



Standing
Panel on
Impact
Assessment

SPIA strategic directions and updates

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October 2, 2019

Challenges of measuring impact of CGIAR

- SPIA's mandate ~ impacts at system level of a set of agricultural research for development (AR4D) centers and programs with long and complex causal pathways
- AR4D faces uncertainty about
 - Scientific progress
 - Development processes

⇒ IA approach must differ from standard approaches to IA of development interventions

But acknowledge “rigor revolution”

~ **methods development** (e.g. environmental call)

⇒ Some similarities to approaches for innovation programs elsewhere

Overall logic

- To maintain confidence in the system:
 - Evidence needed on whether the benefits of the “big successes” exceed the total investments in the system
 - Rather than whether the benefit of a specific research activity > investment in that activity

$$Benefits\ system = \sum_i^n number\ of\ beneficiaries_i * (benefit/beneficiary)_i$$

- Beneficiary i = farmers, consumers, communities,...
 - Benefit/beneficiary: can be small for many activities and very large for some
- At the same time:
 - Early learning needed to maximize possibilities for impact at scale
 - ~ testing assumptions along theory of change
 - => which steps in the causal pathway may prevent innovations from achieving impact at scale?
- Portfolio of studies & multi-year process

Accountability studies

- Long term, large scale studies that provide rigorous evidence on (few) “big wins” that justify investment in the system
 - The 2 types of uncertainty (science and development) mean that not all investments get to this point (in the relevant time frame)
 - Inherently backward looking
 - Methodological challenges to measure this impact rigorously mean that only some big wins can be subject of IAs
- More tomorrow!

Estimating number of beneficiaries

- Systematic collection of data on adoption and use of CGIAR innovations at scale
 - More tomorrow

From evidence to use: Learning studies

- Focus on recent research outputs that are going to scale: forward looking
 - Can be specifically designed to fill evidence gaps related to key assumptions in ToC.
 - SPIA role is in coordinating sets of studies that can give more generalizable lessons to these questions ~ steps in causal pathway multiple innovations
 - complement rather than duplicate studies conducted by centers and CRPs
- ~ Implicit system level ToC
- ⇒ Feedback into both research and dissemination efforts
- ToCs for more recent research may be different from past successful ToCs
 - Context is different
 - Characteristics of the innovations are different

How characteristics of innovation affect adoption or impact?

- Benefits from adopting some innovations may take time to be realized, potentially generating more costs than benefits in the years until they bear fruits
- Some innovations have highly heterogeneous benefits depending on local conditions, and it may take time to fine-tune the proper combination of inputs adapted to each site
- Certain benefits or costs are not easily perceived
- Innovations can be complex and demanding in human capital
- Innovations for which costs and benefits may be substantially larger/smaller for certain types of farmers (gender, age, ...) for other reasons
- Many recent CGIAR innovations have such characteristics

Elements of a proposed learning-oriented call on how to scale up “challenging” innovations

- Focus on innovations or the characteristics of innovations that are relevant and of high priority for CGIAR agenda to 2030, in research and/or scaling
- For each innovation
 - Show evidence that innovation is promising
 - Identify key characteristics of the innovation and their implications for the ToC (where possibly validated during research process)
 - a clear prior identification of the traits of the innovation that can potentially hamper or facilitate its diffusion
- Design studies that test well-designed diffusion strategies based on the specifics of the innovation and ToC
 - Typically involves collaboration with a development partner to do the dissemination/scaling
 - Comparison of different diffusion strategies for different innovations
- Question: What’s the best way to find these for priority innovations?
 - Innovation database (?), existing knowledge, dialogue with science leaders, RCT registry...