



How do we build a world with less poverty?



Farmers harvest snow peas
in Karongi Region, Rwanda
Credit: Tom Gilks

...By creating and sharing evidence, while equipping
decision-makers to use it to reduce poverty.



Teenage girls at school in Western Province, Kenya
Credit: Aude Guerrucci

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How does IPA build a world with less poverty?

...We create and share
evidence, while equipping
decision-makers to use it
to reduce poverty.



What does it take for evidence to reduce poverty?

The Problem: There is **not enough evidence** on what actually improves the lives of people living in poverty (and what doesn't!). The **evidence that does exist is not always used** to inform programs and policies, leading to wasted money and enduring poverty. **IPA exists to solve these problems, building a world with more evidence and less poverty.**



Students in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, India
Credit: Arvind Eyunni (Pratham)

Lessons From Our Past

From 2007-2012, IPA pushed the field of randomized evaluations forward, establishing that we could run hundreds of randomized evaluations in dozens of countries. We grew exponentially. Yet we realized that supplying decision-makers with evidence wasn't enough to create a demand for evidence.

So from 2013-2018, our strategic plan and mission statement emphasized 1) discovering what works and 2) promoting the adoption and scale-up of effective solutions. We continued growing the body of evidence and contributed to the adoption of evidence-based programs, improving hundreds of millions of lives.

FOR EVIDENCE TO BE USED:

- **More evidence needs to exist:** Over the past decade the number of evaluations has grown, but there is still a gap in research and development for the international development sector.
- **It needs to be credible:** The highest standard for research quality cannot be compromised—it is and continues to be the foundation of everything we do.
- **It should be relevant:** “What works?” is rarely as straightforward as it seems. Knowing which solutions are effective requires understanding where does it work? Under what conditions? Why does it work? How is it being implemented?
- **Evidence users have to buy into the process:** Promoting an effective solution is not enough. Evidence use requires:

A commitment to ongoing adapting and learning about what works (and doesn't), and why

Ongoing engagement of decision-makers throughout the research process

Sharing evidence with the right people at the right time

Partners having a hand in creating evidence and building understanding of how to apply it

An Eye to the Future

Our vision remains the same as always: a world with more evidence and less poverty. And we're still an organization built on the cornerstone of high-quality rigorous research in deep collaboration with world-class researchers.

To achieve our vision, our last strategic plan emphasized promoting the adoption and scale-up of effective solutions. But because we have learned that promoting an effective solution alone is not enough for evidence to be used systematically, our strategic ambition through 2025 emphasizes the need for iterative learning about what works (and doesn't work!), and why, and the need to equip decision-makers to use evidence, by building deep partnerships, engaging decision-makers throughout the research process, and helping them develop learning agendas adapted to their needs.



A mother and son under a bednet in Western Province, Kenya
Credit: Aude Guerrucci

TO BUILD A WORLD WITH MORE EVIDENCE AND LESS POVERTY, WE WILL:

- Continue to lead the field of development in cutting-edge **research quality and innovation**
- Test promising ideas **across contexts and at a larger scale**
- Proactively **engage** key decision-makers **throughout the research process**
- Equip partners with the skills and tools they need to **co-create and use data and evidence**



2025 STRATEGIC AMBITION PILLARS

How will we build a world with less poverty?



