

Sesame Sector

Introductory brief for stakeholders

Rapid assessment of the sesame sector

Amidst the worldwide COVID-19 crisis we currently face, and the socio-economic effects of coping measures, specific attention and action are needed to secure agricultural production for farmers' income, employment, and food and nutrition security. After 25 years of economic growth, the World Bank¹ projects economic decline in Africa in 2020. Agriculture is considered to be one of the most seriously affected sectors: reduced production, reduced food imports and increased food insecurity are expected. The High-Level Panel of Experts, under the Committee on World Food Security,² indicates that the COVID-19 crisis is leading to instability in both local and global food markets, causing a disruption to food supply and availability.

For the upcoming agricultural season, it is important to ensure that the production and marketing of agricultural commodities will be as good as possible under the prevailing circumstances. This requires regularly assessing how the COVID-19 containment measures affect the agricultural sector, and taking action to minimize negative impacts on food security and income generation. This introductory brief suggests a collaborative effort to conduct rapid assessments of the sesame production zones and to find adequate responses to the challenges that are identified.

COVID-19 crisis and the sesame sector

Activities in the sesame sector are seasonal and time-sensitive; they take place in farmers' fields and company premises, and involve many other stakeholders. The COVID-19 crisis may threaten the performance and resilience of the sesame sector in multiple ways:

- If farmers cannot access inputs, credit or labour, then sesame production and harvesting activities will be seriously affected or even fail
- If transport is restricted, labourers will not be able to travel to sesame-growing areas and earn an income

- If health measures are not respected, labourers may spread the virus
- If marketing channels are blocked, especially exports, sesame prices will fall and sector revenues will decrease
- If nutritious and essential food items become scarce because of availability, stocking density or mobility issues, and farm households earn lower incomes, consumption patterns will be disrupted

These examples show that disruptions can have chain effects. However, proactive action can mitigate risks and optimize production and revenues: for example, the rotation crops of sesame (sorghum, soya, mung bean) can support food availability in other parts of the country.

Rapid assessment

Different partners are joining hands to organize rapid assessments of the sesame sector involving stakeholders of the sector. The aims are threefold: (i) to raise awareness of the effects and impact of the COVID-19 situation; (2) to prepare alerts to inform decision-makers in the government, industry, research, civil society and farmers' organizations, where the impact is felt the most; and (3) to contribute to the planning and implementation of immediate actions and interventions. Furthermore, the partners are developing these rapid assessments as a tool that can be useful for other sectors.

Focus on critical functions

The rapid assessment is based on a sector transformation model and focuses on the following ten functions: (i) sesame production, (ii) ecosystems,

1] World Bank, 2020. *An Analysis of Issues Shaping Africa's Economic Future. Africa's Pulse*, No. 21, Spring 2020. World Bank, Washington, DC ([link](#)). 2] HLPE, 2020. *Interim Issues Paper on the Impact of COVID-19 on Food Security and Nutrition*. HLPE Secretariat, Rome ([link](#)).

(iii) communities, (iv) producer organizations, (v) value chains, (vi) sesame-related services, (vii) consumption, (viii) sesame sector coordination, (ix) sesame-related policy and regulation, and (x) sesame sector revenues and investments. The model allows for a comprehensive sector assessment, facilitating the identification of the most affected functions and vulnerable interactions within the sesame sector, in order to direct the need for immediate action and interventions.

Method

The rapid assessment is regularly conducted and involves diverse stakeholder groups, who operate at different levels. A group of experts participate in a rapid remote survey. Survey results are discussed in more depth during focus group discussions (FGDs).

The first step is to establish a panel, including experts representing government, research, industry, service delivery, farmers' organizations, and farmers. Panellists answer a fifteen-minute survey. The survey covers the full range of functions and value chain operations of the sesame sector, which are considered essential at the time of the survey. A summary of the results is generated and feeds into the FGDs. Each discussion brings some 5-8 experts together (virtually) to review the results, propose actions, and identify stakeholders responsible for taking action.

The outcomes of the survey and FGDs will be compiled in an 'Alert'. This is a short document that outlines the most important and pressing challenges within the sesame sector and suggests immediate actions for stakeholders to initiate a practical response. A variety of communication tools, including social media, blogs, video messages, and portals are used to share the Alert.

The current planning is that the first Alert will be published in the first week of June 2020. Iterations will be performed monthly for the full duration of the crisis. The second Alert would thus be published in the first week of July. After these two months, the pilot will be evaluated.

Partnership

The rapid assessment, which mobilizes several stakeholder groups, is facilitated by the Sesame Business Network (SBN) support programme, and coordinated by the Ministry of Agriculture, Amhara Regional Agricultural Research Institute (ARARI) and Tigray Agricultural Research Institute (TARI). The SBN support programme is part of the Bilateral Ethiopian Netherlands Effort for Food, Income and Trade (BENEFIT). The BENEFIT partnership is funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs through the Embassy of the Kingdom of the Netherlands (EKN) in Addis Ababa. The SBN support programme aims to contribute to competitive, sustainable and inclusive sesame sector development, including related rotation crops, for increased farmers' income and socio-economic spill-over effects. The SBN support programme is coordinated by Wageningen Centre for Development Innovation (WCIDI), which supports value creation by strengthening capacities for sustainable development. WCIDI is part of Wageningen University & Research (WUR).

The 'Rapid assessment of the Sesame Sector' is published within a series of 'Rapid assessments' and 'Alerts' in multiple countries, and is a WCIDI Sector Transformation publication.

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