



2019-2020 ANNUAL REPORT

# Building a world with more evidence and less poverty



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**Front Cover:** A photo taken during IPA's Becoming One project in Uganda. Credit: Aude Guerrucci  
**Inside Front Cover:** A survey conducted during IPA's impact evaluation of land allocation programs in Myanmar. Credit: IPA Myanmar

**Back Cover:** In 2019, Ileana, an enumerator on an IPA project in Panama, walked for 8 hours to a school in the Arcoiris community. The project tested the effects of a math program on child learning in the indigenous community Ngäbe-Buglé. Credit: Pilar Ouro Paz

# LETTER FROM ANNIE

DEAR FRIENDS,

*One thing is certain: none of us were prepared for what 2020 would bring. The COVID-19 pandemic and the subsequent economic fallout, as well as the global protests against racial injustice, have challenged and compelled us to adapt, reflect, and ultimately grow and evolve as an organization.*

We are honored to be able to help policymakers answer critical questions during the crisis period. We are heartened by the support of our funders and donors for offering flexibility and for accelerating their support when we were forced to shut down our in-person research. And we were also amazed, though not surprised, by the efforts of our staff and researcher network who worked tirelessly to ensure a pivot to support the pandemic response. Here are some highlights of our work this past year:

**When the pandemic hit, we worked to ensure our staff and communities were safe.** We suspended travel for all IPA staff globally, canceled events, and moved to work-from-home in March. We adapted dozens of research projects to remote surveys, getting tablets and phones quickly into the hands of our enumerators before lockdowns commenced. As we are writing, the pandemic is still upon us, and we remain vigilant in our efforts to ensure the safety of our staff and the communities in which we work.

**We quickly pivoted our work with a major new effort—Research for Effective COVID-19 Responses (RECOVR).** Dozens of partners reached out asking for timely and accurate data and evidence to respond to the crisis, and we felt it was our responsibility to contribute in any way we were uniquely positioned

to—that is, by harnessing our on-the-ground presence in 22 countries, our data collection expertise, and these relationships with partners.

**We started dozens of new studies with researchers and co-created research with government partners to directly and rapidly respond to their questions.** As part of RECOVR, we partnered with decision-makers from 10 countries to develop panel surveys. For example:

- *In Colombia, we worked with the National Planning Department to inform the Government of Colombia's reopening strategy, collecting and disseminating data on real-time trends of policy concern for communities hardest-hit by the pandemic.*
- *In Ghana, we supported the Ministry of Education with information about parental engagement and how teachers can best support students while schools are closed.*
- *In the Philippines, we gathered data for the Department of Education to inform their approach to distance learning in the coming school year, as well as the Department of Social Welfare and Development as they implement an income support program in response to the COVID-19 crisis.*



A woman operates a sewing machine in Colombia. This photo was taken as part of an IPA project in our Small & Medium Enterprise (SME) Program. Credit: Luz Karime Palacios

**We were able to rapidly respond to the crisis and support decision-makers with data because of what we have been building together over the last few years.** In 2019, which seems so far away now, we held 70 events, released results from 49 studies, and started 118 new projects with our network of researchers—more than ever before. And we also made significant investments in our research quality leadership and in our ability to engage national policymakers and synthesize and share relevant evidence. These investments positioned us to proactively respond to the pandemic. We were able to not only stay relevant but to continue to push forward our Strategic Ambition in the current context—creating stronger evidence, sharing evidence strategically, and equipping decision-makers to use evidence to reduce poverty.

**We also recognized that as we work to fight poverty with evidence, we can and need to do more to**

**fight systemic inequalities, both through our work and our own organizational behavior.** The protests against racial inequality and police killings in the U.S. compelled us to look inward at diversity and inclusion at IPA. We formed an internal working group to gather internal data on our staff composition, and diagnose current perceptions and issues related to representation, discrimination, and bias.

**It has been a challenging time, but with challenge comes opportunity, and IPA has pushed the limits of what we previously thought was possible.** And we couldn't have done it without you. Thank you for continuing to join us as we forge ahead in achieving our vision of a world with more evidence and less poverty.



Annie Duflo  
Executive Director

## IN THE MEDIA

Last year, our work was featured in many respected national and international news outlets.



# WHAT WE DO

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



A survey conducted during IPA's impact evaluation of land allocation programs in Myanmar. Credit: IPA Myanmar

With a long-term presence in 22 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, IPA leads the field of development in cutting-edge research quality and innovation. We test promising ideas across contexts and along the path to scale, proactively engage key decision-makers throughout the research process, share findings with the right people at the right time, and equip partners with the skills and tools they need to co-create and use data and evidence.

Since our founding in 2002, our research has led to better programs and policies that have made a positive impact on hundreds of millions of people's lives worldwide.

### HOW DO WE BUILD A WORLD WITH LESS POVERTY?



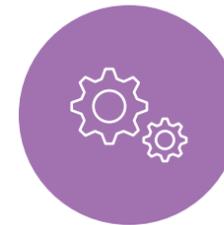
#### CREATE STRONGER EVIDENCE

To deepen public knowledge on how to reduce poverty



#### SHARE EVIDENCE STRATEGICALLY

To influence conversations & inform decisions



#### EQUIP DECISION-MAKERS TO USE EVIDENCE

To improve the lives of the global poor

## PIVOTING WITH RECOVER

In response to the COVID-19 pandemic, IPA launched a major new effort—**Research for Effective COVID-19 Responses, or RECOVER**. Through this effort, IPA is generating rigorous evidence, advising governments, and bringing together partners across the research-to-policy sector to rapidly provide decision-makers with rigorous data and evidence to mitigate the impacts of the crisis. How we are achieving our RECOVER impact goals:



Rapid Response Surveys to Answer Critical Policy Questions (10+ countries)



A Portfolio of IPA Studies to Generate Rigorous Evidence on COVID-19 (80+ studies)



A Global Hub that Centralizes Research and Policy Lessons (150+ projects)



Advising 20+ Governments on Evidence-Based Approaches



Research-on-Research to Strengthen the Quality of Remote Data Collection

### OUR WORK AT A GLANCE

22

Country Programs

9

Program Areas

530+

Partners

700+

Researchers in our network

900+

Evaluations to date in 51 countries

17

Years of generating evidence and moving evidence to policy

## CREATING STRONGER EVIDENCE



Credit: ©EC/ECHO/Jean-Louis Mosser

# Bolstering Accountability in Health Systems Before and During the Ebola Outbreak in Sierra Leone

**IN SIERRA LEONE**, having communities monitor the performance of their health clinics increased reporting and reduced Ebola deaths.

**Researchers:** Darin Christensen, Oeindrila Dube, Johannes Haushofer, Bilal Siddiqi, and Maarten Voors

Over 8 million people die annually from health conditions that are largely treatable, according to a 2015 study. One main reason is low quality of care, which goes hand-in-hand with low patient confidence in health providers and people not seeking care when they are ill. These issues can be particularly damaging when health crises such as epidemics occur.

Sierra Leone has long struggled with poor health outcomes and limited accountability in the healthcare system. In 2010, the government made a push to increase healthcare quality, removing fees and increasing health worker salaries. It also sought ways to increase accountability and trust and confidence in the health system.



Credit: Simon Davis/DFID

IPA-Sierra Leone partnered with the government, the World Bank, and three international NGOs to measure the impact of two approaches designed to increase accountability in the healthcare system. Two hundred and fifty-four clinics took part in the randomized evaluation. Some clinics competed for a non-financial award to be the best or most improved in their district. Other clinics' catchment areas received information about their clinic's performance and town-hall-style meetings took place with community members and clinic staff to discuss improving access to health services.

One year later, both interventions had produced higher patient satisfaction with health workers, greater use of clinics, and greater faith in Western medicine. The community monitoring intervention had also improved child health outcomes, reducing under-5 mortality by 38 percent.

Roughly one year after the researchers' follow-up survey, Sierra Leone was struck with the West Africa Ebola outbreak, the largest in history. The research team went back and collected additional data on Ebola cases. In areas that received the programs, there was greater reporting of Ebola cases, and fewer Ebola patient deaths: about one in seven Ebola patients died in areas that received the programs compared to one in four patients in the ones that didn't.

Overall, these results suggest that accountability programs may not only improve health outcomes under "normal" conditions, but they may also provide resilience during health crises, when trust in the health system becomes critical.

## WHAT LESSONS CAN BE DRAWN FROM THIS RESEARCH TO INFORM THE COVID-19 PANDEMIC RESPONSE?

*"The first lesson I think that's directly relevant to us now is about trust and testing. We're seeing with COVID-19 how important it is to test and identify carriers and put in measures to prevent the spread. **What we learned in Sierra Leone was that in a time of danger and uncertainty, trust between people and their health providers saved lives.** Where trust had been built up, more people got tested and that meant more people could get treated.*

*The second lesson is that many of us in development work on long-term questions, but a crisis brings on an additional set of challenges. If you can find the data to test how your program works in a crisis, that's also critical information."*

**OEINDRILA DUBE**

## CREATING STRONGER EVIDENCE



In refugee camps, such as this one in Bangladesh, it is much more difficult to implement social distancing. Credit: Jared Kalow

# COVID-19 in Refugee and Host Communities in Bangladesh

**COVID-19 SYMPTOMS WERE** prevalent in a Rohingya refugee camp and its host community in Bangladesh, and large gatherings remained common despite high levels of knowledge about the disease.

**Researchers:** Paula López-Peña, C. Austin Davis, A. Mushfiq Mobarak, and Shabib Raihan

Forcibly displaced people often live in overcrowded camps in countries with struggling health systems, making them highly vulnerable to COVID-19. Since these camps lack adequate diagnostic tests, personal protective equipment, and treatment infrastructure, promoting behavior that minimizes the pandemic's spread is critical. However, baseline information about

COVID-19 symptoms, risk factors, and related behavior—key for creating effective interventions—is hard to come by in these settings.

In the Cox's Bazar district of Bangladesh, large numbers of Rohingya refugees have settled in recent years after fleeing Myanmar. In April, shortly after the global



Credit: Bryon Lippincott / Flickr



## POLICY INFLUENCE

impact of COVID-19 became apparent, IPA worked with researchers to remotely survey 909 households from an existing household panel representative of Rohingya refugees and nearby host communities. Participants were asked about COVID-19 symptoms (fever, dry cough, and fatigue or tiredness), returning migration, employment, and food security. Half of the households were also asked about health knowledge and behaviors.

The research team found that common COVID-19 symptoms were prevalent. Twenty-five percent of camp residents and 13 percent of host community members reported at least one symptom, and 72 percent of camp residents and 59 percent of host community members reported an inability to buy essential food items. While respondents generally reported high levels of knowledge about respiratory hygiene and COVID-19 transmission, attendance at religious and social events remained common, threatening efforts to contain the spread of the disease.

This survey was part of a collaborative research effort by IPA and the Yale Research Initiative on Innovation and Scale (Y-RISE) to inform global policy responses to COVID-19 in places where people are migrating or mobile. **The research team published results in the World Health Organization (WHO) Bulletin shortly after the survey concluded and shared key findings in a series of meetings with key stakeholders and public virtual events.** Building on the finding that religious gatherings remained common despite high levels of knowledge about COVID-19 transmission, the research team is now working on measuring the impact of sharing such messages via imams.

