 2024, the newly elected Board had not fully assumed their roles by mid-March 2025, and some board members lacked clarity on their responsibilities. Supporting committees—Electoral, Education, Supervisory, and Certification—were not mentioned by interviewees, suggesting limited visibility or engagement with these governance bodies. While COOPSSUR management advocates for participatory and transparent leadership, members' day-to-day experiences do not reflect this. Many reported minimal contact with the Board and a desire for consistent engagement and transparency. Some suggested that leadership's distance from the broader membership may contribute to low attendance at meetings and recommended more frequent gatherings to strengthen engagement. Zones with more established associative models, such as APROCCI and the Boca Pariamanu Women's Committee, may offer valuable lessons for improving governance practices and member involvement.

3. Transparency

Members raised concerns about unequal access to support, limited transparency of internal processes, and the need for more inclusive decision-making.

Members raised concerns about a lack of transparency in decision-making, resource allocation, and unclear expectations for participation. Many noted that tools, training, and technical assistance are distributed without transparent or consistent criteria, leading to frustration and, in some cases, disagreement among members. Several expressed dissatisfaction that some individuals receive benefits despite not delivering their harvest, while others who comply with expectations are still waiting for support. Although leadership is acknowledged, members reported limited understanding of how decisions are made or what policies govern cooperative operations. In some cases, even board members were unclear about their specific roles, highlighting broader gaps in role clarity and internal communication. Several participants shared that policies are not well communicated, and one member expressed concern about being expected to produce without clear guidance on how to qualify for cooperative assistance.

4. Member Benefits

Farmers join COOPSSUR primarily to access better markets, secure fairer prices, receive technical support, and qualify for financial and government programs.

COOPSSUR membership provides access to better markets, fairer prices, technical assistance, and eligibility for government programs. The cooperative has reduced members' reliance on intermediaries by securing more stable sales channels and improving bargaining power. Members benefit from workshops, organic farming guidance, and support in accessing public programs such as Agroideas and Procompite, as well as low-interest loans through Agrobanco. While many value these long-term benefits, some cited short-term challenges, including delayed payments during harvest season when liquidity is limited. This sometimes forces farmers to sell to third-party buyers. Despite these constraints, members remain hopeful that the cooperative model will continue to offer long-term stability and support. As one farmer noted, "We give and we receive," highlighting both financial and institutional benefits of participation.

5. Technical Support and Crop Management

Despite significant efforts to adopt organic practices and improve production, persistent challenges continue to hinder farmers' ability to maintain quality and fully capitalize on market opportunities. They emphasize the need for more technical support and resources to overcome these obstacles.

Members recognize the value of training provided by COOPSSUR, particularly in organic farming and post-harvest practices. However, persistent challenges such as plant diseases (Witches' Broom, Monilia, Black Rot) and climate variability continue to affect yields and production cycles. Farmers expressed a need for more regular and specialized support. Irregular rainfall and prolonged droughts have disrupted planting schedules and increased crop stress, prompting calls for irrigation systems and more adaptive strategies. While members are committed to organic farming, many stated that the added effort and cost are not yet matched by the prices they receive, leading some to maintain conventional practices. Limited access to infrastructure like dryers and storage areas further restricts their ability to meet quality standards. Sustained investment in infrastructure, technical support, and pricing transparency is essential to strengthen farmers' commitment to organic production and ensure meaningful economic returns from certification.

6. Post-harvest Collection

Unreliable cacao collection–ranging from missed pickups to long waits for the cooperative due to unprepared product–has led members to sell elsewhere, undermining cooperative loyalty and operational efficiency.

Members expressed dissatisfaction with COOPSSUR's cacao collection system. In several zones, farmers reported that collection requests often go unanswered, forcing them to sell to outside buyers and weakening their commitment to the cooperative. In contrast, zones like Boca Pariamanu praised consistent collection, which encouraged members to deliver their full harvest. Collectors themselves also face inefficiencies, as members sometimes request pickups before their cacao is ready, leading to delays and wasted effort. Improving both logistical coordination and communication between members and collectors is essential to strengthen operational performance and rebuild loyalty among farmers.

7. External Partner Perceptions

COOPSSUR benefits from strong external credibility, largely due to its association with Cáritas, but must strengthen its managerial capacity, internal coordination, and technical expertise to ensure long-term success.

External stakeholders such as Agrobanco and Agroideas generally view COOPSSUR as a professional and committed organization, recognizing its reliability, strong documentation practices, and active role in market and regional development. Much of its reputation is strengthened by its association with Cáritas, which holds substantial credibility in the region. However, partners also noted internal limitations that could hinder long-term progress, including weak coordination, limited oversight, and managerial gaps. Despite available funding, the cooperative has struggled to hire technical staff. Agroideas recommended hiring dedicated managerial support to strengthen operations. Addressing these internal challenges will be essential to maintaining external trust and supporting COOPSSUR's continued growth.

III. RECOMMENDATIONS

How does COOPSSUR'S internal organization influence members motivation and commitment

Recommendations

1. Define "Engagement" in the Cooperative Context

Defining what engagement means (with clear actions and metrics) to build trust, clarify expectations, and ensure fair participation in the cooperative.

2. Set expectations and responsibilities for everyone

Create a Mutual Expectations Chart, co-designed with members, clearly communicated, and regularly updated, to strengthen trust and ensure fair participation.

3. Establish clear and public criteria for the distribution of benefits and tools

Define and share clear criteria for the distribution of benefits, based on fair and transparent standards, and ensure everyone knows, understands, and sees them applied equally.

4. Informative Bulletin

A consistent, cooperative-wide bulletin is essential to bridge communication gaps and build a stronger sense of unity across zones.

5. Quarterly General Assembly Meetings

Quarterly general assemblies are critical to restoring trust, fostering inclusion, and re-centering members in the cooperative's decision-making process.

Recommendations

1. Transparency

Concerns about fairness and a lack of clarity in decision-making emerged across COOPSSUR's zones. Many members expressed dissatisfaction over the perceived inconsistency in how support, such as tools, training, or project benefits, is distributed. The sense of unfairness is further reinforced by limited visibility into how decisions are made, who makes them, and according to what criteria. Without clear communication, newer and younger members, in particular, reported feeling disconnected from the cooperative and unsure of their responsibilities and rights. To address these issues and build a culture of trust and accountability, we propose three related recommendations:

Recommendation 1: Define "Engagement" in the Cooperative Context

Defining what engagement means (with clear actions and metrics) to build trust, clarify expectations, and ensure fair participation in the cooperative.

COOPSSUR should work with members to co-create a clear definition of what active engagement means in the cooperative. This definition might include activities such as attending assemblies, delivering harvests consistently, participating in training, and contributing to collective decisions. Using these agreed-upon activities, the cooperative can develop simple participation metrics to help clarify expectations and support eligibility for cooperative benefits. Transparent engagement criteria will strengthen mutual understanding and support a more inclusive, trust-based culture.

Example of metrics:

Category	Examples	What it reflects
Participation	Attending general assemblies, workshops, joining working groups, etc.	Shows commitment and shared governance. Members' presence helps shape decisions and collective direction.
Production	Delivering product on time and in the agreed quantity/quality	Ensures cooperative performance and trust, and reliable delivery supports everyone's success.
Communication	Responding to cooperative messages, reading announcements	Keeps members informed and involved. Open communication builds transparency and inclusion.
Learning & Training	Attending workshops, applying new practices	Supports innovation and sustainability. Members' learning strengthens the cooperative's future.
Solidarity	Helping other members, respecting community agreements	Reinforces cooperative values. Mutual support creates a stronger and more united cooperative.

Recommendation 2: Set expectations and responsibilities for everyone.

Create a Mutual Expectations Chart, co-designed with members, clearly communicated, and regularly updated, to strengthen trust and ensure fair participation.

Building on the definition of engagement, COOPSSUR should create a “Mutual Expectations Chart” that outlines what members can expect from the cooperative and what the cooperative expects from its members. Co-designed with member input, the chart should be distributed in accessible formats during assemblies, workshops, and via WhatsApp. This living document should be reviewed annually, providing a foundation for shared responsibility, fairness, and ongoing dialogue.

Example of the chart:

What the Cooperative Expects from Members	What Members Expect from the Cooperative
Deliver the product on time and in good condition*	Clear and timely communication of policies and decisions
Attend general assemblies and training sessions	Fair access to benefits and tools based on clear criteria

**Define what good condition means.*

Recommendation 3: Establish clear and public criteria for the distribution of benefits and tools.

Define and share clear criteria for the distribution of benefits, based on fair and transparent standards, and ensure everyone knows, understands, and sees them applied equally.

The cooperative should develop and communicate clear, fair, and practical criteria for how tools, training, and support are allocated. These criteria should be based on consistent and observable indicators such as participation, delivery history, or training attendance, and must be applied equally across all zones. This will help prevent misunderstandings, reduce internal tension, and enhance trust. Written in simple language and distributed through all available channels, these guidelines should be periodically reviewed to ensure continued relevance and fairness.

