Innovations for Poverty Action

IPA's Ambition: Deepening Impact

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The development sector is at a turning point. Progress against global poverty has slowed dramatically. Conflict, climate shocks, rapid technological change, and tightening fiscal pressures are compounding the challenge while bilateral funding is shrinking. In this context, a growing share of development work will be funded and implemented by low- and middle-income governments themselves.

Meeting this moment requires two things: scaling approaches that are proven to work, and strengthening how institutions, especially governments, use data and evidence to design policies and allocate resources.

For more than 20 years, IPA has worked at this intersection, building broad and deep expertise in conducting rigorous research and moving it to impact. IPA's nuanced understanding of what this work requires is drawn from more than 1,000 evaluations across over 60 countries, and this evidence has driven real changes that improve the lives of millions of people.

This ambition builds on and expands IPA's ability to work at the intersection of evidence and policy. Much of it reflects continuity and builds on foundations we have been developing for years. What is new is the depth and deliberateness with which we pursue scale and evidence use.

This will require expanding and building new capabilities. Specifically, IPA will:

- Deepen our work on strengthening data and evidence use within institutions, through our Embedded Evidence Labs model and by incorporating a policy lens into more of what we do.
- Be deliberate about building a scaling perspective into our work from the outset, and make our scaling support a more structured offering, focused on improving implementation for impact at scale.
- Expand the research methods we use to answer a broader set of questions.
- Build AI into our work: to strengthen our own research, evaluate AI interventions, and help partners use AI effectively and responsibly.

Our goal remains unchanged: a world with more evidence and less poverty. As IPA enters its next phase, it is pursuing a bolder version: a world where governments, NGOs, and funders use evidence and data as a routine part of how consequential decisions are made, and where evidence-informed interventions reach people at the scale and depth of the problems we confront.

Our Vision in Practice

These are the changes we hold ourselves accountable for. We will judge our progress by whether we can point to clear, documented examples of each. Annually, we will identify and track concrete targets associated with these changes.



EVIDENCE-INFORMED APPROACHES REACH SCALE

Programs with strong evidence behind them serve people at national scale and keep delivering results as they grow. Partners lead delivery themselves and IPA's role shifts from technical assistance provider to occasional external advisor.



GOVERNMENTS USE EVIDENCE CONSISTENTLY AND OVER THE LONG TERM

Data and evidence shape how governments make consequential decisions, year after year, without depending on a single champion or project cycle. Where IPA supports Embedded Evidence Labs, we expect the Labs' functions to be written into government structures and budgets and to continue after IPA's involvement ends.



DECISION-MAKERS HAVE NEW APPROACHES TO PRESSING PROBLEMS

Decision-makers have credible answers to the questions they face across the life of a program, from early design through scale, and act on them. The evidence base grows fastest where it is thinnest and the need is greatest. Our research responds to questions decision-makers bring to us, and they use the results to shape their programs.



THE WIDER SECTOR USES EVIDENCE TO CREATE CHANGE

Organizations that IPA has never worked with directly use its tools and frameworks, including Best Bets, the Scaling Ingredients Framework, and the Stage-Based Learning Framework, to make their own evidence-informed changes.

How IPA Makes an Impact

IPA generates rigorous evidence in partnership with governments, researchers, funders, and implementers, keeping scale and institutional use of data in mind from the outset. From that foundation, IPA creates impact through two connected pathways: **Scaling Evidence-Informed Approaches** and **Strengthening Data and Evidence Use Within Institutions**. The two reinforce each other: scaling depends on institutions that use evidence well, and institutions that use evidence routinely are better positioned to scale what works.

As IPA works directly with partners, it also builds public goods, including frameworks, data, and tools that the wider development community can draw on.

Being committed to impact means being selective. IPA works to answer questions with real consequences for how development resources are spent, and we focus on evidence-driven change, rather than responding to all demands.

