Evidence-Based Policy Cause Area Report

AUTHOR:
MARINELLA CAPRIATI, DPHIL

11/18

Executive Summary

By supporting increased use of evidence in the governments of low- and middle-income countries, donors can dramatically increase their impact on the lives of people living in poverty. This report explores how focusing on evidence-based policy provides an opportunity for leverage, and presents the most promising organisation we identified in this area.

A high-risk/high-return opportunity for leverage

In the 2013 report 'The State of the Poor', the World Bank reported that, as of 2010, roughly 83% of people in extreme poverty lived in countries classified as 'lower-middle income' or below.

By far the most resources spent on tackling poverty come from local governments. American think tank the Brookings Institution found that, in 2011, $2.3 trillion of the $2.8 trillion spent on financing development came from domestic government revenues in the countries affected.

There are often large differences in the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of social programs—the amount of good done per dollar spent can vary significantly across programs. Employing evidence allows us to identify the most cost-effective social programs. This is useful information for donors choosing which charity to support, but also for governments choosing which programs to implement, and how.

This suggests that employing philanthropic funding to improve the effectiveness of policymaking in low- and middle-income countries is likely to constitute an exceptional opportunity for leverage: by supporting the production and use of evidence in low- and middle-income countries, donors can potentially enable policy makers to implement more effective policies, thereby reaching many more people than direct interventions.

For many organisations working on policy, most of their positive results come from only a few exceptionally successful programs. This is because success is extraordinarily hard to achieve in this area, since policymaking is a complex and often unpredictable process. However, when successful, changes can be highly impactful because of the large number of people they reach.

Because of the way impact is distributed across different projects, supporting policy interventions is a high-risk/high-return investment; most investments are likely to fail, but the successful ones are likely to have an enormous impact.

Selecting charities

We started with an initial list of over 90 charities, and based on expert advice and desk research, we progressively narrowed down the focus to select the donation opportunity we deemed most promising in this area.

We assess charities based on their cost-effectiveness, organisational strength, transparency, and room for more funding. Three factors are central when evaluating future cost-effectiveness of organisations working in policy: track record, project selection, and theory of change.

When assessing track record, we focus on selected case studies, and estimate the benefits derived from those projects. We use this as a proxy of the organisation's overall impact because the positive impact created by policy organisations often comes from a few exceptionally successful programs.

When assessing project selection, we consider two factors. First, we focus on the quality of evidence used, since higher-quality evidence indicates higher likelihood that the suggested policies will be effective. Second, we focus on the role cost-effectiveness plays in organisational decision-making procedures; the more the charity's decision-making criteria explicitly target effectiveness and cost-effectiveness, the more confident we are in the organisation's future cost-effectiveness.

When assessing an organisation's theory of change, we consider whether the organisation employs strategies supported by the literature, such as involving policymakers in the planning and development of research, building long-term relationships, and employing tailored messaging.

Charity recommendation: the Innovation in Government Initiative

Our recommendation in this area is the Innovation in Government Initiative (IGI), a project of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). J-PAL is a global research centre and network of researchers whose mission is to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. IGI is a re-granting fund: they raise funds and then select projects to support.

IGI funds research grants, grants to support technical assistance for scale-ups of evidence-based programs, and grants to support technical assistance for the use of evidence more broadly. They support the partnering of governments with: J-PAL offices, J-PAL affiliated researchers, and/or the offices of Innovations for Poverty Action, a research organisation J-PAL closely collaborates with. IGI has so far re-granted roughly $2.6 million, funding 28 partnerships in 15 countries.

Cost-effectiveness and track record

To assess IGI's track record, we focused on their contribution to two policy changes. These case studies were chosen because IGI considered them their most effective projects to date. To estimate the organisation's past cost-effectiveness, we estimate the benefits deriving from those case studies and the costs the organisation has borne since the oldest case study.

The first project took place in India and focused on the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme, the country's largest social protection program. A series of reforms simplified the way funds were disbursed to beneficiaries. The simplification likely led to large savings by decreasing opportunities for corrupt officers to appropriate funds, and reducing 'idle funds' (funds sitting in accounts that earn no interest). The second policy change we looked at took place in Zambia, where the Ministry of Education piloted, and then decided to scale up, 'Catch-up', a program delivering remedial education. This consists of grouping children according to their learning level (rather than age or grade) for part of the time they spend at school. Evidence suggests it is one of the most cost-effective ways to improve learning. In both cases, we think it is likely that the reforms significantly improved the well-being of affected citizens and that IGI played a central role in making the reforms happen. Our cost-effectiveness analysis suggests that IGI are roughly 3–4 times more cost-effective than direct cash transfers.[1]

IGI implements most of the strategies supported by the literature. For example: they require each project to be formally endorsed by decision-makers involved in the relevant policy; they seek to build long-term personal relationships between government and J-PAL researchers; they have a quick turn-around time; and they accept proposals outside their official funding cycle for urgent projects, to take advantage of policy windows.

Organisational strength and transparency

IGI has a lean structure. Decisions about the grants are made by the Advisory Board, which consists of J-PAL affiliated professors. They currently have two staff members, both working for IGI half-time. IGI has been transparent throughout our interactions and provided all data we asked for.

---

[1] Cash transfers is a category of highly effective interventions, often used as a benchmarking of other anti-poverty interventions; at the very least, a program providing services or materials should be more beneficial than simply giving the equivalent cash directly to the beneficiaries. Read more about on the website of our research partner GiveWell. "Cash Transfers," GiveWell, accessed November 16, 2018, https://www.givewell.org/international/technical/programs/cash-transfers.

Room for more funding

As of January 2018, IGI is no longer planning a request for proposals (RFP), due to lack of funding. They aim to raise an additional $5 million from multiple funding partners to meet demand from policymakers, researchers, and J-PAL offices for support over the next three years. They are open to different forms of funding partnership, including support for all three of IGI's priority activities, a dedicated fund that would support just one of these, or a grant to support partnerships in a specific geographic region or sector. $500,000 would support one 'request for proposal' round that would lead to funding of 2-4 partnerships.

Acknowledgements

Table of Contents

1. Evidence-Based Policy in Low and Middle-Income Countries

In this section we explore why evidence-based policy in low- and middle-income countries is a promising area to focus on. We start by highlighting that the factors that affect well-being, such as income, health and education, vary widely among these countries. We then point out that local governments are the largest source of spending to improve the well-being of people living in poverty. Finally, we stress how, as is the case for philanthropy, evidence can help direct funding towards the most cost-effective programs.

1.1. Poverty in low- and middle-income countries

Poverty is a multi-faceted concept, encompassing several different factors which all impact the lives of the poor. Many of those factors differ widely among different countries.

In 2013, over 740 million people were living in extreme poverty.[2] The 2013 report 'The State of the Poor', published by the World Bank, reported that in 2010 roughly 83% of people living in extreme poverty lived in countries classified as 'lower-middle income' or below.[3]

In 2011, 37% of out-of-school children lived in low-income countries and 49% in lower-middle income countries.[4]

Health losses are measured using a unit called 'disability-adjusted-life-year' (DALY), which can be thought of as one lost year of healthy life.[5] The Global Burden of Disease is a research project that collects information on the health loss from different diseases, injuries, and risk factors across the world.[6] Their data indicates that in 2017, in high- and upper-middle income countries roughly 28,000 DALYs were lost per 100,000 people, while the number increased to roughly 36,000 DALYs for lower middle-income countries and 48,000 DALYs for low-income countries.[7]

Moreover, large differences persist in terms of resources addressed to tackle these challenges. In the 2018 'The Status of Social Safety Nets' the World Bank reports that "The absolute benefit level

