



## CREATING A CULTURE OF EVIDENCE USE: LESSONS FROM J-PAL'S GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS IN LATIN AMERICA

## ABOUT J-PAL

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is a global research center working to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. Anchored by a network of over 170 affiliated professors at universities around the world, J-PAL conducts randomized impact evaluations to answer critical questions in the fight against poverty. J-PAL engages with hundreds of partners around the world to conduct rigorous research, build capacity, share policy lessons, and scale up effective programs. J-PAL was launched at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) in 2003, and has regional offices in Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, North America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.

[povertyactionlab.org](http://povertyactionlab.org)

## ABOUT J-PAL LAC

J-PAL Latin America and the Caribbean (J-PAL LAC) is J-PAL's regional office based at the Pontificia Universidad Católica in Santiago, Chile. J-PAL LAC works alongside governments and NGOs in the LAC region to identify and promote effective programs and policies in the region. With the help of our research, training, and policy teams, our network of affiliated professors measures the impact of these programs and policies through randomized evaluations that become critical inputs for informing public policy. In addition to its headquarters in Chile, J-PAL LAC has a presence in Argentina, Brazil, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, and Mexico. Additionally, J-PAL works alongside Innovations for Poverty Action in Peru.

[povertyactionlab.org/lac](http://povertyactionlab.org/lac)

## ABOUT GPI

J-PAL's Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) is a competitive fund whose mission is to build and strengthen partnerships between governments and J-PAL affiliated researchers and J-PAL regional offices to increase the use of evidence in policymaking. The initiative supports partnerships with governments to design and evaluate policies and programs, to scale up policies already evaluated and found to be effective, and to institutionalize the use of evidence in policy more broadly. By funding a wide range of research, capacity building, and policy outreach activities, GPI aims to make it easier for researchers and governments to work together to increase the use of evidence in policymaking.

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### Creating a Culture of Evidence Use: Lessons from the J-PAL's Government Partnerships in Latin America

Authors: Samantha Carter, Iqbal Dhaliwal, Julu Katticaran, Claudia Macías, Claire Walsh

Additional Contributors: Vivian Bronsoler, Sebastian Chaskel, Juan Manuel Hernández-Agramonte, Carolina Morais Araujo, Edoardo Trimarchi, Magdalena Valdés Lutz, María Luisa Vásquez Rossi

Design: Amanda Kohn

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## PREFACE

Governments have long been critical partners in our mission to reduce poverty and improve social policy around the world. Since J-PAL was founded in 2003, we have built long-term partnerships with over 40 government agencies in 15 countries to generate and use evidence from randomized evaluations in policy decisions. To date, our government partners have implemented or commissioned scale-ups of effective programs evaluated by J-PAL affiliated professors that have reached over 350 million people around the world.

J-PAL's regional office in Latin America and the Caribbean (J-PAL LAC) has been at the forefront of our efforts to promote evidence-informed policymaking in government. Over the past decade, we have met and worked with a growing number of policymakers throughout the region who recognize the importance of using data and evidence to improve social programs and public policy. This report is a celebration of their outstanding efforts, and the efforts of champions for evidence-informed policymaking around the world.

Two of our early experiences promoting evaluation and evidence use in government in LAC were the Compass Commission in Chile in 2010 and the Quipu Commissions in Peru in 2012. In these initiatives, government ministries invited us to convene a group of experts to identify the major social challenges facing each country, review existing evidence about them, and propose innovative solutions that could be evaluated using randomized evaluations.

In Peru, the government adopted three of the Commission's recommendations. These initial experiences led us to design other innovative partnerships with over 15 governments across the region. In Colombia and Peru, these collaborations were always co-led by Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), where together we designed partnerships to institutionalize evidence use in government bodies, such as MineduLAB inside the Ministry of Education (Minedu) in Peru.

To support these and similar efforts around the world, in 2015 J-PAL launched the Government Partnership Initiative (GPI), a competitive fund that supports partnerships between governments, researchers, and J-PAL and IPA offices to increase the use of evidence in policy. After supporting 28 partnerships in 15 countries, this report is also an opportunity to share what we have learned from our government partners about promising ways to put evidence into action.

None of our work with governments would be possible without the commitment, insight, and hard work of the many public officials who invested their time and effort to promote better policies through the use of rigorous data and evidence. We are excited to share the lessons we have learned from these partnerships, and to commend the individuals and teams who made them possible. We also want to sincerely thank all of these partners for contributing their time, ideas, and insights to this report.

Our hope is that, by sharing examples of governments using data and evidence to improve policy and service delivery, we will encourage many more collaborations like the ones described here. In the end, our goal is to help make it easier for governments to draw on data, evidence, and experience in their decisions so that they can more effectively provide critical services and improve the lives of their people.

- Claudia Macías, Associate Director of Policy, J-PAL LAC
- Claire Walsh, Senior Policy Manager for J-PAL's Government Partnership Initiative

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This report was funded by J-PAL's Government Partnership Initiative.

## TERMINOLOGY

**DATA:** Throughout this report, discussions of government data refer primarily to *administrative data*. Administrative data are information collected, used, and stored primarily for administrative (i.e., operational), rather than research, purposes. These data can be used to inform and improve program implementation, targeting, and service delivery, and can also be a useful data source in impact evaluations.

**EVIDENCE:** Policymakers need a range of different kinds of evidence to design and implement effective programs and policies. This includes evidence from needs assessments, descriptive surveys, qualitative studies, feedback from citizens, monitoring data on program implementation, and high-quality impact evaluations that provide evidence on the causal impact of programs and policies on people's lives. While we help our government partners engage with and use different types of evidence in decision-making, J-PAL's main focus and expertise is conducting and increasing the use of evidence from randomized evaluations, a type of impact evaluation that provides a rigorous and unbiased estimate of a program's causal impact. In this report, when we refer to evidence and increasing evidence use, we primarily refer to evidence from randomized evaluations.

**IMPACT EVALUATION:** An impact evaluation is a systematic research exercise that seeks to answer the question: how effective is a particular program? The main objectives of an impact evaluation are to determine whether a program is having its desired impact(s), to quantify how large that impact is, and to shed light on why the program works or does not and for whom. There are many different methods of doing impact evaluations, but J-PAL's area of expertise is randomized evaluations, so we primarily refer to randomized evaluations throughout this report.

**RANDOMIZED EVALUATION:** A randomized evaluation, also known as a randomized controlled trial, is one type of impact evaluation method. When designed and implemented well, randomized evaluations produce a rigorous and unbiased estimate of a program's causal impact. They can also be designed to investigate important questions about why a program works and for whom.

In a randomized evaluation<sup>1</sup>, a large group of eligible program participants is randomly assigned to two or more groups before a program begins. One group receives the program (known as the “treatment group”), and the other does not receive the program during the study period (known as the “comparison group”). Researchers measure the outcomes of interest in the treatment and comparison groups before and after the program is implemented. Because the two groups are randomly assigned, they are statistically equivalent on average at the beginning of the study, such that the only difference between them is whether they participate in the program. Assuming randomization was successful, when we compare the outcomes of the two groups after the program, any differences between the two groups can be attributed to the program, and not to other factors.

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<sup>1</sup> For more on randomized evaluations, please see J-PAL's Introduction to Evaluations page: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/research-resources/introduction-evaluations>



LOCATION: BOGOTÁ, COLOMBIA. IQBAL DHALIWAL, J-PAL'S EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR, AND IPA AND J-PAL STAFF MEET WITH THE DEPARTMENT OF SECURITY, COEXISTENCE, AND JUSTICE, OF THE MAYOR'S OFFICE OF BOGOTÁ. PHOTO: J-PAL

## 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

### THE OPPORTUNITY

Governments—given their unmatched reach, widespread infrastructure, and mandates to provide critical public services—are some of the most important actors in addressing pressing social challenges like poverty and inequality. Administrative data and evidence from randomized evaluations are tools that have the potential to help governments identify social programs that are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes, monitor and improve program implementation, and design and test innovative programs before scaling them up. Although there are barriers to using data and evidence in policy, many governments around the world are eager to incorporate monitoring data and evidence from impact evaluations more systematically in their program design, implementation, evaluation, and learning cycles.

### OUR EXPERIENCE

Over the past 15 years at J-PAL, we have been fortunate to build long-term partnerships with over 40 government agencies at the forefront of the evidence-informed policymaking movement in over 15 countries. In 2015, we launched the Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) to strengthen these partnerships to increase the use of evidence in policy and to draw out broader lessons about building a culture of data and evidence use in government. Over the past decade, J-PAL Latin America and the Caribbean (J-PAL LAC) has partnered with more than 15 national, state, and city governments in Argentina, Brazil, Chile, Colombia, the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, and Peru. In Colombia and Peru, these partnerships were always co-led with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA). Whether the partnerships focus on establishing an Evaluation Lab to systematically pilot, test, and scale new policy innovations, improving administrative data systems and analytics, or reviewing existing evidence to inform a new policy strategy, our multifaceted Evidence to Policy Partnerships are designed to help governments use data and evidence more frequently and systematically.

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## J-PAL LAC'S GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

The purpose of this report is to share examples and lessons we have learned about building a culture of data and evidence use in government, and to celebrate the outstanding efforts our government partners to increase the use of data and evidence in policy in LAC. To generate these insights, we conducted interviews with 40 officials in 15 of our partner agencies. We hope these insights will be valuable for both government agencies and organizations working on evidence-informed policymaking. While the focus of this report is our work in LAC, the lessons may also be relevant to other regions and countries.

## KEY INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS

### BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

#### 1. Proactive support from a senior official is crucial to advancing data and evidence use.

These champions can inspire support for evidence-informed policymaking throughout the institution, identify strategies to overcome bureaucratic barriers, encourage buy-in from other high-level officials, and help identify resources to ensure the project's sustainability.

### DESIGNING PARTNERSHIPS

#### 2. Increasing data and evidence use is an incremental process. It is important to meet governments where they are.

Government agencies enter partnerships with third-party organizations at different stages and with different goals. At the beginning of a partnership, it is important to take time to understand the institution's capacity, existing processes and incentive structures, and the availability of user-friendly datasets to identify the intermediate steps that will help the institution achieve its ultimate goals for evidence use.

#### 3. Different types of government agencies may require different approaches.

When working with institutions that control and implement their own programs, partnerships can focus

on conducting pilot research to diagnose problems, using existing evidence to formulate potential solutions, using administrative data to improve program implementation, developing impact evaluations, or creating systems that encourage evidence use in program design. Non-implementing institutions, which often evaluate or finance the programs run by implementing institutions, can often be conveners or places to build systems and processes that incorporate evidence in decision-making.

#### 4. Respond quickly to opportunities and policy windows where there is interest and authority to use evidence.<sup>2</sup>

Impact evaluations and Evidence to Policy Partnerships that are conducted in close collaboration with policymakers, and designed to answer their priority questions from the start, are more likely to lead to data and evidence use that can improve policy.

### ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

#### 5. Fostering broader institution-wide support is crucial for sustainability.

While support from champions is critical, changes are likely to be sustainable only if they have wider organizational support. Demonstrating concrete ways that data and evidence can improve service delivery through quick wins for the government and building capacity and infrastructure to engage with evidence can help cultivate broader buy-in.

#### 6. Invest in and formalize long-term partnerships.

Having a long-term presence in a country and a long-term relationship with a government fosters greater trust and mutual understanding. Long-term partnerships allow us to respond quickly to policy windows where evidence could be useful, design research to be more useful for policy, know whom to work with, and maintain partnerships when key officials are transferred or administrations change. Collaborating on multiple projects also allows for more institutional learning than a one-time evaluation. In many cases, formal agreements and Memoranda of Understanding (MOUs) can define how the relationship will continue beyond an individual champion's efforts.

# 1. EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

## KEY INSIGHTS FOR GOVERNMENTS

### **1. It is important to allocate resources to evidence use, and make it someone's job to apply evidence in policy design.**

While many governments and donors fund evaluation, few hire personnel or allocate personnel time to focus on evidence use, which takes time, resources, and specialized knowledge. In some cases, evaluation departments have no formal mechanism for feeding results into program design. Allocating even a small amount of resources and personnel to apply the lessons from data and impact evaluations in policy design and implementation, and setting up systems that facilitate this institutional learning, is a crucial part of building a culture of data-driven and evidence-informed decision-making.

### **2. Similarly, creating dedicated spaces where evidence use is encouraged and rewarded can help build a culture of evidence-informed innovation.**

It can be challenging for policymakers to propose new policy ideas or processes. Day-to-day responsibilities can crowd out innovation and experimentation, and evaluation is often seen only as a tool for accountability. Where it is possible to go beyond reserving a small amount of staff time and resources to evidence use, innovation labs and other institutions dedicated to identifying and testing new policy solutions create incentives and safe spaces to propose and evaluate new ideas. These dedicated spaces help build an understanding of data and evidence as tools for learning and improvement, rather than only for accountability.

