

ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL

Poverty Action Lab



TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO ACTION

Concluding Remarks

J-PAL Launch

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January 16, 2011

Cape Town

Once upon a time ...

- In 1998, Ted Miguel, who was then a graduate student at Harvard, first went to Kenya. All the other students made fun of him, because he was studying worms. That was a small, uninteresting issue...
- In France, they did not waste their time with such things. They always knew what was right. Whenever they had a problem, they passed a law. Then they claimed success, and the world watched with wonder.

And then...

- But Ted was not discouraged. He collected data in treatment and control schools and showed that students were more likely to go to school regularly. When his results were compared to that other programs, he found it to be the most cost effective policy.
- Meanwhile, in France, the government was getting a little scared. Angry youth were burning cars. They did not seem so enthusiastic about the great policies the government was dreaming up for them.

Extra years of schooling per \$100

... Wise men

- Ted was now a professor, and Deworm the World was created to encourage take up of deworming. But his colleagues continued to tease him: they go to school, right, but deworming was not about to make Africa grow.
- In France, a group of wise men finally thought of a solution: let's do better than a law, let's change the Constitution! Now, experimentation will be allowed... why even, encouraged!

And they had many children

- But African governments were not derailed. Kenya adopted the policy, and dewormed 3.8 million children. And Ted and many other friends showed that deworming increases wages by more than 20%. This was more than many years of good growth (even if we knew how to generate good growth).
- And in France, a fund was created. 200 million Euros were made available to try out new policies. Heralds were dispatched with the news. Anyone could come and propose an idea. It did not have to be right! It just needed to have some promise. And experimentation would determine whether that would work. People from all over the Republic came up with their ideas.

The morale of the story

- We need to pause and realize how important these stories are. They are not just bedtime fairy tales. They are real, and they are epics.
- They show us how the process of policy debates and policy design can be radically transformed.
- J-PAL is known for randomized evaluations. But randomization is just our tool. We are really about something more: how researchers and policy makers can come together to make sure that policy is informed by evidence.
- When we started our work, 15 years ago or so, many people told us: there is no time for evidence, we have to carry on with our work, while you indulge in the pursuit of science and try to publish in the best journal.
- But this conference was the clear demonstration that this is changing. Some time is being made for evidence, and the evidence can change policy.

Our hope for J-PAL Africa

- Too many people come to Africa with their very strong views about what needs to be done: menstrual cups, free markets, nothing...
- There are also many people (we heard from the Ghana Education services, the Zambian health ministry, Minister Manuel) who are seeking solutions and experimenting with them.
- J-PAL's dream is to play a role in facilitating this process of innovation and evaluation: training, working with partners on the ground, talk to policy makers to understand priorities and share lessons.