2. Communication

To address fragmentation and strengthen cooperative-wide cohesion, COOPSSUR must adopt a structured communication strategy that fosters connection across zones and builds a shared sense of identity among its members. One of the most significant barriers to collective identity and member engagement is fragmented communication. While local relationships remain strong within specific zones, cooperative-wide communication is inconsistent, overly reliant on intermediaries, and lacking in regularity. Many members reported limited contact with leadership, and several had never met or heard from the recently elected board. To foster stronger connections and a more unified cooperative identity, COOPSSUR should invest in two complementary actions:

Recommendation 4: Informative Bulletin

A consistent, cooperative-wide bulletin is essential to bridge communication gaps and build a stronger sense of unity across zones.

A structured monthly bulletin, distributed via WhatsApp, should provide members with consistent updates on key cooperative activities. This one-page document can include information such as tool distribution, technical support provided, collection volumes by zone, updates on training and programs, reminders of upcoming events, and messages from leadership. Highlighting member achievements or milestones can further strengthen inclusion and cohesion.

This bulletin not only supports transparency but also reinforces a sense of belonging. It will reduce the cooperative's reliance on technicians and collectors as informal messengers and create a direct link between leadership and the broader membership. We recommend designating an internal staff member, such as the administrative bookkeeper, to compile field updates and coordinate the monthly bulletin with support from technicians and zone representatives.

To enhance responsiveness, the bulletin should be accompanied by a short "pulse check" survey (2–3 questions) to collect real-time feedback on communication, trust, and engagement. Over time, these surveys can help leadership adapt practices and monitor progress on transparency and member satisfaction.

Recommendation 5: Quarterly General Assembly Meetings

Quarterly general assemblies are critical to restoring trust, fostering inclusion, and re-centering members in the cooperative's decision-making process.

General assemblies are central to cooperative governance, yet by mid-March 2025, no assembly had taken place since the December 2024 board election. This absence of direct engagement contributed to feelings of disconnection among members across multiple zones. To restore regular dialogue and improve trust in leadership, COOPSSUR should institutionalize quarterly general assemblies, with dates shared well in advance and integrated into the bulletin.

To increase participation, particularly given the time and income members must sacrifice to attend, assemblies should be paired with practical technical workshops and a shared meal. Members consistently ranked training as one of the most valued cooperative services, especially in organic practices, crop disease management, and post-harvest quality control. By offering tangible value at these gatherings, COOPSSUR can incentivize participation and reinforce the relevance of cooperative life.

In addition to technical content, these assemblies should include structured space for dialogue between members and leadership. Dedicated time should be set aside for open feedback, with attention to ensuring that newer, younger, and quieter members have opportunities to speak. Facilitators should reflect the cooperative's diversity and rotate across zones to promote inclusive engagement. When possible, inviting external guests, such as public agency representatives or other cooperatives, can further enrich learning and foster new connections.

IV. OPPORTUNITIES FOR GROWTH

Opportunities for Growth

The following strategic opportunities represent COOPSSUR's envisioned future state and are intended to guide its long-term growth, sustainability, and impact. By strengthening internal systems, investing in member capacity, and fostering strategic partnerships, COOPSSUR can build a more resilient organization, improve operational efficiency, and better meet the evolving needs of its members. These forward-looking recommendations draw on feedback from partner organizations, cooperative members, and proven practices from successful cooperative models.

1. Improve product quality

To enhance the quality of its products, COOPSSUR should focus on improving post-harvest handling processes, as the cooperative cannot directly control the quality of products during the harvest itself. Establishing standardized procedures to ensure consistent product quality, will lead to higher marketability and better pricing for members.

Key strategies for improving product quality include:

- **Centralizing post-harvest handling:** Standardize post-harvest processes to ensure consistency and quality control at every stage of handling.
- **Implementing a tiered pricing system:** Introduce a tiered pricing structure where products of higher quality are rewarded with premium pricing, while lower-quality products (*merma*) are either rejected or paid at a lower price.
- **Leverage upcoming funding:** Use grants and partnerships with CITE and DER to modernize production infrastructure, improve quality control, and reduce operational costs.
- **Quality-based incentives:** Develop incentives that reward members for adhering to best practices in post-harvest handling, ensuring that products meet quality standards for both local and international markets.
- **Introduce peer-to-peer learning models:** Encourage members with strong post-harvest practices to serve as peer educators, fostering a culture of continuous improvement and knowledge-sharing across zones.

2. Strengthen disease management protocols

COOPSSUR should implement comprehensive training programs in Integrated Phytosanitary Control for its members and establish localized early warning systems to monitor and respond promptly to pest and disease outbreaks.

To strengthen this effort, the cooperative can consider the following actions:

- **Conduct training workshops:** Organize regular training sessions for cooperative members focusing on pest identification, monitoring techniques, and sustainable control methods.
- **Develop early warning protocols:** Establish a community-based surveillance system to monitor pest populations and disease symptoms, enabling rapid response to emerging threats.
- **Collaborate with agricultural experts:** Partner with local agricultural extension services and research institutions to stay updated on pest management innovations and receive technical support.

3. Invest in Internal Capacity and Capability Development

Given the recruitment challenges in the region, COOPSSUR should prioritize developing the skills and leadership potential of its existing members and staff. By focusing on internal training, mentorship, and upskilling in areas such as quality control, cooperative governance, and operational management, the cooperative can build a stronger internal pipeline. This approach not only enhances operational effectiveness and institutional resilience but also creates pathways for member advancement and long-term sustainability.

To support this capacity-building, key steps include:

- **Define key roles and competencies**: Develop clear job descriptions outlining the technical and managerial skills required for positions in agronomy, quality control, and cooperative governance.
- **Provide ongoing training:** Invest in continuous professional development programs for hired managers and technical staff to ensure they remain current with best practices and innovations.
- **Create performance-based incentives:** Tie contract bonuses for managers and technical staff to measurable outcomes such as quality improvements, member satisfaction, or implementation benchmarks.
- **Leverage Agroideas and other external funding**: Use existing funds to support technician hiring, training, and operational support. This may include assigning a dedicated operations or strategy manager to lead growth initiatives, coordinate implementation across zones, and drive internal alignment.

4. Establish clear performance benchmarks and oversight mechanisms

Develop and implement standardized performance indicators alongside regular internal evaluations to monitor progress and strengthen accountability. Research shows that cooperatives with strong governance structures and internal accountability experience greater member satisfaction and success (Cornforth, 2004).

To strengthen governance and oversight, recommended actions include:

- **Develop standardized performance indicators**: Define key performance indicators (KPIs) for production quality, member participation, financial health, and service delivery.
- **Implement regular internal evaluations:** Set up quarterly or biannual reviews using agreed benchmarks to assess progress and identify areas for improvement.
- **Digitize Monitoring Systems:** Gradually introduce digital tools to streamline data collection, reduce errors, and create accessible dashboards for leadership review.
- **Train leadership and staff in monitoring and evaluation:** Build capacity among Board members and key staff in monitoring and evaluation techniques, including data collection and reporting.
- **Create transparent feedback mechanisms:** Institutionalize systems such as member assemblies, feedback surveys, or listening sessions to capture input and reflect it in governance decisions.
- **Enhance Board's visibility:** Through more frequent meetings, home visits, and information sharing, the Board's engagement can help bridge gaps in trust and understanding. COOPSSUR can also learn from more participatory models in the region, such as APROCCI or Boca Pariamanu's Women's Committee, and adapt their practices to its context.

5. Enhance access to working capital and financial tools

Expanding access to financial tools and working capital will empower COOPSSUR members and improve the cooperative's long-term sustainability. In collaboration with partners, COOPSSUR could explore:

- **Expand usage of available funds**: Encourage broader awareness and participation in grant and credit programs already available through partner organizations.
- **Develop a revolving line of credit**: Design a fund that can provide timely support for production cycles, emergencies, or quality improvements, with the potential to be replenished through cooperative revenues.
- **Offer financial literacy programs:** Provide training to members on the benefits of becoming banked, budgeting, managing seasonal income, and understanding loan conditions, enabling more informed participation in cooperative financial tools.

V. CONCLUSION

Conclusion

COOPSSUR stands at a pivotal moment in its development. As it continues to grow and gain external credibility, its long-term success will depend on strengthening internal structures that promote trust, transparency, and active member engagement. The findings from this study show a strong commitment among members to the cooperative's mission and highlight opportunities to enhance governance, communication, and service delivery in ways that further support that commitment.

To move forward, COOPSSUR must embrace a more inclusive and participatory approach, one that clearly defines expectations, communicates decisions openly, and ensures all members feel seen and valued. By reinforcing internal cohesion and building a shared sense of ownership, the cooperative can not only improve its operational efficiency but also empower its members to collectively shape a more resilient and sustainable future.