### **3. Greater investment in administrative data collection, management, and inter-agency data sharing can go a long way in helping advance the evidence use agenda.**

Developing more user-friendly administrative data systems can enable government employees to use data and evidence more regularly in program management and implementation. Good administrative data also significantly reduce the costs of impact evaluation, including evaluating at scale, making it easier to embed evaluation in the policy cycle.

### **4. Collaborating with evidence-to-policy organizations and researchers can help establish a culture of data and evidence use.**

Organizations and researchers that have expertise in generating, synthesizing, and applying data and evidence can be valuable partners in governments' efforts to use data and evidence more systematically. While some governments have the resources to build this expertise internally, many do not, and in these cases collaborating with others can help augment government capacity.

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<sup>2</sup> Kingdon, J. W. 1995. *Agendas, alternatives and public policies*. HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995. Andrews, Matthew, Jesse McConnell, and Alison O. Wescott. 2010. "Development as Leadership-led Change-A Report for the Global Leadership Initiative and the World Bank Institute (WBI)."



LOCATION: PERU. PHOTO: DARIO RODRIGUEZ | J-PAL/IPA

## 2. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

This report summarizes J-PAL LAC’s experience working with governments to increase the use of data and evidence in policy and shares key lessons for governments and other organizations working on evidence-informed policymaking. Section 3 describes the challenge of evidence-informed policymaking. Section 4 summarizes J-PAL LAC’s Evidence to Policy Partnerships and our approach to working with governments. Section 5 shares some practical insights for evidence-to-policy organizations about how to design and manage these kinds of partnerships. Finally, Section 6 identifies promising areas for governments to invest in to make evidence-informed policymaking more common throughout the region.

To generate these insights, in 2017 we conducted detailed interviews with 40 officials in 15 of our partner agencies, as well as staff from organizations like IPA who have worked with us to manage these partnerships:

- Institute of Public Security of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil
- Ministry of the Environment, Brazil (together with the Climate Policy Initiative, CPI)
- Ministry of Social Development, Brazil
- National School of Public Administration, Brazil
- Budget Department, Ministry of Finance, Chile
- Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism, Chile
- National Fishing and Aquaculture Service, Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism, Chile
- Colpensiones, Colombia (together with IPA)
- Department of Security, Coexistence, and Justice, Mayor’s Office, Bogotá, Colombia (together with IPA)

## 2. OBJECTIVE AND SCOPE OF THIS REPORT

- Division of Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies, National Planning Department, Colombia (together with IPA)
- Office of the Vice Presidency, Dominican Republic
- Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion, Peru (together with IPA)
- Ministry of Education, Peru (together with IPA)
- Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations, Peru (together with IPA)
- Department of Education, Puerto Rico (together with J-PAL North America)

We also interviewed a number of researchers, both from J-PAL's network and outside, who have worked with governments in the region to evaluate social programs and policies. Last, we compared our experiences with those of other evidence-to-policy organizations working in the region, like IPA, and multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

We hope that other practitioners can learn from our successes and failures. We also hope that, by sharing concrete examples of the benefits that data and evidence can bring to policymakers, this report will inspire other governments to pursue evidence-informed policymaking.



LOCATION: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC. PHOTO: BÁRBARA GARCÍA BATISTA | J-PAL

### 3. THE CHALLENGE OF EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY

*“We don’t have a long tradition of evaluating our policies. This is really sad, being in a country that has so many initiatives, different policies, and so much to learn. Because we don’t have this culture, we end up losing a lot of opportunities. In the last five years, we’ve repeated many wrong policies which we should have learned from in the past.”*

— Vitor Pereira, Former Director, Secretariat of Evaluation and Information Management, Ministry of Social Development, Brazil

Governments in low- and middle-income countries support social programs that reach millions of people, with budgets that dwarf those of foreign aid agencies and foundations.<sup>3</sup> In 2015, social expenditure made up more than 50 percent of central government spending in Latin America.<sup>4</sup> Because taxpayers finance these social programs, it seems reasonable for citizens to demand that governments spend their budgets as effectively as possible. However, like many institutions, governments sometimes spend money on ineffective programs or lose resources due to implementation challenges.

In an ideal world, these inefficiencies would not occur. Policymakers would identify a problem, understand it well, consider several options for solving it, select an effective solution, and implement it well. Data and evidence would be crucial inputs in this process, as they provide the necessary information to choose the best method to achieve a given

### 3. THE CHALLENGE OF EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY

objective. Of course, policymaking is neither a linear nor a simple process like this. Government decisions involve many other important considerations besides data and evidence, including constituent preferences and budget constraints. Government decisions are also shaped by politics, ideologies, inertia, and private interests, all of which can make it challenging to design and implement effective social programs and policies.

In addition, even the best-intentioned policymakers have many competing priorities. Taking the time to create and select from a menu of policy options may not be feasible. While many officials are enthusiastic about the potential for data and evidence to inform their work<sup>5</sup>, applying evidence to design better policies and programs takes time and resources. In some cases, there may not be relevant evidence for the decision at hand. Where evidence does exist, it can be challenging to find it, assess its quality, interpret it, and apply it to a new setting. The main obstacles that our government partners in Latin America highlighted in our interviews include:

- **Low prioritization of, and limited capacity for, evidence-informed policymaking:** In some institutions, evidence is not a priority relative to other important commitments and constraints. Policymakers need to consider the demands of more senior officials and their own constituents first. They also have limited time to search for and apply relevant evidence; in our interviews, government partners in Brazil and Chile emphasized the many competing demands on their time. One former PhD student in Chile told us that, upon taking a job in the Ministry of Economy, he “was surprised that it’s easy to forget these issues [of using data and evaluation]. There’s so much going on in terms of defining goals, negotiating, understanding your job, that you can just go on without ever even thinking about it.”

“The public sector is a long way away from thinking seriously about impact evaluations. For most public servants, the easiest way to evaluate whether you are doing things is to see if you are spending the money assigned to you.... I would say that there is a cultural and educational issue... where people merely ask whether the government is doing stuff. The impact is the cherry on the cake.”

— Andrés Zahler, Former Head of Innovation Division, Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism, Chile

- **Limited infrastructure for evidence-informed policymaking:** Using data and evidence requires a number of tools and skills: technical capacity to compile and interpret existing evidence and conduct or commission new evaluations; accessible data on program implementation and constituent feedback; and processes, guidelines, and/or incentives that encourage the use of data and evidence in decisions. In our interviews, our government partners described fragmented datasets, a lack of guidance for how to use administrative data or existing literature, and contracting requirements that prioritized cost savings over quality and technical rigor in evaluations.

<sup>3</sup> For example, see World Bank World Development Indicators. 2015. “External health expenditure (% of current health expenditure).” Accessed 18 October 2018. <https://data.worldbank.org/indicator/SH.XPD.EHEX.CH.ZS>

<sup>4</sup> Social expenditure is defined here as the volume of resources committed to policies associated with the following six functions: 1) environmental protection, 2) housing and community amenities, 3) health, 4) recreation, culture, and religion, 5) education, and 6) social protection. For more information, see ECLAC 2018.

<sup>5</sup> For more than 100 examples of this, see Results for All’s recent Global Landscape Review. Results for All. 2017. “100+ Government Mechanisms to Advance the Use of Data and Evidence in Policymaking: A Landscape Review.” Washington, DC: Results for America. <https://results4america.org/our-work/results-for-all/>”

### 3. THE CHALLENGE OF EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICY

“The current capacity to evaluate impact is low. The public contract process may privilege groups that are not experienced evaluators. If the evaluation is badly done, stakeholders may end up feeling that the evaluation was not useful. This is a negative feedback loop.”

— Juan Pablo Silva, Former Vice Minister of Institutional Management, Ministry of Education, Peru

- **Financial constraints:** In several cases, government officials described facing budget constraints that made it difficult for them to allocate resources to data analysis, literature reviews, or impact evaluation.
- **Political uncertainty:** When entire administrations or administration priorities change, high-level government officials are often required to transfer between posts or decide to leave the political sphere entirely. In cases where the champion for evidence-informed policymaking within our partner institution has been transferred, it has been difficult to maintain momentum for data and evidence use. In addition, uncertainty about tenure can make politicians and political appointees unwilling to invest in programs that will only pay off in the long run.
- **Difficulty finding the right evidence and applying it to a new context:** In many cases, evidence on a policymaker’s precise question does not exist at the time when they need it. When this is the case, politicians and civil servants may not know how to access and synthesize related studies that might provide some guidance. In Peru, for example, the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) partnered with J-PAL and IPA to create an evidence repository that collected and summarized impact evaluations studying interventions that sought to prevent and address violence against women, children, and vulnerable populations. Building on this evidence repository, MIMP designed an impact evaluation of one of its national programs to prevent violence against women in order to fill a gap in existing literature.

“In government, you never have the information you need before the decision-making process. Especially for practitioners who have to support politicians in their role, you cannot decide/say anything without evidence. You don’t know if you have reason on your side, you don’t know if what you are doing makes sense. In many ways, you don’t have the causality chain. Everybody has ideas. Everybody has suggestions, but you don’t know really what is happening. I think we need to encourage the development of policy capacities in government.”

— Francisco Gaetani, President, National School of Public Administration, Brazil



LOCATION: BUENOS AIRES, ARGENTINA. ALEJANDRO GANIMIAN PRESENTS AT THE J-PAL/PROYECTO EDUCAR 2050 EDTECH CONFERENCE. PHOTO: INSOMNIA FILMS, PROYECTO EDUCAR 2050



LOCATION: PERU. PHOTO: J-PAL/IPA

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC

*“I did not at all feel comfortable about using political priorities to allocate resources. I needed evidence.”*

— Andrés Zahler, Former Head of Innovation Division, Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism, Chile

To design and implement more effective policies, governments need easier and more innovative ways to build data and evidence into the design and implementation of social programs. Our Evidence to Policy Partnerships (EPPs) support governments in doing just this. Through EPPs, J-PAL works together with governments to address the various obstacles that come in the way of building a culture of evidence use in the policymaking process.

To date, J-PAL LAC has collaborated on EPPs with public servants in Argentina, Brazil,<sup>6</sup> Chile, Colombia,<sup>7</sup> the Dominican Republic, Ecuador, Mexico, Peru,<sup>8</sup> and Puerto Rico.<sup>9</sup> These partnerships have contributed to the development of (1) MineduLAB, a laboratory for innovation within the Peruvian Ministry of Education,<sup>10</sup> (2) linked and organized databases on crime and violence in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, (3) evidence repositories in Chile and Peru to identify best practices for addressing particular social issues, (4) a data hub that aims to compile and organize data from all government agencies in the Dominican Republic, and (5) numerous randomized evaluations that answer important policy questions facing our government partners and expand the frontiers of knowledge on various social issues.

<sup>6</sup> In close collaboration with Climate Policy Initiative (CPI) Brazil

<sup>7</sup> In close collaboration with Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)

<sup>8</sup> In close collaboration with IPA

<sup>9</sup> In a project led by J-PAL North America.

<sup>10</sup> MineduLAB was developed through a collaboration between the Ministry of Education in Peru, J-PAL, Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA), the Strengthening the Management of Education in Peru (FORGE), and the World Bank.

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC

### WHAT DO WE MEAN BY INCREASING DATA AND EVIDENCE USE?

By data use, we mean applying insights from high-quality administrative or program monitoring data to improve implementation, targeting, and/or service delivery.

By evidence use, we mean applying insights from high-quality randomized evaluations in policy design or implementation decisions, as well as setting aside resources or creating systems that encourage more regular evidence use. We consider it evidence use when:

- The government develops new processes, systems, incentives, or requirements that encourage greater evidence generation and use, such as requiring staff to consult existing evidence when designing programs or creating an impact evaluation fund to test promising policy innovations;
- The government uses evidence from high-quality randomized evaluations when making a decision about the design or implementation of a program or policy;
- The government decides to scale up a program that has been evaluated and found to be effective, or scale down or change a program that has been evaluated and found ineffective;
- The government decides to conduct additional randomized evaluations and uses their results to inform particular program or policy decisions
- The government sets aside resources (either financial or human resources) to continue generating and using evidence in the future.



LOCATION: COLOMBIA. PHOTO: PAUL SMITH | J-PAL/IPA

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC: THE LEARNING CYCLE

FIGURE 1. THE LEARNING CYCLE



- Phase 1: Diagnosis
- Phase 2: Evaluation
- Phase 3: Evidence use and learning

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC: THE LEARNING CYCLE

**Phase 1 - Diagnosis:** As a first step, the agency identifies the policy issue that it wants to address. Using data and contextual knowledge, and often with the support of external researchers and/or practitioners, the agency diagnoses the nature and extent of the problem and its potential causes. The agency then reviews existing evidence to determine what types of solutions could potentially address the problem. If the existing body of evidence from rigorous impact evaluations indicates that a given program could work, the underlying problem is the same in the new context, and the program can be successfully adapted to the new context, the government could choose to pilot and monitor the program on a small scale. If the pilot shows that the program can be implemented according to the model that was found effective in the original evaluation(s), the agency could expand or scale up the program. However, if sufficient evidence on a proposed program is not available, the agency works in conjunction with an evaluation team to design and conduct an impact evaluation.

