CGIAR | Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service

Summary of Learnings on Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessments (MELIA)

Authors: G. Gullotta, A. Jersild,

S. Negroustoueva, D. Templeton

March 2025

Correct citation: CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES). 2025. *Summary of Learnings on Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessments (MELIA).* Rome: IAES Evaluation Function. https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation

Cover image: Whistle. Unknown.

Comics in the report are from Chris Lysy @FreshSpectrum

Summary of Learnings on Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessments (MELIA)

Authors: G. Gullotta, A. Jersild,

S. Negroustoueva, D. Templeton

March 2025

Acknowledgments

This summary learning product was developed by G. Gullotta, A. Jersild, S. Negroustoueva, and D. Templeton. The overall strategic direction was provided by Allison Grove Smith, director of CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES).

Valuable insights and feedback were provided by colleagues across the CGIAR system, including Allison Poulos (PCU), Valerien Pede and Justin de la Rueda (IRRI), Pascale Sabbagh (SO), Enrico Bonaiuti (CIP-ICARDA), Xiaoxi Lian (WorldFish), and Tonja Shultze (Alliance-Bioversity), whose contributions helped sharpen and strengthen this final product.

External peer review was provided by John Gargani from the Evaluation Reference Group (ERG) to IAES, bringing an independent lens to the report's credibility and relevance. Special thanks go to the IAES team in Rome for their seamless support on both the technical and administrative fronts—ensuring the evaluation process ran smoothly from start to finish.

Contents

List of Tables

List of Figures

List of Boxes

List of Acronyms

AI	Artificial Intelligence
AMD	Asian Mega-Deltas
AR4D	Agricultural Research for Development
BT	Breeding for Tomorrow
CoP	Community of Practice
CRP	CGIAR Research Program
DQA	Data Quality Assurance
EA	Evaluability Assessment
EMT	Executive Management Team
EoI	End of Initiative
F2R CWANA	Fragility to Resilience in Central and West Asia and North Africa
FP	Flagships
GENDER	Generating Evidence and New Directions for Equitable Results
GI	Genetic Innovation
IA	Impact Assessment
IAES	CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Services
IDO	Intermediate Development Outcomes
iPSR	Innovation Packages and Scaling Readiness
ISDC	Independent Science for Development Council
M&E	Monitoring and Evaluation
MARLO	Managing Agricultural Research for Learning and Outcomes
MEL	Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
MELIA	Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessment
MR	Management Response
NARES	National Agricultural Research and Extension System
PMEL	Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning
PPU	CGIAR Portfolio Performance Unit
PRMF	Performance and Results Management Framework
OST	Online Submission Tool
QA	Quality Assurance
RAFS	Resilient Agri-Food Systems
RBM	Results-Based Management
RII	Regional Integrating Initiative
R4D	Research for Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
SIMEC	Strategic Impact, Monitoring and Evaluation Committee
SLO	System-Level Outcomes
SMART	Specific, Measurable, Accurate, Relevant, and Time-bound
SO	System Office
SP	Science Program
ST	Systems Transformation
TAFSSA	Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia
ToC	Theory of Change
ToR	Terms of Reference
TRA	Technical Reporting Arrangement
WCA	West and Central African Food Systems Transformation
WP	Work Package

Executive Summary

The continuum of Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Impact Assessment (MELIA) is essential to the effective delivery of CGIAR's Research Portfolio. To support the ambitions of the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy and the CGIAR Performance and Results Management Framework 2022-30 (PRMF), the MELIA framework must be agile, evidence-based, and capable of generating real-time insights that inform strategic decision-making and reinforce CGIAR's credibility with stakeholders. It plays a critical role in ensuring that interventions are assessed against their theories of change (ToCs), enabling clear reporting outcomes, and continuous learning. This approach is anchored in the CGIAR-wide Evaluation Framework and Policy (2022) which define the criteria and principles for learning, steering and accountability. 'Evaluability' and 'measurability' are further covered in the Evaluability Assessment Guidelines (2022), to ensure that CGIAR's work remains results-focused, transparent, and impact-driven.

To support the implementation of CGIAR's 2025-30 Portfolio, this learning product presents MELIA-related findings and recommendations drawn from evaluation of previous CGIAR research portfolios. This learning product draws on evaluative insights from CGIAR Research Programs (CRPs) and Science Groups (SGs), including 11 studies produced by the Evaluation Function of CGIAR's Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES), and by the Portfolio Performance Unit (PPU) between 2021-24 (see Table 1). It takes stock of key lessons, prioritize and highlight the evidence behind 30+ MELIA-related recommendations to support the inception phase of the new 2025-30 Portfolio. This summary learning document lays the foundation for the 2025 Evaluability Assessments (EAs) of the 13 Science Programs and Accelerators (ToRs; System Council endorsed 2025-27 Workplan for CGIAR's IAES (SC/M21/DP5) and supports the design and rollout of the updated MELIA framework.

For ease of reference, this document is organized around four MELIA-related themes: ToCs; Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL); Indicators and Reporting; and Impact Assessments (IAs). The status of Management Responses (MRs) for ten studies commissioned by the System Council are presented in Annex 3, from the MR Actions Tracker.

Table 1. Evaluative studies in the scope of learning product

1.	1-3 Three SG Evaluations: Genetic Innovation. Report (2024); Annexes; MR + Resilient Agri-food Systems. Report (2024); Annexes; MR + System Transformation. Report (2024); Annexes; MR
4.	Evaluability Assessment Review of Four Regional Integrated Initiatives. Synthesis (2024); MR
5.	Genebank Platform Evaluation Report (2024); Annexes; CGIAR MR; Crop Trust MR
6.	Generating Evidence and New Directions for Equitable Results (GENDER) Platform Evaluation. Report (2023); Annexes; MR
7.	Study of the PRMS Project Management Approaches and Fit-for-Purpose Information Products. Advisory Report (2023)
8.	Evaluation of CGIAR Excellence in Breeding Platform Report (2022); Annexes; MR
9.	Evaluation of CGIAR Platform for Big Data in Agriculture. Report (2021); Annexes; MR
10.	Synthesis of Learning from a Decade of CRPs. Report (2021); Annexes; MR
11.	Assessment of CGIAR Contributions to the 2022 Aspirational System Level Outcome Targets Report (2023)[1]

What We Learned and Priority Actions

Evidence supporting the recommendations is organized according to the four MELIA-related themes. The full **Summary of MELIA: Knowledge Product,** including annexes[2] provides a detailed mapping of all evaluative recommendations.

Theory of Change

ToCs are fundamental to CGIAR's MELIA approach and its 2030 Research Strategy. They serve as a

[1] This study was commissioned by CGIAR's PPU and therefore was not subject to a MR; it was included in this summary knowledge product given its relevance and wide potential for learning.

[2] Available upon request from IAES.

critical tool to framing MELIA, guiding planning and implementation, and supporting adaptive management. By clarifying causal pathways and underlying assumptions, ToCs strengthen both project design and evaluation processes. ToCs are embedded in CGIAR's core policies and frameworks, including the CGIAR Performance and Results Management Framework (PRMF), the CGIAR-wide Evaluation Framework and Policy, and the EA Guidelines (2022).

While ToCs were generally found to be relevant in design, the studies identified several shortcomings in their development, implementation and use across CGIAR. Common issues included the absence of clear impact pathway narratives and a comprehensive set of evidence-based assumptions—often linked to confusion around MEL terminology. In complex programs involving multiple projects, there was a lack of feedback loops and insufficient coordination towards broader programmatic goals. The studies also highlighted limited capacity to effectively interpret, apply, and report against ToCs, which hindered their use as a tool for planning, adaptive management, learning and reporting. Nevertheless, important progress was made, including CGIAR's efforts to standardize ToC concepts and terminology, develop tools and guidance, and integrate ToCs into annual reporting and evaluation processes. However, the evaluative studies identified areas for improvement. Seven (out of 11) studies put forward a total of eight ToC-related recommendations. In summary:

> **CGIAR should continue to strengthen its capacity to develop, refine, and continuously apply ToCs to guide MEL systems, engage MEL professionals, and ensure that research effectively contributes to development outcomes.**

Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning System

A comprehensive MEL system is vital for tracking progress toward outputs, outcomes, and impacts while guiding organizations in achieving their strategic goals. Such a system should strengthen the ToC by clearly articulating the context, rationale, and causal logic, thereby informing the development of key MEL components—including indicators, monitoring plans, and evaluation strategies. Toward the development of 2030 Research Strategy and the PRMF, the 2021 Synthesis of Learning from a Decade of CGIAR Research Programs identified significant gaps in assessing outcome measures during the CRP era. These included insufficient follow-up on capacity development, shifts in practice, policy, and institutions, as well as limited measurement of both direct and indirect benefits within CGIAR's sphere of influence. These shortcomings stemmed from an inadequate MEL system, hampering CGIAR's ability to measure CRP contributions to development goals. Subsequent studies revealed that CGIAR's MEL systems face several significant challenges, including limited integration, a lack of real-time monitoring, and inadequate resource allocation. These weaknesses impede effective decision-making and the ability to track cumulative progress across initiatives.

Additionally, the CGIAR MEL community has faced persistent resource constraints, including limited specialized staff and insufficient budgets, which have undermined the overall effectiveness of the system. A lack of emphasis on capturing and applying lessons learned has further limited opportunities for continuous improvement. CGIAR's MEL systems have often been reactive, with limited real-time monitoring capabilities—resulting in challenges such as missing baseline data, incomplete indicator sets, and misaligned frameworks that impede effective measurement, particularly at the outcome and impact levels.

> **CGIAR should strengthen its MEL framework, build the capacity of its MEL community, and improve the integration of learning and reflection processes to enhance the effectiveness and impact of its monitoring and evaluation efforts.**

Indicators and Reporting

Agricultural research for development (AR4D) targets need to closely align with CGIAR's strategic goals, with indicators clearly linked to the corresponding ToCs, especially nested ToCs. This alignment is essential for assessing the effectiveness of investments and driving continuous improvement toward development outcomes.

CGIAR collects data across portfolio-level output, outcome, and impact indicators, while project—and program-level indicators are tailored to reflect their specific ToCs. However, findings were mixed regarding the use of specific, measurable, achievable, relevant, and time-bound (SMART) indicators to support both internal monitoring and impact assessments.

CGIAR faces several challenges related to indicators. Poorly defined or overly numerous indicators weaken results frameworks, while inefficiencies and fragmented data within reporting systems and databases complicate accurate and timely reporting. The key message from the 11 evaluative studies is clear: data inconsistency and underreporting of rigorously evidenced outcomes remain significant issues. To enhance effectiveness, enable real-time monitoring, and improve data integration across CGIAR Initiatives, a more streamlined and standardized approach to indicators is needed, along with better alignment of reporting to meet stakeholder needs. Both 2023 studies on System Level Outcome (SLO) and the Performance and Results Management System (PRMS) underscored limited clarity and governance in CGIAR's quality assurance (QA) processes. In response, CGIAR has begun strengthening its QA system by improving focus and robustness, streamlining QA procedures, and increasing consistency and capacity across the system. To this end, since 2021, eight of the 11 evaluative studies put forward a total of 21 recommendations—14 related to indicators and seven focused on reporting. The recommendations focused on:

> **The need to develop SMART, inclusive and realistic indicators that correspond to CGIAR's comparative advantage. CGIAR must further clarify and streamline its reporting modalities in terms of both funding and results.**

Impact Assessments

IAs evaluate the causal effects of research on economic, social, and environmental outcomes. In CGIAR, these assessments are often conducted alongside ongoing interventions, though they can also take place years after an intervention has concluded. While the CGIAR Evaluation Framework primarily focuses on process and performance evaluations, IAs play a vital role within the broader MEL continuum. They complement other evaluation efforts by using shared impact indicators, data collection methods, and analytical approaches. Challenges for future IAs include securing adequate resources, accessing reliable data, and ensuring the necessary expertise. Additional complexities arise from measurement difficulties, and the misalignment between research timelines and longer timescales needed to observe and attribute impact. While IAs can be resource-intensive and require specialized skills and long-term planning, they are vital for understanding the effectiveness of interventions. Importantly, IAs should complement rather than replace process and performance evaluations within CGIAR's broader MELIA approach.

Strategic planning is essential to effectively balance the purpose, scope, and costs of IAs. Lessons from studies such as the SLO study and EA Review of Four Regional Integrated Initiatives (RIIs) emphasize the importance of setting ambitious yet measurable impact targets that align with CGIAR's strategic goals and its commitments to Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Key recommendations highlight the need to:

> **Review impact indicators and data collected to determine what can be used in the continuum of MELIA, including impact assessments. On the pathway to impacts, short- and long-term outcomes remain key to measure.**

Conclusion

CGIAR continues to strengthen its MELIA system, with ToCs now widely applied across the Research Portfolio, more robust MELIA structures and improved QA processes. Nevertheless, the 2024 evaluative studies point to a range of persistent challenges. These include persistent underinvestment in MELIA planning and systems, limited MELIA capacity across the system, confusion around MELIA terminology, and the limited application of ToCs beyond the initial design phase of Initiatives or Programs. A comprehensive and integrated approach to MELIA is essential for CGIAR to effectively and efficiently deliver its Research Portfolio and track progress toward achieving development outcomes.

1 Background

CGIAR's Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning, and Impact Assessment (MELIA) underpins the effective measurement and delivery of its Research Portfolio, which seeks to transform food systems, address climate challenges, and safeguard environmental resources. To meet the needs of both internal and external stakeholders—and to remain aligned with CGIAR's evolving Portfolio—MELIA must be fit-for-purpose, agile and grounded in evidence of what works and what does not. The MELIA approach is designed to generate high-quality data and evidence, while providing real-time insights to support strategic decision-making. By achieving these objectives, MELIA enhances CGIAR's credibility with funders and partners and enables a clearer understanding of its overall impact. The delivery of CGIAR's Portfolio is guided by the CGIAR 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy (along with its 2022-24 Investment Prospectus and companion document). This Strategy is aligned with CGIAR's five Impact Areas and to the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).[3] It is supported by the Performance and Results Management Framework 2022-30 (PRMF) which defines three levels of result—outputs, outcomes, and impacts (see Box 1), and maps them to the spheres of control, influence and interest (see Figure 1).[4] To inform MELIA design and reporting requirements, the PRMF provides an overarching conceptual framework that is translated into a specific results architecture for the Science Group (SG) Portfolio. Within this structure, CGIAR Initiatives intended to systematically measure, and be accountable for, their outputs and outcomes to demonstrate progress against theories of change (ToCs), at Initiative and work package (WP) levels.

Box 1. CGIAR result types

Outputs: Knowledge, technical or institutional advancement produced by CGIAR research, engagement and/or capacity development activities. Examples of outputs include new research methods, policy analyses, gene maps, new crop varieties and breeds, or other research products. Outputs are generated by Initiatives and non-pooled projects.

