Adapting the Global Farm Metric for Malawi: Soil health, Social, and Human domains

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Overview

Sustainable Food Trust's **Global Farm Metric (GFM)** initiative aims to develop a common framework and holistic tool that can be adopted by farmers, food companies, investors and governments, allowing stakeholders to measure and monitor the impact of agriculture and take collective action for nature, climate, and health. The Global Farm Metric is a common framework to assess **whole-farm sustainability** that draws on **environmental, social and economic data** from the farm. It provides a single set of categories, indicators and measures that can be applied to all farming systems and landscapes. The GFM was developed initially in the UK, with **11 high-level categories measuring environmental and social sustainability**. Using Malawi as a case study, this research project set out to adapt GFM for a Global South context and to test the viability of the indicators with smallholder farmers in Malawi.

Methodology

Objective

To examine of three GFM indicator categories and to modify them for Malawi, with particular attention to gender.

Main Research Questions

- *Is the GFM appropriate and applicable to measuring whole-farm sustainability in **Malawi's context**?*
- *What indicators best capture **sustainability** in areas of soil health, human capital, and social capital?*

Step 1: Expert consultations with Malawian soil health, gender and social science experts (NASFAM, LUANAR University, Mzimba North District of Agriculture Department).

- *How do you understand each GFM category?*
- *Are these indicators relevant in the Malawi?*
- *What indicators better capture the farm context in Malawi?*
- *What tools are already in use?*

Step 2: An initial list of **key Indicators** proposed to test for Malawi.

Step 3: Survey development to capture each indicator, drawing from existing national and regional survey instruments in Malawi.

Step 4: Survey tested in Mzimba North and Mchinji Districts. In each area, we randomly selected 8 households to participate in the survey test. Husband and wife of the household were interviewed separately, for a total of 16 households (32 respondents).

Step 5: Reflection with enumerators and farmers on the tool's usefulness and appropriateness for Malawi.

Indicator Guidance adapted for Malawi

	Key Indicators	*UK Indicators*	*Adapted for Malawi*
Soil Health	**Soil Organic Matter** *(phys., chem. & biolog.)*	Combined samples from a single field (mixed) and analysis through "loss on ignition" (LOI).	Soil samples from 2 plots (improved vs unimproved) & NPK tests
	Soil Structure	Assessment of soil structure (VESS protocol) and infiltration (drainpipe test).	**Farmer self-assessment**, observations, '**feel**' **test** & comparison 2 plots (improved vs unimproved)
	Soil Biota / Biodiversity	Numbers of **Earthworm** and earthworm ecotypes	**Farmer self-assessment** and **visual observations**
Social Domain	**Farm Structure**	Farm legal structure, involvement of staff and local community in decision making	**Gendered land ownership** and control; Equitable division of **labor** and shares of the farm **income**
	Social Health	% of **staff living within 10 miles of farm,** info on **public access** and **selling direct to public**	**Group membership**, **trust** within groups, quality of **social support networks**
	Community Engagement	**Education provision** (apprenticeships, work placements, school visits), methods of **communication** & number of **visitors to farm**	**Knowledge-sharing** among farmers, households, and service providers; **Access to information** and training (disaggregated by sex)
Human domain	**Training & Capacity Building**	**Total # training days for staff**	**Access to information and training** (disagg. by sex) → *included in Social Domain, Community Engagement indicator*
	Employment	**# staff** (including volunteers and family members) working on farm; **# working hours** in 12 months	**# days the household had to rely on day labor to make ends meet; Months of food insecurity**
	Sick Days	**# sick days** for staff, **Information on social activities, risk assessments and workload**	**Subjective well-being module:** Assessment of individual health, well-being and problems-solving

Conclusions

Overall, we conclude that the Global Farm Metric (GFM) tool is potentially **relevant for key stakeholders and policy makers interested in whole-farm sustainability**. However, to be useful to farmers themselves, the GFM should be approached as a **learning and dialogue opportunity.**

Recommendations

We recommend that the survey be **administered by community agriculture, nutrition, and gender experts who have the skills and communications tools** (such as visual aids and key messages) to offer **actionable recommendations on sustainable agriculture and nutrition practices, as well as to discuss some of the problematic gender dynamics** that can hinder health, productivity, well-being and sustainability.

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