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Juneteenth: Why We Are Embracing the Cause of Justice

Last week, IPA announced that we will observe Juneteenth, a day that commemorates the end of slavery in the United States, as a global holiday. We do this in the context of reflection on our own role and history in the fields in which we work. IPA believes in freedom and equality—and recognizes, accepts, and values individual differences. But we recognize 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.

So While Juneteenth commemorates a U.S. event, we are celebrating it in all our offices around the world, and using it as an opportunity to reflect. As a leader in the fight to reduce global poverty through evidence, we must acknowledge that poverty does not exist in isolation of racism, sexism or oppression of many other forms, in the US as well as everywhere else.

We need to support more research into issues of bias, discrimination, and the larger sources of social inequalities, but we also need to look inward and examine whether we're living these principles in our organization and in the way we work, and what we can do to further diversity and inclusion. Nor can we ignore the fact that IPA operates in the nexus of two sectors that struggle with diversity—economics and development. From access to educational opportunity to recruitment decisions, we know that we are as much a product of the systems that we rely on, as we are agents of influence. In the midst of a global pandemic that disproportionately impacts those who are already marginalized, we look forward to sharing a day of solidarity with our colleagues around the world.

So as we pause to observe Juneteenth, how can we use this as a starting point to reflect on our position and practice?

We have launched an internal working group with the mandate to make meaningful and pragmatic recommendations on the way we work to strengthen diversity and inclusion at IPA, and in the way that we work with our partners. Over the next six weeks, the group will focus on the following tasks:

1. Defining IPA's diversity and inclusion commitment in order to clarify the bar to which we want to be held, both in the U.S. and globally.

2. Analyzing internal existing data to give us a sense of how we are doing in terms of diversity and inclusion, for instance, the representation of global south and/or minorities in our country and global leadership, or the participation of researchers from the global south in studies that we implement or fund.
3. Gathering qualitative insights internally and externally to identify where IPA is doing well and how we can do better in the future
4. Socializing the change that we want to see across IPA and with our partners so that we can see meaningful cultural change

We don't claim to be able to single-handedly change the field, and we acknowledge the organizations already deeply committed to change—including The Sadie Collective, the Black Economists Network, People of Color Also Know Stuff, the Cite Black Women Collective, and the National Economic Association—but we do know that we have a role to play in lifting up underrepresented voices and developing talent in the field. As an institution, we also have professional skills and human and financial resources that we must commit to putting towards this cause, and we acknowledge that we need to do more as an institution.

We will continue to share our reflections with you through this process, and will share the outcomes from the working group activities by the end of August. In the meantime, we hope you will also join us in adopting the spirit of Juneteenth as we pause and begin the process of thinking about how we can do better.

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