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Appendix 1: Research Design

This study was undertaken by the University of Notre Dame's REEL Regenerating Ecologies and Economies for Livelihoods (REEL) Class in collaboration with Cáritas Madre de Dios to:

I. Determine how the cooperative's internal structure impacts social cohesion among members
II. Assess the current levels of motivation and commitment among cooperative members.

To achieve the objectives listed above, the report aims to answer the following question:

> *How does the internal organization of the cooperative influence members' motivation and commitment?*

To answer this question, the team adopted an ethnographic research methodology composed of focus group discussions (FGD), Key Informant Interviews (KII), and surveys. The team conducted five FGDs in the Madre de Dios region. The FGD's spanned four of the five agricultural zones and native communities where COOPSSUR has had presence for the last couple of years by recruiting producers for cacao; Mavila, Alegría, Lucerna, Santa Rosa, and Las Piedras (Boca Pariamanu community). Due to time constraints, we did not conduct a FGD in the fifth region, El Progreso.

Additionally, the team carried out nine key informant interviews (KIIs) with active cooperative members—two in Mavila, Lucerna, Santa Rosa, and El Progreso, and one in Las Piedras. The team administered 21 surveys to cooperative members who participated in the focus group discussions to gather demographic and standardized data on their perceptions of governance, economic benefits, and levels of engagement within COOPSSUR. These surveys were conducted in the following zones: Alegria (4), Lucerna (4), Mavila (8), Santa Rosa (3), and El Progreso (2).

The team also conducted seven KIIs at Puerto Maldonado with strategic partners of the cooperative, as well as two interviews with technical and administrative staff from Cáritas and COOPSSUR, both based in Puerto Maldonado. This qualitative approach was complemented by a benchmark analysis to identify best practices in cooperative models, examine cooperative organizational structures, market strategies, and social initiatives, and extract practical lessons that could strengthen COOPSSUR.

1.1 Qualitative Data Sources

To gather qualitative data, the team prioritized agricultural zones where COOPSSUR maintains an active presence and where Cáritas Madre de Dios has conducted activities supporting the organization. The selected areas—Mavila, Alegría, Lucerna, Santa Rosa, and El Progreso—were chosen based on their relevance to the cooperative's current operations, diversity in levels of member engagement, and accessibility for fieldwork. Particular attention

was given to areas with Indigenous participation, such as Boca Pariamanu in Las Piedras. Table 1 summarizes the focus group discussions, key informant interviews, and surveys conducted by location and stakeholder type. Interviews with strategic partners and technical staff from Cáritas and COOPSSUR, based in Puerto Maldonado are detailed in Table 2.

Table 1. Agricultural zones sampled for data collection in Madre de Dios, Peru

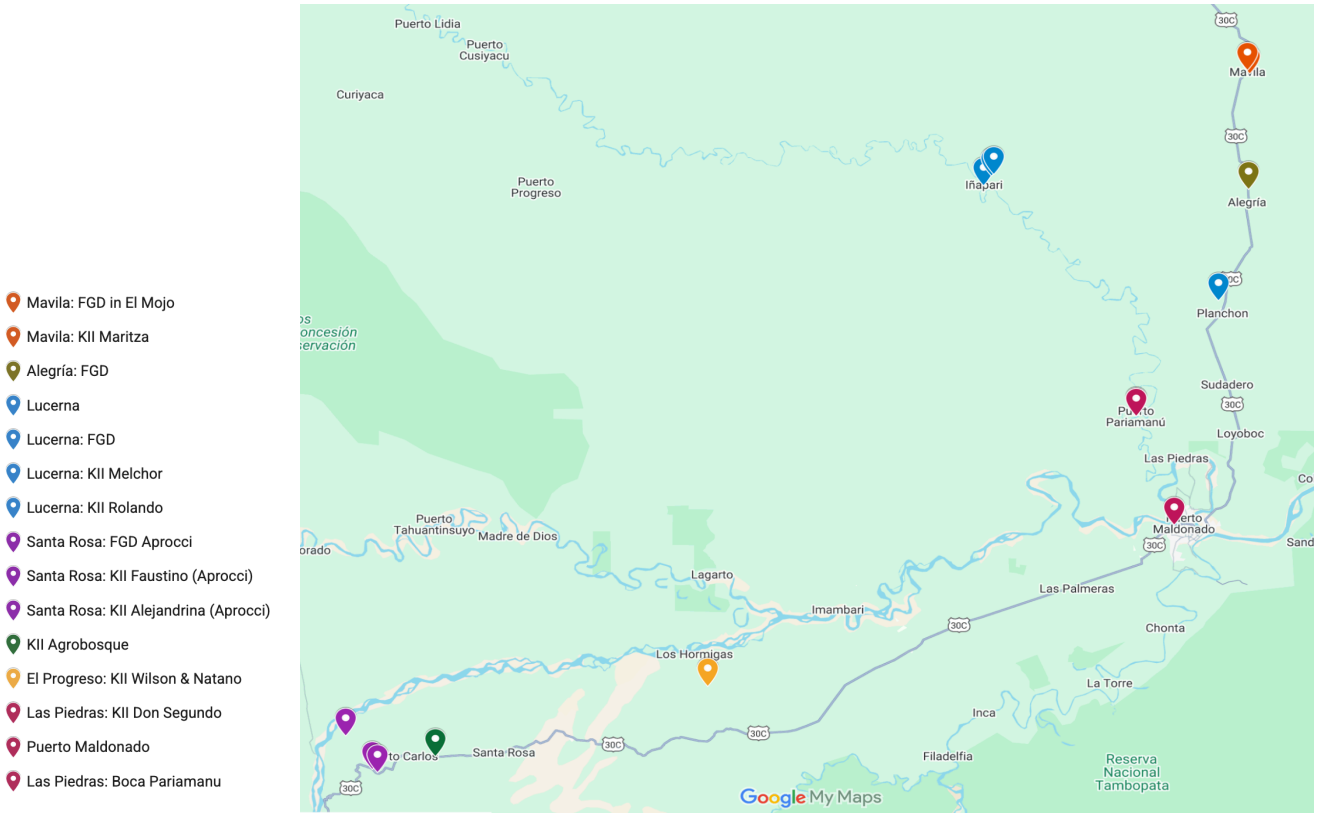
Region	Agricultural Zone	Data collected	Date
MDD	Mavila	1 FGD, 2 KII, 8 Surveys	**Mar 10, 2025**
MDD	Alegría	1 FGD*, 4 Surveys	**Mar 10, 2025**
MDD	Lucerna	1 FGD, 2 KII, 4 Surveys	**Mar 11, 2025**
MDD	Santa Rosa	1 FGD, 2 KII, 3 Surveys	**Mar 12, 2025**
MDD	El Progreso	1 FGD, 2 KII, 2 Surveys	**Mar 12, 2025**
MDD	Las Piedras	1 FGD & 1 KII**	**Mar 13, 2025**

**No KII due to time constraints as a result of road and weather conditions*
*** No Survey due to time constraints as a result of road and weather conditions*

Table 2. Cáritas, Coopssur, and strategic partners KIIs in Madre de Dios, Peru

Region	Location	Interviewee	Data collected	Date
MDD	Virtual	Cáritas Staff 1	1 KII	Apr 3, 2025
MDD	Virtual	Coopssur Staff 1	1 KII	Apr 3, 2025
MDD	Pt. Maldonado	Agrobanco	1 KII	Mar 14, 2025
MDD	Pt. Maldonado	Agroideas	1 KII	Mar 14, 2025
MDD	Pt. Maldonado	CITE	1 KII	Mar 14, 2025
MDD	Pt. Maldonado	Municipality of Puerto Maldonado-Environmental Agency	1 KII	Mar 14, 2025
MDD	Pt. Maldonado	Dirección Regional de Agricultura (DRA)	1 KII	Mar 14, 2025
MDD	Pt. Maldonado	Dinamización del Ecosistema Regional (DER)	1 KII	Mar 14, 2025
MDD	Pt. Maldonado	Agrobosque	1 KII	Mar 14, 2025

FGD & KII Locations



The locations where the focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) were conducted are geolocated in the interactive map below. This resource illustrates the territorial distribution of field activities and supports a better understanding of the local context of each participating community:

https://www.google.com/maps/d/viewer?mid=1vmMTEtQbqxP0R8gNJHC3O-U7mrdm49Q&hl=en&usp=sharing

1.2 Qualitative Data Collection and Analysis

1.2.1 Data collection

Qualitative data was collected in Madre de Dios between March 8 and March 16, 2025. The research team gathered data through five focus group discussions (FGDs) and nine key informant interviews (KIIs) with active members of COOPSSUR across the zones of Mavila, Alegría, Lucerna, Santa Rosa, El Progreso, and Las Piedras. Participants included long-standing members, new affiliates, and individuals holding positions on the cooperative's board. The team relied on Cáritas MDD to identify the appropriate members to be interviewed. Participant selection was conducted collaboratively with Caritas Madre de Dios, which leveraged its long-standing relationships and trust with the communities to propose an initial list of participants, further refined by the research team according to the study's objectives.

