



STRATEGIC PLAN >> 2013–2018

MORE EVIDENCE, LESS POVERTY



ipa
INNOVATIONS FOR
POVERTY ACTION

OUR VISION:

MORE EVIDENCE, LESS POVERTY

OUR MISSION:

**TO DISCOVER AND PROMOTE
EFFECTIVE SOLUTIONS TO
GLOBAL POVERTY PROBLEMS.**

THE PROBLEM

Limited Evidence
of what works best
to help the poor

Limited Use
of available
evidence

Ineffective
Programs &
Policies

WASTED MONEY, ENDURING POVERTY

OUR SOLUTION

Design & Evaluate
potential solutions to
poverty problems

Mobilize & Support
decisionmakers
to use evidence

Better
Programs &
Policies

MORE EVIDENCE, LESS POVERTY

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

In 2010, the Ghana Agricultural Insurance Programme launched a commercial rainfall insurance product, a first in Ghana. This product provides farmers with financial support

in the event that too much or too little rainfall ruins their crop.

This was the result of a study by IPA, which demonstrated that farmers hesitated to buy fertilizer or tend their fields because they feared losing the investment if the rains didn't come. When farmers were given rainfall insurance, they bought and applied more fertilizer than those without insurance, and they spent more time tending to their crops. What's more, after having experienced the product, the majority of farmers were willing to pay for the insurance.

This is just one example of how IPA creates evidence and uses it to build a world with less poverty.

Three trillion dollars have been spent in the last 30 years to help the poor. Has it really helped? Without clear evidence of what solutions are most effective, decisionmakers are left with anecdotes and gut instinct when deciding how to invest those funds. With 2.4 billion people still living on \$2 dollars a day or less, it is critical to fill this gap.

That is where IPA comes in. We believe that to create a world with less poverty, we need to effectively implement solutions that have measurable impact. IPA designs and

evaluates potential solutions to poverty problems using the most rigorous evaluation methods. We then refine these solutions and their applications, and mobilize decisionmakers to use that evidence, improving opportunities for the world's poor.

In the last ten years, we have created a solid body of evidence. Our work has already contributed to **improving millions of lives**. For example, as a result of an IPA study, over 40 million kids have been treated for intestinal worms, leading to a significant increase in their school attendance. Now, with over 350 studies, **we have reached a key juncture**: for this work to be worthwhile, we need to build on our successes and ensure that all this evidence translates into actual programs and policies.

To achieve our vision, in the next five years IPA will continue to create **More Evidence** of what works best to help the poor, and we will expand our capacity to mobilize and support decisionmakers to use evidence, resulting in **Better Programs & Policies**. To get there, we will leverage our unique local presence, and build a strong organization with the **People, Systems, and Resources** necessary to achieve our goals.



GOALS	More high-quality evidence	Better, evidence-based, programs & policies
STRATEGIES	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Expand our research network » Strengthen our research implementation quality » Ensure measurement precision » Promote research transparency » Facilitate wider use of data 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Demonstrate how good ideas can work in different contexts and at scale » Link a global body of evidence to local issues » Create deliberate and long-term partnerships with local decisionmakers » Promote the adoption of demonstrated interventions
WHERE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » In 20 countries, where we will have a combination of experienced local and international staff, and established relationships with government, NGOs, and the private sector. 	
WHAT'S NEEDED	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> » Invest in people through staff development and new positions » Build systems for operational efficiency and knowledge management » Expand resources to fund strategic activities 	

OUR FIRST TEN YEARS

For ten years IPA has produced high-quality evidence about what works, and what does not work, in addressing poverty. In partnership with over 200 academics and implementing organizations, we have completed over 125 studies, and have over 225 in progress, in 51 countries. Our work spans the sectors of agriculture, education, finance, governance, health, and water & sanitation. We have 11 permanent offices supporting 16 countries, where we conduct research and routinely consult with governments, foundations, NGOs, and others to present evidence that can inform their work. In 2013 alone, IPA research was featured in prominent publications such as the *New York Times*, *Wired Magazine*, *The Economist*, and *The Guardian*.

