

Photo credit: Lil Artsy

## MELIA Needs Assessment Results

### Assessing the Evaluability of CGIAR's 2025–30 Portfolio

April 2025



Independent  
Advisory and  
Evaluation  
Service

The Multi-Year Evaluation Plan (MYEP) ([2025–27 Work Plan for CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service \(IAES\) \(SC/M21/DP5\)](#)) includes Evaluability Assessments (EAs) of [CGIAR's 2025–30 Portfolio](#) under the [2030 Research and Innovation Strategy](#). EAs would support the inception phase of Science Programs and Accelerators (SP/As), to build strong Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessment (MELIA) plans, in light of mid-line evaluations by IAES in 2027.

In preparing to assess the evaluability of [CGIAR's 2025–30 Portfolio](#), IAES surveyed colleagues of the 13 SP/As to identify specific needs and concerns as they prepare their Inception Reports for submission to the ISDC by June 30. The results of the survey were used to inform the development of the [EA Terms of Reference \(ToRs\)](#). The survey was jointly designed and administered by the Evaluation Function of IAES and CGIAR's Project Coordination Unit (PCU).

The survey includes 13 questions: open-ended and closed-ended (both dichotomous response and ranking), and focused on respondents' expectations about the EA and their desired output and outcome from the EA exercise. Analysis involved grouping responses by respondent roles, and through triangulating the data. Four key findings were articulated based on themes emerging from the analysis.

Respondents commented on each of the six domains of the [EA Framework](#)<sup>1</sup> ([Spanish](#)) in Figure 1, and identify key challenges related to the development of MEL(IA) activities in their SP/A's.

**Figure 1. Six domains of the EA Framework**

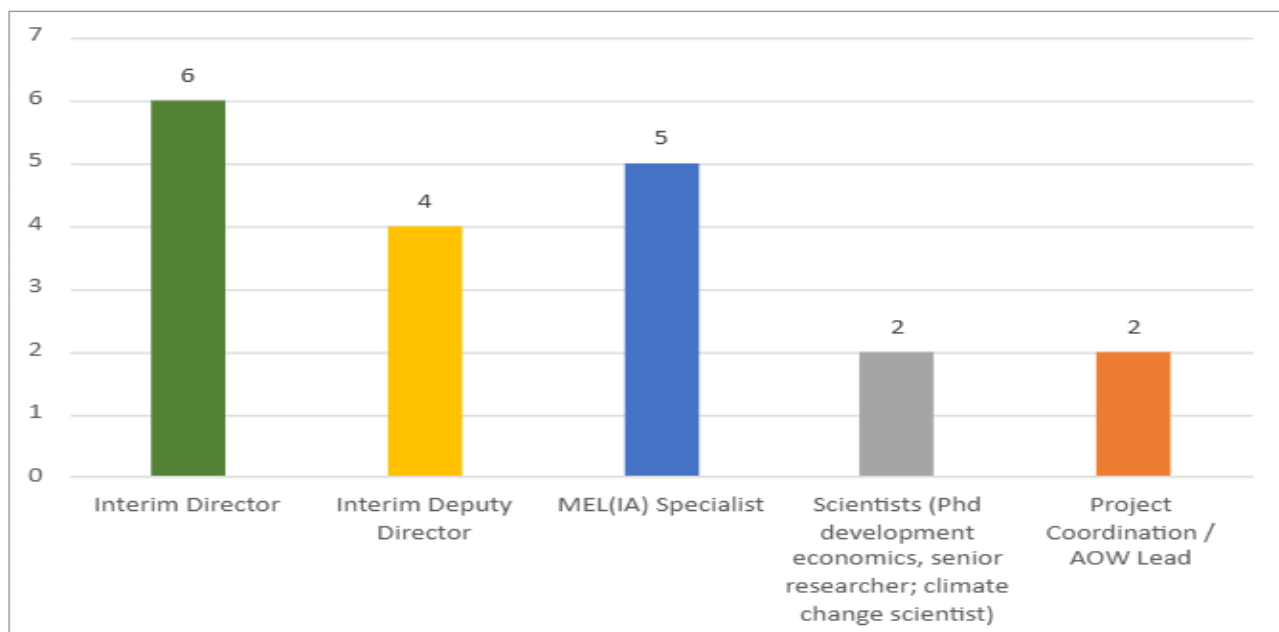


The survey was sent to 48 Interim Directors and Deputy Directors, Area of Work (AoW) leads and MEL(IA) focal point of the SP/As via email. The survey was implemented from 7–24 February 2025.