Four members of the research team facilitated the FGDs and KIIs directly in the field, using the standardized instruments. Instrument implementation was conducted in Spanish to support main ideas in native language of participants. Data collection was carried out in coordination with COOPSSUR's management and Cáritas Madre de Dios, who also supported the logistical arrangements and community outreach. FGDs took place in locally accessible venues provided by community members and allies, such as homes, restaurants, and community centers. KIIs with technical and administrative staff from Caritas and COOPSSUR were conducted virtually after the fieldwork period, also in Spanish.

All FGDs and interviews were conducted in accordance with ethical research practices that were aligned with IRB guidelines. Verbal informed consent was obtained from each participant prior to any note-taking or audio recording. To ensure confidentiality, participants' responses were anonymized and used solely for analytical purposes. While handwritten notes were taken in all sessions, KIIs were also audio-recorded—with prior consent—to ensure accuracy. Participants were not identified by name in the recordings, which were used exclusively for internal analysis. The team adapted the wording of the questions according to the audience to engage with them and adapt to their terminology. While most data collection took place in person, virtual interviews were conducted with staff members due to logistical constraints.

1.2.2 Data Analysis

To prepare the data for analysis, all handwritten notes and audio recordings from FGDs and KIIs were transcribed and translated into English. The research team carried out transcriptions, and the resulting documents were organized using Excel to facilitate thematic classification and coding.

The qualitative data was analyzed through a two-level analysis process designed to capture internal- with members (first level) and external- with partners (second level) perspectives on

COOPSSUR's performance and organizational dynamics. This approach enabled a layered understanding of the cooperative by first focusing on the voices of its members and then incorporating the observations of strategic partners and institutional actors. The findings were compared with survey data to reinforce and contextualize key patterns.

The team members that conducted the various instruments in the field implemented a cross-review of coding and thematic groupings to ensure data reliability. This collaborative validation process helped strengthen the consistency and accuracy of the analysis across interviews and locations.

1.2.2.1 First-level Analysis: Member Perspectives

In the first level of analysis, transcripts from focus group discussions (FGDs) and key informant interviews (KIIs) with cooperative members were manually reviewed and thematically coded. For KIIs, the data was thematically organized under the following categories: (1) Introduction and General Perception of the Cooperative, (2) Challenges and Opportunities, (3) Current Initiatives and Impact, and (4) Other Insights. For FGDs, the themes included (1) Introduction and Perception of the Cooperative, (2) Challenges, (3) Opportunities, (4) Current Initiatives and Impact, (5) Member Benefits and Engagement, (6) Future Needs, and (7) Other. An initial codebook was developed inductively to reflect recurring themes emerging directly from participants' testimonies. The analysis focused on three main categories: Production, Cohesion, and Motivation.

This analysis stage allowed the research team to capture the lived experiences of cooperative members and identify both barriers and enablers for deeper engagement in the cooperative. The data revealed variations across communities in terms of perceived leadership, the distribution of benefits,and participation levels.

The team applied a mixed coding strategy that combined inductive and deductive approaches. An initial codebook was developed based on the research questions and fieldwork objectives and was refined through an iterative review of the transcripts. A binary coding system (0–1) was applied to each interview and focus group transcript to identify the presence or absence of specific variables.

The thematic and comparative analysis focused on identifying recurring patterns, emerging themes, and variations across different zones. Each category was analyzed in relation to a set of predefined sub-variables:

- Production-related variables: crop diseases, drought, cold weather (freeze), access to dryers, tools, labor intensity, staff availability, on-site technical assistance, transportation, storage capacity, product quality and volume.

- Cohesion-related variables: perceptions of fairness and inequality, awareness of the cooperative model, transparency, sense of belonging, workload (as a barrier to participation), and previous experiences in organized groups.
- Motivation-related variables: fair and stable pricing, fixed buyers, access to government programs, financing, tools, and training opportunities.

1.2.2.2 Second-level Analysis: External and Comparative Insights

The second stage focused on the analysis of KIIs with external stakeholders, including technical and administrative staff from Cáritas and COOPSSUR, as well as strategic partners. These interviews were reviewed separately to identify broader institutional and strategic perspectives. Data was coded and grouped into three overarching categories:

- Perceptions of COOPSSUR from external actors, focusing on reputation, organizational capacity, and alignment with development goals.
- Challenges identified by partners, including structural limitations, leadership gaps, or operational inefficiencies.
- Opportunities for growth, such as potential partnerships, funding sources, and long-term sustainability strategies.

This external lens provided a complementary viewpoint to the internal assessments, helping to validate some member concerns while also identifying additional areas for improvement that were not always visible from within the organization.

The second stage was supported by a descriptive analysis of survey data collected from cooperative members. After translating- with AI tools and the team checking the translations for accuracy- the results, these were analyzed using basic descriptive statistics to identify trends related to communication practices, leadership perception, awareness of cooperative policies, and reported benefits. These findings were used to contextualize and reinforce the results obtained from the other instruments.

Appendix 2: Successful Cooperative Model Case Studies

2.1 Introduction

A cooperative is an autonomous association of persons who voluntarily unite to meet their shared economic, social, and cultural needs through a jointly owned and democratically controlled enterprise. Through their unique structure and principles, agricultural cooperatives play a significant role in empowering small-scale producers and promoting sustainable development. They serve a dual function of contributing to both social and economic development.

This benchmarking aims to identify best practices in cooperative models, analyze their organizational structures, market strategies, and social initiatives, and extract practical lessons that may strengthen Coopssur. By comparing different cooperative models, we aim to provide strategic recommendations grounded in evidence and best practices.

Cooperatives can generally be categorized into three primary organizational models: traditional cooperatives, cooperatives supported by external capital entities, and federations of cooperatives.

- **Traditional cooperatives** are fully owned, financed, and governed by their members, emphasizing democratic decision-making, collective ownership, and autonomy.
- **Externally supported cooperatives** also maintain member ownership but access financial resources and technical assistance from external entities such as NGOs, donors, or impact investors, which can enhance investment capacity and economic resilience, though often requiring careful management to preserve member control.[2]
- **Federations of cooperatives** represent a third model, where individual cooperatives unite to form an umbrella organization, allowing them to aggregate products, strengthen bargaining power, and coordinate services while retaining local-level autonomy within each member cooperative.

[2] Chaddad, F. R., & Cook, M. L. (2004). Understanding new cooperative models: An ownership–control rights typology. Applied Economic Perspectives and Policy, 26(3), 348–360. https://doi.org/10.1111/j.1467-9353.2004.00184.x

Organizational Models of Cooperatives

Category	Traditional Cooperatives	Externally Supported Cooperatives	Federations of Cooperatives
Definition	Member-owned, member-financed, democratically controlled cooperative	Member-owned cooperative supported financially or technically by external entities (NGOs, donors, impact investors)	A cooperative whose members are other cooperatives (zone or local cooperatives); umbrella organization
Capital Source	Internal: members shares and retained earnings	Internal plus external: grants, loans, or impact investments	Contributions from member cooperatives, sometimes external project funding
Governance Structure	One-member-one-vote system; full member control	Member governance with oversight or influence from external partners	Federated governance: each member cooperative is represented; an umbrella board of directors is elected by cooperatives
Pros	- Strong member loyalty - High alignment with member needs - Full autonomy	- Access to larger financial resources - Faster scaling and investment - Technical and marketing expertise	- Strong collective bargaining power - Economies of scale - Division of tasks: local cooperatives focus on production; federation handles marketing, advocacy
Cons	- Limited capital access- Slower decision-making- Vulnerability to financial shocks	- Risk of external control - Dependency on external funding - Mission drift is possible	- Complex governance and coordination - Risk of weak local leadership - Potential bureaucratic inefficiency if not well-structured
Growth Potential	Gradual, member-driven expansion	Accelerated with external financing	Expanded reach through the aggregation of multiple cooperatives
Sustainability Risk	Financial fragility occurs if member capital is weak	Long-term dependency on donors or investors	Risk of fragmentation if local cooperatives lose engagement or loyalty
Examples		Early-stage Manduvira Cooperative (Paraguay) with NGO support	Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union (Ethiopia)

2.2 Lessons learned from other cooperatives

Agricultural cooperatives must succeed both as businesses and as member-serving organizations. Their success depends on strong financial performance and member satisfaction[3]. Failure can result from poor economic performance or weak member engagement. This section examines three cooperatives, Cooperativa Agraria Yakatheo del Amazonas, Café Orgánico Marcala S.A. (COMSA), and Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union (OCFCU), selected for their different development stages and relevance to Coopssur.

