IPA Embedded Evidence Lab Program

The Embedded Evidence Lab Program assists governments to institutionalize the use of data and evidence in their policy process. The program collaborates with government agencies to establish Embedded Evidence Labs within their organizations, enabling them to use data and evidence to improve their decision-making, policies, and programs. The Embedded Evidence Lab Program currently supports 19 Labs across 10 countries and 7 sectors: education, finance, gender, social protection, environment, health, and crime.

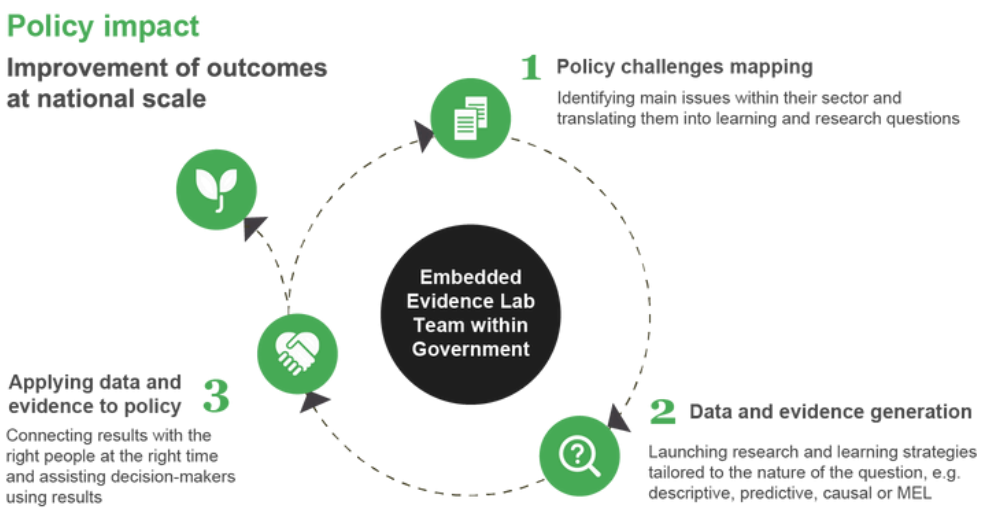
What are Embedded Evidence Labs?

Embedded Evidence Labs are teams within government agencies dedicated to make the policymaking process more impactful through data and evidence. They achieve this by identifying the necessary data and evidence to address policy challenges, developing and implementing strategies to generate relevant data and evidence, and facilitating the application of these insights to improve policy decisions that impact people's lives.

What do Embedded Evidence Labs do?

Embedded Evidence Labs follow a three-stage cycle to achieve impact on public policy:

Embedded Lab Learning Cycle



1. Policy Challenge Mapping: The Lab assists the government in identifying the main issues within their sector and translating them into research and learning questions.

2. Data and Evidence Generation: The Lab launches research and learning strategies tailored to the nature of the questions, such as descriptive analysis, predictive analytics, impact evaluations, or design and implementation of monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) systems, among others.

3. Applying Data and Evidence to Policy: The Lab connects results with the right people at the right time and assists decision-makers in using evidence to improve policy.

What is IPA's role in establishing Embedded Labs?

Embedded Evidence Labs are co-designed by IPA alongside government partners who request this support. The co-design process aims to ensure that the Labs are effective in promoting the use of data and evidence while being institutionalized to become an integral and sustainable part of the government. Many of the Labs are the results of long-standing relationships that IPA has cultivated in the countries where we operate.

In an initial phase, IPA teams are embedded within the government, working shoulder-to-shoulder with government officials to co-design and implement the Embedded Lab. Together, they advance the four Lab components described in the theory of change below to institutionalize the Lab within the government agency. As progress is made, IPA's embedded teams gradually phase out, allowing the Lab to be fully led by the government.

IPA Technical Assistance:

Process: The Lab team designs a learning cycle to connect policy challenges with data and evidence.

Structure & Governance: Determine the location and setup of the Lab, including engaging with key technical and political actors.

Capacity: Strengthen capacity by enhancing the skills and knowledge in the Lab team and other units, and improving information systems.

Resources: Institutionalize the Lab, including sustained financial resources, legal frameworks, and changes in organizational culture on the use of data and evidence.

Outcomes:

Policy Improvement: Governments apply data and evidence

Systems Change: Routine and institutionalized Lab process & structure

Impact:

More impactful programs & policies at scale

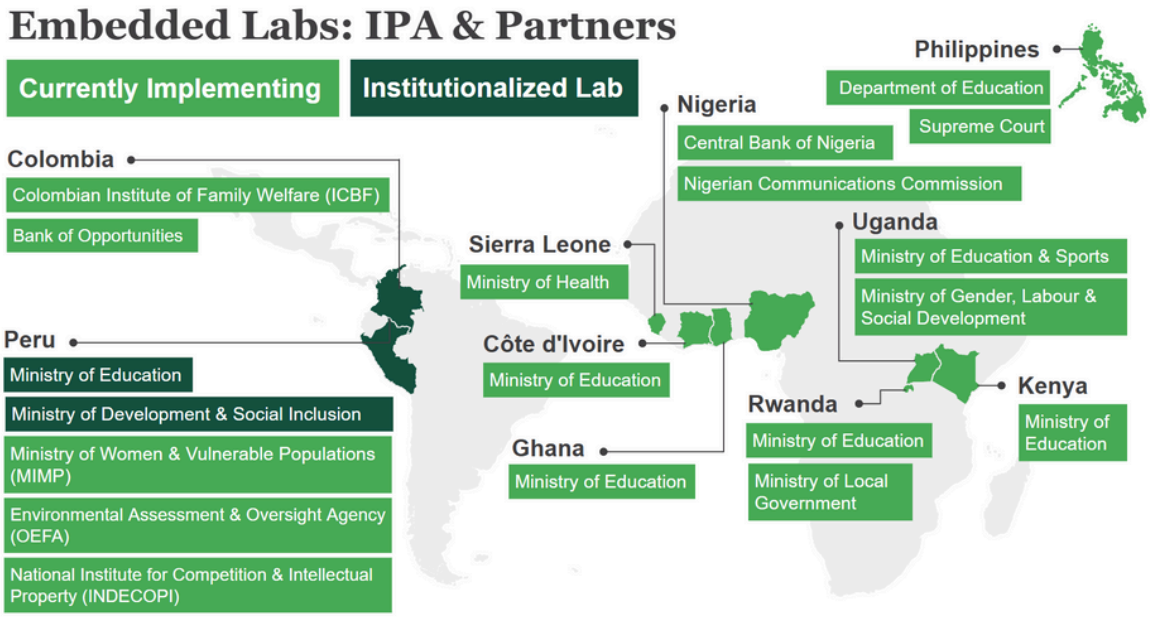
The Embedded Labs achieve impacts at two levels: creating Policy Improvement by connecting evidence and data with decision-making through the learning cycle, and driving Systems Change by improving processes, strengthening capacity, and ensuring sustainability of the Lab.

Why IPA?

Implementing Embedded Evidence Labs requires a deep understanding of the institutional and contextual aspects of the government agency, as well as strong technical capabilities in research and learning. IPA has 16 country offices around the world, and maintains long-term presence and partnerships with government agencies and a network of more than 600 national and international academics.

This allows the Embedded Evidence Lab Program to work shoulder-to-shoulder with governments, co-designing Labs to understand their structures, processes, incentives, and challenges, while employing strategies to enhance leadership and engagement.

IPA supports 19 Labs across 10 countries and 7 different sectors, allowing the program to generate global insights. These learnings are then translated into tools and strategies to assist country teams in the effective implementation of Labs.



"MineduLAB has now completed nine evaluations of innovative education interventions (research that has utilized Ministry of Education data), but we started really from scratch... I couldn't have imagined the spread of these ideas from Peru to Ghana to Zambia (the IPA Ghana team has also started an education lab within the Ministry of Education!), but it's an honor to have been part of the process."

- Annie Chumpitaz Torres, former Head of Monitoring and Strategic Evaluation at the Ministry of Education in Peru

What have Embedded Evidence Labs achieved?

- In Colombia, IPA partnered with ICBF (Colombian Institute of Family Welfare) to establish an Embedded Lab within their Planning Directorate. One of the Lab's projects is Heal to Grow (HtG), a program designed to enhance the socio-emotional skills of Early Childhood Development (ECD) workers through mindfulness-based practices. The randomized evaluation demonstrated that HtG improves the socio-emotional well-being of ECD workers and has a significant positive impact on their strategies for helping children manage their emotions and recognize the emotions of others. HtG is now being scaled as part of ICBF's ECD program portfolio, and by the end of 2024, ICBF will have reached over 2,000 ECD workers nationwide.
- Kenya's Ministry of Education Evidence Hub team has been incorporated into the National Education Sector Strategic Plan (NESSP) 2023-2027, providing the Hub with a budget and official legitimacy as a Ministry strategy for the coming years. The Lab has informed the design of two national-level policies with evidence: the Teacher Education & Training Policy and the Education & Training Sector Gender Policy.
- MineduLab, the Peru Ministry of Education's Embedded Evidence Lab, collaborated with local and international researchers to address high school dropout rates. In Peru, 12 percent of children leave school before age 13 and 17 percent do not complete secondary school, so the Lab conducted a randomized evaluation to assess the impact of delivering information about the returns to education through a video series. The campaigns significantly reduced dropout rates: in urban areas, the video series decreased the two-year dropout rate by 1.8 percentage points, an 18.8 percent reduction. With COVID-19 school closures creating the urgent need for policies to keep students engaged, the Ministry adapted videos to the TV programming format and broadcasted nationwide. Moreover, the Lab was institutionalized by being incorporated into the legal framework and budget of the Ministry and securing political support from internal and external actors to the Ministry. This strategy has allowed it to survive 7 changes of presidents and 16 changes of education ministers.
- The Rwanda Education Embedded Lab is supporting the scaling of performance-based teacher contracts. This program, which was rigorously evaluated in collaboration with researchers from Georgetown University and IPA, demonstrated improvements in both teacher performance and student learning. Following these positive results, the Ministry requested the Lab to scale up the program while testing different delivery methods to identify the most effective approach. The Lab is also developing information systems and capabilities to ensure high-quality program implementation at scale. In 2023, the incentive scheme reached 6,664 teachers and 304,000 primary school students.
- In Zambia, the Education for All (EFA) school grants policy have become the primary means of funding education, replacing traditional tuition fees and accounting for 50% (USD 85 million) of the non-personnel expenses in the education budget. However, inefficient monitoring capacity initially hindered the Ministry's ability to effectively implement the policy. To address these challenges, the Zambia MoE Lab implemented a transition from paper-based to electronic surveying, accompanied by training for Ministry of Education (MoE) staff in data collection. This shift led to improvements in data analysis and enhanced reports, which subsequently informed revisions to the EFA guidelines. As a result, new grants tailored to the unique needs of special education schools were developed and deployed, addressing specific educational requirements and further supporting the policy's goals.