**CREATING STRONGER EVIDENCE**



Credit: Village Enterprise

# Alleviating Poverty with an Integrated Microenterprise Program in Uganda

**A MULTI-PRONGED PROGRAM** that provided poor households with cash along with extensive training appeared to be more cost-effective at reducing poverty than a cash transfer or other individual components delivered alone.

**Researchers: Richard Sedlmayr, Anuj Shah, and Munshi Sulaiman**

Helping the poorest households develop sustainable livelihoods is a global priority, but policymakers, practitioners, and funders are faced with competing ideas about the best way to reduce extreme poverty. One approach that has recently shown promise across a range of contexts is the Graduation model, an integrated package of sequenced interventions

intended to help the poorest people develop stable and sustainable livelihoods. Despite the success of these programs, they can be expensive and complicated to implement, raising the question of whether a simplified approach would be more cost-effective and scalable.



Credit: Village Enterprise

IPA-Uganda worked with researchers and the NGO Village Enterprise to test the impacts of the Village Enterprise microenterprise program, which provides poor households with a combination of cash transfers, mentorship, business training, and support with the formation of savings groups. Researchers tested the impact of the complete package, which is rolled out over one year, and also measured impacts of its individual components, including a cash transfer of roughly the same amount as the program (about US\$150 per household).

After two years, results found that those who received the full integrated microenterprise development program had more assets, higher incomes, and consumed more than those in the comparison group. They also had better nutrition and reported feeling happier than their peers in the comparison group. The individual components, including the cash transfer, seemed to produce less promising results on poverty reduction.

These findings suggest that combining cash transfers with other interventions may help beneficiaries get more value out of their newly acquired assets. More research is needed on how such a package might be effectively delivered at a larger scale.



## SCALING AN EFFECTIVE SOLUTION

The evidence from this evaluation helped Village Enterprise participate in the first Development Impact Bond (DIB) in poverty alleviation, enabling it to scale up its model. Launched in 2017, this DIB gives outcome funders assurance they are funding a poverty alleviation program that works based on measurable results.

**Village Enterprise has expanded in Kenya and Uganda through this DIB by launching 4,700 new sustainable microenterprises and improving 14,100 lives.**

*One of the researchers is affiliated with a financial supporter of IPA. Neither funders nor other parties influence results from IPA evaluations.*



Credit: work via Flickr

# Boosting Child Growth and Development with Cash Transfers and Behavioral Change Communication in Myanmar

**GIVING MOTHERS CASH TRANSFERS** with a social and behavioral change communication program reduced child stunting, while cash alone didn't have the same impact.

**Researchers:** Erica Field and Elisa Maffioli

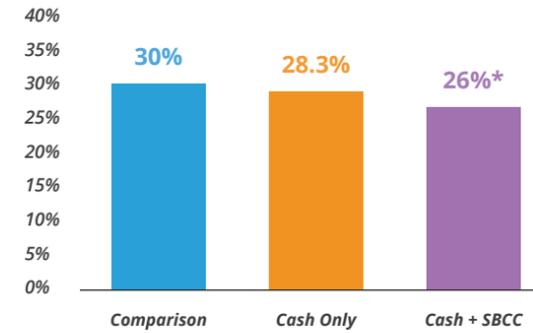
The first 1,000 days of life are a critical period for children's physical and cognitive development. Inadequate nutrition can lead to long-term developmental consequences for individuals, and limit the growth of a country. About 29 percent of children under five in Myanmar experience stunting—one of the highest rates in the Asia-Pacific region. In the poorest rural

areas, levels of stunting can reach as high as 50 percent.

To address stunting, in 2014, the Government of Myanmar announced it would launch a universal maternal cash transfer program for pregnant women and their children under the age of two. Beginning in 2016, Save the Children International launched a pilot

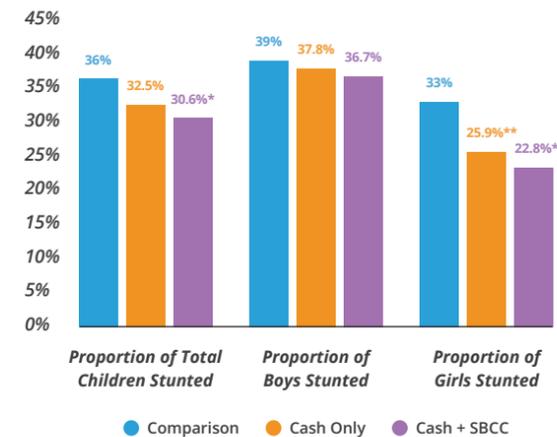
Proportion of Children Stunted

6-29 months old



Proportion of Children Stunted Whose Families Received Program the Longest

24-29 months old



\*\*\* Statistically significant at 1% \*\* Statistically significant at 5%  
\* Statistically significant at 10%

program to inform the national roll-out of maternal and child cash transfers. Researchers worked with IPA to conduct a randomized evaluation among 102 sub-rural health center catchment areas (429 villages) to measure the impact of giving new mothers a cash grant or a cash grant along with an intensive set of nutrition-related messages called social and behavioral change communication, or SBCC.

After 30 months, cash plus SBCC led to a 4-percentage point reduction in the proportion of stunted children. The reduction in proportion of children stunted was more pronounced for children from poorer households. These positive impacts were driven by improvements in dietary diversity, breastfeeding, health seeking behavior, hand washing practices, and food expenditures. On average, cash alone did not lead to a reduction in the proportion of stunted children.