---

[2] The World Bank defines extreme poverty as living on less than $1.90 a day.
[3] Pedro Olinto et al., "The State of the Poor: Where Are The Poor, Where Is Extreme Poverty Harder to End, and What Is the Current Profile of the World's Poor?," 2013, 8.
[4] United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organisation (UNESCO), 2014. Teaching and learning: Achieving quality for all. Education for All Global Monitoring Report.
[5] "WHO | Metrics: Disability-Adjusted Life Year (DALY)," WHO, accessed May 17, 2018, http://www.who.int/healthinfo/global_burden_disease/metrics_daly/en/·
[6] "About GBD," Institute for Health Metrics and Evaluation, April 18, 2014, http://www.healthdata.org/gbd/about.
[7] "GBD Compare | IHME Viz Hub," accessed November 20, 2018, http://vizhub.healthdata.org/gbd-compare.

per household also differs significantly across country income groups. In a subsample of 36 countries that have flagship (main) programs with the household as

a beneficiary unit [...], the benefit amount (in [purchasing power parity (PPP)] $) per household is four times greater in upper middle-income countries than in low-income countries—PPP $106 versus PPP $27, respectively".[8]

The 'Education for All' report published by UNESCO in 2015 reports that spending per capita on primary education in 2012 was $100 in low-income countries, roughly $470 in middle-income countries and roughly $6800 in high-income countries.[9]

The figure below depicts country shares of global health expenditure in 2015 by income group and shows that the large majority of resources are spent by high-income countries.

[8] World Bank. 2018. The State of Social Safety Nets 2018. Washington, DC: World Bank. © World Bank. https://openknowledge.worldbank.org/handle/10986/29115 License: CC BY 3.0 IGO.
[9] "Education for all 2000-2015: achievements and challenges", UNESCO http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0023/002322/232205e.pdf. Spending is expressed in PPP constant 2011, US$

Figure 1.

Country shares of global health expenditure in 2015, by income group
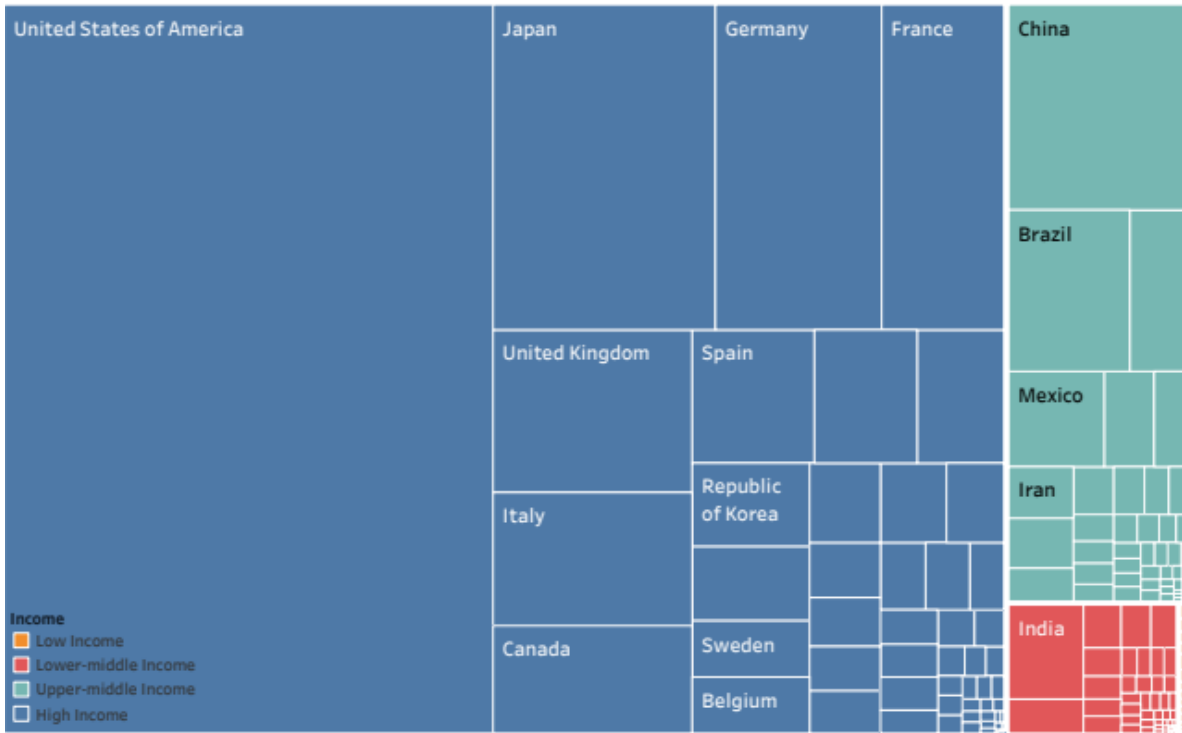
Source: WHO, New Perspectives on Global Health Spending for Universal Health Coverage[10]

In what follows, we focus on policy in low and middle-income countries. We use the term 'low- and middle-income countries' broadly, to include all countries facing pressing poverty challenges. We do not use the specific ranking provided by the World Bank, or other precise categories provided by different research institutions, such as the 'low or medium social-demographic index' used by the Global Durden of Disease,[11] or 'medium and low human development' countries used in the Human Development Reports.[12] While in many contexts it is important to distinguish between those rankings, we do not find it helpful to distinguish between them for this report, as finding promising philanthropic opportunities does not depend on these precise categorisations. However, the scale of poverty and resources directed towards it vary widely across countries, and this is a good reason to focus on countries in which poverty is more pressing. We decided against using other

[10] World Health Organization. "New perspectives on global health spending for universal health coverage." (2017).
[11] "Global Burden of Disease Study 2015 (GBD 2015) Socio-Demographic Index (SDI) 1980–2015 | GHDx," accessed September 17, 2018, http://ghdx.healthdata.org/record/global-burden-disease-study-2015-gbd-2015-socio-demographic-index-sdi-1980%E2%80%932015.
[12] "| Human Development Reports," accessed November 19, 2018, http://hdr.undp.org/en/countries.

terminology which is usually used to distinguish between the measures in a broad way because many of the terms in this area have negative connotations. For example, the term 'developing countries' can be perceived as a judgment of the country's development status.[13]

1.2. Why focus on policy?

When we look at the total resources spent to improve the well-being of people living in poverty in low- and middle-income countries, we find that the **resources spent by governments amount to several times the resources from other sources, such as philanthropy and foreign aid**. A report from the Brookings Institution found that in 2011, $2.3 trillion of the $2.8 trillion spent on financing development came from domestic government revenues.[14] In several low- and middle-income countries, government spending has increased in recent years (Figure 2) and a growing percentage of these funds is dedicated to anti-poverty policies (Figure 3).

Figure 2.