Outcomes: A change in knowledge, skills, attitudes, and/or relationships, which manifests as a change in output users' behavior, to which a combination of research outputs and related activities such as partnerships have contributed. Outcomes can occur within the lifespan of an Initiative/project, culminating in end-of-Initiative outcomes, as well further into the future, in which case the outcome is housed at Action Area level.

Impacts: A durable change in the condition of people and their environment brought about by a chain of events or change in how a system functions and to which research, innovations, and related activities have contributed.

Source: CGIAR MELIA Glossary, 11/2021

The PRMF includes a set of indicator categories (Box 1),[5] updated on a three-year cycle, that enables the aggregation of results and indicators reported by individual Initiatives. In addition, the PRMF outlines the processes, systems, and measures used to manage CGIAR's performance and results. These encompass

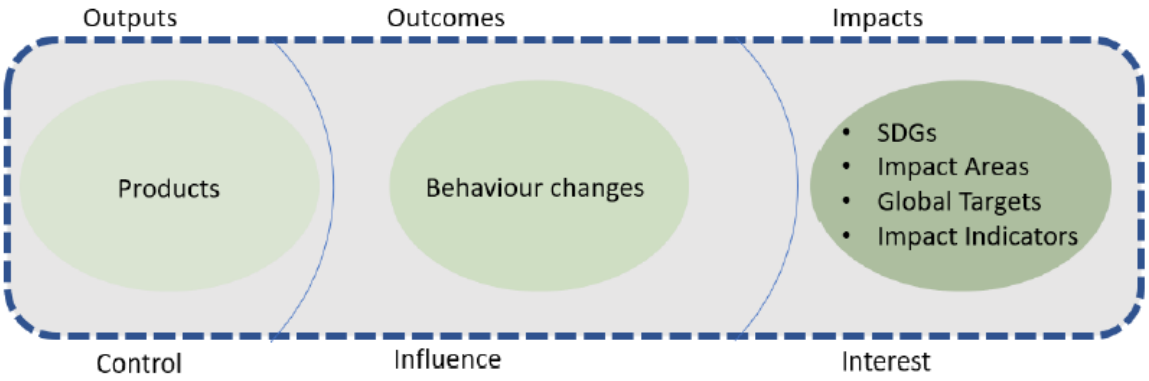
[3] As outlined in the CGIAR Technical Reporting Arrangement 2022 (CGIAR-SIMEC, 2022d), the aim is to progressively incorporate non-pooled results and indicators into CGIAR common Results Framework.

[4] Technical Reporting Arrangement (TRA) (CGIAR-SIMEC, 2022d) "the sphere of control is our operational environment, and we have direct control over it. The sphere of influence is where interactions with other food, land, and water systems participants occur, and we exert direct influence over it. The sphere of interest houses social, economic, and environmental status and trends and we exert indirect influence over it via partners."

[5] Indicator categories: at *outcome* level-innovation use, capacity change, policy change; at *output* level-knowledge products, innovation development and capacity sharing for development. See full list of CGIAR indicators in Annex 2.

planning, monitoring, and reporting, forming a comprehensive system for measurement, learning, and accountability across CGIAR's performance and outcomes.

Figure 1. CGIAR's Results Framework aligns outputs, outcomes and impacts to the spheres of control, influence and interest, the CGIAR technical reporting arrangement 2022



Box 2. Ways the PRMF supports CGIAR's impact pathways

- Providing accurate and ready access to CGIAR results to enable uptake by partners and research users.
- Generating knowledge on CGIAR's contributions to development, allowing partners and CGIAR to co-define clear roles for CGIAR within specific innovation systems and strategic partnerships.
- Providing evidence to inform decisions on impact-oriented investment in research and innovation.
- Building capacity to effectively manage performance.

Source: CGIAR PRMF 2022-30, Approved 12/2020

The Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES), operating under a mandate defined by its Terms of Reference (ToRs), and approved by the System Council (SC), conducts independent evaluations to promote accountability, inform decision-making, and enhance the outcomes of the CGIAR's agricultural research. The 2022 CGIAR-wide Evaluation Framework and revised Evaluation Policy, endorsed by the CGIAR System Board and approved by the SC, provide the guidance for process and performance evaluations in CGIAR. The Evaluation Framework (EF) sets the overarching approach, including 15 mandatory principles and standards that establish the parameters for independent, robust, utilization-focused evaluations. These principles ensure that evaluations support both accountability and learning and are designed to inform strategic decisions. The Evaluation Policy complements EF by detailing the evaluation criteria, the interplay between different types of evaluation and the respective roles, and responsibilities within CGIAR's evaluation ecosystem.

The Evaluation Policy positions CGIAR's evaluation practice within the broader EF, aligning it with CGIAR's internal governance and management frameworks, as well as with relevant global frameworks and international industry evaluation standards. The EF, under IAES, carries out knowledge management and communication activities to disseminate actionable lessons and recommendations from evaluations, supporting improved programming and operational effectiveness. In line with the Evaluation Policy, the EF prioritizes the use of evaluations, facilitates the preparation of Management Responses (MRs) to independent evaluations, and coordinates follow-up on the implementation of agreed actions. A MR is mandatory for all independent evaluations commissioned by the SC through the IAES EF, including:

- Independent evaluations commissioned by the SC through IAES's Evaluation Function; and,
- Independent (or decentralized) evaluations commissioned by CGIAR entities and management.

At the time of developing this learning product, the MR System was undergoing a review as per the ToRs, endorsed by the SC (the final report is available here).

2 Purpose, Method, and Scope

This report presents MELIA-related findings and recommendations from 11 evaluative studies conducted by the Evaluation Function of CGIAR's IAES, along with one additional study from the Portfolio Performance Unit (PPU) of CGIAR. Aiming at supporting the implementation of CGIAR's 2025-30 Research Portfolio, the learning product summarizes the evidence underpinning 36 MELIA-related recommendations (list in Annex 3) drawn from these 11 studies, with the goal of enhancing the overall utility and effectiveness of MELIA-related activities.[6] Since 2021, a MR has been mandatory for all evaluations commissioned by the SC through the IAES EF. The implementation of these MRs is tracked in the Evaluation & MR Actions Tracker. Table 2 provides links to the MRs for the ten evaluative studies commissioned by the SC via IAES. The System-Level Outcomes (SLO) Study (hereafter referred to as the 2023 SLO Study) conducted by CGIAR's PPU was not subject to this requirement.

Table 2. Evaluative studies and evaluations 2021-24

No.	Title	Number of MELIA-related recommendations
1	CGIAR SG Evaluations: Genetic Innovation. Report (2024); Annexes; MR	1 (out of 9)
2	CGIAR SG Evaluations: Resilient Agri-food Systems. Report (2024); Annexes; MR	4 (out of 15)
3	CGIAR SG Evaluations: System Transformation. Report (2024); Annexes; MR	1 (out of 11)
4	Evaluability Assessment Review of Four Regional Integrated Initiatives. Synthesis (2024); MR	10 (out of 19)
5	CGIAR Genebank Platform Evaluation. Report (2024); Annexes; CGIAR MR; Crop Trust MR	1 (out of 11)
6	Generating Evidence and New Directions for Equitable Results (GENDER) Platform Evaluation. Report (2023); Annexes; MR	2 (out of 11)
7	Study of the Performance and Results Management System Project Management Approaches and Fit-for-Purpose Information Products. Advisory Report (2023), MR embedded in the report	3 (out of 10)
8	Assessment of CGIAR Contributions to the 2022 Aspirational SLO Targets Report (2023)[7]	5 (out of 5)
9	Evaluation of CGIAR Excellence in Breeding Platform Report (2022); Annexes; MR	1 (out of 9)
10	Evaluation of CGIAR Platform for Big Data in Agriculture. Report (2021); Annexes; MR	2 (out of 10)
11	Synthesis of Learning from a Decade of CGIAR Research Programs. Report (2021); Annexes; MR	6 (out of 41)
	Total MELIA related recommendations	**36 (out of 151)**

[7] This study was commissioned by CGIAR's PPU and therefore was not subject to a MR; it was included in this summary knowledge product given its relevance and wide potential for learning.

In four of the 11 evaluative studies, explicit evaluation questions focused on MELIA were included (see Table 3). In the remaining cases, relevant MELIA-related data were collected through portfolio analyses of monitoring and qualitative data. As the Evaluability Assessment (EA) Review of Four Regional Integrated Initiatives (RIIs) and the Performance and Results Management System (PRMS) Study (hereafter referred to as the 2023 PRMS Study) were specifically designed to assess MELIA systems, their findings and recommendations feature more prominently throughout this report.

Table 3. MELIA-specific evaluation questions in reviewed reports

No.	Evaluation report	MELIA-specific evaluation questions
2	Evaluation of the Resilient Agri-food Systems SG	– To what extent were the objectives and strategies of the SG articulated in terms of a solid ToC and built on CGIAR comparative advantage across the system? (Annex, p. 16)
3	Evaluation of the Systems Transformation SG	– How well aligned were the SG objectives, scope of Initiatives, and activities? (Annex, p. 19) – What was the evidence-base behind assumptions underlying the impact pathways? How valid were they considering internal and external contextual factors? (Annex, p. 19) – How did the experience of the SG so far correspond to the ToC? Has the ToC been useful in guiding MRs and adaptations? Why or why not? (Annex, p. 20)
9	Evaluation of CGIAR Excellence in Breeding Platform	– How has the CGIAR Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) and International Maize and Wheat Improvement Center (CIMMYT) system facilitated or inhibited achievement of results? (Inception Report, p. 44) – What mechanisms best facilitated effective learning within the Platform, with other platforms, CRPs and external partners community of practice (CoP)? (Inception Report, p. 44)
10	Evaluation of CGIAR Platform for Big Data in Agriculture	– Has the Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning (MEL) system facilitated achievement? (Inception Report, p. 37)

Across the 11 reports, four MELIA-related themes were identified and used to structure this report: **1) ToCs; 2) MEL; 3) Indicators and Reporting; and 4) Impact Assessments (IAs).** The findings, recommendations, and lessons learned are organized under these four themes, with summary analyses and comparative discussions drawn from across the reports. Each thematic section begins with an introduction outlining the background, relevant policy context, and the theme's role within CGIAR's overall MELIA approach. This is followed by a synthesis of findings across sub-sections within the theme and concludes with a summary paragraph highlighting key insights and implications.

3 Findings by MELIA-Related Themes

3.1 Theory of Change

Summary

ToCs are central to CGIAR's MELIA approach and 2030 Research Strategy, guiding planning, implementation, and adaptive management. Integrated into key frameworks such as the PRMF, Evaluation

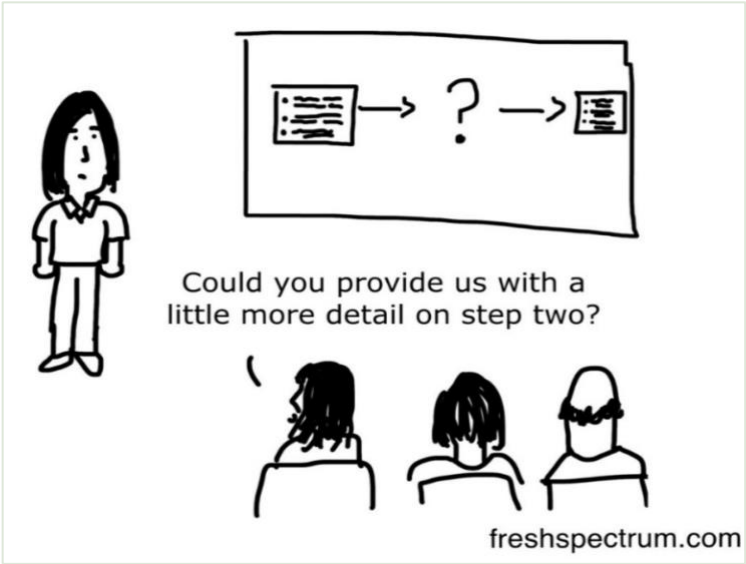
Framework, and EA Guidelines, ToCs clarify causal pathways and assumptions. While generally relevant in design, evaluations found gaps in their development and use—particularly unclear impact pathways, weak assumptions, and limited coordination across complex programs. Confusion over MEL terminology and inadequate capacity for interpreting and applying ToCs hindered their effectiveness. Despite progress in standardizing tools and guidance, further improvements are needed. Seven of 11 studies made eight ToC-related recommendations.

Robust and detailed ToCs form the foundation of the MELIA framework in CGIAR. They guide planning and implementation, support MEL, and inform adaptive management. By clearly outlining causal pathways from activities to expected impacts and identifying the underlying assumptions, ToCs play a dual role in both project design and implementation. They serve as essential tools for monitoring progress, informing course corrections, and guiding future strategy development.

Since 2011, the development and use of ToCs have become increasingly common across CGIAR. ToCs are now integrated into CGIAR's evaluation policies and processes in several key ways. The PRMS[8] features a digital board grounded in ToC principles, with an embedded ToC module. The PRMS also emphasizes the importance of theory-based approaches for both evaluation and performance management, in line with the CGIAR-wide Evaluation Framework and Policy (2022). Additionally, ToC analysis is embedded into the EA Guidelines (2022), which aim to uphold the evaluability standards set out in the Evaluation Framework and strengthen the evaluability of the CGIAR Portfolio. An historical overview of ToCs development and use within CGIAR is provided in Annex 1.

3.1.1 Design

Finding 1: While the design of the ToCs was generally found to be relevant, they often lacked clarity in articulating impact pathways and the underlying assumptions, particularly for more complex interventions. This created several challenges for stakeholders, including blurred boundaries between research and development, insufficient clarity on the contributions of individual centers to overall outcomes, and ambiguity regarding responsibility for the scaling activities necessary to achieve the outcomes envisioned in the ToC.



The Resilient Agrifood Systems (RAFS) SG Evaluation found the rationale behind the SG to be "relevant to global concerns" and "coherent with CGIAR comparative advantage in research for development." However, it stressed the need to strengthen the RAFS SG ToC by clearly identifying indicators, defining a coherent impact pathway, and providing "a timeline for success supported by a companion narrative document". The evaluation recommended that the ToC diagram be accompanied by a detailed narrative explaining the impact pathways, underlying hypotheses and assumptions, internal and external contextual factors influencing impact, the consultation process used in ToC development, the expected timeframe for achieving results, and the research evidence supporting the intervention logic. Some stakeholders noted

[8] Assessed in 2022: https://iaes.cgiar.org/evaluation/publications/advisory-report-study-performance-results-management-system-prms-project.

that the Initiatives' rationale often failed to clearly delineate the boundary between research and development. As a result, scientists were expected to work with ToCs that projected outcomes for vulnerable populations, without a clear understanding of who was responsible for achieving those development-oriented results.

