Chapter 2

IMPACT
Assessing the Outcomes of IFPRI's Research[1]

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Key messages

- IFPRI's approach to research entails working with partners to understand the immediate regional, country, and local contexts and outlooks; testing, adapting, and scaling diverse solutions; shaping enabling environments; and strengthening research methods and sharing capacity.
- IFPRI's assessment of its own work has yielded a range of evidence on its impact and that of its partner organizations. These benefits have included improvements in policies, programs, innovations, and investments that have, in turn, positively impacted food security, healthy and diverse diets, livelihoods, and environmental sustainability. IFPRI's capacity strengthening work has also improved the ability of government ministries and local research organizations in low- and middle-income countries to collect data and analyze policy.
- Obtaining evidence of impact can be difficult, with challenges in attributing influence to specific research outputs or organizations, evaluating the importance of specific research on impact, and understanding gaps in research and methodology.

1 Portions of this chapter draw on the 50th Anniversary Impact Assessment Report, *Taking Stock: Impacts of 50 Years of Policy Research at IFPRI*, by Peter Hazell and Frank Place, publication forthcoming.

To improve impact in the future, research and policy organizations will need to consider:

- There is increased pressure for policy organizations to improve their impact. Policy research organizations can do so by ensuring that the **demand for their research** is driven by governments and other external stakeholders, maintaining **close relationships with policymakers**, and articulating a **deliberate strategy of influence** at the beginning of research projects.
- As development funding becomes scarce, proof of impact will become even more important. Organizations can work with funders to **forge a culture of impact** and plan for impact assessments and evaluation at the project design phase.
- Policy research organizations should continue to **prioritize high-quality science** so that they remain a trusted source of evidence on policies, programs, and investments that can advance development goals.

Throughout 2024, the world continued to face challenges to achieving food security, ensuring nutritious, diverse, and sustainable diets for all, and securing other development goals. Major challenges included conflicts in Burkina Faso, Chad, Gaza, Mali, Myanmar, and Sudan; climate change-induced disasters, which displaced 123 million people by the end of June 2024 alone (USA for UNHCR 2024); and shocks such as high inflation and cross-border migration. Some of these challenges result from significant demographic, economic, and social shifts that have occurred since IFPRI was founded 50 years ago: during this period, the global population has more than doubled, and urbanization and international trade have changed the locus and dynamics of food supply chains and markets, giving rise to a dietary transition in many countries. The world faces increasing pressures on natural resources and the environment, a changing climate, biodiversity loss, and the spread of infectious diseases, all of which are becoming increasingly interconnected. IFPRI's goals have similarly evolved to address these challenges: although the Institute was founded to address famines and lack of calories, it now has a much broader set of priorities related to ending hunger and malnutrition globally, strengthening livelihoods, ensuring environmental sustainability, and transforming entire food systems.

Food policy research plays an essential role in helping food systems meet these various aims. It can provide timely data on rapidly evolving situations,

generate and evaluate evidence, and develop metrics and frameworks to analyze and monitor impacts on the poorest and most marginalized populations. But research cannot exist in a vacuum: food policy research must provide independent, high-quality evidence to inform policy options, programs, and investments. Researchers can work with policymakers, both to help them test alternative interventions and weigh the results and to promote adoption of effective policies and help prevent bad ideas from shaping government interventions. Policy research can also complement the scientific and engineering research that underlies technological advances, creating "socio-technical innovation bundles" (Barrett 2022) and identifying options to promote inclusivity in technology use and benefits. The ability to measure a technology's prospective impact, model its scaling, and assess relevant human, institutional, political, and cultural interactions is integral to its success in the real world. Evidence-based policies, interventions, and investments have a track record of helping to achieve food security for all, promote sustainable and healthy diets, build efficient markets, transform economies, and strengthen food systems institutions and governance.

Research with a real-world impact

IFPRI's approach to research (see Chapter 1) entails working with partners to understand the immediate regional, country, or local contexts and outlooks; testing, adapting, and scaling diverse solutions; shaping enabling environments; and strengthening research methods and sharing capacity. Articulating these modes of work helps the Institute assess more clearly whether its food policy research has made a positive difference or affected policies, investments, and programmatic choices that shape food systems. It also allows IFPRI to determine whether this research has led to further downstream impacts on food and nutrition security, poverty, and the environment, even if these outcomes are not directly attributable to the research activities.

