



Advisory
Services



CGIAR Advisory Services

2020 Narrative and Financial Report

February 2021

Executive Summary

In 2020 the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC), the Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA), and the Evaluation Function coordinated by the CGIAR Advisory Services Shared Secretariat (CAS Secretariat), collectively termed as Advisory Services functions, provided a broad range of externally-driven evidence and evidence-based advice to CGIAR. Advisory Services' work furthers the System's effectiveness, its culture of continual learning, and its transition to One CGIAR.

ISDC made several contributions to the scientific underpinnings of CGIAR work. It commissioned two foresight reviews on One CGIAR impact areas, as well as a report analyzing trade-offs in agri-food systems, and made these reports widely available in multiple forms. It updated the CGIAR Quality of Research for Development (QoR4D) frame of reference and reviewed a draft template for One CGIAR research proposals. During the year, ISDC also held virtual meetings and webinars on the foresight, trade-offs, and QoR4D work. The ISDC chair and members participated in consultations and dialogues on the transition to One CGIAR.

SPIA called for and funded a wide range of impact assessments and studies in 2020 and sought to strengthen the capacity of CGIAR researchers to design such assessments. It approved funding for six proposals on learning studies that will causally identify whether diffusion strategies specifically adapted to the characteristics of innovations can lead to more sustained adoption ("adapted strategies" call) for CGIAR innovations. To help develop methods to measure the impact of risk-reducing innovations, SPIA funded a study on blast-resistant wheat in Bangladesh. It issued three development grants to strengthen researchers' capacity to design rigorous impact assessments, and the panel approved three proposals designed to measure the environmental impacts of CGIAR research. SPIA organized a virtual workshop on the use of remote sensing for impact evaluation. Bringing together impact assessment focal points representing all CGIAR Centers, SPIA held meetings on new ideas for impact assessment studies, on the effects of COVID-19 on impact assessment, and on how to support the One CGIAR reform. In addition, it released a report on the adoption and diffusion of CGIAR-related innovations in Ethiopia and signed a letter of agreement on integrated data collection with the Ugandan Bureau of Statistics.

The Evaluation Function, coordinated by the CAS Secretariat, commissioned and carried out independent reviews of 12 CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs), focusing on quality of science, effectiveness and future orientation. The CRP 2020 Reviews generated a knowledge management database to support learning, and Evaluation Function shared the CRP review findings, conclusions, and recommendations with a range of CGIAR stakeholders. It also created a CAS Evaluation Roster of 50 external reviewers for future use.

In support of One CGIAR, ISDC, SPIA and Evaluation Function prepared commentary for the designers of the One CGIAR Research and Innovation Strategy and Performance Results Management Framework.

The CAS Secretariat supported the work of all of these functions. Specifically, it recruited and brought on board six Secretariat staff to reach its full complement of staff. It strengthened communications through new tools and communication channels, including increased web traffic. The Secretariat streamlined planning, workflow, and reporting procedures. It provided administrative support for dozens of consultancy and contractor engagements and operational support for a \$4 million pipeline of SPIA letters of agreement. Finally, the CAS Secretariat provided support and representation to meetings across One CGIAR governance and management structures.

The Figure at right illustrates how the CAS functions work together to provide the System with evidence-driven external **advice** while providing and facilitating use of **evidence** for decision making.

