

Date

August 03, 2023

Salifu Amadu: Never a Dull Moment

To mark its 20th anniversary, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) created People of IPA, a series of profiles celebrating IPA's diverse staff, highlighting their contributions, and discussing how and why they seek to improve the lives of those living in poverty. Salifu Amadu is IPA's Country Director for Ghana.

If it hadn't been for an interviewer's curiosity - and Salifu's love of research - his long relationship with IPA might have ended before it even began.

He was teaching project management in his home country, Ghana, when a student who worked with IPA told him about a job opening at the organization. Salifu sent his CV and received an invitation to interview.

He met with a former IPA economist named Elizabeth. As they talked, both realized that there had been a misunderstanding: the job requirements and Salifu's experience weren't a good match. He was disappointed, but as he prepared to leave, Elizabeth said, "Since you're here, let's have a chat."

He agreed. Elizabeth asked whether he had ever done any research. Salifu described two studies he had developed in university. In one, he wanted to find out why some drivers in his country don't wear seat belts. He created a sample group of drivers, interviewed the members and reported his findings.

Salifu recalls Elizabeth explaining the similarities between his seat belt study and IPA's approach to research: "We try to investigate, to learn about what works, what doesn't work," she told him. "So, maybe, at IPA, we would have come up with an intervention to try to get the drivers who don't wear seat belts to wear them -- through education, incentives or anything along those lines."

He learned that his work could serve as a scoping study, a first step toward creating evidence-based policy.

"I fell in love with the whole thing," he says, "because she related my work to what IPA does. I could see the whole path."

In time, Salifu recalls, Elizabeth told him, "'I think you're great. If you like IPA, I would want to hire you.'"

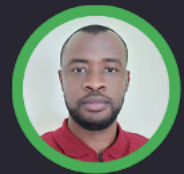
“That sounds awesome,” he replied. “Let me join.”

That’s how Salifu came on board.

PEOPLE OF IPA



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SALIFU AMADU

Today, 11 years later, the job still sounds awesome.

Salifu says what drives him every day at work is the absence of routine tasks at IPA.

For every study that IPA does, the design and the end goals have to be thought through.

“So there’s never a dull moment,” he says.

Salifu also enjoys the opportunity to see projects being developed from the beginning until the end.

“You get to really think through and come up with something new all the time. With every study, it’s almost like a new challenge. If you are lucky, you see it informing policy,” he says.

Salifu knows from experience how poverty feels. “I come from a not-so-well-to-do family,” he says. “Sixteen children, three wives. So you can imagine, right? I have seen it firsthand.”

He also knows that there can be a way out. “There are answers,” he says. “It’s just that we’ve either not found them or not placed them in the right hands. I feel like people should know what programs to run or not run in the quest to alleviate poverty.”

IPA collaborates with partners to find those answers. “Governments are trying,” he says, “but

with IPA in the picture, we're helping the whole drive. And when we find something interesting, we share it with the relevant people closer to making policies and designing programs."

He works hard, but the job energizes him. "It gets me any time, right? Any time, any day we talk about it, it's almost like I'm rejuvenated," he says. "I'm, like, 'Okay, yes, we're still in that fight. We can't give up.' It's always a motivation for me."