Policy research institutes employ several methods to collect data on their influence and undertake robust impact assessments. IFPRI uses a range of methods, including analysis of large-scale datasets and modeling. Available methods, detailed on the next page, examine influence in countries where research activities were conducted, as well as spillover or global effects of the research. Research organizations can also undertake quantitative and qualitative impact assessments to examine downstream impacts of research on development goals.

On-the-ground engagement. Ongoing relationships with stakeholders and major philanthropic or for-profit investors within countries and at a global scale can show direct evidence of the use of research within policies and strategies. One-on-one meetings, interviews, and policy events can uncover these influences.

Academic citation analysis. Undertaking literature reviews, tracking outputs such as publications and citations, and monitoring Altmetric scores (readership metrics) and institutional rankings can assess influence on academic discourse. During its 50 years, IFPRI has published more than 4,000 journal articles; these are generally well-cited and downloaded, and the top ones attract much international attention every year. Its datasets have been downloaded more than 2.2 million times in the past decade.

Capacity building. If a research organization engages in building human and institutional capacity through, for example, trainings or co-creation of tools and governmental policy units, as IFPRI does, these successes can be directly monitored (see capacity building section below).

Online trends. Tracking specialized search terms on internet search engines, such as "agriculture+nutrition+health," can yield insights on whether research has influenced global policy agenda setting.

Policy document scoping. Research organizations can systematically examine policy or institutional documents and government websites for research citations or acknowledgments.

Media scoping. News articles with quotes and research citations from decision-makers can point to research uptake.

Challenges in measuring policy research impact

Despite the methods described above, assessing policy-oriented research poses several major challenges (Place and Hazell 2015).

Assessing policy influence and attributing influence to specific research outputs or organizations

Obtaining evidence to demonstrate policy influence is often hindered by the lack of a paper trail. In some cases, making claims of influence can create frictions in researchers' relationships with policymakers. Impact claims may undercut policymakers' incentives to pursue recommended reforms, as they may not want to be seen as simply championing others' ideas, especially if these ideas come from a foreign or international institution. Policy research may also recommend retaining the status quo, making it impossible

to point to any "change." In contrast to reporting on innovation use, policy outcomes achieved by research institutes may go underreported. Given the many actors involved in policymaking processes, measuring the influence of research or evidence is generally difficult; thus, contribution of evidence or of a research organization is a more useful concept than attribution for policy outcomes.

Evaluating the importance of specific research outputs to a policy decision

In addition to documenting contributions, policy researchers and their funders need to assess how their research affects policy decisions. The importance of any individual piece of evidence or research actor is often difficult to gauge, raising the following questions: Would the evidence have been generated by another actor, possibly at a later date? Would the policy decision have occurred without the scientific evidence? Qualitative evaluations that capture the viewpoints of key decision-makers can help shed light on these questions, but given the cost of conducting such exercises across many policy influences, these evaluations need to be selective and strategic.

Addressing methodological and counterfactual challenges to measuring and attributing impacts from policy outcomes

Once a contribution to a policy decision has been established, another area of interest encompasses the extent of the decision's impact on objectives such as poverty reduction, improved nutrition, better environmental outcomes, or more gender equality, among others. For IFPRI, this focus is equivalent to assessing the extent of an agricultural innovation's impact, once its adoption has been established. The first challenge, however, is that it often takes a long time for policy changes to be implemented and effects to materialize so they can be evaluated. Second, if the policy change occurs at the national level, there is no obvious counterfactual to the change, so one must be constructed, often through the use of modeling. In theory, it should be more feasible to identify counterfactuals to policy changes at the subnational level, but data availability and modeling efforts at that level are more difficult. In some cases, the counterfactual is the absence of a policy change, while in other cases it is a different policy change. Third, it is difficult for any one model to capture the full range of a policy's effects; some models are better for assessing economic impacts while others are better for assessing environmental impacts. Therefore, a blending of quantitative and qualitative approaches may be needed.

The road to demand-driven research

IFPRI has been measuring its institutional impact since the mid-1990s and has completed 46 independent impact assessment studies covering many countries for which it carries out research. These studies range in scope from the evaluation of relatively small research projects to evaluations of entire research programs.

