



Advisory
Services



CGIAR Advisory Services

2021 Narrative and Financial report

January 2022

Executive Summary

CGIAR Advisory Services (CAS) comprise three independent advisory functions: the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC), the Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA) and the CAS/Evaluation Function,¹ all supported by the CAS Shared Secretariat. Together, CAS provides external, impartial and expert advice and evidence on strategy and positioning, impact assessment and evaluation. This report summarizes CAS major deliverables and progress in 2021 and presents its financial report.

Independent Science for Development Council

During 2021, ISDC provided analysis and advice on the emerging CGIAR portfolio. It moderated the external assessment of the One CGIAR Initiative proposals, based on a fair and transparent assessment process.

ISDC delivered a [report on the first 19 reviews](#) of CGIAR Initiative proposals, a [review of the Companion Document](#) to the CGIAR Investment Prospectus, and provided a commentary on the Investment Prospectus.

Two briefs set out key areas of advising – a brief to [operationalize the Quality of Research for Development Frame of Reference for the Initiative Reviews](#), and a brief to address a [culture of innovation](#) in CGIAR. A [video](#) address from the ISDC summarized some of the key messages that ISDC took to the 13th meeting of the System Council, about the future of One CGIAR.

ISDC also expanded its diversity and capacity during the year, welcoming three new members.

Standing Panel on Impact Assessment

By completing the [first business cycle of the 6-year workplan \(2019-2024\)](#), SPIA began moving from a scoping and matching phase to an implementation, results and learning phase, and the workplan remained on track to address One CGIAR priorities. During 2021, SPIA continued to broaden the impact assessment community of practice, achieving good representation of different audiences.

SPIA supported [One CGIAR Initiatives to develop their specific impact assessment plans](#), stressing that these should be developed from the start of the research process, to test assumptions of the theory of change (ToC) and to causally test impacts related to the United Nations' Sustainable Development Goals. The support included [guidance for Initiative impact assessment plans](#) and a [training video on how to use the ToC to design impact assessments](#). SPIA also engaged with System Council members through their 14th meeting, and with the Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC) on methods for and approaches to impact assessment for One CGIAR.

The [SPIA series of webinars](#) supported CGIAR early career researchers to think through how to rigorously design impact assessments, while the [small grants program](#) helped them to address new research questions using datasets from SPIA-supported studies.

In 2021, SPIA started [a new set of studies on digital tools](#). Other [accountability and learning studies](#) continued to receive support, with emerging evidence of impacts of CGIAR innovations. One 2021 study reported sustained adoption and positive impacts of demi-lunes in the Sahel, and a second study innovatively used remote sensing techniques to measure environmental impacts of index-based livestock insurance.

SPIA continued to build on the successful experience of the [Shining a Brighter Light in Ethiopia](#) report, and [expanded country work to Uganda](#) to document the reach of CGIAR innovations and to track the dissemination of biofortified sweetpotato. Scoping work in Vietnam started to take stock of CGIAR innovations, identifying potential items on the SPIA [methods and measurement](#) agenda.

¹ the Evaluation Function is implemented as a unit within the CAS Shared Secretariat

CAS/Evaluation Function

The CAS/Evaluation Function conducted three major external evaluative activities in 2021. It delivered the [2021 Synthesis of Learning from a Decade of CGIAR Research Programs Report](#), which drew on 43 past evaluations of CGIAR Research Programs. Knowledge management activities that supported the uptake to One CGIAR of the synthesis included briefs for each Strategic Action Area outlined in the [CGIAR Research and Innovation Strategy](#); namely, [Systems Transformation](#); [Resilient Agrifood Systems](#), and [Genetic Innovation](#).

The CAS/Evaluation Function also delivered an external [evaluation of the CGIAR Platform for Big Data in Agriculture](#). Major progress was made as well on the Excellence in Breeding Platform Evaluation, with the report at advanced state by year end and [the Inception Report](#) available.