Cooperativa Agraria Yakatheo del Amazonas

Founded in 2021, Cooperativa Agraria Yakatheo del Amazonas (Coopayakat) is a traditional producer cooperative with over 690 members from 25 Awajún indigenous communities and 3 mestizo neighborhoods in the Imaza district of Peru's Amazonas region. It follows a democratic model with a general assembly, a board of directors, and specialized committees. Focused on the sustainable cultivation of native cacao and bananas, the cooperative integrates indigenous knowledge with environmentally responsible farming practices. Members receive technical assistance, training, and credit through AgroPerú and Agrobanco, supporting their commitment to organic production. Cacao is centrally collected at community points and transported to a wet processing facility in Monte de los Olivos for fermentation and drying before delivery to clients.

While Coopayakat continues to face challenges such as limited financial resources, market access barriers, and the need for ongoing capacity building, it has made significant progress. Strategic partnerships with organizations like Helvetas Perú and the Binational Development Plan have facilitated training, organic certification, and logistics upgrades—including the acquisition of a transport truck. Public engagement through events like native cacao fairs has also raised the cooperative's profile. Coopayakat's experience highlights the importance of combining grassroots participation with targeted external support to overcome early-stage obstacles and build a more stable and market-responsive organization.

Café Orgánico Marcala S.A. (COMSA)

The Café Orgánico Marcala S.A. (COMSA), based in Marcala, Honduras, was established in 2001 by a group of smallholder coffee farmers seeking better prices and sustainable practices. Today, it has over 1,500 members, about a quarter of whom are women, and is renowned for its organic, Fair Trade, and specialty coffees grown at high altitudes. COMSA is governed democratically, with a board elected from among its members and a participatory structure that includes regular assemblies and specialized committees. The cooperative's La Fortaleza experimental farm serves as a hub for training and innovation, where members and visitors learn about organic techniques and agroecological principles.

COMSA's market strategy is built on certifications such as Denomination of Origin Marcala and a focus on specialty coffee exports to North America, Europe, and Asia. The cooperative has

[3] Mann, S., & Stoinescu, A. (2021). Exploring draheim's three dimensions of success in cooperative organizations—the case of collective alpine summer farms.

developed value-added products and established strong relationships with ethical buyers, securing premium prices for its members. Social and environmental initiatives are central to COMSA's mission: it runs extensive training programs, supports women and youth leadership, and invests in reforestation, water conservation, and carbon-neutral production. COMSA's achievements include international awards for coffee quality, the restoration of thousands of acres through agroforestry, and the creation of educational and health infrastructure funded by Fair Trade premiums.

Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union (OCFCU)

The Oromia Coffee Farmers Cooperative Union (OCFCU) was founded in 1999 in Ethiopia's Oromia region and now represents over 250,000 smallholder farmers through a federation of more than 400 primary cooperatives. OCFCU is a second-tier cooperative, with a general assembly of elected representatives from each member co-op and a board that oversees union-wide operations. This structure allows OCFCU to coordinate large-scale activities, such as direct exports and infrastructure investments, while maintaining democratic accountability and transparency through regular audits and member participation.

OCFCU's market strategy focuses on the direct export of organic, Fair Trade, and Rainforest Alliance-certified Arabica coffee, bypassing intermediaries to maximize returns for members. The union has invested in value addition, including a state-of-the-art roasting plant, and has diversified into domestic and international packaged coffee markets. Socially, OCFCU uses Fair Trade premiums to build schools, water stations, and clinics, while environmentally, it promotes sustainable farming, distributes clean cookstoves, and supports reforestation. OCFCU has been recognized as Ethiopia's largest organic coffee exporter, significantly increasing member incomes and earning international recognition for its sustainability and climate resilience programs.

2.3 Common Strengths and Weaknesses by Cooperative Type

Cooperative Type	Common Strengths	Common Weaknesses
Traditional Cooperative (e.g., Coopayakat, Peru)	- Strong community identity - High local participation and ownership - Grassroots leadership and trust - Flexibility to adapt to local context	- Limited access to financing - Weak infrastructure - Product and market dependency - Low technical and managerial capacity
Externally Supported Cooperative (e.g., COMSA, Honduras)	- Strong technical assistance and capacity building - Access to external funding and expertise - Advanced training and innovation programs - Integrated social and environmental initiatives	- Risk of donor dependency - Sustainability challenges post-support - Risk of limited local ownership if not well-balanced - External influence on governance decisions
Federation of Cooperatives (e.g., OCFCU, Ethiopia)	- Economies of scale - Strong export market access - Centralized services and infrastructure - Broad social and environmental impact	- Complex coordination and governance - Risk of disconnect between federation and base-level members - Potential inequities across member co-ops - Higher administrative burden

2.4 Conclusion

Cooperatives have proven to be powerful vehicles for empowering producers, improving livelihoods, and fostering sustainable development. While each model offers unique strengths, such as community cohesion, access to external resources, or economies of scale, they also face challenges like resource limitations, governance complexity, or the risk of disconnect between members and leadership. The case studies of COMSA, OCFCU, and Coopayakat illustrate that success is rooted in strong member participation, transparent governance, and a commitment to social, economic, and environmental responsibility. For COOPSSUR, adopting best practices from these models and tailoring them to local needs will be crucial for building a resilient, equitable, and future-ready enterprise.

Appendix 3: Description of COOPSSUR's Strategic Partners

3.1 CITE

CITEagroindustrial is part of the Centros de Innovación Productiva y Transferencia Tecnológica or Centers for Productive Innovation and Technology Transfer (CITE), a network of centers under the Instituto Tecnológico de la Producción, or Technological Institute of Production, that promotes innovation and the adoption of new technologies across Peru. In our KII, CITE staff explained how they work with producers, businesses, associations, and cooperatives to improve productivity, sustainability, and competitiveness in the agro-industrial sector. Their services—including applied research, training, and technical assistance—support the development of value-added products and help strengthen local and regional economies.

3.2 Agrobanco

Agrobanco is a state-owned but independently managed financial institution that supports small agricultural producers through credit and microfinance services as well as financial education. Agrobanco administers the AgroPerú Fund, a public financing mechanism that provides low-interest loans to smallholder farmers and producer organizations. Through this and other targeted financial products, Agrobanco promotes rural financial inclusion, strengthens agricultural value chains, and supports sustainable, inclusive economic development in Peru's rural sectors.

3.3 Agroideas

Agroideas is a government-run and publicly funded program under Peru's Ministry of Agrarian Development and Irrigation that promotes the competitiveness and sustainability of small and medium agricultural producers through co-financed business plans. Agroideas is the 'seed' program that initiates the formalization and strengthening of producer organizations, serving as the first step in a broader support pipeline that includes more advanced programs like Agromercado which supports producers in the market and branding part. Through a competitive process, organizations submit proposals for productive investments, with Agroideas funding up to 80% of project costs and requiring a 20% contribution from beneficiaries. This approach promotes long-term sustainability, value chain development, and improved market access for rural agricultural communities.

3.4 Dirección Regional de Agricultura

The Dirección Regional de Agricultura, the Regional Agriculture Office, (DRA) is the regional branch of Peru's Ministry of Agrarian Development and Irrigation and serves as the principal state institution supporting agricultural development in Madre de Dios. DRA has a dual role in providing technical support to farmers and promoting environmental conservation through coordination with other government entities. They convene the *Mesa Técnica*, a regional technical roundtable launched in 2012, which brings together stakeholders to prioritize productive chains—including cacao, copoazú, camu camu, and Brazil nuts—and align efforts across sectors. The office promotes associative models, supports infrastructure and certification projects, and links cooperatives to national programs like Agroideas and Procompite. As the

primary agricultural authority in the region, the DRA plays a central role in fostering sustainable, competitive, and organized rural development.

3.5 Regional Environmental Agency

The Municipality's Environmental Agency in Tambopata is responsible for enforcing environmental regulations and promoting sustainable land use in the region. The Agency works in environmental oversight, technical assistance, and grant facilitation, including support for cooperatives applying for and managing environmental funding. They also play a key role in the development of the "Madre de Dios" regional brand, which emphasizes biodiversity and conservation, capitalizing on the fact that over 50% of the region remains under some form of environmental protection. As a regional authority, the agency helps integrate environmental sustainability into local development while navigating major challenges related to underfunding and rapid population growth.

3.6 Dinamización del Ecosistema Regional

Dinamización del Ecosistema Regional, Ecosystem Activation for Regional Development, (DER) is a newly launched initiative under Peru's Ministry of Production aimed at energizing regional economies through innovation and ecosystem strengthening. DER is in its first year and currently conducting a diagnostic study across four sectors—academia, business, government, and civil society—to identify priority value chains in Madre de Dios. While DER is provisionally aligned with COOPSSUR, its future engagement depends on whether cacao is selected as a strategic focus area; if not, the program will not proceed with related interventions. Designed to promote cost reduction and efficiency through innovation, DER offers a potential pipeline for targeted support but remains in the planning phase as of now.