IFPRI's approach to setting research priorities has directly influenced the scope of its impact. In the early years, its research agenda was based largely on literature reviews and discussions with donors. Its early emphasis was on generating knowledge products, or international public goods, about regional and global policy problems that could be extrapolated to multiple countries. Many researchers were trained at universities of the Global North, especially US land grant colleges, which have long been among IFPRI's key research partners. Today, IFPRI's research is much more demand-driven and determined at the country and regional levels, in consultation with local policymakers, researchers, and donors, in order to contextualize policy research and develop deep engagement with local partners. For example, there is great demand for ex ante impact assessments to help partners and stakeholders assess options; the high quality and credibility of these analyses in predicting ex post outcomes influences impact. Demand-driven research is facilitated by the Institute's long-term commitment to decentralization and building a strong international presence. In 2003, most of IFPRI's staff were based at its Washington, DC, headquarters. As of 2024, more than half of its staff were based outside of headquarters, and 59 percent hailed from LMICs. Through country programs in Bangladesh, China, Egypt, Ethiopia, Ghana, Kenya, Malawi, Myanmar, Nigeria, Papua New Guinea, Rwanda, Senegal, and Sudan, along with regional offices in Africa and South Asia, IFPRI has a unique opportunity to engage and contribute at local and subregional levels, as well as to facilitate cross-country learning.

IFPRI's growing research on political economy and governance (Chapter 15) has also yielded insights on favorable environments for the uptake of research that can lead to desirable development outcomes. This work has illuminated the complicated process by which evidence is—or is not—considered in decision-making, as a result of power dynamics, interest groups and coalitions, differing timetables, and more. IFPRI has developed practical tools, such as the Kaleidoscope Model, for assessing factors that drive policy change (Haggblade and Resnick 2018).

IFPRI has long aligned its data collection and impact reporting with CGIAR, which it joined in 1979. Between 2010 and 2021, IFPRI reported its own outcomes and impacts to CGIAR, as well as those of the CGIAR

Research Programs it led with other Centers during this period. Since 2021, IFPRI has aligned its work with the five CGIAR impact areas, which aim to achieve a range of interlinked impacts: climate adaptation and mitigation; environmental health and biodiversity; gender equality, youth, and social inclusion; nutrition, health, and food security; and poverty reduction, livelihoods, and jobs. These impact areas consider the interconnectedness between climate change and food-related nutritional and health challenges, as well as the direct linkages between agrifood system performance and broader economic growth and poverty reduction outcomes, as well as the challenges related to a range of natural resource limits to system expansion.

Attempts to quantify impact

Due to the challenges associated with impact assessment, a definitive quantitative summary of IFPRI's total impact will remain elusive. For example, an impact assessment report in 2015 using estimates from IFPRI's work on six distinct projects in Bangladesh, Ethiopia, India, Mexico, Viet Nam, and Kenya and Tanzania found that the economic benefits from these projects alone could exceed US$1 billion. However, the authors acknowledged that the full benefits were likely much larger, as these estimates did not include cross-country spillovers and benefits associated with global public goods. In addition, the evidence-informed policy and program changes continued to generate benefits after the estimates were calculated. This example demonstrates that policy research can have great impact, but the limited quantification of such impacts highlights both the challenges to measuring them and the limitations of using a single figure, or dollar amount, to convey the full range of impacts generated by policy research.

Another quantification exercise summed up the numbers of beneficiaries reported for many of IFPRI's "big successes"—projects or initiatives that produced reasonable evidence of influence on programs, policies, or investments impacting beneficiaries. This exercise concluded that IFPRI's work has indirectly benefited around half a billion people, including individuals benefiting from social protection schemes, biofortification, commodity policy reforms, and agricultural strategies. This figure is likely conservative, as it does not account for the vast amount of research that did not estimate the number of beneficiaries, smallholders affected by IFPRI's more general policy support in specific countries, or people who benefited when countries refrained from enacting harmful policies, such as export bans, due to IFPRI's research. Regardless, these types of estimates reflect long-term relationships with hundreds of partners, including governments, national agricultural research

systems (NARS), universities of the Global North and Global South, development agencies, funders, multilateral organizations, the private sector, and civil society organizations. Many of these partners directly serve beneficiaries, and without them, development impact would be impossible.

