

DRAFT OBSERVATIONS ON THE IMPACT PRESENTATIONS¹

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Abstract

Two categories of presentation are addressed in this commentary. First that from IAEG, then the 16 individual Center presentations. This is done in turn, taking as a framework that used by the World Bank's Operations Evaluation Department (OED). Efforts are rated according to Outcome, Sustainability and Institutional Development, as well as the performance of the key actors.

Introduction

We have had a long and busy week—longer than a week for many—long not least for having to absorb the 17 presentations on impact. Are we wiser for them? Have the efforts been worthy and worthwhile? I may not be able to answer these awkward questions definitively but I will at least broach them in various ways in my limited time. I am rather dodging my assigned task of synthesizing all the presentations, confident that the Chair will do this at any rate, and with his usual flair and insight, will do it better than any of us could. I have prepared a background paper (Anderson 1997) to deal with some conceptual and practical issues in impact assessment, which you may care to read at your leisure (it is on the CGIAR Secretariat table), and for brevity I will not get into such matters much in our limited time today.

I want first to touch on a bit of history and, to do so in as neutral a manner as I can, let me quote from a CGIAR Secretariat publication prepared by Collinson and Tollens (1994, p. 4). "During ...1984-86, the CGIAR donors funded a major study of IARC impact (Anderson, Herdt and Scobie 1988) [and a parallel TAC study of training]. These studies will not be repeated. In the future, **the main responsibility for impact assessment will rest with the Centers themselves.** Most IARCs, however, are not organized for systematic assessment. ..." [my emphasis]. Be relieved that I too do not plan to repeat the 1980s experience! I do, however, wish to draw your attention to the final two sentences of the quote.

First, and most importantly, is the belief expressed by Collinson and Tollens that **Centers must take responsibility for impact assessment.** In the spirit of the self-evaluation culture to which I belong, I feel strongly that this is the way to go, and this was the recommendation I made at the completion of the mid-1980s Impact Study. Second, the only reservation that Collinson and Tollens had in this regard concerned the (final-sentence) judgment about the (then slender) capacity of Centers to do such work. However, as I believe we have witnessed this week, and in spite of what may be inferred from some of the IAEG commissioned reports, on balance, that situation has significantly changed. But more on this when I get to the Center presentations, and I trust from

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you in the Group and the Centers too as you have the chance to observe more reflectively on the set as a whole.

Next I should explain briefly where I am “coming from” these days. The Bank’s Operations Evaluation Department (OED) is a group of World Bank Staff committed to supporting and monitoring the Bank-wide self-evaluation processes. It has a well-established score-card approach to judging outcomes and impacts (see, e.g., OED 1997), which are briefly described in a few visuals to introduce Members of the Group to the terminology to be used in what follows.

The IAEG Presentation: An Object Lesson in Impact Assessment?

The IAEG has clearly been busy in its two years of existence, including in trying to best-guess what it is that the Group has charged it with doing. In presenting the First Annual Impacts Report in the manner it has, Members of the Group are explicitly charged with responding as to how well or otherwise it accords with your hopes, ambitions, imperatives, The costs of gathering such information and of assembling the other reports have probably been considerable and so, as good resource allocators, we must reflect on the opportunity costs involved, even within the System itself, so tightly strapped for funds as it presently is.

First Annual Impacts Report

This Report is presented as the first in a series that will “include evaluations on the extent that intermediate CGIAR objectives are being met” (IAEG Comment p. 1) but, in fact, there is virtually none of this sort of evaluation in this Pilot edition. It is proposed to report each year on a “selective sample” of impacts, given the evident impossibility of an encyclopedic approach. Perhaps it is unfair to note again, as the report makes abundantly clear, that all the information reported this time on the tight Pilot schedule was drawn from available Center documents. It appears to be a good and broad selection, attractively presented, conveniently summarized in compact form, and is generally informative also to readers who may not be closely familiar with the System. It will certainly be interesting to discover through Members’ responses to the questionnaire if it is indeed what was wanted, as I for one did not get a clear message on this from the discussion on Monday afternoon. I would guess from some of the discussion during the week that Members will (as always?) have a diverse set of needs in this regard for their various constituencies, with their in turn variously short reading-attention spans.