Credit: IPA Myanmar



## POLICY IMPLICATIONS

In this context, combining cash with social and behavioral change communication (SBCC) appears to be more effective than cash alone at improving children's nutritional status.

The findings that impacts were largest for children who received the programs the longest demonstrate the importance of ensuring full coverage for children in their first 1,000 days of life.

**CREATING STRONGER EVIDENCE**



Credit: Salma Mousa

# Rebuilding Trust After Violent Conflict with Inter-Religious Soccer Teams in Iraq

**WHEN CHRISTIAN PLAYERS** were placed on mixed soccer teams, they became more tolerant toward Muslims they had contact with, though underlying prejudice remained the same.

**Researcher: Salma Mousa**

How can trust and social cohesion be rebuilt after conflict forcibly displaces people and social ties and trust across groups are damaged? Some evidence suggests that when different groups engage in activities together where cooperation is mutually beneficial, it can reduce anxiety about other groups, improve tolerance, and reduce prejudice.

IPA's Peace & Recovery Program supported research in Iraq that evaluated the impact of mixed Christian-Muslim soccer teams on social cohesion and interactions between Christians and Muslims. The study was conducted in partnership with Nineveh Governorate Council and a local Christian community organization (MaakThahTheh).



Credit: Salma Mousa



**POLICY INFLUENCE**

**IPA'S HUMANITARIAN AND FORCED DISPLACEMENT INITIATIVE: SUPPORTING CRISIS RESPONSE AROUND THE WORLD**

Over 79 million people are forcibly displaced as a result of conflict, persecution, or violence, a number which is expected to only rise in the coming decades. Despite the scale of this challenge, there is very little evidence on which policies and programs improve outcomes for forcibly displaced populations and host communities, and at what cost. **IPA's Humanitarian and Forced Displacement Initiative is supporting the generation of robust data on the impact of displacement crises in Bangladesh, Colombia, Lebanon, and other countries around the world to help decision-makers develop better policies and programs, and invest limited aid dollars effectively.** Learn more at: [www.poverty-action.org/peace](http://www.poverty-action.org/peace).

# MORE RESULTS



## FINANCIAL INCLUSION

### Uganda

*New research identifies incomplete disclosure of product information to consumers in Uganda*

*Researchers: Elly Atuhumuza, Rafe Mazer, and Joeri Smits*

Uganda has made substantial advancements in financial consumer protection policy in recent years, but understanding whether and how the financial sector complies with these new regulations can be a challenge. Working with Financial Sector Deepening (FSD) Africa and Financial Sector Deepening Uganda (FSDU), an IPA research team conducted an audit study of over 1,000 financial institutions in three districts of Uganda to understand current practices and compliance with existing consumer credit disclosure and transparency requirements from the Bank of Uganda and the

Uganda Microfinance Regulatory Authority. Overall, the study found that information on product cost was not consistently provided by loan officers, that inexperienced borrowers received less information than experienced shoppers, and that printed materials were conspicuously absent during sales visits and did not comply with guidelines.

## EDUCATION

### Liberia

*Beyond short-term learning gains: The impact of outsourcing schools after three years*

*Researchers: Mauricio Romero and Justin Sandefur*

Public-private partnerships to provide education in low-income countries are common, yet controversial. In Liberia, researchers worked with IPA, the Ministry of Education, and a set of eight private operators to conduct a randomized evaluation that measured the impact of 93 partnership schools—free public schools with management outsourced to private operators. After three years, partnership schools raised test scores in math and English (equivalent to four words per minute additional reading fluency for the cohort that started in first grade). **Looking beyond learning gains, the program reduced corporal punishment (by 4.6 percentage points from a base of 51 percent), but increased dropout (by 3.3 percentage points from a base of 15 percent) and had no impact on sexual abuse. Results varied by provider: some produced uniformly positive results, while others present stark trade-offs between learning gains and other outcomes.**



## FINANCIAL INCLUSION

### Pakistan

*In low-income communities, COVID-19 put microentrepreneurs and their families in crisis*

*Researchers: Kashif Malik, Muhammad Meki, Jonathan Morduch, Timothy Ogden, Simon Quinn, and Farah Said*

COVID-19 has created immediate challenges for institutions that serve affected communities. Researchers built on an existing IPA study to evaluate the short-term impacts of the pandemic on Pakistan's microfinance sector. About a week after the country's

COVID-19 lockdown began, the research team began rapid response phone surveys with about 1,000 microenterprise owners and 200 microfinance loan officers, and interviews with regulators and senior representatives of microfinance institutions. **The surveys found that week-on-week sales and household income both fell by about 90 percent on average, and that households' primary immediate concern in early April became how to secure food, resulting in 70 percent of the sample of current microfinance borrowers reporting that they could not repay their loans.** These findings suggest that COVID-19 represents a crisis for microfinance in low-income communities, and is also a chance to consider the future of microfinance.

## AGRICULTURE

### Kenya

*Well-timed loans helped farmers store more maize and earn higher farm revenues in Kenya*

*Researchers: Marshall Burke, Lauren Falcao Bergquist, and Edward Miguel*

Seasonal fluctuations in crop prices can have direct impacts on farmers' earnings and savings. Crop prices are often lowest right after harvest, increasing substantially in the months afterwards, but farmers are not always able to take advantage of these price changes. In Kenya, researchers evaluated whether well-timed access to credit allows maize farmers to make better use of storage and sell their output at higher prices. **The loan offers allowed farmers to store more maize and earn slightly higher revenues, with larger impacts for farmers granted loans immediately following harvest. A new startup nonprofit organization, Taimaka, used these results to design and launch its agricultural program in northern Nigeria, providing bridge loans and storage bags to farmers.**

# SHARING EVIDENCE STRATEGICALLY

Last year, IPA shared evidence with key partners in 22 countries at times of critical decision to support co-creation of evidence and evidence-informed decision-making. Here are some highlights.

## DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

On February 4, 2020, IPA signed a cooperation agreement as a strategic partner for the Vice-Presidency of the Dominican Republic's Cabinet for Coordination for Social Policy (GCPS)'s new Evidence Lab. IPA and GCPS signed the agreement, along with J-PAL and the World Bank, in the first Forum for the Design of Public Policy Based on Evidence, where IPA participated on a panel exploring the importance of evidence creation for policy design and implementation. The event gathered policymakers in the social protection sector and aimed to identify research needs in several policy areas.

Launching a New Evidence Lab



Convening Security Secretaries to Understand Public Safety



Co-creating Evidence with Policymakers to Reduce Gender-Based Violence

## PERU

IPA Peru and researchers Erica Field and Ursula Aldana hosted a series of events with Peru's Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) to discuss the goals, preliminary results, and policy implications of an evaluation of a program that trains local leaders to counter gender-based violence in their communities. IPA Peru has continued its policy collaboration with MIMP during the pandemic, developing an effort to understand the relationship between COVID-19 and gender-based violence.

## COLOMBIA

IPA and J-PAL LAC convened the Secretaries of Security from Colombia's three largest cities—Bogotá, Medellín, and Cali—and Universidad EAFIT economist Catalina Gómez Toro to discuss and debate evidence-informed strategies for public safety, including the importance of local context and citizen perceptions of safety.

Influencing Global Debates About Outsourcing Education



Sharing Policy Lessons for Impact on Targeted Instruction and Kindergarten

## LIBERIA

In 2016, Liberia embarked on an ambitious and controversial plan to assess whether private school operators could effectively run public schools and improve learning outcomes. In 2019, IPA and lead researchers shared final results with the government, school operators, and the public. The results were widely discussed by the global education policy community and covered in media outlets including *The Economist*, *Quartz*, and *Devex* (Read more on pp. 18-19).

## UGANDA, ETHIOPIA, & TANZANIA

In 2019, the LEGO Foundation made a bold investment and awarded a \$100 million grant to a consortium of partners, including IPA, led by the International Rescue Committee (IRC) to bring Learning through Play to nearly 800,000 pre-primary and primary school aged children impacted by humanitarian crises and living in Uganda, Ethiopia, and Tanzania. IPA has been sharing lessons from existing evidence with consortium partners, informing the project's monitoring and evaluation strategy, and will eventually conduct three randomized evaluations.

A Research Collaboration on Learning through Play (LtP)

Research Informing Policy on Teacher Motivation and Performance

## GHANA

IPA co-hosted the third annual Evidence Summit with Ghana's Ministry of Education, which brought together researchers, practitioners, and policymakers to share rigorous education evidence and discuss opportunities for policy impact. The event highlighted two evidence-informed policy priorities, teaching at the level of the child and play-based early childhood education, that IPA evaluated in Ghana. The Ministry of Education has directed funds toward scaling these nationally, and the World Bank has incorporated these priorities into the Ghana Accountability for Learning Outcomes Project (GALOP), a \$150 million fund aimed at improving the quality of education for more than 2 million children in low-performing primary schools in Ghana.

## MYANMAR

In 2019, researchers working with IPA and Save the Children concluded a randomized evaluation of a maternal cash transfer program in collaboration with the Government of Myanmar (Read more on pp. 14-15). IPA and the research team shared the results in a series of meetings and public events with the Department of Social Welfare, the National Nutrition Center at the Ministry of Health and Sports, the Livelihoods and Food Security Fund (LIFT), UNICEF, and the World Bank—the key institutions in charge of implementing and funding maternal cash transfers in Myanmar.

Disseminating Findings on Maternal and Child Cash Transfers



## RWANDA

Researchers working with IPA and the Rwanda Education Board (REB) found that structuring teachers' contracts to tie salary increases to student performance resulted in better learning outcomes and was popular with teachers. IPA was asked by REB for support in using evidence to improve the teacher recruitment processes, including building a standardized measure of student learning and increasing teacher motivation through existing systems. These steps may lead to scale-up of the pay-for-performance system.

## EQUIPPING DECISION-MAKERS TO USE EVIDENCE

SPOTLIGHT ON BANGLADESH ▶



Credit: Jared Kalow

# Relief and Recovery During the COVID-19 Pandemic in Bangladesh: Leveraging a Close Government Partnership

**WHEN COVID-19 HIT IN MARCH**, IPA collaborated with government and research partners to design data-driven policies to address the acute crisis and prepare for the long-term recovery.



Kutupalong Refugee Camp in Bangladesh. Credit: Sebastian Chaskel

With one of the world's highest population densities, a resource-constrained health system, and an economy relying on the export of ready-made garments and remittances from abroad, Bangladesh is particularly vulnerable to the health and economic devastation of COVID-19.

To contain the health and economic devastation of COVID-19 quickly and effectively, Bangladesh had to generate real-time data and evidence to inform their policy decisions. Information on the geographical spread of the disease, affected population, and impact of mitigation strategies would allow the country to direct its limited resources towards policies that generated the highest impact.

Through years of collaboration, IPA Bangladesh has developed a strong relationship with policy partners, including the innovation hub in the government's Information and Communication Technology Division (ICT) called Aspire to Innovate, or a2i. IPA has worked with a2i for years and signed an MOU in 2016 to collaborate on a range of activities. Our longstanding relationship with the government allowed IPA to partner with a2i and other policy partners in generating rapid data and evidence that could help combat COVID-19 in the country.