Despite the challenges, nuanced and thoughtful communication of research results, impacts, and outcomes is key to highlighting research findings as well as demonstrating to partners the value of investing in impact assessment. IFPRI publishes a wide range of impact-focused blogs, brochures, and briefs that synthesize lengthy technical reports for decision-makers. These communication efforts have won several awards. Most recently, IFPRI researchers were twice awarded the Quality of Communication Award from the Agricultural and Applied Economics Association (2021 and 2023) for coverage and analysis of how the COVID-19 pandemic the and Russia–Ukraine war negatively impacted global food security.

Case studies of impact

A forthcoming assessment of IFPRI's 50 years of impact (Hazell and Place 2025) concludes that IFPRI has been successful as a research institution in terms of its publications and international recognition. It then uses case studies to illustrate IFPRI's deeper policy impact. This chapter adopts the same approach, summarizing case studies of impact covering different themes, impact pathways, and geographies, including portfolios of work across Africa, Latin America, and South Asia (see also Chapters 19–24 on regional impacts). These cases illustrate how policy research can shape both development and research methodologies.

Addressing sustainability and climate change

IFPRI's work has provided knowledge, modeling assessments and tools, and policy guidance that have influenced sustainability and climate change efforts globally (see Section 2 of this volume). This body of work has helped countries commit to reducing emissions, trained communities to manage scarce natural resources, and led to the design of holistic approaches that can be integrated into policies.

IMPACT model for climate change mitigation in Colombia. In the early 1990s, IFPRI developed the International Model for Policy Analysis of Agricultural Commodities and Trade (IMPACT) to help policymakers explore sustainable ways to address long-term challenges in reducing hunger and poverty under changing demographic and climate conditions. The IMPACT

model has since been used many times to guide transformations of agri-food systems under climate change (see Chapter 4). In Colombia, for example, IFPRI researchers used the model to identify agricultural policy options that supported climate change mitigation and resilience while maintaining compatibility with national development goals. The Colombian government used the results to develop and submit its Intended Nationally Determined Contribution in 2015, which committed the country to slashing emissions by 20 percent by 2030 (UNFCCC 2015). Using IMPACT, IFPRI and the International Fund for Agricultural Development (IFAD) found that of all Viet Nam's crops, rice held the greatest potential for climate change mitigation, accounting for 57 percent of the country's agricultural greenhouse gas emissions (Yu et al. 2013). IFPRI presented a Low Emissions Development Strategy (Salas et al. 2012), which took Viet Nam's national growth plans for rice production into account. The strategy was endorsed by the government.

Water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus in the Niger River Basin. The Niger Water Basin Authority (NBA) coordinates development projects across the nine West African countries that share the river basin, which faces challenges from extreme water insecurity and civil strife. To support the NBA in better understanding possible trade-offs and synergies among its 350 projects (Autorité du Bassin du Niger 2017), which include a range of investments and funding sources, IFPRI collaborated with GIZ (Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit, the German development agency) and Canada's University of Ottawa to create tools and guidelines for a systematic water-energy-food-ecosystem nexus analysis in 2018 (see Chapter 5). After several workshops and further capacity building on nexus analysis methodologies, in 2022 the NBA's ministers formally adopted a nexus guidance policy, which is anticipated to benefit 160 million people, across 2.23 million square km, who rely on the basin (Mounkaila et al. 2023).

Experimental games for sustainable water management in India. In 2012, IFPRI partnered with the Foundation for Ecological Security and the International Crops Research Institute for the Semi-Arid Tropics in India to enhance sustainable water management and collective action for dwindling groundwater supplies (see Chapter 6) by using experimental games and learning tools. Participating communities were more likely to alter water-use decisions and water infrastructure maintenance than nonparticipating communities (Meinzen-Dick et al. 2018). As a result of these outcomes, the approach was scaled up to 6,500 rural communities across six Indian states (Falk et al. 2023). In addition, Atal Bhujal Yojana, the government-run groundwater management program, subsequently adopted the games approach across seven Indian states.

Supporting smallholder farmers

The Institute has long supported smallholder farmers by identifying ways to improve extension services; collaborating with breeding partners within CGIAR, government agencies, and NARS to improve uptake of crop varieties; and partnering with the private sector on innovative insurance and credit products (see Section 3).

