

SF18 BREAKOUT SESSIONS SESSION OUTLINE

Impact assessment of AR4D in the era of the SRF and SDGs: Challenges, methods and guidance

1. Session day and time

Wed, 10th October 2018, 15:30 – 18:00

2. Session coordinator(s) and affiliation(s)

Nancy Johnson, James Stevenson, Lakshmi Krishnan (SPIA Secretariat)
Karen Macours (SPIA Chair)

3. Summary

Background

Commitment to achieving impact on development outcomes is stronger than ever in CGIAR in the wake of the reform and CGIAR Strategy and Results Framework (SRF). For scientists and research managers, CGIAR reform has resulted in numerous documents in which archetypal impact pathways link CGIAR research to development outcomes, and CGIAR Research Programs have been encouraged to map their research to all relevant SRF outcomes. This has resulted in a proliferation in the possible outcomes that could be subject to assessment or evaluation. However, the methods for generating the evidence on the different outcomes vary widely, which makes it challenging to learn and compare across outcomes, let alone across pathways.

The task of demonstrating impact has become more challenging over the past decade given the context of “the rigor revolution” in impact evaluation. SPIA characterizes this as: a step-change in expectations for causal inference in impact studies; a wealth of new indicators that require appropriate and careful measurement; and the desire for outcome indicators to be collected over large, representative samples (Stevenson, Macours and Gollin, 2018). To meet the demand for more rigorous causal inference, measurement efforts and study designs may necessarily focus in on specific outcomes at the expense of others. This can create a tension that has to be negotiated when determining the appropriate study design and allocation of resources to different kinds of assessment – particularly important in situations when a trade-off is suspected (i.e. that positive progress for one outcome is at the expense of another outcome). A further tension is between examining short-run (i.e. micro) and long-run (i.e. macro) impacts, or impacts that are only apparent at a higher spatial scale.

This session will run through these principles underlying rigorous impact assessment and what they mean in the context of the SRF and SDG, where synergies and trade-offs will be the rule rather than the exception. The session will be targeted at a broad, non-specialist audience. One of the lessons from SPIA’s recent work is that it is important to engage a range of stakeholders in impact assessment. While conducting studies requires specialist expertise, understanding the issues and challenges of impact assessment, and how to interpret and use results, is important for many people across CGIAR and partners. Therefore, SPIA is proposing to develop a guidance document targeted to the needs of a range of different users.

The talk and the subsequent break-out sessions will be structured around the following topics and will cover opportunities, challenges, and examples of good practices, including for addressing relevant synergies and trade-offs:

- Developing and validating impact pathways and theories of change through the AR4D process
- Specifying and measuring outcomes and impacts
- Causal inference and methodological pluralism

- Dealing with spatial and temporal scales.

Objective

To engage in a discussion with a broad range of scientists and research managers on the subject of impact assessment in the context of multiple, interlinked outcome and impacts targets. The objectives are: 1) to further understanding of the implications of synergies and trade-offs among development outcomes for impact assessment; 2) to broaden understanding on data needs and possible contributions and pitfalls of different types of impact assessments; and 3) discuss the potential mechanisms and roles of different actors to assure diffusion of innovations is documented and identify opportunities for impact assessments.

Expected outcomes

- Greater shared understanding of the purpose and practicalities of impact assessment in agricultural research, including how our understanding of synergies and trade-offs can both inform and be informed by impact assessment.
- Ideas and suggestions from participants to go into a guidance document on impact assessment.

4. Speakers/contributors and affiliations

Main presenter - Karen Macours (SPIA Chair, Paris School of Economics/INRA)

Panelists/discussants - Karl Hughes, (ICRAF, and possibly others TBC)

5. Rapporteur (for brief report back to plenary on Friday, 12 October; ~10 min) and affiliation

Nancy Johnson (SPIA Secretariat)

6. Session structure

- Introductory talk by Karen Macours (30 mins)
- Discussants and plenary discussion on reactions (30 mins)
- Breakout groups (1 hour)
- Reporting back (30 mins)