01: Create Stronger Evidence

To deepen public knowledge on how to reduce poverty



02: Share Evidence Strategically

To influence conversations & inform decisions



03: Equip Decision-Makers to Use Evidence

To improve the lives of the global poor

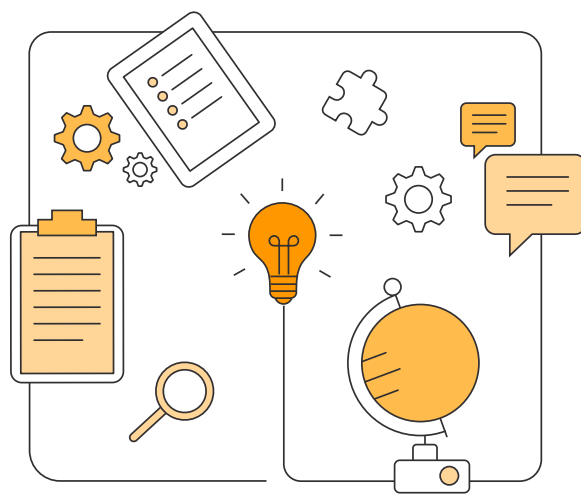
How do we build a world with less poverty?

Create Stronger Evidence

Create Stronger Evidence

Rigorously evaluate programs and test new, innovative ideas

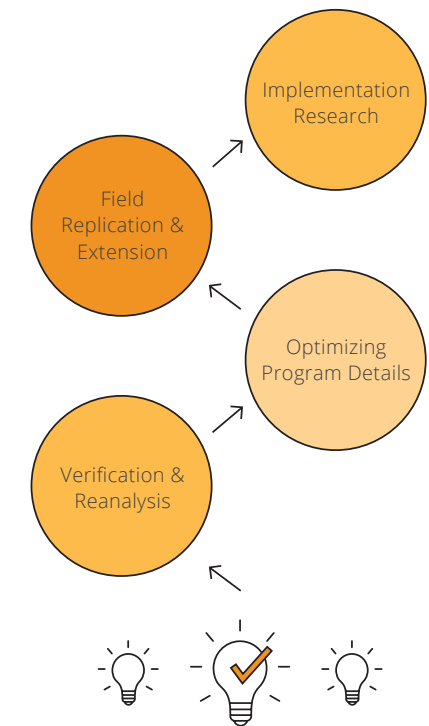
Rigorous evaluations generate critical insights and inform decision-makers. Together with our network of researchers and program partners, we will continue to identify pressing problems faced by people living in poverty, formulate key research questions, discover innovative solutions, and understand which development interventions work, which do not, and why.



Implementing randomized controlled trials (RCTs) in partnership with world-class researchers, in particular to test innovative ideas, is what we are known for, and we will continue to focus on excelling in this. We will continue to introduce cost-effective improvements, both structural and operational, to strengthen our field research evaluation capabilities and our ability to provide value-added service to research teams at the forefront of development innovation. Our goal is to build an efficient and high-quality partnership throughout the research lifecycle, from research project development and management, to grants management and research communication.

Validate promising ideas along the path to scale

When one study shows an idea works, people tasked with applying the evidence can be left confused about exactly how to achieve their goals. Additional research is needed to understand **whether and how promising ideas would work in different geographical or institutional contexts, and at a larger scale.** IPA moves promising ideas along the path to scale through verification and reanalysis, program optimization, field replications, and implementation research.



IPA is uniquely positioned to create and execute opportunities for path-to-scale research by building the internal capacity to identify, push forward, and support the management of such studies, thereby reducing the costs for academic researchers to participate. **IPA's comparative advantage within this scope is conducting field replications and extensions, and evaluating promising interventions at larger scales or in new contexts.** We did this, for example, with the six-country ultra poor graduation studies and with the replication of the targeted instruction model from India in Ghana. We will do more of these kinds of replications and will be more deliberate about building this needed capacity.



A student in Anantapur, Andhra Pradesh, India thinks about what he would write in a mind map and then follows up with actually writing his answer.

Credit: Arvind Eyunni (Pratham)

“ I would like IPA to continue to be the **liaison between government and researchers** to help them answer key questions. For [our study], IPA helped redirect us to do something scalable, sustainable, and that was not the initial direction. This knowledge about key gov't questions is not something we can do as researchers sitting in another country. That expertise and partnership is so valuable.