3.7 Agrobosque

Agrobosque is a cooperative established in 2013 to support sustainable forest and agroforestry production among its member cooperatives in the Madre de Dios region. With a mission focused on improving rural livelihoods through inclusive, biodiversity-based development, Agrobosque integrates gender equity, fair trade principles, and environmental conservation into its operations. Unlike many other cooperatives, Agrobosque processes cacao on-site into value-added products, strengthening its position in both domestic and international markets. Initially supported by a Swiss partner—similar to how Caritas has supported COOPSSUR—the cooperative has since transitioned to full independence in recent years. In a Key Informant Interview, leadership emphasized their commitment to cooperative consolidation, market access, and logistical efficiency: all member cooperatives deliver their own product, fostering ownership and accountability, in contrast to models like COOPSSUR where technicians manage collection. Agrobosque's proven experience, peer coordination, and sustainability-driven model make it a strong anchor institution within the regional cooperative ecosystem.

Appendix 4: Instruments

4.1 Survey Questions

Survey Questions

Your participation in this survey is completely voluntary, and your responses will remain confidential. The information you provide will be used solely for understanding how to make COOPSSUR better and will not be shared in a way that identifies you personally. Your responses will not affect your relationship with COOPSSUR, CARITAS, or the University of Notre Dame in any way. If you have any questions or concerns, please ask us.

Thank you for your time and participation.

Target audience: COOPSSUR Members

Topic 1: Demographic information			
Current Occupation		**Zone**	
Farming Experience (Years)	☐ Less than 5 ☐ 5-10 ☐ 11-15 ☐ 16-20 ☐ Greater than 20		
Previous source of income (if not farming)		**Role in COOPSSUR**	
How long have you been a COOPSSUR member?	☐ Less than a year ☐ 1-3 ☐ 4-6 ☐ Since 2018 (Co-op creation)	**What crops do you mainly produce in your parcel?**	☐ Cocoa ☐ Copoazu ☐ Brazil nut ☐ Chestnut ☐ Other (please specify):_____

Topic 2: Communication	
Preferred Communication Channels with COOPSSUR leaders:	☐ WhatsApp ☐ SMS ☐ Radio ☐ Printed newsletter ☐ in-person meetings ☐ Email ☐Other (please specify): _____
Preferred frequency of updates:	☐ Daily ☐ Weekly ☐ Biweekly ☐ Monthly ☐ Other (please specify): _____
Who do you contact at COOPSSUR for production/ financial/ technical-related concerns?	please specify: _____

How do you typically interact with other COOPSSUR members?	☐ Buying and selling goods/services from other members ☐ Bartering/exchanging services ☐ Financial support ☐ Social support ☐ Sharing resources (e.g., equipment, space, transportation) ☐ Other (please specify): _____

Topic 3: Leadership						
Please indicate your level of satisfaction with the following statements:		Very dissatisfied	Dissatisfied	Neither dissatisfied nor satisfied	Satisfied	Very Satisfied
1	How satisfied are you with how COOPSSUR leadership represents its members?					
3	How satisfied are you with how COOPSSUR leadership addresses challenges?					
4	How satisfied are you with how COOPSSUR leadership communicates during change/crises?					
5	How satisfied are you with your level of involvement with decision-making in COOPSSUR??					
6	Overall, how satisfied are you with the current governance of COOPSSUR?					

Topic 4: Perceived Benefits		
1	Please indicate any benefit(s) of COOPSSUR membership? (Select all that apply)	☐ Increased income ☐ Access to funding opportunities ☐ Improved farming techniques ☐ Fairer pricing for products ☐ Better access to markets

		☐ Training and capacity building ☐ Stronger community support ☐ Other (please specify) _____
2	Please indicate any disadvantages of COOPSSUR membership.	
3	How has your income and livelihood changed since joining COOPSSUR?	☐ Significantly worsened ☐ Slightly worsened ☐ Neither worsened nor improved ☐ Slightly improved ☐ Significantly improved
4	Do you receive any training from the cooperative?	☐ Yes ☐ No
5	If Yes, specify the type of training	☐ Technical ☐ Financial ☐ Other(please specify)_____

Topic 5: Members' Experience					
Please indicate any motivations for joining the cooperative: ☐ Higher income ☐ Better work conditions ☐ Professional growth ☐ Community support ☐ Other (please specify): _____ _____	Have you gained new skills through the cooperative? ☐ Yes ☐ No If yes, please describe: _____				
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	**Strongly disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither disagree nor agree**	**Agree**	**Strongly agree**
My opinions are considered in cooperative decisions.					
I have built stronger relationships with other members since joining the cooperative.					
The main COOPSSUR leadership provides sufficient support for my farming or production activities.					
The cooperative leadership offers adequate training and learning opportunities.					
The local leadership in my area provides sufficient support for my farming and production activities					
I trust the leadership to act in the best interest of members.					

Topic 6: Cooperative's Policies					
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following question:	**Strongly unfamiliar**	**Somewhat unfamiliar**	**Neutral**	**Somewhat familiar**	**Very familiar**

How familiar are you with COOPSSUR's rules, policies, and decision-making processes?					
Please indicate your level of agreement with the following statements:	**Strongly Disagree**	**Disagree**	**Neither disagree nor disagree**	**Agree**	**Strongly Agree**
Coopsur Policies are clearly communicated to members.					
Members can give input on policies and rules					
COOPSSUR policies align with members' needs.					
Do you have any concern about COOPSSUR policies	☐ Yes ☐ No		If yes, Please specify		
Are you currently practicing organic farming?	☐ Yes ☐ No				
Are you aware of the certifications COOPSSUR promotes?	☐ Yes ☐ No				
What certifications are you aware that COOPSSUR promotes	☐ USDA organic ☐ Agricultura familiar del peru ☐ Senasa peru ☐ Other(please specify):_____				
The organic certification process is worth the benefits.	☐ Strongly Disagree ☐ Disagree ☐ Neither disagree nor disagree ☐ Agree ☐ Strongly Agree				

What benefits do you think certification will bring	☐ Increased market access ☐ Higher prices and improved income ☐ Good reputation and credibility ☐ Improved production practices ☐ Access to training and resources ☐ Better working conditions and community development ☐ Other(please specify):_____

4.2 Focus Group Discussion Questions

Introduction of the Focus Group Discussion	
Greetings	Good [morning/afternoon/evening], everyone, and thank you for taking the time to join us today. My name is [Your Name], I am working with the University of Notre Dame and COOPSSUR, and I will be facilitating our discussion. The purpose of today's focus group is to gather your valuable insights and experiences as members of the cooperative. Your feedback is crucial as we assess the current operations and plan for future improvements. Through this discussion, we hope to better understand what's working well, what challenges exist, and how COOPSSUR can better serve its membership moving forward.
Topics	Over the next [45-60] minutes, we'll explore four main topic areas: - [Introduction & General Perception]: We'll start by discussing your understanding of the cooperative's purpose and reflecting on their achievements thus far. - [Challenges & Opportunities]: Next, we'll explore the challenges you've faced as members and identify what aspects of the operations have been most beneficial. - [Current Initiatives & Impact]: We'll then assess which programs have had the greatest impact and areas where their current offerings could be improved. - [Future Growth & Member Needs]: Finally, we'll discuss what additional support or resources would help members thrive and what changes would make the cooperative more valuable to you.
Information	Before we begin, I want to emphasize that there are no right or wrong answers. We're interested in your honest opinions and experiences. Your feedback will be used to develop recommendations for improving the cooperative's services and operations, which will be presented to – and incorporated into the strategic planning process. Everything shared today will be kept confidential, and while we'll be compiling themes and insights from our discussion, no comments will be attributed to specific individuals without your permission. I encourage everyone to participate actively and respectfully. Please feel free to build on others' ideas or share different perspectives.
Questions	Are there any questions before we begin? [Address any questions] Great, let's start with our first topic...