Agricultural extension in Africa and Asia. From 2016 to 2021, IFPRI worked with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), the public and private sector, and civil society to draft recommendations to improve service delivery and extension program operations (see Chapter 8). The Developing Local Extension Capacity (DLEC) project was implemented by Digital Green, an NGO, in partnership with IFPRI and several other organizations, reaching 1.3 million farming households and influencing more than 77 other partners across 17 countries, including Bangladesh, Guinea, Honduras, Liberia, Malawi, Mali, Mozambique, Nigeria, Rwanda, and Senegal. In Bangladesh, Digital Green worked to bridge gaps in neglected services and provide farmers with financial, market, and extension support, boosting incomes by 15 percent (Digital Green Trust 2019). In Nigeria, a video-enabled approach doubled the number of processors being reached with information, which helped improve the quality and quantity of milk and reduced milk spoilage by 40 percent (USAID and IFPRI n.d.).

Nutrition and public health through biofortified crops. HarvestPlus has rapidly scaled up the production and consumption of biofortified staple crops (iron pearl millet and bean; vitamin A cassava, orange sweet potato, and maize; and zinc maize, rice, and wheat) while also working to improve farmer uptake (see Chapter 9) and consumer acceptance. By 2023, about 3,000 scaling partners had helped release more than 443 varieties of biofortified crops in more than 40 countries (HarvestPlus 2023). HarvestPlus served as the technical partner for Enhancing Nutrition Services to Improve Maternal and Child Health in Africa (ENRICH), a five-year program that aimed to reduce maternal and child mortality by addressing malnutrition in the first 1,000 days of life. From 2016 to 2021, ENRICH delivered a series of gender-responsive interventions to train smallholder farmers on the cultivation of biofortified staple crops. ENRICH is estimated to have directly improved the diets of more than 1 million people in farming families in Bangladesh, Kenya, and Tanzania, and yielded nutritional benefits for another 1 million people through communitywide sharing of seeds, vines, and agronomic benefits.

Improving the lives of vulnerable people

IFPRI has a long history of working to transform the lives and livelihoods of vulnerable people around the world, with these efforts represented by a wide range of causal impact evaluations (Section 4).

Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) in Ethiopia. In 2005, the government of Ethiopia launched its PSNP (see Chapter 11) to support populations facing chronic food insecurity, poverty, and shocks. IFPRI played the primary role in monitoring and evaluating the program's effectiveness, as well as supporting continued engagement, financial support, and coordination among donors (EDRI and IFPRI 2014). IFPRI's targeted recommendations included encouraging the government to strengthen the program's nutrition objectives, such as through temporary direct support payments to pregnant women. As of 2024, the PSNP had reached 8 million beneficiaries, making it one of the largest safety net programs in sub-Saharan Africa (Hirvonen 2018).

Nutrition Embedded Evaluation Program in Malawi. The Nutrition Embedded Evaluation Program was established to use community-based childcare centers in Malawi as a platform to promote child health and nutrition. The University of Malawi and Save the Children provided training on nutrition and agricultural production and distributed seeds of nutritious crops to households. IFPRI worked with Save the Children to undertake an impact evaluation of the program, which showed that preschool children receiving the integrated nutrition and agriculture intervention experienced greater increases in nutrient intake and dietary diversity. Younger siblings of participating children experienced better growth (height-for-age z-scores), resulting in a 17 percentage point difference in the prevalence of stunting between the participating group and the control group. As a result of this evaluation, Malawi's government collaborated with the World Bank in 2018 to scale up the intervention with a $60 million investment, to reach over 700,000 beneficiaries.

Women's Empowerment in Agriculture Index (WEAI). WEAI is a standardized metric to directly measure women's empowerment and inclusion in the agriculture sector (see Chapter 14). As of March 2025, WEAI tools have been used by 279 organizations across 69 countries (IFPRI WEAI n.d.). In Bangladesh, USAID used the WEAI as part of a baseline survey that found 75 percent of rural women were disempowered in the Feed the Future Zone of Influence (the geographic area targeted by Feed the Future interventions). As a result of these findings, the government worked with Feed the Future to refocus its efforts and create more opportunities for women to control productive assets and hold leadership positions in their communities. A follow-up study

conducted in 2015 showed that these changes led to significant improvements in women's empowerment, with the share of empowered women rising from 27.4 percent to 41.2 percent (USAID 2016).