SHARON WOLF, Assistant Professor, Graduate School of Education, University of Pennsylvania

Facilitate the co-generation of policy-relevant studies

We have learned that achieving long-term impact is not just about generating evidence or even making it digestible by decision-makers: it requires **engagement with decision-makers from the start of a study via a co-generation approach**, and getting buy-in into the process of generating and using evidence. We will therefore broaden our work as a facilitator of policy-relevant studies by intentionally bringing together academics and decision-makers.

To facilitate the co-generation of policy-relevant studies, we need to be able to identify key issues faced by decision-makers, broker strategic, iterative partnerships with key players, and facilitate matchmaking between researchers and decision-makers. **We will grow our capacity to do this well by:**

- Building additional **sectoral expertise** and increasingly leveraging our **strong local presence**
- **Pushing forward research agendas around certain sectors or topics**, proactively developing or incentivizing the development of studies and partnerships, and pushing the frontiers of development research topics and questions, as we are doing, for

example with our Peace & Recovery and Intimate Partner Violence Initiatives

- **Working more proactively with local academics**, who know the relevant local problems both from the research and the policy side, and often know decision-makers well

Focus on delivering the highest-quality research

Our evidence is only as good as the implementation of our research and the data we collect. While research quality has been a continuous focus and something we are known for, **we will aim for even greater consistency in the application of our own data quality standards**. We will do this through the restructuring of research management and training, and by strengthening our staff's technical skills.

In a context of increasingly complex research management and fast-changing technologies, we aim to constantly improve the quality and consistency of our data. To deliver on this ambition, we will need to strengthen our staff's technical skills, using online platforms to deliver on-demand instruction at the right level and the right time, and also develop new, specialized technical skills, for example to process new and complex datasets. As we do so, we will also continue to **share our standards in open source tools** that other organizations can access and benefit from. In addition, we will **strengthen the collection of process and cost data** for interventions that we are evaluating through a randomized evaluation, such that there can be strong documentation of what was effectively implemented and how, providing a better understanding of the findings and their relevance to other contexts.

Innovate in data collection, research methods, and measurement

Randomized evaluations have only begun to be used more widely in the development field over the last fifteen years. During this time, the complexity of studies has increased, for example with larger sample sizes and multiple study arms. The range and complexity of research

questions and topic areas has also grown, for example working on issues of migration and conflict, generating new measurement and quality oversight challenges.

To continue improving the field of evaluation, we will build a Research Methods Initiative, in partnership with the Global Poverty Research Lab at Northwestern University, focused on **enhancing and driving innovations in methods and measurement for research and policy**. Drawing on the wealth of local knowledge and surveying experience IPA has built through its country offices, we will drive and promote innovations in research design, measurement tools, data collection, and quality control. For example, we will leverage new technologies to improve measurements, examine the effects of surveyor characteristics on survey response, and test new ways to measure complex outcomes, as we have been testing standardized intimate partner violence survey modules across several studies. We will share these findings publicly and use them to adjust our resources, training, and methods.

Strengthen capacity of select, local research organizations and universities

IPA is known for high-quality research implementation. Yet we believe that **for standards of evidence to scale as needed in the field, other organizations and researchers will need to take on similar work with the same level of quality**. While we make our research resources public and will continue doing so, this is not necessarily enough for other organizations to adopt the same standards.

We will work with select, local research organizations and universities to **share our tools and experience and build their capacity to lead high-quality research, while learning from their even deeper knowledge of the policy context**. There are constraints to doing so: first we need to carefully select the organizations and universities we will be working with. Second, our business model currently does not incentivize us to do this. This means that we will have to find creative ways to partner and to fund such endeavors, and to learn over time where we can add the most value.

IN SUMMARY

How will we create stronger evidence that deepens knowledge about how to improve lives?

1

Rigorously evaluate programs and test new, innovative ideas

2

Validate promising ideas along the path to scale

3

Facilitate the co-generation of policy-relevant studies

4

Focus on delivering the highest-quality research

5

Innovate in data collection, research methods, & measurement

6

Strengthen capacity of select, local research organizations and universities

How do we build a world
with less poverty?

