

**Evaluation of the “Strengthening Impact Assessment in the CGIAR” (SIAC):
Management Response and Action Plan
February 16, 2017**

This management response reflects the consolidated views of the ISPC including input from SIAC Management.

The Standing Panel on Impact Assessment (SPIA) of the Independent Science and Partnership Council (ISPC) greatly appreciate the time, effort and thoroughness of the Evaluators and IEA in conducting this evaluation. The evaluation report is thoughtful and constructive, with many recommendations that will support the development of SIAC Phase-II proposal as well as the upcoming evaluation of ISPC.

We recognize that conducting this evaluation was no easy task in the light of time constraints as well as the challenge of evaluating an on-going work program, the outputs of which are only just emerging. Nevertheless, the Evaluators put immense effort into reaching out to key stakeholders ranging from Impact Assessment Focal Points (IAFPs) to Center Directorates to System Council members, during a period (late 2016) in which the demand for their time elsewhere was significant. We thank the many respondents for their inputs and time.

SIAC management welcome the evaluation findings on:

- The demand for SIAC/SPIA work on IA methods, collection and centralization of IA data as well as the general high “quality of science”
- The innovativeness and influence of work on methods for varietal adoption (one of the four objectives of SIAC)
- The relevance of SIAC to the SPIA mandate to deliver timely and credible information on system level impacts, as well as the needs of CGIAR funders and Centers/CRPs
- The efficient management of SIAC

We are in agreement with all of the six recommendations (listed below) made on SIAC. The response to the recommendations and action matrix is presented in the Table 1. The recommendations can be summarized as follows:

1. Revisit the theory of change of SIAC project before/while designing a new project phase
2. Put in place a more systematic process for selection of IA topics and specific studies
3. More systematic consultation of CGIAR research leaders on needs for IA and the proposed SIAC work program
4. Take steps to improve the utilization of IA results in the prioritization of CGIAR research
5. Invest more strategically in helping to institutionalize IA across the CGIAR
6. Revisit the management and governance of SIAC/SPIA

Some of the recommendations made by the evaluation team, particularly on selection of topics/priority areas for impact assessment, institutionalizing IA, and utility of IA in decision-making have helped crystallize the thinking we’ve been developing over the course of SIAC and looking ahead to the next phase of work. We have taken this opportunity to outline some our thinking, and the direction we hope to take in the coming months in preparing (a potential) SIAC Phase-II that incorporates the insights this evaluation has provided.

We agree that **institutionalizing IA** across the CGIAR is important. SIAC has deliberately taken a broad approach to institutionalization as outlined in Table 1 below. While “management of large areas of the work has been outsourced to trusted academics”, learning and institutionalization can, and has occurred. For instance, in the case of the MSU work on estimating adoption data across a large number of countries and crops (SIAC Activity 1.1), almost all of the data collection work was completed by CGIAR Centers. MSU’s role was to provide [guidelines](#) and supervision on expert opinion exercises, drawing on experience from the SPIA-managed “[Diffusion and Impact of Improved Varieties in Africa](#)” (DIIVA) project. In the case of new methods for tracking adoption (e.g., DNA fingerprinting), this is being institutionalized in national statistical offices within the framework of the World Bank Living Standards Measurement Study – Integrated Surveys on Agriculture (LSMS-ISA). Where similar non-SIAC funded efforts exist, such as collaborations between the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, academics and CGIAR Centers, we intend to bring these efforts together through [joint workshops](#) and published guidelines. SIAC Phase-II will propose to scale up work with LSMS-ISA or national agencies to enable regular monitoring of CGIAR technology diffusion, in specific countries. While Centers or CRPs should continue to monitor adoption and collect diffusion data using proven methods at a smaller scale for the purpose of learning during the process of program implementation, there doesn’t appear to be an obvious comparative advantage in CGIAR Centers undertaking many new surveys.

