



CALL FOR PROPOSALS Experimental impact evaluations of CGIAR research

Call issued by: Karen Macours, Paris School of Economics & SPIA

Email expressions of interest to: Lakshmi Krishnan, lakshmi.krishnan@fao.org, no later than 11:59 pm CET, Sunday, June 1st 2014

Overview

The CGIAR Independent Science and Partnership Council's Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA) is soliciting expressions of interest for experimental impact evaluation projects. SPIA invites researchers from academic institutions and from CGIAR Centers/CRPs to submit proposals for impact evaluation projects that are based on an experimental design (randomized design or natural experiments). While the project may run beyond December 2016, SPIA funding must be utilized before this period (refer Budget Guidelines for more). The overall budget available for this call is USD 900,000, and we expect to award 2 to 4 proposals. Projects must be able to provide rigorous and innovative evidence on the impact of CGIAR technologies, but researchers from CGIAR CRPs/Centers do not necessarily need to take part in the evaluation.

Process

Expressions of interest (EOIs): If you wish to submit a full proposal, you must first submit an expression of interest, no later than **11:59 pm CET, Sunday, June 1st 2014**. EOIs will be reviewed and a subset will be requested by July 10th 2014 to submit full proposals.

Requested **final proposals** will be due at **11:59 pm CET, Sunday, September 7th 2014**, and final selection decisions will be made in October. Project implementation may begin after October 2014, conditional on the contractual process being finalized.

Questions on this call may be directed to lakshmi.krishnan@fao.org.

Background

Low agricultural productivity is a key development challenge in many parts of the developing world. The development of new technologies by the various CGIAR centers/CRPs and their national agricultural research systems (NARS) partners therefore seems to hold great promise.¹ Yet evidence on *whether* and *how* new technologies

¹ CGIAR technologies are varied and all are potential of interest for this call: higher yield/cost savings; risk mitigation/stress resistance; quality improvement; natural resource management practices; and policies such as product regulation or supply chain development.

contribute to increasing productivity, incomes, and ultimately household welfare is limited. The pathway from technological innovation to household welfare indeed is long and involves a number of intermediate steps including the appropriateness of new technologies and their adaptation to local bio-physical, climatological and socio-economic conditions, a period of field trials, increasing availability of the technology for the target population, information dissemination, addressing constraints to adoption, and once adopted, translation of the potential productivity increases to measurable welfare improvements. Given the complexity of this causal chain, a better understanding of the direct and indirect linkages (and potential bottlenecks) in each of these steps is needed in order to fully understand whether and how new technologies can indeed fulfill their promise. SPIAs is interested in supporting RCTs to provide rigorous causal evidence on these linkages, and where the situation warrants, the potential bottlenecks along the impact pathway.

Themes and areas of inquiry

The EOI and full proposals should put forward a research plan that promises to add to our knowledge regarding the potential impacts of CGIAR technologies in particular agro-ecological environments and social settings in specific years. This includes a better understanding and evidence base regarding the potential lack of impacts of certain technologies.

In particular, we invite impact evaluation proposals that address one or more of the following themes:

- a) studies designed to convincingly show the effect of adoption of a CGIAR technology on productivity (downward shift in marginal cost of production or upward shift of production function) – and ideally also on measures related to household welfare. Studies that credibly show the lack of impacts are of equal interest.
- b) studies that help understand under which conditions adoption of a CGIAR technology leads to welfare impacts (on income /nutrition / good or bad environmental outcomes) – this includes studies that evaluate potential complementary interventions.
- c) studies that help understand other constraints that limit the effectiveness or sustained adoptability of current CGIAR research, this can include questions related to technology production process itself.
- d) studies with potential to make a significant and innovative contribution to the economic literature linking agricultural productivity to rural poverty.

These themes are however not exclusive, and proposals addressing other related questions will also be considered, and evaluated on their relevance to SPIA's overall mission. Note however that this call is not interested in evaluations designed simply to understand the determinants or correlates of adoption.

