



**IMPROVING LIVES THROUGH EVIDENCE**  
Adapting to a changing world

2020–21

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## LETTER FROM THE GLOBAL EXECUTIVE DIRECTOR



Iqbal Dhaliwal

Today, in the midst of a pandemic that has imposed untold suffering on millions worldwide, there are signs of hope on the horizon. Although the vaccine is rolling out worldwide in the coming months, the pandemic will still alter the course of the next decade,

particularly for the world's poorest. J-PAL worked with many new and existing partners in creative ways in 2020 to meet the needs of a changing world.

J-PAL was far from immune to the impact of the pandemic. While the full consequences of the pandemic are still coming to bear, we have seen grants for critical research and scaling put on hold. We have also faced great uncertainty in the research pipeline, forcing us to halt field research, shrink our staff, and leave many key positions unfilled. We pivoted to adjust our research operations from in-person to remote surveys and, through our [Innovations in Data and Experiments for Action \(IDEA\) Initiative](#), leveraged administrative data for rapid research to inform policy responses.

Our work continues to evolve to address new pandemic-related challenges as they arise. We are [collaborating closely with policymakers](#) around the world to ensure that their pandemic responses are informed by relevant existing scientific evidence, and are synthesizing evidence around pressing topics like [increasing adherence to health guidelines](#) and keeping children learning.

Our affiliated researchers have already released results from new research projects designed to inform pandemic responses, including those aimed at [addressing preventive health behaviors](#) and [stemming learning loss](#) despite school closures.

And in the midst of ongoing challenges, J-PAL was fortunate to be able to launch a few new initiatives to strengthen evidence-informed policymaking. With the generous support of King Philanthropies, we launched our biggest research and policy initiative yet, the \$25 million [King Climate Action Initiative](#) (K-CAI), to tackle the challenges of climate change and explore solutions at the intersection of climate and poverty alleviation.

We opened a new regional research center in the Middle East and North Africa in collaboration with the American University in Cairo and longtime J-PAL partner Community Jameel. This new center will focus on generating rigorous research to reduce poverty and support a culture of evidence-informed decision-making in the region.

We are also proud to have launched the [Jobs and Opportunity Initiative](#) (JOI) in partnership with Google.org, and the [Gender and Economic Agency Initiative](#) (GEA) in partnership with the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation. JOI and GEA will support innovative research on pressing labor market challenges and strategies to promote women's work and enhance women's economic agency. This work is even more critical as the pandemic exacerbates enduring unemployment and existing inequalities faced by women in the labor force.

As we look toward 2021, we are seeking knowledge and funding partners to join us in efforts to launch new initiatives aimed to provide evidence-based insights for policymakers related to improving humanitarian response in emergencies, building robust social protection programs, reducing discrimination, and combating disinformation and democratic backsliding.



Members of J-PAL's Worldwide Senior Management Team at their annual retreat with staff from the J-PAL Europe office. Back row, left to right: John Floretta, Lina Marliani, Mary Ann Bates, Sam Friedlander, Anja Sautmann, Maya Duru, Paula Pedro, Shobhini Mukerji. Middle row, left to right: David Sears, Alison Fahey, Anna Kilpatrick, Claudia Macias, Iqbal Dhaliwal, Anna Schrimpf, Laura Feeney, Gaëlle Féneloux, Ashleigh Morrell, Elizabeth Zuckerberg. Bottom row, left to right: Cillian Nolan, Ruben Menon, Jenna Juwono, Ilf Bencheikh, Vincent Quan, Ana Tabacaru, Marie Dubois.

We have reaffirmed our commitment to diversity, equity, and inclusion, setting out a concrete action plan for how we can build on our existing work and be even more proactive about these topics moving forward. This includes improving the diversity of our research network, staff, and leadership; building mentorship of researchers from low- and middle-income countries into our initiative models; and taking steps toward more inclusive research practices and policy engagement.

We are also looking forward to building connections between the research coming out from a new initiative focused on discrimination and our own organizational efforts. For example, we launched an "HR lab" project to use our recruitment data to test and scale diversity, equity, and inclusion practices in our hiring process. These issues are even more critical now as the J-PAL community continues to grow: In 2020 we welcomed 34 new affiliated researchers to [our network](#), bringing the total number up to 225. Our new affiliates are based

in 29 universities across 4 continents. Our pool of invited researchers working with specific initiatives and regions rose to 300.

Amid all the uncertainty, it is more important now than ever to strengthen our bonds with our partners and keep evidence at the forefront of decision-making. As a result of the Covid-19 pandemic, extreme poverty is [increasing](#) worldwide for the first time in more than twenty years; we have a long fight ahead of us.

I sincerely hope that in 2021, we will be able to [build on the lessons learned](#) in 2020 to create a stronger world more equipped to use evidence in the fight against poverty and climate change. Your partnership is invaluable in this journey: Thank you for your continued critical support as we navigate these unprecedented times.

[@IqbalDhali](#) | [@JPAL](#)

## THE YEAR AHEAD



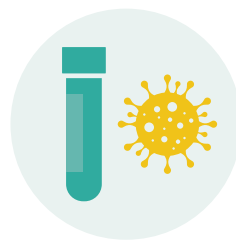
### INNOVATIONS IN RESEARCH

Developing new strategies for safe, cost-effective randomized evaluations that help answer the most critical policy-relevant questions.



### TACKLING THE GLOBAL CLIMATE AND ENERGY CHALLENGE

Designing, testing, and scaling cost-effective, high-impact policy solutions at the nexus of climate change and poverty alleviation.



### PANDEMIC RECOVERY

Conducting rapid-response research and policy engagement to ensure effective pandemic recovery programs that reach those most in need.



### SCALING TO REACH MILLIONS

Partnering with governments to test, innovate, and scale effective approaches that improve lives worldwide.



### STRENGTHENING DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

Increasing the diversity of our staff and research network and ensuring inclusive research, policy engagement, and training.