A total of 19 responses were received with representation of all 13 SP/A's. Two responses were received from six out of 13 SP/As.

Figure 2 shows the roles of respondents: the highest number of responses were from Interim Directors (6); the second highest – from Interim Deputy Directors (5); and (4) were from MEL(IA) specialists.

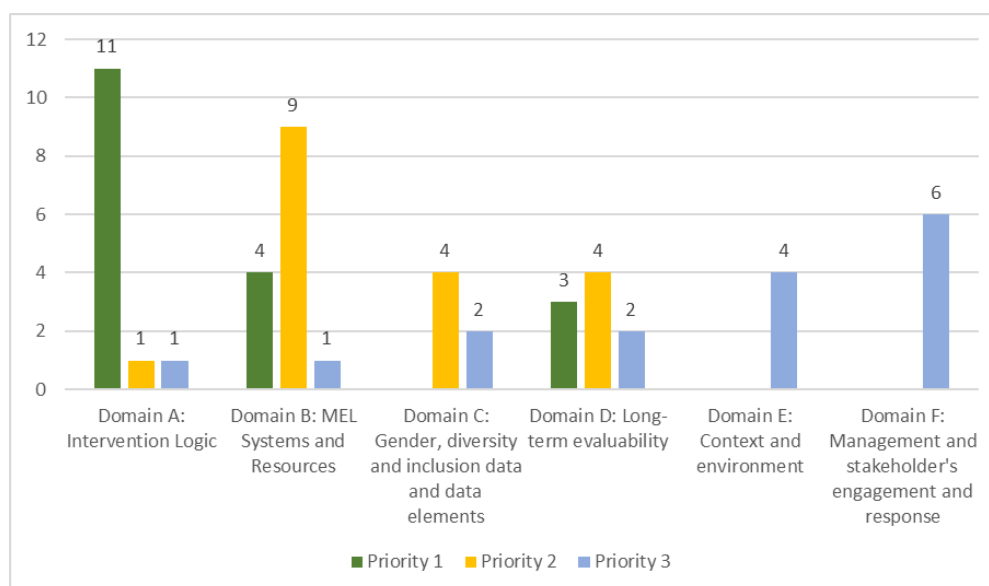
<sup>1</sup> (Pg. 10–12)

**Figure 2. Title of survey respondents (n=19)**

## Key Findings

**Finding 1: Intervention logic was ranked the highest in area of pertinence and need, followed by MEL systems and resources, with limited variation among the respondent groups.**

Respondents commented on the importance of each EA domain and ranked them by perceived need. They prioritized **Domain A: Intervention Logic** and **Domain B: MEL Systems and Resources**. Participants chose other Domains (C, D, E and F) as either the second or third most important domain, as shown in Figure 3. Participants were primarily focused on Domains A, B and D as areas of greatest interest and need, and as priority for the EA exercise.

**Figure 3. Importance of domains for SP/As (n=19)**

While the focus on *Domains A and B* may be anticipated, given they are fundamental to the MELIA framework, they indicate respondents' concern for further support in this area, specifically for understanding ToCs.

*Intervention logic has always been a challenge to interpret the thoughts into an actionable workplan. For SPs the logic becomes complex to address all the proposed outcomes. A robust ToC with well described interpretation and development hypothesis may be helpful to support this process.*

MEL(IA) specialist respondent

*The ToC that was defined and included in the SP Proposal is of a very high level. Therefore, it needs to be updated according to the evolution of the Program discussions.*

Interim Director respondent

Respondents considered Domain B as the second most important, emphasizing it as a key criterion. One respondent addressed systemic issues related to the development of MEL systems at CGIAR.

