

# SESAME SEEDS IN SUDAN

Human rights risks linked to hummus and tahina



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## About ETI Sweden

Ethical Trading Initiative Sweden (ETI Sweden) is a multi-stakeholder initiative bringing together companies, trade unions, civil society and public sector to strengthen workers' rights and the respect for human rights in global supply chains. ETI Sweden offers trainings, advise, resources and a platform for collaboration between companies and organisations in all sectors. Read more on [www.etisverige.se](http://www.etisverige.se).

**May 2023**

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This report was written by Ergon Associates Ltd and commissioned by ETI Sweden; the research and final draft were completed before the widespread violence that erupted in Sudan in mid-April 2023.

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# Executive Summary

This report presents the findings of a Human Rights Risk and Impact Study (HRRIS) for ETI Sweden and its member companies (hereafter “ETI Sweden”) on the sesame seed supply chain originating in Sudan, conducted by Ergon Associates.

The study is based on a combination of desk-research and input provided by a range of stakeholders including sectoral experts working on the field (UN Food and Agriculture Organization and the UN Industrial Development Organization); traders and suppliers, Sudan’s Ministry of Agriculture, and non-governmental organisations working with sesame farmers (ZOA and Mercy Corps).

The two NGOs interviewed provided feedback regarding the situation of farmers, workers, and internally displaced people, but engaging with these communities directly would be the next key step. In addition, two of ETI Sweden’s member companies’ suppliers, as well as a Sudanese exporter of sesame were interviewed, and they corroborated the most important commercial steps in the supply chain from the production setting until the export phase out of Sudanese ports. Finally, a representative from Sudan’s Ministry of Agriculture was interviewed to fact-check findings and provide additional context to understand the challenges facing Sudanese sesame.

A key limitation of this HRRIS is that because it does not include field research in Sudan, its findings should be corroborated by engaging with the rightsholders identified as impacted by the sesame seed supply chain in Sudan, particularly sesame seed farm workers and communities.

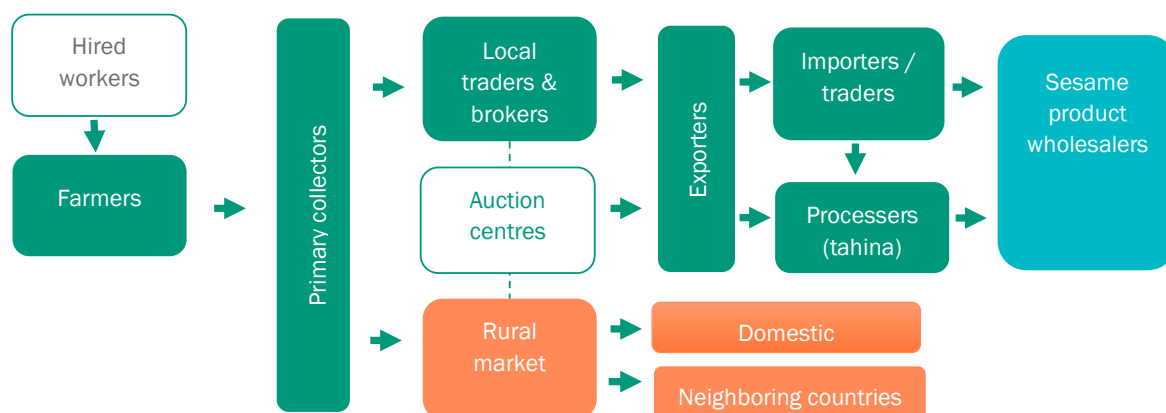
## Background to conducting this HRRIS

While ETI Sweden’s member companies trade just a fraction of the sesame seeds that are exported out of Sudan, this supply chain was selected as a focus for this HRRIS due to Sudan being one of the top world producers and exporters of sesame seeds along with the high quality of its seeds. ETI Sweden’s member companies therefore have a strong interest in continuing doing business with suppliers buying from Sudan. However, Sudan has experienced ongoing political and economic crises that exacerbate human rights risks and create a duty for businesses to conduct ‘heightened’ due diligence in relation to operations or business relationships in conflict-affected areas.

## Key points on the sesame seeds supply chains of ETI Sweden’s members

- Sesame seeds from Sudan are mainly produced in the Central, Southern, and Eastern regions. The top growing states, listed in order of highest average production between 2018 - 2022 are S. Kordofan, Sennar, N. Kordofan, Gedaref, S. Darfur, White Nile, W. Kordofan, and Blue Nile.
- The seeds are sold by farmers, usually at the time of harvest, when prices are lowest. They sell directly through local village markets or sell to intermediary collectors who pay the farmers in cash, the latter is reportedly more common for sesame destined for international markets. Farmers reportedly lack information about the market and have little access to storage in order to keep the seeds and sell them when prices are more advantageous to them.
- The seeds are then exported to traders and food manufacturers in third countries (typically Lebanon, Dubai, Greece). These actors maintain close ties to exporters and agents in Sudan to source needed volumes.
- Finally, ETI Sweden member companies buy either raw sesame seeds or processed sesame seed products such as tahina from first tier suppliers located outside of Sudan. ETI Sweden member companies have little to no visibility down to production level within their sesame seed and sesame product supply chains. Their suppliers and other supply chain actors located outside of Sudan have little concrete information from Sudan-based traders and exporters regarding production practices or market dynamics at source / farm level.

## Stages and key actors within the Sudanese sesame seeds supply chain



The above is a simplified overview of the supply chain. There are varied business relationships and structures at each stage of the supply chain, with some actors performing multiple functions.

## Summary of identified risks

The table below summarises the most potential salient human rights risks in relation to the production setting of the sesame seed supply from Sudan. The most potential salient risks appear in red or orange, and the least potential salient risks are yellow and pale yellow. No positive impacts were identified by this study.

Rights category	Risk or potential impact saliency
Forced labour	Very high
Child labour	Very high
Labour - Non-discrimination and prevention of gender-based violence and harassment	Very high
Right to adequate standard of living (livelihoods, housing, water, food)	Very high
Right to an effective remedy	Very high
Society - Non-discrimination and prevention of gender-based violence and harassment	High
Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)	High
Working conditions (wages, hours, and contracts)	Medium
Right to life, liberty, and security	Medium
Right to a healthy environment	Medium
Right to health	Medium
Freedom of association and collective bargaining	Medium
Right to property	Lower

## Summary of key risks or potential impact findings from research

Key risks and potential impacts (in order of saliency)	Key points
Forced labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forced labour (economic exploitation and debt bondage) identified in the agricultural sector, particularly among refugees and internally displaced persons (IDPs) who are more at risk of labour exploitation according to some sources.</li> <li>• Larger farms reportedly use labour intermediaries for recruiting migrant and other local workers, posing a risk of involuntary labour through wage withholding.</li> </ul>
Child labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are significant reports of child labour in the agricultural sector. Widespread societal acceptance of child labour, along with poverty, conflict, and limited access to social protection and education are aggravating factors.</li> <li>• Children have been reported to work in agricultural harvests across Sudan, carrying loads, and planting, sometimes with hazardous tools, for as much as 10-12 hours without meals or breaks. Reports of children's exposure to extreme heat, dust, and fumes were also highlighted.</li> </ul>
Labour - Non-discrimination and prevention of gender-based violence and harassment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Anecdotal reports of wage discrimination against women in sesame farming.</li> <li>• Informal women workers vulnerable to sexual harassment. General absence of safeguards or reporting channels for women workers.</li> <li>• In relation to family labour in agriculture, there is a discriminatory division of tasks with an assumed double burden of domestic work and farm work.</li> <li>• Internally displaced persons are particularly at risk of violence and harassment, although the extent within sesame farming is unknown.</li> </ul>
Right to adequate standard of living	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farming work in sesame is seasonal, and farmers' incomes are low and unpredictable.</li> <li>• Sesame farmers often rely on alternative economic activities during lean seasons, including travel to mines or larger cities in search of work, leaving women and children behind to tend the farms.</li> <li>• Across Sudan, many farming households face extreme levels of deprivation and malnutrition. Daily wage labourers, poor farming communities and internally displaced persons in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, all sesame producing areas, are those most affected by food insecurity.</li> <li>• Food prices in Sudan have surged due to poor harvests and inflation, which averaged 359% in 2021 (Al Jazeera, 2022; Reuters, 2022b) pushing millions into acute food insecurity (WFP, 2022).</li> </ul>
Access to grievance mechanisms / remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Farmers and workers are unlikely to have access to grievance mechanisms due to informality and absence of effective legal systems.</li> </ul>
Society - Non-discrimination and prevention of gender-based violence and harassment  Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are significant contextual risks around gender-based violence and harassment (GBVH) in Sudanese agriculture and women farmers are reportedly particularly vulnerable to harassment and violence from within the community and within the household.</li> <li>• Government OHS regulations exclude the agricultural sector.</li> <li>• Incorrect use of agrochemicals and fertilisers constitutes a key risk for farmers and workers, with 50% of sesame farmers reportedly using pesticides considered unsuitable by the FAO.</li> <li>• Many highly toxic pesticides are still being used across Sudanese agriculture.</li> </ul>