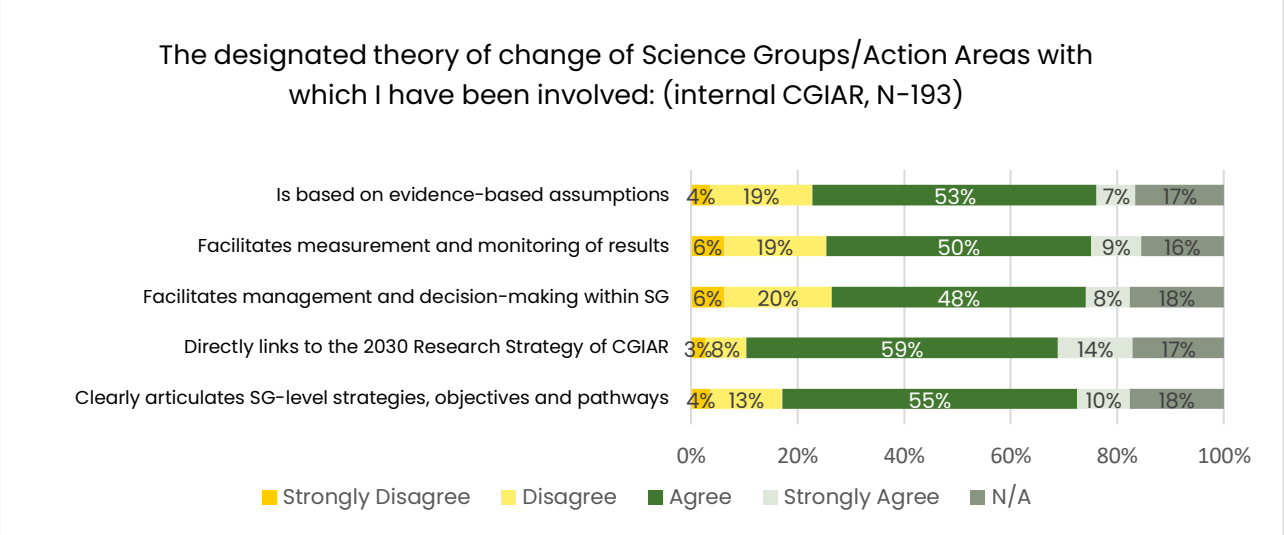
The 2024 EA Synthesis of four RIIs (hereafter referred to as the 2024 EA Synthesis) reiterated the need for further development of ToCs as part of an overall monitoring and evaluation (M&E) Framework. Strengthening the ToC narrative would enable a more robust analysis and better support MEL activities, offering a level of depth beyond what is typically included in funding proposals. The synthesis found inconsistencies in how the four RIIs ToCs articulated the uptake of research results by partners, particularly in relation to how new knowledge influences behavior change, and informs decision-making in complex political contexts.

A ToC analysis conducted as part of the Genetic Innovation (GI) SG Evaluation revealed that critical causal assumptions—such as how CGIAR and National Agricultural Research and Extension System (NARES) crop breeding programs would use research outputs to achieve early outcomes—were not sufficiently articulated or explored, either at the outset or during subsequent revisions. Similarly, the 2024 EA Synthesis observed that while assumptions were identified, they lacked in-depth analysis, especially those concerning human behavior, adoption dynamics, and socio-economic realities.

Although some WPs provided clear descriptions of expected changes, the ToCs for the four RIIs did not clearly explain how the WPs interacted to contribute to RII-level outcomes, further highlighting the need for greater coherence in ToC design and implementation.

Notably, results from the SG Evaluation online survey revealed mixed perceptions regarding the quality and utility of ToCs within CGIAR. While a majority of respondents (73%) reported a clear linkage between their ToCs and the CGIAR 2030 Research Strategy, fewer (60%) claimed that their ToCs were based on evidence-based assumptions. Only 56% agreed that the ToC facilitates effective management and decision-making within the SG, and a similar number (59%) viewed ToC's as useful tools for measuring and monitoring of results (see Figure 2).

Figure 2. SG ToCs—perceptions of CGIAR respondents



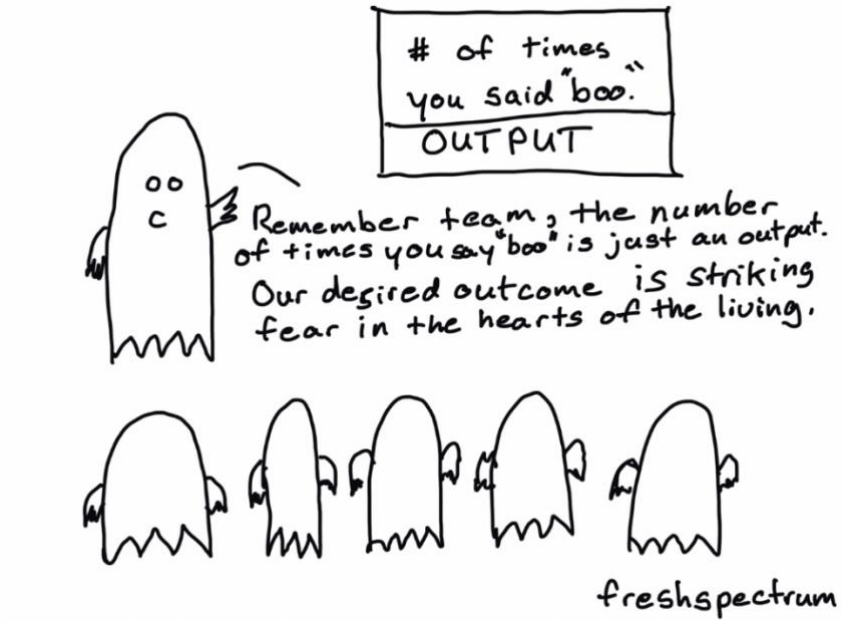
Source: IAES SG Evaluation Survey, 2024

Finding 2: Confusion around the use of MEL terminology, specifically the interpretation and application of key terms such as outputs, outcomes and impact, contributed to poorly constructed ToCs. This lack of clarity hindered the evaluability of the CGIAR Portfolio and limited the ability to aggregate and analyze results across interventions.

The 2024 EA Synthesis highlighted the need for more consistent use of MEL terminology across CGIAR. This concern was echoed in the 2024 evaluation of the RAFS SG, which found persistent confusion in the formulation of outcomes—particularly in distinguishing between what falls within an Initiatives' sphere of influence, what is CGIAR's direct responsibility, and what is expected of external partners. Despite the availability of CGIAR ToC Guidance and MELIA Glossary (2021) with definitions for key terms, inconsistencies in how teams defined outputs, outcomes, impact and assumptions were evident.

Multiple studies noted ongoing confusion in defining outputs, outcomes and impacts[9]. As Belcher et al. (2024)[10], observed the "ambiguous use of terms and concepts led to incoherence and incomparability within and between ToCs (and the related research strategies and plans)" which "explains some of the inconsistencies and weaknesses observed in the current set of ToCs: poor formulation of outputs; poor definition of outcomes; and weak assumptions".

The 2024 EA Synthesis also recommended a more outcome-oriented formulation of objectives, roles, and expected results to increase clarity around the responsibilities of different stakeholders. It noted that the definition of the evaluand in the ToCs was often ambiguous, complicating efforts to assess their effectiveness. In many cases, the scope of the intervention was broader than what was reflected in the ToC frameworks. Similarly, the 2023 PRMS Study identified a lack of clear identification and engagement of target users during the project's design phase, further limiting the relevance and usability of project outputs.



3.1.2 Implementation

Finding 3: In complex programs involving multiple Initiatives—each engaging several centers—there was clarity at center level regarding individual pathways for change. However, in practice, the interaction among centers within the broader intervention and their collective contribution to higher-level outcomes were unclear. Feedback loops and coordination mechanisms among Initiatives were often insufficient in pursuit of higher programmatic goals.

[9] CGIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES). (2024). Systems Transformation Science Group: Evaluation Report, and Belcher, B. M.; Bonaiuti, E.; Thiele, G. 2024. Applying Theory of Change in research program planning: Lessons from CGIAR. Environmental Science & Policy.

[10] See: Applying ToC in research program planning: Lessons from CGIAR.

The 2024 GI SG Evaluation noted that while Initiative-level ToCs and pathways were established, they focused largely on individual deliverables, with limited attention to how Initiatives interconnected. This was partly due to time constraints during the development of the ToCs, which hindered a holistic understanding of interlinkages. The 2024 RAFS SG Evaluation, further attributed this gap to the fragmentation of the 2022-24 Portfolio into numerous Initiatives, including RIIs, with an overemphasis on individual Initiatives, rather than programmatic coherence and research integration. "Success was often measured by comparing Initiatives against each other, rather than focusing on how they contribute to the larger research objectives. This approach was not conducive to a successful launch of the entire Portfolio" (Interviewee).[11]

The ToC brought scientists together, according to the Systems Transformation (ST) SG Evaluation. It deepened their understanding of complexity and encouraged collaboration, while also revealing key limitations, such as evidence gaps and weak assumptions. One assumption in the ST SG ToC was that national and international partners would adopt and scale CGIAR's outputs to drive behavior change outputs and achieve SDG-level impacts. However, several CGIAR stakeholders viewed this as overly ambitious and unrealistic. They pointed to the independent governance of CGIAR centers, different administrative rules, and misaligned leadership incentives as barriers to cooperation and an enabling environment.

Finding 4: Overall, there was limited capacity for effective ToC interpretation, application, and results reporting.

The 2023 PRMS Study identified a key challenge: many users lacked the understanding to effectively interpret and apply ToC, limiting the quality of monitoring and results reporting. The MR emphasized the value of innovative capacity-building aligned with PRMF to foster a culture of learning and adaptation, integrating ToC into results reporting via PRMS has already improved understanding, and the MR recommended further expanding this linkage. Successful Initiatives—such as the Innovation and Scaling course, which trained over 1,300 participants in English, French, and Spanish by end-2022—offer strong models. Tools such as the CGIAR Results Dashboard Navigation Guide and ongoing capacity-building efforts continue to enhance user experience and system optimization.

There are ongoing learning and optimization processes, including capacity-building and potential human resource increases based on lessons learned. More clarity is needed on how the information gathered from system usage and data quality analytics will be incorporated and utilized, and a timeline with associated resources for these efforts should be confirmed.

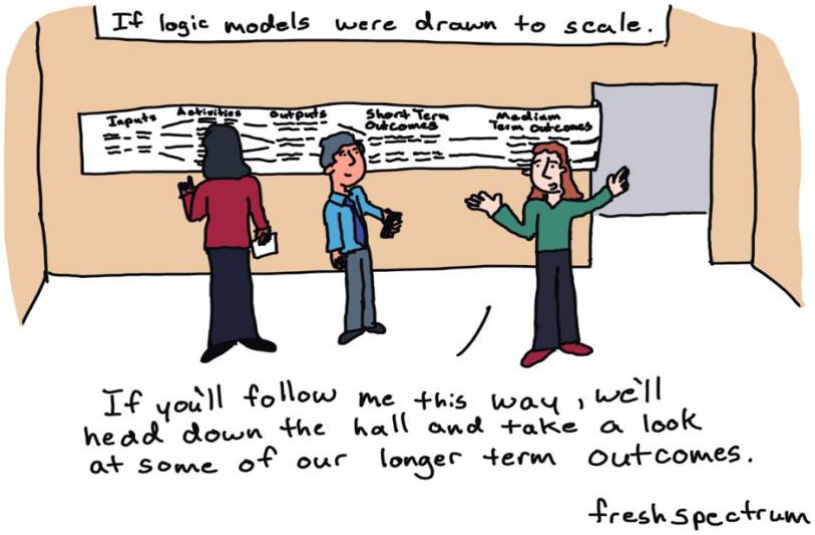
Finding 5: There was insufficient use of ToCs for planning and reporting purposes. This included a lack of adjustment based on funds secured, and a lack of use in management decisions and for learning.

The 2024 ST SG Evaluation highlighted limitations in the practical use of ToCs for planning and reporting. While updates to ToCs were done, the evaluation noted frequent adjustments to the results and targets in response to funding uncertainties, making it challenging to assess effectiveness. Several internal respondents suggested that ToCs were used more for tracking progress, rather for guiding adaptive management and learning.

The 2024 ST SG Evaluation review of annual reports and interviewees indicated that the low level of approved budget and funding-related uncertainties were a constraint in 2022 and 2023. A vast majority of Initiatives showed strong progress in meeting the End of Initiative (EoI) outcomes and progress against the Initiative-level ToC as per self-reporting of results provided in annual technical reports. However, various limitations and weaknesses related to planning, monitoring and reporting also made it challenging to draw concrete conclusions on the effectiveness of SGs and Initiatives.

[11] CGIAR IAES. (2024). RAFS SG: Evaluation Report, p. 18.

The 2024 EA Synthesis found that the limited successes to adjust the logical frameworks and ToCs in response to reduced funding raised concerns about the feasibility of achieving RII objectives, putting into question the overall value of evaluating at RII level. The 2023 PRMS Study identified implementation challenges such as inadequate planning, insufficient user engagement, and data limitations, which restricted the ToC's adaptability and effectiveness.



3.1.3 ToC-Conclusion

Recognizing that ToCs are a vital element of MELIA-related approaches, CGIAR's has mainstreamed development and use of ToCs since 2011. ToCs are linked to CGIAR's 2030 Research and Innovation Strategy and integrated into CGIAR's evaluation policies and processes. Nevertheless, a review of the 11 evaluative studies found that challenges still exist. ToCs are not always accompanied by a clear narrative that sufficiently explains impact pathways particularly in terms of uptake of research results by partners. Moreover, the underlying assumptions are not based on clear evidence. While ToCs are readily used for planning and design purposes at Initiative and programmatic levels, their use for adaptive management, learning and reporting purposes has been minimal.

3.2 Framing Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

Summary

A robust MEL system is essential for tracking outputs, outcomes, and impacts, and for guiding CGIAR toward its strategic goals. It should reinforce ToCs by clarifying context, rationale, and causal logic to inform indicators, monitoring plans, and evaluations. The 2021 Synthesis identified major gaps in outcome measurement during the CGIAR Research Program (CRP) era, including limited follow-up on capacity development and indirect benefits. Ongoing challenges include poor system integration, lack of real-time monitoring, and under-resourced MEL teams. Inadequate learning capture and reactive approaches further weaken effectiveness. Strengthening MEL frameworks, resourcing MEL professionals, and embedding learning processes are key to improving impact and accountability.

A robust ToC with associated analyses, per the previous section, underpins a comprehensive MEL(IA) system. A comprehensive and in-depth ToC analysis would serve in developing other parts of the MEL system, including indicators, reporting, monitoring plans, evaluation plans, and learning plans.

