

Evaluation of SPIA's 2019–2024 Program of Work

Reflections from the SPIA Professional Team

In 2024, SPIA undertook a [comprehensive evaluation](#) of its 2019–2024 program of work to assess the effectiveness of its 2019–2024 work program. The process combined a thorough document review with an online survey targeting key stakeholder groups. Building on an in-depth analysis of the survey responses, this report distills the main thematic areas that emerged and presents the SPIA professional team's reflections on each.

1. Changes in awareness of adoption and impacts of CGIAR innovations observed

It is encouraging to see that some System leaders and most impact assessment (IA) researchers recognize an increase in their awareness of adoption and impacts of CGIAR innovations since 2019. SPIA, however, takes note that there are still some CGIAR stakeholders that have not changed their awareness. Consistent with some recommendations provided during the evaluation, SPIA is expanding the ways to reach different audiences for its rigorous evidence. The SPIA use of evidence component has launched an SPIA account on LinkedIn and a dedicated newsletter to expand the updates of the emerging evidence and strategic advice being generated. Likewise, SPIA is developing an evidence finder tool to make the evidence and SPIA output more accessible to wider audiences that SPIA engages with.

2. Use of evidence from SPIA studies needs further impetus

As expected, the close collaboration of SPIA with CGIAR IA researchers has resulted in a wider use of the SPIA impact evidence and more rigorous methodologies for assessing impacts of CGIAR innovations. SPIA plans to expand its support to CGIAR IA researchers in the identification and design of impact assessments and has built in its current workplan a dedicated component for scoping and designing rigorous and

relevant impact assessments. Several interactions with different CGIAR centers and research programs have resulted in various rigorous impact assessment designs that would expand the coverage of relevant areas of CGIAR research.

SPIA also takes note that little progress has been made in the use of evidence among System leaders. SPIA has built in its current workplan a more visible use of evidence component with the aim to engage CGIAR leadership in promoting a learning agenda for the System, focusing not only on successes, but also from zero- or negative results for specific CGIAR innovations. Furthermore, SPIA has recently appointed a full-time Senior Officer for the use of evidence and is now better positioned to be more adept, rapidly communicating new findings and responding to requests for evidence. The expectation is that SPIA output will achieve the greatest possible impact for CGIAR.

The evaluation brings to SPIA's attention the difficulties for IA researchers to have full access to SPIA databases and publications that can be used in developing research proposals, implementing their own research and generating research outputs. SPIA has been improving its webpage to make readily available all outputs on the reach and casual impacts of the CGIAR that have already been published by SPIA or by partners working with SPIA. The evidence finder tool being developed by SPIA aims to facilitate better access to publications and databases coming from the SPIA portfolio.

3. Impact evidence from SPIA studies – suggestions for improvement

We appreciate the suggestions made by System leaders and IA researchers about how to improve awareness, availability and the use of impact evidence. The System leaders' suggestion to present the evidence with greater clarity has been acknowledged. SPIA is currently updating the use of evidence strategy and considering guidance for data use and extending reach. The suggestion to have an online repository to organize the SPIA evidence will be addressed more effectively with the evidence finder tool.

Consistent with the recommendation of the IA researchers of improving access to impact evidence, SPIA will continue to rely on webinars, seminars, newsletters and its website as one of the main means of communication. The new workplan envisions

more tailored communication events for different audiences to have a more effective use of rigorous evidence.

When possible, SPIA would also contribute with financial resources to support participation of IA researchers in relevant in-person meetings. The recent financial support to 8 IAFPs from Centers and Science Programs to participate in the SPIA-organized sessions during AAEEA meeting is a concrete example of this type of support offered by SPIA to strengthen the IAFP community of practice. At the same time, SPIA is actively identifying opportunities to organize events/visits to CGIAR centers and interact and provide advice directly to IA and other researchers working in the different research areas of the system. SPIA will continue to favor organizing the SPIA panel meetings in different centers to facilitate these interactions.

SPIA acknowledges the views among some CGIAR researchers related to colonialism in the system. SPIA will improve its communication channels to clearly support the participation of IA researchers from the global south (from centers and from national partners) and to bring different perspectives when promoting interaction between CGIAR and academic institutions. The organization of different events like matchmaking meetings to promote the collaboration of IA researchers in the CGIAR with external IA experts will keep engaging Global South researchers.