*MEL systems and resources should be established first at the CG level as a whole to be cascaded to CG centers, SPs and bilateral projects. Yet, at CG level, frameworks and institutional support are there but these are not translated to creating a culture and institutional mechanisms for many reasons. Resources (personnel, FTE, and operational) for establishing and executing a MEL system are very limited and inconsistent.*

MEL(IA) respondent

Although **Domain C: Gender, Diversity and Inclusion** was ranked as second and third tier priority, almost all respondents agreed on its importance, with several commenting on the need to do more.

*This is regularly applied by our programme with little to know issues, however it is important to stress for programmes to not only focus on statistically including women in interventions but rather showing actual impact on women and marginalized group (perhaps setting targets beyond "x number of women trained").*

AoW lead respondent

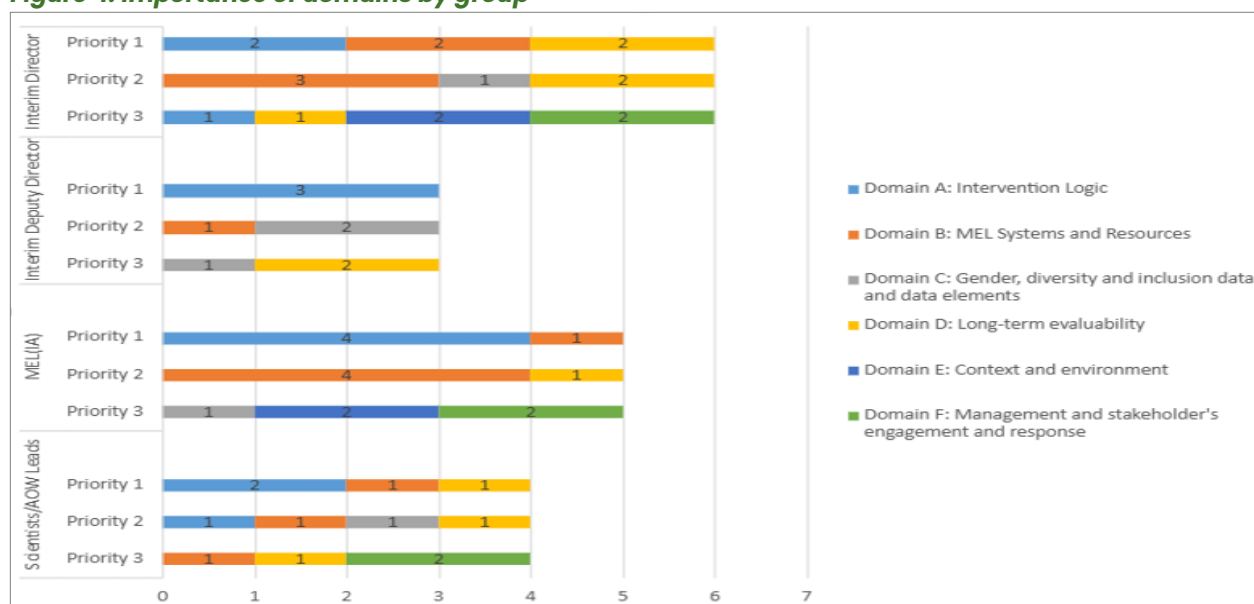
*Maybe the Gender accelerator should have short courses available online for MEL and program leaders to do a quick check and make sure they are using the up-to-date data and tools to capture how our work affects vulnerable groups.*

MEL(IA) respondent

Regarding **Domain F: Management and Stakeholder Engagement and Response**, half of the respondents agreed with the statement "To be evaluable, management and stakeholders must be active participants in the evaluation process", highlighting the importance of inclusive engagements. Notably, the other half disagreed, with some indicating such engagement is a conflict of interest and would make MELIA results susceptible to manipulation. The latter response reveals confusion about the purpose of evaluation compared to research. Interestingly, the figure also shows Domain F as the third priority, with relatively less importance, but still deemed relevant, compared to other domains.

