



Food and Agriculture
Organization of the
United Nations



Investing in rural people



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An introduction to

World Agricultures Watch

Generating evidence to inform policies
on agricultural transformations



There is a long-running debate on the merits of various agricultural transformation models, with sometimes-strong positions adopted despite a lack of empirical evidence. Conflicting views arise, for example, on small-scale versus large-scale production structures and on family (or 'peasant') farming compared with industrial farming. World Agricultures Watch (WAW) aims to supply much-needed empirical evidence to inform this debate, thereby reducing ideological biases and providing insights into the diversity of holding types.

Diversity in farming structures is evident to scholars and development practitioners but rarely acknowledged in policy-making: too often, the rule in policy design is 'one-size-fits-all'. WAW provides a methodological framework for understanding diversity in agricultural production structures and taking it into account in policy-making.

WAW uses a typological approach to categorize diversity based on the various assets managed by holdings and on the organizational, institutional and policy environment affecting the development of such assets. WAW also considers the ways in which production structures link to markets and the extent to which food is processed at the farm level.

The various types of production structure generate different outcomes in the three dimensions – economic, social and environmental – of sustainable development. In addition to the usual performance criteria (land and labour productivity), adequate assessments of production structures should include sustainable farming, the self-provision of food, and natural resource management. WAW is concerned that data is lacking to adequately inform policy-making on these issues; therefore, it adopts a pragmatic approach that takes into account existing datasets, produces new data when needed, and mobilizes data from complementary sources.

WAW aims to bridge the gap between existing agricultural data and the end users of such data, with a specific concern for family-farmer organizations, which are rarely consulted on the content of agricultural datasets and are poorly equipped to access and analyze them.

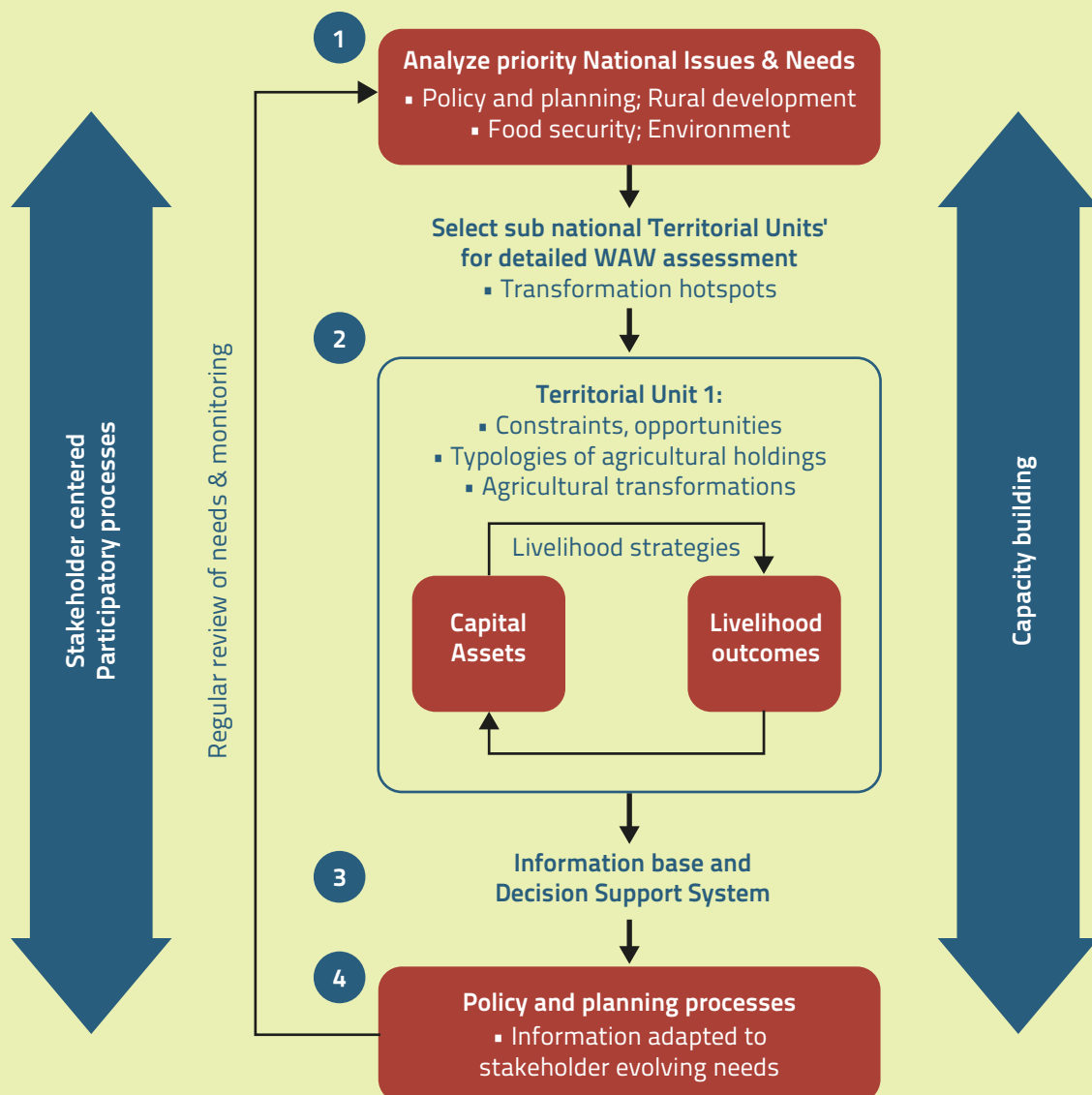


WAW focuses on four interrelated thematic domains:

- **gaining greater** insight into the coexistence of different farming types;
- **better measuring** sustainable development outcomes for different farming types;
- **meeting data and information needs**, including those of family-farmer organizations, early in the policy development process; and
- **informing policies** to ensure appropriate decision-making.

