



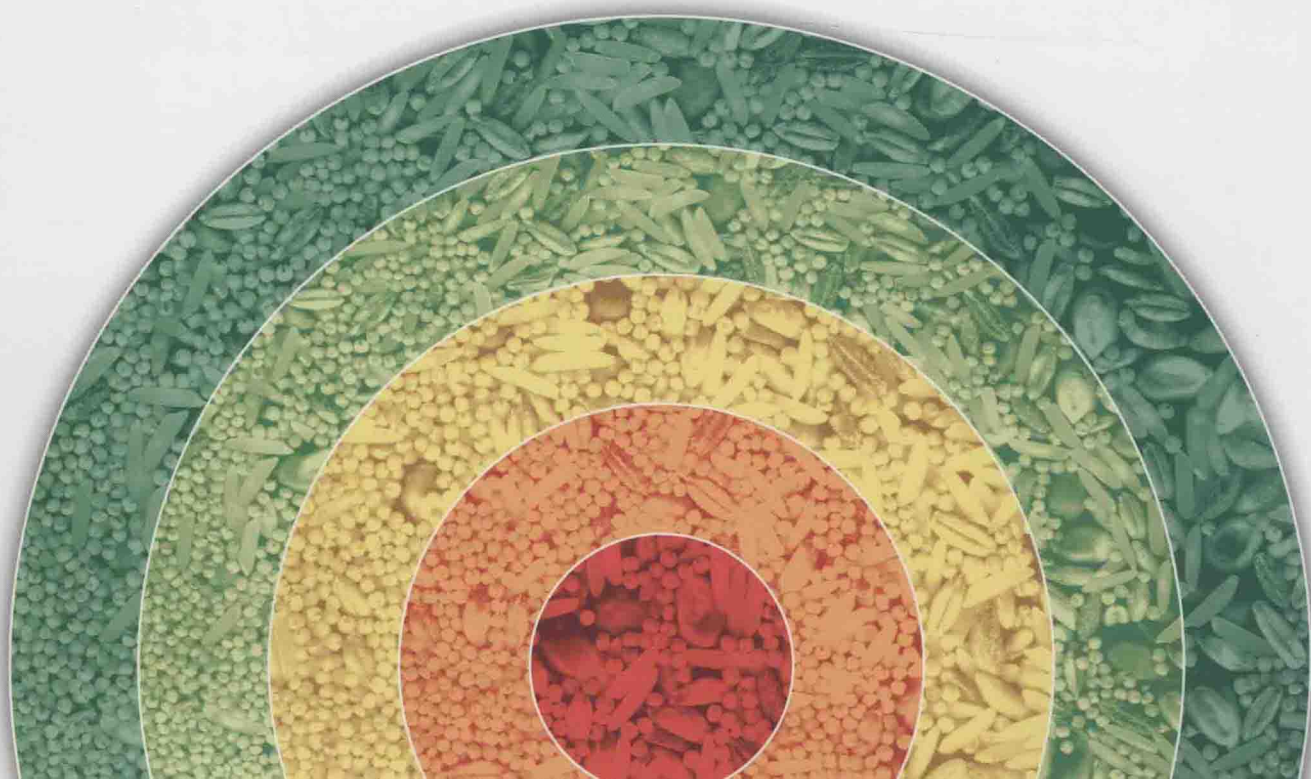
Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations

SAFA

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT OF FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SYSTEMS

GUIDELINES

VERSION 3.0



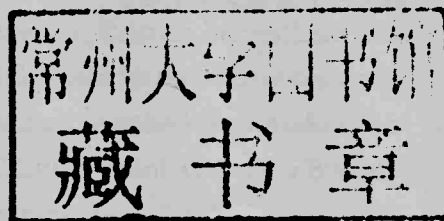
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ISBN 978-92-5-108485-4 (print)

E-ISBN 978-92-5-108486-1 (PDF)

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ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

SAFA is an initiative led by Nadia El-Hage Scialabba, Natural Resources Management and Environment Department; thanks go to Alexander Mueller for his continuous support and to the Government of Switzerland for the kind financial assistance.

The draft Sustainability Framework was first defined through a FAO cooperation with the ISEAL Alliance and an expert meeting held in 2009; thanks go to Sasha Courville, Elisabeth Guttenstein and Jonathan Loh for their collaboration during this phase.

