

Date
May 19, 2023

Aliou Diallo: IPA Gave Me the Opportunity to Grow

*To mark its 20th anniversary, Innovations for Poverty Action 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. Aliou Diallo is a Research Manager at IPA Francophone West Africa, covering Burkina Faso, Mali, and Côte d'Ivoire.*

When Aliou Diallo joined IPA in 2017 as a research associate, he got much more than just a job. He got an environment in which his career could flourish.

"As an economist, especially for one who graduated in development economies, IPA is a good place to start and to advance," he says. "They give a lot of responsibility to young staff."

He was drawn to randomized controlled trials (RCTs), the research model used by IPA and its close partner, J-PAL, to gather evidence for what works, what doesn't work and why, in alleviating poverty.

"I joined IPA at the start of one of the largest RCT projects in West Africa - a project funded by the European Union," says Aliou. IPA's willingness to invest responsibility in early-career researchers like himself motivated him to join, "in addition to the fact that IPA is one of the main organizations which use randomized controlled trials."

"It's not very easy for a younger researcher to get funding to work on such an important project," says Aliou. "That's why I went into IPA. And, since then, I have been really happy IPA gave me the opportunity to grow and to occupy different positions."

PEOPLE OF IPA



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Work and learning advance together at IPA. Staff members are enthusiastic about how much their skills and knowledge grow through trainings and everyday conversations with colleagues, many of whom come from or have worked in places where the organization is active. The more diverse the workforce, the better everyone gets to understand a range of perspectives on key issues.

“We have this possibility of having a very diverse workplace,” says Aliou. In his office in Burkina Faso’s capital, Ouagadougou, for instance, “we have people from different countries, including Germany and South America.”

“This environment is very interesting,” he says. “But there's also an opportunity to learn new things. Since joining IPA I have learned a great deal, not only on technical aspects on the research side, but also on how to manage a project, how to handle a budget, and how to better communicate with internal and external partners.”

For Aliou, one skill stands out. “I think the most important thing I learned working with IPA is management: managing people, managing finance, managing procurement,” he says. He notes that recent graduates are often confident in their skills and technical knowledge, but less so “on how to manage, and especially how to manage people, because that is very tricky.” And as Aliou points out, if you can’t manage staff at all levels in an office, they won’t get things done.

His job also brought him into an ongoing conversation within his field. “One feature of IPA is that when you are based in, like, Africa, you don't have a lot of opportunity to discuss your research with others who are based in American or European universities,” he says. “But IPA

gives us this opportunity. In our daily work, we have discussions with incredible people, including those based in universities in Africa, America, and Europe as well.”

In 2020, IPA launched an initiative to expand the organization's diversity and inclusivity. It includes a focus on researchers, whom IPA describes as a key to its strength. And it supports another of the organization's broad goals: the empowerment of local staff and partners. In late 2022, IPA formed a partnership with the Research in Color Foundation (RIC). RIC is a 501c(3) nonprofit organization that is dedicated to increasing the number of Ph.D. students of color in economics and economics-adjacent disciplines and amplifying meaningful economic and policy research about and by communities of color.

“One goal is to increase the number of researchers from low- and middle-income countries participating in projects,” says Aliou.

“Also, we now have an internal research group where we can learn how to write a proposal, how to prepare a budget, but also how to work on technical issues. “All these components are very helpful to grow within the organization,” he says, “and that's why I'm still excited about working with IPA.”

We spoke with Aliou in August, 2022