Share Evidence Strategically

2

Share Evidence Strategically

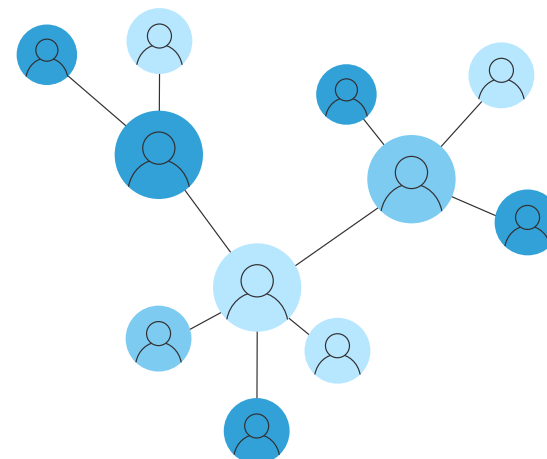
To the right people at the right time

Going from simply sharing evidence to doing so strategically requires a strong understanding of the local context and the issues being discussed, deep connections with decision-makers, and a knowledge of the forums where decisions are taken or influenced. IPA will continue to build our ability to share evidence strategically by **deepening our understanding of the local context and building strong, iterative relationships with the players**. For example, in some countries we participate in sector working groups that bring together policymakers and donors, and in others we convene these groups to discuss the sector's research agenda in a particular country.

We will grow our strategic evidence sharing by:

- Reaching the **right people at the right time**, to inform and influence local and global debates
- Linking **global bodies of evidence** with understanding of **local issues**

- Articulating clearly and concisely the **nuance of a body of evidence** (what the evidence does and does not say)
- **Leveraging partnerships** with others in the evidence ecosystem, including local researchers and institutions, as well as other global evidence partners
- Approaching decision-makers with a **clear understanding of the local political economy**, the policy and management cycles, and the development partner interests at play
- **Using events as anchor moments** in building evidence-to-impact opportunities and changing development debates



A photo from IPA's evaluation of the impact of commitment savings accounts among beneficiaries of ProSoli, a conditional cash transfer program in Azua Province, Dominican Republic
Credit: Maricha Friedman, Sebastian Chaskel, Colin Felsman, and Laura Pulecio

Craft relevant, clear, and targeted evidence reviews

IPA is known for accurate, clear, and concise communication of rigorous studies. Yet we know that to go from one study's implications to digestible policy insights requires more than a research project summary—it requires **thoughtful and detailed review, synthesis, and clear communication of the evidence**, as well as where more evidence is needed.

Many organizations synthesize evidence already—we do not want to replace the work others are doing. Rather, we will leverage the existing syntheses and our analytical strength, demonstrated communications abilities, and local presence to bring together **sharp, concise, and relevant analysis of rigorous evidence into clear and targeted policy communications products**, such as briefs addressing a partner's potential program or policy change, or topical briefs bringing together lessons on a particular question.



A photo from IPA's evaluation of a merit-based girls' scholarship program in Kenya
Credit: Aude Guerrucci

Doing this well, together with our proactive partner stewardship strategy (below), will contribute to our goals of co-creating evidence with decision-makers, broadening their learning agenda, identifying relevant knowledge gaps, and ultimately equipping decision-makers to use evidence.

Use our convening power to influence global and local debates, and rally partners around using evidence

IPA's work is collaborative in nature, so we are able to bring a variety of players together to discuss critical questions in the development research space, problem-solve, and

“ We would like **more synthesis of existing evidence** with new findings for comprehensive reports. For example, there was a report prepared by IPA for the government that was very good. We would like **more accessible general reports** like that on state of field, recent findings, and potential future questions/directions.