The Test Version 1.0 of the SAFA Guidelines was released on the occasion of the United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development in June 2012. It was shaped by stakeholders' surveys, an expert meeting held in 2011 and two electronic public consultations held in 2011 and 2012; thanks go to Jan Grenz and his team for the write-up, including Julia Jawtusich, Madeleine Kaufmann, Christian Schader, Susanne Stalder and Christian Thalmann.

The Test Version 1.1 of the SAFA Guidelines was benchmarked against major sustainability tools and piloted in 30 settings in 2012-13; thanks go to Sally Lee and Noémi Nemes for their backstopping and coordination of this process.

The Draft SAFA Guidelines (version 2.0) was prepared following a practitioners and partners meeting held in 2013; thanks go to Elisabeth Henderson, Cristina Larrea, Sally Lee, Noémi Nemes, Aimee Russillo, Michael Sligh and John Stansfield for their contributions.

The SAFA Guidelines (version 3.0) are produced following a peer-review and additional provision of expertise; thanks go to Marta Bentancur, Giulia Bernini, Gabriella Bianchi, Cécile Brugère, Doug Kneeland and Jon Manhire for their inputs.

Last but not least, thanks go to the several hundred individuals who provided their knowledge and insights on the occasion of the different SAFA events, including sustainability concerned partners in academia, associations, food industry, multi-stakeholder organizations, as well as within the UN system and FAO.



PREFACE

More than two decades have passed since the principle of sustainable development received nearly universal agreement at the 1992 Earth Summit. As of today, 106 countries have established national sustainable development strategies and related sustainability reporting, as evidenced by national reports to the Commission on Sustainable Development. Furthermore, over 120 voluntary sustainability standards, eco-labels, codes of conduct and audit protocols are referenced on the Standards Map of the International Trade Centre. World over, there is an increasing user demand for practical tools to support decision-making processes regarding the use of sustainability tools in business operations. However, there is no single framework that integrates all aspects of sustainability and sadly, sustainability objectives are deteriorating in all spheres of development, as witnessed by multiple environmental, social and economic crisis.

The hundreds different sustainability frameworks developed in the last decades by universities, civil society, corporations and national and international institutions, range from environmental and social standards to corporate social responsibility and codes of good practices that apply to operational units or specific supply chains, with or without labelling. This expansion of sustainability tools and various claims place a burden on producers and traders and frustrate consumers in the market place. In addition, the implementation of an integrated approach to analyzing all sustainability dimensions as a coherent whole, and integrating them into business or development strategies, remains a major challenge.

Global trade and the governance of inter-state externalities on public goods (e.g. climate, biodiversity, food safety, financial stability), compounded by the proliferation of sustainability schemes, call for a multi-party cooperation that must be supported by “common rules” in order to reduce fragmentation, prevent conflicts, mitigate uncertainty and build capacities for effective sustainability. More accurate data and sound guiding principles to establish a common basis for assessing sustainability is needed. Tackling these challenges requires, among other things, a common language for sustainability, as well as a holistic approach to assessment and implementation that considers the complexity and relationships of all dimensions of sustainability. While there is now a wide awareness of the sustainability concept, there is also wide interpretation of the definitions

and components of sustainability based on different disciplines and political beliefs and values. There is need to measure what matters; the dilemma is to measure what matters to whom and how?

SAFA is a holistic global framework for the assessment of sustainability along food and agriculture value chains. SAFA establishes an international reference for assessing trade-offs and synergies between all dimensions of sustainability. It has been prepared so that enterprises, whether companies or small-scale producers, involved with the production, processing, distribution and marketing of goods have a clear understanding of the constituent components of sustainability and how strength, weakness and progress could be tackled. By providing a transparent and aggregated framework for assessing sustainability, SAFA seeks to harmonize sustainability approaches within the food value chain, as well as furthering good practices.

These Guidelines are the result of five years of participatory development, together with practitioners from civil society and private sector. The Guidelines are the result of an iterative process, built on the cross-comparisons of codes of practice, corporate reporting, standards, indicators and other technical protocols currently used by private sector, governments, not-for-profits and multi-stakeholder organizations that reference or implement sustainability tools. SAFA builds on, and acknowledges, existing sustainability tools, with the goal of integrating and relating current systems.