Real growth in government consumption expenditure
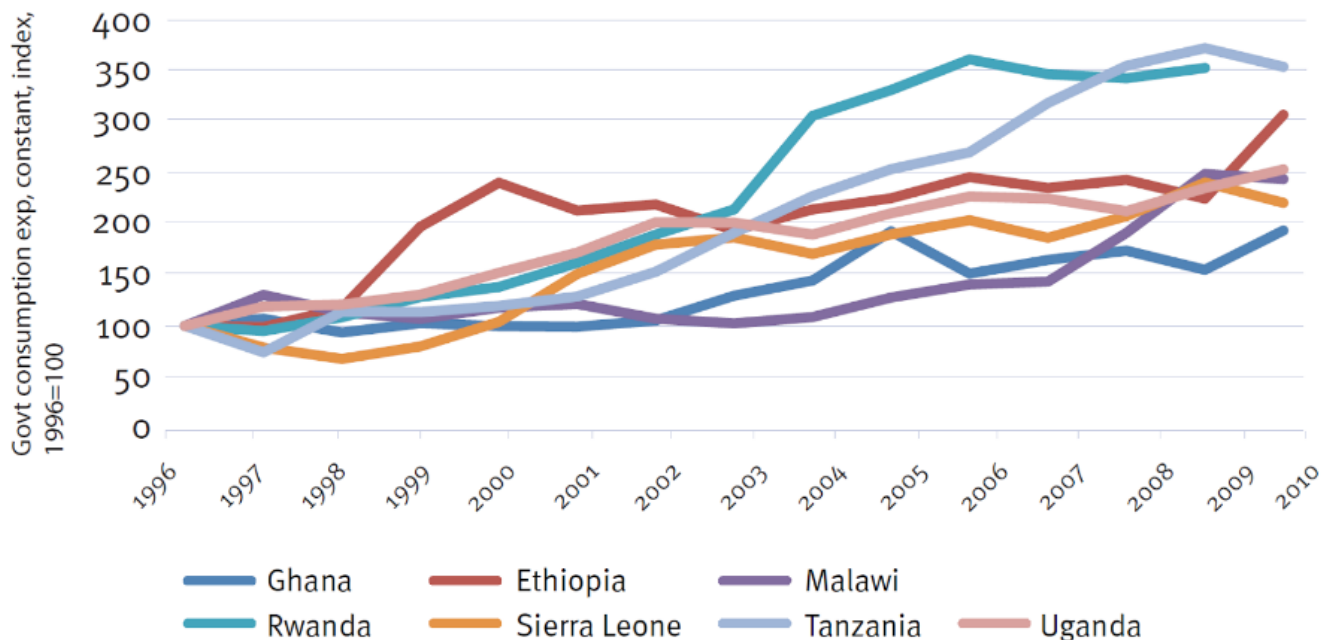
Source: Simson,R. "Following the money: Examining the evidence on 'pro-poor' budgeting", 2012

[13] Tariq Khokhar, "Should We Continue to Use the Term 'Developing World'?," Text, The Data Blog, November 16, 2015, https://blogs.worldbank.org/opendata/should-we-continue-use-term-developing-world.
[14] Excluding India and China, that were treated as 'suis generis' for the purpose of the analysis. https://www.brookings.edu/research/financing-for-development-international-financial-flows-after-2015/

Figure 3.

Average poverty-reducing expenditure and debt service in HIPCs
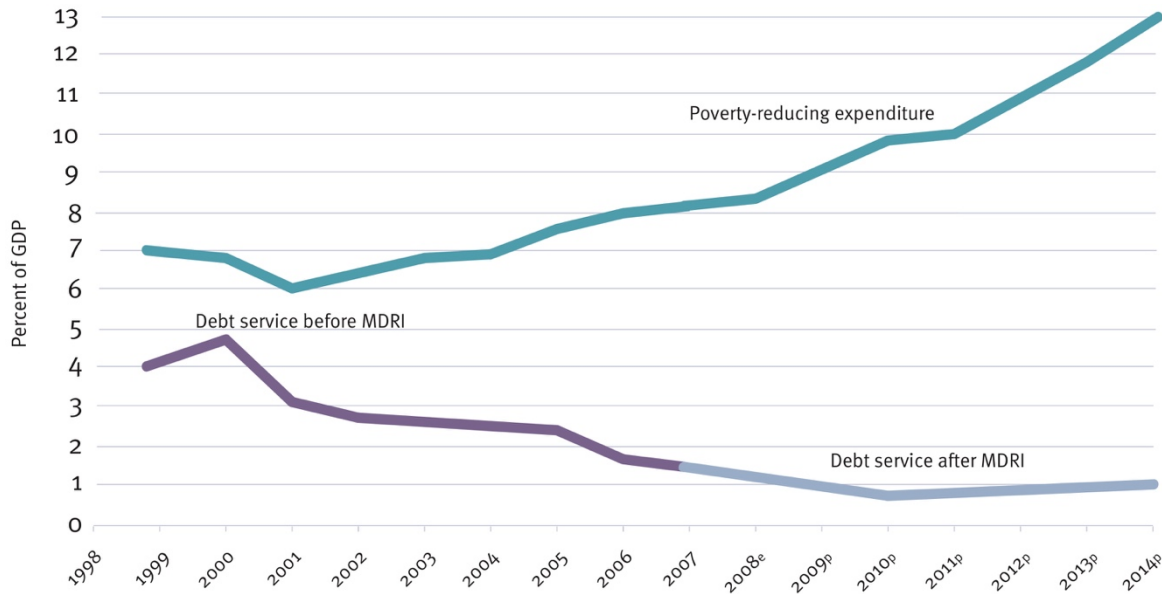
Source: Simson, R. "Following the money: Examining the evidence on 'pro-poor' budgeting", 2012, p. 4

1.3. Why focus on evidence?

Our approach to philanthropy stresses the importance of using evidence when choosing programs to support. You can read more about our approach here. In short: implementing social programs that improve the well-being of beneficiaries is difficult, and despite good intentions, many programs end up having little or no impact. This does not indicate an untrustworthy system, but rather is a testament to the complexity of social change. Even among the programs that have positive impact, there are often large differences in cost-effectiveness, so the positive outcomes achieved per dollar spent can vary significantly. **Using evidence lets us estimate which are the most cost-effective social programs.** This is useful information for donors choosing which charity to support, but also for governments choosing which programs to implement, and how.

1.4. An opportunity for leverage

This suggests that using philanthropic funding to improve the effectiveness of policymaking in low- and middle-income countries is likely an exceptional opportunity for leverage. By supporting the production and use of evidence in low- and middle-income countries, donors can enable policymakers to implement more effective policies, thereby improving the well-being of large numbers of people.

The work of the global research centre J-PAL exemplifies the potential of this type of work. J-PAL is a network of over 160 affiliated researchers and seven offices whose mission is to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. For example, in 2012 J-PAL-affiliated researchers and co-authors conducted a randomised evaluation in partnership with the Government of Indonesia that aimed to improve the effectiveness of Raskin, a national social-security program. Raskin is a rice-subsidy program through which low-income households can buy 15 kg of rice per month at a highly discounted price. Raskin's annual budget was over US$1.5 billion in 2012, and it targeted 17.5 million households. However, the subsidy was often misdirected: as of 2012, Raskin beneficiaries received only about one-third of their intended subsidy. When researchers looked at the distribution of Raskin benefits in the comparison villages in their study in 2012, they found 63% of ineligible households had purchased subsidised rice recently and that, on average, beneficiaries paid 40% more than the official price.[15]

In partnership with the Government of Indonesia, J-PAL affiliated researchers and co-authors ran a randomised controlled trial (RCT) to test different ways to reduce leakages and improve the distribution of benefits to targeted beneficiaries. One of the solutions tested was to distribute ID cards to low-income households eligible for Raskin that would provide information about household eligibility for the program and the amount of rice they were entitled to each month. ID cards increased the amount of subsidy received by low-income households by 26%, and the program was subsequently scaled up by the Indonesian government in 2013.

The RCT cost about US$1 million, and to the extent that the national scale-up had similar effects as the intervention in the RCT, it is estimated to have generated at least US$69 million per year in additional subsidies received by low-income households per year from 2013 to 2016.[16] This made funding the RCT an exceptional opportunity for leverage.

[15] "Improving the Transparency and Delivery of a Subsidized Rice Program in Indonesia | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab," accessed October 12, 2018, https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evaluation/improving-transparency-and-delivery-subsidized-rice-program-indonesia.
[16] 'IGI, examples of collaborations with governments', J-PAL, unpublished.

2. Selecting charities

This section outlines our approach to selecting charities within this cause area. We start by outlining the criteria we used to assess charities. We then discuss some features of policy interventions that make the evaluation of this work different from many other types of projects. We move on to describe the way we applied our criteria to select our recommended charities.

2.1. The criteria we use to assess charities

When evaluating charities, we use the following criteria:

Cost-effectiveness and robustness of evidence

Is the charity implementing a program that is supported by rigorous evidence, and does the evidence suggest that it leads to the biggest improvements per dollar spent?

