



CGIAR Research Program on Forests, Trees and Agroforestry (FTA)

Special workshop of the Independent Steering Committee (ISC)

Impact Assessment for Natural Resources Management and Policy Research in FTA

Tuesday 5 Nov 2019, Rome

CONCEPT NOTE and draft provisional agenda

(version 3 of 30 October 2019)

The ISC has requested the organization of a workshop on Impact Assessment for Natural Resources Management and Policy Research in FTA. The aim of this workshop is to strengthen a shared understanding within FTA of (i) NRM, institutional and policy research impact pathways and (ii) how we can reliably evaluate effectiveness and impact by addressing the challenges just mentioned.

The present note presents the state of the reflection, after various exchanges between the ISC chair, MSU and the MELIA team.

The discussion in the MT meeting shall clarify the understanding in FTA of the purpose of the workshop, the examples that could be presented, the background paper(s) to be prepared (content and responsibilities) as well as participation.

Background and Rationale

The CGIAR has a long history of quantitative *ex post* impact assessment of its research, especially for crop germplasm improvement and other technological innovations. Such assessments have typically estimated economic surplus by modelling yield gains from new varieties or technologies. More recently, there has been a strong push, from donors and led by SPIA, for impact evaluation that focuses more on empirical measurement of an impact (or causal effect) through comparison with a counterfactual (what would have happened without the intervention) ([Stevenson, Macours & Gollin, 2018](#)).

However, for many reasons that the workshop will discuss, different approaches are called for, when research aims to influence NRM, policy and institutions, as part of complex development impact pathways, and when research adopts a systems perspective.

The aim of this workshop is to strengthen a shared understanding within FTA of (i) NRM, institutional and policy research impact pathways and (ii) how we can reliably evaluate effectiveness and impact by addressing the challenges just mentioned. This will provide FTA scientists with research tools and

approaches that yield credible and internationally recognized assessments of the effectiveness of FTA's research, as well as greater accountability towards FTA's stakeholders, including its donors.

This workshop will focus on FTA, with the aim to also feed into a wider reflection of the R4D community on these issues.

The workshop will include discussion on:

1. Conceptual models of NRM and policy research impact pathways. The intention is to move beyond the standard technology development/dissemination model and recognize that CGIAR research in the 21st century intervenes in multiple ways in complex systems. We need to build relevant and defensible causal arguments for these impact pathways. It will include a presentation by FTA about the range of impact pathways in its theories of change, a synthesis of the impact assessment work of FTA, and discuss the principal challenges which FTA needs to address to capture the characteristics of impact pathways along which it conducts its research, and the causal relationships within these impact pathways.

2. Causality perspectives. CGIAR impact assessment approaches are still based largely on what philosophers of science call a "successionist" causal perspective. For NRM and policy work and for work in complex systems more generally we also need to give space to "generative", "causal package", and "complex systems" causal perspectives.

3. Evidence requirements. We need discussion about what evidence is sufficient for different audiences and what evidence is practical and feasible to reliably assess effectiveness and impact of NRM, institutional and policy research. Scientists need feedback to research for increasing research quality and effectiveness. Donors want feedback on the 'return on their investment'. We need to inform donors about the broader context and practicalities of evaluating this kind of research for better-informed, realistic expectations. Donors will not be present at this internal workshop, but ultimately, donors need to be part of this discussion as we need to know better what they need/expect.

4. Research impact evaluation methodology in complex systems. The workshop will highlight FTA's experiences on new research evaluation approaches, including those linked to complex systems, that involve multiple partnerships, and a wider range of interventions and impact pathways, with emphasis on capacity in theory-based evaluation, and empirical work., as well as how to deal with time and scale issues: from projects to an entire global programme.

5. Scale and time Issues. Different approaches will be needed depending on the scale at which research is being evaluated. At the project scale, it is possible to identify and test specific theories of change over relatively short periods; at the programme scale, time lags and complexity increase.

5. Synthesis. Based on these inputs, what are the implications for FTA, for collaborative research programs, what is possible now and what do we need to work on?

The aim of the workshop is, focusing on FTA, to generate better common understanding of each of these aspects of NRM, institutional and policy research evaluation, and how international NRM research

is intended/expected to contribute to change processes and how we can reliably evaluate effectiveness and impact.