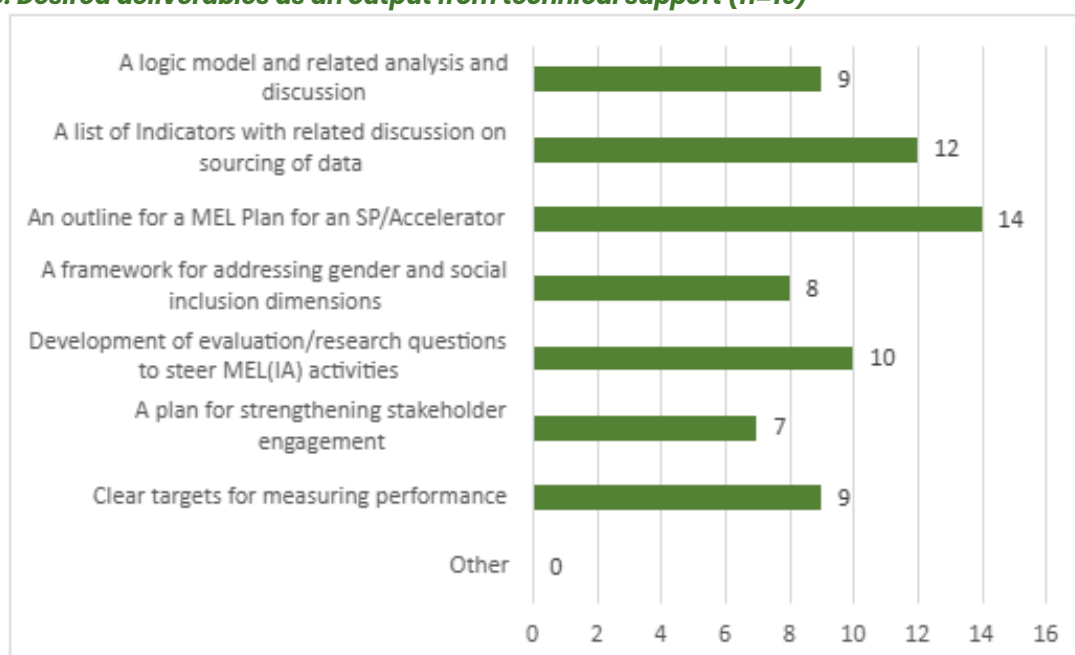
Views aligned among respondent groups. *Domain A: Intervention Logic* can be seen as the most important across all, and *Domain B: MEL Systems and Resources* – as the second-most important by Interim Directors and MEL respondents. The greatest concern was expressed for **Domain D: Long-term evaluability** among Directors and Deputies, while MEL(IA) specialists focused more on Domains A and B (see Figure 4). Domains C, D, E and F were ranked lower in importance for their SP/A's.

**Figure 4. Importance of domains by group**



**Finding 2: Participants indicated interest in receiving support on developing an outline for a MEL plan, list of indicators, and ToC, with less priority on strengthening stakeholders' engagement and a framework on gender and social inclusion.**