IAEG Report 1 (Florida State University)

It is good for evaluators to be “lean and mean,” but when they are merely mean, one can be justifiably concerned. Let me develop this point by revisiting the process. The Florida team received 265 documents for possible review. It was judged that only 87 of these “presented evidence on center effects” and thus became eligible for further scrutiny. I would not wish to deny Members and Center staff the joy of coming to their own judgments about whether each of the 178 documents, intriguingly undated, listed in Appendix IV has been fairly and justifiably “withdrawn” from consideration. It is my prediction that many Center staff will be quite incensed about some of the decisions. For my own personal angle, it seems that few of the mid-1980s Impact Study documents were submitted (and, seemingly, none of the main reports or key summary versions of

that study), so at this point of rejection it is only some of the concerned consultants who will be upset on this account. More generally, since I have implicitly raised the sampling issue in the selection of the 265, it is apparent that the process engaged in did not meet the test of unbiased sampling (in this case, of the global literature) that is recommended as good practice in judging the acceptability of impact evidence.

One aspect of the non-inclusion of the mid-1980s Impact Study that is especially galling, at least to me, relates not to rejection but to non-consideration at all. A constant theme in Reports 1 and 2 is a quest for meta-evaluation across the system within a consistent framework, and a complaint that even within a Center's documents there is an evident reluctance to look across the span of Center efforts and effects. The previous Impact Study (a condensed summary of the 850 pages of main report is contained in Anderson, Herdt and Scobie 1988) did this explicitly across the then whole System (at that stage only 13 Centers). Implicitly, this study was not considered by the Florida team because it was not actually conducted by a Center and, had it been submitted by a donor, it as well would have been rejected on this strangely inconsistent criterion.

Apparently (Cooksy 1997a, p. 3), the major reason for withdrawal from the group finally to be given some scrutiny was the perceived lack of clearly articulated link of a claimed effect to Center activities. In many of these and other cases, it was judged that data issues were insufficiently or unclearly dealt with in the reports examined, aspects of which led to the exchange on Monday afternoon that I think I will allude to as the Stanford Non-Consensus. The differences evident in disciplinary standard professional practices are doubtless several but may not, in fact, be as divergent as that discussion perhaps suggested. It is my own observation that most of the Centers' **formal** impact-study documents **do provide adequate description** of the nature and quality of the data used, although **all** the messy details are sometimes to be found in unpublished background reports. What is clear is that a large majority of Center impact documents were never intended to portray "a comprehensive picture of effectiveness" and many are overtly locationally-specific case studies not intended to be generalized to larger populations or different geographical areas, and neither of these aspects necessarily discounts their worth as potentially valuable pieces of the overall CGIAR evaluation puzzle.

I initially hesitated to question some of the procedures adopted in the Florida study on grounds that it might be considered impolite to criticize authors not here to defend themselves, but on re-reading the uncompromising and overt criticism in the reports of Center and other documents, I figure it is fair game to be bluntly critical of what we have been served up here, and so let me continue briefly to the further reports.

IAEG Report 2 (Florida State University)

The second report presents the detailed analysis of the 11 Center documents whittled down from the 87 as being worthy of review. This involves the work of 10 Centers (CIMMYT appears twice, while CIFOR, ICARDA, ICLARM, ICRAF, ICRISAT, and IITA did not make it, and ILRI was "represented" by ILRAD) Unfortunately, there is little correspondence between the selections and the presentations made this week by the Centers. The closest is for CIP, while there was some overlap evident for CIMMYT, IIMI, IPGRI, IRRI, ISNAR and WARDA. The analysis hinges on a logical framework (logframe in the evaluators' jargon) developed in a TAC/DSE workshop

convened by IAEG. The logframe (Cooksy 1997b, Figure 2.1, p 2.4) is based on a process interpretation of the CGIAR Mission statement. The creative activities that enter into the articulation of a logframe are such that the result is bound to be an idiosyncratic reflective of the world view of the contributors. It is surely the case that not all logframes are equal in quality or utility. As I understand that the documents have now arrived and are in your hands, I have not reproduced Figure 2.1 for projection. At any rate, we probably do not have time today to get to such specific details of any of the impact documents before us. Accordingly, let me just note that I find it somewhat strange that a framework of such claimed breadth has no mention of market effects of new technologies that may be associated with Center products.