Collaboration

We welcome and encourage expression of interests both by researchers at the CGIAR, and by academic researchers. In the later case, it is possible but not necessary for the CGIAR to be directly participating in proposed research.

In both cases we do encourage consultation with the CGIAR researchers that have been/are involved with the development of the specific technology or policy targeted by the evaluation. Indeed, as part of the full proposal, you are asked information for which early dialogue with CGIAR researchers will often be useful. In particular, you will be asked to describe the specific technology that is targeted by the evaluation, demonstrate the critical role of the CGIAR in the development of this technology, and discuss the importance of the technology in the CGIAR research portfolio.

Project implementation and responsibilities

Proposals coming from institutions outside the country where the evaluation will be conducted must indicate partner organizations in the country where the evaluation will be conducted. The proposals should document how their involvement and responsibilities in the research project fit in their broader portfolio of activities. The proposals will need to make a convincing case on the operational capacity and feasibility of the experimental evaluation.

Reporting requirements will include an annual work plan and detailed budget, financial (expenditures) report, an annual activity report summarizing results and accomplishments, research outputs and summaries. As a part of the contract, researchers will also be required to make the database publicly available within a reasonable amount of time after research is completed.

Budget guidelines

Annual Meeting:

All Principal Investigators (PIs) will meet once a year to provide peer feedback on the ongoing research, and to lay the foundation for synthetic activities that draw together the messages from the different evaluation projects. In addition, there will be an inception workshop (a few months after final selection) that will bring together all PIs. All research budgets need to provide for travel expenses for one of the PIs. For planning purposes, assume the meetings will be held in Paris or Oxford or Rome.

PIs will be expected to participate in possible policy dissemination events organized by SPIA after the end of projects – these will be separately funded and do not need to be included in the budget.

Matching and funding timeframe:

SPIA encourages that each impact evaluation match a portion of their budget with other funds. All proposals must provide indicative matching figures.

SPIA has a particular interest on funding evaluations that build on existing evaluations (e.g. longer-term follow-ups that allow to look at final impacts or complementary funding that allows to address questions of interest to SPIA).

SPIA is also open to co-funding of evaluations that extend beyond December 2016 (e.g. funding for early rounds of data collection) as long as all activities funded by SPIA funds end by December 2016. Since disbursements are closely linked to outputs, projects should clearly specify research outputs in relation to project activities (baseline database and analysis, mid-term databases and/or analysis etc.) that will be delivered by December 2016.

Project implementation:

For full research projects, implementation costs are expected to be borne by the project partners. However, under some circumstances where implementation costs are significantly increased due to the research design, for example a randomized encouragement design, SPIA may fund some of the additional implementation costs. Proposal budgets that include line items for implementation are required to explain why the implementer cannot bear the costs.

Submission guidelines

There will be 2 steps in the proposal selection:

Please send an **expression of interest (EOI)** in electronic format by **11:59 pm CET, Sunday, June 1st 2014** to lakshmi.krishnan@fao.org. Expressions of interest must be **maximum 3 pages** (excluding CVs) and contain the following elements:

Title	Description and guidelines
Title page	List of all PIs (name, institutional address, phone, email), total project budget, and funds requested from SPIA.
Research question	Description and motivation of the research question and how it relates to the theme of this call.
CGIAR technology targeted by the evaluation	Describe the specific technology(ies) that is (are) targeted by the evaluation. Briefly, demonstrate the critical role of the CGIAR in the development of this technology, discuss the importance of the technology in the CGIAR research portfolio, and the basis for selecting it for evaluation (potential based on early assessments).

Methodology	Describe the proposed impact evaluation methodology, including the experimental variations and estimated sample sizes.
Relationship with CGIAR center that developed the studied technology	Describe the type of collaboration and consultation with the CGIAR researchers involved with the development of the technology (if any).
Timeline	A timeline of activities over the life of the project.
Information on in-country partners	Name and basic information on partners in the country in which the evaluation will take place.
Summary of qualifications	One paragraph summary of PIs qualifications.
Curriculum Vitae	CV of all PIs – including field experience and publications directly related to agricultural/NRM impact evaluation – and information on other impact evaluation projects led by the PIs.

