CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Functions
Cumulative Summary Narrative 2022 to Date, 2023 Consolidated Report

Purpose

This document sets out a Cumulative summary narrative, 2022 to date, on CGIAR's independent functions, being the Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES), the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC), and the Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA). The cumulative summary material takes a longer view across the Business Cycle and supplements the 2023 annual technical and financial reporting. These materials intend to provide background context to a discussion on the development of the next triennial plan.

[Consolidated 2023 Technical and Financial Report for IAES, ISDC and SPIA](#)

Action Requested

The System Council is requested to use the cumulative and annual report (2023) to inform its input to a conversation about the next triennial plan of IAES, ISDC and SPIA. Namely, IAES is broadly framing the 2025-2027 planning effort around the following four decision-demand areas, and seeks System Council strategic guidance:

Decisions surrounding -	Key question
Investment	Which are the best investment bets and are they soundly designed?
Accountability	Has there been effective and efficient delivery against documented, adaptively management plans?
Learning	What can CGIAR do better in its portfolio and organizational implementation?
Assurance	Are the evidence and processes used for decisions inclusive and sound?

Document category: Working document of the System Council.
There is no restriction on the circulation of this document

Prepared by: Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service in consultation with the chairs of ISDC and SPIA

# CGIAR's independent functions: Cumulative summary report 2022 to date

Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service

CGIAR

May 2024 – Discussion Version

The Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES) is the shared secretariat for the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC) and the Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA),[1] and, through its Evaluation function, implements CGIAR's multi-year, independent evaluation plan. Three distinct terms of reference govern the three workstreams of ISDC, SPIA and IAES, available to the public on https://iaes.cgiar.org/about.
The IAES has prepared a consolidated cumulative report (2022 to date) for ISDC, SPIA and IAES, for information at 20th meeting of CGIAR's System Council. The cumulative summary report will be finalized in February 2025.

Purpose

Independent advice, and evaluative evidence fulfill a fundamental need in CGIAR. This function is mission-critical for a global integrated partnership, governed through a multilateral and multilayered governance mechanism comprising System Council, Integrated Partnership Board, and Center Boards, and supported through multilateral funding and bilateral funding. CGIAR has employed independent science advice through many generations of its status, strategy, and structure, and stands in good company. External science, technical and accountability advice is a norm at World Bank, the Global Environment Facility, many bilateral agencies, and, in 2023 the United Nations announced its own science advisory body. Regarding independent evaluation, the Multilateral Organisation Performance Assessment Network (MOPAN) 2019 assessment of CGIAR underscored the importance of independent evaluation, and Boehmer et al (2013) established useful reflections on independence in evaluation, as a complement to self-commissioned evaluation, in the face of complexity and to underpin evaluation credibility and, therefore, use. Activities under the broad umbrella of independent assurance, ranging from *ex ante* review to *ex post* evaluation, can be considered an essential third line to manage reputational and organizational risk. Finally, System Council has made strong statements to the need for rigorous and impartial evidence of CGIAR's impact.
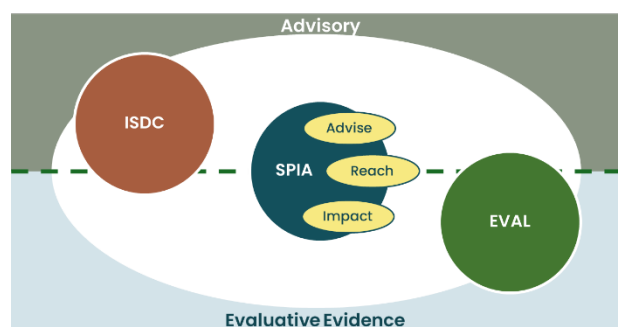
Figure 1 IAES supports three mandate areas, providing independent advice and evaluative evidence.

---

[1] In accordance with SPIA's new operational model (2023), IAES houses only the operational arm of the SPIA Professional Team, namely SPIA Program Management Unit and Use of Evidence staff.

Realizing Five Operating Principles

In each of the three terms of reference, CGIAR's System Council set out five, cross-cutting operating principles.

1. **Independence** of advice, being neither funders nor implementers of CGIAR research
2. Improved **efficiency**, providing advice that maximizes CGIAR's impact while reducing overall costs
3. Improved **communication,** with assessments and evaluations aligned with CGIAR Business Plan cycles
4. Improved and **systematic linkage between science and development** embedding innovation and partnerships in all aspects of CGIAR's advisory services
5. Higher **ownership and improved coordination of the advice by the System** itself.

The first section of this report provides a general update on delivery against the principles. While not time bound, the operating principles are used here to gauge how IAES and the supported independent bodies, ISDC and SPIA, have delivered against principles set out in mandate documents.

Independence. IAES supports the System Council appointment and search for ISDC and SPIA members, working closely with System Council secretariat as prescribed in IAES terms of reference. For external evaluation and ISDC-moderated review, **IAES maintains a roster of experts, currently numbering 222 (35%F 65%M)** competitively selected experts, with engagements governed by IAES's conflict of interest policy.

