

Governance Initiative – Concept Note

Key Objective

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) has setup the Governance Initiative (GI) to carry out randomized impact evaluations of programs designed to improve participation in the political and policy process, and reduce Leakages in public programs. By providing targeted funding for rigorous evaluations of the most promising programs to improve governance, GI aims to provide guidance for organizations and governments in developing countries as well as the donors who provide support to these countries, so that policies can be guided by scientific evidence on what works (or does not work). Through dissemination of findings to policymakers and by providing support for the scale-up and replication of successful programs, GI will help translate this evidence into concrete policy change. The following is a description of the various activities that will be conducted under GI.

I. Creation of White Paper (July to December 2010)

GI is currently conducting a comprehensive literature review on what researchers know about governance to help define the overarching research priorities. As part of this process, GI will also reach out to J-PAL affiliates, other academics and policymakers to solicit their opinion and feedback. This study will result in the creation of a “White Paper” that will set out what is currently known (or not known) about the drivers of governance, organized along two broad research areas that are the most theoretically and practically relevant for reducing corruption and improving governance. The first focuses on how to improve the provision of public goods and services by improving citizen oversight of politicians, including oversight via broader community participation. The second explores the best ways to reduce corruption, exploring a wide range of mechanisms from innovative technologies to improved incentives for civil servants.

Theme-1: Participation

- Understanding the role of community participation and community ownership of shared resources to improve citizen control over policy.
- Understanding the determinants of citizen participation in the political process.
- Understanding the role of compensation, selection and other incentives in influencing who becomes a politician and how they behave.
- Evaluating the incidence of electoral malpractices and policy solutions.
- Identifying the impact of different institutional arrangements in influencing the ability of different citizen groups to influence policy.
- The role of information in influencing voter participation and voter control over politicians.

Theme-2: Leakages

- Understanding the role of compensation, selection, and other incentives for bureaucrats to reduce corruption and improve the efficiency of public services.

Governance Initiative – Concept Note

- Testing the role of technology in reducing corruption and improving the efficiency of public services.
- Changing the structure of the bureaucracy to harness the forces of competition to reduce corruption and improve the efficiency of public services.
- Understanding how policy should be formulated to minimize inefficiency in the presence of corruption.
- Improving the ability of the judiciary and other anti-corruption bodies to effectively prosecute corrupt actors, especially when they themselves are prone to corruption.
- Understanding the long-run impacts of anticorruption policy.

II. Funding Evaluations (March 2011 onwards)

Based on the research priorities identified in the White Paper, GI will (a) call for research proposals for evaluations of programs aimed at improving governance, (b) evaluate the proposals according to a set of criteria and research priorities laid out in the white paper, and (c) fund 8 to 16 randomized impact evaluations of governance programs in developing countries, depending on the total funds raised and the size of the projects awarded. RFPs will be issued every six months to fund evaluations and small-scale pilots. GI will constitute review boards whose function will be to examine the various proposals and select and fund the most promising evaluations from this pool. These projects will be in developing countries in Africa, Asia, Europe and Latin America and will be in collaboration with field partners that include NGOs, federal, state and local governments, foundations and international development organizations.

III. Policy Outreach (September 2011 onwards)

Last year, J-PAL setup a dedicated Policy Group that works to create new policy content based on academic research, disseminate knowledge about “what works” to foundations, NGOs, international development organizations and governments, and works with these organizations to scale up programs that have been found to be effective by J-PAL research. The group is currently helping scale up a few projects and this is expected to provide useful lessons on the cost-effectiveness of different forms of policy outreach.

Many of the evaluations funded by GI will have immediate impact on policy by influencing the academic and policy debate on issues of governance. Some other evaluations funded by GI will help identify programs and policies that are likely to improve governance if scaled-up. There may also be other evaluations that may not have been originally funded by GI but are likely to have a large impact on governance if scaled up. GI will undertake policy outreach around all these three types of evaluations as follows:

- Widely disseminate the results of the evaluations through activities that include regular networking with policy makers and conferences. While frequent interaction between

Governance Initiative – Concept Note

researchers and practitioners is essential, conferences are expensive and require considerable commitment of researcher time, so GI will leverage existing conferences, and use virtual forums in addition to a few special regional conferences to achieve regular interaction at reasonable cost.

- Identify which of the evaluations should be scaled up and where and then work closely with governments, NGOs, foundations and international development organizations around the world to scale up those programs that are found to be successful in improving governance and that GI considers to be suitable for scale-up. This could include both programs funded by GI and those not directly funded by GI.

Co-Chairs of the Governance Initiative

Iqbal Dhaliwal
Director of Policy, J-PAL

Professor Ben Olken
Department of Economics, M.I.T.

Professor Rohini Pande
Harvard Kennedy School