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Key risks and potential impacts (in order of saliency)	Key points
Working conditions: low wages, long hours of work	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agricultural workers in Sudan are employed on informal basis, with no written contracts or access to social protections. Long working hours reported.</li> <li>• Low and fluctuating wages reported as critical issue for agricultural workers, with payments in money or food.</li> </ul>
Right to life, liberty, and security	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Ongoing ethnic and communal violence has been linked to severe human rights abuses, including the killing, rape, and torture of civilians including in sesame producing states.</li> <li>• Women farmers in conflict areas are faced with intensifying violence, including killing, injury and sexual violence while farming and collecting water or wood.</li> <li>• Isolated reports of abduction of sesame farmers and violence between sesame farmers and workers caused by wage disputes.</li> </ul>
Right to a healthy environment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Climate change has contributed to extreme weather across Sudan, making floods, droughts, and erratic rainfall more common. This poses severe risks to farmers' livelihoods and damages large cultivation areas.</li> <li>• Extreme weather has increased demand on natural resources such as water and fertile land, thus intensifying conflicts between communities (UNEP, 2022).</li> </ul>
Right to health	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Agricultural workers and those living in rural areas face serious barriers to accessing health social protection services.</li> </ul>
Freedom of association and collective bargaining	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• No trade unions are found in the informal agricultural sector. There are no dedicated institutions which serve to represent the interests of workers either with farmers / recruiters or the government.</li> <li>• Severe State-imposed restrictions on workers' organisations.</li> </ul>
Right to property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Theft of sesame crops linked to intercommunal violence.</li> <li>• Low levels of legal protection for farmers' land rights.</li> </ul>

## Summary of recommended next steps

With the multi-layered nature of the supply chain and with most of Sudan's sesame production exported to China and other non-European markets, Swedish companies indirectly sourcing from Sudan have little direct leverage to change the fundamentals on the ground affecting the potential risks identified in this study. Thus, collaboration vertically through the supply chain and horizontally, among different actors at production level, should be the medium-long term focus of any mitigation strategy.

Recommendation	Summary
<b>Commission a full HRIA involving direct engagement with stakeholders</b>	While this HRRIS has identified several potential salient risks which exist in the sector, there are residual information gaps needed to understand more about the actors involved and their connection to risks in practice. Therefore, it is recommended that ETI Sweden commission a study aimed at following up on the key findings from this report and engage rightsholders on the ground to confirm findings, supporting members' efforts towards HRDD in relation to sesame from Sudan.

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Recommendation	Summary
<b>Identify ETI Sweden member companies that recognize Sudan sesame seeds as a potential salient risk and encourage a full mapping of members' supply chains</b>	Work with its membership to map their sesame supply chains and determine whether they source from Sudan. ETI Sweden can allow members to use the Ergon research questionnaire (see Annex) for suppliers prepared in the course of the HRRIS. Disseminate key learnings to membership.
<b>Start a dialogue with other interested actors willing to work collaboratively towards addressing risks in sesame production</b>	Engage members, their suppliers, and stakeholders towards discussing how retailers and food brands can develop strong, closer relationships with producers through a coordinated network of trusted suppliers. This would enable a more direct, coordinated mitigation effort in response to risk findings. This would involve building an alliance of farmers, government agencies, NGOs and other actors in the production areas and agreeing on how to work together to achieve social (and environmental) goals.
<b>Follow-up with national level stakeholders to understand opportunities to mitigate risks</b>	Engage with stakeholders further on what is needed to support farmers and workers, strengthen cooperatives, and empower civil society and government, and look for opportunities to align / collaborate. This is an envisaged component of a follow-up HRIA.

# 1. Background of the study

This sectoral Human Rights Risk and Impact Study (HRRIS) focuses on ETI Sweden members' supply chains of sesame seeds originating from Sudan. It is based on research covering the broader agricultural value chain in Sudan and known human rights risks.

Two of ETI Sweden's member companies and their suppliers participated in the study, after having identified Sudan's sesame seeds as a priority focus. The ETI Sweden member companies are major food producers and distributors in Sweden. They specialise in wholesale and private label sales of Middle Eastern and Mediterranean food products, including sesame seed-based products such as tahina and hummus.

Sesame seeds from Sudan are of commercial importance to the ETI Sweden member companies participating in this study, due to the high level of quality. The member companies have a preference to continue sourcing through their current suppliers who export from Sudan. Moreover, the sesame sector is of key importance to Sudan's agricultural value chain and long-term economic development plans. Sesame seeds are a resilient crop with a high market value when compared to other Sudanese agricultural commodities such as groundnuts, sorghum, and millet. Sudan has the largest sesame seed harvest area in the world. While the production of tahina occurs in large part outside Sudan, the Sudanese states of S. Kordofan, Sennar, N. Kordofan, Gedaref, S. Darfur, White Nile, W. Kordofan, and Blue Nile are origins of primary importance for raw sesame seeds used to make tahina destined for international markets.

However, the Sudanese agricultural development landscape is complicated by years of internal conflict, economic recession, and political instability, all leading to heightened risks and greater impact on social rights of farmers, workers, and communities. Several companies sourcing sesame seeds from Sudan already consider these products to be high risk in relation to the country context. Food companies supplying own branded or private label food products for retailers have been increasingly receiving requests for information from their customers about human rights issues present in the sesame seed supply chain.

## ETI Sweden member participants

This study aims to support ETI Sweden members' efforts to conduct responsible sourcing and human rights due diligence in line with the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD-FAO Guidance for Responsible Agricultural Supply Chains.

### Key aims of the HRRIS:

- To identify the most salient potential human rights impacts within sesame farming in Sudan.
- To understand value chain dynamics in the market for sesame seeds and how these relate to risks at farming level.
- To gather relevant feedback from 'rightsholders' and their views related to actual or potential impacts.
- To identify areas needing follow up research in order to recommend both mitigation actions for identified impacts relating to the Sudanese sesame seed supply chain.

## 2. Methodology

The HRRIS has been designed to support due diligence efforts in relation to international standards and frameworks, including the UN Guiding Principles on Business and Human Rights and the OECD Guidelines on Multinational Enterprises. The study is a desk-based deep dive into available information and literature on the subject, reinforced by inputs from stakeholders through remote interviews. Where no references are provided, information is taken from these interviews.

The scope of this study encompasses risks in local production including farming, cleaning, and packaging sesame seeds up to but not including export from Sudan's major ports.

Findings of human rights risks and potential impacts arising in the value chain were analysed and classified according to salience (Lower-Highest) based on:

- The different responsibilities of various value chain actors (farmers, traders).
- The frequency of reports and / or other factors influencing the likelihood of a risk or impact occurring in practice within a target supply chain.
- The severity of risk or potential impact - whether the risk or potential impact is either felt widely or has a singular significant or severe effect on the enjoyment of rights.

Recommendations at this stage reflect the likely next steps for ETI Sweden and members in relation to their due diligence on sesame seeds with Sudan. They are informed by views of stakeholders and considered in light of ETI Sweden's current members and their needs.

While considerable information on the sesame seed value chain in Sudan was found both through desk-research and stakeholder corroboration, some conclusions on inferred risks presented in this study are based on reported risks present in primary agriculture in Sudan. For instance, the reliance on hired workers employed by communal farming units and the common participation of children in agricultural work settings is reportedly consistent across different types of cash and subsistence crop production.



## Limitations

The methodology followed for this study is considered to have provided an effective means for identifying risks in the Sudanese sesame seed supply chain and identifying areas to develop recommendations. However, the nature of an HRRIS does not include direct participatory engagement with rightsholders on the field. A second phase for this project, a Human Rights Impact Assessment (HRIA) is an envisaged follow-up step to validate findings and corroborate recommendations for ETI Sweden's members.

This HRRIS was based on the following steps:



Based on identified risks, a potential phase 2 of the project would entail:



### 3. Contextual risks in Sudan

There are multiple interconnected and prolonged crises affecting Sudan - political, humanitarian, and economic – which affect the human rights situation in agricultural value chains. Businesses operating or engaging with Sudan must regularly contend with political instability, conflict / violence, and economic depression.

The effects of violence and instability have been felt comprehensively across all of Sudan, with nearly every segment of society, including sesame growing communities, having been affected in some way.