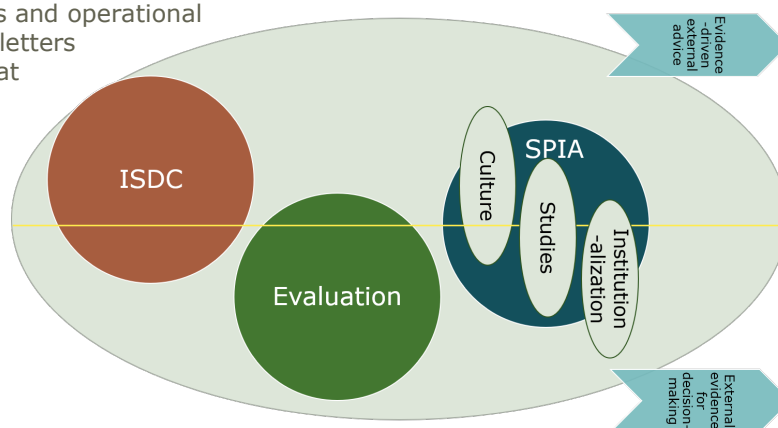


Figure 1: Bringing together external advice and evidence

Independent Science for Development Council

Foresight and Trade-off Advice

In the first half of 2020, ISDC's work centered on two commissioned foresight reviews on the One CGIAR impact areas (divided into [societal](#) and [environmental](#) impact areas) and a follow-up report on [trade-off](#) analysis of agri-food systems. From these reports, ISDC developed a [suite](#) of materials—including a [synthesis](#) of the foresight reviews—that provided advice to the System Council (SC) and the Transition Advisory Group 2 (TAG2) in the development of the Research and Innovation Strategy. These reports were also adapted for a more general audience and published in the first open-access issue of [Q Open](#), a new agricultural economics journal published by Oxford University Press. Members of ISDC wrote an introduction to the articles, and the CGIAR Foresight Team co-leads wrote a commentary.

Quality of Research for Development Frame of Reference Update and Operationalization

In early 2020, ISDC published an updated version of the [Quality of Research for Development in the CGIAR](#) (QoR4D) frame of reference and an accompanying [brief](#). During Q4 and into 2021, ISDC invited the Executive Management Team (EMT); Science Leaders; the Strategic Impact, Monitoring, and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC); and the SC to help co-design the operationalization of QoR4D, an effort that included the Eschborn Principles. This forthcoming brief will be used by the CGIAR community as a tool for drafting research initiative proposals and by ISDC for assessing them.

Advice on Research and Innovation Strategy and Research Initiative Template

The work to operationalize QoR4D was complemented by the ISDC review of the draft template for One CGIAR research initiative proposals, delivered to the System Organization Programs Unit. ISDC also responded to invitations to provide [feedback](#) on the first and second drafts of the One CGIAR Research and Innovation Strategy.

Semiannual and Leadership Meetings

Because of travel restrictions, ISDC held two virtual semiannual meetings in 2020. The first [meeting](#), held in April, presented and discussed the foresight review outcomes and refined the scope of the commissioned report on trade-offs. The second [meeting](#), held across five sessions in October/November, concentrated on the operationalization of QoR4D.

In addition to the semiannual meetings, the ISDC chair led several meetings to substitute for in-person engagement during COVID-19. Invited guests at these meetings included EMT and SC members. Additionally, ISDC hosted two webinars with Science Leaders. The first webinar, which included the SIMEC and SB chairs, was a presentation and Q&A session focused on the foresight and trade-off outcomes. The second webinar was a co-design session to operationalize QoR4D.

Participation in TAGs and TCF

The ISDC chair was substantively engaged in the Transition Consultation Forum (TCF) and brought ISDC perspectives into the co-design dialogue and process in TAG2 (on research). Additional ISDC members participated in cross-cutting communication and change management (TAG1), country and regional engagement (TAG5), financial management and modalities (TAG6), and resource mobilization (TAG7).

ISDC Member Recruitment and EMT Involvement

ISDC member [Suneetha Kadiyala](#) participated as an invited guest in both the ISDC member and EMT recruitment processes, which were led by different panels. The ISDC chair also provided input into the ISDC membership announcement, and members actively communicated the opportunity among their networks.

ISDC Chair Led the Selection Committee for the TPMU

In April and May 2020 a selection panel of five members—Holger Meinke (chair), Hilary Wild, Clarissa Van Heerden, Stephen Potter, and Andrew Smith—evaluated five competitive proposals for the incoming Transition Program Management Unit (TPMU). The committee recommended the appointment of Dalberg Advisors.

Standing Panel on Impact Assessment

SPIA released [Shining a brighter light: Comprehensive evidence on adoption and diffusion of CGIAR-related innovations in Ethiopia](#), a synthesis of more than five years of work in Ethiopia. This synthesis built on a comprehensive stocktaking exercise of 52 innovations and 26 policy influences resulting from research conducted by the 11 CGIAR Centers and 12 CRPs that work in Ethiopia. [A validation workshop with CGIAR researchers and national partners was organized in Addis Ababa in February 2020.](#)

SPIA signed a letter of agreement with the **Ugandan Bureau of Statistics** to integrate data collection protocols on CGIAR-related innovations in the forthcoming 2021/22 round of the Ugandan National Panel Survey. Uganda will be the second country (following Ethiopia) to engage in national-level data collection. SPIA started a nine-month **scoping phase in Vietnam** to consider its suitability as the third country.