The Guidelines are produced in the same spirit of codes of practice, guidelines and other recommended measures to assist in achieving sustainable and fair practices in food and agriculture production and trade. Because existing schemes remain fragmented on what constitutes a sustainable food and agriculture system, SAFA aims to fill the gap between specific sustainability tools, while fostering partnerships for the long-term transformation of food systems.

The target audience of a SAFA assessment is small, medium and large-scale companies, organizations and other stakeholders that participate in crop, livestock, forestry, aquaculture and fishery value chains. However, as a framework and harmonized global assessment approach, SAFA is also relevant to governments' strategies, policy and planning.

The guiding vision of SAFA is that food and agriculture systems worldwide are characterized by four dimensions of sustainability: good governance, environmental integrity, economic resilience and social well-being. For each of these four dimensions of sustainability, SAFA outlines essential elements of sustainability based on international reference documents and conventions. The 21 themes and 58 sub-themes were defined



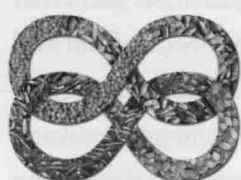
FOREWORD

through expert consultations. Default performance indicators for each sub-theme facilitate measuring progress towards sustainability. SAFA assessment involves adaptation to geographic, sector-specific and individual conditions of the assessed entity and the comprehensive use of existing documentation, standards and tools.

The SAFA Guidelines consist of three sections: Section 1 describes the purpose, linkages, principles and scope of SAFA; Section 2 outlines the procedure of SAFA implementation; Section 3 contains the SAFA protocol for sustainability themes and sub-themes. Default indicators sheets, providing guidance and references can be found in this publication complement entitled SAFA Indicators; these will be subject to periodic reviews, as learning is gained during the Guidelines' implementation.

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FAO is also making publicly available an electronic SAFA Tool, with a view to assist users in implementation of the Guidelines. The Tool and other SAFA resources are freely downloadable from: <http://www.fao.org/nr/sustainability/sustainability-assessments-safa>



SAFA

SUSTAINABILITY ASSESSMENT OF
FOOD AND AGRICULTURE SYSTEMS

ABBREVIATIONS

- 4Cs** Common Code for the Coffee Community
- B2B** Business to Business
- B2C** Business to Consumer
- CBD** Convention on Biological Diversity
- CGD** Center for Global Development
- CMP** Conservation Measures Partnership
- COSA** Committee on Sustainability Assessment
- CSR** Corporate Social Responsibility
- EFQM** European Foundation for Quality Management
- FAO** Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations
- FLO** Fairtrade Labelling Organization
- FSC** Forest Stewardship Council
- GAP** Good Agricultural Practices
- GEA** Greening the Economy with Agriculture
- GHG** Greenhouse Gas Emissions
- GLOBALGAP** Global Partnership for Good Agricultural Practices
- GRI** Global Reporting Initiative
- GSCP** Global Social Compliance Programme
- HACCP** Hazard Analysis Critical Control Points
- IDEA** Indicateurs de Durabilité des Exploitations Agricoles
- IISD** International Institute for Sustainable Development
- ILO** International Labor Organization
- IFC** International Finance Corporation
- IPCC** Intergovernmental Panel on Climate Change
- ISEAL Alliance** International Social and Environmental Accreditation and Labelling Alliance
- ISO** International Organization for Standardization
- LCA** Life Cycle Analysis
- MandE** Monitoring and Evaluation
- MSC** Marine Stewardship Council
- OECD** Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development
- PCR** Product category rules
- RA** Rainforest Alliance
- RISE** Response-Inducing Sustainability Evaluation
- ROL** Rule of Law
- RSB** Roundtable on Sustainable Biofuels

- RSPO** Roundtable on Sustainable Palm Oil
- RTRS** Roundtable on Responsible Soy
- SAFA** Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture systems
- SAI** Social Accountability International
- SAI platform** Sustainable Agriculture Initiative Platform
- SAN** Sustainable Agriculture Network
- SFL** Sustainable Food Lab
- SME** Small and Medium Enterprises
- SSI** State of Sustainability Initiative
- SSTI** Sustainable Standards Transparency Initiative
- TSC** The Sustainability Consortium
- UNCTAD** United Nations Conference on Trade and Development
- UNCED** United Nations Conference on Environment and Development
- UNCSD** United Nations Conference on Sustainable Development
- UNEP** United Nations Environment Programme
- UNESCO** United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization
- UNGC** United Nations Global Compact
- UNITC** United Nations International Trade Centre
- WBCSD** World Business Council for Sustainable Development
- WCED** World Commission on Environment and Development
- WEF** World Economic Forum
- WHO** World Health Organization
- WTO** World Trade Organization