<p><b>Political instability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Conflict in the early 2000s between Arab groups and non-Arab tribes led to South Sudan’s secession in 2011.</li> <li>• A popular uprising led to the overthrow of former president Omar al-Bashir in 2019.</li> <li>• From 2019-2021, a civilian-led government continued legal reforms and signed the 2020 Juba Peace Agreement with rebel groups.</li> <li>• In October 2021, there was a military coup which saw civilian leaders arrested and a state of emergency declared. The coup was met with strong resistance from civilians and many popular protests were forcibly suppressed by state security forces, leading to several reported civilian deaths.</li> <li>• As of early 2023, the military led government was deadlocked while political parties try to reach a transition deal with the military to form a civilian government.</li> <li>• In April 2023, infighting between the Sudanese army and paramilitary groups led to widespread violence across the country, leading to an unprecedented humanitarian crisis. Khartoum and the Darfur region have been the most affected, with thousands of people wounded and hundreds killed. The violence has led to massive evacuations and major assets and infrastructure being affected.</li> </ul>
<p><b>Conflict and humanitarian crisis</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Internal conflict has characterized Sudan for most of its independent history. Protracted ethnic and inter-communal violence has been linked to severe human rights abuses, including the killing, rape, and torture of civilians (US DoS, 2021; Freedom House, 2022).</li> <li>• Sudan hosts one of the highest numbers of displaced people in Africa, with over 1.1 million refugees and 3.7 million internally displaced people (UNHCR, 2022). These forcibly displaced groups lack access to education, decent work, and social protections with large numbers working in the informal agricultural sector (ILO, 2022a).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Land and resource disputes</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are ongoing conflicts rooted in land disputes across Sudan. These have caused significant displacement among internally displaced persons and property damage (Human Right Watch, 2023). There are reports of a significant number of farmers unable to plant their fields due to the ongoing insecurity and violence, leading to famine conditions in parts of South Kordofan (US DoS, 2022).</li> <li>• Intercommunal violence is present both in the Darfur states as well as areas bordering Ethiopia, where refugees clash with Sudanese people over limited resources.</li> <li>• There are 1.5 million vulnerable and conflict-affected children requiring humanitarian assistance to access education (OCHA, 2021).</li> </ul>
<p><b>Poverty and economic instability</b></p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sudan is one of the least developed countries in the world. Poverty in Sudan is experienced in multiple ways, including monetary poverty, as well as non-monetary factors such as low access to education and health systems, and overall low living standards.</li> <li>• While there are few recent statistics on poverty rates, projected estimates for monetary poverty for 2020, headcount poverty was 64.2% across Sudan and 70.6% for rural areas (MoFEP, 2021).</li> </ul>

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## Poverty and economic instability

- Poverty varies widely across states, with rates highest in Kordofan and Darfur states in 2014-2015 (MoFEP, 2021).
- Factors that affect poverty rates vary by region and include conflict, poor harvests, weak infrastructure, and a crashing economy (Dabanga, 2022a; MoFEP, 2021).
- Since the secession of South Sudan in 2011, Sudan has lost over half of the government revenues that came from South Sudan's oil.
- The economic landscape is plagued by reduced economic growth and hyperinflation, which averaged 359% in 2021 (Al Jazeera, 2022; Reuters, 2022b).
- An estimated 15 million people in Sudan are experiencing acute food insecurity (WFP, 2022). Daily wage labourers, poor farming communities and internally displaced persons in Darfur, South Kordofan and Blue Nile, all sesame producing areas, are among those most affected (FEWS NET, 2021).

### 3.1 Key implications for business operating in conflict zones

The United Nations Development Program (UNDP) and the UN Working Group on Business and Human Rights have created a guide for businesses and other stakeholders to gauge risks and develop practical measures to ensure responsible engagement in conflict-affected areas, such as Sudan.

Business is expected to implement 'heightened' due diligence in relation to operations or business relationships in conflict-affected areas such as Sudan. This means identifying potential and actual impacts on people (human rights) as well as on the context (conflict) and taking steps through an ongoing process involving meaningful consultation with affected rightsholders to ensure business activities do not exacerbate the conflict.



# 4. The Sudanese sesame seed industry and value chain

## 4.1 Production context

Agriculture is the largest segment of the economy, employing 65% of the Sudanese population and providing a vital source of food and income-earning opportunities, as well as employment opportunities (especially for women) (FAO, 2022a; ILO, 2022b). Farming households in Sudan produce a mix of subsistence food crops for their own consumption and cash crops for domestic or export markets. Sesame production is volatile and dependent on market trends and cropping patterns across Sudan's millions of small producers. Sesame production is rotated with other cash crops as well as food crops and / or produced intermittently across suitable growing areas and is therefore deeply interwoven with the wider agricultural context in Sudan. The unpredictability of sesame seed yields along with the fact that most producers are small scale cash crop farmers without any proper systems of traceability (STDF, 2021), mean that suppliers' ability to forecast purchase volume and trace origin to a specific production site / local trading centre is extremely challenging.

### 4.1.1. Key facts and figures: Sesame seed production

Three main varieties of sesame seeds are grown in Sudan: white, red, and black. The type of sesame grown reportedly varies between regions depending on soil quality, with seeds becoming increasingly bitter towards the south of the country. Producers in Sennar and Gedaref states, situated in the east of Sudan, tend to grow white sesame seeds, while producers further west in Kordofan and Darfur grown black, red, and white sesame seeds, which tend to be darker and higher in oil content than in the eastern states.

#### Production

- Sudan has the largest sesame-seed harvest area (the part of the crop area that is harvested) in the world and sesame-seeds are its most exported agricultural commodity (FAO, 2022a), representing 17.6% of global production in 2021 (FAO STAT).
- Sesame seed quality from Sudan is widely recognized, with several buyers and supply chain actors highlighting its unique quality.
- Sesame production volumes are highly volatile. In 2022 production volumes declined by between 12-25% following low market prices the previous year, which led many farmers to grow alternative crops (FAO, 2023). Below average yields in 2021 led to a 40% reduction in exports (FAO, 2022a).
- 60% of Sudanese sesame is produced by traditional rainfed small-scale farmers while approximately 40% is produced by semi-mechanized rainfed farming (FAO, 2022a; ILO, 2022b).
- Semi-mechanized rainfed farms: Large farms (400-50,000 hectares) with mechanization used for land preparation, seeding, and some harvesting (FAO, 2022a). Irrigation is primarily carried out manually.
- Traditional rainfed farms: Small farms (2-50 hectares) run by smallholder farmers and family households with no access to irrigation. Most of the labour is manual at all stages of the production setting (FAO, 2022a).
- Farms with both types of production settings rely mostly on manual labour and depend on rainfall to irrigate, making production cycles highly unpredictable. Sesame yields have significant fluctuation year to year mainly due to drought and pest contamination (FAO, 2022a).
- Other factors affecting yield are a lack of efficient and maintained farming equipment, a lack of credits / capital for farmers, inadequate maintenance of irrigation canals and pumps and deficient weed and pest control.

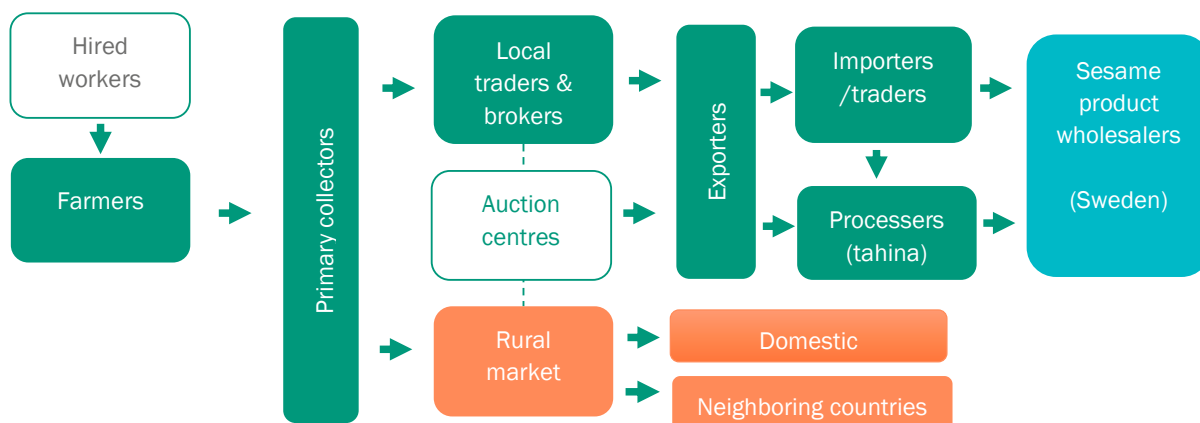
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Geography	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• According to FAO's production data from 2018 - 2022, the main sesame producing regions of Sudan are in the center, southern, and eastern parts of the country. S. Kordofan (35% of total production), Sennar (14% of total production), N. Kordofan (14% of total production). The remaining sesame comes from Gedaref, S. Darfur, White Nile, W. Kordofan, Blue Nile, W. Darfur, Central Darfur, Kassala, Al Jazirah, E. Darfur and N. Darfur, (FAO, 2023).</li> </ul>
Trade context	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sesame production and exports have substantially grown over the last decade; in 2021-2022, Sudan produced over 1 million tonnes of sesame seed, most of it being exported.</li> <li>• Sudan's top export market is China, followed by Turkey (Tridge, 2022). The quantity of sesame exported to the European Union differs significantly from year to year, varying between 4,000-16,000 tonnes per year between 2017-2021 (CBI, 2022).</li> <li>• Greece is the largest direct importer within the European Union. Over 90% of Sudan's sesame exports into the European Union in 2021 were exported to / through Greece.</li> <li>• For Sweden-based food retailers, particularly in relation to value-added sesame products such as tahina, product is imported by countries such as Greece, Lebanon, and United Arab Emirates (UAE), where the manufacturing processes occur. Tahina and other sesame-based products are then exported to Sweden as finished products.</li> <li>• In recent years, quality, food safety and contamination concerns related to sesame seeds from Sudan have led to rejected exports (UNIDO, 2017).</li> </ul>
Economic importance to Sudan	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sesame is considered a resilient, high-value crop compared to other Sudanese agricultural commodities. However, it is also sensitive to changeable weather such as erratic rainfall patterns and is therefore not without risk.</li> <li>• Sudanese sesame seeds have been able to enter high value markets, predominantly in Asia and the Middle East. However, production is still characterized by traditional, labour intensive, and low yield farming practices (ILO, 2022a), with most farmers not achieving their income earning potential from sesame farming.</li> <li>• Sudanese farmers have been targeted for capacity building in recent years, both by the Sudanese government and international development actors. These upskilling activities focus on developing entrepreneurial skills, networks and technological training targeting the agricultural value chain with an aim to expand and diversify economic and employment opportunities (ILO, 2022a).</li> </ul>
Quality, ethical, and sustainable production standards	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• The majority of sesame seeds produced in Sudan are not certified under any national or international standards framework focusing on labour, decent work or human rights. Aside from reports of limited volumes of organic production of sesame in Sudan, there is also little take up of schemes aimed at improving incomes or promoting good agricultural practices.</li> <li>• However, exporters to the EU will need to be able to demonstrate compliance with European Food Safety import regulations.</li> </ul>