### EXPLORING NEW PRESSING ISSUES

Designing sustainable infrastructure for social protection programs, reducing discrimination, and combatting misinformation and democratic backsliding.



### ADDRESSING HUMANITARIAN CRISES IN FRAGILE CONTEXTS

Reducing the vulnerability of people living in humanitarian settings and ensuring their basic needs are met.



### EXPANDING REMOTE CAPACITY-BUILDING OPPORTUNITIES

Transitioning more training and educational offerings to a virtual setting to reach a wider audience of researchers and policymakers.

## LAUNCHING J-PAL MENA

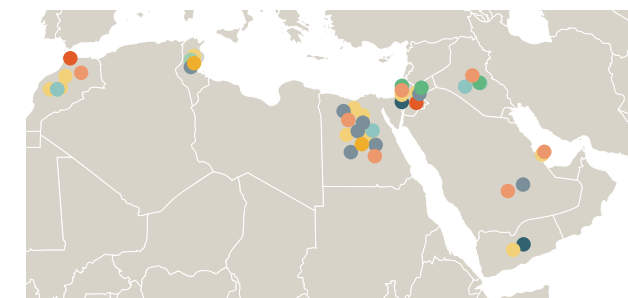
We launched our newest regional research center, J-PAL Middle East and North Africa (MENA), in collaboration with our longtime partner Community Jameel. Based at the American University in Cairo, J-PAL MENA builds on more than a decade of research and policy partnerships in the region led by our affiliates and staff.

As our seventh regional office, J-PAL MENA works with innovative regional academics, policymakers, and development practitioners to co-design, evaluate, and scale effective approaches to reduce poverty and improve the lives of the MENA region's most vulnerable.

J-PAL MENA brings together research, evidence dissemination, and capacity-building efforts to meet strong demand in the region for an evidence-based approach to reducing poverty. Bruno Crépon (ENSAE and École Polytechnique) and Adam Osman (University of Illinois at Urbana-Champaign) serve as scientific directors, with leadership from Alison Fahey as interim executive director.

J-PAL MENA prioritizes research that addresses pressing policy issues in the region, including youth unemployment, social protection, and gender equality—many of which have been exacerbated by the Covid-19 pandemic.

J-PAL AFFILIATES HAVE CONDUCTED 29 ONGOING OR COMPLETED RANDOMIZED EVALUATIONS ACROSS SEVEN SECTORS IN EIGHT COUNTRIES IN THE MENA REGION.



- Crime, Violence, & Conflict
- Gender
- Education
- Health
- Finance
- Labor Markets
- Firms
- Political Economy & Governance

### ABOUT COMMUNITY JAMEEL

Community Jameel innovates for a better world in the fields of education, health, climate and evidence.



Mohammed Jameel



Fady Jameel



Hassan Jameel



*J-PAL's decades of expertise position them to succeed not only in pursuing meaningful research but also in using evidence to deliver impact. We are proud of our longstanding partnership with J-PAL and are committed to supporting its efforts to innovate and change lives in the region.*



– George Richards, Director, Community Jameel

## INNOVATIVE RESEARCH: PIVOTING TO PANDEMIC RESPONSE



West Bengal, India. April 29, 2020. Businesses handed out over 19,000 face masks to the district magistrate of Purba Bardhaman for public use.

Now more than ever, investing in rigorous research is essential to finding solutions to the world's greatest challenges. Our growing network of 225 affiliated researchers and 300+ invited researchers work with local partners across the globe to conduct randomized evaluations that help us understand which approaches are most effective in the fight against poverty.

The pandemic caused unprecedented disruptions to J-PAL's worldwide research operations. In March, we shut down ongoing research in order to preserve the safety of the communities in which we work, as well as our staff, researchers, and partners.

As the pandemic took hold around the world, we pivoted from on-the-ground to virtual research operations, dedicating resources and staff to conducting rapid response research through online and phone surveys to inform pandemic response and recovery. Results from this research are informing Covid-19 policies and programs in Brazil, India, Indonesia, and other countries.

### ENABLING NEW APPROACHES TO PANDEMIC RESPONSE

Many J-PAL research initiatives immediately opened dedicated off-cycle funding rounds to support new research on the most innovative approaches to addressing the impacts of the pandemic. With this focus now embedded in regular cycle rounds, our initiatives have funded rapid research relevant to Covid response, mitigation, and recovery.

This pioneering research includes evaluations of strategies to mitigate the effects of Covid on migration and livelihoods in Uganda, women's employment in Pakistan, and small businesses in Ghana. Research was also undertaken to improve remote learning in Italy and Rwanda, increase mask use in Kenya, decrease school dropout in Chile, reduce intimate partner violence in Colombia, and analyze the impact of Covid-19 on women's access to health care in India, among many other studies.

Our initiatives are also supporting innovative projects that leverage data and technology to support the delivery of critical health and social protection programs.

### INFORMING PANDEMIC RESPONSE

**Togo:** Researchers are using satellite imagery, phone data, and machine learning to assist the government in identifying and targeting cash transfers to the country's most vulnerable individuals.

**India:** Researchers sent short-minute celebrity videos with tips for Covid-19 prevention to 25 million people in West Bengal. After finding the intervention increased reporting of symptoms and good preventative behaviors, researchers are assisting with the scale-up across West Bengal.

**India:** Researchers partnered with the Government of Rajasthan to use state health insurance data to analyze the disproportionate impact of Covid-19 lockdowns on women's access to health care.

## INNOVATIVE RESEARCH: ADAPTING TO NEW REALITIES

### NEW RESEARCH METHODS

The new reality of the Covid-19 pandemic required a new approach to conducting rigorous, high-quality research. J-PAL took action to enable remote research, including partnering with mobile phone companies to reach survey respondents and developing a suite of resources for governments, NGOs, and researchers for conducting effective online and phone surveys.

This created opportunities for J-PAL and our partners to gather data on the immediate needs of people in poverty around the world, from Egypt to Indonesia, in order to ensure targeted government and NGO responses.

