


 Methodology Brief

Photo: Bala Wenceslas Sanou

COVID-19 RAPID ASSESSMENT OF AGRI-FOOD SECTORS IN AFRICA

Rapid assessments of agricultural sectors are conducted through a remote survey and focus group discussions (FGDs). They take an approach inspired by sector and food system frameworks that have been adapted by Wageningen University and Research (WUR) to a variety of sectors.

Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WC DI), part of WUR, has been contracted to conduct rapid assessments of the dairy and floriculture sectors in Kenya, the cotton sector in Burkina Faso, and the marine fishery sector in Ghana. Rapid assessments evaluate the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of these sectors; they are performed in collaboration with African-based consulting organizations, national partners, and sector platforms. By identifying impact areas, and short-term and strategic actions and interventions, partners aim to enhance the sectors' resilience through practical, remedial, and preventative actions.

Methodology and steps

Below, we provide a general outline of the rapid assessment methodology and its steps. A more detailed description of the methodology is shared in De Boef et al., 2021¹.

Step A. Setting sector boundaries and timing

The objectives of performing the rapid assessment define the scope in terms of topics, time frame and geographical focus – in this case, the impact of COVID-19 on specific sectors at country level since the outbreak of the pandemic.

Step B. Establishing a panel of experts

Country partners establish a panel that consists of experts representing relevant stakeholders, including government, research organizations, industry, service delivery providers, regulatory bodies, and civil society, farmer and consumer organizations.

The geographic distribution over regions, states, or other administrative levels of the country is taken into consideration.

Step C. Developing the survey guided by the model

The survey is based on the integrated food system and sector framework (Figure 1). The framework identifies eight sector activities: production, value chain development, service provision, stakeholder organization, consumption, regulation, coordination, and investment. These are joined by the socio-economic and environmental drivers relevant to and impacted by the sector. The assessment draws attention to outcomes at sector and food system levels. At the level of food systems, these include food security and nutrition outcomes, as well as socio-economic and environmental outcomes.

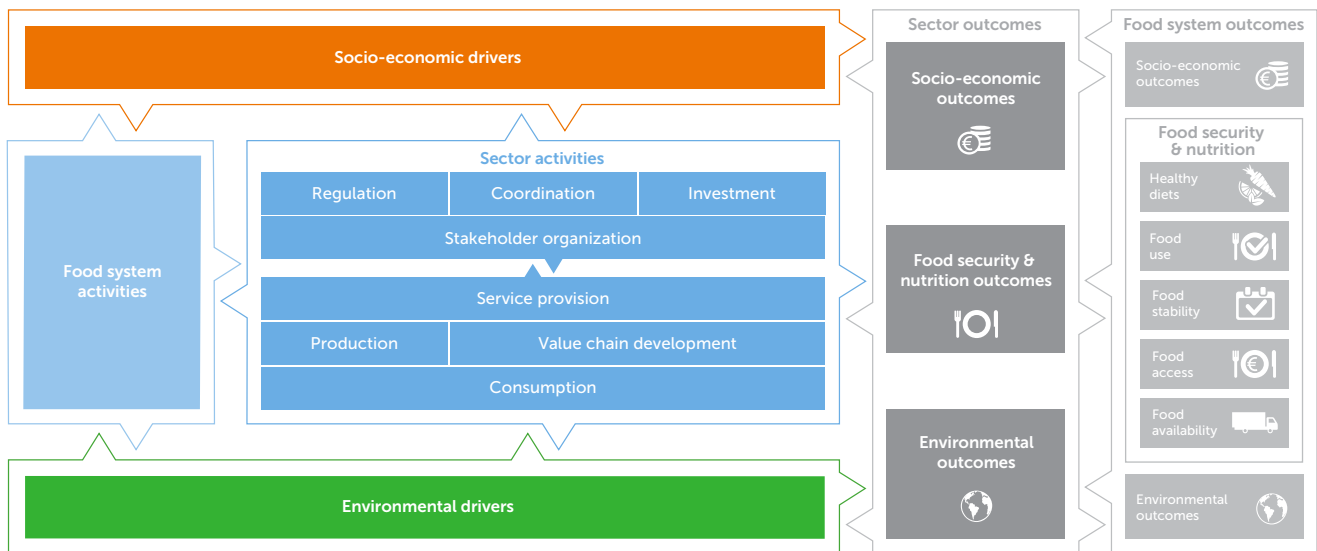
The integrated food system and sector framework presents sector activities, and socio-economic and environmental drivers, and identifies challenges and vulnerable interactions, with the aim of guiding the sector to respond to the changing conditions. For each of the sector activities and drivers identified, questions relating to the level of impact are formulated.