The Synthesis of Learning from a Decade of CRPs (hereafter referred to as the 2021 Synthesis) found an inadequate assessment of outcomes and impacts in the CRP era.[12] Despite the establishment of CRPs with a focus on development outcomes, there was a lack of follow-through in evaluating measures such as capacity development, policy changes, and direct benefits and indirect benefits in CGIAR's sphere of influence. This was in part due to a lack of appropriate MEL tools which hindered CGIAR's ability to assess how CRPs contributed to development objectives and to provide future recommendations. As indicated by the assessment of CGIAR Contributions to the 2022 Aspirational SLO Targets, CRPs with stronger MEL frameworks and evaluation cultures performed better in tracking progress towards the 2022 SLO targets.

3.2.1 M&E design

Finding 6: There were MEL systems that were internally misaligned, with incomplete indicators and unclear baselines, which limited understanding of the program logic and created confusion about MEL activities.

Along with the need for more complete and well-designed MEL systems, a more coherent approach was warranted. The 2024 EA Synthesis noted several critical issues regarding the MEL systems across the four RIIs. Firstly, MEL tools, such as results frameworks, are incomplete, with missing indicators and unclear baselines, hindering effective performance monitoring and assessment of intervention outcomes. For example, the Asian Mega-Deltas (AMD), Transforming Agrifood Systems in South Asia (TAFSSA) and West and Central African Food Systems Transformation (WCA) RII were building their baseline at country level in 2023, while activities were already underway, with a potential negative impact on the accuracy of the baseline obtained. Furthermore, the absence of a comprehensive MEL approach limits understanding of project logic, and confusion around the purpose of baseline and endline studies undermines investment in these resources. In some RIIs, notably Fragility to Resilience in Central and West Asia and North Africa (F2R-CWANA), a disconnect between research efforts and project management was evident, as the use of ToC and results frameworks for monitoring implementation was not aligned. The RIIs EA also highlighted the need for a nuanced stakeholder analysis to address weaknesses in the MEL system, such as limited understanding of diverse stakeholder agendas and insufficient attention to marginalized groups.[13]

The evaluation noted that the M&E design at RAFS SG level lacks a specific MEL system, despite having an M&E officer in the team. The Initiatives structured MELIA plans that outline results, indicators, baselines, target values, geographic scope, data sources, methods, and responsibilities for data collection. These plans support results-based management and effective monitoring, with both efficiency and effectiveness indicators to track progress and societal/behavioral changes. Despite these strengths, the evaluators found that many plans lacked baseline data, which hinders the ability to measure progress.

3.2.2 MEL Resources

Finding 7: While there were parts of an M&E system or framework developed for programs, they needed a better design to facilitate implementation of sound MEL practice, based on realistic budgeting and planning processes.

The 2024 RAFS SG Evaluation found that "adequate results architectures have accompanied the Initiatives and the new setup. Although these seem conducive to appropriate monitoring and evaluation, the MELIA plans were weakly implemented, and the evaluators grappled with accessing a comprehensive overview of cumulative values for output and outcome indicators. This prevented monitoring from being a tool

[12] "CRPs align the research of 15 research centers and their partners into efficient, coherent, multidisciplinary programs, and maximize the potential of collaborative research to address complex development problems." 6 February 2014. https://hdl.handle.net/10947/3048.

[13] From Toward Greater Impact: A CGIAR Engagement Framework for Partnerships & Advocacy. 2022. (https://storage.googleapis.com/cgiarorg/2022/03/CGIAR-Engagement-Framework-29-March-2022.pdf).

supporting result-based decisions and real time oversight."[14] Overall, the evaluation found the RAFS M&E system to be insufficiently integrated to support effective monitoring and learning.

Although the M&E system of the RAFS SG benefited from budget and dedicated resources, it mainly focused on feeding data into the PRMS and CGIAR Results Dashboard, fulfilling technical reporting requirements, and using inaccessible comprehensive data to track cumulative progress against targets. Although monitoring tools existed, there was no real-time system to track outputs and outcomes. As a result, the evaluators could not assess progress toward EoI outcomes, as technical reports often provided fragmented results without clear connections to the planned targets. Additionally, outputs and outcomes were typically entered into the Results Dashboard only at year-end, limiting real-time monitoring.

The 2024 EA Synthesis found M&E approaches developed as part of funding proposals, subsequently not fully developed as frameworks to effectively plan for, budget, and implement M&E activities. As a result, M&E plans were neither fully developed nor based on a realistic notion of feasibility against the budgets.

Finding 8: Overall, there was lack of investment in both MEL human resources and activities that were properly based on actual budgets.

The 2021 Synthesis found that cross-cutting issues, such as MELIA, became vulnerable with scarcity of W1/W2 funds. The 2023 SLO Study identified a low and uncertain discretionary budget and a lack of staff with specialized M&E skills as factors that inhibited a CRP's ability to monitor and report progress toward the 2022 SLO targets.

These findings align with the 2023 PRMS Study. While the CGIAR's Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Community of Practice (MEL CoP) could play a crucial role in ensuring the quality of PRMS products, particularly for evaluation readiness, the membership decreased due to restructuring in 2022. Despite this, there were attempts to realign the MEL CoP's scope to include performance and results management. Notable progress included the assignment of MEL focal points in some CGIAR units, which demonstrates a commitment to strengthening the integration of MEL within the PRMS products. These assignments were not equivalent to full-time dedicated roles. The study also pointed to insufficient attention to aligning resource support for MEL and tracking previous evaluative findings, which impacted the effectiveness of MEL across CGIAR Initiatives.

Strengthening MEL systems requires a coherent and focused MEL community across CGIAR. The 2023 PRMS study highlighted the importance of standardized data entry and quality assurance (QA) processes to improve the evaluability of the portfolio and boost stakeholder's confidence in PRMS outputs. A comprehensive data QA framework with clearly assigned responsibilities along the data pipeline is essential for enhancing data quality and MEL effectiveness. Enhancing the MEL system across CGIAR also requires sufficient resources to build user capacity in utilizing PRMS modules effectively. The 2023 PRMS study called for innovative and efficient capacity building materials to accelerate user learning, particularly on key modules such as Online Submission Tool (OST), ToC and Innovation Packages and Scaling Readiness (iPSR), an approach developed by CGIAR to maximize the impact of promising agricultural solutions. The MR to recommendations from the 2023 PRMS study highlighted the role of capacity building for strong MEL framework, particularly by expanding the linkage between ToC and results reporting within PRMS.

The 2024 EA Synthesis echoed many of the findings discussed above and highlighted the need for greater investment in MEL during the program design phase. For each of the four RIIs assessed, MEL was invested in and developed within the context of funding proposals, which provided an abbreviated format within the context of an argumentative document. While the MEL approach was well-detailed in these proposals, they did not constitute what should be a fully developed MEL framework for the Initiative. Resources are needed to invest in a MEL framework that is reflective and analytical in nature, detailing all aspects of the MEL

[14] CGIAR IAES. (2024). RAFS SG: Evaluation Report, p. 33.

process and approach. This would provide a robust and sound approach for planning and implementing MEL throughout the implementation phase and enable clarity for all partners. The 2024 EA Synthesis recommended conducting an EA at the beginning of the design phase to go beyond selling proposals to detailing substantial and workable plans grounded in a realistic budget.

3.2.3 Learning

Finding 9: There are gaps in CGIAR's approach to fostering learning from M&E, both at programmatic and organizational levels.

The 2024 RAFS SG Evaluation noted that there was no visible or planned action to capitalize on the knowledge gained from RAFS Initiatives. Accumulated knowledge covered both the technical feasibility of the innovations and lessons learned during implementation. However, capitalization efforts were limited to internal reflection processes, such as the Pause and Reflect Workshops, and there was no consolidated or accessible system to manage this knowledge. The 2024 EA Synthesis also highlighted that, despite integral learning approaches involving stakeholders, MEL staff were not actively participating in reflection sessions that could enhance the learning process.

The 2023 PRMS Study highlighted limited attention to tracking prior learning and recommendations from evaluative activities and recommended fostering a cohesive, focused MEL CoP to enhance PRMS product quality, aligning with the CGIAR-wide Evaluation Framework and Policy, rather than relying on fragmented efforts across Initiatives. This aligns closely with the objectives of the ongoing MR System Review (October 2024), which seeks to assess the system's effectiveness in implementing evaluation recommendations and supporting evidence-based planning and decision-making. Addressing the gaps identified by the 2023 PRMS Study would strengthen the MR system by ensuring systematic follow-up on evaluations and fostering a more integrated approach to accountability and learning across CGIAR.

3.2.4 Monitoring, Evaluation and Learning Conclusion

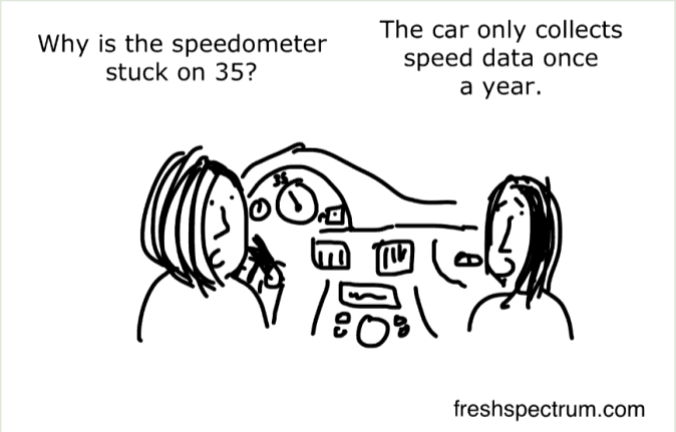
CGIAR's MEL systems face significant challenges related to integration, resource allocation, and the effectiveness of learning practices. M&E systems are generally reactive and lack real-time monitoring capabilities, which hinders the ability to make result-based decisions and track cumulative progress. While structured MEL plans exist, issues such as missing baseline data, incomplete indicators, and misaligned frameworks across Initiatives limit the effectiveness of measuring outcomes.

The MEL community is under-resourced, with limited specialized staff and insufficient budget allocation, which affects the capacity to implement a robust MEL system. There is also a need for a more standardized and coherent MEL approach across CGIAR to ensure better data quality, enhanced user capacity, and clearer accountability. Insufficient attention has been given to capturing and applying lessons learned, which diminishes opportunities for continuous improvement.

3.3 Indicators and Reporting

Summary

To effectively track progress and inform decision-making, CGIAR's agricultural research targets must align with strategic goals and be linked to specific ToCs. While indicators are tailored at project and program levels, the use of SMART indicators remains inconsistent. Evaluations identified challenges such as poorly defined or overly numerous indicators, fragmented data systems, and underreporting of rigorously evidenced outcomes. Enhancing indicator quality and streamlining reporting are essential for real-time monitoring and improved data integration. CGIAR is addressing quality assurance gaps, but further efforts are needed. Eight studies issued 21 recommendations to strengthen indicators, reporting, and QA governance.



Performance indicators are systematically used in the Research for Development (R4D) arena to measure the effectiveness of investment in innovation systems for accountability and learning purposes. CGIAR collects data based on Portfolio-wide output, outcome, and impact indicators (such as common reporting indicators), extending to Action Areas/SGs.[15] While these indicators provide funders with a broad view of the Portfolio's overall performance, each individual Initiative was to develop tailored indicators to capture results beyond the common metrics and demonstrate their ToC. Effective indicators should ideally follow the SMART criteria[16] to ensure they are useful for both internal monitoring and broader impact assessments.

3.3.1 Number and Quality of Indicators

Finding 10: There are challenges for CGIAR staff and partners to navigate the database and monitoring system, and to report on indicators that are questionable in their relation to overall outcomes.

The 2023 PRMS Advisory Study made selected recommendations during PRMS revision to fit the new SG Portfolio and 2022 Technical Reporting Arrangement (TRA). The 2024 SG Evaluations flagged that the PRMS and reporting processes would face challenges in navigation, efficiency, and data quality, also with fragmentation and misalignment in reporting and QA issues. The 2024 ST SG Evaluation noted that the 2022-24 Research Portfolio was accompanied by a heavy PRMS database and monitoring system, which the evaluation revealed many internal and external stakeholders found difficult to navigate. Issues included indicator number/quality, excessive focus on reporting of outputs that may be trivial for contributing to outcomes, and limited knowledge/capacity of some centers/scientists for providing inputs into the system.

Finding 11: Program staff face challenges in selecting meaningful indicators with clear target values for both output and outcome levels. Additionally, standardizing indicators that align with program outcomes and meet stakeholder needs proves to be difficult.

Selecting appropriate indicators and ensuring data quality can be challenging. For instance, while the RAFS SG developed a results framework that describes outcome-level indicators, the 2024 RAFS SG Evaluation found no clear target values for these or output-level indicators. It is advisable to design both outcome and output indicators with target values and include them in the ToC logic model for a clear understanding of success. Although numerous high-quality outputs from 2022-24 were identified, distinguishing them from earlier CRP-era work was difficult due to a lack of accessible comparative data and clear target indicators.

The 2024 EA synthesis revealed that several Initiatives struggled with their indicators. Some were under-developed or poorly defined, others lacked essential SMART criteria elements, which limited their usability. Additionally, stakeholders noted that long-term outcome indicators often depended on factors outside the Initiative's control. Designing indicators more aligned with achievable changes within the Initiative's timeframe could prove more effective.

The 2023 SLO Study highlighted measurement issues, including the disconnect between time-to-impact and project or CRP life cycles. Undocumented data sourcing roles and timing complicated data

[15] EAs are an Essential New Tool for CGIAR Managers (Oct. 2022).
[16] SMART indicators in M&E.

consistency. Despite well-developed results statements, a consistent use of MEL terminology is needed for greater clarity among stakeholders, including community members and policymakers. The lack of comprehensive stakeholder analyses has led to insufficient alignment of indicators with their interests, which weakens results frameworks and ToC assumptions. Addressing these gaps would enhance indicator effectiveness and reinforce the overall MEL framework, supporting adaptive learning and improving program evaluation.

Under the previous portfolio, with the exception of the 2023 Genebank Platform Evaluation,[17] the CRP 2020 Reviews and Platform evaluations found that indicators were not explicitly mapped to the CRPs and Programs ToCs and provided limited coherent overview of progress toward development outcomes due to:

- A disconnect between the ToC and the performance indicators such as milestones, Sub-Intermediate Development Outcomes (sub-IDOs), Intermediate Development Outcomes (IDOs), and SLOs.
- Misalignment between project-level indicators and CGIAR indicators.
- A lack of robust and relevant monitoring data.
- Inconsistencies in the reporting system: the 2023 PRMS Study highlighted a lack of standardization in indicators, in addition to inconsistencies in types of inputs and partners involved.

