



CGIAR Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA) evaluation results

Purpose

The document outlines the results of the SPIA self-evaluation carried out at the closure of the SPIA 2019-2024 workplan.

In order to confirm that the deliverables are matching the previously set expectations of the System Council and support the role of SIMEC in SPIA review according to the section 8 of [SPIA Terms of Reference](#), SPIA carried out a light-touch evaluation, focusing on program effectiveness—delivery of promised outputs and contribution to intended outcomes—and on seeking operational feedback that can improve the way SPIA implements its current workplan.

Action Requested

The System Council is requested to read and reflect on the document ahead of the SPIA Side Event on 10 December.

<p>Document category: Working document of the System Council. There is no restriction on the circulation of this document</p>
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Preliminary Results of an Evaluation of SPIA's 2019–2024 Work Program

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Standing Panel on Impact Assessment

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Brief number or link to main document.

Summary

SPIA commissioned a “light-touch” evaluation of the effectiveness of its 2019–2024 program. In addition to document review, an e-survey was sent to key stakeholder groups. Results are reported here for two groups: System Council/SIMEC and Impact Assessment specialists inside and outside CGIAR. The results show that SPIA delivered the majority of its outputs on time, with some delays in early years. According to the survey results, the majority of respondents are more aware of CGIAR impact evidence than they were pre-2019 and believe that CGIAR’s impact culture is stronger, evidence that suggests that SPIA is delivering on its mandate. System Council members were more likely to feel this way than IA specialists. Despite the overall high levels of achievement, stakeholders had numerous suggestions for improvement.

1. Introduction

SPIA’s 2019–2024 program of work was its first following the 2018 advisory services reforms that led to a new mandate and higher profile for SPIA within the CGIAR system. As this workplan comes to a close, SPIA wanted to confirm that it is on track for delivering what

the System was expecting. Given that the current workplan (2023–2030) resulted from extensive consultation with stakeholders, SPIA opted for a light-touch evaluation focusing on program effectiveness—delivery of promised outputs and contribution to intended outcomes—and on seeking operational feedback that can improve the way SPIA implements its current workplan.

2. Methodology

The evaluation is structured around a standard program theory of change (Figure 1). A comprehensive assessment of delivery of outputs was conducted using workplans, reports and other documents.

Outcomes and impacts were assessed via stakeholder surveys conducted between Sept 30 and Oct 14, 2024. The surveys focused on the two parts of SPIA’s mandate: 1) to expand and deepen evidence of the impact of CGIAR research investments and 2) to support CGIAR’s commitment to embedding impact assessment into the system. For the first part of the mandate, e-surveys focused on the sequence of outcomes—whether respondents are aware of impact evidence and if so whether it had changed their knowledge and behavior. For the second part of the mandate, respondents were asked directly about the

Figure 1. Impact pathway

Outputs produced => Reach intended users => Change knowledge, attitudes, skills => Change behavior => Impacts

desired impacts—the strength of CGIAR impact culture and the capacity within the system to conduct rigorous impact assessment. The survey of IA specialists also included a series of more granular outcomes that were defined in the workplan and related to specific activities and outputs but these are not reported here.

Surveys contained both quantitative questions related to perceived achievement of outcomes and impacts and open-ended questions seeking detail on responses as well as suggestion for how SPIA can improve. Qualitative responses served to better understand the quantitative responses and to establish linkages along the impact pathways. All surveys were anonymous.

Surveys were sent to four stakeholder groups: 1) System Council and SIMEC, 2) CGIAR System management, 3) CGIAR Research leaders and 4) IA specialists inside and outside the CG system. Mailing lists for the first three were obtained from the System Office. The list for the fourth group was compiled within SPIA. Response rates were low across the board and for groups two and three they were too low for systematic analysis.

3. Results

3.1 Delivery of outputs

SPIA has delivered the vast majority of its promised outputs on-time over the period (Table 1). Delays in the early years were largely related to institutional challenges in setting up the new Secretariat and then

to Covid 19. Delayed outputs were, for the most part, delivered in subsequent years, however in a few cases changes in SPIA priorities resulted in outputs being changed or dropped. One such case, involved the strong focus on broadening the impact assessment Community of Practice, in particular engaging research leaders (part of Obj 1). Another was the decision to have SPIA continue to lead the country work (Obj 3) rather than seek another home for it within CGIAR, as was originally planned.