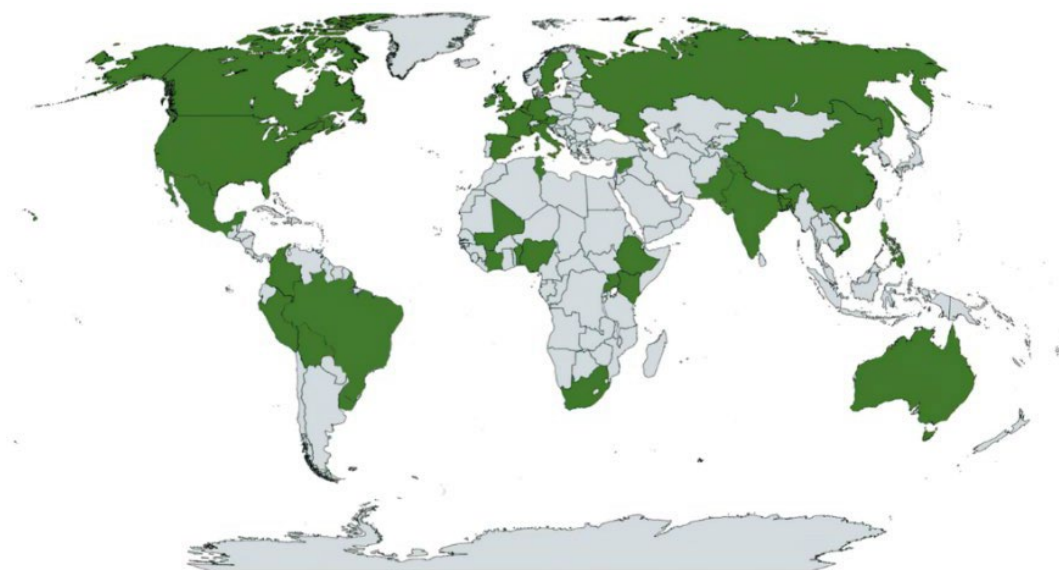
Extensive communication and knowledge management activities of the CAS/Evaluation Function supported the delivery of performance and process evaluation evidence to key audiences. These audiences included the Initiative Design Teams involved in producing the One CGIAR Initiative proposals.

During the reporting year, the CAS/Evaluation Function revisited CGIAR's 2012 evaluation policy, described in a policy revision [Approach Brief](#), to align with the assurance needs of One CGIAR.

CAS Secretariat

Completing a change process initiated in 2018, the CAS Secretariat was [fully staffed](#) as of 4 January, 2021, by a diverse, international team. In 2021, the CAS Shared Secretariat liaised with CGIAR executive management and governance entities to deliver relevant, timely and accessible advice and evidence produced by ISDC, SPIA and the Evaluation Function for CGIAR, through, for instance, a regular CAS newsletter ([subscribe through this link](#)). The CAS [2021 annual snapshot](#) captures some of the major features that characterize the function, productivity, engagement, reach and diversity of ISDC, SPIA and the CAS/Evaluation Function in 2021.

Most illustrations in this report are from [CAS 2021 Annual Snapshot](#)



This map depicts country representation of Secretariat staff, ISDC members, SPIA panel and collaborators, researchers, grantees, evaluation professionals, subject matter experts, and other consultants in 2021.

Figure 1Annual Snapshot: Which countries are represented in the CAS network?

Independent Science for Development Council

ISDC provided analysis and advice on the emerging CGIAR portfolio in 2021. It moderated the external assessment of One CGIAR proposals, and conceived a fair and transparent process to do so. ISDC also expanded its diversity and capacity in the year.

Providing analysis and advice on optimizing the CGIAR portfolio

ISDC successfully completed many requests from CGIAR System Council that provided analysis on the proposed One CGIAR portfolio. This ranged from [reflections](#) on the emerging One CGIAR research portfolio and 2022–24 CGIAR Investment Prospectus to the review of the [Companion Document of the Prospectus](#).