Phase-I experience also suggests that two types of capacity development are particularly effective in enabling institutionalization of rigorous impact studies: (1) collaboration between academic (IA) researchers and biophysical scientists in a Center, and (2) collaboration between Centers and an academic institution that includes methodological training, development of frameworks for prioritizing IA topics, or posting Masters/Doctoral students to work within the social science units responsible for IA. We will certainly reflect on these and newer pathways to institutionalization, and the comparative advantage of CGIAR and SPIA on IA during Phase-II proposal development.

It is, however, worthy of note that there is a sense that the staff and funding resources allocated to IA has been reducing over a period of time, even as attrition rates are high. This poses questions on how best to attract and retain high-quality IA researchers, whether and where to invest in capacity development, and what “institutionalization” means in this context. While the 2017 evaluation of ISPC may examine roles and responsibilities for impact assessment across the CGIAR in the context of ISPC’s work streams, and the proposed ISPC study on staff recruitment and retention might shed some light on these issues, this is also an issue for the Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee (SIMEC) of the System Council as well as the CGIAR science leadership to reflect on.

Second, on the question of **selection and prioritization of IA topics and specific studies**, there is a need for IA strategies in the CGIAR to balance multiple objectives of (1) summary assessments (syntheses, meta-analyses) of areas of CGIAR investment drawing on the existing body of evidence on impacts; (2) investigating relatively recent CGIAR innovations to build rigorous evidence; (3) investigating partial success or failed innovations to inform internal learning; (4) investigating promising innovations for which the full diffusion and impact potential will only be known in the future; (5) investigating specific links in the AR4D impact pathway in a rigorous manner; and, (6) investigating areas that are widely recognized as under-assessed.

In identifying candidate themes or topics to focus an open call for proposals on, and later, in selecting studies to constitute the portfolio, there are a number of approaches SPIA could take:

- (a) use systematic reviews or expert knowledge to identify evidence gaps;
- (b) use expert knowledge or other information (e.g. annual reports) to identify promising/failed/successful innovations for IA;

- (c) use the CGIAR SRF to guide selection process and decisions – focusing on critical pathways as well as key outcomes and impacts of interest; and
- (d) respond opportunistically to researcher interests through competitive calls.

SIAC Phase-I used a combination of these approaches because binding resource constraints (time, money, staff), but also a dearth of high quality data in the CGIAR is the reality of the environment in which we operate. For the adoption/diffusion data collection, the selection of research outputs for assessment, locations and partners was also driven by the new data technologies (remote sensing, DNA fingerprinting) we wanted to test and the ease of ‘doing business’. As stated, our preference is to institutionalize this work through LSMS-ISA or national partners, but decisions about geographies and target outputs will be in consultation with Centers and CRPs (as recommended by the evaluation).

We agree with the Evaluators that leveraging Center and CRP impact studies as well as non-CGIAR studies (all conditional on quality) is prudent. One way we started doing this in SIAC Phase-I was by deciding to not pursue a systematic review of IAs on agroforestry or forest management because of the work underway in 3IE, CIFOR (Evidence-Based Forestry Initiative) and ICRAF along similar lines. IAFPs have spoken about the need for systematic collaboration between their units on impact studies, particularly to utilize ongoing surveys to collect data of interest to another CGIAR Center/CRP – this rarely occurs currently. We also recognize that, too often, baseline data remains under-used because they were completed based on project-specific donor demands in a highly localized geography. Since timing and quality is critical to collaborations, this is another issue for discussion with SIMEC and the CGIAR science leadership.

Finally, the larger issue is the way **IA results and findings are used** by ISPC, CGIAR Centers and CRPs, and donors. We agree on the need for better utilization of IA results in informing CGIAR system priorities, and will build this into the next phase. In doing this, we will need to carefully consider the utility (to priority setting) of ex post IA results that, in some cases, speak to research outputs delivered 10-25 years ago. Additionally, the evidence base for CGIAR research is unevenly distributed, and we recognize that IA results are only one of the many sources of information that inform donor decision making. Overall, we also see SPIA as having an important role in CGIAR-wide learning about cross-cutting topics such as on farmer behavioral responses to new technologies.