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PURPOSE OF SAFA

SAFA is a framework for assessing the sustainability of a country's economic growth. It is designed to provide a comprehensive and balanced view of a country's economic performance, taking into account not only the growth of the economy but also the environment, social development, and institutional factors. The framework is based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is designed to provide a clear and concise overview of a country's economic performance, taking into account not only the growth of the economy but also the environment, social development, and institutional factors. The framework is based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is designed to provide a clear and concise overview of a country's economic performance, taking into account not only the growth of the economy but also the environment, social development, and institutional factors.

What is SAFA about?

SECTION ONE FRAMEWORK

The SAFA framework is designed to provide a comprehensive and balanced view of a country's economic performance, taking into account not only the growth of the economy but also the environment, social development, and institutional factors. The framework is based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is designed to provide a clear and concise overview of a country's economic performance, taking into account not only the growth of the economy but also the environment, social development, and institutional factors. The framework is based on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) and is designed to provide a clear and concise overview of a country's economic performance, taking into account not only the growth of the economy but also the environment, social development, and institutional factors.

PURPOSE OF SAFA

SAFA Vision

The Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture systems (SAFA) Guidelines were developed for assessing the impact of food and agriculture operations on the environment and people. The guiding vision of SAFA is that food and agriculture systems worldwide are characterized by all four dimensions of sustainability: good governance, environmental integrity, economic resilience and social well-being.

Sustainable development has been defined by FAO as “*the management and conservation of the natural resource base, and the orientation of technological and institutional change in such a manner as to ensure the attainment and continued satisfaction of human needs for present and future generations. Such sustainable development (in the agriculture, forestry and fisheries sectors) conserves land, water, plant and animal genetic resources, is environmentally non-degrading, technically appropriate, economically viable and socially acceptable*”. (FAO Council, 1989).

SAFA offers a holistic framework that encompasses all aspects of sustainable cropping, livestock husbandry, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry production, postharvest, processing, distribution and marketing. It builds mainly on existing sustainability schemes, creating opportunities for enterprises to use existing data and combining efforts with other tools and sustainability initiatives. SAFA allows a fair playing field for all by presenting a framework that is adaptable to all contexts and sizes of operations. In SAFA, what matters is performance, leaving space for the diversity of implementation means possible. SAFA encourages continuous improvement and builds capacity for sustainability. It strives to establish an easy-to-use standardized system, which does not require external experts. This vision can be realized through different pathways, depending on local circumstances.

Based on aggregate global trends and outlooks for the future, sustainable development efforts are not making enough positive difference. More accurate data and sound guiding principles to establish a common basis for assessing sustainability is needed. Tackling these challenges requires, among other things, a common language for sustainability, as

well as a holistic approach to assessment and implementation that considers the complexity and relationships of all dimensions of sustainability. This is the inspiration for SAFA.

By providing a transparent and aggregated framework for assessing sustainability, SAFA seeks to harmonize sustainability approaches within the food value chain, with the long-term objective of sustainable transformation of food systems. Using SAFA, enterprises and actors involved with the production, processing, distribution and marketing of food and agricultural goods, have a clear understanding of the constituent components of sustainability and how strength, weakness and progress could be assessed.

What is SAFA about?

SAFA is a holistic global reference framework for the assessment of sustainability along agriculture, forestry and fisheries value chains. SAFA was developed as an international reference document, a benchmark that defines the elements of sustainability and a framework for assessing trade-offs and synergies between all dimensions of sustainability. There are several levels of SAFA, which are nested to enhance coherence at all levels (see Figure 1).

Figure 1. SAFA Framework



Different users with different purposes can enter at different levels of the SAFA Framework.

The SAFA Framework begins with the high level, overarching dimensions of sustainability: good governance, environmental integrity, economic resilience and social well-being. It is recognized that these dimensions are broad and encompass many aspects. These are translated into a universally agreed definition of sustainability, through themes and sub-themes for each of the sustainability pillars. Goals are established for the themes while objectives are defined for the subthemes. These are measurable and verifiable through indicators applicable to food and agriculture supply chains, with example indicators provided. SAFA Guidelines provide the guidance for the application (calculation) of these indicators.

