Evidence-Based Programing in Early Grade Reading

Abhijit Banerjee

New Delhi, India | July 26, 2012

USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL
Poverty Action Lab
TRANSLATING RESEARCH INTO ACTION

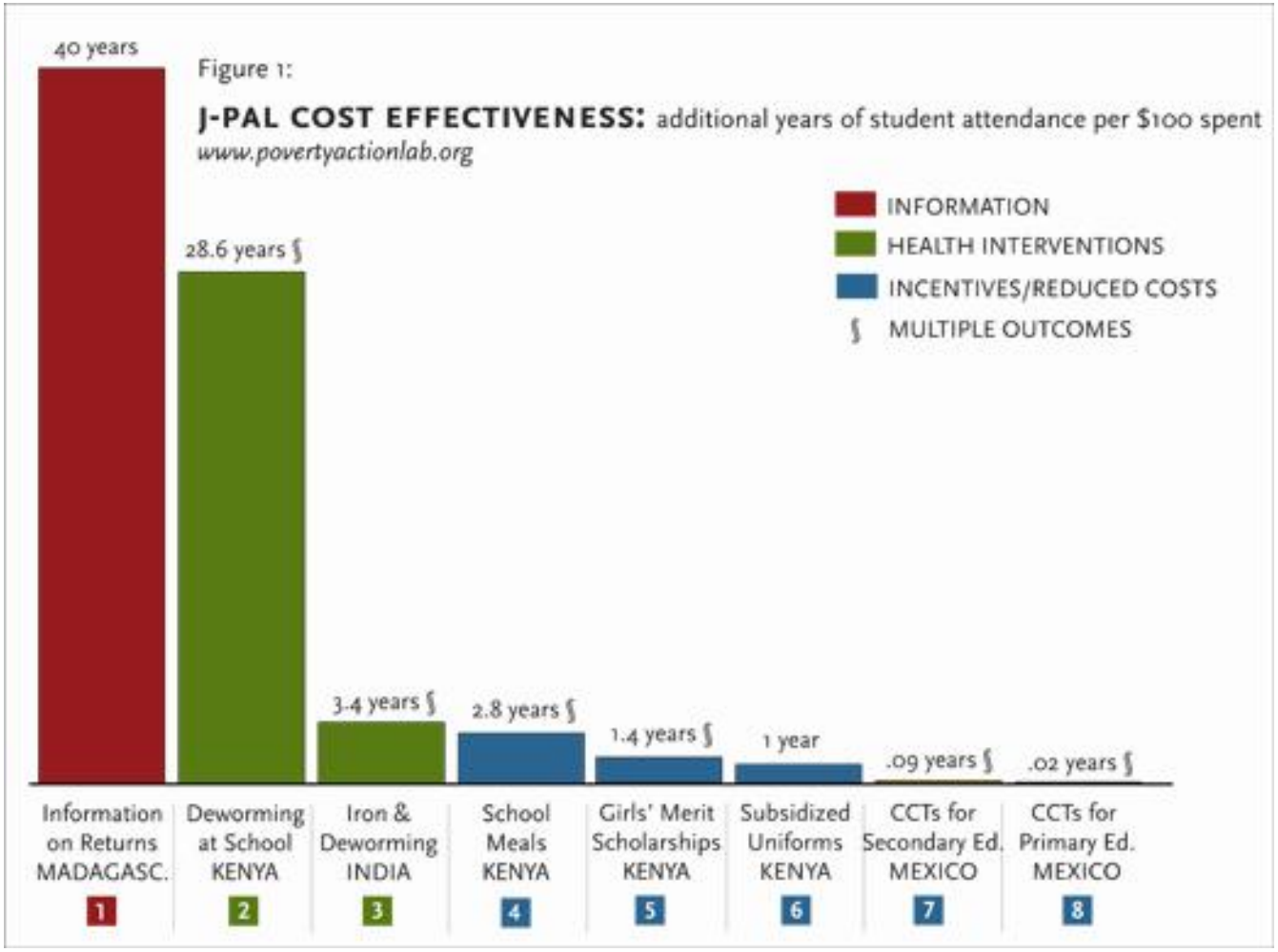
How Do You Increase School Attendance in Developing Countries

- *Low Enrollment > High Dropout > Low Attendance > Low Achievement*

1. Books for Free
2. Building Improvements
3. Cash Grants for Attendance
4. Community Participation
5. Deworming
6. Lunch for Free
7. Remedial Education
8. School Supplies (Blackboards, Chalk, etc.)
9. Teacher Attendance (Monitoring)
10. Uniforms for Free