The workshop would seek to make recommendation to FTA: what are the implications for FTA, what can be done now and over the next year, what needs to be done later on?

Finding of the workshop will aim to help the design and feed into a wider symposium tentatively to be organized in 2020 and that will include more broadly the research funders, the CGIAR impact assessment community, SPIA and ISDC, other CGIAR programs and research entities and the research-for-development community more broadly.

Participants: ISC members, FTA management team, and FTA presenters (from MELIA).

Documentation / background paper(s):

1. One introductory paper, with all terminology, concepts and methods and how they can be pragmatically applied to FTA (lead Brian Belcher, with support of MELIA team). This will support in particular the Session 2 of the workshop.
2. Synthesis of FTA work on impact assessment since the beginning of phase 1, aiming to review how the portfolio of studies already conducted in FTA cover the ToC. Main lessons learned from this synthesis since the beginning of FTA phase 1, with identification of gaps (lead Karl Hughes, with support of the MELIA team). This will support in particular Session 3.
3. One background paper by each FP (lead: each FP leader). The background papers are internal documents prepared as an input into Session 4 of the workshop (see below). The papers focus on and provide background information on the different topics that will be discussed during that session: key impact pathways, methods to measure contributions to end of program outcomes and challenges experienced so far.

Outputs

- Set of background papers/bibliography (papers that are provided as draft input to the workshop will be finalized after the workshop)
- Proceedings of the workshop
- Program of work/research agenda for advancing NRM research evaluation and impact assessment in FTA
- Recommendations for advancing NRM research evaluation and impact assessment in the CGIAR, from an FTA perspective (to feed into the symposium)

Expected outcomes

1) Shared views and common understanding on the complexity and specificities of assessing the impact of R4D when its impact pathway has strong NRM/policy/institutional components.

- Increased appreciation of the multiple pathways by which research contributes to SLOs and SDGs

- Review of the state of the art/existing approaches, methods and tools mobilized by FTA in different contexts: strengths and gaps.

- Broader recognition and agreement of appropriate ways to evaluate impact in FTA

2) Recommendations for FTA and more broadly for the research community esp. integrative R4D programs having strong NRM/policy/institutional components in their impact pathways.

- Build and share a broader conceptual framework of how NRM research contributes to change in complex systems and how we can evaluate those contributions for learning and for accountability

- Improved toolbox of methods and approaches to assess research outcomes and economic, environmental and social (including gender) impacts, and how they are articulated

- Research agenda for new work to refine and improve research evaluation, to be followed up with collaborative research

Draft provisional Agenda

Chaired by Anne-Marie Izac, FTA ISC Chair

C) Main challenges to measure and show progress along the theory of change at FP level			
4	<p>1. Detailed examples of key impact pathways, showing the links between outputs, outcomes and impacts, hypotheses and how results are expected to be measured.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Local governance and policies (FP4) ○ Supporting private sector initiatives and commitments to sustainability to improve practices (FP3) ○ International governance and policies (FP5) 	<p>1/ Presentations by FPs 3, 4 and 5. Each FP presentation to be followed by plenary discussion</p> <p>30' for each FP (presentation + discussion)</p>	11:30 – 13:00
Lunch break 13:00 – 14:00			
4 (cont'd)	<p>2. Typology of results, of methods/approaches to substantiate progress and of evidence mobilized</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> ○ Introduction (Karl) ○ PATSPO Ex ante assessment (Lars) <p>3. Showing results using extrapolations, indirect evidence and analogies in the context of a ToC (FP2).</p>	<p>2/ Presentation by Karl and Lars 15' Discussion 30'</p> <p>3/ Presentation Fergus 15' Discussion 30'</p>	14:00 - 15:30
Coffee Break 15:30-16:00			
4 (cont'd)	4. Application of all the above for a FP (FP1)	4/ Presentation by Lars/Ramni 15' Discussion 15'	16:00-16:30
D) Assessing progress : going from FP to program level			
5	Presentation Discussion	10' 30'	16:30-17:00
E) Conclusions and way forward			
6	Conclusion and recommendations for FTA and more broadly for the research community	FTA ISC Chair Anne-Marie Izac	17 :00-17 :30
End of the workshop and commute back to Rome 17:30			