Themes: these are refined in a set of 21 core sustainability issues, or universal “Themes”, with associated sustainability goals. These can be implemented at any level, national, supply chain or operational unit and thus, provide a common understanding of what “sustainability” means in a practical context. These themes are thus considered universal. At the Theme level, policy-makers and national governments can work towards alignment and harmonization of a holistic scope of sustainability goals without defining the specific pathways. The use of the SAFA framework and Themes for national assessments and policy-making will require the development of appropriate sub-themes and indicators.

Sub-themes: each of the 21 sustainability themes is detailed into sub-themes, or individual issues within SAFA themes, with associated explicit sustainability objectives. This level, composed of 58 sub-themes, is relevant for supply chain actors doing an analysis which identifies risk (or hot spot areas), as well as gaps in existing sustainability efforts. Other sustainability metric initiatives, standards and benchmarking schemes can identify issues and gaps not covered by their systems and tools for convergence and alignment at the sub-theme level.

Indicators: SAFA has defined default indicators within each sub-theme which identify the measurable criteria for sustainable performance for the sub-theme. These default indicators are examples that can be used if no other more appropriate indicators are available and are applicable at the macro level – meaning to all enterprise sizes and types, and in all contexts. Default indicators serve the purpose of providing standardized metrics to guide future assessments on sustainability. The default indicators’ set is provided for a general level

of reporting, as SAFA users do not necessarily have the knowledge to develop indicators themselves, without the risk of lowering the bar of the assessment. Default indicators provide ratings for the highest performance and unacceptable conditions. Customized indicators can also be developed by the assessor for determining performance between best and unacceptable performance, depending on context.

Who are the Guidelines aimed at?

SAFA can be used at multiple levels for multiple purposes and by different actors using a harmonized taxonomy under one framework ensuring consistency, applicability and transparency. Regardless of size, geography or role, all stakeholders have a clear and common language for assessing sustainability. SAFA serves as an effective means for:

- » **Food and agriculture enterprises (individual or associations in the crop, livestock, fisheries, aquaculture and forestry sub-sectors):**
 - » self-assessment for evaluating sustainability of operations and identifying hot-spots for performance improvement;
 - » gap analysis with existing sustainability schemes for improvement of the thematic coverage;
 - » managing or benchmarking suppliers to improve sustainable procurement.
- » **NGOs and sustainability standards and tools community:**
 - » monitoring outcomes of impacts of projects;
 - » sharing of, and global learning on, best practices and thresholds;
 - » gap analysis with existing checklists on all aspects of sustainability.
- » **Governments, investors and policy-makers:**
 - » informing the establishment of Sustainable Development Goals;
 - » implementation of regional planning, local procurement, investment or the development of legislation;
 - » providing a global guidance on sustainable requisites for global supply chains to governments.

The objectives of SAFA Guidelines

The SAFA Guidelines are intended to provide an accessible operational resource to put the SAFA framework into practice at all levels for different purposes. The SAFA Guidelines provide a holistic interpretation of the major themes of sustainability (Framework), of alignment with existing tools and initiatives (Sub-themes) and is a template for agriculture and food sustainability assessment (Sub-themes and default indicators). Key performance (default) indicators for each sub-theme are proposed in order to facilitate measuring progress towards sustainability in a harmonized reporting format.

Acknowledging that there are many definitions of sustainability, depending on values, power relationships, time and space considered, SAFA offers a common framework for measuring performance according to core sustainability themes. SAFA provides an international reference tool for assessing the sustainability performance of food and agriculture enterprises. The purpose of a SAFA is to support the implementation of effective sustainability management and communication in the food and agriculture sector, worldwide. Through voluntary assessments, the goal is to holistically assess an enterprise performance along the four dimensions of sustainability. Using harmonized approaches contributes to making sustainable food chains more transparent, measurable and verifiable.

The Guidelines do not replace existing systems but put them into the perspective of an overarching common sustainability language for the food and agriculture sector. SAFA builds on existing sustainability tools, with the goal of integrating and relating current systems through the common framework. An underlying principle of SAFA is to avoid duplication and not to add complexity to a market already full of regulations and standards serving different purposes. SAFA serves this principle by providing a common understanding of the elements of sustainability and partnering with other initiatives for shared resources, such as methodologies, information and indicators (see the Linkages section below).