SPIA published a [guidance document on the use of DNA fingerprinting](#) for varietal identification: "DNA Fingerprinting for Crop Varietal Identification: Fit-for-Purpose Protocols, Their Costs and Analytical Implications."

The panel launched a call for learning studies on adapted strategies for CGIAR innovations reaching the scaling phase. This call facilitated a systematic matching between CGIAR Centers and academic partners, which worked together to prepare proposals. Eleven study teams were formed, and six had their proposals approved for funding: ILRI's **vaccine and treatment method**, AfricaRice's **two-row adapted motorized paddy weeder**, ICRISAT's **machine-harvestable chickpeas**, Niger's **demi-lune rainwater-harvesting technique**, CIP's **Triple-S technology** for sweet potatoes, and CIMMYT's **Small Mechanization Impact Stimuli in Ethiopia**.

To help develop methods to measure the impact of risk-reducing innovations, SPIA funded a study on **blast-resistant wheat** in Bangladesh—a collaboration between CIMMYT, the Bangladesh Wheat and Maize Research Institute, and Tufts University.

To strengthen the capacity of CGIAR researchers to design rigorous impact evaluations, SPIA issued three development grants: on the dissemination of **ASI threshers** with AfricaRice, **early-maturing lentils** with ICARDA and **genetically improved tilapia** with WorldFish.

Three proposals designed to measure the environmental impacts of CGIAR research were approved for funding in 2020, bringing the portfolio of accountability studies to 6. CIMMYT's **Happy Seeder** involves labor-saving innovations and machinery, ICRISAT's **sorghum and millet improved varieties** are being scaled up in dryland systems of Mali, and ILRI's **index-based livestock insurance** study is documenting rangeland health impacts. The accountability studies have applied a multidisciplinary perspective to the evaluation of a variety of impacts of CGIAR technologies. Not only do these studies include principal investigators (PIs) from agricultural and development economics, but study teams also rely on contributions from PIs with backgrounds in environmental sciences, agronomy, geography and other disciplines.

A virtual [workshop on Remote Sensing for Impact Evaluation](#), in partnership with the Environmental Markets Solutions Lab (emLab) at UC Santa Barbara, brought together seven panelists who are specialists in remote sensing across various disciplines (geological and environmental sciences, geospatial sciences, hydrology, ecology, environmental economics). The workshop provided detailed feedback on remote sensing work planned for the SPIA-funded studies measuring environmental outcomes. More than 100 participants, most of them from across CGIAR, attended the workshop.

SPIA organized several meetings with impact assessment focal points (IAFPs) representing all CGIAR Centers. The meetings presented new ideas for impact assessment studies for CGIAR innovations and policy influence, reported on how COVID-19 has affected the ability of CGIAR to implement impact assessments, and facilitated a discussion on how the CGIAR community of practice on impact assessment could support the One CGIAR reform. SPIA also convened CGIAR research leaders and impact assessment researchers to present and discuss implications of the Ethiopia report. Finally, in partnership with PIM, SPIA organized a [series of webinars for CGIAR social scientists on "getting published,"](#) including participation by several editors of high-impact journals.

SPIA contributed to the [One CGIAR Research & Innovation Strategy and Performance Results Management Framework](#), highlighting the key role of rigorous evidence on the causal impacts.

The [SPIA 2019–2021 progress report](#) provides an in-depth update on SPIA's work plan implementation.

Evaluation Function

CGIAR System Engagement

Coordinated by CAS Secretariat, the Evaluation Function provided feedback and reflections on key documents in support of the transition to One CGIAR, including the [Draft CGIAR Performance and Results Management Framework 2022–2030](#), and substantive input into the [management response](#) to the [Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network's diagnostic assessment of CGIAR in 2019](#).

