

# Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture Systems (SAFA)

**Nadia El-Hage Scialabba**  
**Natural Resources Management and Environment Department, FAO**

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, ecolabels, codes of conduct and audit protocols are referenced on Standards Map of the International Trade Centre. Worldwide, there is an increasing user demand for practical tools to support decision-making processes regarding the use of voluntary sustainability standards in business operations. However, there is no single framework that integrates all aspects of sustainability and, sadly, sustainability is deteriorating in all spheres of development, as witnessed by multiple environmental, social and economic crisis.

The Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture system (SAFA) was developed as an international reference tool, a benchmark that defines the elements of sustainability and a framework for assessing trade-offs and synergies among all dimensions of sustainability. It offers a fair playing field, adaptable to all contexts and sizes of agriculture, livestock, forestry and fisheries operations. The SAFA framework begins with the high-level, overarching dimensions of sustainability: good governance, environmental integrity, economic resilience and social well-being. These are translated into a universally agreed definition of sustainability, through 21 themes and 58 subthemes for each of the sustainability pillars. These are measurable and verifiable through a set of indicators applicable to food and agriculture supply chains.

Since 2009, FAO Natural Resources Management and Environment Department has been working in partnership with several associations and enterprises working on sustainability tools. SAFA

is the result of a process that engaged hundreds of stakeholders from academia, civil society and the private sector in order to ensure scientific rigour and grassroots involvement from supply chain actors. This was ensured through targeted stakeholder surveys, expert meetings, electronic public consultations and pilot studies in all continents and for all supply chain types and sizes. The consultation and active involvement of experts from the food and agriculture industry, public administrations, non-governmental organizations, multistakeholder roundtables and multilateral institutions shaped the purpose and contents of the SAFA initiative in a way that adds value to existing efforts. The added value of SAFA is the provision of a common language for assessing enterprises' performance from production to retail. SAFA results are represented through a polygon over a traffic light colour code that highlights hotspots requiring consideration to improve delivery on specific sustainability themes.

SAFA is provided in two volumes and an IT tool. The SAFA Guidelines offer the "rules of the game", including the framework and assessment methodology. The SAFA Indicators offer a set of indicators for self-assessment, including guidance on metrics and further information resources. The SAFA Tool is a freely available java script program that assists the implementation of the SAFA Guidelines by making use of the SAFA Indicators. The SAFA Secretariat is committed to developing SAFA through continued networking and cooperation with practitioners and partners.

SAFA history and resources are available at <http://www.fao.org/nr/sustainability/sustainability-assessments-safa>