Through our government partnerships, J-PAL supports agencies in diagnosing problems and identifying promising solutions based on existing evidence. We also help to contextualize existing evidence from other locations to assess its relevance to the new local context and pilot new ideas on a small scale.

**Phase 2 - Evaluation:** In this phase, the government works with researchers to design and evaluate the impact of the program. To facilitate these conversations, J-PAL policy staff build links between the government and researchers from its network of affiliated professors. J-PAL research staff support the researchers over the course of the evaluation.

Before this evaluation begins, it is important to conduct a small-scale, or pilot, version of the program to ensure it can be implemented well. During this pilot, the government and researchers “stress test” the intervention and evaluation strategy to ensure that both can be implemented as designed. Once the program is implemented and data on implementation and outcomes of interest are collected, researchers analyze the data and draw conclusions about whether the program has the expected impact and the reasons why or why not.

*“We need to seriously evaluate our programs. Why? Because we need to understand how these programs work—the mechanisms—so that we can improve how these programs are designed.”*

— Vitor Pereira, Former Director, Secretariat of Evaluation and Information Management, Ministry of Social Development, Brazil

*“Impact evaluation is a very important gap in Brazil. We don’t have impact evaluations in public policies in the federal, state, municipal governments. In addition, we don’t have learning with public policies. We reproduce the organizational models and institutional models, bureaucracies, etc. without learning from our failures.”*

— Fernando Filgueiras, Director of Research, National School of Public Administration, Brazil

**Phase 3 – Evidence Use and Learning:** In this phase, evaluation results help generate policy recommendations and inform key decisions. If the evaluation shows that the program had positive impacts that the government deems large enough to justify the program’s costs, the government scales up the program, sometimes with technical assistance from third-party organizations. If the evaluation shows that the program as implemented was not an effective solution to the given policy challenge, the next step is to either redesign, tweak, or scale down the program. If necessary, the redesigned program may go through another round of diagnosis and evaluation (Phases 1 & 2). Finally, the research team (often with the support of policy staff from J-PAL) publicly shares the results of the evaluation so that they can inform the decisions of other organizations facing similar policy issues.

In this stage, J-PAL works with the government implementation team, and often with additional third-party experts, to provide technical support on the scale-up. We also help disseminate results through presentations and workshops with key policymakers, policy briefs, blogs, website content, and social and news media.

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC: THE LEARNING CYCLE

### THE LEARNING CYCLE IN PRACTICE: MINEDULAB

MineduLAB, a laboratory for innovation within the Peruvian Ministry of Education, was the result of a collaboration between the Ministry, J-PAL LAC, and IPA Peru. Housed within the Ministry, MineduLAB designs, implements, and evaluates the effectiveness of low-cost interventions to improve policy management and educational outcomes, maximizing the use of administrative data. The Ministry then uses the results of these evaluations to inform its policy decisions. MineduLAB is the first of our Evidence to Policy Partnerships so far to implement the Learning Cycle in its entirety. With the Learning Cycle in place, MineduLAB has the necessary infrastructure and capacity to use rigorous evidence to respond to key policy questions it faces.

To create MineduLAB, Minedu brought together J-PAL LAC, IPA Peru, the World Bank, and the Behavioural Insights Team. Supported by these institutions, Minedu leadership and staff worked to convince others in the education sector that testing new ideas and programs would be valuable, adapt the Behavioural Insights Team's model to work for Peru, set aside resources to enable MineduLAB to function, and develop policy mechanisms that would institutionalize the lab as a permanent part of the Peruvian government.

J-PAL affiliated professors Francisco Gallego (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile) and Christopher A. Neilson (Princeton University) played an instrumental role in the development of MineduLAB, from the first conversations about the idea of the lab to the selection of which interventions would be evaluated. Under their guidance, J-PAL and IPA provided technical assistance throughout MineduLAB's design and first year of operation. During the design phase, J-PAL and IPA assisted Minedu to review academic literature on education interventions, map MineduLAB's databases, and meet with implementing units to understand which projects would be feasible for evaluation. During MineduLAB's first year, as part of the technical assistance, they identified a Research Advisory

Board, hired a Research Manager for the project, and provided online and in-person trainings on impact evaluation. Minedu, J-PAL, and IPA also developed an operations manual to guide the lab in subsequent years. These efforts were supported by funds from Strengthening the Management of Education in Peru (FORGE) and Minedu itself.

Today, MineduLAB is entirely managed by staff within the Ministry of Education. The Secretariat of Strategic Planning at the Ministry identifies priority policy areas that the Ministry should address. MineduLAB then invites researchers, practitioners, and departments within Minedu to propose low-cost innovations that might address the Ministry's priority areas. Once MineduLAB has selected final innovations, researchers and Minedu work together to design the program and impact evaluation. If the program is found to be effective, Minedu scales it up. Because MineduLAB impact evaluations rely on administrative data that Minedu already collects, the evaluations themselves are lower-cost and quicker than evaluations that require the collection of new primary data.

Since MineduLAB began operating in 2014, it has identified nine innovations to pilot, of which six randomized evaluations have been completed. One of the interventions with positive impacts was scaled up in 2017, and MineduLAB is currently scaling up two additional interventions.

In their interviews with us in 2017, Ministry officials, IPA and J-PAL staff, and researchers who have worked with all emphasized that part of MineduLAB's success lies in the fact that the lab prioritizes innovations that can be implemented at low cost and evaluated using existing administrative data, which reduces barriers to piloting and scaling up. Because the innovations and evaluations are low-cost, MineduLAB does not need to wait for the Ministry's regular budget planning before moving forward with pilot programs or scale-ups. Thus, MineduLAB's major expenses are limited to staff salaries.

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC: LAYING THE FOUNDATIONS FOR THE LEARNING CYCLE

While the Learning Cycle as a conceptual tool is straightforward, in practice every government will have unique starting conditions, capacities, and constraints. Furthermore, policymaking is rarely as simple and linear as in the ideal scenario of the learning cycle. Not all governments have the need or the capacity to institutionalize the Learning Cycle in its entirety. For instance, one of our partners in Colombia was concerned about legal obstacles to randomizing the rollout of its programs and was therefore looking to systematize evidence use by relying solely on evidence that already existed. In another case, an agency preferred to focus on developing new randomized evaluations of its own programs rather than applying evidence from other locations. In such cases, we work together with the government and other partners like IPA to institutionalize discrete segments of the Learning Cycle that are relevant to the government's goals, rather than the Learning Cycle in its entirety.

Governments interested in increasing the use of data evidence in their decision-making processes can often benefit from collaborating with evidence-to-policy organizations like J-PAL. These organizations can support partner governments in specific phases of the Learning Cycle, from producing tailored evidence reviews to inform a specific policy question (Diagnosis) to producing policy implementation plans to ensure that the results of evaluations can be used (Evidence Use and Learning). In addition to supporting governments in adopting various parts of the Learning Cycle, evidence-to-policy organizations can help strengthen core competencies that enable governments to use data and evidence in the long term:

- **Technical Capacity:** To use evidence in decision-making, government officials need to know where to find existing evidence, how to distinguish between different types of evidence, how to generate or commission new evaluations on important unanswered questions, and how to incorporate insights from these different sources into decision-making. To build capacity, we design customized training courses and workshops to help staff learn when to conduct impact evaluations and what types of evaluations to conduct. We also co-generate research and evaluations with government employees, transferring practical insights and knowledge through learning-by-doing activities.



LOCATION: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC. PHOTO: LAURA PULECIO | J-PAL/IPA

- **Administrative Data:** Governments often collect a wealth of data about their policies and programs, but few have established systems to use administrative data in decision-making. Data are rarely stored, formatted, or analyzed in a way that makes it easy for policymakers to identify useful insights. Good administrative data and data systems can help inform day-to-day decision-making about program management and implementation and significantly cut the costs of conducting impact evaluations. Administrative data also enable governments to monitor implementation as effective programs are scaled up, allowing them to identify and address bottlenecks or other issues that may arise at scale. We help governments organize, manage, and analyze their administrative data by linking data sets across departments, creating data manuals, and proposing systems that facilitate the regular use of data.
- **Institutional Processes:** Systematically increasing the use of evidence in the policy process not only requires committed individuals, but also requires formal institutions, systems, guidelines, and/or incentives that encourage or require the generation and use of evidence in important policy decisions. J-PAL supports our partners in designing processes, creating structures and protocols, assigning responsibilities, and allocating the necessary resources so that the organization is equipped to manage the Learning Cycle.

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC: EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC

FIGURE 2. CURRENT AND PAST GOVERNMENT PARTNERS IN LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN



“We sought two things from J-PAL in the collaboration: Firstly, we wanted training and a better understanding of evaluations. You organized hands-on workshops dealing with how to evaluate and write terms of reference for evaluators hired on contract. We also conducted an impact evaluation with you. Secondly, we also asked J-PAL to help us with identifying indicators to measure progress of 130 instruments we finance.”

— Antonio Martner Sota, Research Coordinator, Innovation Fund for Competitiveness, Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism of Chile

“We look to generate information that is used for decisions budgetary and programmatic. Learning that a program is not going well might mean that the program needs more resources or might mean resources should be sent somewhere else. We want to generate evidence and data that can be used to inform decisions.”

— Rodrigo Díaz Mery, Head, Evaluation Department, Budget Office, Chile

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC: EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC

TABLE 1. EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC

Since J-PAL began partnering with governments in the LAC region, together we have accomplished a wide range of evidence-use goals. While the governments take the lead in defining their own objectives, J-PAL is able to provide them with the technical support that they may not have in-house. The tables below feature examples of J-PAL LAC's government partnerships, the phase(s) or foundation(s) of the learning cycle we provided support on, and what the government partner and J-PAL have achieved together.

### FOUNDATIONS OF THE LEARNING CYCLE: TECHNICAL CAPACITY, ADMINISTRATIVE DATA, AND INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES

GOVERNMENT PARTNER		OUTPUT
Escola Nacional de Administração Pública (ENAP), Brasil	National School of Public Administration, Brazil	J-PAL partnered with ENAP to develop an online course in Portuguese to train civil servants on evaluating social policies. Over 1,400 Brazilian civil servants completed the course in its first run, and it is now included in ENAP's regular course catalog ( <b>Technical capacity</b> ).
Instituto de Segurança Pública do Rio de Janeiro (ISP-Rio), Brasil	Institute of Public Security of Rio de Janeiro, Brazil	J-PAL created two administrative datasets to facilitate subsequent randomized evaluations ( <b>Administrative data</b> ). A J-PAL-funded research assistant also contributed technical support to build ISP's geo-referential software for crime hotspots. The research assistant was subsequently hired as a full-time staff member at ISP-Rio to continue building a culture of data and evidence use within the Institute.
Ministério do Meio Ambiente (MMA), Brasil	Ministry of the Environment, Brazil	In partnership with the Climate Policy Initiative Brazil (CPI), J-PAL embedded a Research and Training Manager within the Ministry to build relationships and enable the development of randomized evaluations. With the embedded manager, J-PAL organized custom workshops on impact evaluation and supported the development of an impact evaluation of the program Bolsa Verde ( <b>Technical capacity</b> ). The impact evaluation did not move forward when the government shut down the program during a fiscal crisis.
Ministerio de Economía, Fomento, y Turismo (Minecon) de Chile	Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism, Chile	J-PAL worked with Minecon's Innovation and Competitiveness Fund (FIC) to create a new system to evaluate and track applications. The system requires applicants to include a theory of change and review of existing evidence from past impact evaluations when seeking funds. Minecon also launched a new public bid for impact evaluations of FIC's investments and reserved a portion of program funds for evaluation ( <b>Institutional processes</b> ). In addition, J-PAL delivered workshops on when and how to evaluate social programs ( <b>Technical capacity</b> ), and developed a randomized evaluation to measure the impact of a national education program ( <b>Phase 2: Evaluation and analysis</b> ).