Three ISDC members participated in the Investment Advisory Groups (IAGs). The IAGs served an advisory role to the System, working closely with Science Group Directors to provide guidance to the Executive Management Team. Their aim was to advise on the research and innovation portfolios within the three Action Areas of the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy. To prevent any conflict of interest and address perceptions of IAG involvement, ISDC adopted [guidelines](#) to maintain ISDC's ability to provide an independent assessment.

Moderating the One CGIAR proposal external assessment

The most intensive task of the year was the development of a roadmap for the external review of One CGIAR Initiative proposals and completion of 19 external reviews.

The first step for the proposal external review was to [operationalize](#) the [Quality of Research for Development](#) (QoR4D) in the CGIAR frame of reference. ISDC embarked on a codesign process with One CGIAR scientists that resulted in 17 criteria using the four elements of QoR4D: relevance, scientific credibility, legitimacy, and effectiveness. The QoR4D criteria also align with the Eschborn Principles—a set of codesigned principles developed by system funders and other stakeholders and endorsed by System Council in April 2020. The criteria were framed to ensure proposals presented context understanding, anticipated needs and opportunities of end-users, and leveraged partnerships. The ISDC Chair presented the [proposal assessment process](#) during the CGIAR System Council 13th meeting June 2021.

The second step of the reviews was to convene review teams. An independent and anonymous review team comprised three external subject matter experts (SMEs), led by an ISDC member, and supported by the CAS Secretariat. The teams reviewed each of the 19 proposals.

The proposal assessment criteria were designed as a means of delivering feedback for improving individual proposals and their implementation, and to provide advice to System Council. The feedback was documented by the review teams in the third step. Two templates were developed: 1) for the review teams and 2) for final reporting. Review Teams assessed proposals using a combination of qualitative data and Likert scores per criterion. These templates provided the necessary information for the [report](#) presented at the 14th meeting of the CGIAR System Council. As the first 19 Initiative reviews ended, ISDC commenced the review of the remaining 13 Initiatives, which will be reported to System Council in March 2022.

Expanding ISDC diversity and capacity

ISDC welcomed three [new members](#) in 2021, expanding its capacity, diversity, and scientific expertise. As part of the new members' induction, they formed a sub-group that led the development of a brief focused on [incubating innovation](#) within CGIAR through an System Innovation lens.

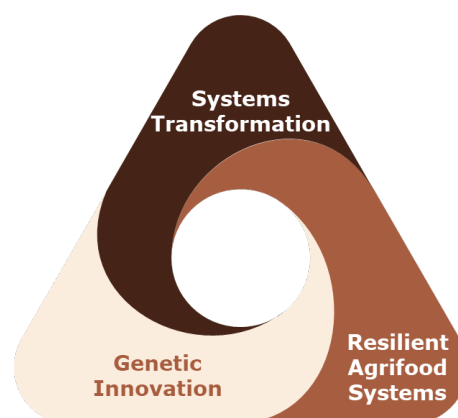


Figure 1 ISDC was asked to assess One CGIAR Initiative cohesiveness

Standing Panel on Impact Assessment

SPIA completed the [first business cycle of the approved six-year workplan \(2019-2024\)](#), moving from a scoping and matching phase to an implementation, results and learning phase. In spite of delays associated with COVID-19, the SPIA portfolio of studies and advisory activities has adapted positively and remains on track to address One CGIAR priorities. Progress is reported by objective below.

Progress towards strengthening the culture of impact assessment in CGIAR

SPIA continued to broaden the impact assessment community of practice (IA CoP) in the system, achieving good representation of different audiences. In 2021, SPIA supported [One CGIAR initiatives to develop their specific impact assessment plans](#). Through group and individual meetings with the Science Group Directors, initiative teams, and the engagement of the IA CoP, SPIA advice stressed the role of impact assessment as clearly defined in the approved Performance Results Management Framework. IA plans should be developed from the start as an integral part of the research process, to test assumptions of the theory of change (TOC) and to causally test impacts on Sustainable Development Goal targets. SPIA supported the development of [guidance for initiative IA plans](#) and made available a [training video on how to use ToC to design rigorous IA studies](#). While highlighting the difference between monitoring and evaluation (M&E) and IA activities, SPIA stressed the role of [M&E systems to provide information on when, where and how scaling of CGIAR innovations occurs](#), as a key input to design rigorous IA. SPIA engaged with SC members through presentation at SC14 and through regular interactions with SIMEC, notably about the methods and approaches to IA for the research initiatives.

