

# FTA's experience in measuring impacts of research on integrated systems

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# Why is it important for FTA?

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By its essence, FTA is a CRP working on socio-economic and environmental **systems** (linking value chains, governance, environment, etc.), with interventions of multiple **nature** (technical solutions, policies, governance, ...), that influence **multiple dimensions** (economic, environment, social), mobilizing **multiple scientific disciplines and methods** (including transdisciplinary), with **multiple outcomes** (e.g. not only crop yield).

As every other research for development program, it is important – for various reasons – to have measures of performance and success. It's particularly challenging for such programs like ours.

## **Important for whom?**

Important for the leadership and management of the program, to position research and as part of the priority setting “loop” (including learning on past impacts), to ensure quality of research.

Important for researchers, to better assess the pathways towards impact including understanding what are the key hypothesis and levers towards impact.

Important for stakeholders, to see potential impact of their activities, to understand on what action success builds upon, therefore , where they fit in impact pathways, what they depend upon and what they can induce further, to motivate their action/behavior, and the one of others.

Important for donors (accountability, track record, fundraising).



# Approach (1): The requirements

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To achieve the objectives of the previous slide, you must ensure “quality of research”: relevant, credible, legitimate, effective.

The issue of measuring impact (of research) is in itself a research question, that needs to follow the same “quality of research” principles.

The method and its outputs needs to be understandable and useful for all the four previous categories of public (leadership, scientists, stakeholders, donors). MELIA scientists may be at the center of it, but it is not only MELIA-oriented.

The “How” needs to be grounded on a dialogue between MELIA and research teams, making connections all along the research cycles (not disconnected or external from it).

Challenges: different cultures; approaches and methods (for measuring impacts) is a research field in itself;

# Approach (2): Collective thinking

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Start of a collective thinking (2018) associating, ISC, Management team, lead scientists and MELIA.

Workshops: Initial workshop (2019) to frame the issue, take stock on existing work, discuss approaches and methods, and decide on specific workplan; follow-up workshops (2020, 2021 forthcoming). Role of ISC and leadership to challenge MELIA on its own field.

Identification a set of 5 global cross-cutting challenges, addressed by the program, linked to the SLOs and SDGs.

Identification of indicators to measure global impact on these challenges, that reflect the focus of FTA (land and people), as coherent as possible with the SLOs.

Launch of 5 integrated studies, one on each challenge : deforestation, unsustainable land management, land degradation, food insecurity, poverty.

Objectives is to (1) assess impact pathways and (2) assess global impact of the program.

# Approach (3): Constraints/ challenges

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- Resources : impact assessment can be as costly as research itself
- Need to construct compatible databases across projects
- Challenges to involve all scientists
- Scarcity on primary data on impact (only a sample of projects have full blown impact assessments)
- Methods: at the same time, we needed to work on the methods that enable extrapolation, that are credible and accepted, based on available data...
- Time: need to develop methods and roll them out in a tight time frame
- Strategic choices: decision on key challenges to investigate, given fast evolving global framings on our issues (CGIAR framework, Phase 2 FTA proposal, Forest goals, SDGs...), and given wide perimeter of work of FTA. (reason why climate and biodiversity were not picked amongst the first 5 challenges, but are candidate for next investigation – obvious links to other challenges)

# Results

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## **1 – Process is a first key result in itself**

- Created organized connections MELIA-scientists, productive confrontation on objectives and methods of MELIA and how they should be put to use for the program.
- Implication of wide range of scientists all across the program
- Reflection on approaches, including the design of a specific methodology for the integrative studies (Brian and Karl can talk about it), co-constructed given the constraints and interests / motivations of the 2 parties.

## **2 - Impacts estimation**

- We managed to fine tune impact pathways, estimate global impacts (including taking into account hypothesis and uncertainties).
- We have numbers that demonstrate that important outcomes along the impact pathway have been realized the 5 domains (quantitative), and a reasonable basis to estimate the impact that could be realized in time.
- We can show that the impact of the whole is bigger than the sum of the individual impacts (for instance because of actions on enabling conditions etc.).

## **3 – Impact on research quality**

- Diffusion of Melia culture
- Better understanding (by scientists) of impact pathways and their relevance for the design, conduct and assessment of research.
- Each scientist better understands the positioning of its research in the ToC, therefore able to perceive its role into the bigger picture (also motivational).

# Conclusion

## Coming back to the original objectives: did we succeed?

- It is feasible
  - It has indirect effects (involvement of scientists, learning) that are as important as the results itself, and that are the condition:
    - of the success of the method itself,
    - and of it being useful for future positioning and design of research
  - This puts us in a good position to prepare a new program .. We would have been well prepared for phase 3.
1. **A more consistent use of ToCs** can help reduce the diffusion of topics and geographies of research and engagement
  2. **Use of nested ToCs** can support challenge-centric program and strategy design, including identifying targets for projects
  3. **Setting targets for projects** helps ground intended influence and impact, and makes researchers build impact into project design
  4. Importance of having **consistency in the documentation and monitoring** of projects, as well as in M&E terminology

## What we hope to gain from the workshop?

Exchange on experiences from other programs

Get feedback on what we have done, especially the methods

Progress on approaches on methods, refine our own, towards new standards for IA of systems research