OUR SUCCESSES

IPA influences policy and practice through multiple channels:

- » **IPA partners change their approach based on study results.** In Malawi, IPA researchers found that fingerprinting led to a dramatic increase in repayment among the riskiest borrowers. IPA is now working with the Malawi Reserve Bank to introduce and evaluate the impact of a fingerprint-based credit bureau covering many more borrowers and all Malawian microlenders.
- » **NGOs, governments, and corporations use IPA's evidence to guide program design.** The Ghana Ministry of Education is partnering with IPA on the Teacher Community Assistant Initiative (TCAI), an education program that assigns teaching assistants to work with struggling students in small groups. TCAI is based on a similar program developed in India that has been shown, through a randomized evaluation, to improve learning levels.
- » **IPA influences global debates.** Research conducted by IPA and our partners showed that microcredit can be a valuable tool for business owners, but that it does not single-handedly move all who receive it out of poverty. Our work has led to a shift away from promoting microcredit as a poverty-fighting tool for everyone, and has contributed to the increased support by development practitioners for savings and insurance products, in addition to credit.
- » **IPA helps create a culture of evidence-based decisionmaking.** IPA and our partners at the Jameel Latif Poverty Action Lab at MIT supported the launch of the Quipu Commission in Peru, which convenes several government ministries together with researchers to identify key research questions the Peruvian government would like to answer to design better policies.
- » **IPA participates in the scale up of effective programs.** An IPA study in Kenya found that installing chlorine dispensers next to community water sources led to a six-fold increase in the percentage of households that treated their water before use. Based on these results, IPA founded the Dispensers for Safe Water program, which in 2013 will reach one million people with access to dispensers.
- » **IPA supports organizations working to bring proven solutions to scale.** In 2013, IPA supported the creation of Evidence Action, a new nonprofit dedicated to scaling up proven interventions to improve the lives of the poor. Our Dispensers for Safe Water program, mentioned above, and our Deworm the World Initiative are both transitioning to Evidence Action.

GROWING DEMAND, NEW QUESTIONS

IPA's growth and successes have come about as others working to combat poverty have both embraced evidence to inform program and policy design and broadly accepted randomized evaluations as the gold standard. **There is far more demand and funding for impact evaluations today than existed ten years ago, and more organizations and researchers that run them.**

However, this awareness and demand is higher among international agencies than at the local level, and those who understand the need for evidence are increasingly asking how we can use what we have learned to develop programs and policies that improve lives for the poor.

Today's concerns include:

- » **Are the questions we ask relevant to decisionmakers?**
- » **To what extent are results applicable across contexts?**
- » **How can development practitioners successfully operate effective programs at scale?**

Within this context, international decisionmakers are looking to increase evidence-based policy and practice on the ground by building the capacity of local institutions and local researchers.

IPA has a unique opportunity in the next phase of growth to develop more evidence and use it to drive practice and policy. We are already known in the development sector as a high-quality provider of evidence, and we are poised to be known for turning that evidence into action.



WHAT MAKES US UNIQUE?

IPA is unique in that it combines the following qualities:

▶ RESEARCH FOR IMPACT

IPA does not do research for research's sake. We design and evaluate solutions to pressing issues that matter to the poor and to those who work on their behalf. We make research results actionable by determining not only whether a solution is effective but why, in what circumstances, and at what scale.

▶ EXPERTS IN EVALUATION

IPA is the largest implementer of randomized evaluations in the international development field, combining rigorous evaluation design with high quality research implementation. Our experienced staff works with a network of more than 200 academic researchers to manage over 225 ongoing studies globally.

▶ DEEP LOCAL PRESENCE

With a strong presence in 16 countries, IPA has one of the largest field infrastructures among international research organizations. Our local presence allows us to both ensure high-quality research oversight and to cultivate the deep, long-term relationships needed to influence decisionmakers.