The timeline below tracks the trajectory of COVID-19 in Bangladesh and illustrates how IPA has been collaborating with a2i, the Yale Research Initiative on Innovation and Scale (Y-RISE), and other organizations in designing data-driven policies to address this acute crisis and prepare for the long-term recovery.

## ▲ MARCH 23, 2020

### *Government declared 10-day nationwide lockdown*

When Bangladesh had 33 confirmed cases, the government first declared a 10-day nationwide lockdown, ordering non-essential businesses to be closed except for pharmacies, food markets, and other necessities. The government ended up extending the lockdown until May 30.

## ▲ APRIL 8, 2020

### *Government declared complete lockdown on the Cox's Bazar district*

Bangladesh imposed a complete lockdown on the Cox's Bazar District where the majority of the Rohingya refugee camps are located. Under the restrictions, no one was allowed to enter or exit the district.

## ▲ APRIL 2020

### *Collecting descriptive information about COVID-19*

IPA collaborated with researchers to conduct nationally representative phone surveys of at least 8,000 individuals using random digit dialing in order to help a2i and other organizations determine how to allocate scarce resources to contain the spread of COVID-19 and hasten the recovery.

*Researchers: Mushfiq Mobarak, C. Austin Davis, and Paula López-Peña*

## ▲ APRIL 11-17, 2020

### *Conducting a representative panel study to understand the prevalence of COVID-19 symptoms, risk factors, and health behaviors in Cox's Bazar*

IPA launched a phone survey under the leadership of researcher Mushfiq Mobarak to study the prevalence of COVID-19 symptoms in refugee and host communities in Cox's Bazar. Policymakers learned that respondents generally reported high levels of knowledge about respiratory hygiene and COVID-19 transmission, but attendance at religious and social events remained common, threatening efforts to contain the spread of the disease and suggesting that social influence interventions may be effective.

*Researchers: Mushfiq Mobarak, C. Austin Davis, Paula López-Peña, and Shabib Raihan*

## ▲ MAY 2020

### *Surveying social welfare program digital payment beneficiaries in the context of COVID-19*

IPA expanded the scope of an existing digital payments monitoring survey with a2i to collect information about the experiences (including challenges, pain points, and successes) in the digitization of cash transfers to Bangladesh's most vulnerable people (seniors, widows, and disabled groups). IPA is supporting a2i in collecting data about the impact of COVID-19 on beneficiaries to inform the design of their benefit payments and reach to vulnerable households, as the government is considering switching from banks to using mobile phones.

*Researcher: Kate Glynn-Broderick*

## ▲ MAY 2-12, 2020

### *Testing messaging interventions in Bangladesh*

IPA collaborated with researchers to identify effective messaging strategies that could promote social distancing and proper hygiene to stem the spread of COVID-19. We reached out to local religious leaders such as imams and school principals to disseminate information on effective disease prevention strategies. The message content and channels of message delivery varied and we plan to partner with a2i to scale up the most effective messaging strategies to mitigate disease transmission.

*Researchers: Mushfiq Mobarak, Paula López-Peña, C. Austin Davis, and Abu Shonchoy*

## ▲ MAY 6, 2020

### *Government gave conditional permission to reopen mosques*

After asking people to pray at home on April 6, the government gave conditional permission to reopen mosques as long as physical distancing measures were followed.

## ▲ JUNE 6, 2020

### *Bangladesh government implemented zone-based lockdown strategy*

The government implemented a zone-based lockdown strategy, where areas in Dhaka are declared red zones if they have more than 60 confirmed cases of COVID-19 per 100,000 people, and areas at the district level are declared red zones if they have more than 10 confirmed cases per 100,000 people in the preceding 14 days.

## USING THIS RESEARCH TO ANSWER CRITICAL POLICY QUESTIONS

In April 2020, the Cox's Bazar Panel Survey found that 70 percent of Rohingya refugees had been unable to buy essential food in the past week due to the impacts of COVID-19. The survey also found that 77 percent of respondents in camps and 52 percent of respondents in the host community had attended a communal prayer in the previous week, and another 47 percent (camps) and 34 percent (host community) had attended a non-religious social gathering. **This work encouraged organizations like UNHCR to make more targeted calls to imams and other trusted leaders to bring about reductions in social gatherings in an attempt to mitigate the spread of the virus.**

In another strand of work, this team is also working on expanding the reach of social protection programs in Bangladesh. Poverty rates in Bangladesh have almost doubled since March, but a comprehensive database that contains information of the new poor does not exist. To meet this challenge, the team is leveraging existing evidence to convince the government to look at ways that cell phone data can be used to target aid. **IPA is partnering with two of the largest telco providers in the country (Grameenphone and Robi Axiata) to identify those who are most in need of cash transfers.**

## EQUIPPING DECISION-MAKERS TO USE EVIDENCE

SPOTLIGHT ON PERU ▶

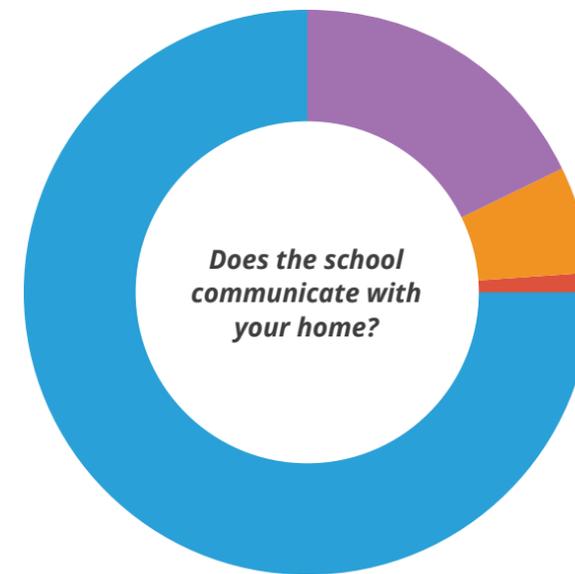


Credit: MINEDU-IPA-IDB

# Supporting Peru's Education Sector in the Time of COVID-19: Building on a Culture of Evidence Generation and Use

**AFTER THE PANDEMIC STRUCK**, governments around the world were tasked with determining how to deliver remote education, mitigate learning loss, and assess how their students were doing—nearly overnight. In Peru, IPA supported the Ministry of Education as it decided to use evidence in its remote-learning strategy.