ANONYMOUS, NGO partner

collectively strategize to answer key research questions or resolve debates. IPA will further develop and use this convening power more often to **rally partners around using evidence and will build strategic global and country-level partnerships with other evidence players** to identify and pursue these opportunities with a high likelihood of leveraging evidence for impact.

Whether through joint efforts around a particular type of intervention, addressing critical research gaps, or building the capacity of a partner to use data, we will use our convening power to leverage, build upon, and build up the work of other evidence players. Together we will:

- **Inform and influence debates** at the global and local level
 - **Identify** critical issues and “windows of opportunity” for influencing these conversations
 - **Proactively share, discuss, and agree on the state of the evidence** (including evidence of what doesn't work!), its implications, and future research questions
- Promote the **adoption and scale-up of effective solutions**

- Develop **targeted relationships with scaling partners** who have an interest in evidence co-creation and improving their data and evidence capabilities
- Identify **high-impact, cost-effective approaches** and promote their scale-up alongside further research
- **Promote continued learning.** Evidence generation needs to be an iterative process for continuous learning and improvement to occur

“ IPA played an important role in **lending credibility and helping disseminate study results** to people that make policy decisions in our sector... They also have **deep graduation sector expertise** which has been helpful in bringing others to the table and encouraging unbiased policy decisions.

DIANNE CALVI, CEO of Village Enterprise

IN SUMMARY

How will we share more evidence that influences conversations about how to serve poor communities?

1

Share evidence strategically: to the right people at the right time

2

Craft relevant, clear, and targeted evidence reviews

3

Use our convening power to influence global and local debates, and rally partners around using evidence

How do we build a world with less poverty?

Equip Decision-Makers to Use Evidence



Equip Decision-Makers to Use Evidence

Invest in iterative partnerships and proactive partner stewardship

IPA **bridges the role between implementing organizations and academic researchers** throughout the lifecycle of a study. This bridge role positions us to engage with partners with an emphasis on **building a culture of organizational learning**—the kind that can turn simple decision-making into actionable learning informed by rigorous evidence. We will continue to leverage our strong country presence and sector expertise to build long-term relationships with partners who have the potential to achieve large-scale impact.

“ *A lot of the **policy engagement is intertwined with the day-to-day research work**—by working with people for a long period of time, you build trust and relationships.*

INTERNATIONAL GROWTH CENTRE, local partner

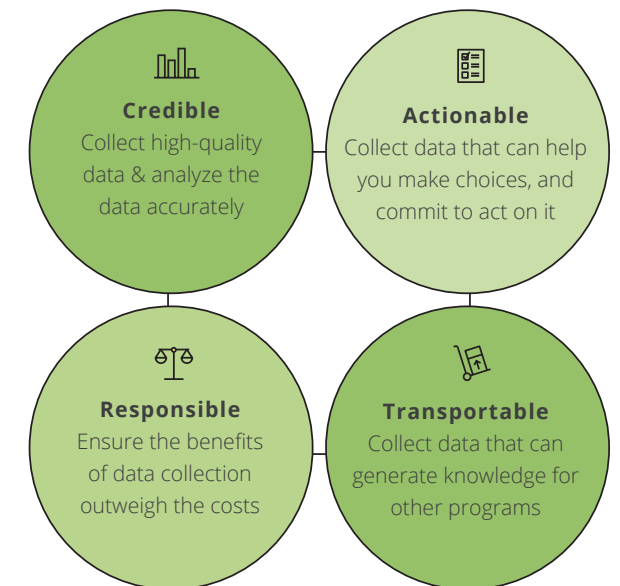
We are focused on being a good partner, striving to be helpful, responsive, and informative. Whether through sharing a baseline brief or helping a partner engage their own stakeholders around rigorous evidence, we proactively engage partners and will continue to invest more in doing so. This kind of deep partner engagement, over time, can result in evidence-informed decision-making cultures. For example, a major telecom provider recently approached the Ministry of Education in Ghana about distributing tablets in half of Ghana’s schools. The Ministry immediately called IPA Ghana, saying that they did not want to participate in the tablet program unless it was piloted and evaluated first. This is an example of the evidence-informed decision-making culture we aim to bring about elsewhere, and is the result of years of intentional engagement.