Finding 12: While donors and representatives of governance bodies are overall satisfied with reporting, CGIAR staff report pressure from planning and reporting requirements that are time-consuming and require producing quality work in a short time.

Evidence from the SG Evaluations (survey and interviewees) points to the pressure to deliver a high number of outputs in a limited time, with some noting that "sometimes products are rushed out and are lower quality than they should be", that "good research takes time" and that "leaders/teams being overcommitted has driven a push to produce as many outputs as possible regardless of the quality, which has also discouraged work-life balance, impacting wellbeing of staff and their ability to generate quality outputs".

The SG Evaluations online survey found that half (49%) of CGIAR staff reported experiencing new challenges since 2022 due to excessive planning and reporting requirements, diverting time and resources away from project work. The survey also found that donors and representatives on governance bodies, who frequently engage with reporting products, were generally satisfied with CGIAR reporting, despite some presenting mixed opinions on the detail and rigor of reporting. This included notes about progress made on the development of the dashboards and their overall impact on reporting, despite their perceived lack of user-friendliness. There was also an expressed desire to have analysis of CGIAR's comparative advantage inform reporting.

3.3.2 Quality Assurance

According to CGIAR's MELIA Glossary (2021), QA is defined as the process of guaranteeing quality through any activity that is concerned with assessing and improving the merit or the worth of research or a development intervention with a focus on its compliance with given standards. It demonstrates the extent to which quality indicators are being measured and quality standards are reached, through the quality management of process and deliverables/outputs. Examples include appraisal, results-based management (RBM), reviews during implementation, and evaluations.

Finding 13: There is an ambiguity and a lack of clarity in providing consistent and accurate reporting as part of the QA process. The absence of clear governance structures hampers the effectiveness of CGIAR's QA processes, resulting in lower data quality.

[17] According to the Genebank Platform Evaluation, establishment of the 2013 Indicators and performance thresholds for genebanks to qualify for in perpetuity funding through Long-Term Partnership Agreements with Crop Trust provided an important incentive for improvement of performance standards.

Both the 2023 SLO Study and the 2023 PRMS Study highlighted limited clarity and governance within the QA processes. The 2023 SLO Study identified ambiguity in the instructions given to CRPs for reporting on SLO targets. Despite providing reporting guidelines and implementing a QA process, instructions were not sufficiently clear to ensure consistent and accurate reporting, leading to low compliance. Additionally, the 2023 PRMS study pointed out a critical governance gap: the QA team was tasked to improve the quality of reported data but lacked the authority to enforce their recommendations. This disconnect between responsibility and authority led to a situation where, despite the existence of quality standards and procedures, there was limited ability to ensure their consistent application. The lack of clear governance structures hampered the effectiveness of the QA processes, resulting in reduced accountability and, ultimately, lower data quality.

Box 3. Selected sub-recommendations from the QA case study of the 2023 PRMS study

- Expand the QA mechanisms' coverage beyond annual reports to other data fields housed in the PRMS' constituent modules.
- Adopt an existing ISO standard or framework (e.g., Data Quality Assessment Framework (DQAF), the Task-based Data Quality (TBDQ) method, USAID Data Quality Assessment (DQA) tools) for data QA.
- Provide clarity on the relationship between CGIAR dashboards as PRMS products; mapping should include their management and QA.
- Ensure the participation of designated and trained MEL professionals along the data pipeline from data production (e.g., quality-at-entry) to data consumption.
- Obtain clarity of and document the intended users of the PRMS modules and their nature of the use to ascertain the "fitness for use for data among users.

Finding 14: There are fragmented and inconsistent QA Frameworks across data pipelines, which has implications for data that is not reported annually and weakens the reliability of the entire data flow.

The 2023 PRMS Study emphasized the fragmentation and inconsistency in the QA frameworks, particularly along the entire data pipeline, from primary data sources to final dashboards. A significant issue identified is the absence of provisions for continuous QA of data, especially for data that is not reported annually, which weakens reliability. There is also a lack of clarity regarding which CGIAR dashboards should be considered part of the PRMS system, creating confusion around the management and QA of the data associated with those dashboards.

There were unclear responsibilities throughout the data pipeline, with specific challenges noted in areas such as the QA of planning data and the ongoing monitoring of data accuracy. This fragmented approach means that important aspects of data quality—such as timeliness, completeness, and accuracy—are not consistently prioritized. Furthermore, the 2023 PRMS Study points out that the limited resources available for MEL in data entry, QA, and usage exacerbate these issues, leading to potential gaps in the overall data quality and undermining the effectiveness of the QA framework. This highlights the need for a more robust, cohesive QA framework with clearly defined roles and responsibilities, particularly in managing the full data pipeline and ensuring consistency and quality across the system.

Despite these challenges, integration of the OST and ToC modules and enhancements to the CGIAR Results Dashboard, such as new functionalities and improved user experience, were positively received. Improvements to the filtering system and basic statistical features would further benefit users, particularly those with limited Information Technology (IT) skills, by reducing the need to download and process data manually.

Finding 15: There are ongoing improvements of the QA process as part of the 2025-30 Portfolio design, particularly through the three areas of improving QA focus and robustness, optimizing the QA process, and increasing QA consistency and capacity.

The CGIAR QA Process for Technical Reporting (June 2024) outlines the framework and methodology for conducting QA. The process builds on five years of QA experience in CGIAR leading up to the One CGIAR transition in 2019, and incorporates selected insights from the 2021 Synthesis, and learning acquired through continuous engagement with data submitters and QA assessors. Enhancements include streamlining the process for greater efficiency, integrating QA within the PRMS Reporting Tool, and improving the quality of reported results through expert QA assessors. Data undergoes one or two rounds of QA depending on its priority, with a third-party mechanism in place for high-priority data in case of disagreements between assessors and data submitters. This process aims to ensure high-quality, accurate reporting and continuous improvement in CGIAR's technical reporting.

According to the same QA document dated June 2024, CGIAR is enhancing the QA process through three main areas:

- **Improving QA focus and robustness:** This includes aligning PRMS data with ToC targets and exploring alignment with international standards such as the ISO (International Organization for Standardization) to strengthen data quality controls.
- **Optimizing the QA process:** Efforts are being made to automate assessments and explore Artificial Intelligence (AI) integration to make the process more cost effective.
- **Increasing QA consistency and capacity:** CGIAR is improving training, guidance, and building a CoP to harmonize QA approaches and ensure alignment across the organization.

3.3.3 Reporting Duplication

Finding 16: There is duplication of reporting efforts and conflicting demands on staff time, which leads to inefficiencies and reduced effectiveness.

The GI SG Evaluation shows reporting is subject to the demands of external funders and bilateral projects. This leads to duplication of reporting efforts, where similar content is reported in slightly different ways to various stakeholders. Furthermore, the conflicting reporting requirements from different donors place significant strain on staff, leading to inefficiencies and reduced effectiveness of the SG. The multiple demands on staff time not only create a heavy reporting burden, but also detract from the overall productivity and impact of CGIAR Initiatives, as noted during interviews.

The 2021 Synthesis noted that multiple reporting lines impose inefficiencies, and that, even with a more effective M&E system in place, tailored reports would still be required to meet the diverse demands of W1/W2 and W3/bilateral donors. Similarly, the 2023 SLO Study found that one of the factors limiting CRPs' ability to measure progress toward the 2022 SLO targets was the need to manage diverse reporting formats and competing reporting demands.

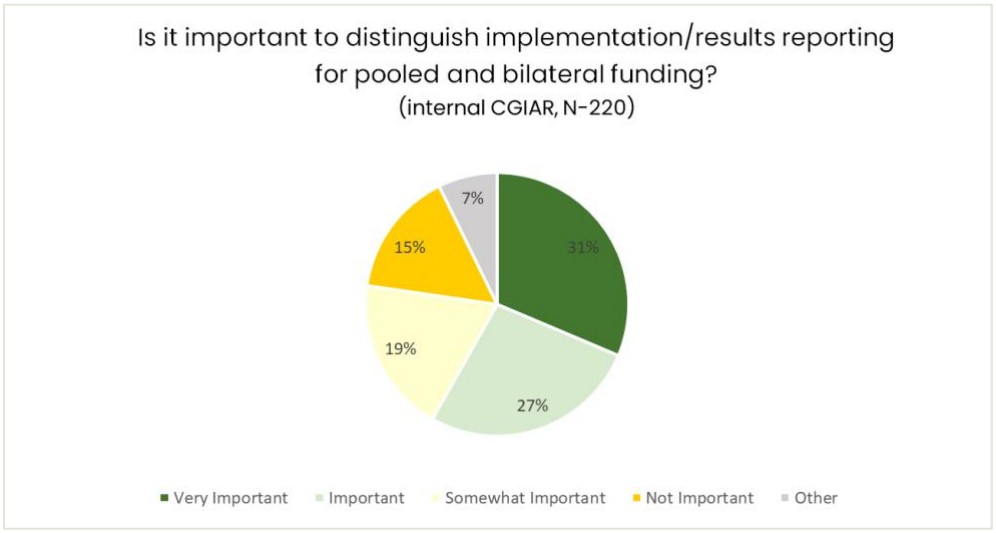
Finding 17: There are inconsistencies in CGIAR reporting, leading to an incomplete picture of outcomes associated with pooled funding Initiatives.

The 2024 EA Synthesis of RIIs pointed out how the lack of reporting integration led to an incomplete picture of the outcomes associated with pooled funding Initiatives, adding to the lack of clarity of CGIAR reporting. Similarly, the 2021 Synthesis emphasized the inefficiencies associated with multiple reporting lines and stated that even in the presence of more effective M&E systems, tailored reports would still need to be generated to suit diverse donor demands. At the time of the CRPs, researchers leading bilateral-funded projects prioritized reporting to their own donors, using donors' reporting formats and timelines, over CGIAR reporting systems such as the Managing Agricultural Research for Learning and Outcomes (MARLO) Platform. The 2023 SLO study suggested that aligning funder metrics across projects facilitates better aggregation of outcomes, enhancing CGIAR's ability to assess and track progress efficiently.[18]

[18] Templeton, D. 2023. Assessment of CGIAR contributions to the 2022 aspirational SLO targets. Montpellier: CGIAR.

Figure 3 presents the responses from 220 internal CGIAR SG Evaluations survey participants, where two out of three respondents (58%) consider it important to distinguish between pooled and bilateral funding, suggesting a strong recognition of the differences in handling these types of funding within CGIAR.

Figure 3. Importance of distinguishing between pooled and bilateral funding—survey



Source: IAES SG Evaluation Survey, 2024

3.3.4 Indicators and Reporting Conclusion

The number and quality of CGIAR indicators remain a significant issue, with weak definitions, lack of SMART criteria, and excessive number of indicators undermining the effectiveness of the results frameworks. The PRMS and the reporting processes would face challenges in navigation, efficiency, and data quality. Competing donor requirements also result in inefficiencies in the reporting processes, leading to duplication and an incomplete picture of outcomes. QA processes are hampered by unclear governance, overloaded staff, and fragmented QA frameworks, contributing to inconsistent data and limiting the overall effectiveness of the system. Addressing these issues requires a streamlined and standardized approach to indicators, better alignment of reporting with stakeholder needs, clearer governance in QA, and improved systems for real-time monitoring and data integration across CGIAR Initiatives. Recent enhancements to the QA process, as outlined in the CGIAR QA Process for Technical Reporting (June 2024), represent important steps forward. These include efforts to align PRMS data with ToC targets, explore automation and

AI integration, and harmonize QA approaches through improved training and a community of practice. Their success, however, will depend on clear governance, consistent application, and continued investment in system-wide coherence and capacity.

3.4 Impact Assessments

Summary

IAs are essential for understanding the causal effects of CGIAR's research on economic, social, and environmental outcomes. They complement process and performance evaluations by using shared indicators, data, and analytical methods. IAs can be conducted during or after interventions but face challenges such as resource constraints, data limitations, and the mismatch between research and impact timelines. Despite being resource-intensive, they are critical for evaluating effectiveness. Strategic planning is needed to balance their scope and cost. Evaluations stress the importance of setting measurable impact targets aligned with CGIAR's goals and SDG commitments, and of integrating IAs within the MELIA continuum.

In the AR4D arena, IAs measure the causal effects of science and innovation on economic, social and environmental outcomes. Given the time lag between research implementation and results, these assessments are often undertaken years after an intervention. In CGIAR, learning-oriented IA may also be implemented by research teams during a program's lifespan, to test causal assumptions, scaling strategies and related research questions. To generate robust evidence on the reach and impacts of its investments, CGIAR is committed to embedding IA across the system.

IAs are beyond the scope of the Evaluation Framework in the CGIAR-wide Evaluation Framework and Policy (2022), which cover process and performance evaluations. Nevertheless, process and performance evaluations and IAs intersect through commonalities in progress indicators, data collection methods and analysis. The results of M&E activities can also feed into IAs and vice versa, and rigorous reach and impact studies provide evidence of progress toward CGIAR targets. As a result, IAs were discussed briefly in a few of the reports under review.

Finding 18: The number and scope of CGIAR impact assessments depends on the level of available resources and specialized skillsets, the availability of credible data and measurement difficulties.

The 2021 Synthesis found that IAs conducted during the CRP era were limited by a lack of funding, the time it takes for research to reach sustainable impacts at scale, and the tendency to prioritize producing innovations over carrying out evaluations. Furthermore, the number of assessments on the impact of natural resources and systems research was scarce because of challenging progress indicators and impact assessment methods.

The 2021 Synthesis noted that while improvement of CRP Flagships' (FPs) capability to conduct robust assessments increased over the CRP era, the degree of independent IAs was questioned in selected CRP 2020 Reviews. The 2021 Synthesis also found that IA "methods remain skewed towards attributing results and outcomes to CGIAR's work. Given that CGIAR operates within the complex reality of innovation webs, there is a strong need for more contribution analysis, using mixed method approaches to determine, from the data and perspectives of others, the scale and value of the contribution made by CGIAR's work toward achieving sustainable development outcomes".[19]

The 2023 SLO Study echoed findings from the 2021 Synthesis, identifying key limitations to measuring progress toward 2022 SLO targets. Primary among them were low and unpredictable W1/W2 funding, limited staff capacity, and a lack of high quality, accessible data. Challenges also included misaligned

[19] CAS Secretariat (CGIAR Advisory Services Shared Secretariat) (2021). *2021 Synthesis and Lessons Learned from a Decade of CGIAR Research Programs* (p. XII). Rome: CAS Secretariat Evaluation Function.

project life cycles with impact timelines and inadequate indicators. Despite these constraints, most CRPs attempted reach and impact studies where feasible. Enabling factors included access to legacy research, strong MEL frameworks, and alignment of bilateral projects with SLO targets.