Impact Evaluations Answer Such Questions:

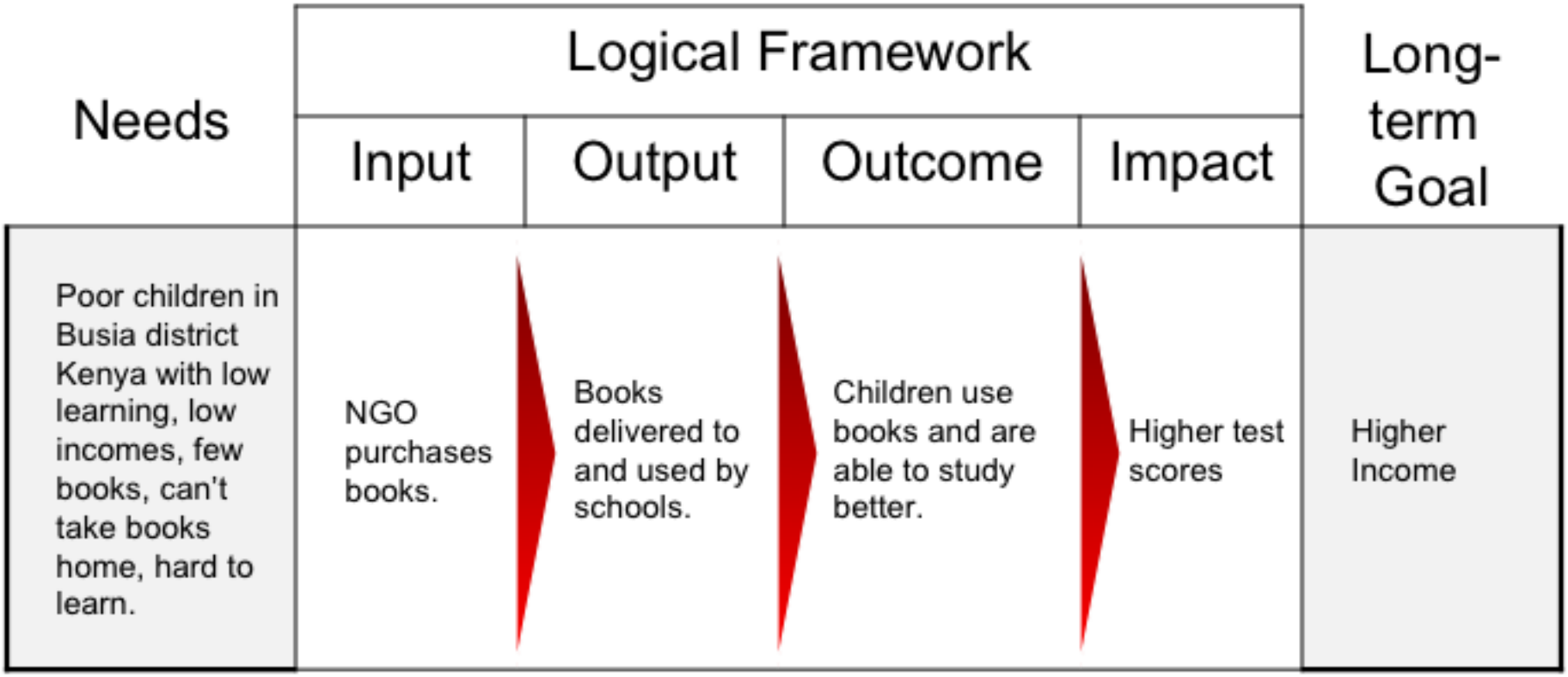
Deworming is one of the most Cost-Effective ways to Increase Attendance



Why Evaluate?

- Increases Accountability of the Program
  - Did the program do what it was supposed to?
  - Did the program have a positive impact on people?
  - What are the reasons for success / failure?
- Improve Development Policy
  - What is the most effective way to achieve an outcome?
  - Are there common strategies that will succeed across fields?
- *Ultimate Goal*
  - *Bigger impact on poverty due to more effective programs*
  - *More funding commitment for these proven programs*

Different Types of Evaluations



< Needs assessment > <~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~ Process Evaluation ~~~~~~~~~~~~~~~> <~~~~~ Impact Evaluation ~~~~~>

Other types of Evaluations: Review / Cost-benefit analysis / Cost-effectiveness Analysis

Impact Evaluations Answer Very Different Questions From Process Evaluations

- What difference did the policy make?
  - Intermediate indicators (number of books read) vs. Final outcomes (test scores)
  - Distributional questions (Who learned more?)
- Flaws in traditional methods:
  - Differences between groups compared (worst schools get books first)
  - Before vs. after subject to confounding factors (kids learn over time; other program effects)
- Need to compare "*what happened*" to "*what would have happened*" without the program, i.e. (**counterfactual**)

Randomized Evaluations

• Before the program starts, eligible individuals are *randomly* assigned to two groups.