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC: EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC

### FOUNDATIONS OF THE LEARNING CYCLE: TECHNICAL CAPACITY, ADMINISTRATIVE DATA, AND INSTITUTIONAL PROCESSES (CONTINUED)

GOVERNMENT PARTNER		OUTPUT
Departamento Nacional de Planeación de Colombia, Dirección de Seguimiento y Evaluación de Políticas Públicas (DSEPP)	National Planning Department, Division of Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies, Colombia	J-PAL and IPA Colombia embedded a Policy Associate within the Department of Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies (DSEPP) for one year. The embedded Associate built a repository of DSEPP's past and ongoing evaluations, organized and delivered trainings on how to determine the quality of impact evaluations, helped DSEPP identify knowledge gaps and define evaluation priorities, and worked with DSEPP to develop a strategy to effectively communicate evaluation results to decision-makers ( <b>Technical capacity</b> ).
Ministerio de la Mujer y Poblaciones Vulnerables (MIMP) de Perú: Programa Nacional Contra la Violencia Familiar y Sexual	Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations, National Program Against Family and Sexual Violence	J-PAL and IPA led a training on impact evaluation, identified interventions that could be evaluated, created an evidence bank summarizing the results of relevant impact evaluations, and presented a proposal to continue strengthening the work of the Ministry on evidence management. Ministry officials noted this work helped them identify opportunities to evaluate interventions to prevent domestic violence. They are currently working with J-PAL affiliate Erica Field (Duke University) and IPA Peru to conduct a randomized evaluation of a national program to reduce violence against women. The Ministry also updated their approach to reducing domestic violence to focus more on violence prevention in response to high rates of violence against women and grassroots movements that marched against violence against women like Ni Una Menos. They noted that the evidence bank J-PAL and IPA created was one of the many factors that helped them make the case to focus more on violence prevention. <sup>11</sup> ( <b>Evaluation and analysis</b> ).

### PHASE 1: DIAGNOSIS

GOVERNMENT PARTNER		OUTPUT
Ministerio del Interior de Ecuador	Ministry of the Interior, Ecuador	J-PAL is partnering with the Ministry and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) to hire and train a Manager of Evaluation to identify opportunities for impact evaluations.

<sup>11</sup> Aldana, Ursula, Erica Field, and Javier Romero. "Training Local Leaders to Prevent Gender-Based Violence in Peru." Ongoing study. See summary here: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/training-local-leaders-prevent-gender-based-violence-peru>.

<sup>12</sup> Blattman, Christopher, Donald Green, Daniel Ortega, and Santiago Tobón. "Pushing Crime Around the Corner? Estimating Experimental Impacts of Large-Scale Security Interventions." NBER Working Paper No. 23941. October 2017. See summary here: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/improving-security-through-concentrated-policing-bogota-colombia>.

<sup>13</sup> Lira, Andres Gonzalez and Ahmed Mushfiq Mobarak. "Enforcing Regulation under Illicit Adaptation." Working Paper, August 2018. See summary here: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/protecting-fisheries-through-enforcement-and-informational-campaigns-chile>.

<sup>14</sup> This project is being led and funded by J-PAL North America's State and Local Innovation Initiative, with technical support from J-PAL LAC. For more information, see: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/stateandlocal/partners#puertorico>.

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC: EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC

### PHASE 2: EVALUATION AND ANALYSIS

GOVERNMENT PARTNER		OUTPUT
Ministério de Desenvolvimento Social (MDS), Brasil	Ministry of Social Development, Brazil	J-PAL's embedded staffer in the Ministry of the Environment and Climate Policy Initiative worked with MDS to develop two randomized evaluations of national programs in agriculture and water, which are currently ongoing.
Secretaría Distrital de Seguridad, Convivencia y Justicia, Alcaldía de Bogotá, Colombia	Department of Security, Coexistence, and Justice, Mayor's Office, Bogotá, Colombia	IPA and J-PAL collaborated with researchers in order to partner with the Department of Security, Coexistence, and Justice of Bogotá to share evidence from other contexts and develop research projects to fill evidence gaps, with funding support from GPI. This led to a randomized evaluation of two interventions intended to reduce crime: hotspots policing and neighborhood improvements such as trash removal and public lighting. <sup>12</sup> The evaluation was supported by J-PAL's Governance Initiative, Fundación ProBogota, the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), Organización Ardila Lülle through Universidad de Los Andes, Colciencias, 3ie, and the J. William Fulbright Foundation. The government used the results from the randomized evaluation to inform police allocation in Bogotá ( <b>Evidence use and learning</b> ).
Dirección de Presupuestos (DIPRES), Ministerio de Hacienda de Chile y Servicio Nacional de Pesca y Acuicultura (Sernapesca), Ministerio de Economía, Fomento y Turismo (Sernapesca), Ministerio de Economía, Fomento y Turismo	Budget Department, Ministry of Finance and National Fishing and Aquaculture Service, Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism, Chile	J-PAL conducted a training course on evaluating social programs for agencies funded by DIPRES ( <b>Technical capacity</b> ). J-PAL affiliates went on to conduct a randomized evaluation with one such agency, the Chilean National Fish Service, to identify strategies to reduce illegal hake fishing. <sup>13</sup> One of the strategies tested in that evaluation has since been scaled up nationwide ( <b>Evidence use and learning</b> ).
Departamento de Educación de Puerto Rico (DEPR) <sup>14</sup>	Department of Education, Puerto Rico	J-PAL embedded an Evaluation Officer at the Puerto Rico Department of Education (DEPR) for 10 months. As a result, the government and a team of J-PAL-affiliated researchers developed a research agenda focused on improving school management practices. The first project under this agenda is the evaluation of a large-scale school-principal training program. J-PAL also provided training on impact evaluation and evidence-informed decision-making to leadership and technical teams at the DEPR ( <b>Technical capacity</b> ).

<sup>15</sup> Berry James, Lucas Coffman, Ryan Cooper, Daniel Morales, and Christopher A. Neilson. "Learning the Value of Education in the Dominican Republic." Ongoing study. See summary here: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/learning-value-education-dominican-republic>.

<sup>16</sup> Berry, James, Giacomo De Giorgi, Christopher A. Neilson, and Sebastián Otero. "Educational Mismatch and Motivational Messages." ongoing study. See summary here: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/education-mismatch-and-motivational-messages>.

## 4. EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC: EXAMPLES OF EVIDENCE TO POLICY PARTNERSHIPS AT J-PAL LAC

### PHASE 3: EVIDENCE USE AND LEARNING

GOVERNMENT PARTNER		OUTPUT
Oficina del Viceministerio de Políticas de Desarrollo - Ministerio de la Presidencia de la República Dominicana, Gabinete de Coordinación de Políticas Sociales (GCPS), Ministerio de Educación (MINERD), e Instituto Dominicano de Evaluación e Investigación de la Calidad Educativa (IDEICE)	Office of the Viceminister for Development Policy, Ministry of the Presidency, Dominican Republic, Cabinet of Coordination of Social Policies, Ministry of Education, and Dominican Institute of Evaluation and Research on Education Quality	J-PAL supported the development of a data center that combines datasets from across different ministries to allow for insights and impact evaluations across different topic areas ( <b>Administrative data</b> ). J-PAL is also providing technical assistance to scale up a program that informs students of the benefits of staying in school. <sup>15</sup> Finally, J-PAL affiliated researchers are conducting a large-scale impact evaluation of motivational letters that encourage students to stay in school <sup>16</sup> ( <b>Evaluation and analysis</b> ).

### ENTIRE LEARNING CYCLE

GOVERNMENT PARTNER		OUTPUT
Ministerio de Educación, Ciencia, y Tecnología, Salta, Argentina	Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology, Salta, Argentina	J-PAL is partnering with the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in the province of Salta, Argentina to establish an Innovation and Evaluation Hub within the Ministry that will identify educational innovations that can be rigorously evaluated using data from the national census-based assessment, Aprender
Ministerio de Desarrollo e Inclusión Social de Perú	Budget Department, Ministry of Finance and National Fishing and Aquaculture Service, Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism, Chile	In 2016, the Ministry created the AYNi Lab, a social innovation lab to identify and implement solutions that improve the life of poor and vulnerable populations. A large part of AYNi Lab's work is to pilot and conduct randomized evaluations of possible innovations to determine whether they are feasible and effective. After the lab was created, IPA Peru and J-PAL provided technical assistance that included a training for MIDIS staff, the design of impact evaluations for a portfolio of three innovations, and the development of a data management protocol.
Ministerio de Educación (Minedu) de Perú	Ministry of Education, Peru	J-PAL and IPA Peru supported the development of MineduLAB, an innovation and evaluation laboratory that identifies, tests, and scales up solutions to Peru's educational challenges. To date, the lab has evaluated six innovations, with three additional evaluations ongoing, and scaled up one intervention, with two additional scale-ups in the design phase.



LOCATION: COLOMBIA. PHOTO: PAUL SMITH | J-PAL/IPA

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS

How can research and policy organizations support governments in advancing greater data and evidence use? This section features some practical insights for starting, designing, and sustaining partnerships with government bodies to encourage greater data and evidence use.

### KEY INSIGHTS

#### Building New Partnerships

1. Proactive support from a senior official is crucial to advancing data and evidence use.

#### Designing Partnerships

2. Increasing the use of evidence is an incremental process. It is important to meet governments where they are.

3. Different types of government agencies may require different approaches.

4. Respond quickly to opportunities and policy windows where there is interest and authority to use evidence.<sup>17</sup>

#### Ensuring Sustainability

5. Fostering broader, institution-wide support is crucial for sustainability.

6. Invest in and formalize long-term partnerships.

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

Under what circumstances are these partnerships most likely to lead to greater use of data and evidence in policymaking? In our experience, partnerships are most likely to succeed when the government is committed to using evidence in a particular decision(s) from the beginning and articulates this goal early on. It also depends heavily on people, timing, and politics. What signals do we look for to indicate that the timing could be right?

### **INSIGHT 1: PROACTIVE SUPPORT FROM A SENIOR OFFICIAL IS CRUCIAL TO ADVANCING DATA AND EVIDENCE USE.**

Partnerships are more likely succeed when a senior government official proactively supports them. These champions for evidence use are senior-level officials who have the autonomy to approve key aspects of the collaboration and who are invested in making the government more evidence-driven. In our experience, champions have held titles like vice president, minister, or director. In many cases, our champions are highly intrinsically motivated and have few, if any, extrinsic incentives to promote evidence-informed policymaking within the government.<sup>18</sup> In some cases, they also face risks in trying to change the status quo and continue to advance the agenda in spite of this. They are deeply committed to promoting evidence-informed policy and often allocate time and resources outside of their regular commitments to furthering the agenda.

*“There are no incentives to improve the program based on the results of the evaluations. Implementers can get in trouble. It is very difficult to convince them to do the evaluations. If the program is not good enough, you can lose your job. If the results are good, then you don't do anything. It doesn't depend on the will of the person that receives the evaluation, but on how the system works.”*

— Carolina Trivelli, Former Minister of Development and Social Inclusion, Peru

*“What are the interests of people implementing and evaluating this project? In the case of the Ministry of the Environment, the program is suffering from budget cuts and might be shut down, so there is a genuine extrinsic motivation to show results. When we're talking about civil servants, they're not only moved by extrinsic motivation but also intrinsic. Some people really love what they do and really care about the programs they are running... It's essential to have that motivation, especially from the people who are running the program. Without this, it would be impossible.”*

— Vitor Pereira, Former Director, Secretariat of Evaluation and Information Management, Ministry of Social Development, Brazil

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<sup>17</sup> Kingdon, J. W. 1995. *Agendas, alternatives and public policies*. HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995. Andrews, Matthew, Jesse McConnell, and Alison O. Wescott. 2010. "Development as Leadership-led Change-A Report for the Global Leadership Initiative and the World Bank Institute (WBI)."

<sup>18</sup> Literature on innovation identifies two sources of motivation: intrinsic and extrinsic. Intrinsic motivation comes from the individual herself because of a belief in the program, a sense of idealism, etc. Extrinsic motivation depends on external rewards and goals, such as promotions or goodwill with bosses, in contrast to the inherent reward of an act itself. In our experience, government champions intrinsically value evidence-informed policymaking, even though their positions rarely offer any external rewards for promoting it.

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

### Why do we need a champion?

Champions for evidence use are often key to success, especially in the early stages:

**1. Developing a vision for the partnership:** Champions help to lay out a joint vision for collaboration and the agency's goals for using evidence in decision-making. As senior-level officials, champions have a high-level view of the agency's current processes and the opportunities for evidence use.

**2. Building the institutional partnership:** Champions help to build the partnership based on that vision by (1) helping to speed up bureaucratic requirements like signing MoUs, (2) securing time, in-kind, or financial resources to support the collaboration, and (3) assigning staff to be responsible for day-to-day activities of the collaboration.

**3. Inspiring support at all levels:** Champions inspire other individuals to support the collaboration. They help build an appreciation for evidence use and make the case for why it is important to the agency. For instance, our champion at the Ministry of Social Development in Brazil helped J-PAL and CPI, our close partner organization, build relationships with implementing agencies under the Ministry's umbrella to develop two new evaluations of priority government programs in agriculture and water.