Step D: Designing and running the survey

Each survey includes a maximum number of multiple-choice questions per panellist and follows a similar structure. Due to their involvement in different functions of the sector (e.g. production, marketing, services, governance, finance and regulation) or activities within the value chain, panellists from different stakeholder groups answer different

1] De Boef, W.S., Borman, G.D., Gupta, A., Subedi, A., Thijssen, M.H., Aga, A.A., Hassena, M.B., Thein, S.Z.M., Thein, W., Okelola, F., Olusegun, O., Olusegun, Ojo, P.O., Agbara, C., Otim, G., Ssemwogerere, P., Ntare, B., Oyee, P., 2021. Rapid assessments of the impact of COVID-19 on the availability of quality seed to farmers: advocating immediate practical, remedial and preventative action. *Agric Syst.* 188, 103037. <https://doi.org/10.1016/j.agsy.2020.103037>.

Figure 1. Integrated food system and sector framework



questions. This makes their responses relevant and informed by experience. Responses vary in a scale, from a 'high negative impact' to a 'high positive impact', with 'no impact' or 'business as usual' as possible choices. Respondents can also indicate where questions are not currently applicable. The survey is accessible online or offline, deployed to respondents' smartphones. In several cases, additional responses are collected through phone or live interviews.

Step E: Identifying impact areas based on survey results

The results of the survey are processed, transforming the level of impact into numeric scores; for each question, the frequency of the various scores is calculated. This is complemented by a calculation of a stakeholder-weighted average score, meaning that the average score of respondents in each stakeholder group is computed, and then the average for the stakeholder group concerned is calculated. Considering that the number of respondents is not equal for each stakeholder group, it is important that each stakeholder group and not each respondent is given an equal weight in the calculation of the average. A minimum of four responses is required for each stakeholder group to be included in the overall weighted average score.

The team subsequently develops a dashboard based on the outcome of the survey; the responses to the questions inform the identification of impact areas. Questions with a large number of respondents indicating a high negative impact are identified and grouped along specific topics. Impact areas can be linked to individual activities in the value chain, or to more general operations or the governance of

the sector. The team subsequently develops a first narrative for each of the impact areas identified. This document describes the impact of COVID-19 on the functioning of the sector and stakeholder(s) concerned as an input to the FGDs.

Step F: Conducting focus group discussions for identifying actions

Each FGD brings several experts together virtually or physically to review the results in terms of impact, propose actions, and identify stakeholders responsible for taking initiative and driving action. Their expertise and practical experience in the sector determine their participation in the discussions on specific impact areas. The FGDs are organized in 60- to 90-minute sessions. Participants are introduced if required, the team then briefly shares the rapid assessment process and survey outcomes. It is assumed that most FGD participants have reviewed the information shared on the rapid assessment process and have participated in the survey. Each focus group is quickly split up into two working groups, making use of break-out facilities of the digital meeting platform for virtual discussions.

Parallel break-out sessions comprise 3-4 participants representing different stakeholders. Each working group delves deep into different sets of impact areas and discusses actions required to cope with the impacts and support continuity in the functioning of the sector. The focus groups identify stakeholders and potential initiators and drivers for the action.

Step G: Drafting the rapid assessment brief

Based on the outcomes of the FGDs, the team develops the first outline of a rapid assessment brief, which includes a description of the impact area, proposed short-term and strategic actions, relevant stakeholders, and organization(s) taking initiative and driving action.

Step H: Finalizing and sharing the rapid assessment document

The rapid assessment briefs are published and used for awareness-raising and advocacy efforts, and are widely shared in relevant traditional and social media.

Use of the methodology in other sectors

In 2020, rapid assessments were conducted to reveal the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of the seed and horticultural sectors, as well as on specific commodities such as sesame and potato. These are sectors in developing countries and emerging economies where WCDI, other groups within WUR, SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and other partners, are active. Working with a similar model on rapid assessments in various sectors and countries over time will allow for interpretation and synthesis of the impact of the crisis on food systems at national, regional, and global scale, while also identifying immediate actions required to allow the sector to cope with the crisis. It will furthermore provide insights into the use of the sector model in guiding this type of intervention to enhance the functioning and resilience of the agricultural sectors.

This rapid assessment is published within a series of rapid assessments in multiple (sub)sectors and countries, and is part of WCDI Sector Transformation publications.

Source: FAO (2021). Assessing the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on agriculture, food security and nutrition in Africa. Retrieved from <https://www.fao.org/publications/card/en/c/CB5911EN>
Reproduced with permission.

Please cite as: WCDI (2021). COVID-19 rapid assessment of agri-food sectors in Africa. Methodology brief. Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation, Wageningen.

For more information:
Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation
info.cdi@wur.nl | www.wur.eu/wcdi

Rapid assessments: [dedicated WUR website](#)

Project lead: Walter de Boef
Email: Walter.deBoef@wur.nl