Efficiency. A comparison with the budget of the IAES predecessor offices,[2] demonstrates under IAES a savings of 2.75M dollars per year on average (in 2024 terms, comparing 2014-2017 and 2021-2024). Therefore, the management of the shared secretariat plus evaluation office generated **savings of approx. 14 M since the office's creation in 2019**. It should be noted, the System Council has requested SPIA to undertake a five-fold expansion of its country work. To respond to such demand, costs for SPIA will rise.

Communication and Coordination. Toward relevance and timeliness, as a practice, IAES conducts triennial consolidated planning with annual plan reconfirmation to support adaptive management. Prompt reporting is published transparently in the public domain. Since 2021, IAES has launched a newsletter (1500 subscribers), ramped up social media (3K new followers on LinkedIn and "X" combined). IAES, ISDC and SPIA **technical notes, evaluation reports, and related materials have been downloaded 40 thousand times**, and 65 blogs have been used to explain and interpret these materials. ISDC, SPIA and IAES presented deliverables at global fora, translated into multiple languages, and communications were supported by visits to CGIAR centers.

Systematic Linkages: Research for Development. The bulk of published materials attest to how IAES, ISDC and SPIA systematically reinforce a linkage between science and development. Out of many examples, for instance, ISDC uses the CGIAR **Quality of Research for Development Frame of Reference** to underpin its reviews; Evaluation function recently published an Insight that connects evaluating Quality of Science with measuring the **Sustainable Development Goals**, and SPIA is expanding its **country work** to support CGIAR better understanding of the reach of CGIAR innovations in context.

System Ownership Engaging with governance entities (System Council, System Board) as well as management and CGIAR internal teams, to understand demand and communicate results, is a key means to ensure the timeliness, relevance, and accessibility of the work to system stakeholders. Active participation at the System Council and its committee meetings brings relevant and timely content for decision-making to the agenda. ISDC chair is an active observer at System Board and IAES director also attends Board meetings and addresses Board from time to time, pursuant to the agenda. Furthermore, as a practice, a frequent (approximately quarterly) interaction with Executive Managing Director brings IAES director, ISDC and SPIA chairs together to engage with CGIAR leadership. Finally, targeted discussions with managing directors of Science Groups, Senior Scientists, Initiative Leads and teams, and CGIAR's aligned Assurance and monitoring, evaluation, learning and impact assessment communities, enhances system ownership, and understanding.

---

[2] Namely the Independent Science and Partnership Council of which SPIA was a specific program, and Independent Evaluation Arrangement

Bird's Eye View: Results 2022-24 (to date)

Independent Science for Development Council

In this business cycle, ISDC **provided portfolio evolution advice** through its reviews of portfolio documents and proposals. ISDC compiled lessons from the 2021-2022 Research Initiative review of thirty-three proposals, implementing these lessons in the 2024 review cycle. The 2024 review represents the quality review of roughly 2.5B in future pooled funds investment. ISDC guest edited a special issue on **inclusive innovation** in Agricultural Systems, inspired by CGIAR's 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy, capping inclusive innovation deliverables including briefs, technical notes, and symposia. To date, the special issue papers have 42 CGIAR staff and affiliates among the authors. ISDC will host its **Science Forum** during CGIAR Science Week 2024, which will be a launch event of the special issue. ISDC's literature review and discussions on **megatrends** led to a discussion paper outlining nine implications for CGIAR's research and innovation portfolio, used by CGIAR to inform planning for Portfolio 2025-2030. The portfolio redesign has cited the megatrends project extensively. Finally, ISDC developed a technical note on **comparative advantage** analysis, also presented as podcasts and videos to support CGIAR's application of the concept of comparative advantage.

Standing Panel on Impact Assessment

While SPIA's goal under the first objective of its workplan is to increase CGIAR center capacity to be the main source of robust impact assessments on CGIAR research, SPIA holds a critical role in **conducting or commissioning impact assessments** to complement center work. During 2022-2024, SPIA oversaw completion of **six accountability studies, and twelve learning studies**, the latter focused on innovations that have not yet experienced widespread uptake and impact. SPIA will deliver insights from its portfolio of causal impact studies at **SPIA Fest in August 2024**, where 200 participants are expected. SPIA will summarize evidence around nine topics, among which are CGIAR's long-term impacts, externalities, and scaling strategies. Furthermore, by the end of 2024, SPIA will have delivered reports on CGIAR innovations' reach in **Uganda, Vietnam, Bangladesh**, and dynamic evidence in **Ethiopia**. Reports released to date have been downloaded 1091 times. Under a newly inaugurated 2024-2030 work plan, SPIA is identifying and contracting independent research consortia to track CGIAR innovations in key countries, and initiated scoping in additional countries. SPIA is identifying up to twenty research consortia.

In 2022-2023, SPIA organized **webinars and published guidelines on remote sensing** for impact assessment. Over 70 impact assessment professionals attended SPIA methods webinars during the business cycle.

