

Agriculture for Impact

EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES 2013 – 2015

HEADLINE FINDINGS (July 2015)

CONTENTS

	Slide
• Background, aims & methodology	2
• Evaluation findings	3
– Perceptions of Agriculture for Impact	4
– Agriculture for Impact: use and impact	5
– Agriculture for Impact: looking to the future	8
– Stakeholder recommendations for Agriculture for Impact	9

Background, aims and methodology

Background and aims

- This document outlines headline findings of an external evaluation of Agriculture for Impact (A4I)
- The aim of this evaluation is to assess the initiatives successes and performance against its objectives and to identify recommendations for the future of the programme
 - The broad objectives for A4I’s work are to *“provide information and expertise to enable decision makers in governments and other donors in the European Union, especially in the U.K. and the European Commission, to provide more effective support for science and innovation for agricultural development to benefit smallholder farmers in sub-Saharan Africa (SSA).”*
- This evaluation focuses on A4I’s work over the course of its most recent BMGF grant period from (i.e. from 2013 to 2015)

Methodology

- The evaluation is based on 27 evaluation interviews conducted with a group of A4I’s key stakeholders (between May and July 2015)
 - The stakeholders interviewed were drawn from a source list provided by Agriculture for Impact. They represented a diverse range of sectors, types of organisation and geographies
 - Interviews were conducted over the phone, followed a semi-structured discussion guide and lasted up to 1 hour
 - These discussions were conducted confidentially. We do not attribute comments to individual stakeholders in our reporting
- The sample breakdown for the interviews conducted is as follows:

Montpellier Panel members	Donors / policy makers (outside SSA)	SSA Policy makers	International agencies
3	7	4	3
NGOs / peers / foundations	Academic	Private sector	Media
3	3	3	1

Headline evaluation findings

Engagement with Agriculture for Impact

- Agriculture for Impact (A4I) has a broad and diverse constituency of stakeholders who remain positive about its work and outputs. Those contacted for the evaluation were keen to participate, gave their time generously and provided useful insights
- Overall, Professor Sir Gordon Conway and the Montpellier Panel (MP) continue to command greater recognition than A4I. Many see the MP and A4I brands as interchangeable. Only its closest stakeholders (i.e. Montpellier Panel members, some whom have partnered with A4I, and a small number of long-standing policy representatives) are clear on the distinction between these different entities
- Stakeholders' contact with other members of the A4I team is growing but Professor Conway remains integral to relationships with organisations in all its stakeholder groups

“What I can tell you is that they [A4I] are a very important stakeholder, a credible voice in conversations around Africa. We understand they have great relationships and credibility with non-governmental organisations as well as governmental organisations and key influencers in Africa.”

Private sector

“I think that A4I and MP are, unfortunately, seen as one and the same thing. It takes a lot of time and energy to delineate it and explain the difference. I think the Montpellier Panel has made a bigger footprint, maybe because of the visibility of the Panel members.”

Panel member

“A4I sometimes does their own A4I-branded reports and sometimes they are producing Montpellier Panel reports, that is a bit confusing for people.”

NGOs / peers / foundations

Headline evaluation findings

Perceptions of Agriculture for Impact

- There is broad recognition that A4I/MP's focus is on advocacy with key policy makers to support effective investment and policy making in agricultural development for farmers in Sub-Saharan Africa (SSA.)
- Stakeholders describe A4I's objectives in general terms as 'raising awareness of agricultural development', 'sharing evidence' and 'influencing policy makers.' The majority of interviewees say that A4I performs well against these objectives
- Discussions with stakeholders indicate that the team has built on the progress captured in the last evaluation. For most, it is now an established player in the agricultural development sector. A number of African interviewees indicate that it is still seen as a newcomer in policy networks in SSA
- A4I/MP continues to be seen as a 'unique voice' in the crowded agricultural development community. It remains relevant, credible, independent, respected and continues to 'punch above its weight.' For many, Professor Conway's 'convening power' is a key asset and one which sets A4I apart from other organisations
- Criticism of the organisation is limited. Several note that A4I's capacity is limited relative to the scale of the debates it seeks to influence. Its contribution to the agricultural development sector is highly valued though several indicate its outputs cannot carry the same weight as those from some larger bodies (e.g. World Bank, Committee on World Food Security.) Several call for the Montpellier Panel reports to be more 'solutions-focused'
- A small number of interviewees comment that A4I/MP has, to date, focused heavily on technology transfer but not explored the social justice / market pieces in sufficient depth

"I think on the intellectual piece, the thought leadership piece, they are doing extremely well. The analysis they do is top-rate, the people in the Montpellier Panel are all like rock stars." **Academic**

"It's the person-to-person contacts that they've got where they can gain access to public secretaries, ministers and presidents very quickly and easily. It's that sort of thing where those people get into those offices, have a thirteen minute discussion around, for example, how do you engage with agribusiness, and that's the real value." **NGOs / peers / foundations**

"There are a lot of think tanks, research centres, universities producing the same kind of papers and I think it is not A4I's fault but it is difficult for them to show the added value compared to others." **Donors / policy makers (outside SSA)**