### LOOKING AHEAD

The shutdown of in-person research projects benched hundreds of J-PAL staff and threatened the completion of many promising studies, either because the underlying intervention being studied may not resume or because budget extensions may not be possible.

In 2021 J-PAL will seek to limit the long-term disruption of our research efforts by restarting field operations where it is safe to do so and continuing to invest in remote survey techniques in settings where it is not yet safe to conduct field research.

### SUPPORTING SURVEY STAFF

As ongoing research projects were put on hold, one of J-PAL's top priorities was to support our more than 1,200 contracted survey staff, whose effort and dedication is so essential to the quality and rigor of J-PAL research.

To mitigate the impact of the shutdown on these surveyors and their families, we mobilized resources from a generous donor to provide surveyors with eight weeks of wages beyond the suspension of field work.

### CELEBRITY MESSAGING FOR COVID-19 PREVENTION




J-PAL affiliates Marcella Alsan, Abhijit Banerjee, Emily Breza, Arun G. Chandrasekhar, Abhijit Chowdhury, Esther Duflo, Benjamin A. Olken, and Paul Goldsmith-Pinkham designed and implemented an information campaign featuring short celebrity videos with tips for Covid-19 prevention sent to 25 million people via mobile phone in West Bengal, India. Funded by J-PAL's Innovation in Government Initiative, the campaign increased reporting of symptoms and good preventative behaviors. Given these positive results, the researchers are assisting with the scale-up across West Bengal in 2021. [Read the full paper.](#)

### LAUNCHING NEW RESEARCH RESOURCES

J-PAL launched a suite of practical online [research resources](#) designed to help researchers, policymakers, and students carry out high-quality, ethical randomized evaluations.

Incorporating lessons learned through our own experience and through the guidance of researchers and research organizations, the resources provide practical advice for designing, implementing, and communicating about evaluations.

This includes a non-technical overview and step-by-step introduction for those new to randomized evaluations, as well as detailed guidance on:

-  Critical Tasks to Undertake Before Starting a Project
-  Ethical Considerations from Start to Finish
-  Project Planning
-  Research Design
-  Data Collection
-  Data Processing and Analysis

## KING CLIMATE ACTION INITIATIVE (K-CAI)



Orissa, India. Barefoot solar engineer Minakshi Diwan, age 20, is one of four women in her village trained in solar power engineering. Between them, the “barefoot” engineers of Tinginaput have brought electric light to their community and a new path for development.

Climate change disproportionately affects people living in poverty and threatens to reverse decades of progress in global poverty alleviation.

In partnership with King Philanthropies, we launched the King Climate Action Initiative (K-CAI) to design, pilot, evaluate, and scale policy solutions at the nexus of climate change and poverty alleviation, aiming to inform the scale-up of effective climate policies that reach at least 25 million people in the next ten years.

By shedding light on the real world impacts of climate solutions and creating sustained partnerships between researchers and policymakers, K-CAI will build a platform that can continue to shape policy and improve lives far into the future.

“  
*K-CAI will contribute the evidence base and critical action steps needed to confront the two deeply interconnected global crises of poverty and climate change. We selected J-PAL for this major gift because of its track record, its high-performing leadership, and its demonstrated ability to work with governments and other implementers to accelerate impact.*



– Kim Starkey, President and CEO, King Philanthropies

### FOUR PILLARS OF K-CAI

Our research and policy agenda will focus on the four pillars of the global climate and energy challenge:



Mitigation



Adaptation



Pollution reduction



Energy access

### ABOUT KING PHILANTHROPIES

King Philanthropies’ mission is to make a meaningful difference in the lives of the world’s poorest people by multiplying the impact of high-performing leaders and organizations.



Bob and Dottie King

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT: INFORMING PANDEMIC RESPONSE AND RECOVERY

J-PAL works to identify policy lessons emerging from randomized evaluations, conduct outreach to share those lessons broadly, and build partnerships to inform high-level decision-making.

This work is especially critical in times of global crisis, when decisions must be made quickly and confidently with millions of lives at stake. It is also much more difficult given the magnitude and ever-changing nature of our current health and economic challenges, the urgent need for action, the limitations of collecting real-time data, and the inability to meet with policymakers in person.

As policymakers around the world rushed to design policies and programs to support low-income and newly vulnerable populations and build a stable foundation for recovery, J-PAL jumped into action to critically analyze the evidence base related to health behavior change, domestic violence, cash transfers, education, and much more.

Armed with this analysis, we built on already strong partnerships with governments and NGOs to help generate evidence-based pandemic response efforts to reach those most in need.

J-PAL’s regional research centers and researchers worked with dozens of national, state, and local governments around the world to inform their Covid-19 responses with insights from randomized evaluations. This level of engagement reflects the high demand from policymakers not only for evidence, but also for guidance on how to interpret evidence responsibly and effectively in the ever-changing context of the pandemic.

### POLICY SYNTHESIS FOR COVID-19 RESPONSE

J-PAL affiliated researchers and staff critically analyzed the evidence base to draw lessons from existing evidence to inform the multifaceted pandemic response. This includes:

**Crime, Violence, and Conflict:** [Intimate partner violence](#)

**Education:** Remedial education, Remote learning, [School attendance](#)

**Finance:** Universal basic income and cash transfers, Digital financial services

**Firms:** [Access to government support](#), [Remote work](#)

**Gender:** [Gender-based violence](#), [Adolescent pregnancy](#), [Childcare](#)

**Health:** [Designing information campaigns](#), [Leveraging... cash transfers](#), [Building trust in health systems](#), [Improving the delivery of health products and services](#)

**Labor Markets:** Matching firms and workers in recovery, Public works programs

**Political Economy and Governance:** Social protection targeting

### 2020 OFF-CYCLE INITIATIVE FUNDING FOR COVID-RELATED PROJECTS



58

Off-cycle proposals submitted, requesting a total of \$2,640,213



34

Off-cycle proposals funded for a total of \$1,524,842



7

Initiatives opened off-cycle rounds

## POLICY ENGAGEMENT: DRAWING INSIGHTS FROM EVIDENCE

### POLICY INSIGHTS

J-PAL [Policy Insights](#) are a go-to resource for policy recommendations and lessons emerging from randomized evaluations. When combined with a detailed understanding of context and program implementation, J-PAL Policy Insights provide practical guidance for policy and program design.