## 4.2 Overview of sesame value chain activities and stages




The key activities and rightsholders affected or involved in the Sudanese sesame seed value chain are listed below. The value chain is complex with multiple actors where intermediaries (collectors, transporters, brokers, and traders) play a key role in moving the seeds up the chain. This is in part due to taxation structures and large distances between farms, as well as lack of resources and information for farmers. While not all sesame seeds moving through the Sudanese value chain may follow this exact pathway, desk-research confirmed by sectoral expert interviews and traders indicate these are the most relevant supply chain actors:

Based in part on “Upgrading the Sudanese Sesame seeds value chain” – STDF Project 2022 (implemented by FAO & UNIDO)





Category	Overview of role
Farmers 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The majority of farmers are family smallholders operating on highly fragmented inherited lands. They are usually not registered and do not pay income taxes (ILO, 2022b).</li> <li>Poorer farmers heavily depend on paid local work but also rely on seasonal migration to work in larger cities, leaving women and children to tend the farms (ILO, 2022b).</li> <li>Land tenure is customary, meaning that small farms are usually considered to be owned in common, and managed communally according to local customary principles and practices. In practice, it is common for community elders to allocate land for production to individuals or households, a process which is wholly beyond the purview of the State (FAO, 2021).</li> <li>Farmers produce sesame alongside either food crops for own subsistence or other cash crops for the market. This is to avoid the risk of crop failure and the risk of farming households falling into food insecurity (ILO, 2022b). Farmers usually aim to sell their entire crop to traders directly after the harvest, when prices are the lowest. This is due to the need for immediate payment and lack of safe storage facilities which would allow farmers to stock their product whilst holding out for higher prices (ILO, 2022b).</li> <li>The majority of farmers have little or no access to formal bank lending and credit. Most farmers rely on local merchants for funding in exchange for purchasing crops during cultivation at a price that is often below the market value at harvesting time (this is known as the “Shail” system) (ILO, 2022b).</li> <li>The degree of organisation through farmers’ associations or cooperatives of small cash crop producers is low (ILO, 2022b).</li> <li>Most farmers harvest their seeds by cutting the plants into bushels and placing them into plastic sheets. As the seeds dry, they fall into the sheets. Whatever is collected contains plant residues and other impurities and is packaged and transported by collectors to local markets. While some farmers sieve the seeds using metal sieves, the proper cleaning of seeds takes place further up the supply chain when seeds are being held by traders and clean them in more industrial facilities.</li> </ul>

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Category	Overview of role
<p>Workforce</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• <b>Family workers:</b> Smallholder farms tend to rely on family members for the cultivation and harvesting of their crops. Usually, whole families engage in farming the land, including men, women, and children (ILO, 2022b). Anecdotal evidence suggests that women make up the majority of farmers as men are increasingly migrating to work in mines or larger cities in order to diversify and increase family income.</li> <li>• <b>Communal labour:</b> This form of agricultural labour, where community members perform agricultural work collectively, is widely used. Its practice has been affected by the ongoing conflict in the region due to internal displacement and security concerns.</li> <li>• <b>Hired workers:</b> Hired labour is used on both small and larger farms. While there is little data on how common this practice is, it is known to be particularly important on semi-mechanised farms. Hired labourers typically do tasks such as weeding and harvesting. Farmers who hire workers do so informally (verbal contracts) on an irregular basis, without registering them with local labour offices or offering any form of social protection (ILO, 2022b). Most agricultural wage labourers work for multiple farmers on a daily or hourly basis, and it is also common practice to pay workers with a share of the crop (ILO, 2022b).</li> <li>• Recruitment is done through informal networks – workers are selected from informal gathering points in the mornings (ILO, 2022b).</li> <li>• Working conditions of hired workers, including wage rates and contract terms, reportedly vary depending on fluctuating yields.</li> <li>• Many workers are seasonal labourers from Ethiopia and Sudan who are commonly employed in sesame farming, often recruited by labour intermediaries. Refugees from South Sudan, Eritrea and Ethiopia are also engaged in work on sesame farms, with some refugees entering into sharecropping agreements, whereby a landowner allows a tenant to use land in return for a portion of the crop (ILO, 2022a).</li> </ul>
<p>Primary collectors</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Collectors are usually well-connected individuals who have their own transport and know their way around the sesame producing areas. They can be farmers themselves who have extra cash allowing them to buy other farmers' crops.</li> <li>• In addition to selling to collectors, some farmers also sell their entire cash crop to the traders and processors at local markets.</li> <li>• Primary collectors then sell the sesame seeds to processors, traders, and exporters. They also sell directly to local buyers for domestic consumption.</li> <li>• Collected sesame seed is taken to local village markets in each state where district, regional, and national traders purchase them in large volumes. A minor percentage of sesame seeds sold at local village markets ends up being traded for domestic consumption.</li> </ul>
<p>Brokers &amp; Regional traders</p> 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Traders are well-established businesses with access to credit, maintaining a network of suppliers, generally with a specific regional or district level focus, with some more established traders operating across all production areas in Sudan.</li> <li>• The market for sesame seeds is fully liberalised with no price controls imposed by the state. Prices are subject to individual negotiation at production level and generally there is a lack of information on the key drivers of sesame prices.</li> <li>• Farmers reportedly understand little about the market value of their crop and are not informed about prices or price development throughout the year (ILO, 2022b).</li> </ul>
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sesame seeds go through various levels upstream in the supply chain, with their price increasing substantially by each broker / trader compared to the pricing that farmers get. It is reported that the price of the seeds at the time of export is exponentially larger.</li> <li>• Cleaning is also done by exporters at the ports.</li> <li>• Industrial cleaning by traders is likely to have a lower risk than other agricultural activities because laws on wages, hours, and occupational safety within the Labour Code cover agricultural workers in the operation, repair and maintenance of agricultural machinery and workers processing agricultural products. However, it is reported that these laws are not effectively enforced (US DoS, 2022).</li> </ul>

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Category	Overview of role
Auction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Stakeholder interviews indicated the existence of 9 regional auction centres across Sudan, where raw sesame seeds are auctioned.</li> <li>There are conflicting reports regarding how frequently sesame is sold through auction, with some brokers also operating as traders, and some traders just buying sesame seeds directly from markets without going through auctions.</li> </ul>
Exporters 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Most exporters operate from either Khartoum or Port Sudan and export the sesame seed as raw material (i.e., not processed into tahina or other sesame containing product).</li> <li>The exporters clean and package the seeds into 50kg bags, which are then packed into 20 and 40 MT containers before being exported.</li> <li>Two-thirds of the sesame seed produced in Sudan is exported, with the remainder processed to be distributed in the domestic market or lost as a result of poor infrastructure or insufficient links in processing (World Bank, 2020).</li> </ul>
Processors 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Food brands selling sesame-containing products within the Swedish market have identified Lebanon and Greece as locations where sesame is manufactured into other products such as tahina.</li> <li>While some tahina is produced locally within Sudan, these local processors of tahina do not appear to be within the export supply chain and are therefore not a key stage in the sesame seed supply chain for Swedish food companies and retailers.</li> <li>Turkey and Israel are other potential key manufacturing locations for European companies, though not yet connected directly to ETI Sweden members' supply chains. Both countries are processors and exporters of high volumes of tahina, meeting high consumer demand while relying on upgraded technology.</li> <li>Processing of tahina involves grinding sesame seeds into a smooth paste. Before processing the seeds into tahina, they can be hulled, roasted, or left raw.</li> <li>The production process is reportedly not especially labour intensive, with industrial volumes produced in small factories utilising less than 20 workers (according to the manufacturers themselves).</li> </ul>

### 4.3 Legal framework

Sudan has ratified 8 of the 10 ILO Fundamental Conventions – with exceptions being C155 (Occupational Safety and Health Convention) and C187 (Promotional Framework for Occupational Safety and Health Convention). It has also not ratified the Labour Inspection (Agriculture) Convention. The key sources of law in Sudan are the 1997 Labour Code, the 2019 Constitutional Declaration and the 2010 Children’s Act. However, the 1997 Labour Code excludes agricultural workers from its provisions, with the exception of those working in the operation, maintenance and repair of agricultural machinery, in enterprises that process or market agricultural products, or in the administration of agricultural products (Labour Code, Art. 3(g)). It is reported that laws on discrimination in employment, forced, compulsory and child labour are not sufficiently enforced in both the formal and informal sectors, and that penalties are too low to stop violations (US DoS, 2022).



