SPIA strategic directions and updates

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Introduction to SPIA

• CGIAR Standing Panel on Impact Assessment: Independent experts with mandate to
  – Expand and deepen evidence of impact of CGIAR research investments
  – Support CGIAR’s strong commitment to embed a culture of impact assessment into the System

• Supported by program manager and researchers & activity leaders

• Works with a wide network of collaborators
  • IA Focal Points in centers/CRPs
  • CGIAR researchers and research managers
  • IA researchers inside and outside CGIAR who implement studies

Karen Macours: Chair
JV Meenakshi: Member
Doug Gollin: Member
Challenges of measuring impact of CGIAR

• SPIA’s mandate ~ impacts at system level of a set of agricultural research for development (AR4D) centers and programs with long and complex causal pathways
• AR4D faces uncertainty about
  – Scientific progress
  – Development processes

⇒ IA approach must differ from standard approaches to IA of development interventions
   But acknowledge “rigor revolution”
⇒ Some similarities to approaches for innovation programs elsewhere
Overall logic

• To maintain confidence in the system:
  – Evidence needed on whether the benefits of the “big successes” exceed the total investments in the system
  • Rather than whether the benefit of a specific research activity > investment in that activity

\[
\text{Benefits system} = \sum_{i=1}^{n} \text{number of beneficiaries}_i \times (\text{benefit/beneficiary})_i
\]

• Beneficiary \( i \) = farmers, consumers, communities,…
• Benefit/beneficiary: can be small for many activities and very large for some

• At the same time:
  – Early learning needed to maximize possibilities for impact at scale
  • ~ testing assumptions along theory of change
  => which steps in the causal pathway may prevent innovations from achieving impact at scale?

• Portfolio of studies & multi-year process
Key elements of SPIA’s workplan

• Support culture of impact assessment in the CGIAR
  – Generating and using high quality IA evidence in CGIAR
  – Engaging researchers, managers, MEL specialists etc as well as IA experts

• Expand and deepen evidence of impact of CGIAR research investments
  – Focus on system-level impact through support to two distinct types of studies—Accountability and learning—with different objectives and associated processes
  – Systematic collection of high quality adoption data at policy relevant scales, to document reach and the magnitude of potential impact (~N)
Accountability studies

• Long term, large scale studies that provide rigorous evidence on (few) “big wins” that justify investment in the system
  – The 2 types of uncertainty (science and development) mean that not all investments get to this point (in the relevant time frame)
  – Inherently backward looking
  – Methodological challenges to measure this impact rigorously mean that only some big wins can be subject of IAs
    • Need credible counterfactuals
Aside on attribution and counterfactuals

• How to know what would have happened in absence of the CGIAR research?
  – Would someone else have done the research? Would the policy have changed anyway? Were adopting farmers already more productive?

• Establishing the counterfactual is difficult exactly because of:
  • Farmers/communities chose whether or not to adopt certain innovations for a reason
  • Government/development partners decide to adopt/promote innovations also for a reason
  • Change may have happened without CGIAR research (policy, adoption of a practice that can’t be conclusively linked to CGIAR)

• And even harder at national or higher level
Estimating number of beneficiaries

• Systematic collection of data on adoption and use of CGIAR innovations at scale
  – Sign of potential big win—since reaching large numbers is generally key to having large impacts
  – Collaboration with World Bank Survey Team—SPIA influencing data collection approaches to allow us to identify adopters in large-scale surveys

• Mainstreaming insights
  • Leverage 50 x 2030 data collection efforts => scale up the number of countries with high-quality agricultural surveys
  • Including DNA fingerprinting in guidebook

• Geospatial panel data & linking with remote sensing, can expand the number of rigorous IA’s that are possible

• Can also provide inputs into assumptions of ex-ante work/foresight
Some details country work

• Deepening work in Ethiopia and Uganda
  – Data on large-scale diffusion efforts to complement initial country-diagnostic
  – Scoping possibilities for:
    • Methods for scaling crop varietal identification – augmenting lessons from DNA fingerprinting
    • Improved measurement of crop and livestock management practices & outcomes
    • Measuring landscape (village) level outcomes
• Started scoping West Africa and Asia (Bangladesh and Vietnam)
• Opportunistic approach in other countries (esp. seeking “big wins”)

From evidence to use: Learning studies

• Learning studies
  – Focus on recent research outputs that are going to scale
  – Can be specifically designed to fill evidence gaps related to key assumptions in ToC. E.g.
    • to the “adoptability” of innovations by target users
    • the size and distribution of impacts of that use on beneficiaries
    • trade-offs and synergies between different types of outcomes

– SPIA role is in coordinating sets of studies that can give more generalizable lessons to these questions ~ steps in causal pathway multiple innovations
  • E.g. environmental impacts/trade-offs
⇒ Feedback into both research and dissemination efforts
Improve rigor individual studies & advise strategy

• Engaging researchers, managers, MEL specialists etc as well as IA experts and other stakeholders
  – Center visits, discussions with Science leader, ...
    • Consultations; identify IA opportunities& synergies; share lessons
  – MEL-IA CoP
  – Feedback to IA specialists on research designs
    • All CGIAR research teams that submitted Eols to recent SPIA call => improve rigor of their impact studies
    • Ad hoc basis
    • One-on-one matching with external impact assessment specialists
  – Collaborations & coordination with other IA research-focussed initiatives
• Methods work and guidelines
Using high quality IA data and evidence in CGIAR

• SPIA sharing lessons learned in various CGIAR fora
• Communications and publications strategy
  – Synthesis documents & briefs available on website
• Promote analysis of existing SPIA data
• Note on SPIA’s approach to impact assessment developed (following earlier RoR note)
Results of relevance to SRG

- Evidence
  - Synthesis of findings of 25 impact assessments, by SLO
- Accountability and learning
  - Set of 9 studies on adoption at scale of 6 major on-farm NRM practices and reflection piece