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NEWSLETTER
April 2021



Photo: Evan Williams | J-PAL

Reducing barriers to higher ed through the Data, Economics, and Development Policy programs

When the J-PAL/MITx MicroMasters in Data, Economics, and Development Policy (DEDP) launched in 2017, any learner with a computer and an internet connection could enroll. Now, four years later, J-PAL staff *dive deeper* into who is enrolling and completing the program to identify potential barriers.

And in January 2021, J-PAL and the MIT Economics department welcomed the second cohort of the DEDP master’s program to campus—all of whom had already completed the online MicroMasters. The thirteen students represent ten countries and come to MIT from a variety of backgrounds.

[Read more](#)

A window for school reform in Africa



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Before the Covid-19 crisis disrupted schools, many students were already in need of classes that helped them to catch up to their grade level. The pandemic has only exacerbated these learning gaps. A new article in *The Economist* highlights how African governments are turning to the [Teaching at the Right Level](#) methodology, developed by Pratham and evaluated by J-PAL affiliated professors, to close these learning gaps. [Read more »](#)



Photo: KAISARMUDA | Shutterstock.com

Generating evidence-informed insights for good governance during Covid-19

The pandemic has emphasized the importance of political participation, anti-corruption efforts, and building state capacity for service delivery—topics which have been central to J-PAL’s [Governance Initiative](#) since its inception in 2011. On our blog, staff highlight recently funded projects that are answering policy-relevant questions in the context of Covid-19. [Read more »](#)



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Building skills and competencies across the Indian bureaucracy

Creating Learning Opportunities for Public Officials, a partnership with [J-PAL South Asia](#), supports all Indian government staff in acquiring and improving upon the professional skills needed to be successful in their current and future roles. The partnership is expanding learning, training, and upskilling opportunities to more than 20 million government officials. [Read more »](#)

Learn more about J-PAL’s response to Covid-19

EVIDENCE-INFORMED DECISION MAKING



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Supporting the design of a social protection program in Chile

Social protection programs have become crucial in providing income to vulnerable groups throughout the Covid-19 crisis. A new Evidence to Policy case study describes how affiliated professors and staff from [J-PAL Latin America and the Caribbean](#) supported the Government of Chile in designing a cash transfer program that reached more than three million households. [Read more »](#)

FEATURED PUBLICATION



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Building resilient health systems in Sierra Leone

More than eight million people in low- and middle-income countries die annually from treatable conditions, in part because patients doubt the quality of the health care system and do not utilize low-cost and potentially life-saving services. J-PAL affiliated professor [Oendriila Dube](#) (UChicago; Co-Chair, J-PAL Crime, Violence, and Conflict sector) and coauthors conducted a randomized evaluation of a community monitoring program and a public recognition award program for health clinics in Sierra Leone, coinciding with the 2014 Ebola crisis. They found that both programs improved clinic utilization, patient satisfaction, and willingness to report symptoms. [Read more »](#)

WELCOMING OUR NEW AFFILIATED PROFESSORS

In summer 2020, 34 new affiliated professors joined the J-PAL network. We'll feature a few of them here each month; click through to read more about their research interests.



Robert Garlick
Duke University



Jonas Hjort
Columbia Business School



Abhijeet Singh
Stockholm School of
Economics

FEATURED EVENTS

[April 22] Covid Dialogues: Cash Grants to Support Female Entrepreneurs

Can providing cash transfers to female entrepreneurs help them withstand shocks related to Covid-19 and improve their economic outcomes? Our next webinar in the [Covid Dialogues series](#) will explore new findings from a randomized evaluation of cash transfers in Kenya, and panelists from Google.org will discuss their philanthropy's insights about cash transfers in sub-Saharan Africa. [Register »](#)

[April 23] Who Delivers Justice? Evidence for Strengthening Dispute Resolution Systems

Citizens often turn to local, informal systems of dispute resolution and justice provision when state institutions are inadequate, overburdened, or unable to reach the population. In the next webinar in J-PAL's [Governance, Crime, and Conflict Initiative](#) series, panelists will share emerging insights from research in Pakistan and South Africa examining different approaches for increasing citizens' willingness to engage with the state for justice provision, and the implications for policymakers. [Register »](#)

Missed our most recent webinar on the state's role in combating violence against women? [Watch the recording »](#)