*“Many times, data are used in political ways. One of the main challenges I faced was to show that I was not really interested in pushing any political agenda. I wanted to show my staff why data and evidence were important, and how we could learn from them.”*

— Joana Monteiro, Director-President, Institute of Public Security, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

**4. Facilitating lateral buy-in:** In cases where collaborations depend on more than one agency, our champions have helped us build buy-in with other agencies. For instance, our collaboration with the Ministry of Economy in Chile depended on other departments subscribing to the changes being made. Our champion met with counterparts in other agencies to signal that the collaboration was a key part of his agenda, and to explain how the partnership would be useful to the government as a whole.

*“This was the most relevant role that Andrés [Zahler, our top champion] played, convincing [his] counterparts. It had to come from high-level authorities because that's how the state works... If the authority is convinced, the charge flows down the chain. Andrés was active and strong, identifying the benefits on each side. Things like this made people enthusiastic about the partnership.”*

— Paula Gonzalez, Head of Innovation Division, Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism, Chile

**5. Helping ensure sustainability:** Champions can help identify resources to ensure that progress made during the collaboration is sustained over time. This can take many forms, such as finding funds to maintain staff who are responsible for data and evidence use, investing in technology for new data systems, or allocating existing staff time to updating and using an evidence repository built during the partnership. In MineduLAB, for instance, our champions in the Secretary of Strategic Planning were crucial to ensuring resources to support the lab's activities, such as designating staff for the lab. This support has continued after J-PAL and IPA's formal role in the lab's management had ended.

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

### CHAMPIONS FOR EVIDENCE USE: MINEDULAB

When J-PAL and IPA began working with Minedu in Peru in 2014, many Ministry officials and civil servants had been trained in economics and impact evaluation methods, and many of our contacts there spoke about an organizational culture of evidence use that made the partnership possible. Minedu leadership actively encouraged staff to make decisions based on data and rigorous evidence, including champions within the Ministry, Juan Pablo Silva, Jorge Mesinas, and Fabiola Cáceres. While MineduLAB was made possible and permanent by policies and institutional arrangements, these individual champions for evidence use laid the groundwork for the lab through advocacy and dedication.

*“I believe that if what we want is to improve the quality of public spending, a critical element is to try to learn from what we are doing, about what is working and what is not working, and to be able to have rigorous information that allows us to realize what it is that we are achieving. Therefore, for me this element of introducing what we always called a 'system of continuous learning in public policy' was central.”*

— Juan Pablo Silva, Former Vice Minister of Institutional Management, Ministry of Education, Peru

J-PAL and IPA first interacted with Juan Pablo Silva and Jorge Mesinas in 2012, as both participated in the Quipu Commission. The Commission brought together policymakers, practitioners, and academics to discuss the most pressing policy issues facing the country and develop evidence-based policies to address them. At the time, Juan Pablo Silva was Vice Minister of Social Policy and Evaluation at Peru's Ministry of Social Development

and Inclusion (MIDIS) and Jorge Mesinas was Director of the Quality of Public Spending at the Ministry of Economy and Finance (MEF). In 2013, Juan moved to Minedu to serve as the Secretary of Strategic Planning, where he, along with Fabiola Cáceres and Jorge Mesinas, played a major role in facilitating the creation of MineduLAB. They worked closely with researchers Christopher A. Neilson and Francisco Gallego, along with staff at J-PAL and IPA, to design an evidence lab that would fit into Minedu's existing structures and processes, and they visited implementing units throughout the Ministry to encourage applications to the lab's first call for innovation proposals. By actively pushing this agenda forward, they helped match our work to goals that Minedu staff were already working toward, demonstrate that the partnership was a priority for Minedu, and foster collaboration with implementing units that otherwise would have been difficult or even impossible.

These champions not only promoted MineduLAB's launch, but were also fundamental in ensuring the institutionalization and continuity of the lab over time. Fabiola Cáceres and Jorge Mesinas helped establish the administrative conditions necessary for the lab to function. They ensured high standards for the lab's activities, made its successes and the results of its evaluations visible, and fostered longstanding collaborations with partners inside and external to the Ministry. Altogether, these actions made it possible to maintain the lab through several Ministers of Education.

*“We visited the implementing units, we knocked on doors to try to work with them. J-PAL and Minedu worked as a single team and we were working towards the same goals.”*

— Fabiola Cáceres, Head of the Office of Strategic Monitoring and Evaluation, Peru

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: BUILDING NEW PARTNERSHIPS

**While champions are critical, there are many other important factors that make a partnership more likely to succeed:** Although highly committed, our champions in Latin America are often political appointees, and are thus likely to have unstable or short tenures. Relying solely on the commitment of the champion is insufficient to ensure lasting change in this region. Some of factors that signal a partnership is more likely to lead to greater data and evidence use are:

- **The agency has articulated a specific goal for how they would like to use data and evidence in decision-making:** In our experience, the agencies that would like to use data and evidence in the long-run have articulated a vision for systematically using more evidence in their policymaking process and are willing to allocate resources to get there.
- **The agency has committed some resources to the partnership:** These resources may be financial (e.g., paying for training for their staff) or in-kind (e.g., hosting a research or policy staff member in a government office temporarily). In some cases, the government is not able to or interested in committing resources right away. Small seed funding from an external source can help get the collaboration started and provide the concrete examples of success needed to unlock larger government or external funding sources.
- **The champion's tenure is stable at early stages of the collaboration:** Many champions are political appointees. It is helpful when we can expect them to be in the agency at least until the collaboration has begun to deliver tangible results.
- **There are no predictable political changes that are likely to derail the partnership:** It is critical to consider whether any political changes (e.g., a change of government or upcoming elections) may jeopardize the completion of proposed activities. In our experience, it is ideal to build partnerships soon after elections or early in a new administration.



LOCATION: PERU. PHOTO: DARIO RODRIGUEZ | J-PAL/IPA

- **The partner institution directly designs and implements programs or has leverage over institutions that do:** In our experience, it has been easier to achieve greater data and evidence use with sector-specific, implementing institutions like a Ministry of Education. Working with agencies that do not implement programs, like planning, evaluation, or finance departments, often involves coordination across multiple institutions (see Insight 3 on page 26). These partnerships are more likely to succeed when they have the power to inform policy design and decision-making in implementing agencies.

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: DESIGNING PARTNERSHIPS

 **INSIGHT 2: INCREASING THE USE OF EVIDENCE IN POLICY IS AN INCREMENTAL PROCESS. IT IS IMPORTANT TO MEET GOVERNMENTS WHERE THEY ARE.**

Evidence to Policy Partnerships are designed to support governments in using data and evidence to achieve their own goals of delivering better services and improving the lives of their citizens. Governments enter partnerships with evidence-to-policy organizations like J-PAL at different stages along the path to evidence-informed policymaking. Some, like Minedu in Peru, already had sufficient data systems and internal capacity to conduct and use results from impact evaluations, and were interested in implementing the learning cycle in its entirety by building MineduLAB. Others, like ISP-Rio, were focused on improving their administrative data systems so that data would be more useful for day-to-day implementation decisions or, like MIMP in Peru, on using existing evidence to improve a particular policy strategy. Agencies are more likely to use data and evidence in their decision-making when it helps them achieve their own goals, so we have found that it is important to meet governments where they are and to focus on the activities that matter to them, especially in the early stages of a partnership.

*“My main goal was to do evidence-based policy... [But] there were so many problems with data management when I got here that everything was very challenging...we needed to create a culture of data analysis first.”*

— Joana Monteiro, Director-President, Institute for Public Security, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

We therefore typically begin these collaborations with a comprehensive effort to understand the potential partner and their broad goals for data and evidence use. J-PAL's Policy and Research staff then work with the partner to map specific ways in which evidence can be leveraged in the organization's policymaking process. We base our collaboration strategy on answers to the following sets of questions:

1. What does the government agency want to achieve with data and evidence? How much of the Learning Cycle does the partner need to meet these goals?
  - a. Can the partner meet its goals using existing data or evidence? In many cases, there may not be a need for further evaluation or data collection, and the partnership can focus instead on building capacity and systems to use evidence that already exists. OR
  - b. Does the partner need to generate new data or evidence to answer its priority questions? Does the partner want to go through the Learning Cycle in its entirety for a particular program?
2. Does the partner have the necessary foundations to institutionalize and manage the parts of the Learning Cycle most relevant to its needs (as identified in 1)?
  - a. Do they have technical capacity and bandwidth to use data and evidence in decision-making?
  - b. Do they have institutional processes or norms that incentivize or create space for data and evidence use?
  - c. Do they have administrative data systems that can enable a monitoring and evaluation system?

If yes, we work together through one iteration of the segments identified in (1). If no, we collaborate with the partner to strengthen the three foundations of the Learning Cycle, while simultaneously walking the partner through the segments of the Learning Cycle identified in (1).

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: DESIGNING PARTNERSHIPS

Once the government has articulated its objectives, we propose a combination of research, capacity building, and/or policy activities that can help the governments achieve them:

- Our policy team works to (1) synthesize existing evidence, map it to local priorities, and contextualize general lessons in order to identify opportunities for innovations that are likely to be effective, and (2) strengthen institutional processes to enable more robust evidence use.
- Our training team delivers custom courses and workshops to build staff understanding of the importance of monitoring and evaluation, as well as technical skills to synthesize existing literature and identify opportunities for evaluation.
- Our research team, always led by at least one of our affiliated researchers, generates new policy-relevant evidence and supports governments in connecting administrative data sources and improving their usability.

*“To try to break this culture [of not using evidence] was difficult. It wasn’t sufficient that they knew the... possible uses of evaluation, but more to change the culture of public management so that you’re not just doing the same thing you’ve done every day. Not to be just prepared, but to be proactive regarding innovating, adapting, trying to improve what you are doing, with the resources and restrictions you have, to be able to get closer to the objective you’re pursuing in a more cost-effective manner.”*

— Juan Pablo Silva, former Secretary of Strategic Planning, Ministry of Education, Peru

### **INSIGHT 3: DIFFERENT TYPES OF GOVERNMENT AGENCIES MAY REQUIRE DIFFERENT APPROACHES.**

When working with institutions that implement their own programs, partnerships can focus on designing and using impact evaluations, diagnosing policy issues and using existing evidence to formulate new programs, and/or using administrative data to improve program implementation and service delivery.

Working with agencies like planning, evaluation, or finance departments, which do not implement their own programs, often requires a different approach. These partnerships are more likely to lead to evidence use when the partner has the power to inform policy design and/or decision-making in implementing agencies. When working with such non-implementing agencies, we have found success by helping these institutions to:

- **Build requirements for evidence use within the programs they fund or evaluate:** Non-implementing institutions that fund social programs often have terms of reference that regulate how funds should be used. We have worked with non-implementing agencies to build in requirements to encourage careful theory- and evidence-informed program design in order to receive funds. For example, the Chilean Ministry of Economy’s Innovation Fund worked with J-PAL LAC to create a new system for reviewing its potential investments. The new system requires applicants to include a theory of change and review of existing evidence from past impact evaluations when seeking funds. The Innovation Fund also launched a new public bid for impact evaluations of its investments and allocated a portion of program funds to evaluation.

*“In the fund, this system created the perception that it is necessary to base yourself on evidence to make public policies.”*

— Antonio Martner Sota, Research Coordinator, Innovation Fund for Competitiveness, Ministry of Economy, Development, and Tourism of Chile

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: DESIGNING PARTNERSHIPS

- **Build their capacity to identify high-quality impact evaluations:** Many agencies in charge of disbursing budgets require the agencies receiving funds to show that their programs have impact. Our training collaborations can help staff understand the pros and cons of different evaluation designs and how to distinguish between more or less reliable evaluations. This skill is also valuable when the non-implementing partner wishes to contract out the evaluations and needs to select one of many third-party evaluation firms. During J-PAL and IPA's partnership with the National Planning Department of Colombia, our embedded staff person delivered a training on the Maryland Scientific Methods Scale,<sup>19</sup> which ranks the robustness of policy evaluations, to Department staff. He also applied the scale to a list of evaluations that the Department had carried out in the past, making the lessons relevant to its day-to-day work.
- **Leverage their relationships with implementing institutions to reach a wider audience within the government:** Given their role engaging with other agencies throughout the government, non-implementing agencies are able to reach multiple implementing agencies at once. In our experience, they have brought multiple implementing agencies together for workshops and technical trainings, and in some cases these outreach efforts have led to further collaborations with participating implementing agencies. For instance, a J-PAL training session hosted by the Budget Department, Ministry of Finance led to a research collaboration between J-PAL and the National Fishing and Aquaculture Service (Sernapesca). Researchers Mushfiq Mobarak, Andrés Gonzalez Lira, and J-PAL LAC worked closely with Sernapesca to design and conduct a randomized evaluation comparing the impact of a consumer information campaign to random audits in fish markets to identify which approach was more effective at reducing the sale of hake during an annual ban.<sup>20</sup> They conducted the evaluation in under a year. Based on the results of the evaluation, Sernapesca decided to repeat the information campaign during the 2016 ban on hake fish sales, and conduct similar information campaigns for fishing bans for three other species.