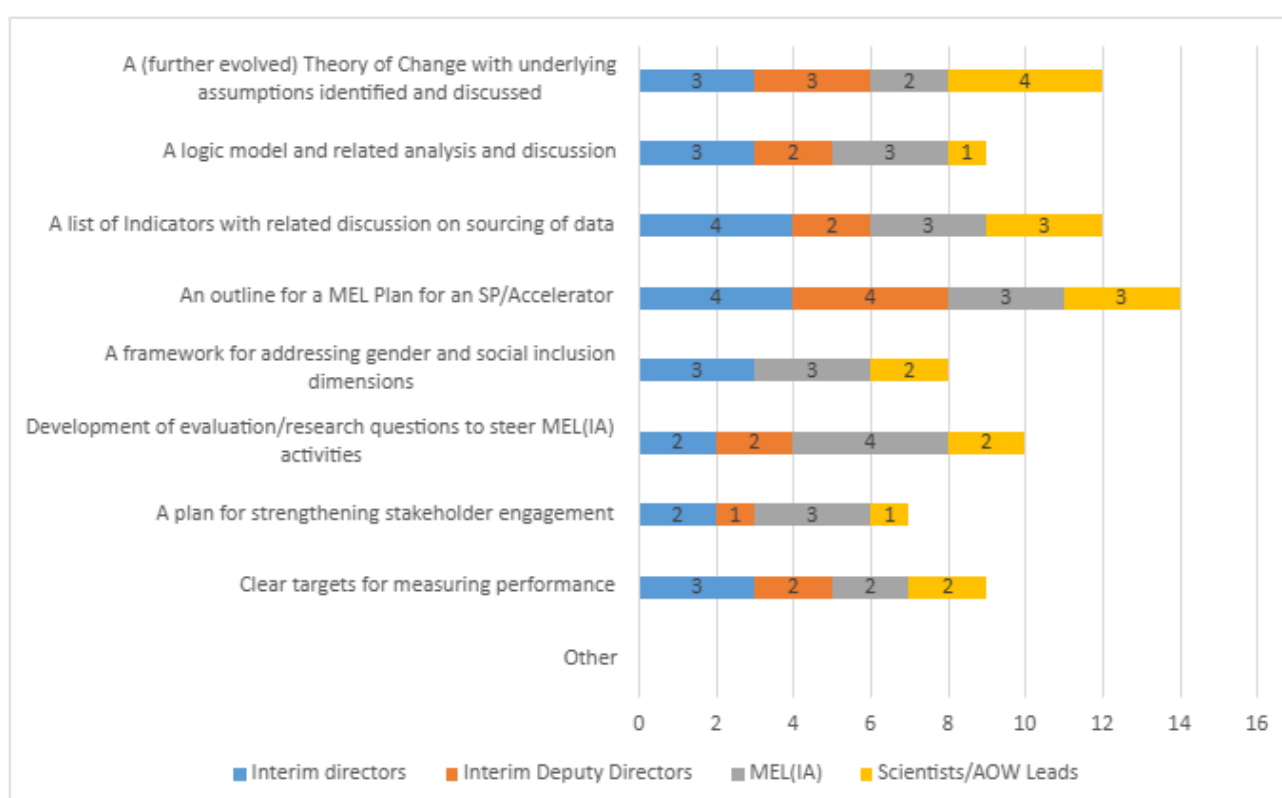
**Figure 5. Desired deliverables as an output from technical support (n=19)**



In the request for specific guidance, respondents prioritized a **MEL plan** outline, followed by **indicators** and evaluation questions. This aligns with Finding 1. The least-prioritized were 'a framework for addressing gender and social inclusion dimensions', and 'a plan for strengthening stakeholder engagement' (7 votes each). This suggests that these criteria are still relevant but considered less important compared to other outputs in developing MEL plans.

Figure 6 illustrates the expectations on developing certain outputs based on respondent roles. There is no significant difference across the four groups.

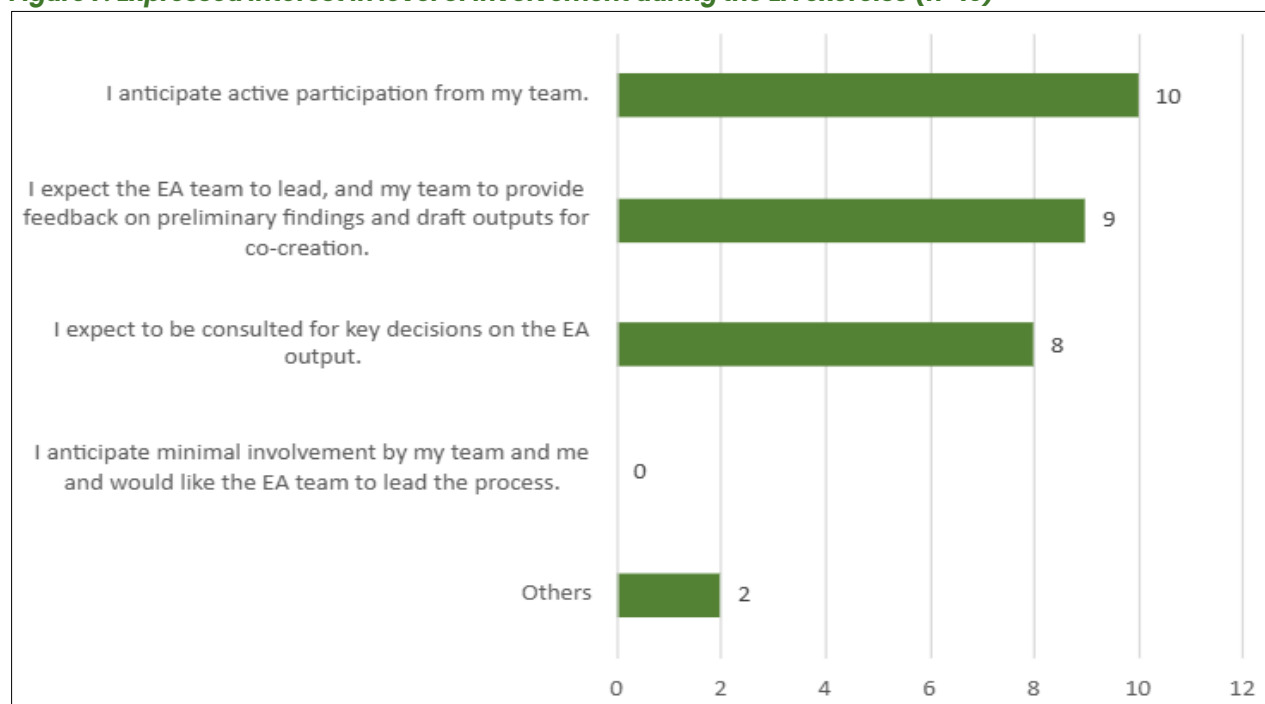
**Figure 6: Deliverables are beneficial as an output for the EA exercise, by respondent group**



