

Agricultural Sector Alerts

METHODOLOGY FOR RAPID ASSESSEMENTS

Photo: Lex Schmeetz

Rapid Assessments are conducted at the country level through survey and focus group discussions (FGDs). In its approach the Rapid Assessments are inspired by the sector model developed by AidEnvironment¹, as adapted by the Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI) to a variety of sectors including seed, horticulture, dairy and sesame².

The Rapid Assessments are currently being piloted to assess the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of the seed sector in Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Uganda, where WCDI collaborates with national partners in seed programmes. By identifying alerts and immediate actions, partners aim to inform decision makers in government, industry, research, civil society, and farmer organizations where the impact is felt the most, and to contribute to the development of the immediate actions that are required to cope with the challenges resulting from the crisis.

This document shares the methodology and steps for those who are curious about what lies behind the Alerts. It also serves as introduction to the process for partners who wish to apply and adapt the Rapid Assessment to other sectors.

Methodology and steps

We here provide a general outline of the methodology and its steps, as currently being piloted in the seed sector. Table 1 (page 2) provides an overview of the planning of the Rapid Assessment. This took about twelve days during the first iteration; during subsequent iterations, this is expected to fall to less than a week.

Step A: Setting sector boundaries and timing

Activities in the sector are defined by subsectors, such as specific crops, commodities, or value chains. These differ in terms of cropping seasons and activities, and thus also in terms of the challenges

they face at different times. Therefore, within one assessment, each country includes at least two crops, crop groups, commodities, or value chains for each iteration of the assessment. An iteration is carried out at least monthly for the full duration of the crisis, allowing responses to specific seasonal variations.

Step B: Establishing a panel of experts

Country partners establish a panel that includes 20 to 40 experts representing relevant stakeholders, covering government, research organizations, industry, service delivery providers, regulatory bodies, civil society -, and farmer and consumer organizations. At least four people are included in the panel for each stakeholder group. The geographic distribution over regions, states, or other administrative levels of the country are taken into consideration.

Step C: Developing the survey guided by the sector model

The survey covers the full range of functions identified by applying the sector model, and includes various value chain operations and services. The sector model allows the team to identify the key functions and potentially vulnerable interactions within the sector, in order to direct the need for strategies contributing to its transformation or coping with changed conditions.

In the context of Rapid Assessments in the seed sector, the following functions are included: services, production systems, market development, revenue generation and re-investment, and governance and coordination. We do not make use of the regulation and management function. The other functions defined in the sector model of AidEnvironment—such as landscape, consumption, and communities—are less relevant to the functioning of the seed sector. For each sector in which a Rapid Assessment is conducted, the functions are identified before the survey is designed. Figure 1 shows the generic transformation model, while Figure 2 shares the model for sector transformation applied to the seed sector.

1. <https://www.aidenvironment.org/sustainable-sector-transformation/>

2. <https://www.wur.nl/en/Research-Results/Research-Institutes/centre-for-development-innovation/Our-Value-Propositions/Guiding-Sector-Transformation.htm>

Figure 1. Sector transformation model
 source: <https://www.aidenvironment.org/sustainable-sector-transformation/>