New policy insights in 2020:

#### Education

- [Improving learning outcomes through school-based health programs](#)
- [Providing information to students and parents to improve learning outcomes](#)
- [Reducing community college dropout through comprehensive supports](#)

#### Energy, Environment, and Climate Change

- [Biomass cookstoves to reduce indoor air pollution and fuel use](#)

#### Finance

- [Reducing the costs of saving](#)

#### Health

- [Encouraging early childhood stimulation from parents and caregivers to improve child development](#)
- [Using cash transfers to improve child health in low- and middle-income countries](#)

#### Political Economy and Governance

- [Increasing accountability and reducing corruption through government audits](#)

### RAISING AWARENESS FOR EVIDENCE-INFORMED POLICYMAKING



51,000+  
Twitter followers



44,000+  
Newsletter subscribers



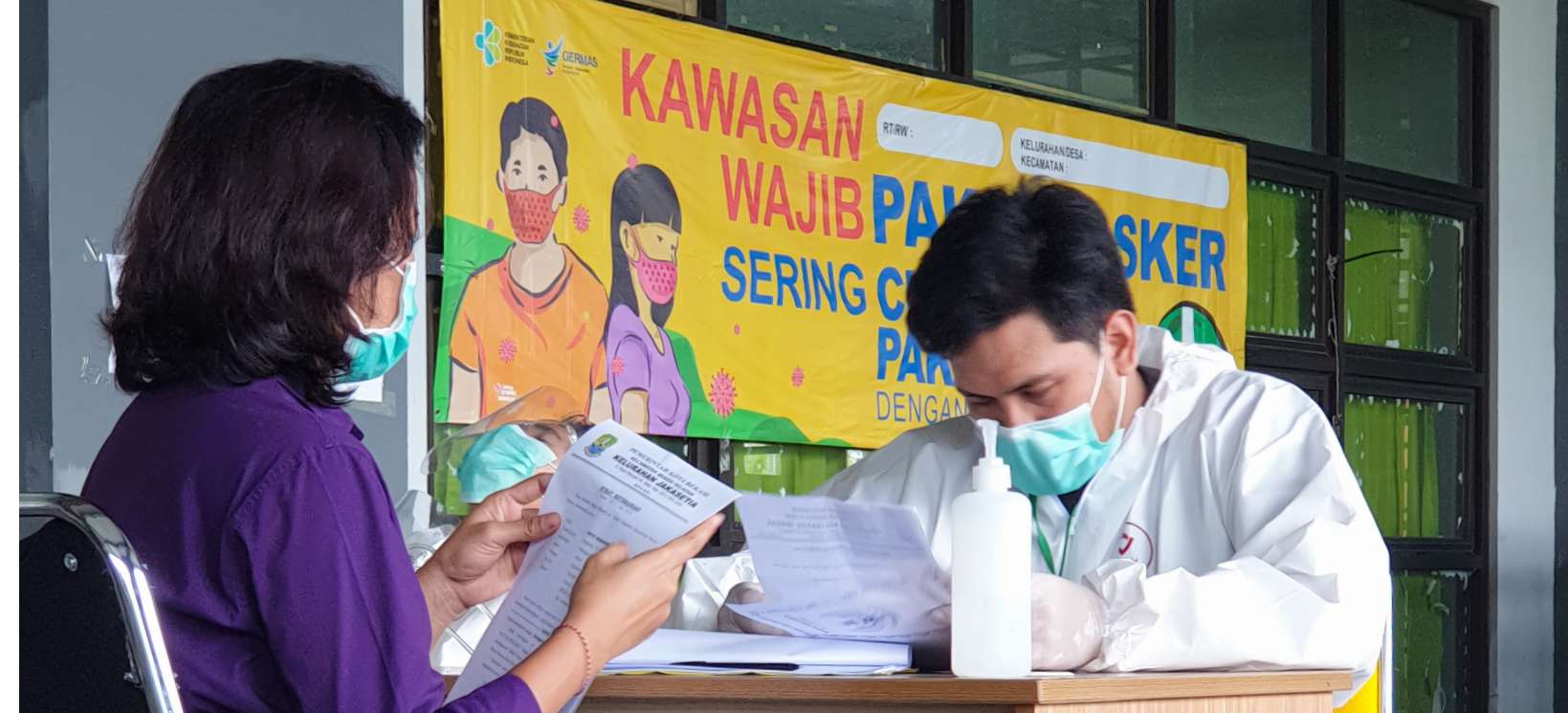
36,800+  
LinkedIn followers



24,000+  
Facebook followers



260+  
Posts on the J-PAL blog



West Java, Indonesia. August 5, 2020. Covid-19 rapid test center at Bekasi Sports Arena.

### SPOTLIGHT ON POLICY ENGAGEMENT:

**Chile:** J-PAL LAC Scientific Director Francisco Gallego and affiliate Claudia Martinez, with support from J-PAL LAC staff, worked closely with the Ministry of Finance to design Chile's cash transfer pandemic relief program, incorporating best practices from a large body of RCT literature. The program reached 7.5 million people in its first five months.

**Indonesia:** J-PAL SEA Scientific Directors Rema Hanna and Benjamin A. Olken worked with Sudarno Sumarto, policy advisor at Indonesia's National Team for the Acceleration of Poverty Reduction, to advise on the use of an evaluated community targeting method to deliver cash transfers to those affected by Covid-19. Informed by this recommendation, the government adopted community targeting for the rollout of its pandemic relief program, reaching over 8 million recipients.