## THE INTERACTION IS HIGH BETWEEN HOUSEHOLDS AND SCHOOLS DURING THE PANDEMIC



% of households

- 75% Teachers
- 18% No Interaction
- 6% Director
- 1% No response

Credit: MINEDU-IPA-IDB. 2020. Peru Parent Survey in times of COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic disrupted education systems across the world: in early April 2020, UNESCO estimated that 90 percent of children worldwide were out of school. Governments were tasked with determining how to deliver remote education, mitigate learning loss, and assess how their students were doing—nearly overnight.

In Peru, persistent existing challenges like regional inequality and high dropout rates among vulnerable students left the country's 8 million school children particularly vulnerable to COVID-19's impacts.

IPA began working with Peru's Ministry of Education (Minedu) in 2010, and since 2014 we have collaborated with IPA and J-PAL LAC on MineduLAB, an innovation lab for education policy housed within the Ministry.

When the pandemic arrived, years of collaboration with Minedu—on activities like randomized evaluations, scaling effective interventions, and training staffers—provided the foundation to support Minedu as they decided to use evidence-informed approaches in their response.

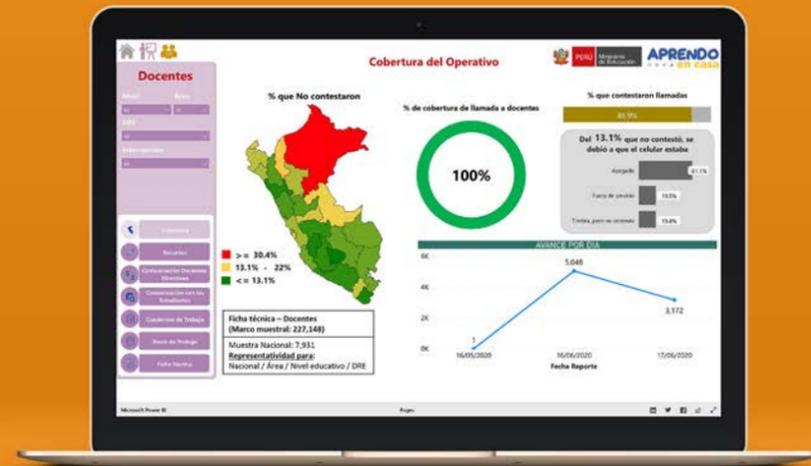
### INGREDIENTS FOR EFFECTIVE RAPID COVID-19 RESPONSE IN PERU:

**Permanent Presence:** IPA has had a permanent office in Peru for 17 years and has developed a deep understanding of the local education policy context.

**Institutional Knowledge:** IPA-Peru staff have learned the Ministry's structure, processes, and culture.

**Technical Know-How:** IPA staff are familiar with Minedu's administrative data.

**Trust:** IPA has earned the trust of a wide network of education policymakers in Minedu.



## THE IMPACT: USING EVIDENCE TO INFORM EDUCATION PROGRAMMING DURING COVID-19

These activities have already had concrete impacts on education policy in Peru, supporting Minedu's efforts to make evidence-informed decisions about how to deliver education during the pandemic. The survey of 8,000 households provided Minedu with information about its remote learning initiative during the first weeks of implementation. The success of the survey led Minedu to continue using this methodology and update the dashboard periodically during the pandemic, to inform high-level management decisions. Below are a few of the ways the data collected by Minedu has informed COVID-related programming:



The survey helped Minedu identify areas where access to the programming was low, leading it to coordinate with local and regional management units to improve access via local TV and radio channels. Minedu was also able to provide advice to those local and regional units on how to use their existing resources to improve connectivity for local students and families (e.g., contracts with local TV and radio providers with a larger presence in the area).



Information from later surveys aimed at teachers helped to adapt teacher orientation materials to more effectively meet teachers' needs, based on the information teachers identified as lacking.



The evidence generated by the nationwide survey helped Minedu validate a strategy to bridge connectivity challenges such as sending tablets to students for remote education—and another survey carried out with the World Bank generated specific recommendations for the distribution of tablets and related materials.

Building on this foundation, IPA-Peru, Minedu, and our partners quickly began a series of research activities to respond to COVID-19's education challenges. With the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), IPA collaborated with Minedu to:

- Provide technical assistance and collaborate on the design of an 8,000-person nationwide survey of parents, which was the starting point of the remote learning monitoring strategy.
- Design and pilot a distance education assessment tool for preschool children.
- Evaluate a text-message campaign promoting parental involvement with young children's remote learning.

With the World Bank, IPA and Minedu:

- Collaborated to use machine learning tools to help anticipate any issues with the delivery and maintenance of tablets for vulnerable students, with an accompanying survey.
- Updated content of a telenovela campaign found in a prior evaluation to reduce school dropout so that it could be broadcast on national television as part of Minedu's remote learning strategy (an evaluation is ongoing).