Organisational strength

How well is the organisation structured and operated? For instance: how qualified and experienced are their staff members, leaders and board? Are they under- or over-staffed? How clear are their goals? Do they have a solid understanding of risks and ways to mitigate them?

Room for funding

Would they be able to use further funds productively? Do they have concrete plans for growth?

Transparency

Are they transparent about their activities and any mistakes they have made?

Track record

If they have been running for a while, have they had any success? If not, have they demonstrated willingness and ability to adapt?

2.2. Assessing cost-effectiveness in policy interventions

Assessing the effectiveness and cost-effectiveness of policy work differs in several ways from evaluating other types of interventions, and this affects the way we evaluate charities working in this area. We discuss this in detail in our forthcoming brief 'Evaluating policy'. For this report, three aspects of policy interventions are especially worth discussing: indirectedness, distribution of impact, and risk.

Indirectedness

One feature that distinguishes policy interventions from other types of philanthropic projects is their indirect nature. Many interventions supported through philanthropy consist of interventions that directly bring about impact. For instance, by distributing vaccines, bednets, or cash, an organisation can fairly directly bring about improvements in the well-being of the recipients, as shown in Figure 4:

Figure 4.

A direct intervention
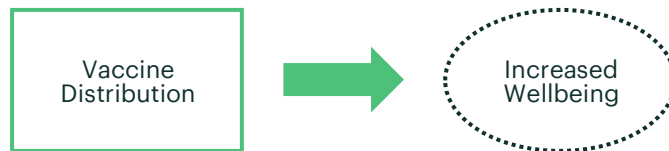
Policy interventions, in contrast, are indirect and typically involve many more actors: there are more steps on the path from the charity to the desired outcome, as shown in Figure 5:

Figure 5.

An indirect intervention
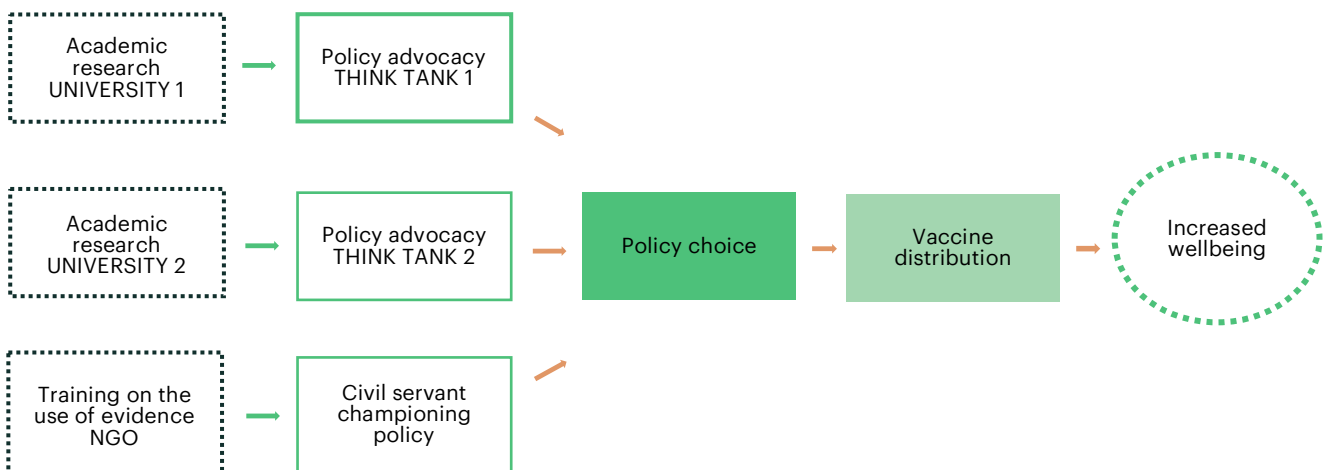
Distribution of impact

When looking at policy interventions, it helps to focus on how impact is distributed amongst them. Is the overall impact equally split among programs, or is the distribution of impact more uneven?

It seems likely that most of the overall impact achieved by these projects is driven by a few exceptionally successful programs, rather than driven equally by all programs. Relatedly, the impact of a typical program could be quite low, while the average impact is high, because the mean is pulled up by a handful of 'big wins'. In formal terms, the size of the benefits from policy-advocacy campaigns follows a rightward-skewed fat-tailed distribution.

This type of distribution is not uncommon when we look at opportunities to do good. For instance, some data suggests that the cost-effectiveness of direct interventions in education and health also follows this distribution.[17] It is also likely that policy projects follow this distribution, since it is likely that projects that influence policy would be highly impactful (because of the considerations outlined above). But there are also reasons to think those wins would be rare: policy is affected by many competing factors, such as availability of resources, timing, competing interests, skills, etc. Only rarely do those factors align in such a way that allows policy interventions to have an impact on actual policy choices and, ultimately, the well-being of citizens.

Risk

As mentioned above, heavy-tailed distributions with a positive skew are not uncommon, and are also likely to occur with direct interventions. One important difference is that, with direct interventions, we are much more likely to be able to predict where a certain program will lie in the distribution: whether it is a typical, low-impact program, or one of the high-impact programs in the tail. This is because with direct interventions, it is easier (though not easy) to measure and generalise information about the effectiveness of a program. When it comes to policy, however, the indirect nature of the intervention and the high degree of context sensitivity make it more difficult to measure impact and generalise lessons learnt.

Implications for donors

Because of the way impact is distributed across different projects, supporting policy interventions is a high-risk/high-return investment: most investments are likely to fail, but the successful ones are likely to have a large impact. We think it is important for donors to be aware of this pay-off structure.

---

[17] "Doing Good Better: How Effective Altruism Can Help You Make a Difference", William MacAskill. p 60-63

Implications for assessing impact

The features of policy interventions outlined above affect impact evaluation and cost-effectiveness analysis in several ways.

Track record and case studies

As we discuss above, when impact follows a heavy-tail distribution, the impact of a typical program could be quite low, even though the average impact is high, because the mean is pulled up by a handful of 'big wins'. This means that analysing the cost-effectiveness of a randomly selected program is unlikely to provide a representative account of the organisation's overall cost-effectiveness. Therefore, we ask organisations to provide a few case studies detailing their most effective projects. To estimate the benefits brought about by the organisations, for our cost-effectiveness estimate, we then estimate the benefits deriving from those case studies. To estimate the costs, we include all the costs the organisation incurred since the oldest case study. The reason we consider all costs since the oldest case study, rather than simply the cost for each case study, is that because of the heavy-tailed distribution of impact, counting only the cost of the case studies would over-estimate the cost-effectiveness of the organisation as a whole.

Project selection

Since policy projects are highly context-dependent, future projects are unlikely to resemble past projects. So project selection is an especially important factor in estimating future impact.

Key general questions when assessing project selection are:

- How much focus do they give to cost-effectiveness?
- How committed are they to prioritising different projects based on sound criteria?
- How committed are they to focusing on outcomes, rather than just outputs?[18]
- How good is their use of evidence?

For organisations working to promote evidence-based policy, we focus in particular on the quality of the evidence used in the organisation's work, as the more robust the evidence promoted, the higher the likelihood the organisation will adopt policy changes that effect positive impact.

---

[18] We draw the distinction between outputs and outcomes in "How we think about charity", Founders Pledge, https://founderspledge.com/research

Theory of change

A theory of change identifies necessary causal linkages in the path to a particular change and provides a rationale for why each stage in the causal process is necessary. Theories of change are useful because they allow us to be explicit about the goals we seek and to consider the most effective way to arrive at those goals. It is easy to neglect the ultimate end, the best possible means to it, and some key potential barriers to success.[19] The more compelling an organisation's theory of change, the more likely it is to successfully bring about change.