The 2023 SLO Study also discussed the issue of IAs being undertaken by independent evaluation specialists rather than in-house. However, the 2023 SLO Study highlighted the need to maintain and strengthen evaluation skillsets within CGIAR centers because center-based MELIA teams play a vital role in *ex-ante* analysis, foresight and priority-setting, as well as in *ex-post* IAs. The study suggests that the impartiality of center-led IAs can be increased if they are undertaken by an independent unit inside a center (outside the project or Initiative being assessed), if state-of-the-art IA frameworks and methodologies are used, and if the process is fully transparent with a rigorous peer-review process. The 2023 SLO Study also stressed that because achieving impacts at scale is the cumulative result of causal relationships between many players and factors, the CGIAR System contributed to the 2022 SLO target results and was not solely responsible for their achievement.

The 2024 EA Synthesis found confusion around the purpose of baseline and endline studies within the context of a MEL strategy, and the rationale for investing resources in such studies. "Even with the Initiative level results framework, the general understanding leaned toward baselines for innovations toward IA instead of WP or country-level activities under an Initiative, where national-level data from secondary sources could have been considered".[20] Regardless, TAFSSA and CWANA RIIs did not complete baseline studies because of budget constraints, the evolving nature of the Initiatives and inherent challenges in capturing specific values for outputs and outcomes. These findings were echoed in the 2024 RAFS SG Evaluation. While Initiatives were found to have structured MELIA plans, these plans had little or no baseline data, making it difficult to measure the progress against the initial situations. Additionally, a cohesive conceptual framework for tracking and IA was lacking in climate change focused Initiatives.

Most of the lessons learned in the 2023 SLO Study echoed a comparative analysis[21] of TAFFSA and AMD Initiatives under 2024 EA Synthesis, which highlighted the need for robust planning, sustainable funding, and stakeholder engagement. TAFFSA RII faced complexity and funding constraints, which hindered establishing clear links between outcomes and long-term goals. In contrast, AMD has a stronger intervention logic, but an overly optimistic ToC given the limited timeline. The AMD MEL system is effective at WP level, but would benefit from a unified framework for broader impact tracking. While TAFFSA requires foundational MEL adjustments, AMD is ready for evaluation with an existing framework that could capture systemic changes.

3.4.1 Impact Assessment Conclusion

The evaluative findings offer valuable insights into future adaptive planning and learning across the CGIAR Portfolio. They center on the resources, data, and skillsets needed to undertake rigorous impact assessments; measurement difficulties; the disconnect between the time to impact and the lifespan

[20] GIAR Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service (IAES). (2023). *Regional Integrated Initiative-Evaluability Assessment Report.* (p.11) Rome: IAES Evaluation Function. https://cas.cgiar.org/

[21] Comparative analysis presented during the Asia Evaluation Week 2024.

of the research endeavor; issues regarding attribution versus contribution; and the degree of independence required.

The implication of these findings is the need for CGIAR to prioritize comprehensive MELIA systems, build internal capacities and to continue to undertake a mixture of both internal and external IAs based on strategic consideration of the purpose, scope and cost of proposed impact studies, while ensuring that these assessments complement, rather than replace, process and performance evaluations.

4 Evaluative Studies Recommendations and Lessons Learned

The original 36 MELIA-related recommendations (see Table 2 in section 2: Purpose, Method, and Scope) in CGIAR's MR Tracker also included sub-recommendations. Figure 4 presents a mapping of 48 MELIA recommendations or sub-recommendations across four MELIA themes, with 11 addressing multiple themes (Annex 3).

Figure 4. Number of recommendations/sub-recommendations by theme

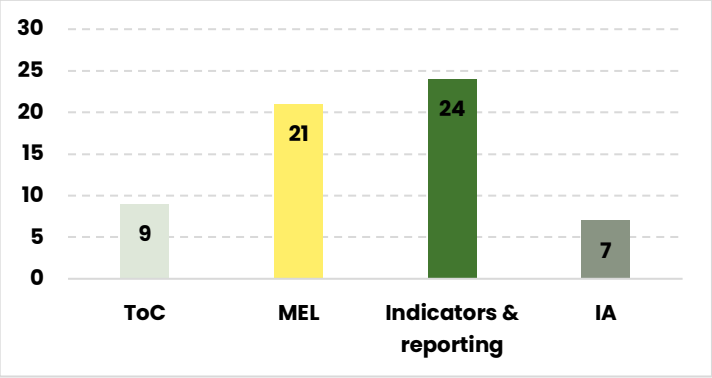
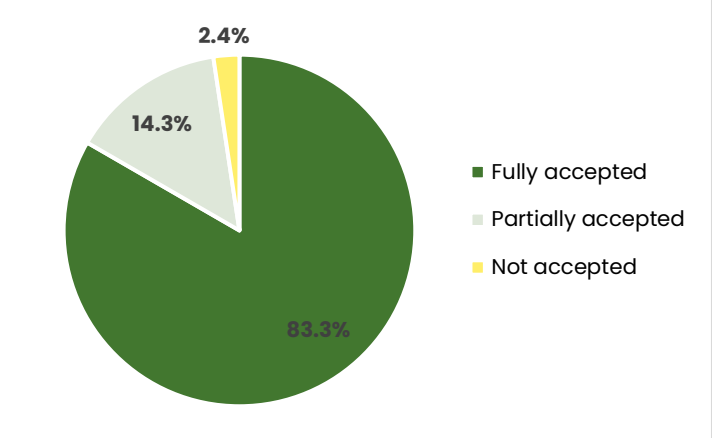


***Figure 5*. MELIA recommendations/sub-recommendations: MR (%)**



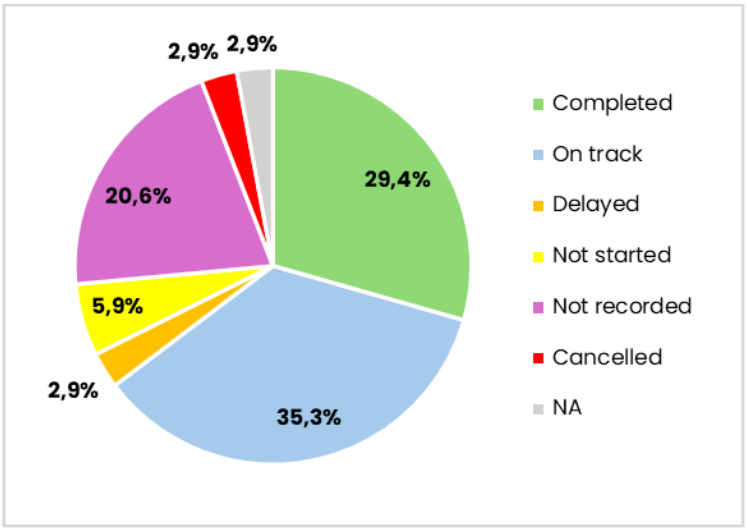
As shown in Figure 5, CGIAR's management was overwhelmingly positive in their MR to each of the MELIA-related recommendations–83% were fully accepted; with an exception of several recommendation in the 2024 EA Synthesis[22] (see Annex 3 for additional detail).[23]

Source: *Evaluation & MR Actions Tracker*

[22] The format of the MR document was amended slightly after the 2021 Synthesis, requiring management to explicitly state if a recommendation is 'fully accepted', 'partially accepted' or 'not accepted', as well as providing a MR commentary. In this report, the MR for the 2021 Synthesis MELIA-related recommendations are classified as 'fully accepted' because management agreed with/supported each of them. In addition, sub-recommendations are given the recommendation-level MR in the Evaluation & MR Actions Tracker.

[23] A MR was not required for the 2023 SLO Study as it was not commissioned by the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC). The MR for the 2024 EA Synthesis states that it is not appropriate for management to respond to recommendations 1,2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 16, 17, and 18 as they are aimed at the practice of an evaluation team.

***Figure 6*. Status of MR actions (%)**



As of 20 January 2025, MR actions for the SG evaluations were not available on the MR Actions Tracker. Therefore, the analysis of the MR actions status is limited to 34 recommendations/sub-recommendations from the remaining seven evaluative studies. Figure 6 shows that almost two thirds of the MR actions were completed (29%) or are on track (35%).[24] Around 21% of the recommendations do not have an aligned action plan or status recorded in the Evaluation & MR Actions Tracker.

Source: *Evaluation & MR Actions Tracker*

Framed by strengthening of MELIA frameworks since 2021, despite CGIAR management's full or partial acceptance of 98% of MELIA-related recommendations, the more recent 18 MELIA-related recommendations from the 2024 SG Evaluations and the 2024 EA Synthesis indicate persistent challenges and unrealized full potential of an efficient and effective MELIA across the CGIAR system.

The next section helps prioritize pending recommendations as well as the lessons learned from the 11 evaluative studies.

4.1 Theory of Change

The 2021 Synthesis recommended that CGIAR should:

> *Strengthen MELIA metrics, and develop user-friendly, streamlined reporting systems based on simple, nested ToCs—developed with and owned by partners and stakeholders that enable required baselines, actions, capacities, and responsibilities to be coherently planned in pursuit of desired outcomes* (Recommendation 27; MR: Supported; Status: Completed).

Important advances have been made in standardizing ToC concepts and terminology, tools, and guidance, and integrating ToC into annual reporting and evaluation (2024 GI SG Evaluation; 2024 RAFS SG Evaluation; 2024 ST SG Evaluation). Nevertheless, many of the ToCs were insufficiently clear and specific, with substantial scope for further improvement. This was due in part to the rushed and de-centralized proposal development process and reflecting different approaches to ToC/MELIA in AR4D processes and gaps in understanding and capacity (EA of RIIs).

The limited use of ToCs stems from their lack of granularity, missing core elements and irregular reviews. Nine related recommendations emphasize the need to develop, refine, and consistently apply ToCs to

[24] Four recommendations/sub-recommendations that are listed as 'on track' had a due date on or before 31 December 2023 (2021 Synthesis, recommendation 15; 2023 PRMS Study, sub-recommendations 6 (i) and 7 (i); 2023 GENDER Platform Evaluation, sub-recommendation 8.2).

guide MEL systems and enhance research impact. As of now, six of these nine recommendations remain unaddressed.

As of 1 January 2025, these pending **recommendations** were:

- **Co-create a ToC**: Develop an overarching ToC with key stakeholders for shared understanding and ownership (2024 GI SG Evaluation, sub-recommendation 8b; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan has not been developed).
- **Develop a nested Program representation**: Detail pathways for change, contributions, interactions, feedback loops, and assumptions within the Breeding for Tomorrow (BT) program (2024 GI SG Evaluation, sub-recommendation 8c; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan has not been developed).
- **Provide MEL staff with a lead role in reviewing ToCs** as part of Pause and Reflect workshops at Initiative level, and/or RII-wide efforts, e.g., ToC development for RII (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 9; MR: Partially accepted; Status: Not started; Due date: 31 December 2025).
- **Consider refining change pathways at individual RII level**, RII portfolio, or country levels, if Initiatives are funded beyond three years (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 15; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2025).
- **Using empirical data to revisit the ToC** and revise it as needed (2023 GENDER Platform Evaluation, sub-recommendation 3.3; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded).
- **Provide sufficient resources** to develop and provide innovative capacity-building materials to speed up the learning process using PRMS reporting and related OST, ToC, and iPSR modules (2023 PRMS Study, recommendation 9; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2024)
- **Identify and give special attention to prospects** for increasing the dissemination of lessons learned, and expanding group membership to external scientists, thereby further extending the international impact and reach of CGIAR (2024 Genebank Platform Evaluation, sub-recommendation 10b; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded).

CGIAR may consider the following forward-looking **lessons learned** in developing and using ToCs:

- **Templates for new program proposals should be improved**, especially for ToC narratives, which should describe the sequence of logically linked causal relationships and clearly articulate how the research process contributes to development outcomes.
- **ToCs should be granulated and context specific**.
- **Make learning and all feedback loops explicit** within and beyond the ToCs.
- ToCs should be based on empirical data and supported by a tailored M&E system.
- **ToCs should be regularly used, revisited, and revised** as progress is made, and new opportunities and obstacles are identified.
- Adequate resources (**funds, time, skillsets, trained facilitator**) should be made available to develop ToCs that are comprehensive enough to plan research, measure progress, capture lessons learned, **communicate results**, and support adaptive management.
- ToCs should contain all essential elements (including key assumptions and SMART performance indicators) and not simply be conceptual impact pathways.
- Assumptions behind ToCs should be evidence-based and on learnings to date if activities are planned along ToCs.

4.2 Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning

MR action plans aligned with four MEL-related recommendations (2021 Synthesis recommendations 29 and 31; 2022 EiB platform Evaluation, sub-recommendation 3e; and 2023 GENDER Platform Evaluation, sub-recommendation 3.1; see Annex 3), but findings from 11 evaluative studies show persistent challenges in CGIAR's MEL systems. These include poor integration, limited resources, and a lack of real-time monitoring,

which weakens progress tracking and evidence-based decision-making. Common issues include missing baselines, incomplete indicators, and misaligned frameworks. The MEL community remains under-resourced, with insufficient staff and funding. A standardized system-wide MEL approach is needed to improve data quality, build capacity, and strengthen accountability.

Strengthening the MEL framework, improving the capacity of the MEL community, and ensuring better integration of learning processes is essential for enhancing the overall effectiveness and impact of CGIAR's Initiatives. To do so, the evaluations reviewed made 21 recommendations, 20 of which required a MR. One of these recommendations was not accepted by management (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 14). Of the remaining 19, as of 20 January 2025, the following 14 recommendations were pending:

- **Build a complexity-aware planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning** (PMEL) System: Create a system to fulfil accountability and learning needs, allowing for swift adaptations (2024 GI SG Evaluation, sub-recommendation 8d; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan has not been developed).
- During planning, consider that research needs adequate time to produce results. In this respect, CGIAR should **promote donors' and external partners' awareness** to allow science quality to determine the pace of the programs. In this respect, MELIA mid-term reviews should support evidence-based targeting and steering (2024 RAFS SG Evaluation, sub-recommendation 12e; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan has not been developed).
- Science programs should systematically **design and implement M&E frameworks and plans**, including development of baselines, for real time monitoring to support result based timely decisions. M&E frameworks, plans should be constantly updated with cumulative values achieved for output and outcome indicators (2024 RAFS SG Evaluation, recommendation 14; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan has not been developed).
- Revise PRMF, **strengthen MELIA processes and capacities** to ensure that these capture how ST SG outputs (present) and future system transformation-related outputs link to outcomes and impact: a) Review and rationalize PRMF and MELIA processes: indicator number/quality (e.g., implement standard definitions of what is an output and outcome) to ensure they are fit-for-purpose; b) Develop and apply improved qualitative and quantitative approaches for measuring scientific quality, policy influence, and the effectiveness of capacity development in the research for development environment; and c) Address internal capacity gaps in data management, monitoring and reporting (2024 ST SG Evaluation, recommendation 5; MR: Partially accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan has not been developed).
- **Develop a comprehensive MEL framework** (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 5; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2025).
- **Ensure there are specific uses and users for the collected data** as part of the MEL framework, for it. (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 8; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2026).
- **Provide MEL staff with a lead role in reviewing ToCs** as part of Pause and Reflect workshops at Initiative level, and/or RII-wide efforts, e.g., ToC development for RII (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 9; MR: Partially accepted; Status: Not started; Due date: 31 December 2026).
- Better **plan baseline and end line studies** as part of a future MEL strategy (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 10; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2025).
- Further refine results statements and EoI outcomes, providing greater specificity in their formulation (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 11; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2025).
- **Develop a nuanced stakeholder analysis** that supports sound development of a MEL framework (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 13; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2025).
- Adopt provisions to assure adequate and proportionate MEL resources among Initiatives and along the data pipeline from the beginning (data production) to the end (data consumption) (2023 PRMS Study, sub-recommendation 7 (iii); MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded).