There are other gaps noted by the Evaluators, such as in the process for assuring science quality, open access and open data (OD/OA), and research ethics that are being addressed through the ISPC and entities in the CGIAR System. The ISPC-facilitated work in 2017 on quality of research for development includes aspects relating to quality of science and will define principles for using the resulting frame of reference. One of the four proposed quality of research dimensions is *legitimacy* that, by definition, will include ethics. We have also kept track of work elsewhere in the CGIAR for e.g., the development of guidelines in the Consortium Office (now, System Management Office) on OD/OA. SPIA has started to strongly encourage Phase-I data submissions to adhere to these guidelines. SIAC management has always believed that this is the best approach to take, and will continue to avoid investing limited resources in an explicit ethics review process or in developing guidelines when available elsewhere.

We reiterate our thanks to the Evaluators and feel strongly that their work has improved ours.

Table 1. Management Response Matrix/Follow up

Evaluation Recommendation (numbered)	Management Response	Management Follow-up			
		Action underway or to be taken (Each action should have a reference number)	Who is responsible for action	Timeframe	Is additional funding required to implement recommendation?
R1 Revisit the theory of change of SIAC project before/while designing a new project phase	<i>Fully accepted</i>	<p>1.1 The ISPC Theory of Change (TOC) that includes the impact assessment work stream has been developed and proposed in its 2017 Work Plan and Budget (link). This identifies the ways in which IA (SIAC) feeds into other ISPC work streams as well as to stakeholders (SC, SMB and the CGIAR Science Community). This TOC will be revised and finalized.</p>	<p>1.1 ISPC; SIAC management</p>	<p>1.1 September 2017 (expected date for a finalized version of the ISPC Theory of Change)</p>	<p>1.1 NA to SIAC Phase I, is at the ISPC level.</p>
		<p>1.2 Consult with CRP and Center Directors during the Montpellier Science Leaders meeting in 2017.</p>	<p>1.2 SIAC management [The System Management Office (SMO) organizes the Science Leaders meeting]</p>	<p>1.2 June 12-15, 2017, Montpellier – Science Leaders meeting. An additional opportunity for feedback is during the SIAC Phase-I end-conference in July 2017, Nairobi.</p>	<p>1.2 No, this has been budgeted for in 2017, as both events were under consideration prior to the evaluation.</p>

		1.3 Draw on the ISPC TOC as well as lessons from SIAC Phase-I, including the evaluation report and Montpellier meeting to revise the TOC for SIAC Phase-II.	1.3 SIAC management	1.3 September 2017, as a part of SIAC Phase-II proposal submission – first within the ISPC, and to the System Council.	1.3 No , the 2017 budget includes funds to develop SIAC Phase-II proposal, including the TOC.
R2 Put in place a more systematic process for selection of IA topics and specific studies	<i>Fully accepted</i> We consider it prudent to continue the multi-pronged approach (developed over SIAC Phase-I) to selection of adoption and IA studies. In saying this, we recognize that the CGIAR site integration strategy for Phase-II CRPs presents an opportunity to bring more focus to selection/prioritization of IA studies. SIAC Phase-II proposal will also consider ways to leverage on CRP Phase-II MELIA strategies. An additional opportunity is the proposed collaboration between Rome-based agencies (FAO, IFAD, LSMS-ISA of the World Bank, and ISPC) that work on agricultural research as well as impact assessments, one of the	2.1 Draw on lessons from SIAC Phase-I in the synthesis reports. The second synthesis report will include review of the evidence (to date) on the links between agricultural research and the individual SLOs.	2.1 SIAC management	2.1 Synthesis report – part I finalized by June 2017; synthesis report – part II pulling all Phase-I work together drafted by end of 2017. The ‘evidence to date’ type of papers will be commissioned and drafted over 2017 – SPIA Chair already drafted a substantive piece on the links between agricultural research and SLO1 (reducing poverty) that can be quickly finalized. Additionally, the special issue on pathways from agricultural research to poverty – an output of the Science Forum 2016 – will be another source of information.	2.1 No , the 2017 budget includes funds to develop Phase-I synthesis reports.

