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IPA Looking Ahead in 2024: Letter from Executive Director Annie Duflo



A mother and child playing in rural Peru. One of IPA's most promising research focuses is on promoting early childhood development. © 2023 Ruslana Lurchenko

Last year marked my 15th year at IPA. As I reflect on this milestone I am incredibly proud of all we have achieved in the last 20+ years of creating evidence, strategically sharing evidence, and enabling others to use evidence in the fight against global poverty.

Looking ahead, I am also tremendously excited about our next chapter, which will focus on our drive to accelerate the translation of existing evidence into real impact that improves lives (we will of course continue to produce rigorous evidence as well).

One of the first things I worked on when joining IPA was our [Targeted Instruction](#) project in

Ghana. Like in many other countries, learning levels in schools were low. We had evidence from India and Kenya that using tutors to provide remedial education or splitting classes by learning level instead of age or grade improved learning outcomes. So we set out to share this evidence with Ghana's policymakers and worked with them to adapt such an approach to their context. With the support of donors, including the [Children's Investment Fund Foundation \(CIFF\)](#), IPA worked with researchers and the Ministry of Education to evaluate, at a large scale, four different ways of implementing targeted instruction, some involving teacher assistants and some relying on the teachers. This was then followed by [another study](#) focused on strengthening the implementation of this approach by teachers. Fast forward 10+ years later and the government of Ghana is now scaling up this methodology to 10,000 primary schools, reaching almost two million students across the country. This is just one example of our collective impact.

This experience, and many others, informed our [2025 Strategic Ambition](#), with three pillars aimed to ensure that evidence that's relevant to a decision maker's needs is generated and translated into real impacts for people living in poverty.

We have made tremendous progress along these three pillars since developing our Strategic Ambition. Just in the past year:

- **Generating Stronger Evidence:** We launched the [Displaced Livelihoods Initiative \(DLI\)](#), to support cutting-edge research and policy work to discover and advance solutions to help the over 100 million displaced people worldwide rebuild their lives and livelihoods after being forced to flee their homes. IPA is partnering with [J-PAL](#) on this initiative, which is the world's first research fund dedicated to generating rigorous experimental and quasi-experimental evidence to inform policies and programs that can foster sustainable livelihoods for displaced and host communities. In addition, DLI will provide investment in research infrastructure and public goods, including panel datasets, software, and measurement innovations that can contribute to future impact evaluations.
- **Sharing Evidence Strategically (at the country and global level).** By strategically, we mean to the right people at the right time, for which we leverage our long-term relationships with decision-makers in the countries where we have a presence. Our High Impact Policy Opportunity Framework helps us focus our efforts and resources and in 2023, we identified and advanced several of those, for example in Kenya we worked to influence the design of the National Teacher Professional Development policy using existing evidence.
- **At the global level, we published our report "[Best Bets: Emerging Opportunities for Impact at Scale](#)."** "Best Bets" are a set of interventions that hold great potential to solve key challenges, but require more evidence and/or partnerships to work at a large scale. To compile the bets, IPA's sectoral experts and academic partners reviewed hundreds of studies and identified what we believe to be the most promising emerging innovations with the greatest potential to scale, taking into account factors such as the strength of the evidence, impact, cost, and other scalability considerations. This report reflects years of work and partnerships by hundreds of researchers, partners, and staff, to whom I am so grateful!

- Equipping Decision Makers to use data and evidence. We have continued to grow our Embedded Evidence Labs program, a collaboration to support government partners in institutionalizing the use of data and evidence within their policy cycles. We now have 23 labs across 16 countries, each addressing context-specific challenges by embedding IPA teams within government offices, primarily ministries. For example, in Nigeria, IPA is working with the Consumer Protection Department of the Central Bank of Nigeria (CBN) to improve policies protecting consumers from unfair financial practices. The Lab has conducted several projects including analyzing complaints data and transaction-level data from Financial Service Providers (FSPs) for market monitoring; and analyzing social media data to enhance the CBN's capacity for market monitoring and policy decision-making.

In the last twenty years along with other players in our evidence-to-impact ecosystem, the body of evidence has not only grown, there are many instances of evidence being translated into large-scale programs, such as targeted instruction. Yet, the number of evidence-informed interventions on a global scale is still limited compared to the body of available evidence, and we are only scratching the surface of the transformational potential of increasing the use of evidence. In order to significantly improve the lives of people living in poverty we must invest now in a dramatic increase in our scope and focus on turning evidence into action.

In the coming years, we will increase and accelerate the translation of what we have learned into real impacts for the almost 700 million people living in extreme poverty worldwide (living on less than US\$2.15/day).

To achieve this goal, we are investing in three areas that will work together:

- 1. Increase immediate evidence use and scale-up of promising programs.** These efforts will catalyze the scale-up of interventions that have a strong evidence base, leveraging the Best Bets that we have identified, and continue to identify new interventions that are strong contenders for impact at scale. This will foster more impactful programs and policies at scale, more effective and cost-effective investments across the development field, and improve the lives of people living in poverty.
- 2. Strengthen national ecosystems for sustainable evidence use.** We are supporting institutions in their continued efforts of training and capacity strengthening for students and researchers from the countries where we work, and developing embedded evidence labs and increased capacity within governments in almost 20 countries. We are partnering with low- and-middle income (LMIC) researchers, facilitating collaborations, and removing barriers to accessing research grants.
- 3. Leverage technology for increased impact.** As social scientists committed to innovation and impact, IPA must also invest in technological capacities that make our information better, cheaper, and faster in responding to the needs of decision-makers. This includes using more advanced data analytics methods like machine-learning algorithms for data quality control or finer poverty targeting, or leveraging social media messaging platforms and handheld devices to complement in-person surveys, allowing researchers and

policymakers to generate rapid, accurate data at a fraction of the cost of traditional methods.

What is our secret sauce that makes IPA successful and positions us for the future? It's a combination of our committed and diverse staff of 650+ strong across the world, our outstanding network of hundreds of researchers at some of the world's leading universities, our loyal donors, our long-term in-country presence in 20 countries, our technical expertise to conduct high-quality research in complex settings and on complex issues, and perhaps most importantly, our unique combination of research, policy engagement, and advisory services.

We thank you for being a part of this journey and for sharing IPA's vision of a world with more evidence and less poverty.