Full proposals must be submitted in electronic format by **11:59 pm CET, Sunday, September 7th 2014** to lakshmi.krishnan@fao.org, have **maximum 10 pages** (excluding CVs), and must contain the following elements:

Title	Description and guidelines
Title page	List of all PIs (name, institutional address, phone, email), total project budget, and funds requested from SPIA.
Abstract	Not to exceed 200 words.
Research question	Description and motivation of the research question and how it relates to the theme of this call.
CGIAR technology targeted by the evaluated	Describe the specific technology(ies) that is (are) targeted by the evaluation, demonstrate the critical role of the CGIAR in the development of this technology, discuss the importance of the technology in the CGIAR research portfolio, and the basis for selecting it for evaluation (good potential for adoption and impact based on early assessments).
Narrative description	Detail the intellectual context, the proposed impact evaluation methodology, including the experimental variations. Include realistic power calculations and source for assumptions, and discuss internal and external validity. Also discuss data collection and measurement of key outcomes. Include short discussion of context and target population.
Anticipated outputs	Describe the relevance of the research to

	answer SPIA's core questions. Describe which evidence will be generated on the strength of the causal linkage (or lack of) between adoption of a particular CGIAR intervention and outcomes of interest in specific environments.
Relationship with CGIAR center that developed the studied technology	Describe the type of collaboration and consultation with the CGIAR researchers involved with the development of the technology. Describe both interactions that have already taken place as part of the proposal development, and the envisioned collaboration and consultation over the life of the project.
Workplan	This should include a timeline for the main activities over the life of the project in the form of a simple Gantt chart by month, as well as brief narrative description. All activities funded by SPIA funds must end by December 2016.
Budget	A budget for the life of the project as per a template to be provided. The budget should also clearly describe any matching with other funds. Provide a narrative description of the inputs that will be provided free of charge/in-kind.
Summary of qualifications	One paragraph summary of PIs qualifications.
Curriculum Vitae	CV of all PIs – including field experience and publications directly related to agricultural/NRM impact evaluation – and information on other impact evaluation projects led by the PIs.
Information on in-country partners+ letters of support	Name and basic information of partners in country in which the evaluation will take place. Document how their involvement and responsibilities in the research project fit in their broader portfolio of activities. The proposals will need to make a convincing case on the operational capacity and feasibility of the evaluation. A letter of support from all implementing partners needs to be attached to the proposal.
Division of tasks	Present roles and responsibilities of each team member, including for all principal investigators named above. Specify number of days each person will work on project

Selection process

SPIA will evaluate the expression of interests both in the intrinsic interest for SPIAs mission, the technical merit of the proposed evaluation, and on the qualification of the proposed research team. In case an expression of interest scores high on interest and potential merit, but the proposed research team does not have experience or expertise in experimental evaluations, SPIA will actively seek to encourage team-formation and subsequent collaborations with interested academic experts prior to the submission of the full proposal. Academic researchers who are interested in participating in this **matchmaking** are encouraged to signal their interest by writing karen.macours@psemail.edu.

A review panel comprised of academic peer reviewers and SPIA members will score full proposals based on the following criteria:

- Potential for and importance of generating evidence about causal linkages in the adoption to impact pathways for CGIAR technologies
- Technical merit
- Innovation of research questions and design
- Feasibility
- Qualifications of the research team
- Value-for-money

During the review process, applicants may be contacted by SPIA, on behalf of review panel, for more detailed information on the proposal. Requests for more information can relate to any part of the proposal. If standardized questions are requested of multiple proposals, those questions will be presented to *all* proposals.

SPIA will select from the top-rated proposals to ensure a project portfolio that is balanced across different types of technologies.

Data publication

Researchers are expected to publish data from their SPIA funded projects within 18 months of completing field work. If grantees cannot comply with this requirement, a written explanation is required.