Pathway One: Scaling Evidence-Informed Approaches

Too often, effective solutions fail to reach the people who could benefit most. Even when there is evidence of impact, promising ideas can stagnate. Common approaches to scaling often fail in two main ways. First, scaling is often treated as a later step, considered only after the evidence is available. Yet many of the choices including program design, cost, or government ownership that determine whether an approach can scale are made much earlier. Second, efforts to scale often focus narrowly on a single barrier to scale, such as delivery, rather than the full set of conditions an approach needs to succeed.

HOW WE ARE DEEPENING OUR SCALING WORK

IPA addresses both challenges by applying the Scaling Ingredients Framework, a practical tool that maps the full set of conditions an intervention needs to deliver impact at scale. IPA combines this framework with deep knowledge of the global evidence base and long-term in-country presence. This allows IPA to advise partners on which interventions can feasibly achieve impact at scale, and to provide them with implementation and monitoring, evaluation, and learning support along the full path to impact. In practice, this means three things:

Identifying and advancing the interventions most ready for scale. IPA helps partners select cost-effective interventions for specific needs, often approaches that have proven successful across contexts and over time, such as ultra-poor graduation or differentiated learning. IPA will also continue to identify Best Bets: promising interventions that are poised to reach significant scale, with targeted investment. IPA will expand this set as evidence accumulates, make the findings widely available, and use them to guide where it invests its own scaling support.

Building the conditions for scale. IPA will apply the Scaling Ingredients Framework from the earliest stages of projects to surface constraints before partners commit significant resources. IPA will then work with partners to

address barriers to scale, including refining interventions to new contexts while preserving the core components responsible for impact. IPA's Right-Fit Evidence tools provide user testing, A/B testing, and process evaluations to check whether early outcomes are on track. Scaling successfully and sustainably takes years, so IPA will be realistic about the long-term commitment and partnerships required, and build the support needed to sustain impact.

Supporting partners to build the monitoring, learning, and costing practices for scale. IPA will expand its work helping governments and implementing organizations to build the monitoring, evaluation, and learning practices needed to deliver at scale, without diluting what makes evidence-informed approaches work. IPA will also expand its support to partners on modelling costs and returns on investment at scale.

Pathway Two: Strengthening Data and Evidence Use Within Institutions

When progress against poverty comes through better policies and programs, much depends on institutions, and on how governments, funders, and implementing organizations use data and evidence to make decisions. Even when an organization adopts an effective practice, improvements can fade if the institutional capacities, processes, budgets, and culture needed to sustain them are not addressed. IPA supports its partners' own use of data and evidence, with the aim of making that use routine and self-sustaining.

Government institutions are central to this work as they deliver services, allocate resources, and shape policy at a scale no other actor can match. Strengthening how they use data and evidence can sustain impact for the largest number of people living in poverty.

Three problems recur in efforts to strengthen data and evidence use for informed decision-making within institutions. Some efforts stop at producing and sharing findings, without doing the additional work needed to change practice. Others place a single outside advisor inside an agency, so changes disappear when that person leaves. Still others treat evidence as the only lever for change, without addressing the incentives, resource constraints, and political dynamics that determine whether an agency acts on it.

HOW WE ARE DEEPENING OUR WORK ON DATA AND EVIDENCE USE WITHIN INSTITUTIONS

IPA addresses these challenges by supporting the institutional processes and capacities that determine whether and how evidence is used in practice. IPA works across teams rather than placing a single advisor in an agency, and combines evidence generation, data systems, monitoring and evaluation, and policy engagement in sustained partnerships. IPA will deepen this work in three ways:

Embedding evidence use in government through evidence labs. IPA's more than 20 Embedded Evidence Labs work within government agencies so that data and evidence shape policymaking. By expanding and deepening its Labs portfolio, IPA will continue to build demand for evidence and ground evidence-informed decision-making in formal roles, budgets, and processes. This helps ensure that the use of data and evidence does not depend on any single champion or project cycle.

Helping funders and implementers learn from their own work. Building on IPA's Right-Fit Evidence work, IPA will expand its work building monitoring, evaluation, and learning systems that partners run themselves. This includes shared learning agendas that connect the findings of individual projects to learning across an entire portfolio. IPA will continue to make the tools and frameworks behind this work publicly available to organizations we do not work with directly.