SPIA successfully launched a [series of webinars to support the design of rigorous IA of CGIAR innovations](#). With an average attendance of over 40 researchers, SPIA brought early career CGIAR IA researchers to present their IA ideas and help them to think through how to rigorously design studies. Some webinars offered the opportunity to discuss lessons learned in the design of rigorous IA relevant for CGIAR. SPIA also supported [early career researchers to address new research questions using datasets from SPIA supported projects](#). In Ethiopia, 14 researchers have completed research papers on impacts of crop improvement, natural resource management, livestock research and the Productive Safety Net Program.

Progress towards expanding independent evidence of CGIAR research impacts

In 2021, SPIA identified and started a new set of [IA studies on digital tools](#) that will provide evidence related to demand-driven Information and Communications Technology (ICT) extension, picture-based advisory and Interactive Voice Response (IVR)-based marketplace. Other [accountability and learning studies](#) continued to receive support and backstopping, with emerging evidence of impacts of CGIAR related innovations. A study reports sustained adoption of demi-lunes (a rainwater-harvesting technique) in the Sahel and positive impacts on agricultural production and food security associated with training and financial incentives. A second study uses innovative remote-sensing techniques and combines these with econometric analysis to measure environmental impacts of Index-based livestock insurance. Three SPIA pilot studies generated learning on how to scale up CGIAR innovations, but also showed the value of building strong partnerships between CGIAR centers and academics. New IA studies are being designed on adoption of lentil varieties tolerant to stemphylium blight in Bangladesh and environmental impacts of grazing exclosures in Ethiopia.

Progress towards institutionalizing collection of diffusion data of CGIAR innovations

SPIA continued to build on the successful experience of [Shining a Brighter Light in Ethiopia](#), by supporting the completion of the panel data collection in this priority country. When available, the new dataset will help to articulate the dynamics of the reach of CGIAR innovations, and to design new IA studies about CGIAR impacts. The [country work expanded to Uganda](#), in partnership with the Uganda Bureau of Statistics and NARO, and data collection started with the aim of documenting the reach of CGIAR innovations. Likewise, in collaboration with CIP, a study to track the dissemination of the biofortified orange sweetpotato is building on previous evidence gathered during the Diffusion and Impact of Improved Varieties in Africa (DIIVA) initiative. The scoping work in Vietnam started in partnership with the Vietnamese Statistical Office (GSO) making significant progress both in taking stock of CGIAR innovations disseminated and building the [methods and measurement](#) agenda.

CAS Evaluation Function

CAS/Evaluation Function conducted three major external evaluative activities in 2021. It also revisited the independent evaluation policy, as custodian of the current 2012 policy, to align with the needs of One CGIAR. Extensive communication and knowledge management activities delivered evaluation messages to key audiences, including the initiative design teams of 32 initiative proposals.

External evaluative activities

Over the course of 2021, the CAS/Evaluation Function conducted three evaluative studies, commissioning and overseeing external expert teams. The first was the [2021 Synthesis of Learning from a Decade of CGIAR Research Programs](#) (CRPs) (see box, below). The second and third were the evaluations of two CGIAR Platforms: [Big Data in Agriculture](#) and [Excellence in Breeding \(EiB\)](#). The completed Synthesis and Big Data Platform evaluations provided independent evaluative evidence and targeted recommendations for One CGIAR and its new portfolio. The final report of the EiB Platform engagement will be delivered to CGIAR stakeholders in the first semester of 2022; an update reported on progress of the EiB Platform Evaluation to System Council's Strategic Impact Monitoring and Evaluation Committee in December 2021.