Focusing on enabling environments

IFPRI's work around the world allows it to focus on the enabling environments needed to transform food systems, including factors related to political economy, governance, finance, and innovation (see Section 5).

Local government accountability in Uganda. In Uganda, the government initiated a program in 2009 to improve the quality of public service delivery by providing beneficiaries with locally led monitoring and accountability forums known as *barazas* to share information (see Chapter 15). At the government's request, IFPRI conducted an evaluation of the program in 2015, finding barazas to be a valuable investment that directly contributed to finishing delayed projects, correcting substandard work, and realigning priorities to meet the needs of local citizens and communities. The final report was used as a key input for the Government Evaluation Facility Roadmap, and the prime minister's office adopted IFPRI's recommendations to prioritize sectors such as health and agriculture in subcounty baraza programs, build citizens' capacity in planning and budgeting, and produce budgetary information in local languages (CGIAR 2020).

Modeling work in response to crisis. IFPRI has used its modeling work to provide guidance to governments all over the world, as well as multilateral and civil society organizations, in response to global crises such as the COVID-19 pandemic and Russia's invasion of Ukraine. Data from the IFPRI-facilitated Food Security Portal's Food Crisis Risk Monitoring and Vulnerability analysis led the Group of Twenty (G20) and World Trade Organization to call for swiftly phasing out food export restrictions imposed in response to the pandemic and the war in Ukraine. In addition, the Myanmar Agriculture Development Bank used IFPRI's modeling results to inform its decision to allocate US$430 million in loans to farmers to offset the economic impact of COVID-19 (CGIAR 2021).

Building individual and institutional capacity

IFPRI's work goes beyond producing knowledge and testing innovations: through programs around the world, the Institute has been significantly involved in building individual and institutional capacity for 50 years.

In the first decade of IFPRI's existence, it built its knowledge base through engagement with visiting researchers who offered extensive policy expertise on

their home countries. Capacity strengthening focused on individuals, including, for example, through training on modeling, data analysis, and research methods. Visiting researchers learned about the latest research methods, while IFPRI's staff gained an understanding of national policy challenges. Partnerships with universities in the Global North also provided a source of human capital and opportunities for the exchange of research methods and tools. Soon after, IFPRI researchers began to collect original data from household surveys, with local researchers and analysts collaborating in these efforts. In the 1980s, the Institute launched extensive research and policy communication activities in select countries. Country programs were established in Bangladesh, Ghana, Malawi, Mozambique, and Pakistan, with a focus on the capacity of local researchers (Babu 2000; Ryan 1999). In Pakistan, for example, datasets collected by IFPRI researchers were used by the Pakistan Institute of Development Economics and resulted in more than 100 master's and doctoral theses.

Establishment of regional programs. The 1990s saw the establishment of regional programs in East Africa, Central Asia, South Asia, and West Africa. In the early 2000s, more country programs emerged, all systematically assessing and serving unique capacity needs. Individual trainings have remained a hallmark throughout the Institute's history: in 2022, IFPRI held 350 events that trained more than 10,600 individuals. In the early 2000s, special thematic programs such as the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (ReSAKSS) in Africa, Policy Analysis and Advisory Network for South Asia, and African Growth and Development Policy Modeling Consortium (AGRODEP) in West Africa became flagship networks for capacity strengthening to support policy analysis and showcased an approach to building institutional capacity for sustainable development. When IFPRI merged with the International Service for National Agricultural Research (ISNAR) in 2005, the Institute added another core approach—strengthening national systems of research and extension—enabling it to reach out to national food, agricultural, health, and nutrition systems. It also introduced a strong decentralization strategy that greatly increased the number of outposted staff worldwide: this move transformed IFPRI's demand-led research goal into a reality (IFPRI WEAI n.d.). Today, IFPRI's capacity development activities are often amplified by global capacity development activities carried out by the World Bank, Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations, the International Fund for Agricultural Development, and World Food Programme, universities, and regional programs such as the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the African Union.

