

FREQUENTLY ASKED QUESTIONS (FAQs)

1. What is SAFA?

The Sustainability Assessment of Food and Agriculture systems (SAFA) defines what sustainability means in the food and agriculture sector. It is a global reference for assessing all components of sustainability along the food and agriculture value chain, including crops livestock, forestry and fisheries. SAFA defines elements of sustainability through its: 4 sustainability dimensions (i.e. environmental, social, economic, governance); 22 sustainability themes that are universal for sustainable development policy, planning and management; over 60 sub-themes that are relevant to all food and agriculture supply chains; and over a hundred core performance indicators related to the sub-themes.

2. Why SAFA?

SAFA offers a holistic framework that encompasses all aspects of sustainable agriculture, fisheries and forestry. 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, and focusing on performance. The SAFA encourages continuous improvement and builds capacity for sustainability by offering an easy-to-use standardized system, which does not require external experts.

3. What is SAFA used for?

SAFA can be used at multiple levels for multiple purposes and by different actors. 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)

- Self-assessment for evaluating sustainability at the operation level and identifying hot-spots for performance' improvement.
- Gap analysis with existing sustainability schemes for thematic coverage' improvement.
- 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
- Determining policy, investment and procurement priorities
- Providing a global guidance on sustainable requisites for global supply chains to governments

4. Is SAFA a standard?

No. Although SAFA shares many characteristics of a standard (e.g. consensus-based, quality focus, indicators suggestions), it does not have strict specifications. SAFA does not have any verification system of claims, as it is meant for self-assessment and continuous improvement of enterprises towards sustainability.

5. Is SAFA an Index?

No. SAFA does not boil down the results of an assessment into one number or value. Instead it provides a full polygon, which allows for an integrated analysis of trade-offs and synergies between all sustainability themes.

6. How does SAFA relate to other frameworks, standards, and guidelines?

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 (e.g. methodologies, information).

7. How can SAFA results be used?

SAFA results can be used for internal management, as well as learning and communication purposes. For credibility, it is essential that the SAFA procedures and results have a high degree of transparency. The completion of a SAFA assessment does not allow the entity to use the logo of SAFA or FAO in any way that implies endorsement or certification, as no one is verifying the claim. SAFA is not intended for Business-to-Consumer communication, as public assurance requires that certain characteristics or attributes of the product (or its production method), as laid down in specifications, be observed. SAFA does not assess products or processes – but enterprises. However, reference can be made to “consistency with the SAFA procedures and principles” provided that the assessment is made fully transparent in all its choices and customization (e.g. with regards to boundaries, data sources, indicator selection, rating, etc.)

8. Who defines SAFA?

SAFA is a result of four years of participatory development, together with hundreds of practitioners from civil society, public institutions and private enterprises around the world. Three expert consultations, two E-fora inviting public comments and 30

pilot studies provided the necessary knowledge for shaping SAFA. SAFA is hosted by the Natural Resources Management and Environment Department of FAO. The scope and principles of SAFA have been defined with stakeholders for stakeholders and future SAFA developments will be carried out with the growing community of SAFA partners.

9. How can SAFA be implemented?

The SAFA guidelines provide the principles and procedures for conducting an assessment. It can be implemented for instance by using the forthcoming SAFA Tools, which FAO will provide for public use by download from the dedicated website. In addition, different users may develop their own mechanisms for assessment in accordance with the SAFA guidelines, which may assess a specific context or have different levels of details.

10. What does it cost?

The SAFA Guidelines and future tools for implementation are free and available to the public on the FAO website. The time required to do a SAFA assessment depends on data availability; it may take from a few days to a few weeks to complete.