- **Empower and professionalize the MEL CoP** as a key structure to reinforce ownership, QA agility, and use of the PRMS's data outputs in line with One CGIAR reporting arrangements (2023 PRMS Study, sub-recommendation 7 (iv); MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded).
- **Assess MELIA structures to befit-for-purpose** against TRA based on recommendations and learning from external assessments. (2023 PRMS Study, sub-recommendation 7 (vi); MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded).
  Build a tailored M&E system to track results and for timely decisions. (2021 Big Data Platform Evaluation, sub-recommendation 6.7; MR: Partially accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2030).

As lessons learned, the 11 evaluative studies also suggested that **MEL activities could be improved** if:

- CGIAR continues to streamline and integrate monitoring and reporting processes to allow for a more systematic and comprehensive tracking of results and the potential for learning.
- CGIAR's capacity to undertake M&E activities, and capture and disseminate lessons learned, is strengthened.
- Existing MELIA structures, processes, and resources are assessed to leverage strengths and lessons learned.
- A thorough review of current indicators and collected data (outputs and outcomes) is conducted to determine what can be of use, and how, in an evaluation or an IA.
- Indicators are further defined as part of a developed MEL framework (RIIs EA).
- Data to be collected under the MEL framework are clearly defined, ensuring there are specific uses and users for it.
- Baseline and end-line studies are better planned as part of a future MEL strategy.
- Results statements and EoI outcomes are further refined, for greater specificity in their formulation.
- Going forward, PRMF processes are reviewed and rationalized to make the system more objective, efficient and is fit-for-purpose.[25]

4.3 Indicators and Reporting

The key message from the 11 evaluative studies is that CGIAR faces challenges with poorly defined or excessive numbers of indicators, inefficient reporting systems, and fragmented governance—all of which undermine the effectiveness of its results frameworks. These issues lead to inconsistent data and an incomplete picture of outcomes.

Going forward, CGIAR needs standardized indicators, better aligned reporting, clearer governance in QA, and enhanced systems for real-time monitoring and data integration. The evaluative studies proposed 24 recommendations addressing indicators and reporting, 18 with a MR. Of these 18, the MR action was completed for five recommendations (2021 Synthesis recommendations 27, 28 and 29; 2022 EiB platform Evaluation, sub-recommendation 3b and 3c; see Annex 3) and one recommendation (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 14) was not accepted by management. As of 20 January 2025, the 11 pending recommendations/under the indicators and reporting themes are:

- **Clearly state social inclusion of marginalized groups and inclusion of youth** and accompany them with definitions and standard indicators to support operationalization (2024 GI SG Evaluation, sub-recommendation 15d; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan is has not been developed).
- **Operationalize the combination of pooled and bilateral funding** by providing specific guidelines to streamline complementarity between the two modalities, with clarifying reporting modalities, both in

[25] CGIAR IAES. (2024). ST SG: Evaluation Report, p.43. and RAFS.

terms of funding and results. While Initiatives reported only the pooled funded portion of the Portfolio (CGIAR, 2024), it is necessary to undertake a review to identify solutions to this problem and provide improved guidance on integrated planning, implementation, and reporting (2024 RAFS SG Evaluation, recommendation 5; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan has not been developed).

- **Revise PRMF, strengthen MELIA processes and capacities** to ensure that these capture how ST SG outputs (present) and future system transformation-related outputs link to outcomes and impact: a) Review and rationalize PRMF and MELIA processes: indicator number/quality (e.g., implement standard definitions of what is an output and outcome) to ensure they are fit-for-purpose; b) Develop and apply improved qualitative and quantitative approaches for measuring scientific quality, policy influence, and the effectiveness of capacity development in the research for development environment; and c) Address internal capacity gaps in data management, monitoring and reporting (2024 ST SG Evaluation, recommendation 5; MR: Partially accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan has not been developed).
- **Further define indicators** as part of a developed MEL framework, particularly at RII level (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 7; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2025).
- **Further refine results statements** and EoI outcomes, providing greater specificity in their formulation (2024 EA Synthesis, recommendation 11; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2025).
- **PPU to co-develop with GENDER Platform for the Research Portfolio** that can provide useful management information on integrating gender equality into CGIAR research and impact pathways. Engagement indicators per Initiative, for example, provide information on stakeholder engagement, which can then be used to inform the Platform's engagement strategies and activities. (2023 GENDER Platform Evaluation, sub-recommendation 8.2; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not started; Due date: 31 December 2023).
- **Expand the QA mechanisms coverage** from the Type 1 annual reports to other data fields housed in the PRMS Reporting (2023 PRMS Study, sub-recommendation 6 (i); MR: Partially accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 30 June 2023).
- **Clarify which CGIAR dashboards are considered PRMS elements** with respective products, their management, and their QA mechanisms concerning the QA of the PRMS (2023 PRMS Study, sub-recommendation 6 (ii); MR: Partially accepted; Status: Cancelled).
- **Create a working and learning group** (e.g., CoP) on QA across CGIAR to ensure consistency and coherence of approaches for all PRMS elements beyond PRMS-Reporting (2023 PRMS Study, sub-recommendation 6 (vi); MR: Partially accepted; Status: Not recorded).
- **Expand and document the PRMS data QA mechanisms** to cover the subset of the data in the annual reports and other fields housed in the PRMS reporting. For data fields that are not prioritized or included in the QA platform, data quality assurance may not require independent or third-party assessors. it may involve stipulating approval processes within Initiatives for data updates, peer review checks across Initiatives, and portfolio-level QA checks (2023 PRMS Study, sub-recommendation 7 (i); MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 30 June 2023).
- **Improve assessment and metrics** related to risk and resilience and co-develop social and technical innovations with at-risk populations. (2021 Synthesis, recommendation 15; MR: Fully accepted; Status: On track; Due date: 31 December 2022)

Additionally, the following ***lessons learned*** can be gleaned from the studies reviewed:

- To effectively track and demonstrate progress towards global goals, **targets must align with collective global objectives** and be measurable through robust, validated data.
- The **continuous review of targets and indicators** is necessary for adaptive management, resource allocation, and demonstrating CGIAR's contributions to sustainable development.

- Actively **involving a wide range of stakeholders**, including Initiative leads, managers, and the MEL community, ensures that the indicator and target-setting processes are more comprehensive, aligned with real-world needs, and reflective of diverse perspectives.
- **Data Quality Assessments (DQAs) should be holistic and integrated**. Expanding the QA mechanisms to cover more data fields beyond just annual reports and adopting established frameworks (such as DQA or DQAF), emphasizes the importance of a comprehensive and consistent approach to data QA. It highlights that data quality needs to be maintained across all stages of the data lifecycle, not just at the point of reporting.
- **Collaboration and user-centric design are essential** for effective QA. Ensuring the participation of trained MEL professionals throughout the data pipeline and clarifying the intended users of the PRMS modules is crucial for ensuring the data's quality and relevance. This emphasizes that data systems should be designed with the needs of users in mind, ensuring that the data produced is fit for its intended purpose and easily usable by those who rely on it.

4.4 Impact Assessments

IAs, while not directly within the scope of the Evaluation Framework and Policy (2022), are essential components of CGIAR's MELIA continuum. While IAs are costly and require specialized skills and long-term planning, they provide critical inputs for understanding the long-term impact and effectiveness of the interventions, complementing processes, and performance evaluations.

Lessons from the 2023 SLO Study and EA of Initiatives (TAFSSA and AMD) highlight the importance of strategic planning, realistic target setting, and stakeholder engagement. Impact-level targets should be ambitious but measurable, aligned with CGIAR's goals and SDG commitments. Impacts at scale depend on the cumulative result of causal relationships between many players and factors. Therefore, when measuring the reach and causal impact of CGIAR research and innovations, contribution rather than attribution should be emphasized. Studies provided six IA-related recommendations; four of the five with a MR remain pending (see MR tracker):

- **Revise PRMF, strengthen MELIA processes and capacities** to ensure that these capture how ST SG outputs (present) and future system transformation-related outputs link to outcomes and impact: a) Review and rationalize PRMF and MELIA processes: indicator number/quality (e.g., implement standard definitions of what is an output and outcome) to ensure they are fit-for-purpose; b) Develop and apply improved qualitative and quantitative approaches for measuring scientific quality, policy influence, and the effectiveness of capacity development in the research for development environment; and c) Address internal capacity gaps in data management, monitoring and reporting (2024 ST SG Evaluation, recommendation 5; MR: Partially accepted; Status: Not recorded because the MR action plan to be developed).
- **Assess MELIA structures** for their fit-for-purpose against TRA based on recommendations and learning from external assessments. (2023 PRMS Study, sub-recommendation 7 (vi); MR: Fully accepted; Status: Not recorded).
- **Shift practices and evaluation toward determining and valuing the essential contribution CGIAR** is making with others, both through its research and by mobilizing collective actions among diverse public, private, and civil society partners to transform innovation systems for development impact. (2021 Synthesis, recommendation 8; MR: Fully accepted; Status: Delayed; Due date: 31 Dec. 2022).

As of 20 January 2025, close to three quarters of the recommendations were pending. Given the ongoing need for the new 2025-30 Portfolio MELIA to generate actionable insights and enhance accountability, the majority of the above recommendations and lessons remain relevant for CGIAR. By implementing these, CGIAR can advance comprehensive MEL frameworks, build internal capacities, and align funder metrics.

Robust planning, stakeholder engagement, and continuous learning are essential to navigate systemic transformation and achieving the SDGs.

5 Conclusion

Building on the successes since 2011, CGIAR has continuously improved its MELIA system, with ToCs now commonplace across CGIAR's Research Portfolio, strengthened MELIA structures and more effective QA processes. The results of the summarized findings, recommendations, and lessons learned across the 11 evaluative studies point to responsibilities across several MELIA-related functions within CGIAR: centralized at PPU and Project Coordination Unit (PCU), MEL leads of CGIAR centers and independent evaluation of IAES. Successes are notable, documented and acknowledged. However, as an input, underinvestment in MELIA planning and implementation throughout the system is evident. A comprehensive and holistic approach to MELIA is needed; the following four themes emerged as core based on the analysis of ***recommendations***:

- **Continue to develop, refine, and continuously use ToCs** to guide MEL systems, engage MEL professionals and ensure that research contributes to development outcomes.
- **Strengthen the MEL framework**, improve the capacity of the MEL community, and ensure better integration of learning and reflection processes.
- **Develop SMART, inclusive and realistic indicators** that correspond to CGIAR's comparative advantage and to further clarify and streamline CGIAR's reporting modalities in terms of both funding and results.
- **Review impact indicators and data collected** to determine what can be used in the continuum of MELIA, including IAs. On the pathway to impacts, short- and long-term outcomes remain key to measure.

A comprehensive and holistic approach to MELIA is needed if CGIAR is to both effectively and efficiently deliver its Research Portfolio and track progress toward achieving development outcomes. This summary document paves the way to the 2025 Evaluability Assessments of the 13 Programs and Accelerators (Terms of Reference, aligned to SC endorsed 2025-2027 Work Plan for CGIAR's IAES (SC/M21/DP5) and MELIA-F framework design and roll-out.

The status of Management Responses (MRs) to recommendations made in the ten studies by IAES, commissioned the System Council are presented in Annex 3, and can be examined in the MR Actions Tracker.

Annex 1. Historical Account of ToCs at CGIAR

Theories of change (ToCs) form the basis of a CGIAR MELIA framework. They became commonplace in the CGIAR system during the CGIAR Research Program (CRP) era. As CRPs moved into their second phase in 2017, their capacity to develop ToCs increased significantly. However, these ToCs were largely high-level and conceptual and were used for planning and communication purposes but not for tracking and measuring progress, capturing and sharing lessons learned or for management purposes. The 2021 Synthesis of Learning from a Decade of CGIAR Research Programs noted that, although the development of ToC frameworks was a positive step in the second phase of CRPs, very few effectively used their ToCs for adaptive management, indicating further improvements were necessary. Similarly, the Platform evaluations recommended revising the ToCs to address gaps in assumptions, milestones, and indicators, ensuring their use as a framework for measuring progress along the impact pathway.

In response to these findings and related recommendations, CGIAR developed harmonized proposals with common ToC guidance,[26] digitized the ToC (see the 2023 PRMS study), and aligned the Plan of Results and Budget with planned ToC results, enhancing reporting against the ToC. In December 2021, the CGIAR System Council (SC) mandated a unified performance management approach for CGIAR Initiatives and large non-pooled projects, approving the PRMF 2022-30 and the 2022 Technical Reporting Arrangement (TRA), which emphasizes annual adaptive management and evaluations. To support this, CGIAR introduced a re-designed Performance and Results Management System (PRMS)[27] featuring a digital board based on ToC principles. Thus, a dedicated ToC module was integrated within the PRMS to enhance CGIAR's approach to performance management, emphasizing the importance of theory-based approaches for evaluation as outlined in the CGIAR-wide Evaluation Framework and Policy (2022). This module enables Initiative teams to visually articulate their intended outcomes, actors, and impact pathways, thereby facilitating the digitization and validation of Initiative proposal data.

Therefore, during the design of the 2022-24 CGIAR Portfolio, each proposal was required to have a ToC at Initiative and work package (WP) levels, that were expected to link to the higher-level Science Group (SG) ToC. CGIAR provided guidance[28] to ensure that a standardized approach was used to develop the ToCs, which were assessed as part of the proposal evaluation and approval process, including by the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC) and IAES. Considering previous experience with using ToCs in CGIAR, this new standardized and system-level integration into research planning and evaluation intended for ToCs to incorporate a strategic analysis of the system the research intended to influence, to transition to a more demand-driven Research for Development (R4D) approach with a greater focus on understanding the needs and expectations of intended research users.