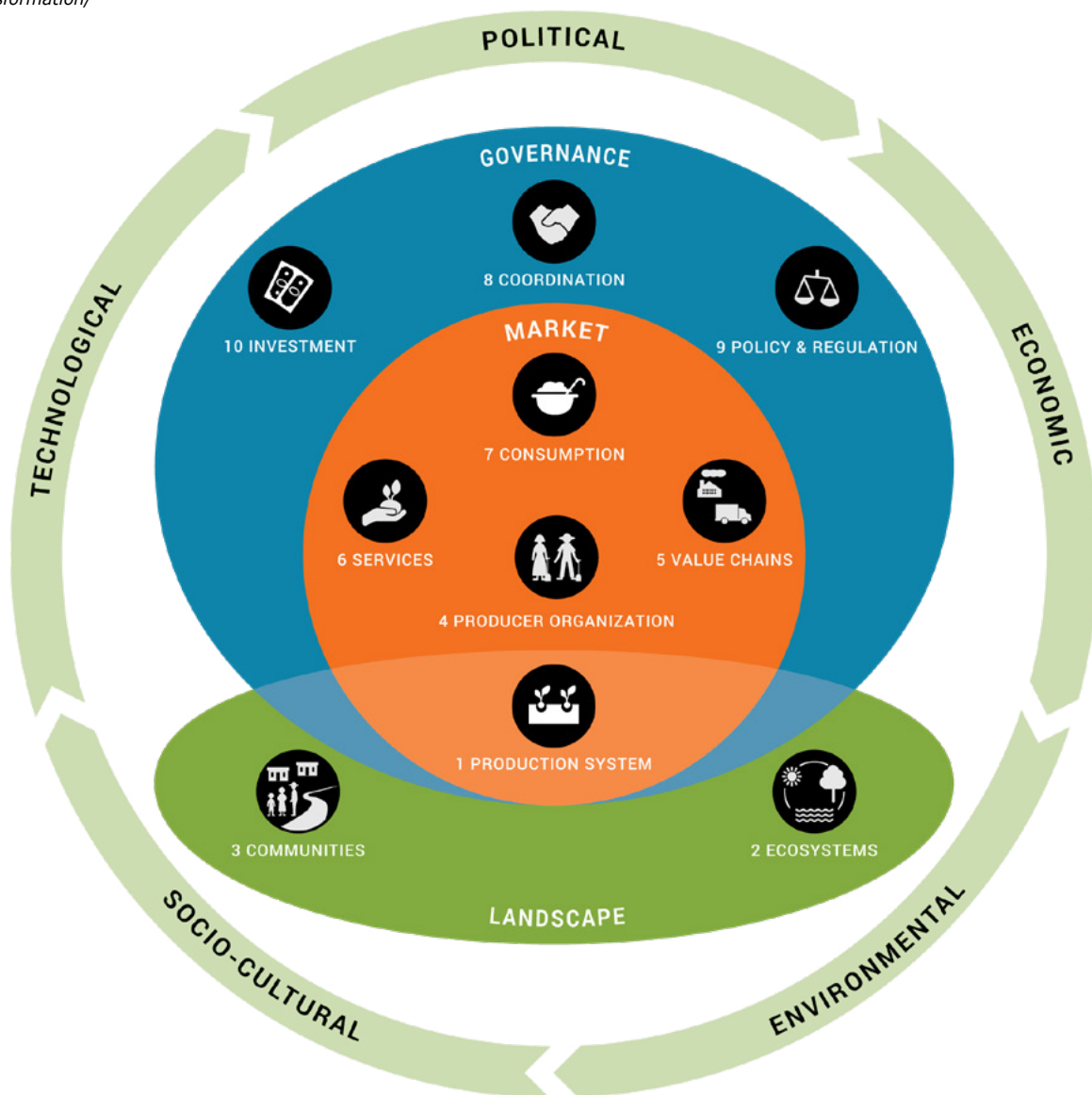


Figure 2. Model of seed sector transformation

Seed sector performance					
Performance of the sector to become more competitive, resilient, profitable, innovative and adaptive, sustainable, inclusive, resistant and transparent					
1. Service provision The capacity of the seed sector to provide high quality, inclusive and differentiated services to seed producers and seed value chain actors	2. Seed production systems The viability and sustainability of seed production systems	3. Seed market development The efficiency, fairness and transparency of seed value chains and seed markets	4. Revenue generation and reinvestment The capacity of the seed sector to generate revenues and make strategic re-investments	5. Seed sector coordination The degree of coordination, alignment and accountability among different seed stakeholders	6. Seed sector regulation and management Rules and systems that govern seed markets, production systems, service delivery, and coordination

Table 1. Assessment steps (first iteration)

Step	Who	Duration	
A.	Setting sector boundaries and timing	Assessment team	1 meeting
B.	Establishing a panel of experts	Local team	1 day consultations
C.	Developing the a survey guided by the sector transformation model	WCDI team in consultation with local team	2 days brainstorm and consultations
D.	Designing and running the survey	WCDI in collaboration with local team	2 days running and tracing panel members
E.	Identifying alerts based on survey results	Assessment team	1 meeting drafting input to FDG
F.	Focus group discussions identifying immediate actions	Local team supported by WCDI team	1.5 hour meetings; one day; half day preparation and
G.	Draft Alert narrative and consolidation in a formal/high level briefing	Assessment team for writing; local team for FGD	2 days including FGD
H.	Finalization and sharing Alert document	WCDI in collaboration with local team	2 days

Step D: Designing and running the survey

The survey covers the full range of functions identified through the application of the sector transformation model, it includes various value chain operations and services. The model allows the team to identify the most impacted functions and vulnerable interactions within the sector to direct the need for coping strategies.

The survey lasts a maximum of 15 minutes and includes no more than 20 questions per panellist. Due to their preoccupation in different functions of the sector (e.g. production, marketing, services, governance, finance and regulation) or activities of the value chain, panellists from different stakeholder groups answer different questions. This makes their responses relevant and informed by experience. Collectively, questions cover all functions of the sector, complemented with a specific group of questions related to outcomes, e.g.: income generation; and food and nutrition security.

Each question relates to the level of impact on practical activities within the current frame in time. Responses vary in a scale from a high negative impact to high positive impact, with no impact or business as usual as possible choice. Respondents also can indicate questions that are not currently applicable. The survey is deployed to their smartphone, but can also be completed online from a different device.

Step E: Identifying alerts based on survey results

The results of the survey are processed transforming the level of impact into numeric scores; for each question, the frequency over the various scores are calculated. This is complemented with a calculation of a stakeholder weighted average score, meaning that the average score for respondents in each stakeholder group is computed and then the average over the concerned stakeholder groups 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.