Develop the Right-Fit Evidence Unit

The development sector is paying more attention to the potential for data and evidence to support program management, learning, and improvement. Yet it can be hard for organizations to develop a monitoring and evaluation (M&E) approach that is a good fit for their needs. IPA is addressing this challenge by **launching**

the Right-Fit Evidence Unit which supports NGOs, social businesses, funders, and governments to **be smart users of data and evidence and to make learning-oriented M&E a reality.**

CART Principles for Right-Fit Evidence

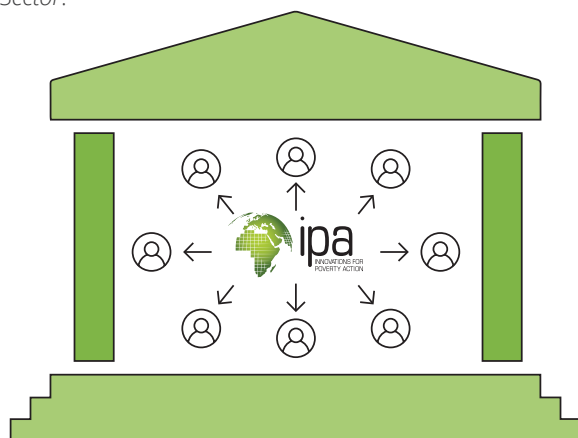


Farmers irrigating cucumber crop in Karongi Region, Rwanda
Credit: Tom Gilks

Carrot farming in a village in Tamil Nadu, India
Credit: Putul Gupta



Development organizations often collect more data than they can use, or not enough to provide meaningful information. The Right-Fit Evidence Unit complements our traditional randomized evaluation work by **helping organizations iteratively develop and carry out a learning agenda that is prioritized, achievable, and integrated with program management decisions.** We will do this through consulting services and the provision of public resources, like a toolkit for applying the framework and the **Poverty Probability Index (PPI®) poverty measurement tool.** The unit builds on IPA's extensive experience of evidence generation partnerships worldwide, and uses the CART principles (Credible, Actionable, Responsible, and Transportable) outlined in IPA Founder Dean Karlan and Mary Kay Gugerty's book, *The Goldilocks Challenge: Right-Fit Evidence for the Social Sector.*



Support the creation of Embedded Evidence Labs within governments

Equipping governments to leverage data and evidence for decision-making can transform hundreds of millions of lives. We will leverage our experience and existing partnerships to work with developing country government partners to build their own Embedded Evidence Labs as a catalyst for better use of data and evidence.

IPA has been involved in a few early examples of building evidence-driven policy capability from within government ministries. One example is our partnership with J-PAL and the Ministry of Education to build MineduLAB, an innovation lab for education policy housed within Peru's Ministry of Education. To build Embedded Evidence Labs in other places, we will adapt our strategy to the contextual realities—recognizing it will take time to get to a stage where testing and learning become part of business as usual. Through our deep in-country presence and relationships, IPA has identified demand for this support from government partners in several countries. From the Mexico City police force to the Ministry of Education in Ghana, IPA intends to offer hands-on, tailored support to help our existing government partners set up Embedded Evidence Labs with a strong mandate for learning, improvement of quality and use of existing administrative data, and rigorous methodological capability.

“IPA, and their partners at the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), were critical in building MineduLAB. They contributed to the conception of the lab and embedded someone within the ministry to get it started. IPA also helped lead some of the first cost-effective policy-relevant studies within the lab, which now serve as a concrete example of how policymakers and academics can collaborate to achieve the education sector's priorities.