In order to assess the theories of change put forward by different organisations, we reviewed the existing literature on different interventions in the area of evidence-based policy. We considered several types of interventions, including training and mentoring, dissemination of evidence summaries, and media campaigns. A full account of our review can be found in Appendix 1 below. In this section, we provide a brief summary of our findings.

Overall, the evidence in support of specific interventions was limited and poor in quality, due to concerns about study design, lack of focus on implementing policies, and reliance on self-reporting. However, despite these limitations, the evidence provides some support for carrying out local research, fostering stakeholders and community participation, as well as training and mentoring. It also highlights the barriers and facilitators reported below (see Appendix 1 for a list of references).

Table 1.

Barriers to evidence-based policy and effective strategies to overcome them

Barriers	Effective strategies suggested in the literature
Academic research lacks policy relevance	Incentivise research of local issues Incentivise co-production of knowledge: policymakers are involved in the planning and development of research
Governments face capacity and resource constraints on ability to use evidence	Building capacity to access, apply and appraise evidence
Communication of research is challenging	Long-term support and relationship building Local and in-person presence Use of non-technical and accessible language Tailored messages

---

[19] This is similar to the idea of goal factoring. See alkjash, "Goal Factoring," LessWrong 2.0, accessed October 19, 2018, https://www.lesswrong.com/posts/Cu5C5KhkoXhrPMLFN/goal-factoring.

2.3. Selecting recommended organisations: our process

To select organisations, we used the procedure described in the flowchart below. Dark blue rectangles indicate selection stages and heuristics – in parenthesis we include the general assessment criteria for which the heuristic stands. Grey rectangles indicate the number of organisations selected at each stage. We discuss the limitations of this process and lessons learnt in Appendix 5 below. Appendix 6 lists the experts consulted.

Desk research
organisations working on evidence-based policy in low and middle-income countries

Desk research
experts working on evidence-based policy

Experts' suggestions of organisations working on evidence-based policy in low and middle-income countries (experts consulted n=9)

List 1
n. organisations included = 97

Website evaluation
- Do they solicit donations on their website? *YES/NO* (room for more funding)
- Do they have case studies of impactful projects? If so, how strong are they? *Score: 1-5* (effect. and cost-effect.)
- Do they use high quality evidence? If so, how robust? *Score: 1-5* (effect. and cost-effect.)
All organisations soliciting donations with an aggregate score above 5 were included in List 2

List 2
n. organisations included = 22

Data collected from orgs - 1
- Examples of case studies – is there evidence that their past work led to improvements in well-being? *Score: 1-5* (effect. and cost-effect)
- Does the literature give reason to think the interventions implemented are effective? *Score: 1-5* (effect. and cost-effect)
All organisations with an aggregate score above 5 were included in List 3

List 3
n. organisations included = 7

Data collected from orgs -2
- Examples of case studies – cost effectiveness analysis *Score: 1-5*   (effect. and cost-effect
- Selection criteria used to choose project *Score: 1-5* (effect. and cost-effect)
- Funding gaps *Score: 1-5*   (room for more funding)
The organisations with the 3 highest scores were included in List 5

List 4
n. organisations included = 3

Data collected from orgs – 3
- Further details on above
- How do they overcome barriers outlined in the literature? (effect. and cost-effect.)
- Strategic, financial and M&E documentation (organisational strength)
- Do they share information on their work? (transparency)
The organisations with the 2 highest scores were recommended

Recommended charities
n. organisations included = 1

3. Charity Recommendation: Innovation in Government Initiative

The process outlined above led us to select the Innovation in Government Initiative as the most promising organisation working on Evidence-Based Policy.

3.1. Summary

What they do

The Innovation in Government Initiative (IGI) is a project of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL); a global research centre and network of researchers whose mission is to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. IGI is a re-granting fund. They provide three types of grants: research grants, grants to support technical assistance for scale-ups of evidence-based programs, and grants to support technical assistance for the use of evidence more broadly. They support the partnering of governments with: J-PAL offices, J-PAL affiliated researchers, and/or the offices of Innovations for Poverty Action, a research organisation J-PAL closely collaborates with.

Robustness of evidence and cost-effectiveness

To calculate their cost-effectiveness, we estimated the benefits of IGI's work from a sample of case studies and estimated the costs of all of their work. We assessed two case studies: one on the reform of fund flow in one of India's social-protection programs, and the other on the scale-up of remedial education in Zambia. Our cost-effectiveness analysis suggests that they are roughly 3–4 times more cost-effective than direct cash transfers.[20]

IGI fares very well with respect to the proxies we used to assess its likely future cost-effectiveness:

- They use high-quality evidence. Proposals are selected by the IGI Advisory Board, which includes J-PAL's affiliated professors. They evaluate the technical design of research proposals, that is, whether the research design is appropriate to answer the questions outlined, and whether it accounts for and addresses risks of bias.

---

[20] Cash transfers is a category of highly effective interventions, often used as a benchmarking of other anti-poverty interventions; at the very least, a program providing services or materials should be more beneficial than simply giving the equivalent cash directly to the beneficiaries. Read more about on the website of our research partner GiveWell. "Cash Transfers," GiveWell, accessed November 16, 2018, https://www.givewell.org/international/technical/programs/cash-transfers.

- Their decision-making criteria explicitly consider impact and cost-effectiveness.
- Their structure mirrors most of the effective engagement strategies presented in the literature. For example: they require each project to be formally endorsed from decision-makers involved in the relevant policy; they seek to build long-term personal relationships between government and J-PAL researchers; they have a quick turn-around time; and accept proposals outside their official funding cycle for urgent projects to take advantage of policy windows.

Organisational strength, track record, and transparency

IGI has a lean structure. Decisions about grants are made by the Advisory Board, which is formed of J-PAL affiliated professors. IGI currently has two staff members, both working for IGI half-time. IGI has so far re-granted roughly $2.6 million, funding 28 partnerships in 15 countries. They have been transparent throughout our interactions and provided all data we asked for.

Room for more funding

We believe that IGI has ample room for more funding. As of January 2018, IGI is no longer planning a request for proposals (RFP) due to lack of funding. They have struggled to raise funds because their work was deemed outside the remit of the funders they approached, and we find this explanation plausible. They aim to raise an additional $5 million from multiple funding partners to meet demand from policymakers, researchers, and J-PAL offices for support over the next three years. They are open to different forms of funding partnership, including support for all three of IGI's priority activities, a dedicated fund that would support just one of these, or a grant to support partnerships in a specific geographic region or sector. $500,000 would support one request for proposal round that would fund 2–4 partnerships.

Open questions

Our estimate of the benefit brought about by IGI's work relies largely on the India-fund-flow case study. While we think the case for impact is plausible, IGI's role in this policy change was not direct. According to our investigation, the policy change came about in part thanks to the work of a researcher who supported one of the policymakers involved in shaping the policy. The researcher was not directly funded by IGI: rather, it is plausible that knowing that IGI funding would become available made J-PAL South-Asia more likely to fund this work. Moreover, we were unable to collect direct evidence of the policy change bringing about savings in our prescribed time frame, and

evidence in support of IGI's role only comes from J-PAL's partners. We do not think this is cause for concern, because IGI was only recently launched, and the impact of policy work relies on rare high-impact programs, which often takes several years to materialise. We will, however, look for stronger case studies as time progresses.

3.1. What they do

The Innovation in Government Initiative (IGI) launched in 2015 and aims to strengthen the partnership between governments and J-PAL-affiliated professors and offices to increase the use of evidence in policy.[21] J-PAL is a global research centre and network of professors whose mission is to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence.[22] J-PAL mainly focuses on randomised control trials (RCTs).

