

Minutes of the Thirty-Ninth Meeting of SPIA (SPIA 39)
FAO Headquarters, Rome
28th February 2011

Attendance:

Derek Byerlee (SPIA Chair), Mywish Maredia (SPIA Member), Tim Kelley (SPIA Secretary), James Stevenson (ISPC Secretariat)

1. Opening comments

DB welcomed members to the meeting. The meeting was held in closed session (i.e. without observers).

2. Review of agenda

The agenda for the meeting was approved without additions or amendments.

3. Minutes of SPIA 38

These were approved. It was agreed that SPIA would clarify with Enrica Porcari which journals are signed up to an agreement on pre-galley proofs. All the PORIA impact studies and the Renkow Byerlee paper would all be posted on the <http://impact.cgiar.org> website as soon as possible.

4. SPIA strategy and new business model

SPIA will need to continue funding impact assessment activities ourselves – the research centres have not been forthcoming with sufficient financial resources or human resources and the necessary expertise. It was agreed that SPIA cannot go back to low-budget calls for proposals – the direction we have set in the past year (of organising higher value calls for proposals – e.g. on DIIVA and on the poverty study) needs to be maintained. However, the expectation is that in the future, the CRPs will fund impact assessment and SPIA can pull back to meta-analyses, and special studies, as well as facilitating improvements in quality and innovative approaches across the system.

SPIA should plan on the basis of an assumed operational budget of around \$500,000. With current projects in the workplan, there is already the commitment to spend approximately \$150 - 200,000 on the legume study, and \$100-150,000 on the poverty study in 2012.

In response to specific request from a number of donors, SPIA needs to start thinking now how it will approach another large-scale meta-analysis study. Raitzer's 2003 paper generated some high-level estimates of rates of return to research that have been much appreciated by donors. It was agreed that 2013 would be the right time to aim to produce a follow-up, once DIIVA is complete.

Action: SPIA to produce a two-page document on what will be required to pull-together the system-level impacts in 2013 based on DIIVA, TRIVSA, IRRI's Asia rice research, ACIAR + CIMMYT on maize / wheat, some modelling on nutrition / poverty using GTAP etc. Likely to cost \$2 or \$3 million USD over 2 years.

The stripe-review model, currently being pursued in the case of legume research, has also been positively received by donors and centre scientists and management. Possible topics for the next one to be launched (likely in 2012) are a) water (IWMI, ICRISAT, ICARDA, IFPRI, WorldFish, IRRI), and b) livestock (ILRI, WorldFish, ICARDA).

Questions remain about how we handle funding for new studies. The model of working in collaboration with a centre to manage pass-through funds (as has been done very successfully in the case of Bioversity for the DIIVA project) is risky and dependent on the individuals in question. The shift to CRPs should not mean major changes for the way that SPIA works, likewise the new Independent Evaluation Arrangement. The relationship with the impact assessment focal points (IAFPs) in the new SPIA model (i.e. keeping an arm's length distance from the centres) is less clear.

Action: SPIA should publish a three-year rolling operational plan (no more than 4 pages) to underlie the current strategy. This should be circulated to donors and published on the website.

5. On-going studies

5.1 Environmental Impact Assessment

Consultants Jeff Bennett and Nelson Villoria have finished with their contributions to this study. SPIA are finalising the land paper (a separate meeting was scheduled with the SPIA authors to discuss the details of the latest draft), and it was agreed that a compendium on environmental impact assessment would be the final output featuring:

- a five-page overview of the study to go up-front (DB)
- Bennett's synthesis paper
- Renkow's review paper
- SPIA's paper on land-use change

Action: DB to draft five-page overview.

The 2011 Science Forum will be on the topic of the agriculture-environment nexus, and SPIA has been charged with organising a session relating to land-use change and the relationship between agriculture and forests in particular.