[26] CGIAR. (2021). Theory of Change Design Guidance Document: Proposal Stage. Retrieved 17 July 2024 from https://docs.google.com/document/d/1Uok7uspauk5P2oLz6vTDKSPvfD5b4hh-/edit#heading=h.gjdgxs.
[27] Assessed in 2022 LINK.
[28] CGIAR. (2021). Theory of Change Design Guidance Document: Proposal Stage. Retrieved 17 July 2024.

Annex 2. Key CGIAR Indicators (2030)

CGIAR standard indicators.

Result Level	Result Category	Standard Indicators
Output	Knowledge product	Number of peer reviewed publications published in the reporting year
		Number of other information products published in the reporting year
		Number of MELIA study knowledge products (and subtypes) published in the reporting year
	Innovation development	Number of innovations profiled
	Capacity sharing for development	Number of people trained
Outcome	Uptake of information product	Altmetric Attention Score
	Innovation use	#people using the innovation disaggregated by gender
		Number of innovations being used (stage 4)
		Other quantitative measure of CGIAR innovation use, e.g. area
		Number of innovation packages designed
	Capacity change[a]	Change in capacity of key (a) individuals (b) organizations (government, civil society, private sector), (c) networks (e.g. multistakeholder platforms)
	Policy change	Number of new or significantly updated policies/strategies/legal instruments/ programs/budgets/investments
Impact	Poverty reduction, livelihoods and jobs	#poor people benefiting from relevant CGIAR innovations
		#people assisted to exit poverty
	Nutrition, health and food security	#people benefiting from relevant CGIAR innovations
		#people meeting minimum dietary energy requirements
		#people meeting minimum micronutrient requirements
		#cases of communicable and noncommunicable diseases
	Gender equality, youth and social inclusion	#women's empowerment and inclusion in the agricultural sector
		#women benefiting from relevant CGIAR innovations
		#youth benefiting from relevant CGIAR innovations
		#women assisted to exit poverty
	Environmental health and biodiversity	#ha under improved management
		#km3 consumptive water use
		#ha deforestation
		#Tg nitrogen application
		#plant genetic accessions available and safely duplicated
	Climate adaptation and mitigation	#tonnes CO_2 equivalent emissions
		#plans with evidence of implementation
		#$ climate adaptation investments
		#people benefiting from climate adapted innovations
		#people benefiting from the implementation of adaptation plans

[a] CGIAR stopped using this indicator in 2023.

Annex 3. Mapping of Recommendations by Status and Themes[29]

(a) Indicators and reporting.
b) The Management Response for the 2024 EA Synthesis states that it is not appropriate for management to respond to recommendations 1,2, 3, 4, 6, 12, 16, 17, and 18 as they are aimed at the practice of an evaluation team.
(c) A MR was not required for the 2023 SLO Study as it was not commissioned by the Independent Science for Development Council (ISDC).

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting (a)	IA
2024 Genetic Innovation (GI) Science Group (SG) Evaluation	8b. Co-create a ToC: Develop an overarching ToC with key stakeholders for shared understanding and ownership.	Fully accepted	Not recorded	X			
	8c. Develop a nested program representation: Detail pathways for change, contributions, interactions, feedback loops, and assumptions within the BT program.	Fully accepted	Not recorded	X			
	8d. Build a complexity-aware planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning (PMEL) System: Create a system to fulfil accountability and learning needs, allowing for swift adaptations.	Fully accepted	Not recorded		X		
2024 Resilient Agri-Food Systems (RAFS) SG Evaluation	5. Operationalize the combination of pooled and bilateral funding by providing specific guidelines to streamline complementarity between the two modalities, with clarifying reporting modalities, both in terms of funding and results. While initiatives have reported only the pooled funded portion of the Portfolio (CGIAR, 2024), it is necessary to undertake a review to identify solutions to this	Fully accepted	Not recorded			X	

[29] Evidence behind all recommendations is available upon request from IAES.

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting [a]	IA
	problem and provide improved guidance on integrated planning, implementation and reporting.						
	12e. During planning, consider that research needs adequate time to produce results. In this respect, CGIAR should promote donors' and external partners' awareness to allow science quality to determine the pace of the programs. In this respect, Monitoring, Evaluation, Learning and Impact Assessment (MELIA) mid-term reviews should support evidence-based targeting and steering.	Fully accepted	Not recorded		X		
	14. Science programs should systematically design and implement Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) frameworks and plans, including development of baselines, for real time monitoring to support result based timely decisions. M&E frameworks, plans should be constantly updated with cumulative values achieved for output and outcome indicators.	Fully accepted	Not recorded		X		
	15d. Social inclusion of marginalized groups and inclusion of youth should be clearly stated and accompanied by definitions and standard indicators to support operationalization.	Fully accepted	Not recorded			X	

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting [a]	IA
2024 Systems Transformation (ST) SG Evaluation	5. Revise PRMF, strengthen MELIA processes and capacities to ensure they capture how ST SG outputs (present) and future ST-related outputs link to outcomes and impact. a. Review and rationalize Performance and Results Management Framework (PRMF) and MELIA processes: indicator number/quality (e.g., implement standard definitions of what is an output and outcome) to ensure they are fit-for-purpose. b. Develop and apply improved qualitative and quantitative approaches for measuring scientific quality, policy influence, and the effectiveness of capacity development in the research for development environment. c. Address internal capacity gaps in data management, monitoring and reporting.	Partially accepted	Not recorded		X	X	X
2024 Evaluability Assessment (EA) Synthesis	5. Develop a comprehensive MEL framework.	Fully accepted	On track		X		
	6. Review the indicators and data collected (output and outcomes) to determine what can be of use, and how, in an evaluation or an impact assessment.	Not required[b]	Not required[b]			X	X
	7. Further define indicators as part of a developed MEL framework, particularly at Regional Integrating Initiative (RII) level.	Fully accepted	On track			X	
	8. In identifying data to be collected as part of the MEL framework, ensure there are specific uses and users for it.	Fully accepted	On track		X		

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting [a]	IA
	9. Provide MEL staff with a lead role in reviewing ToCs as part of Pause and Reflect workshops at the Initiative level, and/or RII-wide efforts, e.g., ToC development for RII.	Partially accepted	Not started	X	X		
	10. Better plan baseline and end line studies as part of a future MEL strategy.	Fully accepted	On track		X		
	11. Further refine results statements and End of Initiative (EoI) outcomes, providing greater specificity in their formulation.	Fully accepted	On track		X	X	
	13. Develop a nuanced stakeholder analysis that supports sound development of a MEL framework.	Fully accepted	On track		X		
	14. Better clarify data disaggregation by indicator within a comprehensive MEL framework and overall strategy.	Not accepted	Na		X	X	
	15. Consider refining change pathways at the individual RII level, RII Portfolio, or country levels if Initiatives are funded beyond three years.	Fully accepted	On track	X			
2024 Genebank Platform Evaluation	10b. Identify and give special attention to prospects for increasing the dissemination of lessons learned, and expanding group membership to external scientists, thereby further extending the international impact and reach of CGIAR.	Fully accepted in MR but not recorded in MRT	Not recorded		X		
2023 GENDER Platform Evaluation	3.1. Employ an M&E professional.	Fully accepted	Completed		X		
	3.3. Using empirical data to revisit the ToC, and revise it as needed.	Fully accepted	Not recorded	X			

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting [a]	IA
	8.2. Portfolio Performance Unit (PPU) to co-develop with GENDER Platform for the research portfolio that can provide useful management information on integrating gender equality into CGIAR research and impact pathways. Engagement indicators per initiative, for example, provide information on stakeholder engagement, which can then be used to inform the Platform's engagement strategies and activities.	Fully accepted	Not started			X	
2023 Performance Results Management System (PRMS) Study	6 i. Expand the quality assurance (QA) mechanisms coverage from the Type 1 Annual Reports to other data fields housed in the PRMS reporting.	Partially accepted	On track			X	
	6 ii. Clarify which CGIAR dashboards are considered PRMS elements with respective products, their management, and their QA mechanisms concerning the QA of the PRMS.	Partially accepted	Cancelled			X	
	6 vi. Create a working and learning group, e.g.., communities of practice (CoP) on QA across CGIAR to ensure consistency and coherence of approaches for all PRMS elements beyond PRMS-reporting.	Partially accepted	Not recorded			X	
	7 i. Expand and document the PRMS data QA mechanisms to cover the subset of the data in the annual reports and other fields housed in the PRMS reporting. For data fields that are not prioritized or included in the QA platform, data QA may not require independent or third-party assessors; it may involve stipulating approval	Fully accepted	On track			X	

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting [a]	IA
	processes within Initiatives for data updates, peer-review checks across Initiatives, and Portfolio-level QA checks.						
	7 iii. Adopt provisions to assure adequate and proportion ate MEL resources among Initiatives and along the data pipeline from the beginning (data production) to the end (data consumption).	Fully accepted	Not recorded		X		
	7 iv. Empower and professionalize the MEL community of practice as a key structure to reinforce ownership, QA, agility, and use of the PRMS's data outputs, in line with One CGIAR reporting arrangements.	Fully accepted	Not recorded		X		
	7 v. Enhance and fully operationalize the Monitoring-QA Processor-API (M-QAP) tool to support the QA of peer-reviewed papers.	Fully accepted	Not recorded			X	
	7 vi. Assess MELIA structures for their fit-for-purpose against the Technical Reporting Arrangement (TRA), based on recommendations and learning from external assessments.	Fully accepted	Not recorded		X		X
	9. Provide sufficient resources to develop and provide innovative capacity-building materials to speed up the learning process using PRMS reporting and related Online Submission Tool (OST), ToC, and Innovation Packages and Scaling Readiness (iPSR) modules (no sub-recommendations).	Fully accepted	On track	X			

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting [a]	IA
2023 System-Level Outcome (SLO) Study	1. While CGIAR's Executive Management Team (EMT) and System Office (SO) should continue to drive the indicator and target-setting process, input from Initiative Leads, managers of large bilateral projects and the MEL Community of Practice (MEL CoP) should be valued and actively encouraged.	Not required[c]	Not required[c]			X	
-	2. Greater attention should be given to the alignment of targets with the collective global targets to which CGIAR and partners aim to contribute through the five Impact Areas, and to the relevance of targets in terms of the prioritized areas of innovation and related dissemination activities that aspire to contribute toward meeting the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). Furthermore, to demonstrate CGIAR contribution to the transformation of food, land, and water systems across local, regional, and global levels, CGIAR should ensure that progress toward meeting CGIAR targets is tracked and measured using rigorous data validation methods.	Not required[c]	Not required[c]			X	
-	3. CGIAR's SO must ensure that efficient and effective QA processes and governance frameworks are operationalized to ensure reported progress toward CGIAR targets is rigorously evidenced.	Not required[c]	Not required[c]			X	
-	4. CGIAR's PPU should assess the current set of common impact indicators to ensure that they directly align with the collective global targets and can be cost-effectively tracked, measured and aggregated, given	Not required[c]	Not required[c]		X	X	

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting [a]	IA
	the quantity and quality of available data and resources.						
-	5. CGIAR's SO/EMT should promote alignment of funder metrics to measure outcomes in bilateral projects to facilitate aggregation across bilateral projects and with W1/W2 supported evaluations of outcomes and impacts.	Not required[c]	Not required[c]			X	X
2022 Excellence in Breeding (EiB) Platform Evaluation	3b. Develop a clear results framework aligned with the 2022–30 CGIAR Results Framework. Operationalize by incorporating all levels of results and milestones, from outputs through to impact, based on agreement with CGIAR, donors, and other stakeholders such as NARES. Results frameworks for CGIAR Initiatives should serve as a common reporting framework for all partners, significantly reducing transaction costs.	Fully accepted	Completed			X	X
	3c. Ensure that SMART interlocking objectives with deliverables, covering both science and non-science aspects, are in place for each team and individual, and ensure effective feedback loops for performance management, reporting internally and externally.	Fully accepted	Completed			X	
	3d. Develop a ToC and identify assumptions underpinning the proposed levels of change and corresponding milestones and indicators, based on lessons learnt. Donors and other stakeholders should participate in this process to ensure that it covers all	Fully accepted	Completed	X			

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting [a]	IA
	evidence-based assumptions and risks considering distinct lessons learned. All funding sources should be linked to the theory of change, and well-integrated into planning and reporting.						
	3e. Put in place an integrated monitoring and evaluation (M&E) system that enables continuous learning, reflection, validation of the theory of change, feedback loops among program components, and adaptation of activities based on the learnings.	Fully accepted	Completed		X		
2021 Big Data Platform Evaluation	3.1. Develop a ToC that articulates clearly how big data analytics can enable CGIAR research to lead to development outcomes.	Fully accepted	Completed	X			
-	6.7. Build a tailored monitoring and evaluation system to track results and for timely decisions.	Partially accepted	On track		X		
2021 Synthesis	8. Shift practices and evaluation away from seeking to attribute development impacts to CGIAR research and toward determining and valuing the essential contribution CGIAR is making with others, both through its research and by mobilizing collective actions among diverse public, private, and civil society partners to transform innovation systems for development impact.	Approved PRMF, which promotes contribution	Delayed				X
	15. Improve assessment and metrics related to risk and resilience, and co-develop social and technical innovations with at-risk populations.	Agrees	On track			X	

Evaluative study	Recommendation/ sub-recommendation	Management response (MR): Tracker	Status (as of 02/2025)	Theme			
				Theory of change (ToC)	Monitoring, Evaluation & Leaning (MEL)	Indicators & Reporting [a]	IA
	27. Strengthen MELIA metrics, and develop user-friendly, streamlined reporting systems based on simple, nested ToCs—developed with and owned by partners and stakeholders that enable required baselines, actions, capacities, and responsibilities to be coherently planned in pursuit of desired outcomes.	Supported	Completed	X		X	
	28. Tailor corresponding metrics to CGIAR's comparative advantage and realistic expectations of CGIAR's contribution to sustainable development outcomes across the five impact areas.	Supported	Completed			X	
	29. Incentivize the use of MELIA metrics for progressive cycles of evidence-based learning and adaptive management, working in close collaboration with partners and stakeholders, to optimize delivery and impacts. Increase the use of mixed-method designs in evaluations, with metrics for outcome pathways that go beyond CGIAR and its immediate boundary partners.	Supported	Completed		X	X	X
	31. Expand the availability of technical assistance on MELIA to research managers, scientists, and partners.	Supported	Completed		X		

Independent Advisory and Evaluation Service
Alliance of Bioversity International and CIAT
Via di San Domenico, 1 00153 Rome, Italy
IAES@cgiar.org
https://iaes.cgiar.org/