IGI is a re-granting fund at J-PAL. They support the partnering of governments with J-PAL offices, J-PAL affiliated researchers, and/or the offices of Innovations for Poverty Action, a research organisation J-PAL closely collaborates with.[23] They fund three types of grants:

- Type 1: Research grants: funding for policy-relevant research, be it an early-stage pilot or a full randomised control trial.[24]

- Type 2: Technical assistance for scale-ups: funding for technical assistance to scale up interventions which have already been evaluated and found to be effective. This might include supporting embedded staff, pilot intervention costs, building capacity to identify and design relevant scale-ups, or monitoring pilot versions of a program designed to be scaled-up in the future.[25]

- Type 3: Technical assistance to institutionalise the use of evidence in policy. As above, this might include embedding staff or capacity-building activities, but the aim is not to support a specific scale-up, it is rather to support the use of evidence within institutions – for instance, by setting up impact-evaluation units, evidence commissions, or creating incentives, guidelines, and/or systems to encourage the use of evidence.[26]

[21] " Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab," accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GPI. https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GPI

[22] "The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab," accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.povertyactionlab.org/. https://www.povertyactionlab.org/

[23] "The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab." https://www.povertyactionlab.org/

[24] " Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab." https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPI%20Overview%20Q4%202017.pdf

[25] " Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab." https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPI%20Overview%20Q4%202017.pdf

[26] "Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab." https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPI%20Overview%20Q4%202017.pdf

To be eligible for grants of Type 1, research projects must have a J-PAL-affiliated professor as a principal investigator (PI) or co-PI on the study[27]. For Type 2 and 3 grants, there is no such requirement, though it is strongly encouraged that the project has a J-PAL affiliate as an advisor.[28]

IGI funds a project for a maximum of $250,000 over its lifetime, except in exceptional circumstances. For the first round of applications, IGI would fund pilots up to $50,000, full RCTs up to $150,000, and Type 2 and 3 proposals up to $100,000.[29]

Type 1 and Type 2 grants only focus on RCTs – that is, IGI only funds RCT pilots, RCTs, and scale-ups of RCTs.[30] Type 3 grants focus on 'evidence' more broadly, including other types of impact evaluations and monitoring and evaluation evidence.[31]

The proposals are selected by the IGI Advisory Board, which includes J-PAL's affiliated professors (see Appendix 3 below for details about current members). The subcommittee evaluating the proposal includes at least one co-chair, at least one representative of the relevant region, and/or an expert in the sector relevant to the grant proposal.[32] The entire IGI Board meets to discuss the proposals submitted during an RFP and makes funding decisions.

3.2. Cost-effectiveness and track record

We evaluate the effectiveness of organisations working on evidence-based policy in two stages: to estimate their past cost-effectiveness, we evaluate case studies of their past work; to estimate how likely these successes are to persist in the future, we assess them using a variety of proxies. Above, we explain the rationale for the criteria chosen to evaluate organisations working on evidence-based policy.

Past cost-effectiveness and case studies

We calculated the benefits by focusing on IGI's role in bringing about a fund-flow reform in India and an educational reform in Zambia. A full discussion of the first case study can be found in

[27] "Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."
https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPI%20FAQ_0.pdf
[28] "Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."
https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPI%20Overview%20Q4%202017.pdf
[29] "Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."
https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPI%20Overview%20Q4%202017.pdf
[30] "Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."
https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPI%20FAQ_0.pdf
[31] "Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."
https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPI%20FAQ_0.pdf
[32] "Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."
https://www.povertyactionlab.org/sites/default/files/documents/GPI%20Overview%20Q4%202017.pdf

and a full discussion of the second case study can be found in . Below, we summarise those longer assessments.

Funds flow reform in India

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is India's largest social-protection program. It provides beneficiaries with 100 days of paid work per year. The program is financed by the Indian Central Government and delivered by local authorities.

Large sums are transferred through this program. The fund flow has two broad stages: fund request (i.e., money being requested by local authorities from Central Government) and fund transfer (i.e., money being disbursed from Central Government to beneficiaries).

The payments for this scheme were initially very complex, including many layers. Moreover, flows were not all based on actual participation in the scheme: rather, some of them were based on expected participation. Basing flows on expected expenditure (rather than actual expenditure) is common practice in low-income countries' financing systems, as it helps avoid delays in cases in which communication is slow.[33]

Starting from 2012, MGNREGS funds flow was subject to several reforms seeking to improve the effectiveness of the initial system. IGI played a role in bringing about one of these reforms. Broadly, the case in favour of IGI's impact is as follows: a 2015 reform of the MGNREGS decreased idle funds sitting in state accounts, leading to savings for the Indian government. The change was championed by, among other people, government official Santhosh Mathew. Mr Mathew received research support from a staff member from J-PAL South Asia office. The decision by J-PAL South Asia to allocate the staff member as full-time research support for Mr Mathew was partly due to their knowledge that IGI's funding would be launching soon.

Mr Mathew is a government official who had worked on funds reform since 2012. He co-authored an RCT conducted in collaboration with J-PAL's affiliated researchers, to design and test a reform of simplifying the MGNREGS fund flow system in Bihar. Since then, Mr Mathew had been making the case for MGNREGS fund-flow reforms, and has done so with the support of J-PAL-affiliated researchers and regional staff.

---

[33] Abhijit Banerjee et al., "E-Governance, Accountability, and Leakage in Public Programs: Experimental Evidence from a Financial Management Reform in India," Working Paper (National Bureau of Economic Research, November 2016), https://doi.org/10.3386/w22803., 2017; p.2

In 2015, the MGNREGS had already undergone two reforms, but fund transfers could still be simplified. Mr Mathew asked J-PAL South Asia for research support to make the case for further reform. J-PAL South Asia lacked the resources to provide long-term research support to Mr Mathew. However, they knew IGI funding would be launching soon and that they would be able to apply to hire a full-time staff member to work on the project. In light of this, they decided to offer Mr Mathew research support. A J-PAL South Asia staff member started working with Mr Mathew in April 2015, which gave Mr Mathew enough capacity to make the case for a further reform of the system. This, in turn, contributed to a third reform, which led to funds being directly transferred from Central Government to beneficiaries. IGI supported two full-time staff members from August 2015 to July 2017, who worked on promoting providing research support for fund reforms in other central and centrally-sponsored schemes. However, aside from MGNREGS, as of June 2018 we were not aware of any other schemes having yet completed the transition to the simplified fund-flow system. For this analysis, we therefore set aside reforms to other central schemes and only focused on the role played by IGI in moving forward the August 2015 MGNREGS funds-flow reform.

Two main sources of uncertainty affect the calculation of the benefits deriving from IGI's work: the extent to which they brought forward the reform and the extent to which the reform led to increased savings. We estimated that IGI brought forward the reform by one and a half years and that the reform led to yearly savings of roughly $20 million.

Catch Up remedial education program in Zambia

A 2014 national assessment of the state of education in Zambia reported a "stagnation in learning achievement amidst exponential growth in the area of access".[34] A group of NGOs and funding partners have supported the Ministry of General Education in designing 'Catch Up', a program delivering remedial education for grades 3–5. With this type of intervention, of children are grouped according to their learning level, rather than age or grade, for a portion of instruction time.[35] The approach is based on programs pioneered by Indian NGO Pratham.[36]

---

[34] Zambia's National Assessment Survey 2014 Report. Accessed at: http://www.exams-council.org.zm/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2014-NAS-Report.pdf, p xii

[35] "Remedial Education | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab," accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.povertyactionlab.org/scale-ups/remedial-education.https://www.povertyactionlab.org/scale-ups/remedial-education

[36] "Remedial Education | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."https://www.povertyactionlab.org/scale-ups/remedial-education

The Zambian Ministry has recently piloted the program and plans to scale it up to 1,800 schools across Zambia over the next three years, reaching an estimated 286,000 students in grades 3–5 once at scale.[37]

IGI has invested $250,000 in the project. Some of the funds were spent supporting the exchange between Pratham staff and Zambian officials to adapt the program to the Zambian context. The Zambian Ministry of General Education officials participated in 'learning journeys' to observe the program being implemented in India, and Pratham officials went to Zambia to train Ministry officials to implement the program.[38] Some of the funds were spent on process monitoring during the pilot conducted in 80 schools. The pilot was co-funded by IGI, the Ministry of General Education, the Global Partnership for Education, and UNICEF.