3.2 Contribution to outcomes and impacts

With regard to SPIA's mandate to expand and deepen the evidence base, respondents were asked a series of questions based on the ToC (Table 2). When asked whether they were more aware of the adoption and impacts of CGIAR innovations than they were pre-2009, the majority of both SC members and IA specialists responded that they were. Qualitative responses revealed that for some, increased awareness related to lack of previous knowledge of CGIAR while for others it was the result of more, better evidence. One SC member cited SPIA's new role in the system and accountability directly to SC.

Among those who had been reached by impact evidence, the majority reported that it had changed how they think about CG impact and that they had used the evidence in their work. An important way that respondents had changed their thinking was in terms of scale, and the Ethiopia report was specifically mentioned. SC members reported using the evidence

Table 1. Share of promised outputs delivered on time, by year and workplan objective

	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
Obj 1 Support CGIAR's strong commitment to embed a culture of impact assessment into the System	0.64	0.75	0.89	0.86	1.00
Obj 2 Expand and deepen evidence of impact of CGIAR research investments	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00	1.00
Obj 3 Improve and institutionalize collection of data on diffusion and use of CGIAR innovations in national data systems	0.80	0.50	0.83	0.75	1.00
Total	0.74	0.71	0.94	0.85	1.00

Table 2. Survey results related to changes in awareness and use of impact evidence, by stakeholder group

	SC (n=5)	IA specialists (n=37)
Are you more aware of the adoption and impacts of CGIAR innovations than you were pre-2019? (Reach)	100	68
Has the evidence from SPIA-related studies changed your thinking about the impacts of CGIAR research and how they should be measured? (Change in knowledge, attitude, skills)	100	72
Have you used the evidence in your work, or do you intend to use it? (Change in behavior)	100	79

Table 3 Survey results related to changes in CGIAR's impact culture, by stakeholder group

	SC (n=3)	IA specialists (n=22)
In your perception, does CGIAR have a stronger impact assessment culture now than it did in 2019?	100	68
Have you personally improved your own understanding of impact assessment and its role in CGIAR over this period?	100	82

both to justify past investments and to influence future investment. IA specialists reported using evidence for a wide range of purposes including research and proposal development.

According to respondents, in addition to doing more of what it is already doing, SPIA should deepen discussion around how impact happens, or doesn't happen, using evidence to enhance future impact. IA specialists emphasized continuing to strengthen linkages with external organizations and with natural scientists in CG. Better outreach with simple summaries, for example in the form of a newsletter, was something both SC and IA specialists mentioned as a way to communicate results more broadly.

With regard to SPIA's mandate to support embedding impact assessment in the system, respondents were asked whether CG impact culture was stronger and whether their own understanding of impact and its role in CGIAR had improved (Table 3). The majority of respondents answered yes to both questions. Again, SC members were more likely to feel this way than IA specialists.

Reasons respondents gave for the stronger impact culture include: SPIA's expanded workplan and that SPIA is "providing rigorous evidence of the reach and causal impacts of CGIAR research and providing independent strategic advice to the CGIAR System on efficient and effective impact assessment methods and practices." In terms of how understanding has improved, the long term, big-picture evidence was mentioned, as were new methods in general. However, one respondent cautioned that SPIA should be careful not to focus too much on developing methods but rather on applying existing cutting-edge methods.

Key messages

- SPIA delivered the vast majority of promised outputs, most of them on time
- In the perceptions of two of SPIA's key stakeholder groups, SC and IA specialists, SPIA is contributing to expected outcomes and impacts.
 - Given low response rates, it would be good to confirm these results with the broader stakeholder groups, especially in the case of SC
- Response rates were too low to reach any conclusions about how System Management and Research leaders perceive SPIA's effectiveness. However, lack of response indicates something about the priority they give to SPIA.
 - Research leaders were a key target group in SPIA's 2019-2021 work plan but for a variety of reasons, inside and outside SPIA, focus shifted away from this group and they were likely not reached as originally intended. It might be useful for SPIA to think about where these stakeholder groups fit in SPIA's current ToC.
- Overall there was support for all SPIA's activities and some suggestions for how these can be improved going forward, especially in the area of improved communication.
 - SPIA has a Use of Evidence unit and ToC in the current workplan that addresses this.





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