**India:** Global Executive Director Iqbal Dhaliwal joined the Government of Punjab's Group of Experts for Covid-19 Relief to co-develop policy measures for the recovery period, including on agriculture, education, digitization, and social protection. Many of the recommendations made by J-PAL form a part of the final strategy agreed to by the Government. J-PAL will continue to stay engaged in this advisory group.

**CASE STUDY: REFORMING MEXICAN NATIONAL LABOR LAW**

In Mexico, labor courts are often overburdened, and workers typically lack information to make informed decisions on their cases.

Researchers found using a randomized evaluation that providing customized information to plaintiffs on predicted case outcomes or asking them to meet with mediators led to increased settlements and higher-valued payouts for workers.

The Government of Mexico [used insights from the evaluation to inform a national labor law](#) that requires workers to meet with conciliators prior to taking a severance case to trial.

## CAPACITY BUILDING: EXPANDING THE REACH OF ONLINE LEARNING

With a focus on learning and innovation, J-PAL works to build the capacity of researchers who produce evidence, policymakers and donors who use it, and advocates of evidence-informed policy.

Even before Covid-19 forced millions of learners online, J-PAL worked for more than five years to make top-quality trainings and course offerings available virtually. As the pandemic took hold, we suspended all in-person events and moved many more of our trainings and courses online.

We transitioned our Cambridge-based in-person [Evaluating Social Programs](#) course to a series of open-access webinars. And given the urgent need for training in evidence-informed decision-making during the pandemic, we waived all course participant fees, drawing hundreds of new participants.

Paid enrollment in the online [J-PAL/MITx MicroMasters in Data, Economics, and Development Policy](#) increased by more than 200 percent following the pandemic lockdown. To date, more than 2,600 learners from around the world have earned a certificate in a MicroMasters course. The program equips learners with a strong foundation in microeconomics, development economics, and probability and statistics, while enabling them to engage with cutting-edge research in the field.

### FEATURED TRAINING: VIRTUAL WORKSHOP ON EVIDENCE IN YOUTH EMPLOYMENT AND ENTREPRENEURSHIP IN CHILE

J-PAL LAC led a virtual evidence workshop for 120 participants from 57 Chilean civil society organizations and NGOs. The training was designed to help participants understand the importance of robust evidence in the design and formulation of social programs, with a specific focus on impact evaluations of programs to promote youth employment and build entrepreneurship skills.

### DEDP MASTER'S PROGRAM SUMMER CAPSTONE SNAPSHOTS: OPENING DOORS

Following the spring semester at MIT, students in the program complete a summer capstone project that allows them to apply learnings from coursework and gain valuable work experience.



**Max Ghenis**  
Policy Simulation Library



**Wei Lu**  
Data and Evidence for Justice Reform unit of the World Bank



**José Pinilla**  
Center for Effective Global Action



**Alexandria Symonds**  
*The New York Times*



The first cohort of DEDP master's students stand with J-PAL and DEDP faculty directors and staff(\*) in a MIT classroom. Back row, from left: Ritesh Das, Sarah Gault\*, Max Ghenis, Abhijit Banerjee\*, Benjamin A. Olken\*, Harsh Goyal, Olaf Oseguera, Fredric Kong, Isadora Frankenthal, José Pinilla. Second row, from left: Akshay Choudhary, Esther Duflo\*, Helena Lima, Brian Daza, Junita Henry, Manil Zenaki. Third row, from left: James Goh, Lovemore Mawere, Maya Duru\*, Mauricio Móndragon, Adetoun Dapo-Famodu, Frank Hoekman. Front: Nouf Abushehab.

### GRADUATING THE FIRST CLASS OF STUDENTS IN THE INNOVATIVE MASTER'S IN DATA, ECONOMICS, AND DEVELOPMENT POLICY

Twenty-two students from across the world joined us on MIT's campus in January 2020 as the first cohort in the joint [MIT/J-PAL master's program in Data, Economics, and Development Policy \(DEDP\)](#). The program represents a new approach to higher education by combining online coursework through the DEDP MicroMasters program with one residential semester at MIT and a summer capstone project.

Our unique admissions process reflects J-PAL's aim to democratize higher education, making top-level education available to those of all backgrounds. College degrees and standardized test scores are not required for admission—instead, applicants prove their readiness through their performance in the online MicroMasters program.

This policy led to a diverse first cohort of students, with some having spent many years out of school, others with unrelated academic backgrounds, and even a recent high school graduate.

The first cohort of DEDP master's students outperformed traditional MIT students in their economics coursework, and professors who taught them remarked on their above-average engagement with the material.

We witnessed students' strong support for one another when they were forced apart by the pandemic, as MIT moved classes online and asked students to return home; their enthusiasm and commitment to the program continued despite this unprecedented challenge.

We look forward to welcoming our next cohort of DEDP students safely to MIT in January 2021. These thirteen students in the incoming cohort hail from nine countries around the world. All top performers in the MicroMasters courses, the students bring a diverse range of experiences, including working in law, government, central banks, and the United Nations.