	outcomes of the expert consultation in January 2017.	<p>2.2 Interactions with CGIAR leadership as well as the Impact Assessment Focal Points (IAFPs) for inputs / feedback on SIAC work plans as well as information on CRP MELIA strategies.</p>	2.2 SIAC management	2.2 Specific meetings coming up include, as stated, the Montpellier Science Leaders meeting in June 2017 as well as end-of-SIAC conference in July 2017.	2.2 No , this has been budgeted for in 2017, as both events were under consideration prior to the evaluation.
		<p>2.3 Follow up on the proposed collaboration between ISPC, FAO, World Bank and IFAD.</p>	2.3 ISPC, including SIAC management	2.3 Mapping of ongoing activities in World Bank, CGIAR, FAO, and IFAD to have a coordinated effort.	2.3 NA to SIAC Phase I , is at the ISPC level.
R3 More systematic consultation of CGIAR research leaders on needs for IA and the proposed SIAC work program	<i>Fully accepted – see response 1.2</i>	<p>3.1 Consult with CRP and Center Directors during the Montpellier Science Leaders meeting in 2017. One of the objectives of this meeting would be to identify the best means of establishing mechanisms for systematic consultations between SPIA and CGIAR science leaders.</p> <p>In response to a proposal by PIM to host an annual CGIAR social science conference focused on adoption data, diffusion studies, and impact assessments, there might be an additional 0.5-1 day for discussions with CGIAR</p>	3.1 SIAC management [The System Management Office (SMO) organizes the Science Leaders meeting]	<p>3.1 June 12-15, 2017, Montpellier – Science Leaders meeting.</p> <p>July 2017, SIAC Phase-I end conference, Nairobi.</p>	3.1 No , this has been budgeted for in 2017, as both events were under consideration prior to the evaluation.

		research leaders – the social science leadership, in particular at the SIAC Nairobi conference.			
R4 Take steps to improve the utilization of IA results in the prioritization of CGIAR research	<i>Fully accepted</i>	4.1 Ensure the use of SPIA outputs in the prioritization work stream of the ISPC.	4.1 ISPC	4.1 Through collaborative work between impact assessment and foresight work streams in 2017.	4.1 No , not in 2017.
		4.2 Ensure IA results feed into the ISPC program review work stream – the outputs of which inform the System Council deliberations and decisions. Additionally, the SIAC synthesis reports are meant to communicate Phase-I results in a form that is easily digestible – the ‘state of evidence’ reports commissioned as a part of Synthesis Report-II might be of particular interest to donors.	4.2 ISPC, including SIAC management	4.2 See 2.1 Synthesis Reports Parts I and II – finalized in June 2017 and end of 2017, respectively.	4.2 No , not in 2017.

		<p>4.3 The potential for SIAC IA results, but also non-SIAC IA work occurring across the CGIAR or outside of it influencing research strategies at the Center and CRP levels needs to be discussed with the CGIAR Science Leadership. The initial steps will be taken at the Montpellier meeting.</p>	<p>4.3 SIAC management. [The System Management Office (SMO) organizes the Science Leaders meeting]</p>	<p>4.3 Discuss with CRP and Center Directors during the Montpellier Science Leaders meeting in 2017.</p>	<p>4.3 No, this has been budgeted for in 2017, as it was under consideration prior to the evaluation.</p>
		<p>4.4 Continue to provide support to IEA evaluations, offering guidance and highlighting specific studies and researchers for involvement – as has been the model to date.</p>	<p>4.4 SIAC management – provide support and advice to IEA</p>	<p>4.4 Regular, as IEA implements its work plan</p>	<p>4.4 No.</p>
<p>R5 Invest more strategically in helping to institutionalize IA across the CGIAR</p>	<p><i>Fully accepted</i> Broadly, institutionalizing IA requires hands-on support in the form of training, collaborations, and funding to undertake relevant and credible studies. This is in addition to convincing the CGIAR leadership of the importance of building a credible impact evidence base,</p>	<p>5.1 Workshop with Excellence in Breeding Platform resulting in a manual (standards) on varietal identification during adoption/ diffusion data collection. This will draw on results from SIAC Phase-I work, particularly DNA fingerprinting.</p>	<p>5.1 SIAC management</p>	<p>5.1 We plan a workshop in Q3 of 2017, to be held jointly with the Excellence in Breeding platform. The output will be a manual – published in Q4 of 2017 or Q1 2018 - for how to implement DNA fingerprinting studies in agricultural surveys.</p>	<p>5.1 No, this has been budgeted for in 2017, as it was under consideration prior to the evaluation – as a follow-up to the August 2016 workshop (Innovative Methods for Adoption of Agricultural Technologies)</p>