ANNIE CHUMPITAZ TORRES, Head of Monitoring and Strategic Evaluation Office, Ministry of Education, Peru

IN SUMMARY

How will we equip partners to use more evidence, improving the lives of the global poor?

1

Invest in iterative partnerships and proactive partner stewardship

2

Develop the Right-Fit Evidence Unit

3

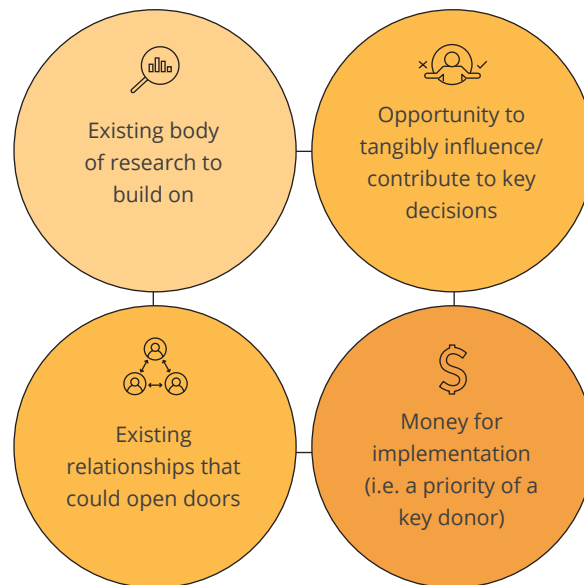
Support the creation of Embedded Evidence Labs within governments

Balancing expansion with depth

In the last five years, we have focused our activities in 21 countries. This country-level focus is critical for high-quality research oversight and allows us to cultivate the deep, long-term relationships needed to effectively engage with decision-makers. We have conducted this research across a range of sectors and topics, while building deeper global expertise in four sectors.

To achieve our strategic ambition, we will need to **push sectoral and topical boundaries and expand our reach into new countries**. At the same time, delivering on this strategy requires **sophisticated and iterative engagement with our partners at the global and country level**. We will not be able to achieve the same level of depth for all countries and all sectors, so we will prioritize investments based on a framework which integrates demand from researchers and funders with a high-impact policy opportunity classification system (right). Using this framework, we aim to **start 2-3 new country offices by 2025, establish global expertise in 3-4 new sectors, and identify opportunities to deepen our impact within about 10 existing countries around specific sectors or topic areas**.

Criteria for prioritizing high-impact policy opportunities



Where we work

As of 2018, IPA has country offices in 21 countries (with an additional office opening in Nigeria in 2019):



ASIA

Bangladesh
Myanmar
Philippines

LATIN AMERICA

Bolivia
Colombia
Dominican Republic
Mexico
Paraguay
Peru

WEST AFRICA

Burkina Faso
Côte d'Ivoire
Ghana
Liberia
Mali
Sierra Leone

EAST AFRICA

Kenya
Malawi
Rwanda
Tanzania
Uganda
Zambia

What organizational capabilities do we need to build?



Women clearing grass to cultivate crops on the slopes of the Murema Valley, Karongi Region, Rwanda
Credit: Tom Gilks

Delivering on our 2025 Strategic Ambition will require **changes to our staffing and operating model**. We need to build capabilities that allow us to become not only a better service provider, but to offer value and services that researchers, decision-makers, and funders cannot find with other partners.

Strengthen staff expertise, leadership, and leadership support

Executing the strategic ambition will require developing more specialized expertise at IPA, through both recruitment and staff growth. Examples of specialized roles that we need more of, or that we need to create, include:

- **Specialized research staff with advanced technical skills:** to lead the field in high-quality research and research methods innovations and provide technical support across projects
- **Internal research project leadership:** to lead the development of field replication studies and support our network of researchers
- **Policy engagement staff:** to lead complex and high-level engagement with decision-makers and develop a deep local knowledge of relevant players, issues, and existing evidence in particular sectors
- **Sectoral experts:** to develop new research and partnerships in their sector, share research results internally and externally, and identify opportunities to influence conversations and decisions

Country office leaders and leadership teams require a variety of skillsets. To achieve this, we will **continue to strengthen support functions staff and support structures globally**, as well as leadership on-boarding, mentoring, and training.