Having reconstructed IGI's role in the policy change and assessed the evidence in favour of this account, we estimate that IGI's support brought the reform forward by about three years. We estimate the reform led to improved learning outcomes of roughly 0.01 standard deviations per dollar spent. Based on the analyses to be presented in our forthcoming report on the income effects of education, we estimate that IGI's engagement led to well-being improvements for Zambian citizens roughly equivalent to doubling the income of almost 1000 people for three years.

The full cost-effectiveness model is here. Overall, we estimate that IGI's past work was roughly 3–4 times as cost-effective as unconditional cash transfers. Cash transfers are a type of highly effective intervention often used as a benchmark for other anti-poverty interventions; at the very least, a program providing services or materials should be more beneficial than simply giving the equivalent cash directly to the beneficiaries. The estimate of the cost-effectiveness of unconditional cash transfers that we use as a benchmark for this evaluation is the one provided by our research partner GiveWell.[39] Note that this cost-effectiveness estimate should be used as a rough guide and not directly compared to GiveWell's estimates: due to time constraints, the models we develop are less detailed than those developed by GiveWell. We expect this to affect

[37]"What Have We Learned about Building a Culture of Data and Evidence Use in Government? | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab," accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/2-5-18/what-have-we-learned-about-building-culture-data-and-evidence-use-government. https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/2-5-18/what-have-we-learned-about-building-culture-data-and-evidence-use-government
[38] "From India to Zambia: A Learning Journey | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab," accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.povertyactionlab.org/news/india-zambia-learning-journey.https://www.povertyactionlab.org/news/india-zambia-learning-journey
[39] "Copy of 2018 GiveWell Cost-Effectiveness Analysis — Version 8," Google Docs, accessed October 12, 2018, https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/1A88A2lQquMLyfKLPNfw2hV0wZVVi6RlqzbipmlFSg1k/edit?usp=embed_facebook.

the comparability of the estimates, since cost-effectiveness estimates tend to become less optimistic the more thorough the models are.

Project selection

This section reviews how IGI fares with respect to the proxies we use to assess the effectiveness of organisations working in evidence-based policy.

Quality of evidence used

We are confident that IGI's work supports the use of high-quality evidence. The proposals are selected by the IGI Advisory Board, which includes J-PAL's affiliated professors (see Appendix 3 below for details about current members). The assessment of research proposals includes an evaluation of study design.

Decision-making criteria

All proposals are evaluated according to the following criteria:[40]

- Policy relevance—whether the proposal addressed a question crucial to the government partner.
- Evidence-based policy—whether the proposal promotes evidence-based policy and supports long-term partnerships between J-PAL and governments.
- Viability of the partnership—whether the proposal relies on a strong and robust partnership with the government.
- Commitment to use evidence in decision-making—whether the government partner is committed to the use of evidence, and is willing to allocate its own resources to the project.
- Scale-up potential—whether the proposal will lead to tangible changes in policy, and whether others will be able to benefit from the insights acquired.
- Institutional support—whether the proposal will have sufficient ongoing support from J-PAL regional offices or other affiliated institutions.
- Level of affiliate involvement—the extent to which the proposal is supported by a J-PAL affiliated professor.

Research applications are also assessed according to the following criteria:

---

[40] For the full explanation of the criteria, see 'GPI Application Form and Instructions' at "Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab." https://www.povertyactionlab.org/gpi

- Contribution—whether the study advances knowledge.
- Value of research—whether the cost of the study is commensurate with its contribution.
- Technical design—whether the research design is appropriate to answer the questions outlined, and whether it accounts for and addresses risks of bias.
- Publishing data—whether the study results will be publicly available.

IGI's criteria for choosing grants are aligned with our approach to philanthropy. Two points are especially relevant to our assessment: First, they explicitly assess the proposals they receive on the basis of 'policy relevance' and 'scale-up potential' of their grants, which are relevant to whether the projects will ultimately affect the well-being of citizens. Second, they consider the 'value of research', taking into account the costs, as well as the benefits, of the proposed study.

Theory of change

As we detail above, the evidence on interventions that seek to support evidence-based policy highlights several barriers and facilitators (see Appendix 1 for a list of references). Below, we outline these barriers, IGI's mitigation strategies, and the strategies suggested in the literature.

Table 2.

Barriers to evidence-based policy making, IGI mitigation strategies and effective strategies suggested in the literature

Barriers	IGI mitigation strategies	Effective strategies suggested in the literature
Academic research lacks policy relevance	Require formal statement of interest and engagement from policymakers (see decision-making criteria) Research on local issues (see type 1 grants)	Incentivise research of local issues Incentivise co-production of knowledge: policymakers are involved in the planning and development of research
Governments face capacity and resource constraints on ability to use evidence	Provide funding and resources (see all grant types: financial and technical support for RCT, scale up and institutionalisation of evidence-use)	Building capacity to access, apply and appraise evidence
Communication of research is challenging	Support from permanent staff in J-PAL offices (see decision-making criteria) Communication strategy and website (email communication with IGI staff)	Long-term support and relationship building Local and in-person presence Use of non-technical and accessible language Tailored messages
Timing mismatch: time constraints on policymaking vs. longer research times	Encourage governments to build long-term relationships with J-PAL offices (see decision-making criteria) Quick-turnaround funding (off-cycle applications accepted when need is shown, and IGI aims to provide funding decisions for these in a month or less)	Long-term support and relationship building Timely support

3.3. Organisational strength and transparency

IGI has a lean structure. Decisions about the grants are made by the Advisory Board, which consists of J-PAL-affiliated professors (see Appendix 3 for details). IGI currently has two staff members, both of whom work for IGI half-time, and spend the rest of their time on other J-PAL projects. They mostly run funding competitions, support the Board, deliver and track the grants, aggregate learning, share knowledge, fundraise, and liaise with the rest of the J-PAL network.

IGI has so far re-granted roughly $2.6 million, funding 28 partnerships in 15 countries. IGI has hosted six rounds of requests for proposal since it launched in September 2015. IGI's list of grants to date can be found here. They have started investing in learning, collecting information from partnerships in Latin America, which they plan to share publicly in 2018.

IGI has been transparent throughout our interactions and provided all data we asked for.

3.4. Room for more funding

We believe that IGI has ample room for more funding. IGI's annual budget is about $1.2 million. They host two requests for proposals per year and aim to award approximately US$500,000 per round.

As of January 2018, IGI is no longer planning to hold requests for proposals, due to lack of funding. They have told us they struggle to raise funds because their work is deemed outside the remit of the funders they approach. We find it likely that the cross-cutting nature of their work has made it difficult to attract funds.

As of January 2018, 67 governments and researchers have applied for IGI grants. IGI has funded 22% of the US$8.3 million in funds requested. IGI provided us with several examples of proposals they would have liked to fund, or fund more extensively, but were unable to because of funding constraints.

IGI would use additional funding on new requests for proposals. Increased funding might enable them to increase the funding granted to selected proposals, hire full-time staff working in the central office, hire dedicated staff to work in J-PAL's regional offices to support a pipeline of proposals and provide support to grantees throughout their project. They think the latter investment might increase the number of proposals they receive from low-income countries, which has been lower than the proposals received by middle-income countries.

They are open to many forms of funding partnership, whether to support all three of IGI's priority activities, a dedicated fund that would support just one of these, or a grant to support partnerships in a specific region, country, or sector, such as education, health, or social protection, etc.

3.5. Which type of funding do we recommend?

IGI funds three types of grants: research grants (Type 1), grants to support technical assistance for scale-ups (Type 2), and grants to support technical assistance to institutionalise the use of evidence (Type 3).