Reviews of 12 CGIAR Research Programs

CAS commissioned and carried out an independent review of 12 CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs). To meet the needs of System Council, represented by SIMEC, the reviews were conducted in 10 months and focused on two criteria: quality of science and effectiveness. By design, the lean 2020 CRP Reviews required no field visits and were therefore feasible under a global pandemic. The review process involved the development of terms of reference through multistakeholder consultation and the recruitment, onboarding, and debriefing of 22 external experts and evaluators, and 8 peer reviewers, all with extensive research and evaluation experience and affiliations (Table 1). The CAS Evaluation Roster, which includes 50 external reviewers, is an important output from CRP Reviews.

Table 1: External expert affiliations by country, 2020

Country	Institution
Australia	University of Queensland, South Australia Research & Development Institute, University of New England
South Africa	Nelson Mandela University, University of Johannesburg
United Kingdom	University of Greenwich Natural Resources Institute, Aberystwyth University
United States	University of Illinois, Auburn University, Michigan State University
Others	Wageningen University, Swedish University of Agricultural Sciences, University of Ottawa

Table 2 provides links to the complete catalogue of CRP 2020 Review products.

Table 2: Reports, annexes and briefs produced, 2020

CRP Reviews	Annexes	Briefs
1 MAIZE	MAIZE Annexes	MAIZE Brief
2 WHEAT	WHEAT Annexes	WHEAT Brief
3 RICE	RICE Annexes	RICE Brief
4 FISH	FISH Annexes	FISH Brief
5 LIVESTOCK	LIVESTOCK Annexes	LIVESTOCK Brief
6 Roots, Tubers and Bananas (RTB)	RTB Annexes	RTB Brief
7 Grain Legumes and Dryland Cereal (GLDC)	GLDC Annexes	GLDC Brief
8 Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA)	FTA Annexes	FTA Brief
9 Climate Change, Agriculture and Food Security (CCAFS)	CCAFS Annexes	CCAFS Brief
10 Agriculture for Nutrition and Health (A4NH)	A4NH Annexes	A4NH Brief
11 Policies, Institutions and Markets (PIM)	PIM Annexes	PIM Brief
12 Water, Land and Ecosystems (WLE)	WLE Annexes	WLE Brief

The CRP 2020 Reviews also generated a CAS knowledge management database to support learning, and CAS Evaluation team members prepared three blog posts on the Reviews: (1) [Evaluative reviews: A streamlined approach to accountability](#); (2) [Bibliometrics in assessing Quality of Science](#); and (3) [Reflection on the CRP Reviews: A time to harmonize data and definitions](#). The CAS Evaluation Function shared targeted evaluation knowledge by presenting findings, conclusions and recommendations to

SIMEC (two times), Science Leaders (two times), and the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Community of Practice (MEL CoP), and by showing a three-minute video to the System Council.

2020 saw Evaluation Function stoke active partnerships, internally with CGIAR MEL COP, and externally through the [EvalForward](#) network of the Rome-based agencies.

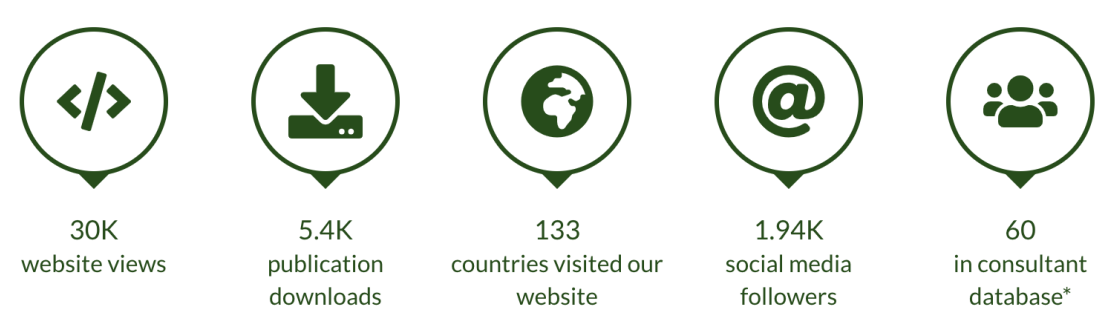
Secretariat Support

The CGIAR Advisory Services Shared Secretariat (“CAS Secretariat”) supports the implementation of the three functions reported in the preceding pages: CAS Secretariat serves as Secretariat to ISDC and SPIA and implements the CGIAR’s external Evaluation Function. Therefore, CAS Secretariat results in 2020 entailed operational support to all ISDC and SPIA above-reported deliverables, as well as implementation support for the Evaluation Function work plan.