### **INSIGHT 4: RESPOND TO OPPORTUNITIES OR POLICY WINDOWS WHERE THERE IS INTEREST AND AUTHORITY TO USE EVIDENCE.**

It is not sufficient to work with the right people: data and evidence must respond to the government's priorities and must do so at the right time. Impact evaluations that are co-generated with policymakers and designed to produce evidence on their priority issues from the start are more likely to be used.<sup>21</sup> Policymakers are also more likely to use results when they articulate their plan to do so from the beginning.

Feeding data and evidence into the government's regular decision-making cycle or responding to policy windows can help make it more likely that policymakers use them. What constitutes a policy window? There are several seminal frameworks that can be useful for identifying opportunities that are ripe for policy change. Kingdon (1995) emphasizes that policy change is more likely to occur when (1) the government has coalesced around a clear problem, (2) it has multiple policy options to address the problem, and (3) there is political pressure to address the problem—the three factors that constitute a policy window.<sup>22</sup> Andrews et al. highlight the importance of political leaders: change is more likely when leaders have the authority, ability, and interest to make it happen.<sup>23</sup>

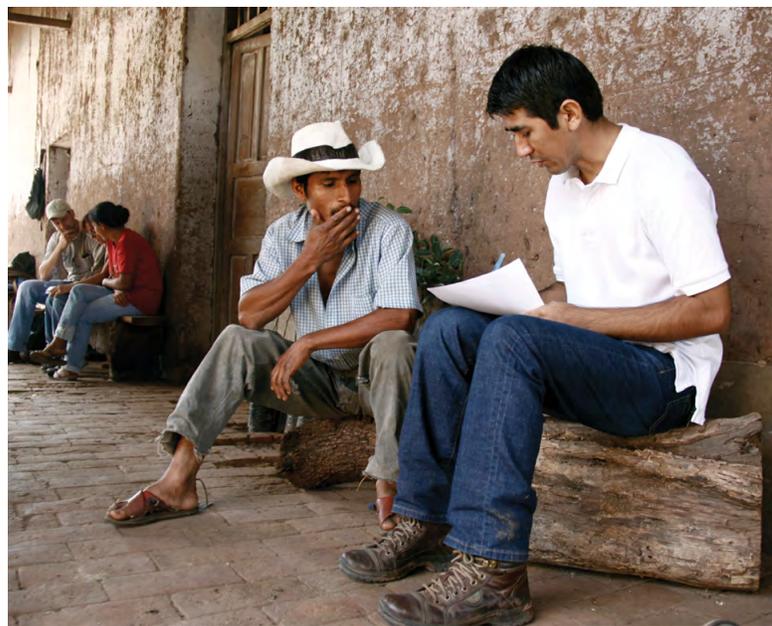
For example, in November 2015, the Mayor-elect of Bogotá, Colombia, Enrique Peñalosa, announced that he would create the Department of Security, Coexistence, and Justice, and appoint Dr. Daniel Mejía, a prominent Colombian economist, as his inaugural Secretary of Security. J-PAL affiliated researcher Chris Blattman (University of Chicago), Daniel Ortega (Development Bank of Latin America CAF), and Santiago Tobón (Universidad de Los Andes) partnered with IPA and quickly responded to offer technical assistance in sharing effective interventions, identifying knowledge gaps, and developing impact evaluations meant to address these gaps.

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: DESIGNING PARTNERSHIPS

The partnership developed out of a longstanding relationship between Universidad de los Andes, the university where Dr. Mejía was based before entering the Mayor's office, and J-PAL and IPA. One of J-PAL's first trainings in the LAC region was held at the university, and IPA's Colombia office was based there from 2012 to 2014. At a joint IPA, J-PAL, and Universidad de Los Andes event in 2015, Dr. Mejía met Chris Blattman, and the two began exploring opportunities to collaborate.

When Dr. Mejía's position in the Mayor's office was announced in late 2015, Chris and IPA reached out to offer to support his efforts to generate and use randomized evaluations to improve security in the city. They quickly applied to J-PAL's GPI for funding and received support to hire a staff member to work closely with the Mayor's office and develop the study, which J-PAL's Governance Initiative, Fundación ProBogotá, the Development Bank of Latin America (CAF), Organización Ardila Lülle through Universidad de Los Andes, Colciencias, 3ie, and the J. William Fulbright Foundation funded in full. Together, the Mayor's office, researchers, and IPA Colombia conducted randomized evaluations of two priority programs, hotspot policing and neighborhood improvements. The Mayor's office subsequently used the results from to inform police allocation in Bogotá.<sup>24</sup>

Policy windows are generally open for a limited time, and when possible, we design Evidence to Policy Partnerships to generate results in time to inform a key policy or budget decision. Timing an evaluation to a policy window is often easier when the intervention period is short, and outcomes can be measured in the short-run (i.e. under a year). Of course, it is also critical to measure the impact of larger reforms or new flagship programs, as well as long-run outcomes that can give a fuller picture of a program's impact.



LOCATION: BOLIVIA. PHOTO: OLIVIA SIEGL | J-PAL/IPA

We do not always need to do a new evaluation to address policymakers' priority questions or respond to a policy window. Results from past evaluations can inform existing policy cycles. For example, governments typically develop medium-run policy plans to outline their strategy for the next several years. Sharing evaluation results with the key decision-makers involved in this process can help encourage take-up, expansion, or continuation of effective programs. In addition, conducting descriptive analyses of existing administrative data can be used to improve program implementation.

<sup>19</sup> Farrington, David P., Denise C. Gottfredson, Lawrence W. Sherman, and Brandon C. Welsh. 2003. "The Maryland Scientific Methods Scale." In *Evidence Based Crime Prevention*, edited by David P. Farrington, Doris Layton MacKenzie, Lawrence W. Sherman, and Brandon C. Welsh, 13–21. London: Routledge.

<sup>20</sup> Lira, Andres Gonzalez and Ahmed Mushfiq Mobarak. "Enforcing Regulation under Illicit Adaptation." Working Paper, August 2018. See summary here: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/protecting-fisheries-through-enforcement-and-informational-campaigns-chile>.

<sup>21</sup> Michael Quinn Patton's seminal book, "Utilization-focused evaluation," provides many strategies for designing impact evaluations that are more likely to be used. Patton, Michael Quinn. 2008. *Utilization-focused evaluation*. Sage Publications.

<sup>22</sup> Kingdon, John W. *Agendas, Alternatives, and Public Policies*. HarperCollins College Publishers, 1995; Stachowiak, Sarah. 2013. "Pathways for change: 10 theories to inform advocacy and policy change efforts." Center for Evaluation Innovation. Seattle, WA: ORS Impact.

<sup>23</sup> Andrews, Matthew, Jesse McConnell, and Alison O. Wescott. 2010. "Development as Leadership-led Change-A Report for the Global Leadership Initiative and the World Bank Institute (WBI)."

<sup>24</sup> Blattman, Christopher, Donald Green, Daniel Ortega, and Santiago Tobón. "Pushing Crime Around the Corner? Estimating Experimental Impacts of Large-Scale Security Interventions." NBER Working Paper No. 23941. October 2017. See summary here: <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/improving-security-through-concentrated-policing-bogot%C3%A1-colombia>.

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: DESIGNING PARTNERSHIPS

### J-PAL AFFILIATED PROFESSORS' ROLE IN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIPS

J-PAL is anchored by a network of more than 170 affiliated professors based at over 50 universities around the world. These professors work with governments, non-profit organizations, and other implementers to conduct randomized evaluations to inform and improve social policy. For government officials, collaborating with independent researchers on an evaluation can help to create a space for experimentation, learning, and reform. Many government officials do not have the capacity or mandate to design and test innovative solutions to pressing policy issues as part of their regular responsibilities, even though they often have great ideas about how to improve on current policy. Collaborating with external researchers is one way to make this kind of positive deviance and experimentation possible.

In addition to conducting impact evaluations in collaboration with governments, J-PAL affiliated professors also play key roles in Evidence to Policy Partnerships beyond research, including leading conversations with potential partners, continuously engaging with champions and agencies to ensure the beginning and successful implementation of Evidence to Policy Partnerships, leading capacity-building sessions for government officials, and providing high-level strategic guidance for the overall partnership. All of our most successful Evidence to Policy Partnerships have actively involved one or more J-PAL affiliated professors. Below are just a few examples of critical roles they can play:



**1. Claudio Ferraz (PUC Rio):** As one of J-PAL LAC's Scientific Directors, Claudio provides overall guidance to several government partnerships in Brazil. He oversaw our partnership with ISP-Rio to organize administrative datasets

to increase the use of data to improve citizen security policies, and provided academic leadership during the creation of our online course with ENAP in Brazil.



**2. Erica Field (Duke University):** Erica participated in a J-PAL LAC workshop for the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations (MIMP) in Peru. She has since worked with the Ministry to design and launch an evaluation of one a

national program to reduce violence against women.



**3. Claudia Martínez, José Tessada, and Jeanne Lafortune (PUC Chile):** All three were lecturers in J-PAL LAC's 2015 training course for the Ministry of Economy in Chile, and are lead researchers on a resulting evaluation of one of the Ministry's flagship scholarship programs.



**4. Christopher A. Neilson (Princeton University):** Christopher is a lead researcher on multiple randomized evaluations with governments throughout the region. He played a key role in the development of MineduLAB in Peru,

providing overall leadership and academic guidance to the project. He has also been a major actor in the development of the data center with the Vice President's Office in the Dominican Republic.



**5. Enrique Seira (Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo de México):** Enrique Seira provided academic leadership in many conversations with PROSPERA, Mexico's social inclusion program. He has also conducted multiple research

projects with the Mexico City Labor Court to improve the Court's functioning and increase access to justice for Mexican citizens.



**6. Francisco Gallego (PUC Chile):** Francisco has conducted numerous evaluations with the Chilean government. As one of J-PAL LAC's Scientific Directors, he has also provided academic leadership to many of J-PAL LAC's activities. Francisco

also played a key role in the development of MineduLAB in Peru, working with Christopher A. Neilson and the Ministry to identify the first set of innovations that MineduLAB would test.

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: DESIGNING PARTNERSHIPS

### EMBEDDING STAFF

While every partnership necessarily takes a different form, one model that J-PAL and our government partners have found consistently useful is to embed staff focused on evidence use within the partner agency for one to two years.<sup>25</sup> Embedded staff are trained in policy and research analysis, often at J-PAL's office in Chile, and work as liaisons between J-PAL and the government, often seated at desks inside the government offices.

Working inside a government office can be an effective way to build trust, better understand its priorities, and spot policy windows where evidence could be useful. In this model, it is important to agree with the government on a clear scope of work focused on helping the government achieve the specific goals defined during the initial scoping of the partnership; this prevents embedded staff from being distracted by day-to-day work either at the agency or at J-PAL. Clear roles and responsibilities for the government staff, embedded person, and the broader J-PAL team should be defined at the outset and revisited throughout the partnership to avoid "mission creep." While the specific activities of the embedded staff member vary, some general tasks they have taken on include:

- **Defining collaboration:** Given their proximity to the partner organization, embedded staff can help adapt the partnership to the evolving needs of the partner organization by (re)defining goals, timelines, and activities. For instance, in recent years, political turmoil in Brazil has affected numerous ministries in the country. Changes in both staff and priorities have occurred so quickly that it has been difficult to keep track of the changes from outside of the government. While we were working closely with the Ministry of the Environment, our embedded Policy and Training Manager played a crucial role in bridging the gap between the Ministry and J-PAL, allowing us to maintain smooth communication and adapt our activities to a new political reality.

- **Generating quick wins:** "Quick wins" are short-term outputs that concretely demonstrate how using data and evidence can help a partner organization achieve its goals more efficiently. Quick wins are essential to maintaining interest in the collaboration, especially when the collaboration involves long-term activities that respond to the partner's long-term needs but not their immediate needs. Some of the quick wins our embedded staff have generated include: generating descriptive statistics from government data for partners to use in reports, helping clean and organize datasets that partners need in order to respond to requests from other agencies or journalists, and demonstrating the ways that existing data can answer the questions facing government staff. Through quick wins, embedded staff help make the partnership more relevant to the government on a day-to-day basis.
- **Responding to policy windows:** Embedded staff can identify and respond to policy windows where evidence and research will be useful to the government; for example, during the drafting of a new national plan or a shift in priorities. By working within an institution, embedded staff will be closer to these conversations and able to provide input on the government's timeline before the policy window closes. Because these staff are part of J-PAL, they can draw on our library of evaluation summaries and evidence syntheses to share insights that directly respond to policymaker questions.
- **Leaving behind technical know-how and new systems or guidelines for evidence use:** Embedded staff work hand-in-hand with staff in the partner government on many concrete tasks throughout the collaboration, including helping create manuals, guidelines, and other process documents. These steps help to ensure that staff within the government learn by doing, and have the resources to continue evidence use activities even after the collaboration has formally ended.