Strengthening partners' use of data and AI effectively and responsibly. IPA will help partners, especially governments, develop their own capacities to use AI for public good. This builds on IPA's work to improve the data infrastructure that partners rely on for their operations, connecting data sources, quality assurance, and analysis so that information generated in one part of a system reaches the people who need it to make decisions.

The two pathways reinforce each other: scaling evidence-informed approaches depends on strengthening evidence and data use within institutions. IPA's work across both pathways, often with the same partners, ensures that evidence leads to lasting change at scale.

SCALING WHILE STRENGTHENING THE USE OF DATA AND EVIDENCE WITHIN INSTITUTIONS: RWANDA'S PERFORMANCE-BASED TEACHER CONTRACTS

Rwanda's teacher performance contracts began as part of a randomized evaluation designed with the Ministry of Education. They are now national policy, reaching more than 100,000 teachers.

In Rwanda, national assessments before 2020 found more than a third of fourth-grade students were below grade level in reading and math. Rwanda already had a performance-pay system for teachers, but it had gone dormant, paying nearly every teacher a full bonus regardless of whether students were learning.

Rigorous research. Between 2015 and 2018, IPA and researchers Andrew Zeitlin, Clare Leaver, Owen Ozier, and Pieter Serneels evaluated whether linking teacher pay to student achievement could improve learning across 164 schools.

These contracts doubled the rate of learning growth, equivalent to an extra year of learning for each year spent in school.

Context-driven policy design and rapid testing. IPA and the Georgetown University Initiative on Innovation, Development and Evaluation (gui^{2}de) worked with the Ministry to design a version of the contract the government could run nationally. Since 2023, the partnership tested several contract variations across hundreds of schools. The government adopted the results as the basis for a new national teacher policy, approved in November 2024.



Juan Manuel Hernández-Agramonte, IPA's Senior Director for Embedded Labs, speaking onstage during the CCLE event in Rwanda in 2022. Photo Credit: IPA Rwanda and gui²de

Strengthening administrative data. Scaling performance-based contracts required data systems to track student learning and teacher management. IPA and gui²de supported the Ministry in building two national management platforms for student assessment data and teacher recruitment and performance. Both now operate across all primary and secondary schools.

An Embedded Lab to institutionalize these changes. Since 2019, IPA and gui²de have worked with the National Examination and School Inspection Authority and Rwanda Education Board to build and maintain an Embedded Evidence Lab inside the Ministry of Education. The Lab carried evidence from pilot to policy and built the institutional processes, legal frameworks, and staff capacity that changed how the Ministry uses data in its routine work.

Scaling with AI. Building on the data infrastructure for student assessment data and teacher recruitment and performance platforms, IPA and gui²de are working on AI-enabled tools to help the Ministry match teachers to schools more effectively, including to address teacher turnover.



Students in a classroom photographed during the STARS project in Rwanda. Photo Credit: Timeless Studios

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Data and Evidence: The Cross-Cutting Foundation

Evidence is the foundation of IPA's mission, and central to both pathways to impact. **Scaling evidence-informed approaches and strengthening institutions to use data and evidence rely on evidence that is credible, relevant, and available when partners need to make decisions.** IPA is as committed to finding out *what works* as we are to learning *how*, *where*, at what *scale*, for *whom*, and at what *cost*. Three commitments will guide how IPA strengthens this foundation going forward.

Expanding IPA's evidence offerings to answer a broad set of questions. Partners bring a wide set of questions across the full life of a program or policy, and answering them requires a range of methods. They need evidence to design and test innovations; adapt proven programs to new contexts; understand how and at what scale a program works; and to evaluate change at the level of whole systems. Rigorous impact evaluation, including randomized controlled trials, remains a core feature of IPA's work. IPA applies the same rigor to the full set of offerings described below. With a global network of researchers, including those based in the countries where IPA operates, IPA brings the expertise and grounded understanding of local problems that this rigor requires. With these researchers, IPA co-designs studies with policy relevance and scale in mind from the outset, ensuring that each study addresses the questions decision-makers need answered.