Build an efficient, compliant, flexible, and collaborative organization

In the last few years, IPA has built stronger systems, processes, and operational teams. However, we still need to improve the quality and use of these systems and processes. Our country- or project-based resourcing model often perpetuates these gaps, by leading to inconsistent delivery. We also know that **retaining some organizational flexibility, even as we build stronger systems and processes, is key to our comparative advantage**.

To improve cost efficiency, consistency, and quality, while retaining organizational flexibility, IPA will **move from a siloed project-based model to a more collaborative, shared services model**, by:

- **Locating some global functional staff**, such as finance and human resources staff, **in country offices** to be closer to programmatic staff
- **Leveraging larger country offices** as they strengthen their functional teams to support smaller offices
- **Developing specialized, targeted technical support functions** for rapid short-term deployment to country offices or projects in need

- **Strengthening our global governance** by creating clear goals and accountability across the matrixed teams
- **Building internal monitoring mechanisms** to ensure efficient delivery, compliance, and ongoing learning
- **Strengthening information management systems** and their use, and automating processes

Engage in strategic partnerships

Sophisticated engagement with decision-makers, whether at the global or local level, is the glue that brings together our strategic objectives: it allows us to know what policy priorities exist, where evidence might play a role, and if we can co-create policy-relevant studies with strategic partners. It allows us to share evidence with the right people at the right time, and through iterative partnerships, equip partners to use and leverage evidence.

We also work in a growing ecosystem of researchers and organizations focused on the generation and/or promotion of the use of evidence. It is critical that we effectively collaborate, leveraging each other's comparative advantages. To do this well, we need to become even more

savvy—to be more proactive, know the space, and be connected. We also need to create space for our senior staff to do this engagement—this means strengthening operations, our research management teams, and adding in-country policy engagement staff.

Strengthen our business model and resources

We expect that in the medium- to long-run, **the costs of global functions that support research across the organization will be covered by overhead revenues**. This includes operational teams such as finance and grants management, human resources, legal, and information management, as well as basic study-level communications, and project development support. However, achieving this will **require some initial investments in the next few years** to strengthen our organizational systems and support structures.

Achieving our strategic goals will also require additional investments, for example to open offices in a new country, start the new Right-Fit Evidence Unit, or develop internal intellectual leadership and specialized expertise. **These investments will not be covered by overhead revenues and will need to be funded by unrestricted funds or grants dedicated to these purposes.**

How can you partner with IPA?

We look forward to partnering with you to achieve this ambition, creating and sharing evidence, while equipping decision-makers to use it to reduce poverty.



For Researchers: Researchers looking for the highest-quality research support, coupled with local knowledge and policy relationships, partner with IPA. We are looking to engage researchers who want to push the boundaries of innovation and/or bridge research and action at scale.



For Practitioners: Have a pressing question that you want answered? Want to improve your program's impact as you grow its scale? We would be delighted to partner with you to ensure that evidence is used to inform your decisions.



For Funders and Philanthropists: We anticipate that by 2025, we will need to be able to raise \$15M in unrestricted and strategic funds annually to deliver on this ambition, and we are building a development plan to achieve this goal. We look forward to partnering with you to achieve this ambition, building a world where organizations are using and creating evidence to reduce poverty.



For Job Seekers: We seek passionate, highly motivated, and intellectually curious staff who are dedicated to building a world with more evidence and less poverty. Visit our website at poverty-action.org to learn more about our current opportunities.



A woman selling beans in Huaraz, Peru. IPA has done a number of projects in and around Huaraz.
Credit: Hannah Trachtman



An IPA supervisor accompanies an enumerator in the field in Senegal.

Credit: Grace Saul



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