BOX 2.1 Achievements in capacity strengthening in China and India

IFPRI's policy research collaboration with institutions in China began when it welcomed visiting researchers from the Chinese Academy of Agricultural Sciences (CAAS) in the 1980s and 1990s. This engagement led to the establishment of the Center for Chinese Agricultural Policy (CCAP) at the Institute of Agricultural Economics and Development at CAAS, modeled after IFPRI. IFPRI collaborators who were focused on reforms in Chinese agriculture subsequently moved CCAP to the Chinese Academy of Sciences (CAS) and Beijing University, where it remains a key policy think tank advising the Chinese government on agriculture. Collaboration with Chinese institutions also involved training of PhD students, often by IFPRI researchers visiting China (Jikun Huang, Peking University, personal communication, August 2024). Researchers from CAAS, CAS, and various universities in China have also collaborated with IFPRI researchers at the Institute's headquarters, which eventually led to the establishment of IFPRI's country office on the CAAS premises. These collaborations continue to provide timely policy advice for national agricultural consultations and local capacity building.

In the 1980s, IFPRI also received visiting researchers from India, who were interested in gathering empirical evidence on the aftermath of the Green Revolution. Researchers engaged in one-on-one collaboration, joint report writing, and more (Hazell and Ramasamy 1991), and IFPRI's model of policy research and outreach subsequently inspired creation of India's National Institute for Agricultural Policy (Dr. Dayanand Jha, National Institute for Agricultural Policy, personal communication, June 1995). Following regular training and capacity strengthening activities with state agricultural universities, the Indian Council for Agricultural Research Institutions, and other policy think tanks, India's then-prime minister invited IFPRI to establish a regional office in New Delhi to serve the South Asia region. Over the last 40 years, policy researchers visiting IFPRI from India have made key contributions to India's food and agriculture policy and strategy development.

Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators. Agricultural Science and Technology Indicators (ASTI), a program of IFPRI between 2010 and 2020, represents another success in building system-level capacity. ASTI played a key role in providing indicators that were not previously available on agricultural research and development in the Global South. Its data encouraged Ethiopia to double the salary of its agricultural researchers and Kenya to form the Kenya Agricultural and Livestock Research Organization (KALRO). ASTI also supported research that backed the

BOX 2.2 Achievements in capacity strengthening in Africa

IFPRI has been undertaking capacity-strengthening activities in Africa since its founding, in collaboration with partners at the country, regional, and continental levels. This work has helped build robust policy frameworks and address food security and poverty reduction. IFPRI played a key role in the creation of the African Association of Agricultural Economics (AAAE), founded in 2004, providing technical assistance and financial support to AAEA's initial meetings and workshops, and working alongside the Food and Agriculture Organization, World Food Programme, and other partners to connect African economists with global thought leaders. The Association now works to foster knowledge exchange, policy research, and professional development among agricultural economics and development experts in Africa and beyond. IFPRI continues to actively participate and contribute to the Association's biennial conferences by presenting research, participating in discussions, and engaging with stakeholders. IFPRI researchers have also served on the board of the Association's flagship *African Journal of Agricultural and Resource Economics*.

Between 2006 and 2020, IFPRI also facilitated the Regional Strategic Analysis and Knowledge Support System (founded in 2006), the African Growth and Development Policy (AGRODEP) Modeling Consortium (2010), and the Malabo Montpellier Panel (2017). In 2020, these programs transitioned to AKADEMIYA2063, a pan-African research organization established by African researchers who previously led the programs at IFPRI. AKADEMIYA2063 now houses more than 50 staff from 16 countries deployed across eight strategic departments. A fourth program, Africa Agriculture Watch, was also launched by the organization, and uses machine learning and remote-sensing data to predict production for 10 key crops as well as tracking greenhouse gas emissions across Africa. Having successfully supported the transition of the program to African leadership, IFPRI has continued to be a key partner of AKADEMIYA2063 since 2020, representing a case of successful localization for sustainable impact for African countries.

creation of the Agricultural Market Information System (AMIS), influenced Egypt's food security and water strategy, and prompted global donors to invest US$7.5 billion in Yemen. This work helped to underpin other commitments to boosting agricultural research and development such as the Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP), an Agenda 2063 initiative that helps African countries eliminate hunger and reduce poverty by increasing economic growth through agriculture-led development.