Revisiting the independent evaluation policy

As custodian of the [2012 CGIAR Policy for Independent External Evaluation](#), the CAS Secretariat implemented substantive steps towards revising the normative framework to enhance evaluation conduct and use, and to support a culture of evidence-based decision-making across CGIAR. A penultimate draft of the revised policy was prepared, for a final round of consultations in 2022, and an overarching CGIAR Evaluation Framework developed. The ongoing and [inclusive policy revision process](#) tested ideas and concepts with the CGIAR monitoring, evaluation and learning community, several layers of management and governance, and sought input from an external reference group of evaluation professionals. The latter was among the activities as CAS/Evaluation function piloted an [evaluation reference group](#) to bolster quality assurance and enhance accountability to stakeholders.

The CAS/Evaluation Function supported the CGIAR transition through sharing evaluative knowledge and subsequently review of 32 CGIAR Initiative proposals, with an eye on future evaluability of the Initiatives.

Synthesis of Learning from a Decade of CRPs

The 2021 [Synthesis of learning from a decade of CRPs](#) pooled evaluative evidence from 43 CGIAR evaluations, reviews, assessments, and syntheses undertaken during the two phases of CRPs, 2011–16 and 2017–21. Using rigorous methodology, it laid out CRP-unique and CGIAR system-wide issues, identified patterns around priority topics, brought to the fore key evaluative evidence gaps, and provided targeted, forward-looking recommendations for One CGIAR.

The Synthesis was widely cited in the 32 CGIAR Initiative proposals, highlighting uptake of learning.

Recommendations

The Synthesis recommended meaningful engagement with next and end-users of CGIAR research through deepening and broadening social science expertise within the system. It recommended strengthened country and regional coordination structures as a facility for One CGIAR to enhance integrated solutions at scale. Tailored recommendations were also made for the Three Strategic Action Areas and Seven Ways of Working within the 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy.

Evidence Gaps

Towards future evaluations, the report indicated two types of gaps in the evaluative evidence: methodological and thematic.

1. Methodological: Country and regional evaluations were rarely conducted during the decade, and local stakeholders' voices were largely absent from 2020 reviews due to review limitations.
2. Thematic: Beyond gender dimensions, which were increasingly taken into account, little evidence was found about the extent to which CRP activities specifically addressed the needs of youth, the landless, indigenous peoples, and other groups of concern.

Watch a short summary of the Synthesis. <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=L-b5OuCcxM>

CAS Secretariat Support

The CAS Secretariat was [fully staffed](#) as of 4 January 2021. COVID-19 and host office closures notwithstanding, Secretariat team members completed relocation to their duty station in Rome, Italy, over the course of the year and the team gathered as frequently as reasonable and safe.

Secretariat activities supported the full range of ISDC and SPIA deliverables reported herein, as well as executing the Evaluation function. A praxis of cross-referencing, learning and coordination among the three functional areas in the Secretariat (ISDC and SPIA Secretariat, and Evaluation) was established. This supports learning and uptake of evidence and advice while recognizing the distinctive aims, audiences and working modalities of ISDC, SPIA and the CAS/Evaluation function. For instance, CAS/Evaluation function reported external evaluation findings and recommendations formally to ISDC after the delivery of the Synthesis, which ISDC chair and CAS Secretariat director reflected on in a [blog](#).

The CAS Secretariat developed an ample, competitive and diverse [roster of subject matter experts](#) (SMEs) and evaluation professionals; both ISDC and Evaluation function use the roster to call up expertise. The roster currently contains close to 150 social and biophysical scientists and evaluation professionals, representing more than 25 countries. Applicable to these experts, as well as staff and ISDC and SPIA members, the Secretariat updated its [Conflict of Interest](#) policies and procedures.

Through the year, CAS Secretariat liaised with CGIAR executive management and governance entities in a quest to deliver relevant, timely and accessible advice and evidence to CGIAR. Communications and knowledge management (KM) activities entailed new features in the CAS [website](#), digitization of archives, CAS LinkedIn and the CAS [Newsletter](#), coupled with function-specific communication and KM efforts.