Headline evaluation findings

Agriculture for Impact - Use and impact among target audiences

- Stakeholders use Agriculture for Impact / Montpellier Panel resources in a range of settings. They provide important contextual information in their work, are used to inform colleagues and others in their networks, and in developing internal and external documents. The limitations of assessing the impact of this use, observed in previous evaluations, also apply in this evaluation
- There is consensus that A4I has continued to make good progress on 'soft' measures of impact among policy makers, NGOs and with its private sector stakeholders. It is active, recognised and respected in relevant national and international networks (DFID, APPG, DEVCO and the UN among others.) For their peers in advocacy, these are important achievements
- Most describe the initiative's impact in general terms as 'putting a spotlight on agricultural development' and maintaining this interest
- The evaluation also identifies a number of examples where A4I/MP's work has influenced decision making in policy circles, civil society and the private sector. The Panel's work on Sustainable Intensification (SI) continues to inform policy making and implementation within the European Commission (EC). Private sector representatives have used insights from A4I/MP's reports to shape internal strategies and to improve their efficiency in getting technology to smallholder farmers

"I certainly see them as a recognised voice, but tracing that back to whether people's investment decisions have changed is very difficult." **Donors / policy makers (outside SSA)**

"In important circles you frequently find reference to A4I publications...equally when you pitch up at an APPG meeting, you see people from A4I or the MP." **Donors / policy makers (outside SSA)**

"When I hear Gordon speak he makes so much sense to me. And people keep inviting him back...he must be having an impact or people wouldn't be having him back." **NGOs / peers / foundations**

"One of their key strengths is their understanding of the issues and problems and being able to put them in an easy to understand, succinct manner without any overbearing complexity...There have been some very enlightening documents from A4I and the MP that have made the debate understandable for agriculturalists and non-specialists." **NGOs / peers / foundations**

"What's produced by the Panel is read, known and referred to." **Academic**



Headline evaluation findings

Agriculture for Impact - Use and impact Wider communications and dissemination work

- Alongside its work to maintain relationships and influence among policy audiences (several of whom contributed to the evaluation) A4I has made progress in its wider communications and dissemination work. Several interviewees referenced A4I's newsletter as a product they follow and engage with. Only a small number report closely following the organisation's social media activity. Several say they do not engage with social media in general
- Quantitative indicators demonstrate growth in engagement with A4I's online and social media activity among a wider audience. Increases in A4I's Twitter following (135% growth since 2013), and numbers of newsletter subscribers (which have increased by 59% to 2200+ over the same timeframe) provide tangible evidence of growth in engagement with the initiative's outputs. Outcomes of this engagement are, however, less tangible
- Over the current funding period A4I/MP has had c.150 media mentions across a range of national, global and international media outlets. Much of this media activity is still driven by Professor Conway
- Several of the stakeholders interviewed encourage A4I/MP to focus on increasing its media presence as a way of encouraging wider engagement with agricultural development, and ensuring it remains on the radar for policy makers (particularly in the UK and Europe)

"I think all of us have a responsibility as well as an opportunity to provide clarity and elevate our voices and connect more with society ...Certainly A4I is one of the organisations that has credible voices that can take that message to society."

Private sector

"Their report on the state of soil in Africa is something that's stuck in my mind, something I want to revisit."

Media

Headline evaluation findings

Responses to key Agriculture for Impact/ Montpellier Panel outputs

Montpellier Panel Report Innovation for Sustainable Intensification 2013

- Sustainable intensification stands out as the area of MP's work that has most engaged and influenced stakeholders
- Together the two MP papers on SI have established Gordon and the Montpellier Panel as authoritative voices in this area
- They have informed strategy development and day-to-day decision making in private sector organisations, NGOs and DG DEVCO
- Several comment the report would have benefited from greater exposure and follow-up

"Everyone is talking about sustainable intensification, nobody really knows what it means, and what Gordon did was developing four different parts of it that also include equity and the importance of addressing women's needs. I thought that was incredibly forward-looking and really has an opportunity to shape how we think about our intervention beyond yield and environment." **International agencies**

"It redefined sustainable intensification, that whole definition that they put together, I think they could get a lot more mileage out of it." **Academic**

Montpellier Panel Report No Ordinary Matter: Conserving, Restoring and Enhancing Africa's Soils 2014

- The report has had significant traction among interviewees and the wider agricultural development sector (including in Germany, the EC and Uganda.) Its publication, launched to coincide with 2015 International Year of Soils, led to high awareness of the report
- Soils are considered an important topic for A4I/MP to address, and one that has previously been neglected
- For a couple of stakeholders, soils do not have an obvious 'landing place' within their organisation / work programme
- Interventions proposed for the management of soils are considered helpful. A couple say the report does not demonstrate the institutional changes needed to respond to these

"It's a very good report, it's very comprehensive, it discusses holistic interventions that need to come about for the management of soils and land... The ability to pull together all these parts, seeds, soils, markets and get a high up panel to speak about it, create some advocacy and dialogue, that's very helpful." **SSA policy maker**

Montpellier Panel Report Small and Growing: Entrepreneurship in African Agriculture 2014