## NEW AFFILIATES IN 2020

**Martin Abel**  
Middlebury College

**Gustavo Bobonis**  
University of Toronto

**Rulof Burger**  
Stellenbosch University

**Michela Carlana**  
Harvard Kennedy School

**Guillermo Cruces**  
Universidad Nacional de La Plata;  
University of Nottingham

**Kyle Emerick**  
Tufts University

**Arya Gaduh**  
University of Arkansas

**Robert Garlick**  
Duke University

**Selim Gulesci**  
Bocconi University

**Jonas Hjort**  
Columbia University

**Pamela Jakiela**  
Williams College

**Rachid Laajaj**  
University of Los Andes

**John List**  
University of Chicago

**Bridget Terry Long**  
Harvard Graduate School  
of Education

**Neale Mahoney**  
University of Chicago

**Ofer Malamud**  
Northwestern University

**Felix Masiye**  
University of Zambia

**Robert Metcalfe**  
Boston University

**Paulina Oliva**  
University of Southern California

**Owen Ozier**  
Williams College

**Paolo Pinotti**  
Bocconi University

**Simon Quinn**  
University of Oxford

**Julian Reif**  
University of Illinois

**Natalia Rigol**  
Harvard Business School

**Mauricio Romero**  
Instituto Tecnológico Autónomo  
de México

**Benjamin Roth**  
Harvard Business School

**Heather Royer**  
University of California,  
Santa Barbara

**Alicia Sasser Modestino**  
Northeastern University

**Laura Schechter**  
University of Wisconsin, Madison

**Heather Schofield**  
University of Pennsylvania

**Abu Shonchoy**  
Florida International University

**Abhijeet Singh**  
Stockholm School of Economics

**James Sullivan**  
University of Notre Dame

**Lore Vandewalle**  
Graduate Institute of International  
and Development Studies



Rajasthan, India. January, 2021. A medic gives the first dose of Covishield vaccine to a Anganwadi worker during a Covid-19 vaccination drive.

### RESEARCH IN ACTION: HIGHLIGHTS FROM OUR AFFILIATED RESEARCHERS

Our affiliated researchers are working closely with governments and NGOs to develop and test innovative solutions to issues exacerbated by the pandemic.

[Joshua Blumenstock](#) (University of California, Berkeley), [Dean Karlan](#) (Northwestern University), and [Christopher Udry](#) (Northwestern University) are using satellite imagery, phone data, and machine learning to assist the Government of Togo in [identifying and targeting emergency cash transfers](#) to the country's most vulnerable individuals. This innovative use of nontraditional targeting methods will greatly expand the set of options the government has for reaching poor individuals with critical social programs. This approach also has the potential to scale beyond Togo; the researchers are exploring designing similar strategies to improve the targeting of cash support in Bangladesh and Nigeria.

[Wyatt Brooks](#) (Arizona State University), [Kevin Donovan](#) (Yale University), and coauthor Terence Johnson evaluated the impact of [unconditional cash transfers](#) to female microenterprise owners in Kenya on economic outcomes during the pandemic. They found that firm profits, inventory spending, and food expenditures all increased, as did the likelihood of re-opening the business during the pandemic. They conclude that cash transfers should be accompanied by public health messaging to encourage businesses to follow safety practices when reopening.

[Pascaline Dupas](#) (Stanford University) and coauthor Radhika Jain partnered with the Government of Rajasthan to use state health insurance data to analyze the [impact of Covid-19 lockdowns](#) on women's access to health care. They found that lockdowns had disproportionate effects on non-Covid health care for women and socioeconomically disadvantaged groups, leading to disruptions in necessary treatment and increased mortality.

[Francisco Gallego](#) (Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile), with support from J-PAL LAC, designed and evaluated an SMS information campaign in Chile targeting parents of students who dropped out of school in 2020. The messages were informed by evidence on nudge theory and included a link to a website containing detailed information on how to re-enroll their child. Based on promising results, Francisco and J-PAL LAC are working with Chile's Ministry of Education to further test and expand upon the program for the 2021 school year.

[Eliana La Ferrara](#) (Bocconi University) and [Michela Carlana](#) (Harvard University) evaluated a program in Italy that provided individual [online tutoring](#) to middle school students from underprivileged backgrounds to address inequalities in education exacerbated by Covid-19-related school closures. They found that after three months, the tutoring program improved students' academic performance and well-being during the lockdowns.

[Read more about our affiliates.](#)

## GLOBALY INFORMED, LOCALLY GROUNDED

J-PAL's seven regional centers are based at local research universities and lead our research, policy engagement, and capacity building work around the world. Select achievements are highlighted below.



### J-PAL NORTH AMERICA

- Launched the [Economics Transformation Project](#) to broaden participation in and support for the work and well-being of underrepresented voices in the field of economics.
- Produced a [Mobility from Poverty Learning Agenda](#) that summarizes core research priorities from state and local governments and provides guidance for concrete action.
- Launched the [Covid-19 Recovery and Resilience Initiative](#) to promote evidence-based policies to inform pandemic response and recovery.



### J-PAL EUROPE

- Launched [Evidence in Europe](#), a web portal summarizing insights from eighty randomized evaluations in twenty European countries.
- Developed a new partnership with the international NGO Médecins du Monde to evaluate a mobile health system for refugees and migrants in Turkey.
- Received a major eight-year grant from the French National Research Agency to drive experimental innovations in education in France by providing tools for improving access to administrative data, cutting-edge equipment for measurement, and network and capacity building tools.



### J-PAL MIDDLE EAST AND NORTH AFRICA

- J-PAL MENA was launched as our seventh regional research center based at the American University in Cairo in collaboration with Community Jameel.
- Launched the [Morocco Employment Lab](#) in partnership with the US Millennium Challenge Corporation, Millennium Challenge Account-Morocco, Harvard's Evidence for Policy Design, and the Policy Center for the New South.
- Expanded research partnerships with the Egyptian government to include capacity building and administrative data analysis.



### J-PAL SOUTH ASIA

- Advised government partners on strategies for pandemic response; launched more than fifteen studies to [better understand the effects of the pandemic](#) on the region's most vulnerable, with the majority in collaboration with governments.
- Transitioned nearly thirty studies to [contactless data collection](#) covering more than 110,000 individuals across nine Indian states; conducted 500+ hours of remote training with 400 research staff.
- Partnered with the government of the Indian state of Odisha to maximize the impact of state anti-poverty programs, and with the Government of India's principal advisory body to strengthen M&E systems in central and state governments.



### J-PAL LATIN AMERICA AND THE CARIBBEAN

- Advised the Government of Chile on pandemic response related to social protection, resulting in Chile's Family Emergency Income program, as well as policies on education and employment.
- Launched collaboration with Peru's Ministry of Economy and Finance, and Innovations for Poverty Action, to evaluate innovations to improve state capacity and increase productivity.
- More than 2,100 students completed the Spanish- and Portuguese-language versions of J-PAL's flagship [Evaluating Social Programs](#) online course.