<p>and creating an internal demand for IA within the CGIAR by improving visibility as well as utility of IA results in Center/CRP research prioritization decisions.</p> <p>There are multiple ways in which this can occur, as outlined below.</p> <p>1. Intellectual leadership on IA: SPIA will continue to promote collaborations between CGIAR scientists and academic community on IAs, as well as set standards for adoption/diffusion data collection and IA studies.</p> <p>2. Training workshops: By assessing demand (within CGIAR) and surveying the IA landscape, SPIA will continue to identify knowledge gaps and help design training workshops.</p> <p>3. Impact Assessment Focal Points (IAFPs): SPIA will continue to engage with IAFPs through standalone workshops or annual Focal Point meetings. There is also the possibility of collaborating with CRP-PIM during the proposed annual Social Science Leaders.</p>	<p>5.2 Two workshops: Impact Assessment methodological training workshop; and, Computer-Assisted Personal Interview (CAPI) and survey design training.</p>	<p>5.2 SIAC partners (Univ. of Illinois and Innovations for Poverty Action), along with SIAC management</p>	<p>5.2 IA methodology – May 2017. CAPI training – second or third quarter of 2017.</p>	<p>5.2 No, this has been budgeted for in 2017, as it was under consideration prior to the evaluation.</p>
	<p>5.3 End of SIAC conference – presentation and discussion of SIAC Phase-I IA studies (IAFPs will participate).</p>	<p>5.3 SIAC management</p>	<p>5.3 SIAC Phase-I end-conference in July 2017, Nairobi.</p>	<p>5.3 No, this has been budgeted for in 2017, as it was under consideration prior to the evaluation.</p>
	<p>5.4 Assess priorities for capacity development and IA institutionalization as a part of SIAC Phase-II proposal development (the consideration set of focus areas for a potential Phase-II were outlined in March 2016).</p>	<p>5.4 SIAC management</p>	<p>5.4 September 2017, as a part of SIAC Phase-II proposal submission – first within the ISPC, and to the System Council.</p>	<p>5.4 No, not in 2017. The 2017 budget includes funds to develop SIAC Phase-II proposal, including the TOC. However, specific activities identified in Phase-II proposal will require funding starting 2018.</p>

	More intensive institutionalizing can occur through long-term engagements – a post-doc program or a sabbatical program for researchers that SPIA facilitates – if considered a priority for Phase-II. And this will require additional resources (that will be outlined in the Phase-II proposal budget)	5.5 Develop and implement a communications strategy.	5.5 ISPC, including SIAC management	5.5 Communications strategy, in place by April 2017.	5.5 No , this has been budgeted for in 2017.
		5.6 ISPC study on staff recruitment and retention, for e.g., in social sciences. Provide inputs based on SIAC experience on terms of reference, but outputs of the study can be drawn on for 5.4.	5.6 ISPC	5.6 Over 2017.	5.6 NA to SIAC Phase I , is at the ISPC level.
R6 Revisit the management and governance of SIAC/SPIA	<i>Fully accepted</i>	6.1 Develop a revised management plan.	6.1 ISPC, including SIAC management	6.1 End of 2017.	6.1 No , not in 2017.
		6.2 SPIA management and governance will be one of the aspects evaluated as a part of the 2017 evaluation of ISPC and SPIA. We will reflect on recommendations and take actions.	6.1 ISPC	6.1 End of 2017.	6.1 NA to SIAC Phase I , is at the ISPC level.

*** Recommendation 7 is for IEA:** In the planned evaluation of ISPC and SPIA, include an analysis of impact assessment roles and responsibilities across the CGIAR.