Recommendations for improving research policy impact

In a world in turmoil and a development landscape marked by declining funding for foreign aid, policy research organizations are under increased pressure to show that they are fulfilling their stated missions. So how can they improve their impact?

IFPRI's investments in assessing its own impact have yielded valuable insights on this question (Hazell and Place 2025). Several independent impact assessment reports have pointed to the importance of aligning policy research with demand and maintaining relationships with policymakers in influencing policies (for example, English and Renkow 2007; Bennett 2013; Lynam 2016). IFPRI had already recognized these concerns and embarked on a process of decentralization; the assessment of the effectiveness of IFPRI's decentralization policy (Benin et al. 2018) found that this has arguably been the most important action taken by the Institute to increase its impact. Close partnerships on the ground can also enable clear pathways for building the capacity of institutional partners to undertake research that has a better chance of being utilized for policymaking.

Another important lesson that emerges for enhancing policy influence is the need to articulate a deliberate strategy of influence from the beginning of a research project. From the outset, it is essential to ensure that there is demand within the country for the research to be undertaken and that a sense of research project "ownership" exists within the policy circles the research is designed to influence (Bennett 2013). Being part of an impact pathway or decision-making framework that is at least partly driven by an external actor such as a government or funding agency provides the clearest avenue for IFPRI research to influence decisions. In these cases, IFPRI uses ex ante models to assess the likely impacts of policy or investment choices or rigorously test an intervention or program (Lowder 2025; Lowder and Regmi 2019; Somwaru 2021). Several external evaluations also point to the importance of proactively communicating evidence to different audiences (for example, Kydd 2015). Therefore, IFPRI outreach and communication strategies are also critical for success and need to be articulated early in a research project.

A more foundational factor in generating impact is conducting and maintaining a strong reputation for high-quality science. As noted earlier, IFPRI has been able to consistently rank highly among peers in its thematic areas. Areas where IFPRI has earned such a reputation include its modeling tools (for example, the IMPACT global model and RIAPA country models), causal impact evaluation work, collection and analyses of household datasets, and

policy and political analysis. The Institute has also developed a solid reputation in specific thematic areas, as noted in the other chapters in this volume. Potential new areas for IFPRI to influence policy are discussed in Chapter 1. The ever-improving capability of NARS and universities in LMICs will enable IFPRI to enter into a wider array of collaborations and potentially generate more international public goods. Artificial intelligence could be viewed as a source of potential competition for policy research, especially for certain types of analyses based on existing evidence. However, it can also be harnessed to add value to IFPRI's existing assets—for example, to its suite of modeling tools—as long as proper processes are instituted to ensure quality and academic integrity.

When an impact has been achieved, it also needs to be assessed and documented. IFPRI's experience highlights how policy research organizations can measure their impact and overcome impact assessment challenges for the future. Strong long-term partnerships with funders can help address the costs of high-quality impact assessment within an increasingly fraught financial landscape. Together, organizations and funders can forge a culture of impact, in which the project design phase includes joint planning for impact evaluation at various levels of investment. Similarly, funders can be asked to accommodate flexible funding cycles that include impact assessments to be undertaken—either by the research organization or a third party—after the project and its traditional core funding have ended. Organizations such as IDInsight have created standardized metrics for evaluating the social contribution of programs, based on breadth (the number of beneficiaries), depth (impact on beneficiaries' quality of life), and contribution (the extent to which the evidence shaped a program). These metrics allow for cross comparison and identification of cumulative institution-level impact results. The issue of limited funding can be addressed by systematically measuring only the impact of projects an organization considers to be large.

Impact assessments should be undertaken with the intention of generating scientific nuance and with a sense of humility. Impact assessments sometimes identify failures, which can provide valuable insights on how programs and investments can change course to improve outcomes. When they do identify successes, policy research organizations can use this opportunity to celebrate the achievements of their partners who work on the ground.

IFPRI's five decades of impact underline the importance of policy research in shaping global research and development agendas, testing whether innovations and interventions can and should be scaled up, and advancing knowledge through partnerships and capacity strengthening. As the world grapples

with climate change, conflict, and geopolitical tensions, it is only high-quality science that can help decision-makers overcome misinformation and arrive at policies, programs, and investments that safeguard the health of our planet and improve the lives of vulnerable people everywhere.

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