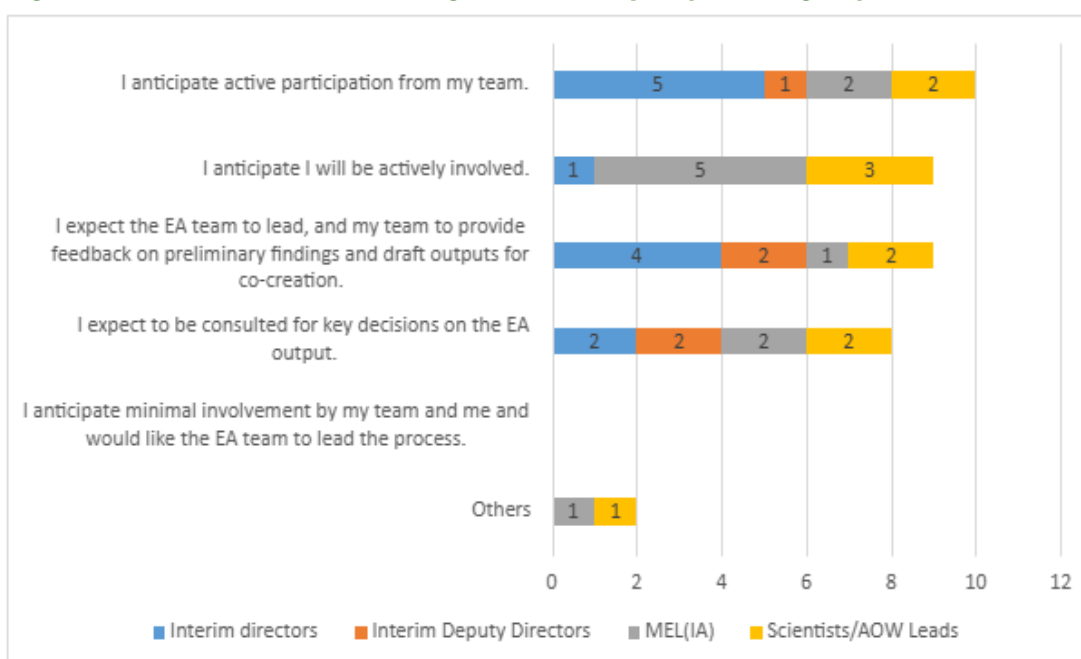
**Finding 3:** There was positive interest expressed by all respondents to participate in the EA exercise, through their desired level of involvement, how they foresaw working with the EA team, and their expressed interest to meet in person.