Specific major deliverables included the following:

- Recruitment and onboarding were completed for six CAS Secretariat staff, which brought the CAS Secretariat staff to its full complement of nine, as specified by the Shared Secretariat Terms of Reference. Onboarding and induction materials were created for the new CAS staff members.
- Communications were improved through standardization of items such as a Style Guide, Blog Tip Sheet, and Workflow and through launching of new channels such as CAS LinkedIn. The 2020 CAS Communications Survey among key stakeholder groups and other activities helped improve audience awareness. Traffic to the Advisory Services [website](#) rose, with Google Analytics showing more than 30K hits from June to December 2020.
- Ways of working improved. The procedures supporting ISDC and SPIA members were revised. More streamlined approaches to planning and reporting were initiated. Transparency was aligned with CGIAR System and host institute needs, including COVID-19 rebudgeting scenarios and assessment of hosting costs.
- The CAS Secretariat provided administrative support to approximately 50 consultancy and contractor engagements, as well as operational support for processing a \$4 million pipeline of SPIA letters of agreement.
- The CAS Secretariat organized convening interactions with the governance and management structures of One CGIAR, including a CAS side event at the 11th meeting of the System Council and multiple meetings with SIMEC for the purposes of CAS planning and reporting. The Secretariat provided support and representation to meetings of the System Council, the System Board, TAG1, and the incoming Executive Management Team.
- Infographics were developed to illustrate the year – see below and following pages.

