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How IPA is Pivoting with RECOVR—Because We Need Evidence Now More Than Ever

As COVID-19 reaches more of the countries where we work and governments respond with increasing lockdowns and containment measures across the developing world, there is an urgent need to understand the most effective responses that can save lives at the same time as reducing the economic impacts on the world's poor.

Emerging lessons from COVID-19 in the global North suggest that acting early based on evidence can save billions of dollars and hundreds of thousands of lives. As COVID-19 enters a new phase in the global South, where it is likely to have a massive impact, we need evidence urgently to inform a different policy approach for the context. Acting now, based on evidence is a cost-effective approach to saving lives and livelihoods. IPA's contribution to this need is an ambitious, multi-faceted new research agenda that we are calling Research for Effective COVID-19 Responses, or RECOVR.

What is RECOVR? Our goal is to support the COVID-19 response effort in the way we are best positioned to do and as we have done before during the 2014-2015 Ebola outbreak: by harnessing our data-collection expertise, our large researcher network, our on-the-ground knowledge and presence, and our relationships with global and local decision-makers. As such, we are well-positioned to generate rapid and timely data and to provide longer-term evidence to decision-makers working to mitigate the impacts of the crisis in the 22 low- to middle- income countries where we work—which are bracing for the worst of this pandemic as we speak.

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In most of the countries where we work, the majority of people lack saving cushions and social safety nets like unemployment insurance. Health systems are much less equipped to deal with a pandemic. Social distancing is much more difficult to implement in crowded urban areas, much less in a refugee camp. Telework and distance-learning is not an option for most people. These impacts threaten to be dire—but the choices decision-makers make now and in

the weeks to come will determine how big those impacts will be in the short and long term.



In refugee camps, it is much more difficult to implement social distancing.

In the coming weeks and months, IPA will be providing data, evidence, and analysis to support decision-makers in their efforts to:

- Reduce COVID-19 transmission rates
- Improve social-safety net responses
- Build resilient and adaptable businesses and employment opportunities
- Keep children safe, healthy, and learning
- Improve women's health, safety, and economic empowerment
- Build resilience and protect the financial health of families and individuals
- Promote peace and safety, and improve humanitarian response

To do this, IPA's RECOVR effort will have three components:

- **A rapid response multi-country survey:** We have built a cross-country panel survey to understand the health, economic, and social ramifications of the 2020 pandemic. Our teams in Bangladesh and Ghana, under the leadership of Mushfiq Mobarak and Dean Karlan respectively, are taking the lead in being the first countries to launch this survey, and we expect to add more countries in response to policymaker and funder demand in the coming days.
- **A combination of studies that respond to COVID-19:** We are rapidly developing new projects with our world-class researcher network, governments, and implementing partners. We expect that in the coming weeks, we will have around 40 individual

evaluations related to the COVID-19 response. (We have more than 80 in the concept stage as of today). Some will build on existing study samples, others will build on the core survey, and still others will work with new samples.

- **A global collaboration to ensure data flows to inform decisions:** We are collaborating with dozens of governments, the Center for Global Development, Yale University, Northwestern University, IGC, J-PAL, and others to share information, resources, and data to inform global stakeholders and advocate for more funding to be allocated to economic responses, especially in the global south. We are also building an online hub that will have a listing of research projects around the world (whether or not we are implementing them), a survey repository, and data and results from the multi-country survey and the ongoing research projects.

IPA's response to COVID-19 will encompass other activities too. For example, our [Right-Fit Evidence unit](#), which advises partners on how to design monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) plans to fit their needs, is helping partners to draw up lean monitoring plans with small numbers of indicators focused on key program aspects, and coordinating data collection services for partners' monitoring plans together with IPA's 22 country offices. If you're interested in learning more or exploring a potential partnership, reach out to the RFE team at rightfit@poverty-action.org.

Meanwhile, the Poverty Measurement team, which hosts the [Poverty Probability Index \(PPI\)](#), is building phone-based poverty tracking surveys that take advantage of existing data, letting researchers monitor changes in welfare during a crisis like this. Together with [IPA's Financial Inclusion program](#), the Poverty Measurement team is also partnering with organizations to use the [global financial health framework](#) to assess not only how poor households are today, but how vulnerable they are to economic hardship in the future. To learn more, contact PM team director Elliott Collins at ecollins@poverty-action.org.

As data becomes available, we will share it publicly and directly with relevant decision-makers working on response efforts. We will also share more details with you as these projects develop further.

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I want to thank our funders who have offered support and flexibility during this time of crisis and adaptation, to our partners who are asking for the data you need, and our network of researchers that is working around the clock with us to execute this pivot. I would also like to call on each of you to continue to join us in generating and using data to make decisions in this time of crisis. With your partnership, we can help save lives and livelihoods for vulnerable populations around the globe.

It's hard to believe it was only a few weeks ago that I shared [this post](#) about how IPA is responding and adapting our work in the face of COVID-19. Since then, so much has happened, and during this uncertain time, a silver lining for me has been watching our staff

mobilize around the world, literally working around the clock to quickly adapt our work. To them, and to all of you, I say thank you.

For more information, please [contact us](#).

April 09, 2020