▶ LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS

IPA partners with researchers and local decisionmakers at nonprofits, governments, and businesses, bringing them together to create and utilize innovative solutions that are relevant to the needs of the poor and are based on scientific evidence.

LESSONS FROM OUR PAST

Our experiences, coupled with our involvement in the development community at large, have taught us key lessons:

- » Creating reliable, relevant evidence requires research infrastructure on the ground. When we run evaluations through our country offices, we achieve a level of quality and applicability that exceeds anything we can do in places where we don't have that presence.
- » Translating evidence into large-scale programs requires that we do more than simply communicate results. It requires on-going dialogue, advocacy, consultation, and, in some cases, hands-on assistance.
- » In the past, we have filled gaps between evidence and action by playing a direct role in implementing interventions at scale, as with the Dispensers for Safe Water program. But providing direct services can conflict with our role as an objective creator of evidence and requires a different type of organization.
- » Influencing decisionmakers requires strong relationships and a deep understanding of local programs and context. Our local, long-term staff is critical for establishing and maintaining those relationships.
- » Our ability to make practical recommendations requires experience translating results to different contexts and understanding of the common challenges of operating large-scale programs.

WHERE WE ARE GOING

In the next five years, we will build on what we have achieved and learned, and leverage what makes us unique to address the next challenges of fighting poverty. There is more to learn about what works best to help the poor, and we need to ensure that what we learn gets translated into action.

OUR GOALS: MORE EVIDENCE, BETTER PROGRAMS

Over the next five years, we will dedicate ourselves to discovering and promoting effective solutions to global poverty problems by creating **more high-quality evidence** that answers questions of immediate importance to decisionmakers at the front lines of development.

We will also promote the design and use of **better, evidence-based programs and policies**, leading to improved opportunities for millions living in poverty.



WHERE WE WILL WORK: A LONG-TERM PRESENCE

Our experience running evaluations in 51 countries has revealed that the quality of our work and our ability to influence decisionmakers is higher in places where we have a long-term presence. We will therefore focus future growth and investment on a global, but smaller, portfolio of country programs where we have offices with experienced staff and developed relationships. Currently, we have 16 country programs supported by 11 IPA country offices. In these locations, we have:

- » Local and international staff
- » Established relationships with government, NGOs, and the private sector
- » Deep knowledge of local issues and customs

Over time, we will grow the number of country programs we operate in a gradual and deliberate manner, prioritizing countries whose populations are disproportionately poor, and where there is a supportive policy environment, limited existing capacity in rigorous research, and strong interest from the research and donor community. **We expect to have approximately 20 country programs by the end of 2018.** This breadth will allow us to both answer questions that are relevant globally and test solutions across a variety of contexts. As we build the capacity and skills of our staff in these places, we will progressively decentralize operations, project development, relationship management, and other elements of our work.



Peru/Bolivia/Paraguay

IPA's work in the Latin American countries of Peru, Bolivia, and Paraguay is defined by very strong relationships with national governments and local researchers, particularly in the areas of finance and education. In 2012 we launched the Quipu Commission to bring together IPA researchers with Peruvian policymakers to directly collaborate on solutions to development challenges. The commission has already led to a pilot project to test whether branchless banking agents in rural areas in Peru can increase the financial inclusion of government cash transfer recipients. IPA will continue to support the Peruvian government in its quest for evidence-based policymaking, while also strengthening relationships and growing a research portfolio in Bolivia and Paraguay.

Burkina Faso/Mali/Senegal

The mostly landlocked, semi-arid countries of francophone West Africa rely heavily on agriculture, despite a long dry season and development in major cities like Dakar, Bamako, and Ouagadougou. Our research in the region has focused on the agriculture, education, health, and microfinance sectors in Mali, and we have collaborated with the government of Mali to evaluate the impact of an irrigation infrastructure project. In the wake of recent uprisings in Mali, IPA is developing an office in Ouagadougou, and investing in Burkina Faso and Senegal to diversify and expand our presence and develop full country programs.