Innovating in data science and artificial intelligence for real-world applications. IPA's data science and AI capabilities strengthen both pathways. As governments, implementers, and funders increasingly adopt AI tools, IPA supports them to build the capacity to effectively, responsibly, and equitably adopt AI, and evaluates the performance, bias, and real-world effectiveness of AI interventions before they are scaled. Data science capabilities run throughout IPA's core offerings, embedding data-driven insight across the program and policy life cycle.

Building data infrastructure, evidence synthesis, and other public goods to advance the sector. Producing evidence as a public good remains one of IPA's foundational contributions. Yet decision-makers rarely have easy access to the evidence they need. Findings are scattered across studies, difficult to compare, and seldom packaged for the questions that governments and funders actually face when designing programs, allocating scarce resources, and deciding what should be scaled. IPA will invest in the data infrastructure that makes evidence easier to find, access, and reuse, turning one of the largest bodies of development research data into a shared resource for meta-analysis and for grounding new tools in real-world context. Leveraging this data, IPA will also produce frameworks, toolkits, and data tools that benefit the whole ecosystem.

IPA organizes much of this work through its sector programs, which bring world-class academic partnerships and rigorous research in sectors where evidence can do the most good. Working alongside researchers, governments, funders, and implementers, sector programs identify important evidence gaps and shape studies that address them.

IPA's Expanded Evidence Generation Offerings

IPA has expanded its evidence offerings so that partners can get the right evidence at the right moment, without compromising on rigor.

- **Impact evaluation**. IPA measures whether a program causes the outcomes that matter, for whom, and by how much by using methods, from randomized controlled trials to A/B testing and factorial experiments, selected to balance rigor with speed and cost. The findings inform decisions about what to scale, or stop, while contributing to the global evidence base.
- **Cost-effectiveness analysis and modelling**. By collecting cost data alongside outcomes and pairing it with impact evidence, IPA generates and models cost-effectiveness and return-on-investment estimates. This helps partners decide where to invest, what to scale, and how programs compare to alternatives.
- **Implementation research.** IPA evaluates how a program is delivered in practice, drawing on process evaluations and mixed-methods research to monitor delivery, assess early outcomes, and understand the perspectives of the implementers and participants. This data helps partners refine delivery and prepare for adaptation and scaling.
- **Intervention and policy design.** IPA works with partners to diagnose the problem a program or policy is meant to solve, understand the people and context it needs to serve, and test early ideas through formative and user research before committing to scale. This evidence is used to design more effective interventions from the outset.
- **Data science.** IPA uses machine learning, natural language processing, and data engineering to answer questions conventional methods cannot reach, drawing on administrative and hard-to-use data sources. This evidence allows partners to unlock insights from data they already hold but cannot easily analyze.
- **Evaluating AI tools and models.** As governments, funders, and implementers increasingly deploy AI, IPA evaluates these tools before they are scaled, generating evidence on effectiveness, bias, and real-world performance. Partners use this evidence to decide which AI tools to adopt, how to adapt them, and where risks need to be managed.
- **Evaluation of complex initiatives and portfolios.** Some initiatives, such as funder portfolios, multi-stakeholder reforms, and complex system changes, such as IPA's own Embedded Labs, produce impact through multiple causal pathways at once. IPA uses theory-based methods to trace pathways of change and assess the contribution an initiative has made. Partners use this evidence to refine portfolios and inform future investments.

Capabilities We're Building

Deeper sectoral expertise in high-demand areas. Interventions in health, agriculture, and social protection with high returns on investment are bringing new opportunities for impact to IPA. IPA will expand on its strengths in these sectors and build new ways to add value.

Expanded staff capacity in new methods, AI, policy, and advisory. IPA's expanded evidence offerings and deeper focus on institutionalization and scaling demand new skills from staff. IPA will grow its internal methodological capacities, AI literacy, and advisory and government engagement skills across the organization.