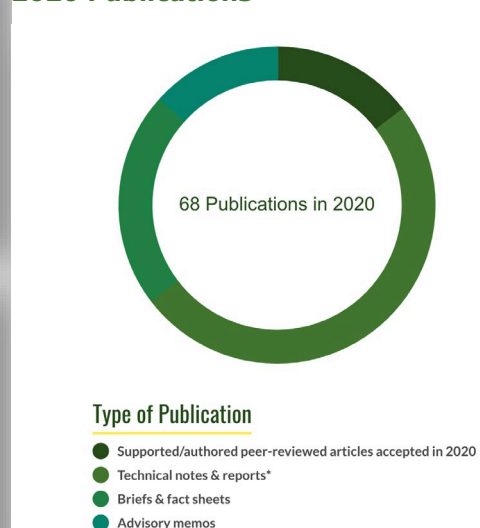
CAS Reach Metrics



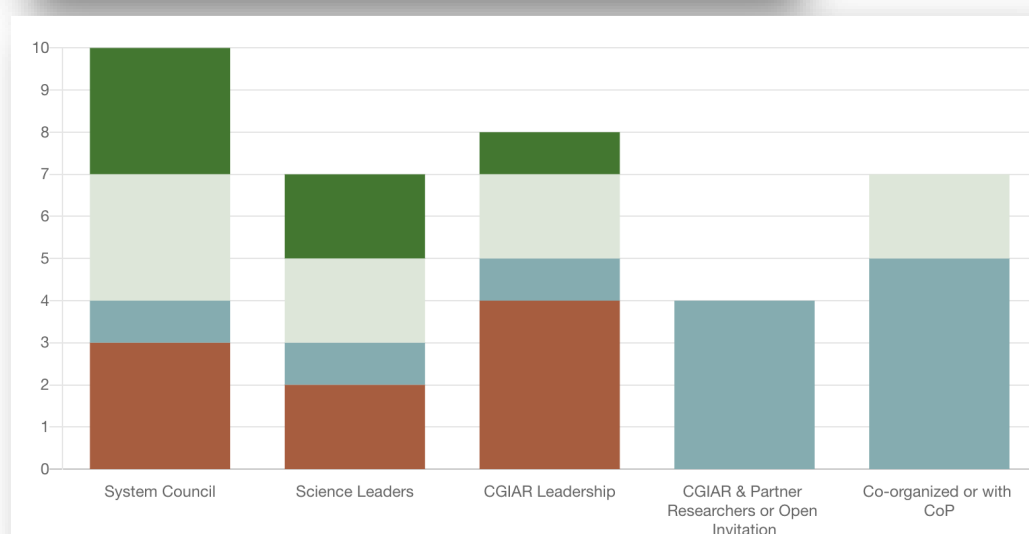
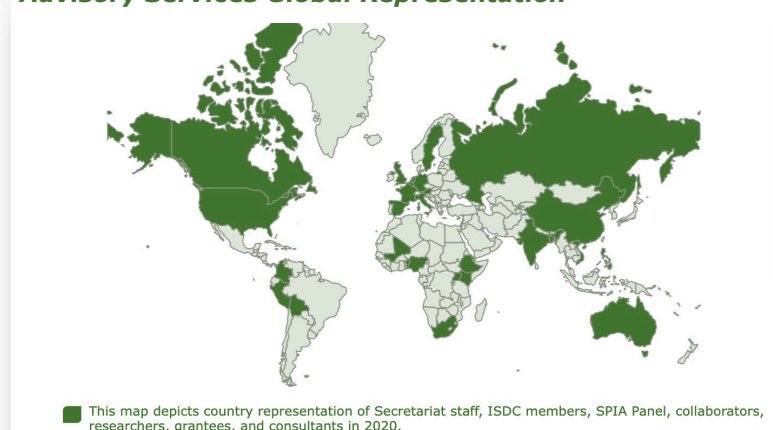
CAS Network Around the World*



2020 Publications**



Advisory Services Global Representation



ISDC Evaluation
SPIA CAS-wide

Notes:

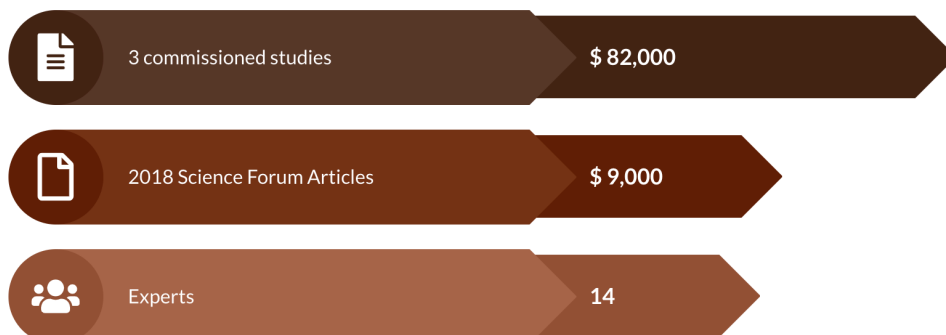
* Our network consists of ISDC members, consultants, and SPIA panel, researchers, and collaborators. SPIA collaborators include only principal investigators of SPIA funded projects.