Current State to Future Vision Road Mapping Activity	
Materials Needed	• Large poster paper or whiteboard • Different colored post-it notes (4 colors) • Markers • Dot stickers (for voting) • Timer
Setup	Draw a simple road on the large poster paper/whiteboard that starts at the bottom ("Current State") and winds upward to the top ("Future Vision/Goal").
Facilitation Steps	

Introduction (5 mins)	• Explain that this activity will help visualize where the cooperative is now, where it wants to go, and what lies in between
	• Introduce the color coding:
	  ○ **Yellow post-its**: Current state elements/realities (Topic 1)
	  ○ **Green post-its**: Future vision/goals (Topic 4)
	  ○ **Blue post-its**: Resources/strengths that will help get there (Topic 3)
	  ○ **Pink post-its**: Pain points/challenges that might be encountered (Topic 4)

Current State Assessment (10 minutes) – TOPIC 1	• Distribute yellow post-its to all participants • Ask: "What are the key characteristics of our cooperative today? What defines our current state?" • Have each person write 2-3 ideas (one per post-it) • Collect and place post-its at the starting point of the road • Briefly discuss key themes
Future Vision (10 minutes) – TOPIC 4	• Distribute green post-its

	● Ask: "Where do we want the cooperative to be in 2-3 years? What does success look like?" ● Have each person write 2-3 vision elements ● Place these post-its at the end of the road ● Briefly discuss key themes
Resources & Strengths (10 minutes) – TOPIC 3	● Distribute blue post-its ● Ask: "What resources, strengths, or opportunities do we have that will help us reach our goals?" ● Have participants write 1-2 ideas each ● Place these along the sides of the road ● Briefly discuss key themes
Pain Points & Challenges (10 minutes) – TOPIC 4	● Distribute pink post-its ● Ask: "What obstacles, challenges, or pain points might we encounter on this journey?" ● Have participants write 1-2 ideas each ● Place these as "roadblocks" along the road ● Discuss major themes
Group Assessment (15 minutes) ND Team: make sure we capture photos of all boards/materials created	● For each top priority challenge, ask: ○ "What resources from our blue post-its could help overcome this challenge?" ○ "What additional resources might we need?" ○ "What specific actions could we take to address this?"

Topic 1: Introduction and General Perception of the Cooperative
1. How would you describe the cooperative's primary mission and purpose?
2. Looking back, what do you think has been the most important achievement of the cooperative?

Topic 2: Challenges and Opportunities
3. What challenges have you encountered as a member of the cooperative?
4. What aspects of the cooperative's operations have been most helpful to members?
5. Are there any barriers that limit members from fully benefiting from the cooperative?

Topic 3: Current Initiatives and Impact
6. Which cooperative programs or initiatives have had the greatest impact on you and other members?
7. Are there any areas where the cooperative's current programs could be improved?

Topic 4: Member Benefits and Engagement
8. What additional support or resources would help members thrive in the cooperative?
9. What changes or new initiatives would make the cooperative more valuable to its members?
10. If you could improve one key aspect of the cooperative, what would it be and why?

4.3 Member Key Informant Interview

Member KII

Target Audience: Members of the COOPSSUR Cooperative (producers)

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your opinions are valuable to our research. Please note that your responses will remain confidential and will be used solely to understand how to improve the cooperative. No personally identifiable information will be shared in reports or publications.

Additionally, your participation is entirely voluntary, and your responses will not affect your relationship with COOPSSUR, Cáritas, or the University of Notre Dame in any way. If at any point you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you may decline to answer or end the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, please do not hesitate to ask us.

I. Introduction and General Perception of the Cooperative
1) Can you tell me about your farm?
2) How many hectares do you own?
3) How long have you been involved in agriculture?
4) What products do you grow and sell?
5) Do all the products you sell go to COOPSSUR?
6) Where else do you sell your products?
7) Where did you sell your products before joining COOPSSUR?
8) Why did you decide to join the cooperative?

II. Communication and Transparency
9) Are you satisfied with the current level of communication with COOPSSUR's leadership?
10) How do you perceive communication with other COOPSSUR members?
11) Do you think COOPSSUR members are sufficiently engaged with one another?
12) If not, how would you like to be more involved with other members, and what currently prevents that?

13) Do you feel a greater sense of community and collaboration with other producers since joining the cooperative? Is this connection stronger within the cooperative as a whole or only among producers in your specific area?

III. Challenges and Opportunities
14) Do you think COOPSSUR supports its members and advocates for their needs?
15) Are you familiar with COOPSSUR's decision-making processes?
16) Are you clear on what COOPSSUR expects from you as a member?
17) Do you believe the policies are communicated clearly?
18) Have you adopted new agricultural practices since joining COOPSSUR? What has your experience been with these practices?
19) Do you feel that your membership in COOPSSUR has generated a satisfactory return on investment?

IV. Current Initiatives and Impact
20) What do you think is COOPSSUR's most important objective?
21) What benefits have you gained from joining COOPSSUR?
22) What would make you feel more engaged and participatory in COOPSSUR?

4.4 Stakeholder Key Informant Interview

Strategic Partner KII

Target Audience: Strategic partners of COOPSSUR

Thank you for agreeing to participate in this interview. Your insights are valuable to our research. Please note that your responses will remain confidential and will be used solely to understand how to improve the cooperative. No personally identifiable information will be included in any reports or publications.

Furthermore, your participation is entirely voluntary, and your responses will in no way affect your relationship with COOPSSUR, Cáritas, or the University of Notre Dame. If at any point you feel uncomfortable answering a question, you may choose not to answer or end the interview.

If you have any questions or concerns, please feel free to let us know.

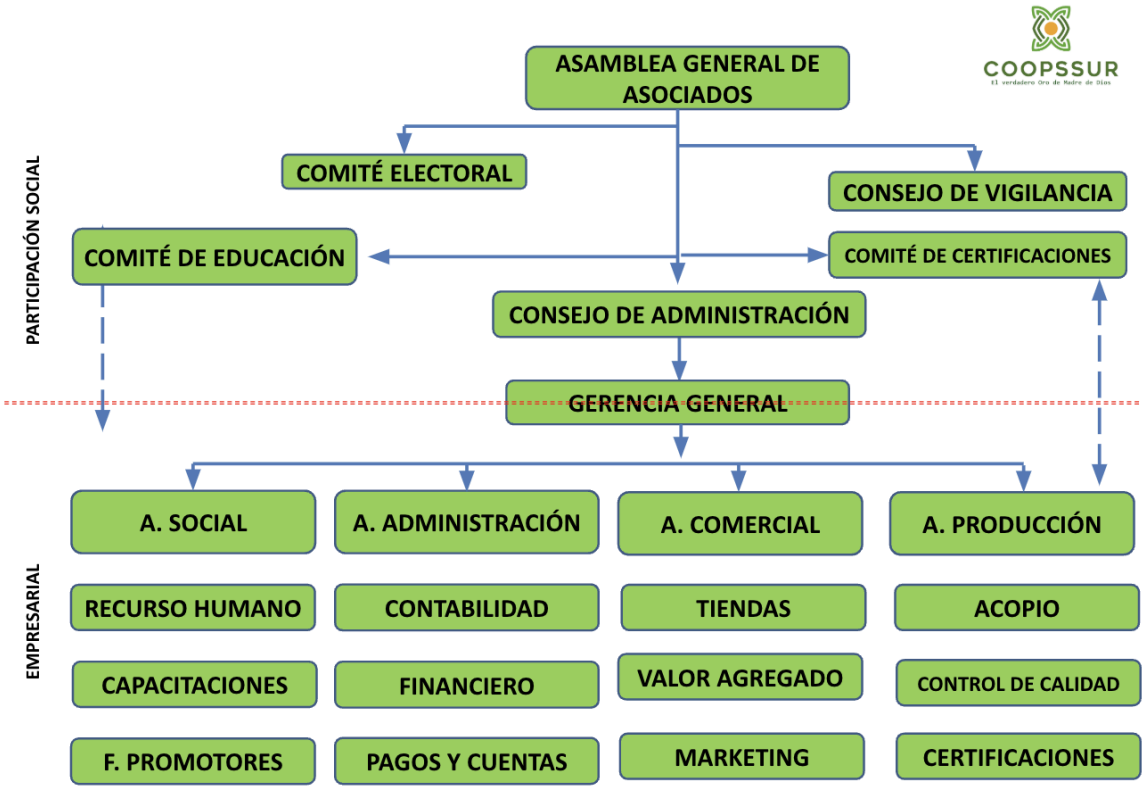
I. Introduction and General Perception of the Cooperative
1) What organization are you from and what is your role?
2) How long has your organization collaborated with COOPSSUR and in what capacity?
3) How was the partnership with COOPSSUR established?
4) What specific resources (funding, training, technology, market access, legal advice, etc.) has your organization provided to COOPSSUR?

5) How well does COOPSSUR align with your organization's mission and objectives?
6) How would you describe your overall experience working with COOPSSUR?
7) In your opinion, what are the main strengths of COOPSSUR as a cooperative?

II. Communication and Transparency
8) How effective is COOPSSUR's communication with your organization? Who is your main contact at COOPSSUR?
9) How well-informed do you feel about COOPSSUR's goals, initiatives, and progress?
10) Are there any barriers to effective decision-making and coordination between your organization and COOPSSUR?