4. Support from SPIA in designing and managing impact assessments

We appreciate the positive feedback from IA researchers on the support they have received to design and manage impact assessments of CGIAR innovations. This will only reinforce the strategy to continue expanding the use of rigorous methods and the generation of relevant evidence on the reach and impacts of CGIAR. SPIA also agrees with the suggestions to include more cross-cutting innovations and to contribute more to assessing large-scale impacts. This is in line with the broad CGIAR research portfolio that aims to contribute to transforming food, land, and water systems. To address this topic, in the near future SPIA is planning to organize a matchmaking event that focuses more in designing studies to measure the impacts at scale of CGIAR and that expand the areas of evaluation.

5. Changes in the culture of impact assessment since 2019

We are happy to receive positive feedback from System leaders and IA researchers on the improvement of the system culture on impact assessments. SPIA has made remarkable progress on supporting the generation of credible evidence of the reach and impacts of CGIAR, but there is still room for improvement on the use of this rigorous evidence on different system decision-making processes.

6. Changes in the understanding of impact assessments since 2019

The evaluation documented the positive outcome of SPIA's work regarding the understanding of impact assessment and its role in the CGIAR. Both System leaders and IA researchers highlighted the value of using rigorous methods and generating credible evidence which reinforces the appropriateness and use of the SPIA approach to impact assessment for CGIAR. SPIA is also happy to see the recognition of the efficient use of the resources invested by CGIAR funders to support rigorous impact assessments.

7. Engaging science leaders in the impact assessment community of practice

Some System leaders recognized the efforts made by SPIA to engage CGIAR science leaders in the impact assessment community of practice. They particularly valued the level of rigor in generating the evidence of reach and impacts of CGIAR research. However, SPIA plans to further engage the science leaders of the system in further use of the rigorous evidence being generated by SPIA-supported studies. We will highly regard the suggestion to engage individually different CGIAR research leaders. This can be achieved with SPIA's plans to visit centers and to organize events around other CGIAR events/convenings. SPIA also welcomes the suggestion to have a repository for rigorous evidence and in producing short briefs to timely disseminate the emerging evidence. The increase in the number of SPIA briefs and the planned evidence planner tool will support this suggestion.

8. SPIA's impact assessment guidance, standards, protocols, and methods helpful

SPIA appreciates the documentation of a broad use of SPIA documents on guidance, standards, protocols and rigorous methods among IA researchers. SPIA agrees to continue the guidance-related publications and to promote the use of best practices for impact assessment. In addition to stressing the importance of using reliable measurement and rigorous methods, SPIA is also promoting replicable analysis to strengthen the credibility of the evidence being generated. These 3 best practices on impact assessment are part of the regular slide deck use for SPIA in several presentations. In terms of supporting the use of mix-methods on impact assessments, SPIA has been increasingly highlighting the value of using qualitative methods to improve the design of rigorous impact assessments.

9. SPIA webinars valued by impact assessment researchers

While the SPIA webinars were launched during the COVID 19 pandemic and proved to be an effective channel to convene IA researchers and specially to support early career researchers in the design and implementation of rigorous impact assessments, we were happy to learn that these webinars continue to be highly valued by IA researchers. It was positive to confirm that the webinars were also a means to promote the use of rigorous methods to improve the generation of credible evidence. We take note on the suggestions to keep expanding the emphasis on IA tools and methods, particularly the most advanced ones. We also agree with the recommendation to use the SPIA webinars for peer learning and networking, and to foster the community of practice of impact assessment in the system.

10. SPIA matchmaking events received positively

We appreciate the positive feedback from IA researchers about the matchmaking events that SPIA organized and how effective they were in creating meaningful and productive research partnerships with external experts in impact assessment. It was also encouraging to know that CGIAR IA researchers value not only the access to state

of the art methods but collaborating with external researchers and opening new opportunities for further joint impact assessments. We take note on the suggestion to keep organizing more matchmaking events but also having greater emphasis on capacity building for the centers and empowering the partnership of both CGIAR researchers and external academic researchers.

11. Study design and SPIA rigor validated

We are happy to verify that CGIAR IA researchers recognize that they have strengthened their capacity to design rigorous impact assessments and that they can use more often the impact assessment standards promoted by SPIA. We agree with the suggestion to increase SPIA engagement with centers and their researchers to support the different impact assessment activities.

We are also taking note of the few cases where the collaboration initiated during a matchmaking event did not land in a strong partnership nor in the design of a rigorous impact assessment. This type of feedback is very useful for planning future matchmaking events and for promoting the collaboration of CGIAR researchers and external IA experts. We also take note that we need to better communicate the meaning of rigor in impact assessment and that we promote an extensive toolkit that can offer solutions to generate credible evidence.