Sierra Leone/Liberia

The conflicts in Sierra Leone and Liberia left a legacy of poverty and social upheaval, especially for young citizens whose development was interrupted by conflict. IPA's work here has focused on evaluating the impact of programs designed to address the challenges of post-conflict societies with limited infrastructure, specifically in the areas of governance, education, and community participation. A project currently underway in Sierra Leone is assessing how voters are influenced by different media during political campaigns—including infomercials, radio debates, and printed policy positions.

Ghana

IPA Ghana is one of our largest programs, home to our Teacher Community Assistant Initiative, agricultural insurance research, and other projects in the areas of education, finance, and water & sanitation. Our program is staffed mostly with local professionals who run our projects and cultivate relationships with government officials and local organizations. This approach of building capacity with local talent is considered a model for how IPA wants to grow long-term programs in other countries. IPA is currently working to further develop sector knowledge in health, education, and agriculture in order to better focus outreach.





Uganda

Established in 2010, IPA Uganda has 17 evaluations completed or underway in education, environment, health, finance & entrepreneurship, and governance. The program has had a specific emphasis on youth and women, and has focused on developing strong partnerships with local NGOs and government agencies. One such partnership produced the Ugandan government's budget transparency website, launched in July 2013, to publicize local budget expenditures. Future work will build off of existing studies and answer new questions related to agriculture, which plays a significant role in the Ugandan economy.

Rwanda

IPA will open its newest country office in Rwanda in late 2013. Our work here is defined by collaboration with the government: we are currently evaluating the impact of a public health initiative sponsored by the Ministry of Health. The program aims to encourage healthy behaviors such as hand washing, sleeping under bed nets, and treating household water before use, among others. We are likewise working to expand our research network and exploring opportunities to expand into other health sub-sectors, agriculture, and education.

Kenya

IPA's first randomized evaluations took place in Kenya. Our pioneering work on school-based deworming, chlorine dispensers for safe water, and the use of bed nets for malaria prevention all originated here. In all, we have 57 studies completed or underway here. These successes put us in a strong position to both contract and expand our office over the next five years: IPA Kenya will be overseeing the spin-off of our deworming and chlorine dispenser programs to Evidence Action, at the same time that our staff will be building new relationships with state policymakers as the Kenyan government transitions to a decentralized model.

Zambia

IPA Zambia opened in 2010 in response to growing demand for evaluations. Our work has historically focused on the health sector—one seminal IPA Zambia study assessed how pricing affects demand and use of Clorin, a water treatment product. The government of Zambia is currently working to improve education outcomes for its citizens, protect the environment, and improve access to water, sanitation, and hygiene. These areas present opportunities for us to promote better action through our existing relationships with the Ministries of Health and Education, and with the Department of Forestry.

Malawi

More than half of the Malawi population lives below the poverty line, and the country lacks some of the systems that facilitate growth. IPA has had a close relationship with the government and other partners to advocate for innovation in development, especially in the areas of finance, agriculture, maternal health, and business growth. One successful study on the use of fingerprinting to identify microfinance borrowers showed that customers who had fingerprints on file were more likely to repay their loans, a finding which is now being expanded with the support of the country's Central Bank and Network of Microfinance Institutions.

Bangladesh

Formed in 2011, Bangladesh is one of IPA's younger country programs. We have completed two studies and have nine underway in the water & sanitation, entrepreneurship, and governance sectors. We are currently conducting a study with the Bangladesh National Board of Revenue to identify ways to improve value-added tax compliance among small businesses. The office has a growing portfolio of studies on small-and-medium enterprises and has particular expertise in research with textile firms. We are also in the process of developing ideas with the government on evidence-based programs for education, an area of high interest.