The team subsequently develops a dashboard based on the outcome of the survey; the results for the individual questions but also those linked to value chain operations and services and sector functions inform the identification of alerts.

Questions with a large number of respondents indicating a high negative impact are identified and grouped along specific alerts. Alerts can be linked to individual activities in the value chain or more general operations and services of the value chain or functions of the sector.

The team subsequently develop a first narrative for each of the identified alerts. This document describes for each alert the impact on the functioning of the seed sector and stakeholder(s) concerned. It provides an input to the FGDs.

Step F: Focus group discussions identifying immediate actions

Each FGD brings six to eight experts together virtually to review the results, propose actions, and identify responsible stakeholders taking initiative and driving action.

Their expertise in relation to each of subsectors (crop, commodity or value chain) and practical experience in the sector determines their participation each time. As such, at least two FGDs are subsector-specific, e.g. in Ethiopia addressing maize and wheat, whilst in Nigeria maize and rice.

The FGDs are organized during a 60-90 minute session. Participants are introduced if required, subsequently, the team shares the process and outcomes briefly. It is assumed that participants have reviewed information shared on process as well as the outcomes of the survey. The FGDs are quickly split up into two working groups making use of break-out facilities of the digital meeting platform used. Parallel break-out sessions include 3-4 participants representing different stakeholders. Each working group dives deep into a different set of alerts and discusses immediate actions required to cope with the impact, and that contribute to continuity in the functioning of the sector. They identify stakeholders and potential initiators and drivers for the action. A report of the FGDs is shared with the participants for verification.

Step G: Draft Alert narrative and consolidation in a formal/high level briefing

Based on the outcomes of the sub-sector based FGDs, the team develops a first outline for the Alert narrative in which it couples for each alert a description of area of

impact, immediate actions, concerned stakeholders and an organization taking initiative and driving action. This document is shared with representatives of stakeholders that will participate in a third FGD that includes leadership to the sector. In countries and sectors where a national platform exists, such bodies are instrumental for a third FGD. The Alert document is discussed for verification and consolidation in this virtual meeting. In this manner, the ownership of the assessment is promoted as well as commitment is sought for the actions proposed.

Step H: Finalization and sharing of the Alert document

Upon verification and consolidation in the third FGD, the team finalizes the narratives for the Alert document. This is published and used for awareness raising and advocacy efforts, and widely shared in relevant traditional and social media.

Follow up to the pilot case

During the pilot phase of the collaborative project, the Seed Alert for Ethiopia, Myanmar, Nigeria, and Uganda will be published in May and June 2020. The outcomes will be shared at country level and through global webinars. These two months constitute the pilot period, during which WCDI and partners will engage in learning lessons on the methodology, the use of sector transformation as a guiding model, and contributions enhancing seed sector resilience. It is expected that the process will be taken up independently in each country and that WCDI will support partners and stakeholders in other countries who have an interest in and need for a similar assessment and action plan. The team seeks mechanisms to support partners in the four countries, as well as beyond them, in continuing the work for as long it is needed.

Use of the methodology in other sectors

During the pilot phase, Alerts are also being developed to cover the impact of the COVID-19 crisis on the functioning of the horticultural and dairy sectors, as well as on specific commodities such as sesame and potato. These are sectors in developing countries and emerging economies where the Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCDI), other groups within Wageningen University and Research, SNV Netherlands Development Organization and other partners, are active. Working with a similar model of Rapid Assessment in various sectors and countries over time will allow for interpretation and synthesis of the impact of the crisis on food systems at the national, regional, and global scale, while also giving insights for immediate action that contribute to the sector to cope with the crisis. It will furthermore provide insights into the use of the sector model guiding this type of intervention to enhance the functioning and resilience of the agricultural sectors.

About WCDI

Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation supports value creation by strengthening capacities for sustainable development. As the international expertise and capacity building institute of Wageningen University & Research, we bring knowledge into action, with the aim of exploring the potential of nature to improve quality of life.

WCDI is engaged in various programmes and guiding sector transformation in a manner that sectors become inclusive, effective and sustainable. Dealing with the complexity of sector transformation and connecting different functions of the sector, WCDI applies a range of concepts, approaches, models and tools to support such transformation processes in various agricultural sectors.

WCDI's seed cluster is engaged in the design and implementation of programmes that guide the transformation of seed sector in several countries throughout the world. It has developed a strong reputation for taking an integrated or pluralistic approach to seed sector development, thereby becoming a preferred partner for seed sector stakeholders in various countries. WCDI is in a unique position to lead this pilot, as it has a global network in the seed sector and leadership on the expertise.

WCDI collaborates with various partners in sector transformation through a range of collaborative programmes in the horticultural and dairy sector. Together with other WUR units, this adds to the unique partnership in various countries, which serves as a basis for using an action-research approach together with sector transformation as guiding model to identify key

The Alerts are published for multiple countries and sectors; they are part of the WCDI Sector Transformation publications.

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