The report is long on statements about plausibility (or, more precisely, lack of it!) in the appreciation of Center documents on impact. The subjectivity inherent in these types of comments is great, as it is necessarily now also in my mentioning that I find most of the analysis in this report to be quite implausible and thus not very useful in itself. If such critical works help to give us cause for pause, and to think more carefully and cogently about the persuasiveness of evidence of different types, perhaps some good will have been achieved, but that proposition remains to be tested. It would be interesting to be privy to some of the heated exchanges that I predict will ensue once Centers have a chance to digest Report 2, and to provide their own peer review of their treatment. Had a certain airline been more efficient, it would have been fascinating too for the Centers to have been able to provide direct feedback on this report when the IAEG Chair presented it on Monday. I guess it will happen fairly soon, maybe even this afternoon if there is opportunity. For brevity in my presentation, I will not attempt a blow-by-blow critique of the claims made in Chapter 3 (Table 3.2 on p. 3-6 gives a short form of the main charges), but I look forward to the fireworks. Having as a "bottom line" the conclusion (Cooksy 1997b, p 4-6) that "**we still know very little** about the degree to which the CGIAR is achieving its mission of food security and sustainable agricultural in developing countries" is certainly a message for the sponsors of this initiative to ponder.

Factors Affecting the Adoption and Impact of CGIAR Innovations: A Project Overview (University of Arizona)

The Arizona team is working with 8 Centers (CIAT, CIFOR, CIMMYT, ICRISAT (twice), ILRI, IPGRI (twice), IRRI, and ISNAR in 10 Case Studies intended to inform the Group and all concerned on matters of adoption and impact. As we heard on Monday this is work seeded by support from IAEG for some of the work, but involves "leveraging" rather larger resource commitments by the Centers themselves. To take the case of Study 1, involving CIMMYT-linked hybrid maize in Ghana, IAEG has provided \$20,000 and CIMMYT some \$200,000, for work that was not in the pre-intervention Work Plan.

I would hope that we might hear from some of the Centers here what they think of this work, which does not impress me as having significantly advanced the research agenda over that in many earlier Center studies of such phenomena, and has none of the broad, fresh thinking outlined in other contemporary contemplations of such matters, such as in the proposal being developed by Uma Lele and colleagues (1997). Perhaps it is too early to comment fairly on this IAEG product, but seeing the reference list of a study in a field with such a rich literature having but 7 items, one of which is on the CGIAR mission, one on disseminating health information, 3 on GAO-style quasi-

experimental procedures, and 2 on generic case study methods, does not give me personally much confidence in the outcome of this work. Lest I be misunderstood, let me make clear that I see nothing but good coming from fresh approaches to impact investigation, making greater use of procedures developed in the evaluation community, but let's do our homework and get it right before squandering too many scarce resources in the name of better evaluation.

Summary Ratings on the IAEG Efforts to Date

Outcome:	Marginally Unsatisfactory	(recall relevance, efficacy and efficiency)
Sustainability:	Unlikely	
Institutional Development:	Negligible	
Center Performance:	Unsatisfactory	
IAEG Performance:	Marginally unsatisfactory	

Impact Presentations by the Centers

It is sometimes said that one of the new strengths of the System is the diversity of its elements—mandates, personalities, and achievements. I think the impact presentations reinforce this perception of diversity. Centers will surely complain that they had too little warning, insufficient time to conduct needed studies, have too few appropriate resources to mount such work, especially on tight schedules, etc., and for some this may indeed be the case. Others have been thinking and working in impact terms for many a year, and have been able to draw on a solid body of impact study work.

On-going Impact Work

Several Centers have more or less well established impact study programs and so it may be sensible to focus first on these. CIMMYT probably has the longest standing systematic effort to document its impacts, and perhaps for this reason has taken a rather laid-back but still highly informative approach to updating the Group on these matters. I judge this to be a reasonable strategy, as it is my feeling that most Members are not too concerned that the impacts of this Center's long-running programs have not been large, beneficial to important target beneficiaries, and generally mainstream to the broad thrust of CGIAR purpose. Much the same tack applies, although less so, to IRRI and its fairly well-documented efforts to record its impact (e.g., Alam et al. 1997), although the presentation chose to share little of these at ICW. I am reminded of the advice I was given in the mid-80s Impact Study not even to mention CIMMYT and IRRI, because "we all know that they have had great (and appreciated) impacts."