Philippines

Philippines has experienced strong economic growth in the past decade, but income inequality remains high. Early IPA studies focused on financial services for the poor, especially micro-credit, but in recent years we have expanded our sector focus and currently have evaluations underway on governance, land reform, and remittances. The five-year plan here emphasizes the continued development of relationships with the Philippine government and other partners to ensure that future projects continue to address the most pertinent issues facing the poor.



STRATEGIES

With our country programs as the foundation, IPA will focus on the following key strategies:

To create more high quality evidence, we will:

- » **Expand our research network** internationally and locally by growing the number of academics we work with and by creating in-house research positions.
- » **Strengthen our research implementation quality** by increasing internal oversight.
- » **Ensure measurement precision** by refining our measurement tools and practices
- » **Promote research transparency** by registering IPA studies in a public domain.
- » **Facilitate wider use of data** by creating a data repository to which we will systematically publish data.

To mobilize decisionmakers to implement better, evidence-based, programs and policies, we will:

- » **Demonstrate how good ideas can work in different contexts and at scale** by studying the impact of effective solutions across contexts and answering questions related to operating programs well and at scale.
- » **Link a global body of evidence to local issues** by identifying key questions in focus sectors at the country level and familiarizing local decisionmakers with research that is relevant to their every day work.
- » **Create deliberate and long-term partnerships with local decisionmakers** to promote and support evidence-based practice and policy.
- » **Promote the adoption of demonstrated interventions.** Targeted instruction, commitment savings, and programs for the ultra-poor are solutions backed by solid evidence, and we will partner to support the adoption of these ideas at scale.

DEVELOPING PEOPLE, SYSTEMS, & RESOURCES

Achieving our goals will require that we invest in our organization, particularly in our people, and in our operational and knowledge management systems.

People

IPA's success depends on our ability to develop and retain our excellent staff. Our future growth, and increased geographic focus, will enhance and take advantage of our talent in three ways.

First, we are investing heavily in staff development. Through continuous training and mentorship, we will equip our staff with the necessary technical and management skills they need to run the organization's operations and ensure high quality and policy-relevant research. While retaining and growing our local staff will be a key focus, we will maintain our ability to access and develop international talent with a new Fellowship Program, aimed at providing recent graduates from around the world the opportunity to build experience and skills in two-year field research positions.

Second, to complement these investments and encourage retention, we are enhancing our organizational model to create more formal career paths for staff throughout the organization.

Third, we will create new positions to enhance our human resources:

- » **Local research managers** to oversee groups of projects. They will ensure that our research protocols are applied, identify and share best practices, and mentor research staff.
- » **In-house researchers** to run projects that have high policy relevance but low interest from academic publications.
- » **Local policy managers** to pursue relationships with local decisionmakers. They will communicate lessons from our research and advocate for the use of evidence in program design. They will be supported by part-time policy advisors such as influential local academics or former government officials who can guide strategy and make personal introductions.





Systems

Meeting our goals requires that we have infrastructure that can support decentralized functions in the various country programs, while still allowing for oversight and support from headquarters. Our investments in this area will focus on:

- » **A knowledge management system** that provides an efficient and effective way to consolidate our research and increase our capacity to search, summarize, and disseminate it.
- » **Global financial and human resource systems** that allow for local management and operations with centralized review and oversight.

These systems will collectively allow our country programs to track and report on their work in a way that makes them stronger, more flexible, and more resilient.

Resources

The future will also see us diversify our resources. In the past ten years, we have mostly relied on project funding—grants applied to specific evaluations—for the vast majority of our work. We are grateful for the faith our funders have had in our mission, which has allowed us to test hundreds of innovative ideas. We will continue to rely on that funding model for most of the projects that we do.

But we will need to develop other funding sources to support the strategic activities described in this plan, with the goal of converting evidence into action. In 2012, we spent less than one percent of our revenue on this component of our mission. We will need more dedicated funds to identify the questions that decisionmakers care about, build long-lasting local partnerships, effectively communicate what we know, and mobilize other organizations to use and apply evidence.