### 4.3.1 Labour Rights

Working conditions	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>While there are legal provisions on working hours and wages in the 1997 Labour Code, this does not cover the majority of agricultural workers, with the exception of those working in the operation, maintenance and repair of agricultural machinery, in enterprises that process or market agricultural products, or in the administration of agricultural products (US DoS, 2022; Labour Code, Art. 3(g)). There is uncertainty around whether minimum wage laws apply to the agricultural sector.</li> </ul>
Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Workers in the agricultural sector are excluded from legal provisions on occupational health and safety, with the exception of those maintaining agricultural machinery, processing, or marketing agricultural products, or working in administration (US DoS, 2022; Labour Code, Art. 3(g)).</li> </ul>
Child labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Work for children under 14 years old is prohibited under the 2010 Children’s Act (Art. 36), with the exception of agricultural work that is not dangerous to children’s health.</li> <li>Working hours for children are restricted to 7 hours per day, with no more than 4 hours consecutive work (Children’s Act, Art. 39). Work between 6pm-8am is prohibited for children (Children’s Act, Art. 39).</li> </ul>
Forced labour	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Forced labour is prohibited under the 2019 Constitutional Declaration (Art. 47).</li> <li>The Ministry of Interior’s Department of Combating Human Trafficking is responsible for enforcing anti-trafficking laws.</li> </ul>
Freedom of Association	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 2019 Constitutional Declaration provides for freedom of association (Art. 58(1)); however these rights are unlikely to be exercised in practice by rural smallholder farmers or by hired workers in the informal, unorganized agricultural labour force.</li> <li>Trade unions, in largely non-agricultural sectors in which they are present, have faced significant crackdowns since the April 2019 military coup. A decree issued by the Sovereignty Council in December 2019 dissolved all unions and seized their assets (ITUC).</li> <li>Unions were dissolved by al-Burhan in October 2021 after the military takeover (Freedom House, 2022), and reportedly frozen again in November 2022 (Reuters, 2022a).</li> <li>The right to strike is not explicitly provided for under the 1997 Labour Code (US DoS, 2022; ITUC), although the Trade Unions Law of 2010 acknowledges trade unions’ right to strike.</li> </ul>
Gender Based Violence and Harassment (GVBH)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 2019 Constitutional Declaration prohibits discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, colour, gender, language, religious faith, political opinion, racial or ethnic origin, or ‘any other reason’ (Art. 48).</li> <li>The Criminal Act was reportedly amended in 2015 to criminalise sexual harassment (UNDP, b). However, the 1997 Labour Code does not explicitly refer to sexual harassment (ILO CEACR, 2022b).</li> </ul>

### 4.3.2 Economic and Social Rights

Right to property	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The right to own property and protection from uncompensated land expropriation are provided for under the 2019 Constitutional Declaration (Art. 61).</li> <li>It is reported that women are denied rights to property through laws based on Sharia (Freedom House, 2022).</li> </ul>
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### 4.3.3 Civil and political rights

Right to life / right to liberty	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>The 2019 Constitutional Declaration recognises the right to life (Art. 44).</li> </ul>
Right to participation	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Sudan has signed but not ratified the UN Convention Against Corruption and the African Union Convention on Preventing and Combatting Corruption (Freedom House, 2022).</li> </ul>

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### 4.3.4 Cross-cutting rights

Access to remedy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The right to litigate and access to the justice system is guaranteed under the 2019 Constitutional Declaration (Art. 53).</li><li>• For workers that are covered by the Labour Code, attempting to resolve labour disputes involves lengthy and complex bureaucratic procedures, including compulsory arbitration (US DoS, 2022). There are no formal legal pathways to remedy at the workplace for the majority of agricultural workers as relevant laws on settling disputes do not cover the majority of the agricultural sector (Labour Code, Art. 3 (g)).</li></ul>
Equality and non-discrimination	<ul style="list-style-type: none"><li>• The 2019 Constitutional Declaration prohibits discrimination on the basis of ethnicity, colour, gender, language, religious faith, political opinion, racial or ethnic origin, or 'any other reason' (Art. 48).</li><li>• Women are prohibited from employment in work that might be hazardous such as carrying weights or with exposure to poisonous materials or to temperatures "exceeding the normal limits born by women" (Labour Code, Art. 19).</li><li>• The 1997 Labour Code does not provide for equal pay for men and women (ILO CEACR, 2022a).</li></ul>

## 4.4 Key challenges in the sesame seed industry

In addition to desk-based research, sectoral experts, suppliers, and traders were interviewed regarding the current situation in the industry, key reported issues include:

- **Lack of farmer information and weak connectedness to market.** Sesame farmers face significant barriers to accessing information. Many agricultural workers do not have access to the internet or mobile phones (ILO, 2022b). Although most farmers work their own land, the lack of organisation or cooperatives for knowledge sharing and market value understanding means that they do not maximize the benefits of their labour and harvests. It is reported that many farmers have a low level of trust when offered legitimate help or information and thus cultural attitudes need to change for farmers to be less isolated and embrace learning and support.
- **Low transparency on price discovery / price setting.** There is a lack of accessible information about market value and pricing of sesame seeds, as these depend on pricing set by local traders and brokers through individualized agreements. Farmers reportedly have little access to market information and are uninformed of seasonal price developments or prices in markets outside of their area (ILO, 2022b).
- **Financial vulnerability of small holder farmers leading to selling below market price.** There is low return on investment on sesame as a cash crop since it is usually sold in local markets directly after harvest when prices are lowest. This is due to farmers having financial pressures – with many farming households being in and / or at risk of food poverty, and limited access to formal lending, as well as a lack of storage facilities. Cash crop farmers are thus increasingly dependent on local merchants and traders who control local markets and sesame prices, while subsistence farmers have low levels of production and little to sell after their own consumption.
- **Erratic weather leading to crop loss.** Most sesame harvested in Sudan comes from traditional rain-fed farming without the use of machinery or irrigation. Reported volumes of production can vary up to 40% year-to-year depending on droughts or floods, sometimes leading to crop failure and total loss of income.
- **No social protection.** Farmers rely on a combination of economic activities to earn a living, especially outside the harvest season, by migrating to larger cities in search of work, mainly in the informal economy. They are not registered with any authority, nor do they pay taxes or social security

contributions. While many farmers are covered by the National Health Insurance Fund (NHIF), there is an overall shortfall with respect to the availability of healthcare services in rural areas. In addition, there is unwillingness or financial inability to make social security contributions.