5.2 Poverty

The call for proposals has yielded a good response from centres – 13 submissions of concept notes. The focus of the discussion was on finalising the names for three reviewers. The aim is to now identify 4 – 6 concept notes to proceed to full proposal stage. The final proposals will be reviewed in late April / early May, with a decision and notification to the successful research teams no later than the end of May 2011.

SPIA have invited IFPRI (i.e. not part of the competitive call) to develop a macro-level proposal focusing on the combined impacts of a number of CGIAR centres in one country, to be submitted on the same timeline as the micro-level studies.

Action: TK and JS to further develop the background to the Washington DC meeting to a full paper.

5.3 DIIVA meeting

Tom Walker should submit a revised workplan with greater detail about how the milestones set out will be achieved. It was noted that DIIVA is a critical input to a number of SPIA projects over the coming years, and so any slippage will have knock-on effects.

5.4 Legume improvement impact study

In the February to June 2011 preparatory phase, Rob Tripp (as lead consultant), SPIA members, and some additional consultants (economists and legume specialists) will visit offices or headquarters of the four relevant CGIAR centres (ICARDA, IITA, ICRISAT, CIAT) to speak with scientists and management, and interview partners from the National Agricultural Research Systems and Statistical Bureaus. Brief field visits to carry out interviews / focus groups with a small number of farmers about their perceptions of the benefits of adoption will also add to the team's understanding.

The following approximate schedule of visits (to be confirmed with the centres) is as follows:

- early-mid March, ICARDA: Syria spring chickpea; Turkey winter chickpea
- mid April, East Africa (ICRISAT / CIAT): Pigeonpea in Tanzania; CIAT beans through DIIVA
- early May, South Asia (ICRISAT / ICARDA): Chickpea and pigeonpea in India; Lentil in Nepal
- early June – Nigeria (IITA): Cowpea in Nigeria

The main objectives of this preparatory phase are to: a) secure the interest and participation of the centres; b) narrow down the list of potential crop x country combinations; c) uncover any unpublished data at CGIAR centres or statistical bureaus that could be of use to the main phase case-studies; d) assemble information about any success stories that would not require extensive collection of new data; e) develop some preliminary ideas about possible methods and data requirements for detailed case-studies in the main phase (July 2011 – Dec 2012).

MM advised that the pulse CRSP has a study on adoption estimates using expert opinions for Nicaragua, Honduras, Haiti, Guatemala, El Salvador (Mexico to be confirmed). Likewise, the study team will need to link with the TRIVSA project in South Asia. MM gave the name of a collaborator from NCAP – Santh Kumar Pandey – who could be a useful contact for the study. Also Ramesh Trandra.

MM is also working with her research student to finalise the overview paper on legumes for publication on the website. It was agreed that we should be as explicit as possible in documenting the decision to exclude potential case-studies from the final list. Also, the role of the centres in the study is yet to be completely finalised – some good potential case-studies may be just below the line that SPIA chooses to draw but may still represent good stories that should be analysed and written up. In these cases, SPIA will encourage the centres to find sources of funding and to write it up themselves.

5.5 Germplasm collection, conservation, characterisation and evaluation (GCCCE)

Following the papers in 2010 by Smale and Hansen and by Jonathan Robinson, SPIA faces the following options for 2011:

- a) A large-scale study of flows and utilisation of germplasm across the system (i.e. focus on outcomes)
- b) A smaller study of a few selected examples in which genebanks have played a role in plant breeding (i.e. a focus on ex-post impacts)

c) Not pursuing this area of work any further, and moving the budget into another study

Issues about budget, and the time input from secretariat staff and SPIA member support and supervision were discussed. The opportunity cost of option a) was considered to be too high at the moment. On the other hand, SPIA has been promising a piece on this issue for a number of years, and so the option of doing nothing was also rejected. In addition, the report by Robinson was of high quality, and there was agreement that moving forward to engage Robinson in discussions over a study this calendar year was a good idea. Melinda Smale (now working at Michigan State University, and not available for further consultancy work at this time) advises that SPIA should work with the centres closely on these cases, and that ILRI, IITA and IRRI are those where the germplasm bank curator is likely to be particularly interested.