- Engagement with this report was limited. Only a small number had read or used it (but this does include important donors and private sector interviewees)
- A number commend the report for highlighting challenges linked to entrepreneurship, finance and innovation. One private sector stakeholder notes that the report effectively bridges the gap between discussions focussed on farmers and those on crops
- A stakeholder from an NGO / peer organisation felt the report was less useful than others because its recommendations are less specific

"Small and Growing was a good report, it highlighted some of the challenges with entrepreneurship. I think what they did do was highlight some of the issues around finance and innovation connected to entrepreneurship, and that was very helpful." **Private sector**

"A4I has expertise in distilling a lot of technical knowledge for a policy maker audience, and the entrepreneurship report does not fit into that framework." **NGOs / peers / foundations**

Headline evaluation findings

Looking to the future – changes in the landscape

- There is a consensus that agricultural development now commands greater interest in the broader international development debate than a decade ago. However, stakeholders stress the importance of maintaining interest in agricultural development which, they say, is central to tackling global health, economic, environmental and social issues. Stakeholders broadly agree that A4I has an on-going role to play in this context
- There are a number of trends and developments for A4I to consider as it seeks to maintain its focus. Agriculture is increasingly recognised as an issue which connects with other important agendas (including climate change, nutrition, land tenure and urbanisation.) There is, within the development community, growing frustration that these different issues are often explored in isolation
- Donors are increasingly keen to demonstrate the impact of their investment, and are supporting partnership programmes between bodies seeking shared outcomes. Several observe that major donors are keen to see development problems and solutions owned in Africa

“The main thing that is happening now is that people are no longer wanting to deal with agriculture as a single sector. Everyone wants to elevate the game so it is about people and their lives. It is not just basic livelihoods. It is about healthy people for sustainable livelihoods...it also brings in the health sector and the job creation sector. The indicator for success is no longer how much food you produce, it zeros around healthy people who are pursuing sustainable livelihoods and are happy to remain where they are.”

Panel member

“Why don’t all the various sectors that are related to agriculture come together and agree their 3-5 priorities ...I think the next big step comes in these sectors coming out of their little bubbles and talking with each other.” **Donors / policy makers (outside SSA)**

“The focus in this Parliament will be getting results for the same amount of money rather than extracting larger amounts of money...what people are interested in is what works with limited resources rather than big grand projects.” **Donors / policy makers (outside SSA)**

“Africa is seen as the frontier where land is still available, infrastructure is developing and the markets are there. Ten years ago there was very little talk about agriculture, now it's the 'in thing.’” **SSA policy makers**

Headline evaluation findings

Looking to the future – stakeholder recommendations for A4I

- Stakeholders report an on-going need for evidence, advocacy and consensus building in this changing landscape. There is broad agreement that Agriculture for Impact is well placed to deliver this work
- As in previous evaluations, those more distanced from the organisation urge A4I to ‘keep up the good work.’ They value A4I’s contribution to their organisations, and in wider debate in the sector
- However, those who have been closest to the organisation (including Panel Members, long standing policy contacts and peers) suggest A4I needs to consider significant changes if it is to make a long term contribution to improving agricultural development in SSA
- Several see the Montpellier Panel as the strongest, most sustainable brand and suggest A4I needs to recognise this
- A number suggest that A4I’s future focus should be as a secretariat for the Montpellier Panel, based in Africa. This move would i) respond to donors’ expectations, ii) provide a global platform for showcasing the research and skills of African communities and experts, and iii) encourage broader engagement with MP outputs in Africa
- Stakeholders do not identify potential future leaders/successors but indicate A4I should take steps to support succession planning. Appointing an African co-chair on the MP and providing advocacy training for all Panel members are mentioned in this context
- Stakeholders identify future themes for A4I/MP to engage on as it seeks to increase its influence. A major theme is a need to ‘bridge’ different development agendas and players within it (particularly the gap between the private sector and NGOs) and several suggest A4I could play a valuable convening role. A number call for A4I to play a more prominent role in the ‘Impact’ agenda – identifying approaches and indicators that work in the context of agricultural development in SSA

“I strongly believe that for the constituencies that the Panel seeks to help, it is high time that we got more visibility within the African constituencies and more ownership... The time is right for the Panel to move its coordination base to where the Southern Constituencies can own and touch it and it is springing from the South to the Global community.” **Panel member**

“We need to capture the non-development world, i.e. the agribusiness sector better. They don’t always want to ride roughshod over poor people but they often do because they don’t know any better. There are very few NGOs who can bridge this divide and speak the language that investors and agribusiness speak, and keep an eye... on the poor and the voiceless. Perhaps there is a role for them [A4I] to bridge this... You don’t have an advocacy organisation there that can straddle those worlds. Gordon has really good relationship and connections.” **Donors / policy maker (outside SSA)**

“I think impact evaluations have been a kind of weak point of agriculture... I think that is an area that has not been particularly high on Gordon’s agenda.” **Donors / policy maker (outside SSA)**

Agriculture for Impact

EXTERNAL EVALUATION OF ACTIVITIES 2013 – 2015

FOR FURTHER DETAILS ON THE EVALUATION PLEASE CONTACT
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