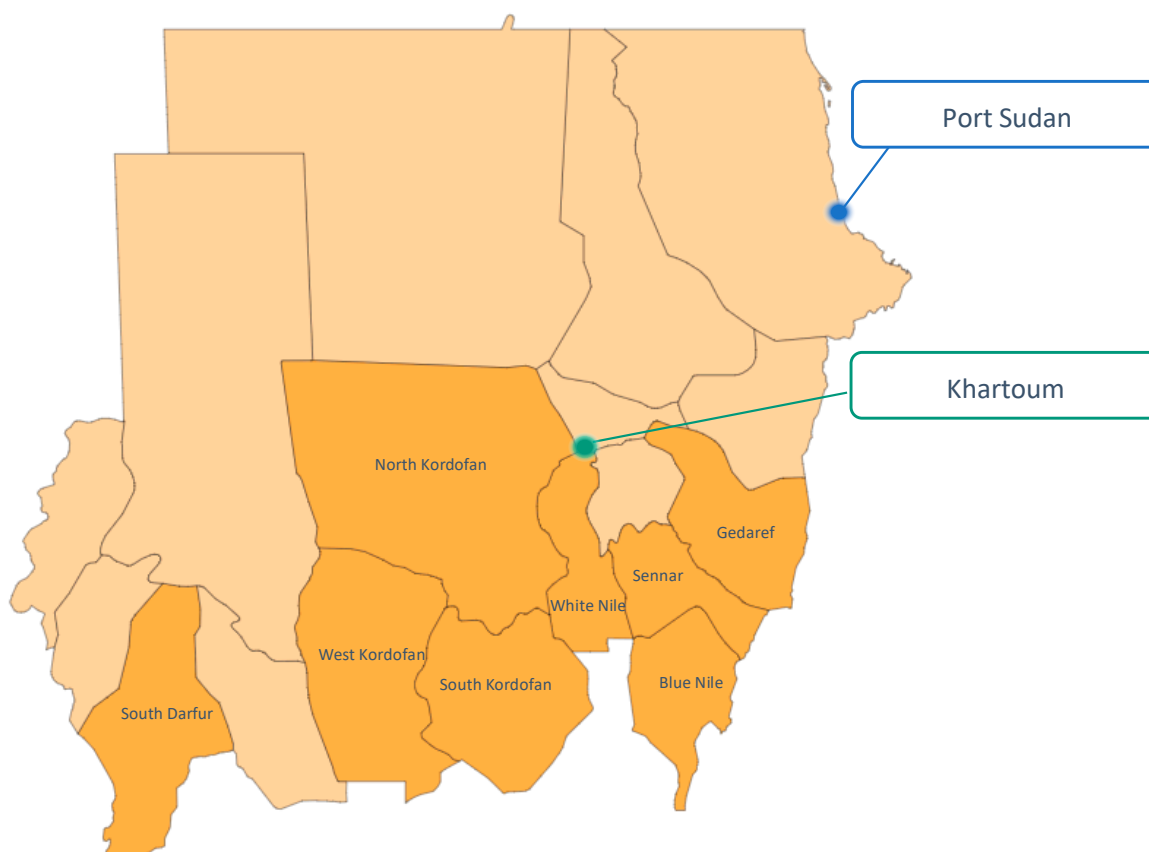
- **Subsistence farmers experience a high degree of debt.** Small farmers often rely on private or personal loans in times of crises.
- **The sector requires investment in training on good agricultural practices and post-harvest handling as well as infrastructure.** Pest control and lack of storage are major operational issues. Considerable national and international investment is going into the development of the Sudanese agricultural value chain to be more effective, increase quality standards, and be able to access best-paying markets in Europe. However, the lack of training, infrastructure, and resources means that tonnes of sesame are wasted every year for not meeting the required standards for export and trade.
- **Low prices.** Both the costs of production for and yield from Sudan's sesame crop are highly volatile. This along with market supply and demand (heavily influenced by behaviors in the Chinese market) dictate final pricing. All reports confirm that pricing for sesame seeds fluctuates significantly from month to month. The final price that suppliers outside of Sudan pay for seeds includes shipping fees, transfer fees, storage fees, and taxes. Anecdotal reports from traders indicate that the pricing per 100 kg / bag of sesame seeds that producers get is reportedly as little as less than 1% of the retail value of sesame seeds (in bulk, not value added).
- **Sector opacity.** There is an overall lack of transparency among actors within the sesame supply chain and a perceived unwillingness among some intermediary actors to share information about production origins or value chain dynamics. There is also little to no transparency on the connection between the traders who auction the sesame seeds out of the value chain and the producers of those seeds. Suppliers interviewed for this study confirmed that while many traders claim ownership of the sesame farms they sell from, the reality is that they are usually agents buying / selling from local producers who are nearly impossible to track.

## 4.5 How ETI Sweden members buy sesame seeds

### 4.5.1 ETI Sweden members' suppliers and sourcing locations

The ETI Sweden members who have participated in this study source sesame seeds from a few key regions within Sudan; however, their suppliers located outside of Sudan could not identify the exact region of origin as there are no facilities capable of tracing product back to production origin. It was reported that it is common for shipments out of Sudan to contain several types of seeds (different colours) mixed altogether. These mixed bags represent seeds coming from various states in Sudan, where soil and growing conditions affect the type, taste, and colour of sesame seeds produced.

The states that produce the highest amount of sesame seeds are in Central, Southern, and Eastern Sudan: S. Kordofan, Sennar, N. Kordofan, Gedaref, S. Darfur, White Nile, W. Kordofan, and Blue Nile. These are listed in order of average production between 2018-2022. From these states, the seeds get transported to local and regional markets where traders buy them and prepare them before they are exported. Once seeds reach the cities of Khartoum and Port Sudan, the individual bags are loaded into 20 and 40 MT containers to be shipped to various locations (China, Turkey, other Middle Eastern countries).



# 5. Risk and potential impact findings

## 5.1 Summary of key risks and information gaps

RIGHTS CATEGORY	RISK LEVEL	KEY RISKS AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS	INFORMATION GAPS
<b>Forced labour</b>	<b>Very high</b>	Labour recruitment through contractors who handle workers' wages; vulnerable workforce incl. IDPs.	Prevalence of FL, existence of 'coercion'.
<b>Child labour</b>	<b>Very high</b>	Multiple reports from experts suggest that child labour within families is common in sesame production.	Frequency of CL, tasks carried out.
<b>Labour – Non-discrimination and prevention of gender-based violence and harassment</b>	<b>Very high</b>	Wage discrimination (gender); widespread risk of harassment and GBVH.	Prevalence of workplace GBVH.
<b>Right to adequate standard of living (livelihoods, housing, water)</b>	<b>Very high</b>	Low prices; reported extreme poverty and malnutrition; vulnerability to crop loss / weather shocks.	Extent of HH poverty among sesame farming communities.
<b>Right to an effective remedy</b>	<b>Very high</b>	No grievance mechanisms; justice system largely inaccessible to small farmers.	Is access to remedy a shared objective of gov or donor programmes?
<b>Society - Non-discrimination and prevention of gender-based violence and harassment</b>	<b>High</b>	Risk of domestic violence / GBVH, barriers to women's involvement in supply chain; barriers to IDP's involvement in supply chain.	Evidence of direct discrimination vs. systemic barriers to participation.
<b>Occupational Health and Safety (OHS)</b>	<b>High</b>	High toxicity chemicals in use with little regulatory oversight; lack of mitigation including PPE provision.	Frequency of use of toxic agrochemicals; farmer awareness of hazards and controls.
<b>Working conditions (wages, hours, and contracts)</b>	<b>Medium</b>	Informal employment. No working hours monitoring. Low pay.	Level of wages in practice, cost of living in areas where workers live.
<b>Right to life, liberty, and security</b>	<b>Medium</b>	Risks of violence in sesame production. Wider trend of inter-communal violence.	Frequency of violence against farmers and workers.
<b>Right to a healthy environment</b>	<b>Medium</b>	Climate change impacts affecting agroecological fundamentals in sesame producing areas.	Longevity of climate change impact.
<b>Right to health</b>	<b>Medium</b>	Quality health care not available nor accessible in sesame producing areas.	Extent of health-related infrastructure.
<b>Freedom of association and collective bargaining</b>	<b>Medium</b>	No trade unions in agriculture. State-imposed restrictions on workers' orgs.	Nature of barriers to unionization / opportunity.
<b>Right to property</b>	<b>Lower</b>	Theft of sesame crops linked to intercommunal violence. Low levels of legal protection for farmer land rights.	Extent of crop theft and customs around land rights.

## 5.2 Description of key risks and potential impacts

### 5.2.1 Labour rights

RIGHTS ISSUE	RIGHTS-HOLDER(S)	KEY RISKS AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS	IMPACT RATING (SALIENCY)
<b>Forced labour</b>	Very high Farmers / Workers / Migrants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Forced labour has been identified in the agricultural sector (US DoS, 2022); however, the extent to which this applies specifically to sesame farming is unknown. Refugees and IDPs are reportedly particularly vulnerable to economic exploitation and debt bondage (US DoS, 2022).</li> <li>• Multiple stakeholders interviewed describe clear indicators of forced labour risks linked to the recruitment process for farm workers, but not enough information to confirm incidences in practice. Larger sesame farmers reportedly use labour intermediaries, who often do not have registration documents, for the recruitment of migrant workers and local workers, paying contractors regardless of the number of labourers that they provide. The wages of seasonal migrant workers are handled by intermediaries, posing a risk of involuntary labour. There is no research available on whether these situations are enforced by coercion giving rise to instances of forced labour.</li> </ul>	<b>Very high</b>
<b>Child labour</b>	Children / Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is widespread societal acceptance of child labour in agriculture and family work is seen as traditional on sesame farms.</li> <li>• Anecdotal reports suggest that child labour occurs on sesame farms, particularly during the harvest season, when children carry out tasks such as cutting sesame plants. Further research is needed to establish the prevalence of child labour in sesame farming and all tasks carried out.</li> <li>• Children work on sesame farms due to a lack of educational opportunities, particularly during the harvest season, when school is not held. Equally, children may miss school due to labour needs on farms. Only 28% of children of secondary school age are enrolled in schools (ILO, 2021). Poverty, limited access to social protection, and displacement due to conflict also aggravate the risk of agricultural child labour (US, DoS, 2021; US DoS, 2022; ILO, 2021).</li> </ul>	<b>Very high</b>
<b>Labour – Non-discrimination and prevention of gender-based violence and harassment</b>	Women / Workers / IDPs	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There is little information about employment discrimination within sesame supply chains; however, there are substantial contextual risk factors, particularly as enforcement of legal provisions on employment discrimination is limited (US DoS, 2022).</li> <li>• There are anecdotal reports of wage discrimination against women working on sesame farms, who are reportedly paid 25-50% less than their male counterparts.</li> <li>• Women's increased farming responsibilities when men work outside the home (for example by migrating to work in mines) exacerbates discriminatory division of tasks with the double burden of domestic work and farm work.</li> <li>• Women working in the informal sector in low paying jobs are reported to be particularly vulnerable to sexual violence (UNFPA, 2020). Further research is needed to establish the extent to which this affects women in the informal sesame farming sector.</li> <li>• Internally displaced persons (IDPs) reportedly experience harassment and violence while they are farming (OCHA, 2021). Further research is needed to establish the extent of this on sesame farms.</li> </ul>	<b>Very high</b>