Action: Terms of reference for the study should be developed, in consultation with Robinson, for about six weeks of his time in 2011 and a travel budget. An economist will need to be recruited to work alongside him, once the 3 or 4 case-studies for detailed study have been finalised. Discussions about the cases should include Elisabetta Gotor at Bioversity and Marcio de Santos (new ISPC member).

6. Other SPIA activities

6.1 Strategic guidance on ex-post impact assessment

The question of whether to revise this document was debated. The conclusion was that there was little enthusiasm for doing so at this point. Having commissioned Julian Alston to read it last year and point out how things could be revised, in the end he did not have the interest to do so. Impact evaluation and the “rigour revolution” is proceeding at pace in economics more generally and in *ex-post* impact assessment in particular, and it was agreed that now was not the right point to undertake major revisions of a whole strategic guidance document – they may be out of date before they are published. See the following agenda item, 6.2 for elaboration.

6.2 Randomised Control Trials

While a lot of useful and interesting discussions have taken place in the last year on this topic, it is important for SPIA to deliver with a paper soon. The SPIA chair’s introduction to the de Janvry-Dustan-Sadoulet paper could be a basis for a more in-depth paper for SPIA on the issue of experimental methods and rigour revolution in economics and epIA. DB noted that there was a paper by Gilligan on orange flesh sweet potato at the recent IFPRI Delhi conference on agriculture and health. MM has submitted an abstract sent for the 3IE meeting in Mexico later this year. There was agreement that there seem to be three distinct areas of study emerging in impact assessment: *ex-ante*; early *ex-post*; and late *ex-post* impact assessment. The relative importance of treatment effects and scale of adoption varies between early (treatment effects are very important; scale of adoption is yet unknown) and late *ex-post* (scale of adoption is very important; treatment effects cannot be known with absolute certainty).

Action: TK and JS to develop paper based on SPIA chair’s introduction to the de Janvry *et al* paper.

7. Communication and Outreach

7.1 Website

It was suggested that a student / research assistant be commissioned each summer to do a search of epIAs and update the impact website. It was noted that the new website's search function needs some attention and Tony Murray (contracted to maintain the site) should look at this and try and improve the usability.

Action: JS to commission and manage Natalia Morazzo to revise the content of the impact database.

7.2 Strategy for outreach

SPIA will not print its own reports - type-set electronic documents (pdfs) will be circulated to Impact Assessment Focal Points (IAFPS) and to the Director Generals (DGs) of the centres, to ensure that there is good exchange between SPIA and the centres under SPIA's new, more independent, business model. Everything that we do should be broadcast to the donors.

A number of donors have noted how useful the meta-analysis carried out by Raitzer (2003) has been in defending allocations to the CGIAR out of a competitive overseas aid portfolio, and have requested an update (see item 4). The latest draft of the SPIA vision, mandate and workplan document from TK was discussed. JS should now edit and type-set this as a 4-page type-set pdf for consultation with donors at the ISPC meeting. This will then be strategy document with a rolling three-year work plan that is revised annually, and always available on the website.

Action: JS to edit and circulate draft 4-page communication piece.

7.3 Conferences

Jo Swinnen, President of the International Association of Agricultural Economists (IAAE), has informally invited SPIA to organise a pre-conference workshop on impact assessment of agricultural research at the IAAE meetings in 2012 in Brazil. This would involve CGIAR IAFPs and advanced research institutes, but would also be partly open to others – perhaps 1 day closed (CGIAR only) and a further ½ day open.

Action: SPIA to develop a 1-page concept note to share with IAAE.

8. SPIA succession plan

Some confidential discussions took place regarding candidates for SPIA membership and future chairs.

ENDS