

CIAR

Culture of impact in Agricultural Research Organizations: What for and how?

ABSTRACT

Research institutions are interested in capturing the contribution of their research activities to society, and the changes they generate. This desire may even be stronger, or in higher demand, among institutes having a development mandate. For some organizations, this trend has resulted in the establishment of a “culture of impact” whereby there is a general recognition within the organization that research needs to be thought through the eyes of the types of impact it aims to generate. In this context, different means including visions, strategies, methods, and tools can be developed to encourage researchers - regardless of their disciplines - to adopt a reflexive attitude about the changes their interventions could produce and the mechanisms through which it happens. Such a switch in the posture at organizational and individual levels to stimulate the questioning around impact from research, their articulation, their evaluation, and more generally the role of researchers involves, however, long-term processes. We are interested in analyzing these institutional trajectories. By comparing three national and international agricultural research organizations, we aim to examine the reasons and motivations to the emergence of a culture of impact in each institute, understand how such a culture materializes, and capture the various changes it generates. Through the building of a learning community across the three institutes, we develop a common analytical framework that we use to identify common triggers and potential obstacles to a culture of impact, which will help to shape their future orientation. For this, we compare institutional elements (e.g. visions, strategies, approaches, and their evolvement over time), which we illustrate using specific internal case studies. Through mutual learning across institutions, this work will on the one hand contribute to improve the relevance, institutional percolation, and uptake of the culture. On the other hand, it consists of a first step towards a long-lasting learning community that will pursue reflections on the role of agricultural research for society. Specifically, we will address the following key research questions: i) What drivers push agricultural research institutions to integrate impact evaluation in their strategic agendas? ii) Which are the main motivation(s) behind the promotion and establishment of a culture of impact? iii) Which factors are key in shaping the nature and trajectory of a culture of impact? iv) How does a culture of impact materialize in practice and translate at operational level? And v) Which changes does a culture of impact contribute to generate at organizational and individual levels?

Year : 2020

Project number : 2002-239

Type of funding : AAP ICL

Project type : AAP

Research units in the network : INNOVATION

Start date : 2021-11-01

End date : 2024-04-30

Flagship project : no

Project leader : Marie Ferré

Project leader's institution : CIRAD

Project leader's RU : Innovation

Budget allocated : 17648 €

Total budget allocated (including co-financing) : 17648 €

Funding : Labex

GOAL

1. Identify the main motivations for an agricultural research organization to integrate impact evaluation in strategic agendas and to build a culture of impact.

2. Identify the internal and external factors that shape the nature and trajectory of a culture of impact. E.g. We aim to test how the discipline of contributors, the mandate and network of the institution, the type of communication, and the strategical institutional motivations shape (or not) cultures of impact.
3. Understand the various forms a culture of impact can take and how it translates at an operational level, e.g. in terms of discourses, visions, strategies, methods, tools, spaces of exchanges, resources, support.
4. Capture the changes that a culture of impact entails in institutional practices and strategies and in researchers' perceptions, attitudes, capacities, practices, and behavior. This covers multiple areas from the conception of research ideas, to the building of project, their monitoring, their evaluation, and the management of partnerships. We want to find out whether a culture of impact could foster a "move" from focusing on producing knowledge and scientific outputs, to promoting the appropriation of these outputs by social actors and encouraging changes in practices following this appropriation that eventually generate societal impacts.
5. Create the basis for a long-term learning process across agricultural research organizations, in order to share experiences and be able to re-interrogate, and adjust/orient the culture of impact's path in accordance with context, priorities, agendas, opportunities.