Researcher network, quality, and standards for new evidence offerings. IPA will expand its researcher networks for our broader evidence toolbox, especially implementation research, portfolio evaluations, qualitative methods, and design thinking. We will establish quality standards and clear guidelines to maintain IPA's signature rigor.

Where We Work: Balancing Depth with Flexibility

IPA will continue to work where evidence has the greatest potential to improve lives.

Our focus will remain in low- and middle-income countries, where governments and their partners are working to address complex development challenges under conditions of constrained resources and growing uncertainty.

IPA will concentrate and deepen its work where partnerships are strongest, contextual knowledge is deepest, and demand for evidence is strong. Where demand for evidence or opportunities for impact have shifted, IPA is prepared to step back from certain contexts to make room for deeper engagement elsewhere.

At the same time, IPA is expanding its ability to work outside of its traditional country office structure, maintaining the flexibility to pursue opportunities for impact where there are strong existing relationships, replication potential, or strategic multi-country engagement. This can take different forms depending on the context, from smaller permanent presences focused on Embedded Labs and policy engagement, to mission-aligned projects run through contracted partners with IPA providing technical leadership and quality of oversight.

What Makes IPA Different

1. Long-standing, trusted government partnerships. IPA has built a network of over 60 government partnerships across the world, many sustained through changes in leadership and shifts in political priorities. These relationships reflect a track record as a partner able to work across multiple projects and many years, trust that cannot be assembled quickly for a single project or grant.

2. In-country presence and research capacity. IPA's country offices in 15 countries have built, over two decades, a cadre of staff experienced in running rigorous research under real field conditions, from survey design and data collection to protecting a study's integrity when circumstances shift. Combined with a connected researcher network, this infrastructure is difficult for a new entrant to replicate quickly.

3. Support across the full evidence-to-impact journey, delivered with the flexibility to adapt as partners' needs change. Partners often need a mix of offerings: a fast descriptive survey, a monitoring system, or a rapid check on program delivery. IPA helps them assess readiness for scale, understand costs and trade-offs, and build the systems that sustain impact at scale. Multidisciplinary teams working across research, implementation support, policy, and advisory services bring continuity, depth, and breadth.

4. Rigor, integrity, and neutrality that governments and funders trust. IPA is not an implementing organization but an independent evaluator known for its rigor and integrity. With its network of respected academic researchers, it shares what the evidence shows, including when results are null, mixed, or unfavorable.

5. Global evidence that strengthens local work, and local presence that informs it. Evidence and lessons from dozens of contexts and sectors inform how new questions and programs are approached, while IPA country teams bring an understanding of the political, institutional, and operational realities that determine whether an intervention will work in a given context.

6. Convener across the evidence-to-impact ecosystem. IPA brings together researchers who generate evidence, funders looking for cost-effective places to invest, policymakers who act on evidence, and implementers who deliver programs. IPA also facilitates government-to-government learning, inspiring data and evidence use by demonstrating what is possible across contexts.



IPA Peru staff with representatives from the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP), following the presentation of a monitoring and learning strategy developed for the Ministry's Economic Assistance for Orphanhood social protection service. Photo Credit: Mariafé Egúsquiza

How You Can Partner with IPA

Evidence-based impact is built through partnership.

IPA works with governments, researchers, funders, implementing organizations, and multilateral institutions to generate evidence, strengthen decision-making, and improve lives.

FOR GOVERNMENTS

IPA helps governments answer priority questions, strengthen monitoring and learning systems, build evidence-use capabilities, assess policy options, and scale effective programs.

FOR RESEARCHERS

IPA partners with researchers to generate rigorous evidence that addresses pressing policy challenges and contributes to both academic knowledge and real-world impact.

FOR FUNDERS

IPA helps funders identify promising opportunities, understand what works, assess value for money, develop evidence-informed portfolios, and strengthen pathways to scale.

FOR IMPLEMENTING ORGANIZATIONS

IPA supports organizations in designing stronger programs, improving implementation, generating evidence, and adapting interventions to maximize impact.

Across all partnerships, IPA's approach is grounded in co-creation, rigor, transparency, and a shared commitment to improving lives through evidence.

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