Ten respondents indicated that they anticipated active participation from their team, while nine expected the EA team to lead– with staff responding to EA team findings and recommendations concerning specific desired outputs. Notably, none of the respondents expressed a preference for minimal involvement from their team and a fully led EA team exercise. MEL(IA) respondents requested active involvement, with Interim Directors expecting active participation from their teams. Notably there is an expectation of the EA team to lead with SP/A staff feedback (Figure 7).

**Figure 7. Expressed interest in level of involvement during the EA exercise (n=19)**



**Figure 8. Level of involvement during EA exercise by respondent group**



Practical concerns about meeting either face-to-face or virtually were addressed in the survey. Respondents expressed preference for in-person instead of virtual collaborations: 53% responded with 'yes', and 47% indicated

'maybe'. No respondents indicated 'no'.

The survey learnt about participants attending [Science Week in Nairobi, Kenya](#), in April, to plan in-person meetings ([EA Workshop](#)). Out of 17 out of 19 participants, confirmed their availability to meet.

Respondents were also interested to meet outside of Science Week, i.e. namely virtual meetings and specific in-person meetings at conferences, such as the Annual Genebank meeting in Peru (End of 2025), and the Gender Conference in South Africa (7–9 October). PCU committed to report from the CapSha Accelerators meeting in May, and a few participants also suggested meetings in April and May in Rome.

***Finding 4: Respondents value clear guidelines and clarity in communications from the EA team, efficiency in working, and clear and beneficial outcomes of the EA exercise.***

Respondents shared various expectations for the EA: from a strong desire for clearer communication and guidance throughout the EA process and moving forward, the need for more structured communication in understanding the EA exercise, and an interest in receiving support on strengthening MELIA related activities, TOC, MEL frameworks and strategy for their SP/A's. Respondents also expressed interest in receiving support with reporting, as they would like to report results and accomplishments and evidence-based impact assessment in a more effective way. There was also indicated the desire for a practical approach to the EA, and not as an academic exercise.

As noted above, all respondents expected the EA to focus on MELIA-related activities and ToCs, MEL systems, and Impact Assessment strategy and guidelines. Interim Directors and Interim Deputy Directors highlighted the need for clear communication and practical support to improve the SP/A's, while MEL(IA) staff and AoW leads expected to receive support mostly related on MEL(IA) systems.

Respondents asked for meetings to clarify the purpose and objectives of EA exercises; other key requests related to timing, flexibility, timely feedback from the EA reports, and program coordination. Also, the need for clear communication and flexible timelines to allow SP/A's adequate time to engage meaningfully with EA activities was requested, including from the EA report during the implementation period to help improve the evaluability of their SP/A's by enabling real-time adjustments and informed decision-making.

These expectations and recommendations are essential to facilitate support and technical assistance for SP/A's, to ensure smooth inception and readiness for their mid-term evaluations in 2027 ([2025–2027 workplan](#)). As the program supports the internal facing unit, PCU has already been leading efforts on guiding and supporting through inception phase of the Portfolio.

A full list of respondent expectations and recommendations are detailed in Annex to the main report, which is available upon request. Many align to findings from the [MELIA-related summary of evidence from 2021–2024](#).

## Conclusions

The NA survey received a high, positive response rate and provided key insights into SP/A's needs, aligned with the EA Framework domains for implementation. The top priority identified is strengthening Intervention Logic, emphasizing clear, targeted frameworks, followed by improving MEL systems and resource allocation—highlighting a focus on foundational planning and monitoring. Respondents showed strong interest in engaging with the EA process, especially in developing MEL outlines, indicators, and ToCs, valuing transparency, efficiency, and tangible results, with less focus on stakeholder engagement and social inclusion. Learnings from the NA were shared during Science Week ([link to session](#)) and informed scoping in-person and virtual meetings and engagements with P/As in April and May. They also guided PCU's deep dive and drop-in sessions about ToCs and MELIA-planning for IRs for ISDC's review. Finally, survey results informed the EA [ToRs](#) for implementing EAs and will help develop SP/A Inception Notes from May to July, in collaboration with 13 P/As, to guide applying the EA Framework to [the 2025–30 Portfolio](#).

For additional information [Link/QR code for EA Hub and MELIA study](#).

[Link to MELIA Study](#)

QR code for EA Hub



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