** Does not include meeting reports

*** Audiences may overlap. System Council includes Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC).

Supporting Evidence Generation for One CGIAR – Year in numbers

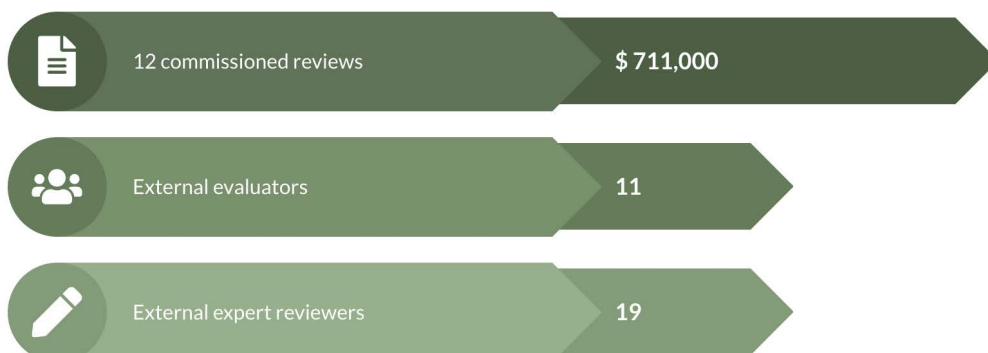
ISDC



SPIA



Evaluation



Financial Resource Utilization and Notes

Table 1. CAS Financial Report 2020 (in USD 000)¹

Workstream	Original Budget	Mid-year Forecast	Expenditures	Balance on Forecast	% Variance
ISDC	869	590	339	251	43%
SPIA	4,602	2,548	2,408	140*	6%
Evaluation	910	966	845	121	13%
CAS Secretariat	1,780	1,945	1,580	366	19%
GRAND TOTAL	8,161	6,049	5,172	877	15%

*See SPIA notes

Financial Report Notes

In 2020 CAS reported a total expenditure of USD 5.17 million out of the USD 8.16 million approved budget. Reflecting constricting budgets and diminished spends in 2020 related to COVID-19, among other factors, while also taking on board an unexpected addition of hosting costs, the CAS revised projection (Mid-Year Forecast) for the year was 6.05 million. Spending variance on the revised projection shows a spending variance of 85%. Explanations on the three functional budgets (ISDC, SPIA, Evaluation Function) and budget for the Secretariat operational support are given below.

ISDC

The fund balance of USD 252k is mostly attributable to unexpended Council honoraria and substantial travel and meeting budget savings. The ISDC worked with a reduced Council of 7 members out of 8 and, for the last semester, with only 6 members. Due to COVID-19 restrictions no travel was undertaken in 2020 and no physical meetings held. The revised ISDC budget projection resulted in a variance of 43%.

SPIA

The explanations for SPIA are made vis-à-vis the original annual approved budget of USD 4,6 million. This illustrates transparently the factors affecting budget use and savings in the context of SPIA's multi-year budget. The SPIA workplan was carried forward in 2020 but experienced delays which were due partly to the engagement process that SPIA adopted for its calls for proposals, which saw a more rigorous review of proposed study designs, feedback to study teams and ex-ante capacity building conducted before funding studies. This led to a slower start of funding studies in 2019 and the first half of 2020. Covid-19 also led to delays in the funded studies, with several study teams requesting no-cost extensions. Of the unspent budgeted funds of USD 2.2 million, permanent savings of roughly USD 462k (with respect to mid-year forecast, the savings were 140k) were made, whereas USD 1.7 million were rolled over to 2021 in keeping with SPIA's commitment to reach its planned deliverables in its 3-year workplan. The SPIA expenditure includes the reported hosting costs of two SPIA researchers at IFPRI and ILRI as of 31 December 2020 through hosting agreements with the SMO, *regardless of whether these costs had already been accounted for in the SMO's books*, to reflect accurately the full year costs.

¹ Please note that this is a consolidated financial report prepared by the CAS Secretariat for expenditures incurred in 2020 under several hosting agreements (Bioversity, SMO, IFPRI and ILRI). It is understood that it is the responsibility of the System Management Office (SMO) to submit the formal (audited) financial report that may differ from the above, depending on whether costs incurred were accounted for in the SMO's books by year-end closure. The financial report notes above provide information on the costs included in this report as well as explanations on the unspent funds.

Evaluation

The evaluation workstream carried out its 2020 activities to plan, primarily the delivery of 12 CRP Reviews, resulting in an unspent budget of USD 121k. This presents a variance of 13%. While little travel was envisaged for the lean approach to CRP Reviews, there was budget for each review team to make one field trip for data collection; thus, the savings reflect COVID-19 impact.

Secretariat

The Secretariat expenditure of USD 1.58 million includes USD 1.26 million for personnel costs of the CAS Secretariat. As not all staff positions were filled in 2020, these costs also include the cost of surge capacity consultants who were hired to temporarily carry out the tasks of missing staff. Costs for recruitment of the CAS Secretariat staff are also included as well as previously unbudgeted hosting costs of USD 164k that CAS Secretariat was asked to assume in 2020 for office space, IT and overheads. Unspent funds totaling USD 364k are mainly attributable to the lack of travel due to COVID-19 and vacant staff positions in the Secretariat that were filled by the end of 2020, allowing the Secretariat to begin the year 2021 with full staffing.



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