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<sup>25</sup> This model is not new; organizations like the Overseas Development Institute, the Tony Blair Institute for Global Change, and others have embedded technical staff in governments for many years.

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: DESIGNING PARTNERSHIPS

### EMBEDDING STAFF AT ISP-RIO

Our partner in Rio de Janeiro, the Institute of Public Security, is a statistical and research agency in Rio de Janeiro under the state's Secretariat of Public Security. ISP compiles and disseminates security-related data from Rio de Janeiro state.

Our embedded staff member at ISP, Julia Guerra Fernandes, has spent over two years supporting the ambitious vision of ISP's Director-President, Joana Monteiro. For Joana, ISP should do more than reactively providing data in response to questions from the government and reporters. Instead, ISP should proactively provide analysis and information that can improve police services and make crime reduction efforts in Rio de Janeiro state more effective.

In her role as an embedded staff member, Julia met with police captains and other stakeholders to understand their constraints and map out ways that data might inform their work. She was also instrumental in contributing to ISPGeo, an online platform that uses geo-referential data to provide time-series information on crime patterns in the state. ISPGeo is now helping police more efficiently allocate patrol forces in Rio's neighborhoods based on data from previous years. Julia also supported the cleaning and organizing of databases that ISP manages, making these databases easier for staff and researchers to use. Finally, Julia served as a link between ISP and J-PAL affiliate Claudio Ferraz, who is working with ISP to design and evaluate innovative strategies to reduce police violence in Rio de Janeiro.

After she was supported by J-PAL's Government Partnership Initiative for one year, Julia was hired as a full-time employee of ISP. Julia's extensive data analysis abilities, past experience working in government, and strong soft skills have all been important to her work at ISP.

*“I think [having Leonardo at MMA] was a positive experience because in our day-to-day we are very involved with Bolsa Verde tasks. Leonardo being able to see our actions every day was important [for him] to understand the program dynamics when designing the evaluation. Another positive point is integration. It's important for our team to be involved in the evaluation to know about the benefits.”*

— Mauro Pires, Director, Department of Extractive Industries, Ministry of Environment, Brazil

**Embedded staff should have a mix of technical, policy, and communication skills:** In hiring these staff, we have found that the most important qualities are previous government experience in the country or region, knowledge of existing evidence and research methods, data analysis skills, and an enthusiasm for supporting their government colleagues and being responsive to their needs. Previous education or experience in the social sciences, experience working with non-technical partners, and good soft skills to build trust and rapport with their government counterparts are also helpful. It is crucial that embedded staff are seen as partners working toward the government's own goals, and not as external experts trying to tell the government what to do.

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: DESIGNING PARTNERSHIPS

“*[Edoardo] helped DSEPP start thinking about evaluations in a different way. Edoardo was uniquely positioned because he had one foot in DSEPP, and the other in IPA and J-PAL, which helped him bring in fresh ideas... What Edo did was connecting the dots between those who are evaluating and those who are making decisions.*”

— Felipe Castro, Former Director, National Planning Department, Division of Monitoring and Evaluation of Public Policies (DSEPP), Colombia

“*It was also crucial to have Edoardo on the inside. Within two weeks, he was on their soccer team, and he eventually won employee of the month at the unit where he was embedded. To that extent, he became a member of their team and that was key for our government partners to begin to trust him and begin to openly talk about the challenges they were facing.*”

— Sebastian Chaskel, Former Country Director of IPA Colombia, partner on DSEPP collaboration, Colombia



LOCATION: DOMINICAN REPUBLIC. PHOTO: LAURA PULECIO | J-PAL/IPA

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

### **INSIGHT 5: FOSTERING BROADER, INSTITUTION-WIDE SUPPORT IS CRUCIAL FOR SUSTAINABILITY.**

While Evidence to Policy Partnerships rely heavily on proactive support from a champion, even the most dedicated champions cannot ensure that the commitment to evidence-informed policymaking is sustained beyond the formal collaboration with J-PAL. Senior government officials are often transferred to new positions or decide to pursue opportunities outside government following administration changes. For example, a recent political crisis in Brazil led to a series of transfers of senior-level public servants in government. As a result, we lost a key champion who had previously played a proactive role in advancing our collaboration with the Ministry of Environment. Given that the collaboration was in its early stages, J-PAL was just beginning to cultivate more widespread support for the collaboration. However, with the sudden transfer of our champion, we had to devote additional time and efforts to understand the new leadership and to gain their support to maintain the collaboration.

Based on this and other similar experiences, we have learned that it is important to make Evidence to Policy Partnerships less reliant on single champions over time. Some of the ways we try ensure the sustainability of partnerships beyond a single champion are: (1) establish a formal framework for the partnership; (2) generate broader institutional buy-in beyond the champion; (3) leave behind know-how, systems, and designated resources for data and evidence use; (4) create constituencies for evidence use beyond the government; and (5) specify next steps and following up with the government partner.

#### **1. Establishing a formal institutional framework**

Working with the champion at the outset of the partnership to put a formal agreement, such as a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU), in place can lay the groundwork for continued meetings and engagement even if the champion leaves the partner institution.

#### **2. Generating Organizational Buy-In**

Some strategies to generate wider organizational buy-in include:

- **Providing capacity-building support to a broader group of staff:** Training programs can demonstrate the concrete ways in which using evidence can benefit the policymaking process to a broad group of government staff. These trainings can include examples in which using evidence has led to cost savings and spurred innovations within governments around the world. Helping mid-level bureaucrats understand how evidence has been used in policymaking contexts similar to their own helps convince them of both the need for and the viability of evidence-informed policymaking.
- **Building support from mid-level and frontline government staff by generating quick wins:** Providing mid-level and frontline government staff with data tools and analyses to help them better manage their programs day-to-day can help make benefits of data and evidence use more tangible and build support beyond the champion.

*“The biggest accomplishment [of our partnership with J-PAL] was to have an objective statistic that showed how effective the information dissemination was relative to the audits. There are many people here who were convinced of the value of auditing and believed that it was effective; they thought that it couldn’t be made more effective with information. They were convinced by the objective statistic. The cost-effectiveness carried out by the research team was especially useful in convincing people of the value of this other strategy.”*

— Daniel Molina, Head of Department of Fishing Inspection Program Management, National Fishing and Aquaculture Service, Chile

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

*“What CPI has done well to weather the change in political people is that we’ve established constant relationships with technical people. For example, there is a person in the Ministry of Finance who loves RCTs. She will never be able to do one herself, but she will get people to show up and support CPI in these meetings. We have built a level of technical people who really want to do their job and are constrained, but who can look to us as someone who seems politically neutral and ask CPI to do something.”*

— Dimitri Szerman, Senior Analyst, Climate Policy Initiative, Brazil

### 3. Building Internal Capacity and Allocating Resources

Since Evidence to Policy Partnerships aim to build capacity that is sustainable in the long term, it is important to consider how activities that begin during the formal collaboration can be continued or built upon after the collaboration has ended.

Working closely with staff at the government agency helps build the technical knowledge required to manage activities that are part of the collaboration, and partnerships should involve many opportunities for government staff to “learn by doing.” The goal of these efforts is not to provide staff with comprehensive skills to carry out the entire Learning Cycle on their own, but to enable them to manage the overall framework and identify proper external support where necessary.

Beyond sufficient technical capacity, sustained use of data and evidence also requires that the partner be willing to dedicate personnel to these activities in the long run. For instance, in the Peruvian Ministry of Education, the Secretary of Strategic Planning continued funding staff to manage MineduLAB even after our collaboration had formally ended. Similarly, in the Institute of Public Security in Rio, the embedded staff member was hired by the agency to continue her data management efforts after J-PAL’s involvement ended. In other cases, the work has been transitioned to staff in the monitoring and evaluation units of the agencies.

### TYPES OF J-PAL TRAININGS

Training courses and workshops can play an important role in helping public servants build technical capacity to engage with rigorous data and research. Customized content with relevant examples can help politicians and bureaucrats think about how to use and produce evidence. These courses help staff develop a theory of change, understand when and how to evaluate various programs, assess the quality of existing research, and translate research results into policy decisions.

In addition to our partnership-specific trainings, J-PAL also conducts more general capacity-building efforts that aim to build a pipeline of civil servants who are interested in expanding evidence-informed policymaking within government and in the social sector more broadly. Through our partnership with the National School of Public Administration in Brazil (ENAP), we worked together to create an online course in Portuguese that introduces the concepts of evaluation and evidence use to Brazilian citizens and civil servants. In the course’s first offering in November 2017, 5,790 students enrolled, and over 25 percent completed the entire course.

*“Many people on my team were very smart and very good professionals, even though they never saw anything from econometrics. It’s just a matter of training for these people.”*

— Vitor Pereira, Former Director, Secretariat of Evaluation and Information Management, Ministry of Social Development, Brazil

## 5. INSIGHTS FOR EVIDENCE TO POLICY ORGANIZATIONS: ENSURING SUSTAINABILITY

### 4. Creating Constituents for Evidence Use

It is also important to engage organizations and people outside government, including local NGOs and civil society, journalists, foundations, and multilateral organizations like the World Bank. In the long run, these actors will continue to hold the government accountable to deliver effective policies long after our collaboration ends. For example, MineduLAB integrates Peruvian academics, practitioners, and other Ministry of Education units into its operations. By responding to questions that are of interest to each of these partners, MineduLAB has created a constituency that will continue to demand that it produce and disseminate evidence.

External stakeholders can also help make Evidence to Policy Partnerships more likely to remain a priority inside the government. If an NGO or other actor is involved in a partnership, they can help maintain momentum even when the involved government staff are transferred or have to reprioritize their time allocation.

### 5. Specifying Next Steps and Following Up

At the end of an Evidence to Policy Partnership, identifying specific next steps for the partner agency to continue to manage and maintain the systems or capacity created during the partnership can help increase follow-through. These next steps should be determined in close collaboration with the individuals who will be carrying them out and include follow-up conversations to monitor progress. For example, after J-PAL and IPA's Evidence to Policy Partnership with the Ministry of Women and Vulnerable Populations in Peru ended, project staff held several high-level meetings to ensure that the impact evaluation designed through the partnership was successfully implemented.

### INSIGHT 6: INVEST IN LONG-TERM PARTNERSHIPS.

Having a long-term presence in a country or a long-term relationship with a government fosters greater trust and mutual understanding. Long-term partnerships between governments and researchers can help civil servants understand the different ways that evidence can be used and help researchers make their research more useful for policy.

By building a reputation and knowledge among many people in a government, long-term partnerships allow us to identify and respond quickly to policy windows where evidence could be useful, know the right people to work with, and maintain partnerships despite transfers of key officials or administration changes after elections. Working together on multiple projects, and not just impact evaluations, is also more conducive to evidence use and institutional learning than a one-time evaluation.

In Peru, many of our government partnerships have developed due to the long-term presence of J-PAL and IPA in the country. Our government partnerships began with the Quipu Commission in 2012, which brought policymakers from the Ministry of Economy and Finance and the Ministry of Development and Social Inclusion (MIDIS) together with researchers to identify Peru's most pressing policy challenges, and to design and evaluate potential solutions.<sup>26</sup> The development of MineduLAB involved many policymakers who had been involved in the Quipu commission, and were therefore familiar with J-PAL and IPA.<sup>27</sup> Since the MineduLAB collaboration, we have also provided technical assistance to MIDIS related to an innovation lab called the AYNI Lab Social. AYNI Lab was created by MIDIS in October 2016 and received technical assistance from IPA and J-PAL in 2018.

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<sup>26</sup> In fact, the Quipu Commission followed the success of a similar effort, the Compass Commission, in Chile in 2010. Beyond having a presence in any particular country, J-PAL's long-term presence in the LAC region has demonstrated to many policymakers that we are committed to identifying and supporting effective solutions to poverty within the region.

<sup>27</sup> MineduLAB inspired the creation of an Innovation and Evaluation Hub in the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in the province of Salta, Argentina.



LOCATION: BRASÍLIA, BRAZIL. ANNE THIBAUT, THEN DEPUTY DIRECTOR OF J-PAL LAC, AND PAULO MARQUES, ENAP'S DIRECTOR OF CONTINUOUS EDUCATION, LAUNCHING THE MOOC AT THE PUBLIC MANAGEMENT INNOVATION WEEK IN BRASÍLIA. PHOTO: HENRIQUE SANTOS/ENAP.