Evaluation Function, IAES

The IAES Evaluation Function completed platform evaluations for **Genebank, GENDER, Big Data, and Excellence in Breeding**; together the four platforms represented an investment of over 80M USD in 2020-2021. Forty-three percent of management planned actions related to recommendations in these evaluations are on track and 22% are completed as of mid-2024. In 2024, the Evaluation Function led **real-time evaluations of three Science Groups**, a programming investment of ~750M in pooled funding. Working in a highly adaptive mode, the Science Group evaluation teams framed their recommendations and learning points to the still emerging CGIAR 2025-2030 portfolio. IAES convened external evaluation teams to report early learning to proposal developers and System Council. More than 400 partners and staff responded to a survey and evaluators conducted more than 300 interviews. Evaluation teams visited five countries to deepen and contextualize results.

Supporting CGIAR's Portfolio25

Since 2023, IAES, ISDC and SPIA have invested a sizable level of effort to support CGIAR's portfolio evolution. The technical note complemented by 3-part podcast on comparative advantage, and a discussion paper and supporting material on emerging and changing megatrends have been relied on by portfolio and proposal authors. Impact assessments from current causal evidence and country reach studies, in the instances when these overlap with legacy innovations, are supporting the capacity for evidence-driven prioritization and uptake. SPIA has organized matchmaking events and other support to help current 22-24 Initiatives embed impact assessment studies. Independent formative process evaluations, of the Science Groups, focusing on coherence, relevance, effectiveness, quality of science and efficiency, evaluability assessments of Regional Integrated Initiatives, and GENDER and Genebank Platform performance evaluations have supported accountability and learning. Independent reviews of the umbrella document and proposals are ongoing.

Independent
Advisory and
Evaluation
Service

CGIAR

Towards the quality and feasibility of future evaluation, the Evaluation function conducted **evaluability assessments of Regional Integrated Initiatives**. The Evaluation function will also review the implementation of Management Responses (2021-2023), and it partnered with Internal Audit to improve the Performance Results Measurement System, towards advisory engagements to support assurance to governing bodies. As custodians of the CGIAR Evaluation Policy, in 2022 IAES presented the System Council and System Board with a **revised Evaluation Policy**. In outyears, IAES Evaluation Function developed **new evaluation guidelines** pertaining to Evaluability Assessment, Management Engagement, and Evaluation of Science for Development. The policy and guidelines apply to independent evaluation implemented through IAES as well as self-commissioned quasi-independent evaluations.

IAES operational support

ISDC, SPIA and IAES supply CGIAR stakeholders with independent and rigorous advice and evidence. A shared aim supported by IAES is the provision of **timely, relevant, and accessible** advice and evidence. In providing operational support across three distinct mandate areas, IAES helps in two ways to complement SIMEC's intention of *"facilitating and maintaining strong connections"* across the spectrum of advisory and evaluation and impact assessment activities (internal and independent). (i) IAES supports the sharing and use of outputs among ISDC, SPIA and IAES Evaluation. The objective is to **inform cross-functionally in a timely manner** about planned and current work that could be relevant to other workstreams. (ii) IAES facilitates **sharing information about the operating context** and understanding of user groups' prioritized needs in support of well-informed conversations with system stakeholders, and to ensure relevant referrals across the mandated areas.

> **Knowledge management:** IAES supports the dissemination and use of outputs among ISDC, SPIA and Evaluation functions. The objective is cross-functional information sharing in a timely manner, to support independent functions to fulfill their respective mandates. For instance, briefing on evaluation outcomes and flagging relevant impact studies informs ISDC proposal reviews. External evaluation teams are briefed and furnished with ISDC ex ante reviews of proposals and SPIA-supported studies. IAES also facilitates the flow of information among three functions on the operating context and demand, towards independent, but not isolated, services.

The future

As CGIAR turns to an integrated operating model, evolving the vision set out in Cheng Du in 2019, independent advice and evaluative evidence, which complements internal science leadership, self-commissioned evaluation, and CGIAR center-led impact research, is more necessary than ever in CGIAR. The integration framework agreement ushered in an integrated matrix structure, multiple accountability frameworks to Center and System, and affirmed that *"Centers are the essential buildings blocks of the Integrated Partnership with that partnership built on the Centers, their governing instruments, and their host country agreements."* In this context of change, , IAES, ISDC and SPIA in the next triennial plan are bearing in mind three key considerations: countries, centers and coordination, while undertaking planning responsive to mandate documents and the CGIAR memorandum (Dec 23) on the implementation of governance recommendations. Planning is framed around demand in a multilateral, multistakeholder environment. Independent services such as IAES, ISDC and SPIA exist to provide robust evidence that helps CGIAR answer key questions.

IAES is broadly framing the 2025-2027 planning effort around the following four demand areas:

Investment	Which are the best investment bets and are they soundly designed?
Accountability	Has there been effective and efficient delivery against documented, adaptively management plans?
Learning	What can CGIAR do better in its portfolio and organizational implementation?
Assurance	Are the evidence and processes used for decisions inclusive and sound?

After completing further rounds of consultation with Council, Board and Management, IAES will proceed with iteration of the 2025-2027 multiyear plan with System Council's committees; after iteration and vetting, IAES will transmit the triennial workplan and budget to the 21st meeting of System Council for consideration and decision.

🌐 2022-2024 plan

Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service
CGIAR