



One CGIAR Advice: A conversation on learning, accountability and evidence-based planning and programming

CGIAR Advisory Services (CAS) engaged with System Council members in a deep dive drop-in session on 15 December 2020 prior to the 11th meeting of System Council. The event presented three elevator-pitch style presentations followed by a moderated roundtable panel that discussed the One CGIAR Research and Innovation Strategy and the use of assessment, evaluation and impact studies in the One CGIAR new portfolio. Over 40 participants attended, comprising members of System Council, SPIA and ISDC members and CAS Secretariat.

1 Conversation threads

The purpose of this event was to foster a conversation among the System Council and external advisory bodies about how CAS will best support planning and programming, accountability and learning, and deepen understanding of One CGIAR impact.



A word cloud highlights the conversation's key words. The word **Evaluate** described the *process evaluation* of ongoing Programs according to OECD-DAC criteria and Quality of Research for Development Framework; *causal impact evaluation* supported by SPIA and rigorous impact assessment methods; and ISDC's *evaluation* of new Initiatives, or proposal assessment.

One CGIAR Research and Innovation Strategy

The Chair of ISDC commented on the Strategy development process, highlighting that many recommendations from ISDC were addressed. Scientific framing, use of past evaluations, and thorny issues on barriers to adoption will require attention in coming months. The chair of SPIA commented on improvements in the Performance Results Management Framework but also on the need for defining clearer impact indicators and a clearer roadmap on what type of evidence to get, and how to get it.

Embedded evaluation and assessment

Integrating process evaluation and designs for causal impact evaluation into the planning of One CGIAR Initiatives is essential. Some SC members stressed the need to embed evaluation and impact assessment in Projects, with more emphasis on learning and use. The panel indicated embedded evaluation as an area of co-design for the Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC) and CAS, particularly during 2021 Evaluation Policy revision. The external evaluator on the panel sees solid evidence of CGIAR Research Programs uptake of current (2020) review recommendations. SPIA champions causal impact assessment research that is prospectively integrated into the OneCGIAR research portfolio.

Theory of change and stage-gates

The panel discussed how to assess Theories of Change, through *ex ante* techniques (e.g. back-casting), coupled with ongoing testing of assumptions at stage-gates along the impact pathway. Participants concluded that SPIA could play a capacity-strengthening role by advising on methods for causal impact assessment relevant to use in stage-gating processes.

New methods in impact assessment

The conversation stressed the need for CGIAR to use techniques in impact assessments that go beyond the farm level. An example is that SPIA invested to bring in remote sensing expertise.

Roles and structure of advisory services

The panel sees CAS's role in supporting strong and diverse partnerships with hosting countries and suggested that relevant emerging technical and strategic advice is made available for use at the country level. The panel also urged that the ISDC Nominations Panel fill ISDC's three open seats with a *combined* focus on scientific *and* development expertise. The CAS structure, namely of SPIA and ISDC supported by one Secretariat that implements the evaluation function, lends itself to built-in feedback and learning.

2 Participants

The deep dive hosted over 40 participants. System Council representation from around the globe was joined by SPIA and ISDC members and CAS Secretariat staff. Mr Eric Witte, USAID International Agricultural Affairs Specialist and SIMEC member, moderated. CAS thanks the panel comprising Drs Pedro Machado, Julianne Biddle, and Alan Tollervey, Professors Holger Meinke and Karen Macours, and external evaluator Dr Jill Lenné.

3 Conclusions and next steps

The moderator concluded that the event was an important step that improved communication between CAS and System Council. The discussions highlighted some priorities for CAS to consider, together with SIMEC, in the coming year. CAS will promote future side events or similar interactive formats on topics aligned to the agenda of subsequent System Council meetings. Priority areas flagged during the meeting will be raised with SIMEC and may be subject to intensified work.