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RIGHTS ISSUE	RIGHTS-HOLDER(S)	KEY RISKS AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS	IMPACT RATING (SALIENCY)
<b>Occupational Health and Safety</b>	Farmers / Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are significant OHS risks to sesame farmers and farm workers as government OHS regulations exclude the agricultural sector (US DoS, 2022).</li> <li>• Incorrect use of agrochemicals and fertilisers constitutes a key risk for farmers and workers, with 50% of sesame farmers using pesticides considered unsuitable by the Agricultural Research Corporation of Sudan (UNIDO, 2017). Sesame farmers reportedly lack knowledge on the health impacts of pesticides and their proper use, leading to pesticide overuse and application of banned pesticides (UNIDO, 2017; STDF, 2021).</li> <li>• Many highly toxic pesticides, including endosulfan, are still being used in Sudan (IPEN, 2020). Acute endosulfan poisoning can cause paralysis and death and long-term exposure is linked to severe health risks including birth defects, memory loss and neurological disorders (PAN). Endosulfan use has been documented in sesame farming to control sesame webworm in Humera in Northern Ethiopia, which borders Al-Qadarif state (Gebregergis et. al., 2018). The extent to which endosulfan is used for sesame farming in Sudan needs further research.</li> </ul>	<b>High</b>
<b>Working conditions</b>	Farmers / Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Hired workers in the agricultural sector tend to be employed on an informal basis and written contracts are extremely rare. Agricultural workers are usually hired based on verbal contracts, often on an hourly or daily basis and have no access to social protection (ILO, 2022b).</li> <li>• In general, hired workers on small farms are paid either in money or in food (US DoS, 2022). While anecdotal reports state that high demand for labour mitigates against low wages during harvest time, low and fluctuating wages have been cited as a key risk for agricultural wage labourers (ILO, 2022b). The informality of the sector means that there are no recent sources that give an accurate picture of how much workers are being paid, therefore further research is needed on this issue.</li> <li>• There are no statistics on working hours in sesame production. However, legal restrictions on working hours do not apply in the agricultural sector and long hours have been reported in the agricultural sector (ILO, 2022b).</li> </ul>	<b>Medium</b>
<b>Freedom of association and collective bargaining</b>	Farmers / Workers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Union membership amongst sesame farmers is likely to be extremely low due to widespread informality and political instability. There are ongoing barriers to unionization by government actors, including crackdowns on independent unions, arrests of unionists, property confiscation and the repeated dissolution of unions in 2019, 2021 and most recently in November 2022 (US DoS, 2022; ITUC; Reuters, 2022a). The Sudanese Farmers' Union was reportedly disbanded in 2015 (Dabanga Sudan, 2022b).</li> </ul>	<b>Medium</b>

## 5.2.2 Civil and political rights

RIGHTS ISSUE	RIGHTS-HOLDER(S)	KEY RISKS AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS	IMPACT RATING (SALIENCY)
<b>Right to life, liberty and security</b>	Workers / Communities / Women	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are anecdotal reports of violence between sesame farmers and workers caused by wage disputes, including one incident that led to the death of 1 farmer and 8 South Sudanese migrant workers (Africa Press, 2021).</li> </ul>	<b>Medium</b>

## 5.2.3 Economic and social rights

RIGHTS ISSUE	RIGHTS-HOLDER(S)	KEY RISKS AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS	IMPACT RATING (SALIENCY)
<b>Right to adequate standard of living (livelihoods, housing, water)</b>	Workers / Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Income from farming does not provide an adequate standard of living and many farming households are at or near the extreme poverty line leading to associated issues with malnutrition. There are anecdotal reports of heavy migration of male sesame farmers to mining areas to create an alternative source of income as yields from farms are not sufficient to support their families.</li> <li>There are anecdotal reports of brokers' pricing of sesame seeds leaving farmers in precarious conditions, while pricing exponentially increases as the seeds move up through the value chain and get exported.</li> <li>Sesame seed cultivation is highly seasonal and wages for labourers are low and unpredictable, meaning that agricultural workers often rely on alternative economic activities during lean seasons (ILO, 2022b).</li> </ul>	<b>Very high</b>
<b>Right to a healthy environment</b>	Farmers / Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Climate change has contributed to extreme weather across Sudan, making floods, droughts, and erratic rainfall more common (UNEP, 2022). Severe floods caused by heavy rainfall in 2020 posed a severe risk to farmers' livelihoods. The floods affected 830,000 people across Sudan (OCHA, 2021) and damaged over 2 million hectares of cropland across 15 states, with 1.9 million hectares of planted area submerged. Tools, seeds, and agricultural equipment were also lost in the floods (GFDRR, 2021).</li> <li>Ongoing desertification and changing temperatures are adversely affecting land productivity and soil quality across Sudan, including in Gedaref, a key sesame growing area (FAO; The Guardian, 2016). There are no recent statistics on the extent of this issue.</li> <li>Extreme weather has increased demand for natural resources such as water and fertile land, thus intensifying inter-communal conflict (UNEP, 2022). The extent to which this affects sesame farmers and workers is unknown.</li> </ul>	<b>Medium</b>
<b>Right to health</b>	Farmers / Workers / Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Agricultural workers and those living in rural areas face serious barriers to accessing health social protection services. The effective coverage of the subsidised NHIF (National Health Insurance Fund) is extremely limited and those living in rural areas often have to travel long distances to access NHIF health-care facilities (ILO, 2022b).</li> <li>Financial constraints also pose a barrier to access to health-care. Inflation meant that the cost of medicines and healthcare rose by 200% in the period 2017-2020 (OCHA, 2021).</li> </ul>	<b>Medium</b>
<b>Right to property</b>	Farmers / Communities	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>There are isolated media reports of crop theft from sesame farmers in South Kordofan by armed groups (Dabanga Sudan, 2021) and looting of sesame stocks in Al-Fashaga by armed Ethiopian militias (Sudan Tribune, 2021b).</li> <li>In areas where rainfed agriculture is dominant, land rights are often governed by customary law based on tribal and community affiliation. In these cases, land is often unregistered or undelineated (FAO, 2021), negatively affecting farmers' rights and decision-making over the areas they cultivate.</li> </ul>	<b>Lower</b>



## 5.2.4 Cross-cutting rights (i.e. rights that apply in combination with other human rights)

RIGHTS ISSUE	RIGHTS-HOLDER(S)	KEY RISKS AND POTENTIAL IMPACTS	IMPACT RATING (SALIENCY)
<p><b>Society – Non-discrimination and prevention of gender-based violence</b></p>	<p>Women / FDPs</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• There are significant contextual risks around gender-based violence and harassment and gender inequality in Sudan. Domestic violence is reportedly widespread and rates of FGM are high, at 87% for women between 15-49 years (UNFPA, 2020).</li> <li>• Women farmers in conflict areas are faced with intensifying violence, including killing, injury and sexual violence while farming and collecting water or wood (International Service for Human Rights, 2022; UNFPA, 2020). Anecdotal reports of gender-based violence include the rape of a 13-year-old girl who was harvesting sesame by armed gunmen in the South Kordofan region (Sudan Tribune, 2021a).</li> <li>• Women in agriculture are often excluded from decision-making processes and marketing due to customs, poor economic status, and limited mobility (FAO, 2021; ILO, 2022a). In some areas, such as parts of Kassala and Gedaref states, women are not permitted to work in agriculture (FAO, 2021).</li> <li>• Gendered barriers to land tenure due to discriminatory bank regulations and land and inheritance laws (FAO, 2021) mean that women primarily gain access to land through birth or marriage (FAO, 2021).</li> <li>• Women's unpaid domestic responsibilities act as a barrier to participation in agricultural capacity building activities (FAO, 2021); extension services and government farm aid programs offering access to credit and agricultural inputs frequently exclude women (Madre; FAO 2021).</li> <li>• Forcibly displaced persons are excluded from involvement in sesame production by high startup costs for cultivation and other financial barriers (ILO, 2022a). Women who are forcibly displaced face additional barriers to participation due to protection risks posed by long commutes to harvesting sites (ILO, 2022a).</li> </ul>	<p><b>High</b></p>
<p><b>Access to grievance mechanism / remedy</b></p>	<p>Farmers / Workers</p>	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• Sesame farmers are unlikely to have access to grievance mechanisms due to informality of work, restrictions on trade unions to support the raising of disputes, and lack of access to legal systems in rural areas more broadly (US DoS, 2022).</li> <li>• Land tenure disputes are cited as root causes of intercommunal and ethnic violence (US DoS, 2021) and there are isolated reports of disputes over wages during the sesame harvest ending in violence (Africa Press, 2021).</li> <li>• No known efforts have been made to extend grievance mechanisms to cover farmers and / or workers.</li> </ul>	<p><b>Very high</b></p>