# OUR 2019 SUPPORTERS

We are grateful to all members of the global IPA community who support our mission to discover and promote effective solutions to global poverty problems. In addition to grassroots-level support of individuals around the world, our work in 2019 was made possible by grants and contributions from the following funders and donors.

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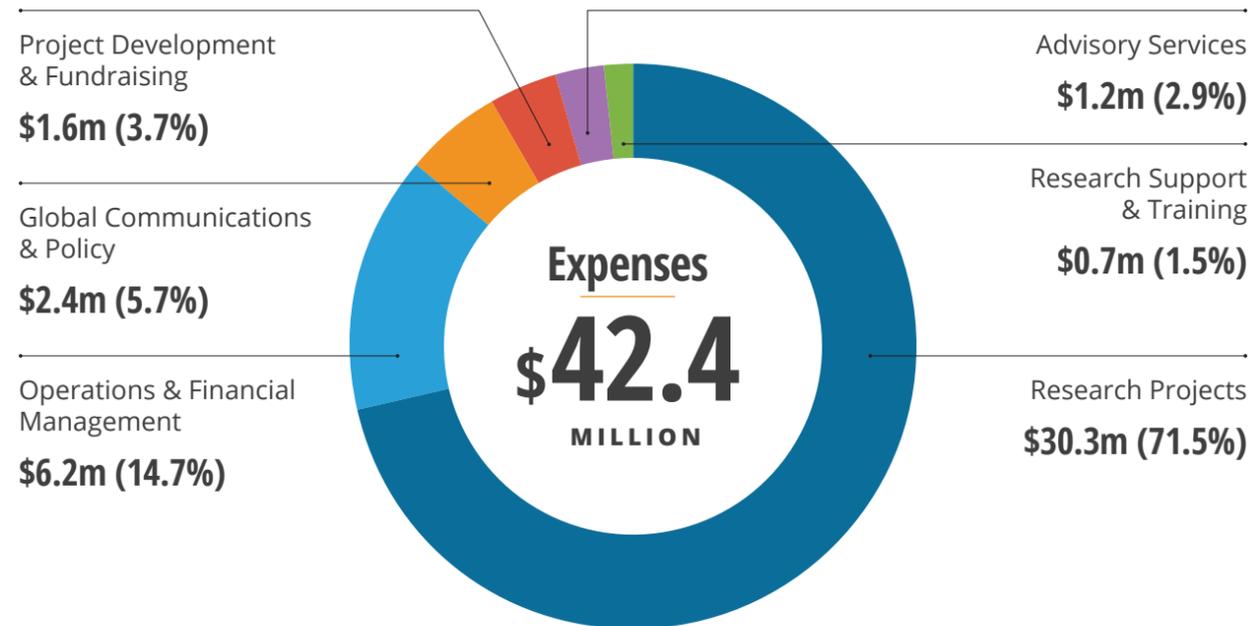
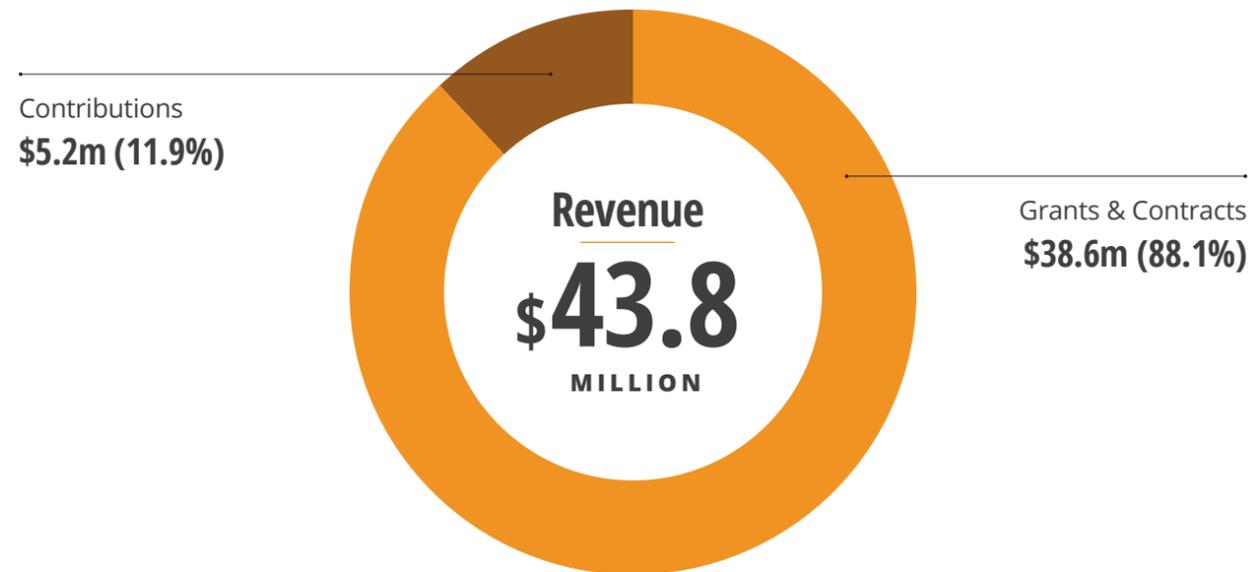
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End of 2018 / **\$1.24 million**  
 End of 2019 / **\$2.68 million**  
 Change in Net Assets / **\$1.44 million**



IPA is recognized as a gold-level GuideStar participant, demonstrating our commitment to transparency. We are also a BBB Accredited Charity and one of The Life You Can Save's top recommended charities for effective giving.

IPA's 2019 fiscal year covered January 1 to December 31, 2019. Percentages are calculated using exact amounts rather than rounded amounts. See our audited financials at: [poverty-action.org/financials](http://poverty-action.org/financials)

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