The Secretariat followed closely the One CGIAR transition effort, adaptively managing its effort to address requests and new-arising opportunities. The Secretariat authored briefs for incoming One CGIAR leadership, and regularly reported to both SIMEC and Assurance and Oversight Committee during the year, and periodically to System Board. Furthermore, the Secretariat engaged in substantive interactions with the Transition Program Management Unit (TPMU); the chief area of CAS Secretariat's interaction with TPMU related to its effort to assign an appropriate name to CAS Secretariat under the One CGIAR operational structure. As of this writing, this name is designated as the **Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service**.



Figure 3 Annual Snapshot: How is CAS engaging online?

Financial Resource Utilization and Notes

Table 1. CAS Financial Report 2021 (in USD 000)^{2,3}

Workstream	Original Budget	Final Budget*	Expenditure	Balance	Variance to Final Budget
ISDC	782	441	412	29	7%
SPIA	5,329	3,132	2,977	155	5%
Evaluation	800	538	500	38	7%
Shared Secretariat	1,775	1,807	1,903	(96)	(5%)
GRAND TOTAL	8,686	5,918	5,792	126	2%

*Annually in third quarter, CGIAR finance director invites the recalibration of budgets, leading to final projected budgets per annum.

Financial Report Notes

In 2021 CAS reported a total expenditure of USD 5.79 million thus coming close to the the recalibrated budget for the year of USD 5.92 million. (The original projected budget of USD 8.69 million budget approved by System Council was officially revised downward in third quarter 2021). Therefore, in 2021, CAS met completely its internal target of <10% variance on the final budget. The following notes explain the causes for the downward revision per the three functional budgets (ISDC, SPIA, Evaluation function) and budget for the Secretariat operational support. i.e., **material revisions to the Original Budget reflected in the Final Budget column are noted in this report.**

ISDC

The revision is mostly attributable to unexpended Council honoraria (for 3 seats unfilled until mid-year), travel and meeting budget. Due to COVID-19 restrictions no travel was undertaken in 2021 and no physical meetings held.

SPIA

The SPIA approved budget for 2021 was USD 5,33 million of which SPIA spent USD 2,97 million, which is 5% less than the third quarter budget revision. Unspent budget is mainly attributable to delays in implementing studies (several no-cost extensions had to be granted due to delays caused by Covid-19) and to savings in the travel and workshop budgets.

In keeping with SPIA's commitment to reach its planned deliverables in its 6-year workplan (2019-2024), the unspent funds have been reprogrammed into the approved 2022-24 workplan/budget.

The SPIA expenditure includes the reported hosting costs of two SPIA researchers at IFPRI and ILRI as of 31 December 2021 through hosting agreements with the System Organization, regardless of whether these costs had already been accounted for in the SO's books or not. The expenditure furthermore includes accruals of USD 220k for payments of studies and consultants, plus related overheads. For the studies it is assumed that progress and/or final reports due in January 2022 for work carried out in 2021 will be approved by SPIA and payments made.

Evaluation

The evaluation workstream carried out its 2021 activities to plan. However, one tentatively and provisionally planned evaluation engagement (i.e., for a third platform evaluation) discussed with SIMEC

² Please note that this is a consolidated financial report prepared by the CAS Secretariat for expenditures incurred in 2021 under several hosting agreements (Alliance of Bioversity & CIAT, System Organization (SO), IFPRI and ILRI). It is understood that it is the responsibility of the System Organization to submit the formal (audited) financial report that may differ from the above, depending on whether costs incurred were accounted for in the SO's books by year-end closure.

³ CAS Financial report has been updated 10 Mar 2022 after post-closing entries of 2021 were included.

was tabled for a subsequent year's workplan. Otherwise, budget revision is attributable to savings in the travel, workshops and meeting budgets. Furthermore, material savings were realized by shifting contracting primarily to the System Organization, thereby reducing overheads.

Secretariat

Secretariat budget required two installation grants for incoming new staff and one unbudgeted maternity leave cover. Unforeseen facilities costs included installation of walls/doors in host office to create a safer working environment for CAS Secretariat, and additional costs related to physical relocation. To a large extent, savings from travel and Secretariat team building were applied to cover these over expenditures.



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