# 6. Recommended next steps

## 6.1 Key considerations

In the context of Sudanese sesame, with most of Sudan's sesame production exported to China and other non-European markets, Swedish companies indirectly sourcing from Sudan through processors and traders in third countries have little leverage to change the fundamentals on the ground directly with producers or other actors. Long-term, durable trading partnerships among actors in the supply chain, which would be critical for conducting effective human rights due diligence or mitigating systemic risks become rare at the production stage of the value chain (e.g., between farmers and traders at all levels), with farm level origins of sesame obscured through multiple layers of intermediary handlers and aggregation / mixing points. **Therefore, collaboration vertically across the supply chain and horizontally, among different actors at production level, should be the medium-long term focus of a mitigation strategy.**

## 6.2 Recommended actions for ETI Sweden

### RECOMMENDATION 1:

**Commission a full HRIA involving direct engagement with rightsholders.**

While the HRRIS study has identified several salient risks which exist in the sector, there are at the same time, residual information gaps needed to be filled to understand more about the actors involved and their connection to risks in practice. Therefore, it is recommended that ETI Sweden commission a study aimed at following up on the key findings from this report and engage rightsholders on the ground to confirm findings. This would support ETI Sweden members' efforts towards HRDD in relation to sesame from Sudan.

ETI Sweden members can make both a business case and a human rights case for making downstream operations more visible, increasing their accountability to risks arising from within the production context or the value chain.

### RECOMMENDATION 2:

**Identify ETI Sweden member companies that recognize sesame seeds from Sudan as a potential salient human rights risk and encourage a full mapping of members' supply chains.**

This HRRIS study has been able to identify sesame-seed production in Sudan as a very high-risk sector and there are significant potential salient risks for companies emerging from the report which should be prioritized for follow up. It is recommended that ETI Sweden work with its membership to identify all member companies who knowingly source sesame from Sudan or who may be sourcing sesame but cannot confirm due to the lack of information.

Encourage members of ETI Sweden and potentially other ETI initiatives to map their sesame supply chains and determine whether they source from Sudan. Commissioning an HRIA with a more granular supply chain mapping exercise could be an opportunity for one or more member brands to receive some support with supply chain mapping. ETI Sweden can allow members to use the Ergon research questionnaire for members to use with their suppliers prepared in the course of the HRRIS.

ETI Sweden can (at a high level – in line with operational rules about antitrust and competition) aggregate findings about members' sesame supply chains through a survey and disseminate to raise awareness about Sudan's supply chain complexity and the potential connection to risks for members.

### RECOMMENDATION 3:

**Start a dialogue with other interested actors willing to work collaboratively towards addressing risks in sesame production.**

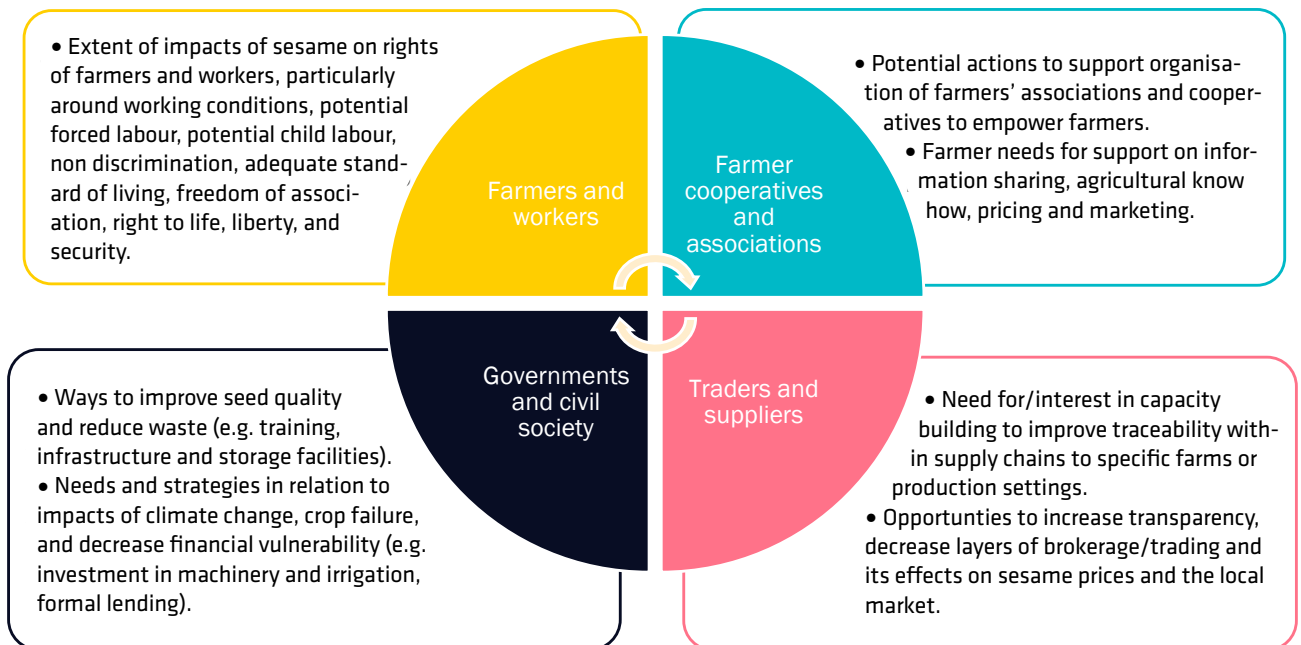
Given the lack of transparency and traceability within the sector, developing stronger, closer relationships with producers through a coordinated network of trusted suppliers is a likely core requirement under human rights due diligence. However, given the structural risks, unilateral actions will carry limitations and therefore, a concerted effort involving a broader network of organizations (i.e., other buyers through the wider ETI movement) together with key stakeholders with involvement in sesame production at the landscape level would be needed to make a more direct, coordinated mitigation effort in response to risk findings. This would involve building an alliance of farmers, government agencies, NGOs and other actors in the production area and agreeing on how to work together to achieve social and/or environmental goals for the landscape. A multi-stakeholder organization such as ETI Sweden (and sister organizations) which represents retailers and suppliers would be well placed to launch a dialogue. ETI Sweden and/or members can already begin preparatory work to launch this.

### RECOMMENDATION 4:

**Follow-up with national level stakeholders to understand opportunities to mitigate risks.**

This study has identified individuals that represent the various stakeholders on the ground. The next step would be to hear from them directly on what is needed to support farmers and workers, strengthen cooperatives, and empower civil society and government. This is an envisaged component of a follow-up HRIA. Below are suggested preliminary issues based on this HRRIS study that would benefit from further research and exploring opportunities around partnerships and multi-stakeholder collaboration.

## Key actors and areas for follow-up



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- 28/02/2023: Ministry of Agriculture

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## 8. Annex: Mapping member companies' supply chains

This questionnaire was designed to help ETI Sweden's member companies do a mapping of their supply chains with regards to sesame seeds from Sudan. Member companies can request their suppliers to submit this information back to them to get a more complete picture of the company's business structure & activities.

Aspect	Key information requested	Answer/response
Volume	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Volume of sesame seeds purchased overall</li> <li>% of total volume sourced from Sudan</li> </ul>	
Suppliers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of sellers through which the company sources sesame seeds (use past year, 2022, if a variable number).</li> <li>Total volume sourced through each seller.</li> </ul>	
Purchase	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>% of volume sourced which is bought through auction</li> <li>Does your company ever buy sesame seeds directly from local traders (outside of auction)?</li> <li>Any other information? Please describe as much as you can.</li> </ul>	
Price	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>How is price determined? What are the main variables?</li> <li>How much does the price vary from most-to-least expensive?</li> </ul>	
Customers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What proportion of your business does your largest buyer of sesame-based products account for?</li> </ul>	
Location	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Which production regions are sesame seeds sourced from?</li> </ul>	
Farmers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of farms in the supply chain</li> <li>Average size of the farms</li> </ul>	
Certification?	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are suppliers or farmers involved in any certification programs?</li> <li>Are the sesame seeds traceable to farm level?</li> </ul>	
Cleaning / transport of sesame seeds	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Number of entities that handle the transportation of raw materials to cleaning facilities?</li> <li>Number of sesame-seed cleaning and handling facilities involved in the supply chain.</li> </ul>	
Supplier monitoring	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>Are there any other processes or systems in place to monitor trader's sourcing practices?</li> </ul>	
Product specifications	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>What are the quality requirements for sesame seeds sourced for your customers' supply chains?</li> </ul>	