### J-PAL AFRICA

- Funded rapid response research on the impact of digital finance programs on low-income and vulnerable populations.
- Engaged with partners on effective approaches to improving remote learning, boosting school enrollment when schools resume, reducing intimate partner violence, and supporting girls' education and empowerment.
- Expanded [Teaching at the Right Level Africa](#) with fifteen new hires based in Côte d'Ivoire, Kenya, Nigeria, and Zambia.



### J-PAL SOUTHEAST ASIA

- Launched multiple nationwide surveys in collaboration with the Government of Indonesia to better understand the impact of the pandemic and inform policy responses.
- Provided policy guidance to the Government of Indonesia on community monitoring methods that were incorporated in their pandemic response; participated in the government's Expert Group on pandemic relief.
- Published a [literature review](#) that summarizes global research on inclusive financial innovation and proposed future directions for evidence generation.

## OUR COMMITMENT TO DIVERSITY, EQUITY, AND INCLUSION

J-PAL fundamentally seeks to reduce human suffering in all its forms. Promoting the dignity and agency of all people is a very important part of this mission.

We are working toward increasing the diversity of our research network, staff, and the places in which we conduct research; and are prioritizing equity and inclusion in our work. We have undertaken many efforts over the years to further this goal and believe that there is significant need to do much more.

Reflecting the global nature of our work, the 500+ researchers in the J-PAL network are based in 32 countries and have carried out more than 1,000 studies in more than 89 countries. We've opened regional research centers in Africa, Europe, Latin America and the Caribbean, the Middle East and North Africa, North America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, with leadership and staff from those regions. Similarly, our hundreds of policy, implementation, and funding partners are based in dozens of countries.

We have also undertaken specific efforts to address the lack of diversity in economics research and support DEI at J-PAL. Some examples include:

- MIT and J-PAL created [the online MicroMasters in Data, Economics, and Development Policy \(DEDP\)](#) and [the new full Master's in DEDP](#) as a new model for higher education, decreasing financial and geographic barriers to enrollment and creating non-traditional pathways to master's degree programs.
- [J-PAL North America's Economic Transformation Project](#) provides workshops, mentorship programming, and networking opportunities to broaden participation and support the work and well-being of underrepresented voices in the field of economics.
- J-PAL's [Gender Working Group](#) includes staff from our seven regional centers worldwide and works to build staff capacity and skills in gender analysis and gender sensitive communication, strengthen the gender lens in research, and affirm our commitment to gender equality in the workplace.

### AFRICAN SCHOLARS PROGRAM

J-PAL's Digital Identification and Finance Initiative in Africa launched the African Scholars Program in 2019. Chaired by J-PAL affiliate Tavneet Suri, it provides dedicated funding for researchers based at an African academic institution, or who completed high school in Africa and are based abroad, to drive the research agenda on digital identification and payments on the African continent.

The program funds exploratory work and connects participants with J-PAL affiliates who can serve as formal or informal research partners. It is designed to strengthen the pipeline of researchers from Africa who specialize in randomized evaluations; as of late 2020 the program has funded 11 resident scholars and 1 non-resident scholar in five countries, and J-PAL is exploring piloting this program in more regions in 2021.

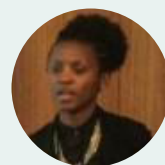
The program also aims to increase the number of African students enrolled in top PhD programs in social sciences via close mentoring.

The J-PAL Africa office is also spearheading numerous efforts to increase the number of African students enrolled in top PhD programs in social sciences. In 2020, they hosted their first webinar for African students interested in enrolling in US-based economics PhD programs, featuring advice from admissions counselors on how to navigate the application process.



#### Dr. Kodjo Aflagah

Dr. Kodjo Aflagah is a postdoctoral associate at J-PAL Africa, where he works with TaRL Africa and DigiFI.



#### Dr. Faith Masekesa

Dr. Faith Masekesa is a postdoctoral associate at J-PAL Africa, where she supports an administrative data partnership with the City of Cape Town.



J-PAL staff convene on Zoom in early January for 2021 strategic planning.

### J-PAL'S DEI PRIORITIES

While much effort and progress have been made to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion in our work, there is significant need to do much more. As a global organization, J-PAL is committed to learning and working together with partners to create more equitable approaches to increasing economic opportunity for all.

We are in the process of developing a robust DEI strategy across many dimensions, including:

- Increasing diversity in the economics profession and in J-PAL's research network;
- Strengthening inclusion in our research and partnerships;
- Strengthening inclusive policy outreach and communications;
- Increasing staff diversity; and
- Ensuring an inclusive workplace in which all staff feel welcomed, valued, and empowered.

We will share more detail on the activities that support these efforts in 2021.

### FEATURE: INNOVATIVE RESEARCH

Many researchers in the J-PAL network are evaluating interventions to reduce bias, discrimination, and inequality; to improve equitable access to public services; and to generate better economic opportunities for people from historically marginalized groups.

J-PAL's United States Health Care Delivery Initiative funded an [evaluation](#) of the impact of provider race on health outcomes of Black men. The study found that seeing a Black male doctor significantly boosted demand for all preventive health services, especially for more invasive tests.

In Uganda, J-PAL's Jobs and Opportunity Initiative funded a [pilot project](#) exploring whether providing incentives for local businesses to hire refugees can reduce discrimination and improve refugees' employment prospects. Results are forthcoming.

In India, researchers [evaluated](#) the impact of classroom discussions about gender discrimination on adolescents' gender attitudes, aspirations, and behaviors. The program was effective in improving support for gender equality and led students, particularly boys, to engage in more gender-equitable behavior.

In Turkey, J-PAL's Crime and Violence Initiative funded an [evaluation](#) of a school-based program designed to foster social cohesion for refugee children. The study found that the program encouraged students to be more inclusive and reduced peer violence.

