

AN INTRODUCTION TO J-PAL AFRICA

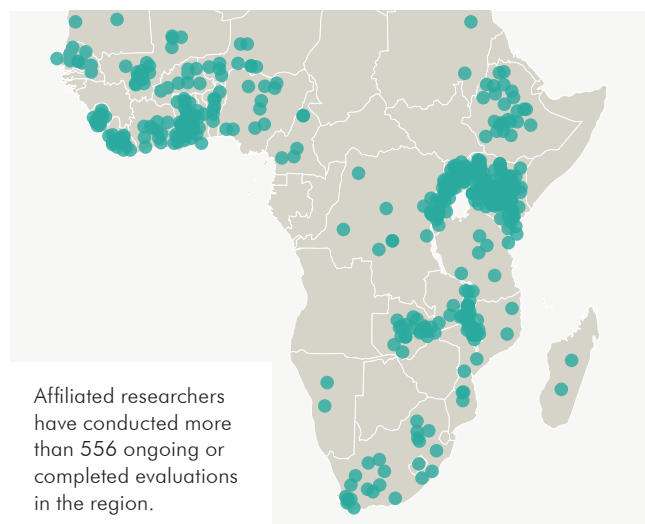


Photo credit: Intersect

J-PAL Africa is a regional office of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL), a global network of researchers who use randomized evaluations to answer critical policy questions in the fight against poverty. Our mission is to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence.

Founded at the University of Cape Town in 2010 and anchored by a network of academic researchers, J-PAL Africa partners with leaders in the public, nonprofit, and private sectors to rigorously study what strategies meaningfully reduce poverty and translate research into action.

Through our work, we've impacted more than 85 million lives across the continent and built a robust network of researchers, governments, and nonprofits who are working to advance the use of evidence in policy. This network includes supporting 66 African Scholars, who are part of our effort to have African researchers develop and drive the randomized evaluation research agenda on the continent.



Affiliated researchers have conducted more than 556 ongoing or completed evaluations in the region.

CORE ACTIVITIES

Our affiliated researchers have more than 556 ongoing and completed randomized evaluations in Africa. J-PAL Africa works to improve the effectiveness of social programs in the region through three core activities: research, policy and scaling, and training.



Research

Our affiliated researchers conduct evaluations to test and improve the effectiveness of programs aimed at reducing poverty. Our [African Scholars Program](#) provides funding, mentorship, and training opportunities to African researchers to develop and drive the research agenda on the African continent. We facilitate conversations between leading researchers and implementing partners to spur innovative, policy-relevant, and collaborative research.



Policy and Scaling

We share research results with those who can act on them and build partnerships with policymakers to ensure policy is driven by evidence and effective programs are scaled up to reach millions.



Training

We train policymakers and practitioners to become better producers and users of evidence through courses, workshops, and partnerships.

For more information, contact our Executive Director, Vinayak Bhardwaj, at vbhardwaj@povertyactionlab.org.

OUR WORK

J-PAL Africa works across a number of program areas to better understand which anti-poverty programs and policies work and why.

Gender

Gender norms and biases continue to constrain human potential around the world. J-PAL Africa's Girls' Education and Empowerment (GE&E) Portfolio aims to improve the lives of adolescent girls in West Africa by ensuring that policies and programmes targeting girls are informed by scientific evidence.

Education

Education is often described as a pathway to mobility, yet schools in the United States continue to fall short on key indicators of a quality education, and low-income students and students of color are disproportionately left behind. The Education team works to catalyze randomized evaluations and disseminate evidence on innovative tactics to improve student learning and expand access to quality education.

Climate

Africa is on the front lines of the global climate crisis. We are expanding our work on climate through our embedded [Water, Air, and Energy Lab](#) in partnership with the City of Cape Town. The WAE Lab is part of J-PAL's Air and Water Labs (AWLs) with Community Jameel. AWLs partner with government agencies to co-generate evidence-based solutions for the most pressing air and water challenges.

Finance

The Digital Identification and Finance Initiative (DigiFI) for Africa aims to generate evidence on how African governments, private companies, and NGOs can leverage digital payments and identification systems to improve public service delivery, governance, and financial inclusion.

Health

We focus on identifying policies and programs effective at improving the reach, quality, and take-up of health services and products. J-PAL Africa is currently exploring opportunities to advance a range of interventions to further this goal, including improving access to clean water treatment and increasing demand for vaccines.

Crime, Violence, and Conflict

Crime and violence can hinder economic development and urban growth, and exacerbate governance challenges. In South Africa, J-PAL Africa has partnered with the Western Cape Government to adapt evidence on cognitive behavioral therapy-inspired programmes, which can be cost-effective ways to reduce violence.

Labour Markets

Africa faces several labor-related challenges, including youth unemployment, slow employment growth, and high worker turnover. J-PAL Africa has supported several evaluations to find solutions, including through a years-long partnership with the Harambee Youth Employment Accelerator in South Africa.

Additional program areas we support include addressing agricultural technology adoption and enhancing citizen political participation and government accountability. We also forge long-term partnerships with government and policy actors across the continent to promote the adaptation and use of evidence in decision-making.

RESEARCH INTO POLICY



Photo credit: Anton Scholtz, J-PAL/Pratham

Teaching at the Right Level

J-PAL Africa achieved a policy milestone by launching Teaching at the Right Level (TaRL) Africa with the Indian NGO Pratham in 2019. TaRL, which was originally developed in India, is a program that aims to build foundational skills in math and reading for all children before they exit primary school. A series of randomized evaluations by J-PAL affiliated researchers over the past fifteen years have shown that TaRL consistently improves learning outcomes when implemented well and has led to some of the largest learning gains among rigorously evaluated education programs.

The iterative process of innovation and evaluation in collaboration with J-PAL has helped Pratham refine and adapt TaRL over time, which has now reached millions of children in India and Africa. TaRL's work in Africa began in 2016 with a J-PAL Africa-supported pilot in Zambia. Following the success of the pilot, Zambia's Ministry of General Education, with support from partners including USAID, UNICEF, and VVOB, scaled up the TaRL approach across the country in 2022, reaching over 3,000 schools and more than 500,000 children.

Since its launch in 2019, TaRL Africa has collaborated with governments and partners to address the learning crisis in primary schools. J-PAL Africa and other organizations are working to support governments to scale TaRL-inspired programs in countries across the African continent.

In 2022, TaRL Africa became an independent entity and registered as a Kenyan organization. The TaRL Africa team continues to successfully support governments and partners to use the evidence-based TaRL approach in over twelve African countries with over four million children reached.