

Potatoe sector

Introductory brief for stakeholders

Rapid assessment of the potato sector

Amidst the worldwide COVID-19 crisis we currently face, and the socio-economic effects of coping measures, specific attention and action are needed to secure agricultural production for income, employment, and food and nutrition security.

After 25 years of economic growth, the World Bank¹ projects economic decline in Africa in 2020. Agriculture is considered to be one of the most seriously affected sectors. The High-Level Panel of Experts, under the Committee on World Food Security², indicates that the COVID-19 crisis is leading to instability in both local and global food markets, causing a disruption to food supply and availability. As a result, millions of people could face acute food insecurity in the near future.

For countries to cope with the emerging food security crisis, we need to ensure that the production and marketing of agricultural commodities will continue to reach markets under the prevailing circumstances. In order to maintain the continued functioning of agricultural sectors, regular assessments must be carried out on how the COVID-19 crisis and associated measures affect them. The overall aim of the assessments is to contribute towards minimizing the negative impacts on income generation and food security.

This introductory brief suggests a collaborative effort to conduct rapid assessments of the potato sector to determine adequate responses to the challenges that are identified. It will contribute to the implementation of immediate actions and interventions that will enhance the sector's resilience and support the continuity of activities in the potato sector, taking into account the unpredictability of the crisis and the seasonal dependency of the potato sector.

COVID-19 crisis and the potato sector

Activities in the potato sector are seasonal, time-sensitive and involve many direct or indirect interactions between actors in the various chains. The COVID-19 crisis may threaten the performance and resilience of the potato sector in multiple ways:

- If farmers cannot access inputs, credit or labour, potato production and harvesting activities will be seriously affected or even fail
- If mobility is restricted, labourers will not be able to travel to the field or their workplace to earn an income
- If health measures are not respected, labourers may spread the virus
- If both production and logistics are disrupted, processors, traders and service providers will not be able to continue their activities and fulfil their crucial roles in the value chain
- If marketing channels are blocked, prices will fall and sector revenues will decrease.

These examples show that disruptions can have multiple and far-reaching effects. However, proactive and collaborative action can still mitigate risks and optimize the performance of the potato value chains under the current circumstances.

¹World Bank, 2020. *An analysis of issues shaping Africa's economic future. Africa's Pulse, No. 21, Spring 2020.* World Bank, Washington, DC ([link](#)).

²HLPE, 2020. *Interim issues paper on the impact of COVID-19 on food security and nutrition.* HLPE Secretariat, Rome ([link](#)).

Focus on critical functions

The rapid sector assessment is based on a sector transformation model and focuses on the following ten functions: (i) production, (ii) ecosystems, (iii) communities, (iv) producer organizations, (v) value chains, (vi) services, (vii) consumption, (viii) potato sector coordination, (ix) policy and regulation, and (x) potato sector revenues and investments. The model allows for a comprehensive sector assessment, facilitating the identification of the most affected functions and vulnerable interactions within the potato sector, in order to direct the need for immediate action and interventions.

Method

The aim is to conduct rapid assessments on a regular basis. It involves all relevant stakeholder groups, who operate at different levels. The group of stakeholders participate in a rapid online survey. Survey results are discussed in more depth during focus group discussions (FGDs).

The first step is to establish a panel that includes stakeholders of the potato sector, representing producers, producer organizations, processors, traders, market actors, service providers, government departments, financial institutions, education and research, and development organizations. The panellists will participate in a survey delivered online or on their smartphone. In case of no internet access, the survey can be conducted by telephone. The survey covers the full range of functions and value chain operations of the potato sector, which are considered essential at the time of the survey.

A summary of the results is generated and feeds into the FGDs. Each discussion brings some 5-8 stakeholders together (virtually) to review the results, propose actions, and identify stakeholders responsible for taking action.

The outcomes of the survey and FGDs will be compiled to produce a 'potato alert'. This is a short document that outlines the most important and pressing challenges within the potato sector and suggests immediate actions for stakeholders to initiate a practical response. A variety of communication tools, including social media, blogs, video messages, and portals are used to share the potato alert.

The current planning is that the first potato alert will be published in late July 2020. The second potato alert would then be published at the end of September. After the first two alerts, the pilot will be evaluated.

Partnership and collaboration

The rapid sector assessment is facilitated by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI), part of Wageningen University & Research, in partnership with SNV Netherlands Development Organisation and implemented in collaboration with partners in the HortInvest project. This project is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN) in Kigali.

The rapid assessment of the potato sector is published within a series of rapid assessments and alerts in multiple (sub)sectors and countries, and is a Sector Transformation publication.

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