## 6. INSIGHTS FOR GOVERNMENT AGENCIES

Government agencies across Latin America have increasingly identified opportunities for evidence to help them improve the design and implementation of social programs. A number of governments across the region, including many featured in this report, have made substantial advances in this direction. But instilling a culture of evidence use within a government is not easy; many governments face real challenges in being able to use evidence to the extent that they would like to. In this final section, we outline some specific areas where, with concerted effort by many actors, evidence use in government can increasingly become the norm. Where relevant, we also highlight the advances our partners have made in addressing these obstacles to evidence use.

 **INSIGHT 1: IT IS IMPORTANT TO ALLOCATE RESOURCES TO EVIDENCE USE AND MAKE IT SOMEONE'S JOB TO APPLY EVIDENCE IN POLICY DESIGN.**

Applying evidence to design better policies and programs takes time and resources. In GPI and at J-PAL LAC, we have seen that allocating resources and personnel time to using evidence is an important way to start to build a culture to support data-driven and evidence-informed decisions. While many governments and donors fund evaluation, few hire personnel to focus on evidence use. In some cases, evaluation departments have no formal mechanisms for feeding results back into program design.

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Allocating even a small amount of resources and personnel to apply the lessons from monitoring data and impact evaluations in policy design and implementation, and setting up systems that facilitate this institutional learning, is a crucial part of building a culture of data-driven and evidence-informed decision-making.

These investments do not always need to be large. Often, small sums can allow either governments or organizations like J-PAL to hire someone whose job it is to use evidence, collect relevant data, or invest in the software they need to process information. Providing quick-turnaround grants after an evaluation is complete can also support evidence-informed scale-ups or reforms, or help establish the infrastructure for a government lab that incentivizes greater use of evidence.

Governments may not be able to fund evidence use activities due to budget constraints, lengthy contracting requirements, or conflicting priorities. Funding from multilateral organizations, foundations, and the philanthropic sector to build the infrastructure for evidence use within governments in Latin America is scarce. Supplementing funds for impact evaluations with a smaller amount of funds for evidence use can potentially help ease large constraints. In Salta, one of Argentina's most disadvantaged provinces, access to GPI funding recently enabled J-PAL to hire a Policy and Research Manager who will work directly with the Ministry to develop an Innovation and Evaluation Hub to identify effective strategies to improve education outcomes throughout the province. The Manager is working with the staff of the Ministry to improve current data collection and storage processes, which will enable better evidence-informed decisions and expand the possibilities for conducting low-cost randomized evaluations of education innovations, as is the case with MineduLAB in Peru. In Salta, this task required the Ministry to consolidate many different, overlapping databases, making a third-party coordinator across all of the offices involved essential.

 **INSIGHT 2: CREATING DEDICATED SPACES WHERE EVIDENCE USE IS ENCOURAGED AND REWARDED CAN HELP BUILD A CULTURE OF EVIDENCE-INFORMED INNOVATION.**

It can be challenging for policymakers to propose new ideas or processes. Day-to-day responsibilities can crowd out innovation and experimentation, and evaluation is often seen as a tool useful only for accountability. Innovation labs and other institutions dedicated to identifying and testing new solutions create incentives and safe spaces to propose and evaluate new ideas. These dedicated spaces help build an understanding of data and evidence as tools for learning and improvement, rather than for auditing and cutting programs.

One model that is becoming increasingly popular among governments in Latin America and around the world is to create new, defined spaces—whether institutions, competitive funds, or departments—that require or encourage evidence use for a portion of their agency's decision-making, rather than trying to institutionalize evidence use in all their existing policymaking processes. These new institutions emphasize data, evaluation, and evidence as tools for catalyzing government innovation, efficiency, and learning. One popular model, pioneered by the Behavioral Insights Team, is to create a government lab that conducts low-cost, rapid evaluations using administrative data to identify ways to make government services more effective and/or efficient. MineduLAB is an example of this kind of lab in Peru. In our interviews with government officials who were involved in the creation of MineduLAB, they highlighted two conditions that were critical to MineduLAB's success: (1) The lab's evaluations required few resources, as only administrative data that would be collected regardless of the evaluation was necessary to evaluate the innovation, and 2) the lab tests low-cost interventions that can be scaled up without requiring a large amount of resources.<sup>28</sup> Another model is to create a competitive fund for new policy ideas that rewards evidence use in program design, such as the Innovation

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Fund in Chile's Ministry of Economy. Other models, like specific institutions for data use in a particular sector, can also open the door for data and evidence use within a government. ISP-Rio is one example of an institution whose mission is to produce information and disseminate research and analysis to improve the implementation and reduce costs of public security policies.

While many successful evaluation units focus on testing simple, low-cost tweaks to existing programs or behavioral nudges, it is also critical to evaluate larger reforms or interventions targeting systems change. Policymakers need evidence of both types—specific program design details and broader directions for impact—to ensure that they are investing in the programs that are most likely to improve the lives of their constituents.

 **INSIGHT 3: GREATER INVESTMENT IN DATA COLLECTION, DATA MANAGEMENT, AND INTER-AGENCY DATA SHARING CAN GO A LONG WAY IN HELPING ADVANCE THE EVIDENCE-USE AGENDA.**

While many government agencies have capitalized on existing evidence to inform their policymaking decisions, they face a number of challenges in doing so in a systematic manner. To begin, there may be little existing evidence on priority topics or questions. And even if evidence exists, it may be difficult to apply to a new context or in a government setting. As a result, government agencies looking to understand how best to address particular issues often rely on piloting and testing policy solutions. Having robust administrative data can significantly ease the barriers to testing and can significantly cut the costs of conducting process or impact evaluations.

However, a number of public sector agencies in Latin America are unable to leverage the benefits of administrative data due to (1) a lack of infrastructure to collect administrative data, (2) a lack of confidence in the quality of the data that have already been collected, (3) multiple, overlapping datasets that are difficult to merge, and (4) a lack of capacity to analyze administrative data. Many of the agencies we interviewed noted that they do not have the in-house capacity

to set up administrative databases, and therefore contract third-party groups to manage data.

Administrative data collection is a costly exercise. But funding administrative data collection and infrastructure has multiple positive feedback loops; administrative data can inform program design by identifying specific target populations or outcomes, enabling program implementers to monitor their progress, and facilitating impact evaluations that contribute to the body of knowledge of what works, both within the government and in the international policy sphere more broadly. If foundations, non-profits, and large research institutions can partially or fully fund the data collection and management process, they can open the door for a more efficient allocation of government resources. We have seen that governments are willing to use administrative data to design, pilot, and test innovative solutions to policy challenges in many countries in LAC and around the world. Enabling high-quality data systems will increase the number of governments conducting nimble, low-cost randomized evaluations that can direct public resources to more effective programs.

**Facilitating Inter-Agency Data Sharing:** Many key policy questions span multiple departments, and answering these questions requires data and collaboration from other agencies. Coordinating data collection efforts can allow agencies to complement each other's work, but robust inter-agency data sharing agreements have not been the norm in our experience. For instance, in the Dominican Republic, primary education data was collected by one agency and secondary education data by another. However, data was managed in such a way that unique identifiers in both datasets did not converge. As a result, simple tasks, such as tracking educational attainment of specific populations over given time periods, become unnecessarily complex.

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<sup>28</sup> While all MineduLAB evaluations are designed to rely on administrative data, a small number of MineduLAB evaluations have also involved the collection of additional survey data by third-party surveyors.

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### DATA CENTER IN THE DOMINICAN REPUBLIC

Many governments are interested in developing their capacity to use data more regularly, and there is also a growing movement among governments to make public data more widely available for the purposes of transparency and accountability. Helping governments to use the data they already collect has been a key part of many of J-PAL's partnerships with governments across regions. Generating descriptive statistics, correlational tables, and charts is a simple way to demonstrate commitment to the government's priorities and to build support for the idea that data analysis can often be quick, low-cost, and useful.

Recognizing the opportunities that could arise from robust data-sharing frameworks, the Ministry of the Presidency of the Dominican Republic worked with J-PAL affiliate Christopher A. Neilson and J-PAL LAC to establish a multi-agency data center. The center will compile and organize datasets from multiple government agencies, allowing policymakers and researchers to identify patterns that would not be visible in any individual dataset. By creating a dedicated space to house this data, with staff to manage the datasets, the data center will make it easier for policymakers to rely on statistics and evidence in their decision-making.

### Facilitating Government-to-Government Learning:

Understanding concrete ways in which other agencies have used data and research to help improve outcomes has, in our experience, motivated policymakers to try and do the same in their agencies. The government of Salta, Argentina's Innovation and Evaluation Hub is an example of how cross-governmental learning can lead to evidence-informed policymaking. The national government of Argentina recently updated its national standardized test, increasing exam frequency (from once every three years to once every year) and giving student assessment more importance in the educational agenda. Building on this policy change at the national level, and building on knowledge of MineduLAB, the Ministry of Education, Science, and Technology in Salta partnered with J-PAL to set up the hub. Similarly, the police in Rio de Janeiro can benefit from understanding how the police in Bogotá used data and research to institute hot spotting techniques that ultimately helped reduce violent crime.

*“Public servants need to be exposed to what is happening internationally in their respective areas. For instance, I am working with the Rio police to increase data use. However, in Sao Paulo and Bogotá, police have been using data to inform decisions for many years now. Last May, I brought Rio police officers with me to Sao Paulo on an exchange—they were shocked at how much data use was integrated into police operations there. This experience showed them real ways in which data could make their work easier. You really need to see the difference, need contact with people who can ask you smart questions.”*

— Joana Monteiro, Director-President, Institute of Public Security, Rio de Janeiro, Brazil

 **INSIGHT 4: COLLABORATING WITH EVIDENCE-TO-POLICY ORGANIZATIONS AND RESEARCHERS CAN HELP ESTABLISH A CULTURE OF DATA AND EVIDENCE USE.**

Organizations and researchers that have expertise in generating, synthesizing, and promoting the use of data and evidence in decision-making can be valuable partners in governments' efforts to use data and evidence more regularly. While some governments have the resources and mandate to build this expertise internally, many do not. Collaborations can help augment government capacity and create space for positive deviance and innovation. Evidence-to-policy organizations can produce tailored evidence reviews to inform a specific policy question, conduct in-depth pilot research to better diagnose a policy problem, support the development and implementation of new impact evaluations, and work with staff inside the government to identify the areas where data and evidence—both new and existing—will be most useful.



## CONCLUSION

The achievements of the public officials and government bodies featured in this report demonstrate the diverse ways in which administrative data and evidence from randomized evaluations can help governments innovate and improve social programs. Some governments may follow the canonical model of pilot, evaluate, scale. For others, building a culture of data and evidence use may instead be about applying general insights from existing evidence when designing new programs, connecting administrative datasets to better track the quality of program implementation and lay the groundwork for future impact evaluation, or building civil servants' capacity to commission and apply the results of impact evaluations.

The partnerships in this report also show how strengthening government capacity for data and evidence use, not only data and evidence generation, can have high returns. This is a promising area for donors, governments, and multilateral and bilateral aid agencies to invest in alongside evidence generation in the future. Focusing more resources on evidence use is critical for achieving the ultimate goal of evidence-informed policymaking—that data and evidence are actually translated into better policies that improve lives. Making it someone's job and building expertise to apply evidence, creating systems that encourage or reward evidence use during program design, or improving administrative data systems and interagency data sharing are promising places to start.

Strengthening government capacity in developing countries is critical for solving the world's most pressing challenges. While this work can be challenging, governments are and will continue to be some of the most important actors in reducing poverty and inequality, and providing critical services in a broad range of sectors including education, health, and social assistance. The examples of government partnerships featured in this report just scratch the surface of a much larger movement among governments across Latin America and around the world to use data and evidence to help solve social challenges and improve people's lives.<sup>29</sup> We hope that sharing our experiences will inspire more governments to move in this direction, and more researchers and practitioners to collaborate with governments to improve social policy.

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<sup>29</sup> See, for example, Results for All. 2017. 100+ Government Mechanisms to Advance the Use of Data and Evidence in Policymaking: A Landscape Review. Washington, DC: Results for America. <https://results4america.org/our-work/results-for-all/>

#### ABOUT J-PAL

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is a global research center working to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. Anchored by a network of more than 170 affiliated professors at universities around the world, J-PAL draws on results from randomized impact evaluations to answer critical questions in the fight against poverty.

[povertyactionlab.org](http://povertyactionlab.org)

#### ABOUT J-PAL LAC

J-PAL Latin America and the Caribbean (J-PAL LAC) is J-PAL's regional office based at the Pontificia Universidad Católica in Santiago, Chile. J-PAL LAC works alongside governments and NGOs in the LAC region to identify and promote effective programs and policies in the region.

[povertyactionlab.org/lac](http://povertyactionlab.org/lac)