III. Challenges and Opportunities
11) Are there administrative and/or operational barriers that make working with COOPSSUR difficult?
12) What opportunities do you see for strengthening your partnership with COOPSSUR?
13) How would you describe COOPSSUR's level of commitment and motivation toward your organization and joint initiatives?
IV. Current Initiatives and Impact
14) In what specific COOPSSUR initiatives has your organization participated?
15) In your experience, what have been the most successful aspects of the collaboration with COOPSSUR? What metrics do you use to measure this success?
16) Do you believe COOPSSUR effectively incorporates feedback from partners like you to improve its initiatives? Why or why not?

Appendix 5: COOPSSUR Organization Chart



Appendix 6: Plant Diseases

- **Witches' Broom**, caused by the fungus *Crinipellis perniciosa*, leads to abnormal shoot growths ("brooms"), pod deformities, and early fruit drop. It significantly reduces yield and is difficult to manage once established.[4]

- **Monilia Pod Rod**, or frosty pod rod, is caused by the fungus *Moniliophthora roreri* and infects cacao pods, causing external lesions and internal decay. It spreads rapidly by wind and rain, with yield losses reaching up to 90% in unmanaged plots.[5]

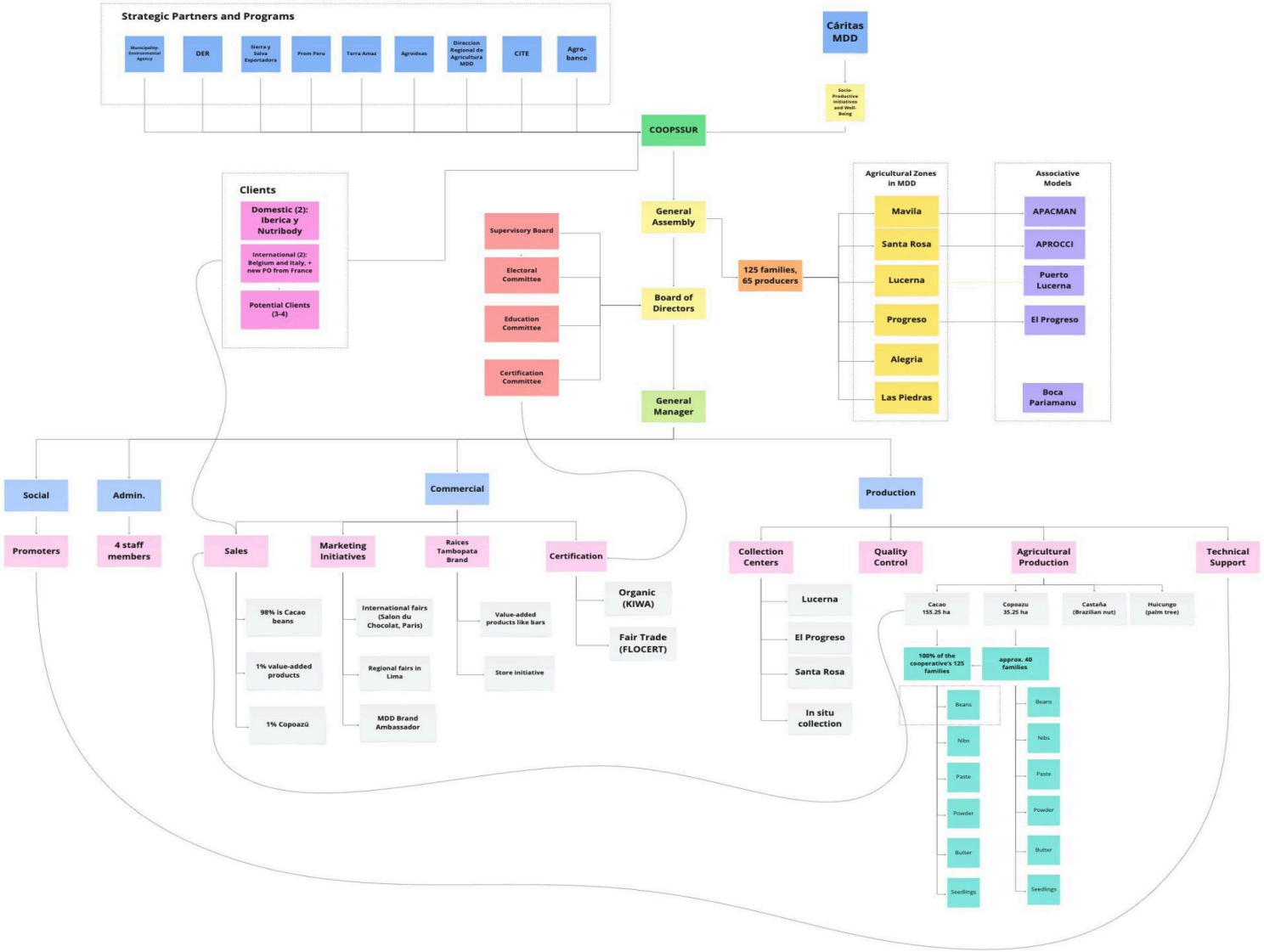
- **Black rot**, caused by Phytophthora spp, thrives in humid conditions and causes black lesions on pods, leading to rotting and loss of marketable products. It can spread quickly during the rainy season. The disease severely reduces cacao yield and causes premature death of trees if not controlled.[6]

[4] Evans, H. C. (2016). De Souza, J. T., Monteiro, F. P., Ferreira, M. A., Gramacho, K. P., & Luz, E. D. M. N. (2018). Cocoa diseases: Witches' broom. In P. Umaharan (Ed.), *Achieving sustainable cultivation of cocoa* (pp. 239–269). Burleigh Dodds Science Publishing. https://doi.org/10.19103/AS.2017.0021.14

[5] Bailey, B. A., Evans, H. C., Phillips-Mora, W., Ali, S. S., & Meinhardt, L. W. (2018). *Moniliophthora roreri*, causal agent of cacao frosty pod rot. *Molecular Plant Pathology*, 19(7), 1580–1594.

[6] Vanegtern, B., Rogers, M., & Nelson, S. (2015). *Black pod rot of cacao caused by Phytophthora palmivora* (PD-108). College of Tropical Agriculture and Human Resources, University of Hawai'i at Mānoa. https://www.ctahr.hawaii.edu/oc/freepubs/pdf/PD-108.pdf

Appendix 7: COOPSSUR Systems Map



Appendix 8: Sample Informative Bulletin

MAYO

BOLETÍN MENSUAL

Actualizaciones de Abril:

- Distribución de herramientas completada en Lucerna y Santa Rosa
- Volumen recolectado por zona (abril):
  - Lucerna: 1.2 T
  - Mavila: 850 kg

Anuncios:

- **Taller de control de enfermedades** –
- 15 de mayo en Alegría
- **Entrenamiento de postcosecha**
- 23 de mayo en El Progreso
- **Asamblea general programada para el 8 de junio**

Recordatorios Importantes:

- **Encuesta rápida**: Responde 2 preguntas sobre comunicación en tu zona – [enlace en WhatsApp]
- **Documentación**: Fecha límite para actualizar datos de socio: 25 de mayo
- **Contacto directo**: Tu representante zonal es tu punto de referencia para cualquier duda

Mensaje de la Junta

Este mes, reafirmamos nuestro compromiso con la transparencia y el aprendizaje compartido. El boletín mensual es una herramienta para mantenernos conectados, reconocer sus esfuerzos, y escuchar sus voces. Gracias por seguir construyendo esta cooperativa con nosotros.

Logros del Mes

- Felicitaciones a Rosa M., productora de Alegría, por entregar su cacao con 98% de calidad A
- Bienvenida a tres nuevos socios en la zona de Las Piedras

UNIVERSITY OF NOTRE DAME

Regenerating Ecologies and Economies for Livelihood (REEL) is a semester-long course offered through the **Mendoza College of Business's Meyer Business on the Frontlines Program**. The course explores the role of regenerative enterprise in addressing environmental degradation and social inequity, particularly in communities where livelihoods are most at risk. Through a service-learning model, students collaborate with international partner organizations—virtually throughout the semester and in person during Spring Break—to co-create sustainable, community-based solutions. This immersive experience develops the skills and mindsets necessary for future leaders in business, policy, law, science, and engineering to harness enterprise as a force for regeneration, sustainability, and human flourishing.

KHADIJAT ATERE

Masters of Global Affairs,
Sustainable Development

MANUELA CORREA

Juris Doctor

CRISTINA GARCÍA ABEDRABBO

Masters of Business Administration,
Finance

XIMENA HERNÁNDEZ REVOLRIO

Masters of Business Administration,
Business Analytics &
Masters of Global Affairs,
Sustainable Development

LAURA CAMILA SUÁREZ

Masters of Global Affairs,
Peace Studies

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Above all, we are most thankful to the farmers of Madre de Dios, Peru. Your resilience and deep connection to the land moved us profoundly and will continue to inspire our path forward.