## J-PAL LEADERSHIP

### WORLDWIDE LEADERSHIP

**Abhijit Banerjee**  
Director

**Esther Duflo**  
Director

**Benjamin A. Olken**  
Director

**Iqbal Dhaliwal**  
Global Executive Director

**John Floretta**  
Global Deputy Executive Director

**David Sears**  
Director, Finance and Operations

### SECTOR CHAIRS

**Agriculture**  
**Craig McIntosh**  
UC San Diego

**Tavneet Suri**  
MIT

**Crime, Violence, & Conflict**  
**Chris Blattman**  
University of Chicago

**Oeindrila Dube**  
University of Chicago

**Jens Ludwig**  
University of Chicago

**Education**  
**Karthik Muralidharan**  
UC San Diego

**Philip Oreopoulos**  
University of Toronto

**Environment, Energy, & Climate Change**  
**Michael Greenstone**  
University of Chicago

**Kelsey Jack**  
UC Santa Barbara

### Finance

**Dean Karlan**  
Northwestern University

### Firms

**David Atkin**  
MIT

**Nicholas Bloom**  
Stanford University

### Gender

**Secma Jayachandran**  
Northwestern University

### Health

**Joseph Doyle**  
MIT

**Pascaline Dupas**  
Stanford University

**Karen Macours**  
Paris School of Economics

### Labor Markets

**Marianne Bertrand**  
University of Chicago

**Bruno Crépon**  
ENSAE and École Polytechnique

### Political Economy & Governance

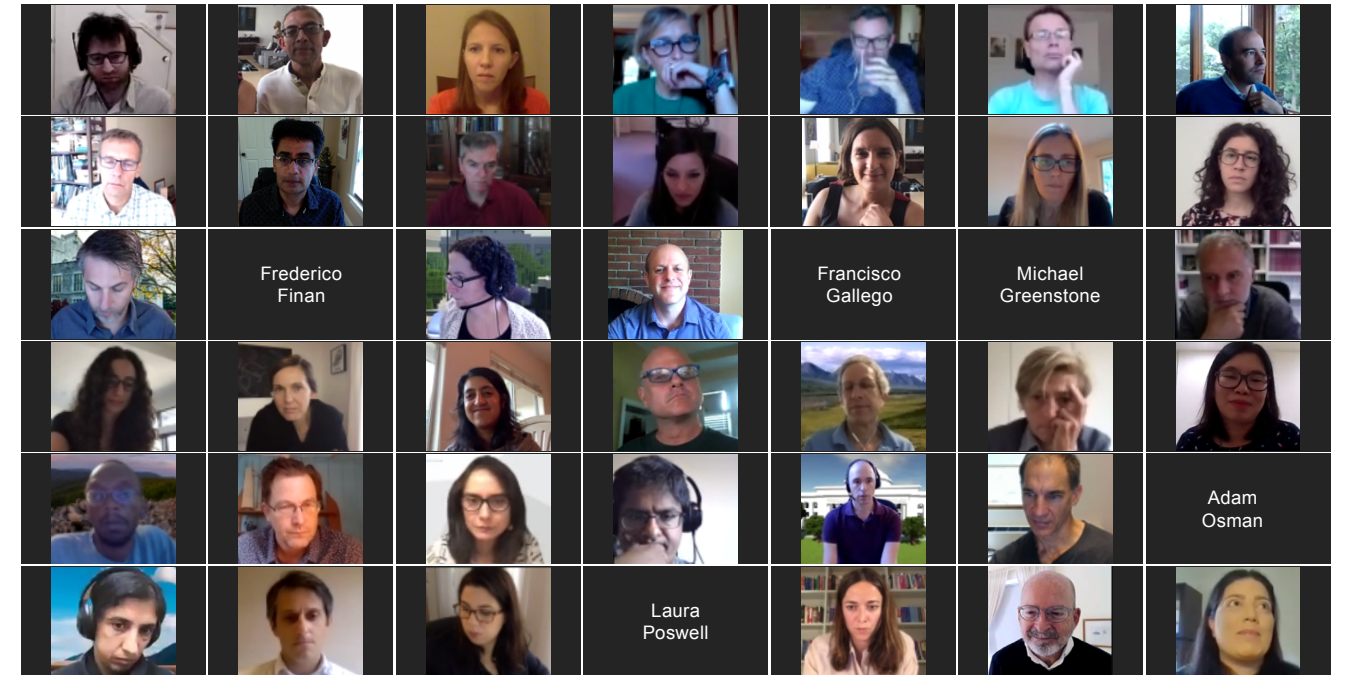
**Frederico Finan**  
University

**Rohini Pande**  
Yale University

### Research, Education, & Training

**Shawn Cole**  
Harvard University

**William Parienté**  
Université Catholique de Louvain



J-PAL's annual Board of Directors meeting moved to Zoom in 2020.

### REGIONAL OFFICES

#### Africa

**Isaac Mbiti**, University of Virginia  
Scientific Director

**Tavneet Suri**, MIT  
Scientific Director

**Laura Poswell**  
Executive Director

#### Europe

**Abhijit Banerjee**, MIT  
Scientific Director

**Marc Gurgand**, Paris School of Economics  
Scientific Director

**Anna Schrimpf**  
Executive Director

#### Latin America & the Caribbean

**Claudio Ferraz**, University of British Columbia  
Scientific Director

**Francisco Gallego**, Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile  
Scientific Director

**Paula Pedro**  
Executive Director

#### North America

**Amy Finkelstein**, MIT  
Scientific Director

**Lawrence Katz**, Harvard University  
Scientific Director

**Mary Ann Bates**  
Executive Director

#### Middle East and North Africa

**Bruno Crépon**, ENSAE and École Polytechnique  
Scientific Director

**Adam Osman**, University of Illinois at Urbana Champaign  
Scientific Director

**Alison Fahey**  
Interim Executive Director

#### South Asia

**Iqbal Dhaliwal**, J-PAL at MIT  
Scientific Director

**Esther Duflo**, MIT  
Scientific Director

**Shobhini Mukerji**  
Executive Director

#### Southeast Asia

**Rema Hanna**, Harvard University  
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