[April 27] Mobile Money: Impacts, Challenges, and Open Questions

Mobile money has been touted as an innovative tool for expanding access to financial services in low-resource settings, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, which has driven a majority of these transactions in recent years. With support from the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation, [J-PAL Africa](#) is hosting a practitioner-focused webinar to highlight the impacts of mobile money and digital financial services on poverty, open policy and research questions, and challenges for practitioners. [Register »](#)

[May 5] Building on Eight Years of Randomized Evaluations to Improve Health Care Delivery

J-PAL North America's [US Health Care Delivery Initiative](#) is hosting a virtual conference to share lessons learned from eight years of supporting randomized evaluations of health policies and programs. Over five sessions, researchers, practitioners, and policymakers will discuss the importance of strong cross-sectoral and interdisciplinary research partnerships and the role randomized evaluations can play in improving health care delivery in the United States. [Register »](#)

[Webinar Recap] Shifting Social and Gender Norms for Improved Development Outcomes in Egypt

Last month, [J-PAL Middle East and North Africa](#) at the American University in Cairo held a webinar with UNICEF Egypt to share global evidence on shifting social and gender norms to improve development outcomes for girls and women. The webinar featured presentations and discussion from J-PAL affiliated professor [Eliana La Ferrara](#) (Bocconi University), Naglaa El Adly (National Council for Women), and Dina Heikal (UNICEF Egypt). [Read the recap »](#)

FEATURED TRAININGS

Applications open for Evaluating Social Programs courses

How do you know if your organization's programs are achieving their intended impact? Apply for J-PAL's [Evaluating Social Programs](#) course to learn why and when randomized evaluations can be used to rigorously measure social impact and how findings can inform evidence-informed policies and programs. Throughout the training, J-PAL affiliated professors and staff will lead interactive lectures and small-group sessions to engage with these topics live over Zoom. Apply now as space is limited; applications will be reviewed on a rolling basis.

J-PAL/MIT: June 14–17 [Learn more and apply »](#)

[J-PAL Africa: August 9–13](#) [Learn more and apply »](#)

Not able to join us live? Enroll in the free, self-paced online version of [Evaluating Social Programs by May 14](#). [Learn more and register »](#)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

[How to stop the poverty pandemic \[Opinion\]](#)
Project Syndicate

[India's new national education policy: Evidence and challenges](#)
Science

[Leverage edtech's transformational potential](#)
The Hindu

[Digital wages can make fintech inclusive](#)
Mint

[Finding Indonesia's everyday heroes and marking the week of International Women's Day](#)
The Jakarta Post

[NYC schools can help close the Covid achievement gap with tutoring \[Opinion\]](#)
City Limits

NEW RESEARCH PAPERS

[Evaluation of Combined Financial Incentives and Deposit Contract Intervention for Smoking Cessation: A Randomized Controlled Trial](#)
Daren R. Anderson, Samantha Horn, Dean Karlan, Amanda E. Kowalski, Jody L. Sindelar, Jonathan Zinman

[How Important is Temptation Spending? Maybe Less than We Thought](#)
Lasse Brune, Jason T. Kerwin, Qingxiao Li

[Can Successful Schools Replicate? Scaling Up Boston's Charter School Sector](#)
Sarah R. Cohodes, Elizabeth M. Setren, Christopher R. Walters

[Can Youth Empowerment Programs Reduce Violence Against Girls during the Covid-19 Pandemic?](#)
Selim Gulesci, Manuela Puente Beccar, Diego Ubfal

FEATURED JOBS

Research Associate (Adoption and Use of Smart Plugs for Demand Side Management),
New Delhi, India

Research Associate (Social Networks Suite), New Delhi, India

Policy and Communications Undergraduate Intern, Cambridge, MA, US or abroad

Policy Manager, Cambridge, MA, US or abroad

Policy Manager (Firms), Cambridge, MA, US or abroad

[Explore a full list of open positions around the world »](#)

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 220 affiliated professors at universities around the world, J-PAL conducts randomized impact evaluations to answer critical questions in the fight against poverty. We build partnerships with governments, NGOs, donors, and others to share this knowledge, scale up effective programs, and advance evidence-informed decision-making. J-PAL was launched at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2003 and has regional centers in Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, Middle East and North Africa, North America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.



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