Treatment Group = Comparison Group

GROUPS ARE STATISTICALLY IDENTICAL BEFORE PROGRAM

TREATMENT

ANY DIFFERENCES AT ENDLINE CAN BE ATTRIBUTED TO PROGRAM

Units of Randomization

- Individuals
  - a child receives a scholarship
- Households
  - a family receives discounted water disinfectant
- Schools
  - all children in a school receive deworming treatment
- Villages
  - the community receives ‘report cards’ on their children’s relative performance

Why Do Randomized Evaluations Work?

- REs provide a valid **counterfactual**.
  - What would have happened without the program?
- REs can measure the **causal** impact of a program.
- Solves the problem of **selection bias.**
  - Members of the groups (treatment and control) are statistically equivalent.
- **Changes over time** do not invalidate results.

What is J-PAL?

- The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is
  - A center within MIT Department of Economics
  - And a network of researchers around the world
- Dedicated to ensuring that the fight against poverty is based on scientific evidence
  - In particular, focus on learning lessons from randomized evaluations of anti-poverty projects

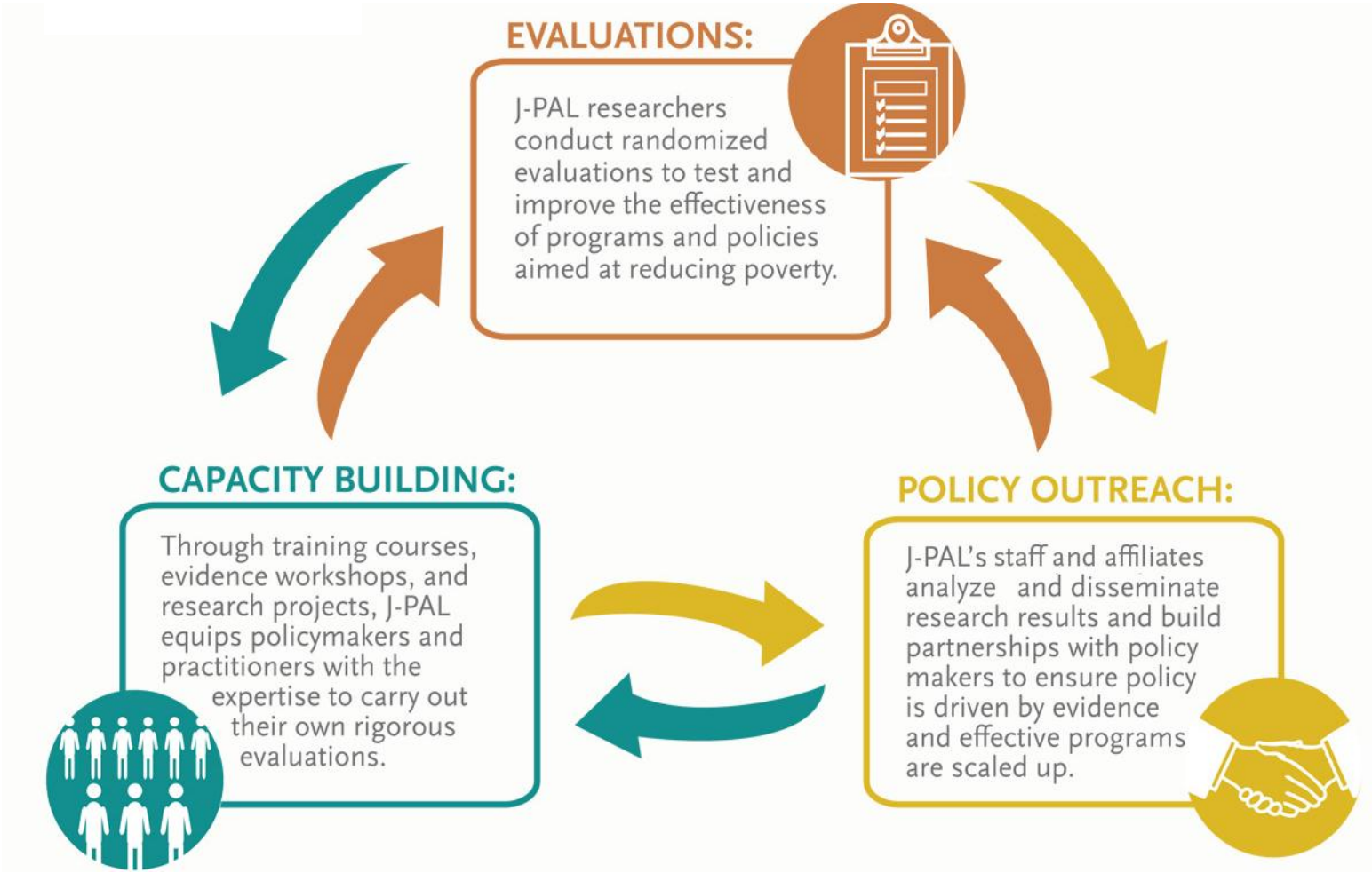
Issues to Keep in Mind

When…

- **Budgets** are **limited** (not all eligible people can be immediately served)
- A program is in a **pilot** stage (and we're still learning whether it works)
- A programs is **phased in over time** (we select who gets it first)

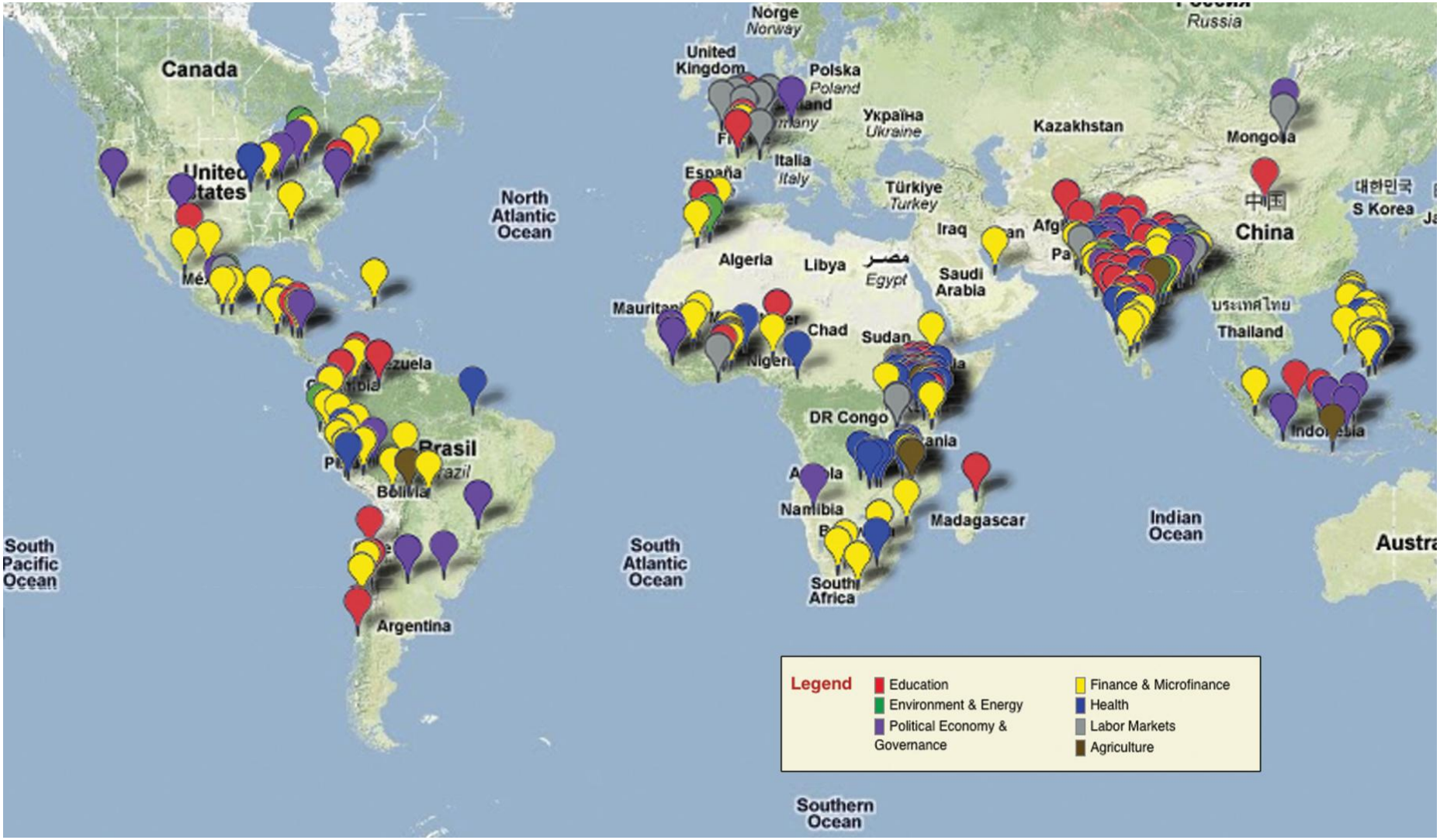
Randomisation is one of the fairest and most transparent ways of determining who receives the program