Two other Centers are especially deserving of high commendation for their recent impact work, well reflected in the presentations this week, namely ICRISAT (which has my nomination for the most effective impact presentation of the week) and CIP. Time denies me the opportunity

to comment in detail on any of the individual presentations. The **IITA** discussion of achievements of farm-level effects in pest and disease resistance and effective bio-control for a number of key tropical crops is of interest, and surely deserving of further socio-economic analysis. The **CIAT** story was in many ways a classic seeds story, with an interesting emphasis on the possibilities (and needs) for an effective agricultural knowledge system delivery operation. We heard of the heartening progress by **ICARDA** in its difficult environment. A lot of smoke screening from our tree-oriented Centers, and an interesting manure-led growth strategy from **ILRI**. But in the short time, let me try to summarize succinctly in tabular form.

Summary Ratings of Center Presentations on Impact

Impact Reports: CIMMYT, CIP, ICRISAT

Outcome:	Highly satisfactory
Sustainability:	Likely
Institutional Development:	Substantial
Center Performance:	Satisfactory

Impact Statements: ICLARM, IIMI, IITA, IRRI

Outcome:	Satisfactory
Sustainability:	Uncertain
Institutional Development:	Modest
Center Performance:	Marginally satisfactory

Program Commentaries: CIAT, CIFOR, ICRAF, ICARDA, ILRI, WARDA

Conceptual Struggles (& Pure IPGs): IFPRI, IPGRI, ISNAR

Outcome:	Unsatisfactory
Sustainability:	Uncertain
Institutional Development:	Modest
Center Performance:	Unsatisfactory

Summing Up

As I noted in my background paper, there are so many seemingly imperative needs for “impact assessment” that some investigations of this type must perforce proceed, and must also take on the especially challenging dimensions of measuring poverty effects and other broad aspects of development effectiveness more generally. But as I listened to the Group Members’ congratulatory remarks during the week, it seems that there is, in fact, a wide range of materials required.

Just who should do the work it seems is still something of an open question. Tradeoffs must be made between the plausibility that should accompany “independent,” detached external assessments and the cost-effectiveness of more informed, targeted, and less divorced internal assessments. **The purpose of any impact study must thus be well articulated** to guide choices as to stage, product emphasis, geographic scope, precision of measurement, and other parameters.

Evidence on impact has improved but there is still quite uneven progress among the Centers. Variation in the quality of the evidence comes from several sources, including unequal (past and present) attention to impact assessment; diversity of evaluation methods (and data); different shares of resources devoted to the field and the accompanying institutional strengthening efforts; and the related matter of incentives within the System and the Centers to get on with the job. Providing credible evidence to meet short run demands can be done relatively easily, but developing the institutional basis to maintain and systematize the efforts will require informed leadership, some patience and real resources.

IAEG can have a useful role in bringing to the processes a truly external perspective. But, in the growing self-evaluation culture of the system, centers must get on and do a bigger and better job of impact assessment. Pleasingly, several Centers have already firmly embedded such evaluation in their work as a core activity, and it seems that you as Members of the Group must fund such work as such, and not indirectly via IAEG.

Impact assessment has long been on the wishlist for External Reviews of Centers, but this has, I think, never been realistic. If, however, ERs can routinely address the self-evaluation efforts underway, this would be a useful adjunct to the external perspectives highlighted through IAEG.

Finally, but not least, I hear the calls (notably from UK and Canada) for measurement of poverty reduction achievements. We heard from IAEG that it is seeking help from IFPRI in this. But, as we have also heard, this is not easy work to deliver on, especially on a tight schedule, and we thus need to be realistic about what is, in fact, a challenging research activity in itself. I have sketched in the companion paper some of the World Bank’s considerable experience in trying to deal with this matter, and the message is one of patience, understanding and on-going urgent attention.

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