WAW's role is to provide methodological guidance – including for stakeholder participation – for linking domains, institutions and skills and increasing the access of family-farmer organizations to information, thereby strengthening their capacity to influence policy-making processes.

Methodological steps for implementing the WAW approach in a country





1. Gaining greater insight into the coexistence of different farming types

WAW seeks to provide greater insights into the diversity of farming systems. Structural diversity in farming should be considered in terms of:

- **Form of agricultural activity.** Beyond the dichotomy of small-scale versus large-scale holdings, the form of agricultural activity is influenced by whether it is family (e.g. tenant or contractual farming, or family business farming) or corporate and by the conditions under which such structures operate (e.g. their access to physical, natural, human, financial and social assets; the type of labour; their organization; and market relationships).
- **Types of collective organization.** Collectives perform diverse functions in each territorial unit, bringing stakeholders together to, for example, undertake processing or engage in value chains in various ways (e.g. conventional, direct-selling, quality or origin markets) to supply local or distant markets.
- **The contextual conditions in which agriculture is operating.** The broader context includes the extent of diversified economic options outside agriculture; the state of the environment and the natural resource base; demographic trends; territorial dynamics; and competition versus coexistence among contrasted and diverse forms of production.

An appreciation of diversity within the broad category of family farming is essential for identifying the investment types that might be suitable for different family-farm types with diverse assets endowments. Monitoring systems based on samples of farm types can be used to assess the conditions under which innovations might be adopted by different types of family farm.

2. Better measuring sustainable development outcomes for different farming types

Various aspects need to be considered in generating data and evidence to inform debate and policy-making on agricultural transformations:

- Agricultural performance is usually measured as by production levels or productivity (per unit of land or labour). But, in its broadest sense, agriculture produces more than commodities and income: for example, it can provide jobs, contribute to food security by self-provision and non-monetary exchanges, and improve the natural resource base, including through in situ biodiversity conservation.
- Agricultural performance for the most vulnerable also depends on access to common-pool resources (by gathering forest products, grazing herds on open ranges, fishing, hunting, etc.)
- By using locally adapted food-processing techniques, agriculture helps diversify food supplies in both local and distant markets.
- The way in which agriculture is practised – such as in the use of chemicals, the efficiency of irrigation, the adoption of certain land management practices, and the production of inputs such as fodder and other animal feed – can have direct and indirect impacts on its sustainability.
- Agriculture is an aspect of many complex livelihood systems worldwide in which it contributes only a minor share of household income. WAW considers such households to be part of the agriculture sector as far as food security is concerned.

A wide set of performance indicators is being established to make effective use of available datasets and proxy data. WAW provides a range of indicators that has to be adapted to local family farming systems with a core set to allow comparability.



3. Meeting data and information needs, including those of family-farmer organizations, early in the policy development process

There is a clear need for the effective organization of information on the diverse types of productive structures (or forms of production) and their diverse performance. WAW coordinates this assemblage of data in various ways, such as by:

- **sharing definitions and typologies** to facilitate exchange, for example through the Committee on World Food Security's High Level Panel of Experts on Food Security and Nutrition and the FAO Expert Working Group;
- **collaborating** with the World Programme for the Census of Agriculture, Dataportait, RuLis, and agricultural surveys;
- **gathering** data on structural dynamics and performance, including at the family level – requiring synergies between information systems managed by different departments (e.g. the Global Strategy for improving Agricultural and Rural Statistics); and
- **ensuring access** to strategic information on diverse marketing options and the conditions for achieving such access.

The inclusion of producer organizations in the process is a condition for their appropriation of such information systems and a strong capacity-building tool for their empowerment. There is an urgent need to build comprehensive information systems on the dynamics of agricultural change at the local and subnational scales. The collaboration with AgriCord enables WAW to include farmers' organisations in the process of designing National Agricultures Observatories.

4. Informing policies to ensure appropriate decision-making

Recognizing the family nature of many farming systems should lead to the better integration of social and public policies to deliver collective and public goods. In family farming, social units undertake economic activities in the agriculture sector (and beyond). Therefore, improvements in domestic aspects of households are likely to increase the economic productive capacity of those households.

Informing policy-makers on family farming implies providing information on both the agriculture sector and policies related to social protection, collective action and the provision of public goods.

Moreover, a range of other policies – such as on trade and industry – have the potential to affect farming activities and livelihoods in rural areas. It is necessary, therefore, to coordinate policy-making to make better use of investments in various domains in agriculture and other sectors to diversify economic options.

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