3 Core Activities

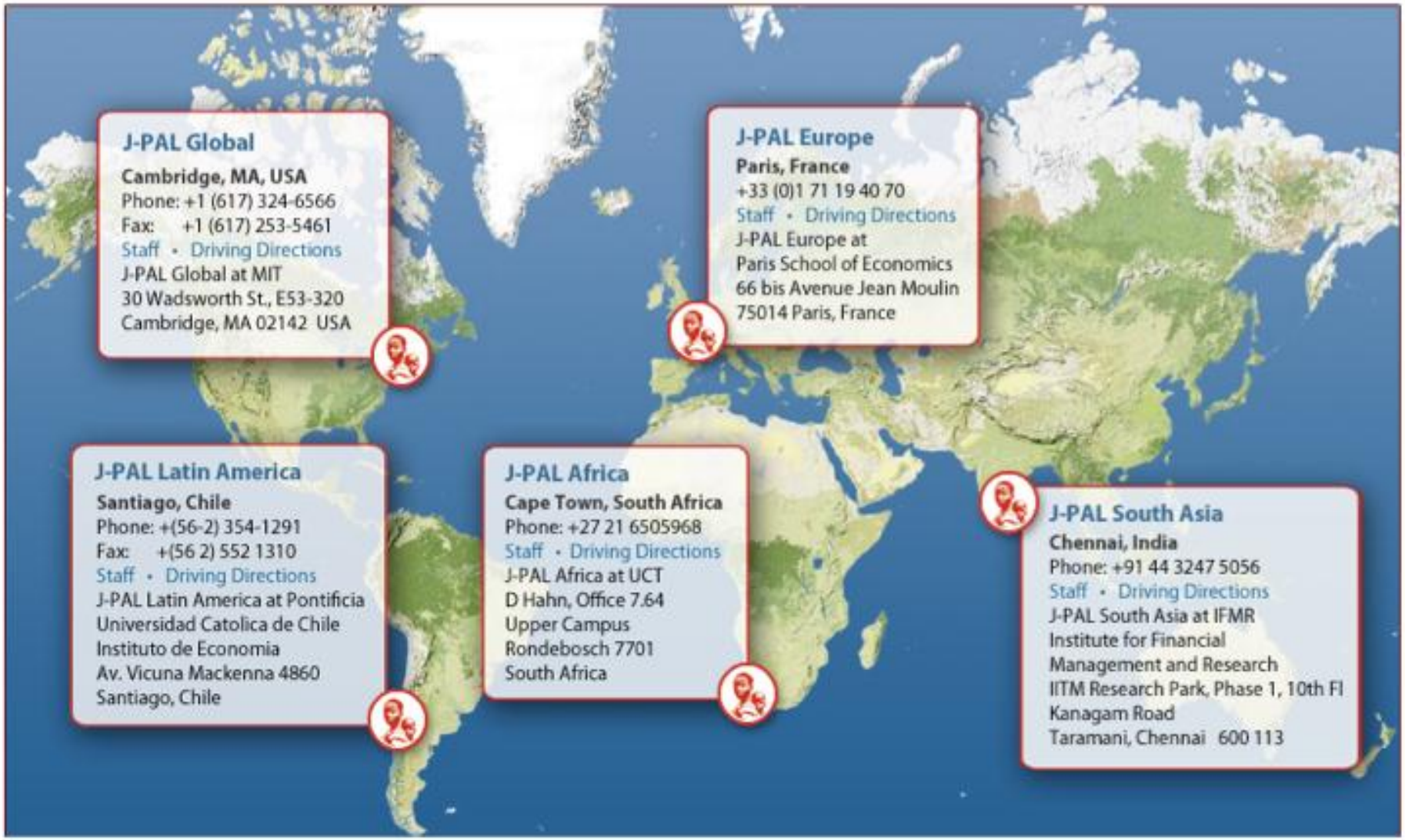
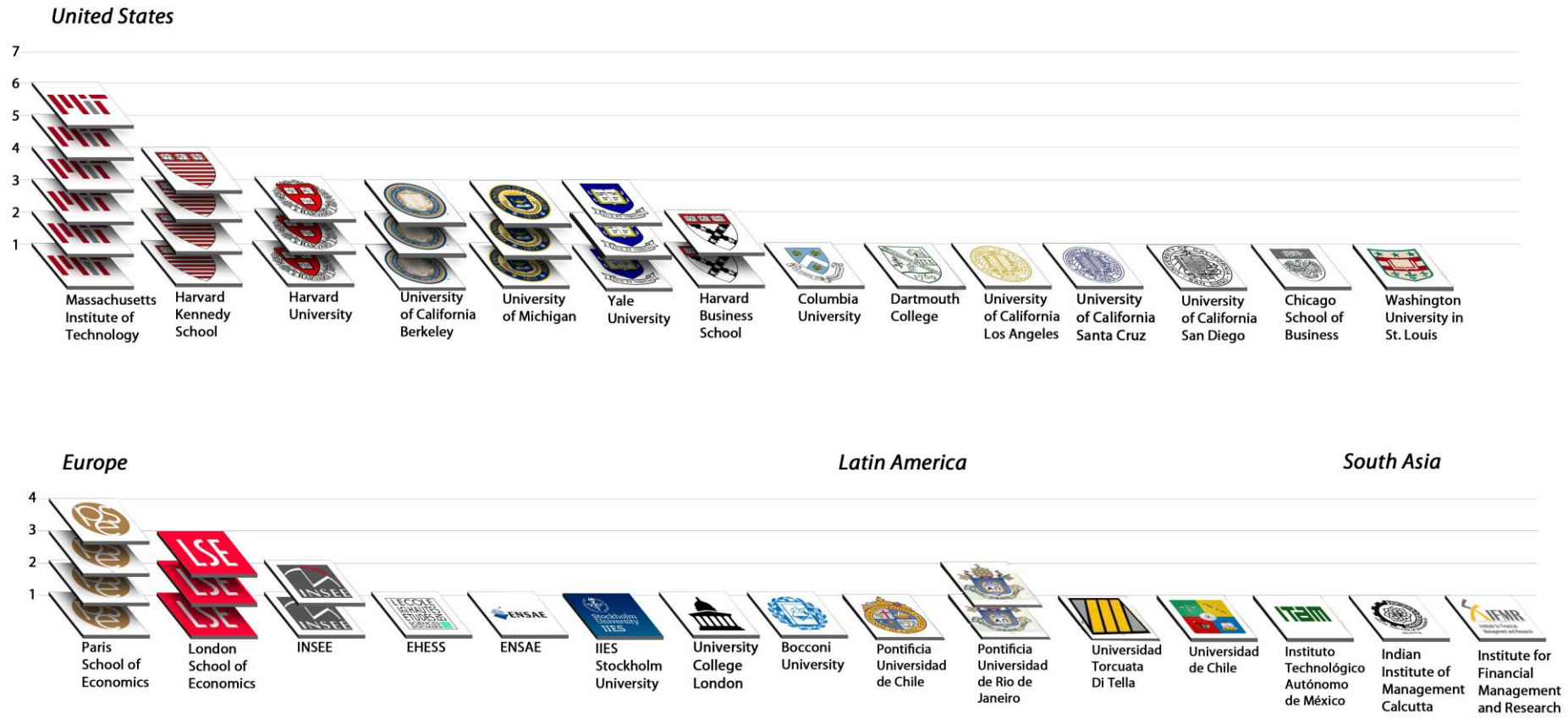


J-PAL'S MISSION IS TO ENSURE THAT POLICY IS DRIVEN BY EVIDENCE AND RESEARCH IS TRANSLATED INTO ACTION
www.povertyactionlab.org
EVALUATIONS:
J-PAL researchers
aimed at reducing poverty.
More than 300 evaluations in J-PAL network
CAPACITY BUILDING:
Through training courses, evidence workshops, and
expertise to carry out their own rigorous evaluations.
More than 1,000 people trained
POLICY OUTREACH:
J-PAL's staff and affiliates
are scaled up.
More than 60 million people reached by policies influenced by J-PAL evidence

344 Completed and Ongoing Evaluations



J-PAL Regional Offices



J-PAL has 70 Professors in its Network of Affiliated Researchers