HOW YOU CAN HELP

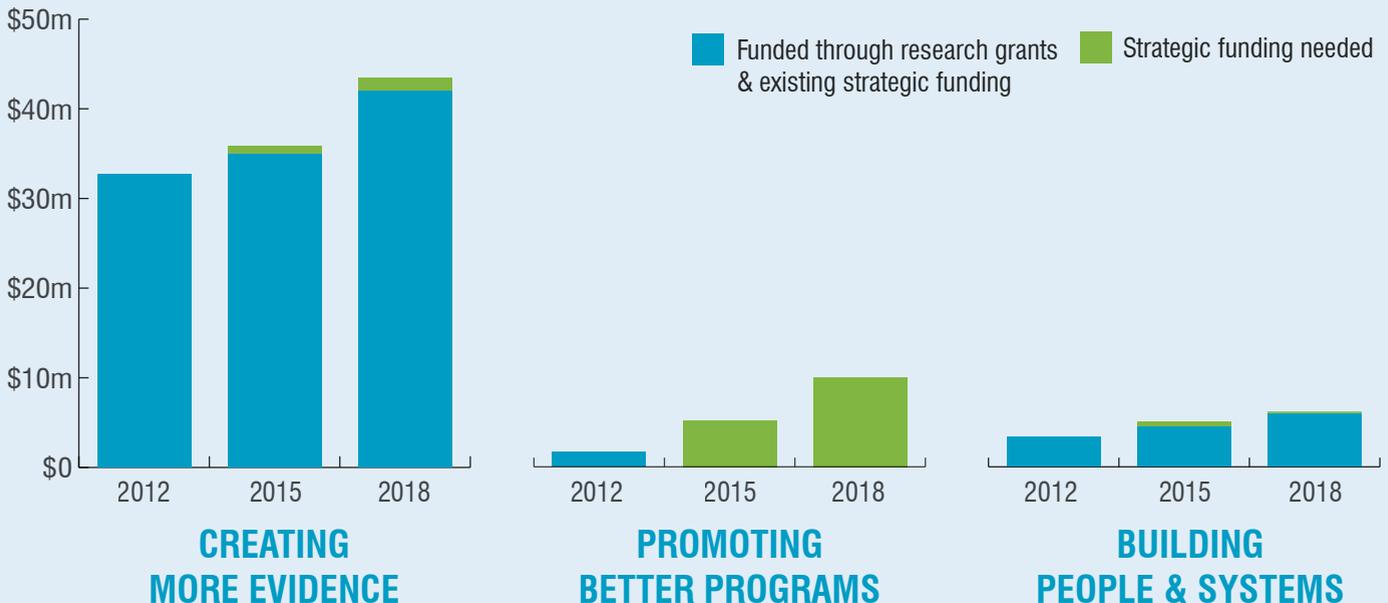
Fulfilling our strategic priorities will require changes to the way we operate, and to the way we finance our organization. Creating evidence does not mean it will get used, yet most of our funding is for creating evidence. We need strategic funding from foundations and individuals to promote evidence-based practice and policy. This funding will allow us to mobilize decisionmakers to use evidence at the global and local level through partnerships, communications, advocacy, and technical support. **This effort will have multiplicative effects on the poor** by influencing organizations that already work at scale.

For example, we supported the Ministry of Education in Ghana in creating a targeted instruction program, based on evidence from

India and Kenya. **This program will improve learning levels for a million children once scaled**, and was only possible through IPA's proactive advocacy to the ministry, the teacher's union, and other key actors. A strategic gift from a small family foundation allowed us to finance the launch of the program, and its ongoing success unleashed larger funding from foundations. Other strategic funds **will support similar partnerships in places like Sierra Leone and Kenya**, for example. Building on these, we are working in parallel to promote other proven programs to improve the lives of millions living in poverty.

With IPA, your gifts can be leveraged for big impact. Please email go@poverty-action.org to join us.

We need an average of \$7 million a year to finance our strategic growth





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