For three reasons, we have most confidence in the expected cost-effectiveness of Type 2 grants. First, case studies of past impactful work focused on projects that received Type 2 grants. Second, we have reason to believe that Type 2 grants tackle a more neglected area than Type 1 grants. Third, Type 3 grants include capacity-building activities, like fostering discussion on different policy actions, use of existing administrative data, or strengthening of monitoring and evaluation data collection,[41] and as we discuss above, it is harder to assess the impact of these types of activities.

Across different topic areas, we think there are especially strong reasons to focus on health, education, and social protection, where there is a stronger track record of programs leading to substantial improvements.

3.6. Sources of uncertainty

Our estimate of the benefit brought about by IGI's work relies predominantly on the India fund-flow case study, which we discuss in Appendix 5. While we think the case for impact is plausible, IGI's role in this policy change was not direct, since the project whose cost-effectiveness estimate we considered was not funded by IGI. Rather, it was funded by J-PAL South Asia, partly because they knew IGI funding would be launching soon.

Note, however, that IGI funded the partnership for two additional years following this policy change. This work contributed to a national policy change in July 2016. Since this change hasn't been implemented yet, we do not assess it as part of this case study.

---

[41] "GPI Funded Projects | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab," accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GPI/funded-projects. https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GPI/funded-projects

Evidence-Based Policy

Moreover, we were unable to collect direct evidence that the policy change brought about savings in our prescribed time-frame. Rather, we rely on estimates provided before the reform.

Finally, evidence in support of IGI's role comes from their J-PAL's partners. We would not ideally base the case for an organisation's causal role only on evidence provided by related organisations.

We do not think this is cause for concern because IGI was only recently launched, and the impact of policy work relies on rare high-impact programs, which often takes several years to materialise. We will, however, look for stronger case studies as time progresses.

Appendix 1. Literature Review on Interventions to Support Evidence-Based Policy

A1.1. Which interventions work?

This appendix discusses specific types of interventions used to support evidence-based policy and reviews evidence in support of these interventions. The interventions considered are:

- **Carrying out local research**—for example, by contextualising general knowledge or collecting local data.

- **Fostering stakeholders' engagement and community participation**—that is, actively involving local policymakers and communities.

- **Training and mentoring**—for example, producing courses on how to find, summarise, and interpret evidence.

- **Brokering knowledge**—that is, deploy people or organisations who work collaboratively with stakeholders to facilitate the exchange of relevant information[42].

- **Disseminating available evidence**—for example, providing systematic reviews, evidence summaries, or policy briefs.

- **Media**—for example, campaigns and advocacy in the press, on television or social media.

We first focus on experimental and quasi-experimental studies, and then broaden the scope to include systematic and literature reviews assessing non-experimental evidence.

Table 3 provides details on the experimental and quasi-experimental studies we retrieved on this topic.

[42] Bornbaum et al., 2015

Table 3.

Experimental and quasi-experimental studies on evidence-based policy

Title	Study design	Description
Dobbins, Maureen, et al. "A randomized controlled trial evaluating the impact of knowledge translation and exchange strategies." Implementation science 4.1 (2009): 61 [43]	Randomised control Trial	Tests the effect of three interventions: 1 providing access to relevant systematic reviews, 2 first intervention plus tailored, targeted messages; and 3 second intervention plus knowledge brokers on the use of evidence in decision-making and the number of evidence-basedevidence-based healthy bodyweight promotion policies delivered.
Beynon, Penelope, et al. "What difference does a policy brief make." Full report of an IDS, 3ie, Norad study: Institute of Development Studies and the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie) (2012).	Randomised control Trial	Tests the effect of a policy brief on policymakers' beliefs and actions
Jacobs, Julie A., et al. "Capacity building for evidence-based decision making in local health departments: scaling up an effective training approach." Implementation Science 9.1 (2014): 124.	Quasi-experimental	Tests the effect of a training curriculum on policymakers' skills and awareness of the importance of EBP
Brownson, Ross C., et al. "The effect of disseminating evidence-based interventions that promote physical activity to health departments." American journal of public health 97.10 (2007): 1900-1907.	Quasi-experimental	Tests the effect of dissemination of guidelines (through workshops, ongoing technical assistance, and the distribution of an instructional CD-ROM) on policymakers' knowledge, skill awareness, adoption and implementation.

Because of the paucity of experimental and quasi-experimental evidence, we also included sources that looking at studies that were non-experimental and non-quasi-experimental. It should be stressed that those provide less reliable information on the causal effect of interventions than experimental and quasi-experimental studies do. We mostly focus on peer-reviewed systematic reviews. We also include literature reviews and discussion papers when we deemed that they were methodologically reliable or provided insight from experts in the area. More details are provided

[43] The same experiment is discussed in Traynor et al. 2014. 'Knowledge brokering in public health: a tale of two studies'.

below. Due to time constraints, we were unable to check whether studies were repeated among the different papers considered, or to analyse the quality of the individual studies cited.

Table 4.

Systematic and literature reviews on evidence-based policy (including experimental, quasi-experimental and non-experimental studies)

Title	Area	Type of study	Type of publication
Gagliardi, A.R. et al., 2014. Exploring mentorship as a strategy to build capacity for knowledge translation research and practice: a scoping systematic review. Implementation Science, 9(1), p.122.	general	systematic review	peer reviewed
Bou-Karroum, Lama, et al. "Using media to impact health policymaking: an integrative systematic review." Implementation Science 12.1 (2017): 52.	health	systematic review	peer reviewed
Perrier, Laure, et al. "Interventions encouraging the use of systematic reviews by health policymakers and managers: a systematic review." Implementation Science 6.1 (2011): 43.	health	systematic review	peer reviewed
Petkovic, Jennifer, et al. "The effectiveness of evidence summaries on health policymakers and health system managers use of evidence from systematic reviews: a systematic review." Implementation Science 11.1 (2016): 162.	health	systematic review	peer reviewed
Bornbaum, Catherine C., et al., 2015. "Exploring the function and effectiveness of knowledge brokers as facilitators of knowledge translation in health-related settings: a systematic review and thematic analysis." Implementation science 10.1 (2015): 162.	health	systematic review	peer reviewed
Clar, C., et al. "What are the effects of interventions to improve the uptake of evidence from health research into policy in low and middle-income countries." Systematic review) (pp. 107pp): University of Aberdeen (UoA) (2011).	health	systematic review	grey literature
Sarkies, Mitchell N., et al. "The effectiveness of research implementation strategies for promoting evidence-informed policy and management decisions in healthcare: a systematic review." Implementation Science 12.1 (2017): 132.	health	systematic review	peer reviewed
Punton, Melanie. "How can capacity development promote evidence-informed policy making?" Literature review for the Buidling Capacity to Use Research Evidence (BCURE) programme (2016).	general	literature review	grey literature
McCormack, B. et al., 2013. 'A realist review of interventions and strategies to promote evidence-informed healthcare: a focus on change agency'	health	literature review	peer reviewed

The sources listed above suggest that evidence is missing or inconclusive for the following interventions:

- **Brokering knowledge**: an RCT testing the effect of knowledge brokers on the use of evidence in decision-making and the number of evidence-based policies (Dobbins, 2009) found no statistically significant effect[44]. A systematic review (Bornboum, 2015) found inconclusive evidence on the impact of knowledge brokers in the health sector.[45]

- **Disseminating available evidence:** Dobbins et al. (2009) found that tailored targeted messages had a statistically significant effect on the number of evidence-based policies that promote healthy bodyweight. However, no significant effect was found on the extent to which research evidence was used in a recent program decision. This raises questions about whether the changes in policy were caused by the increased use of evidence.[46] Beynon et al. (2012) finds that policy briefs have a significant effect on the fraction of people with an opinion regarding strength of evidence but did not find significant effects on the content of those opinions[47]. Browson et al. (2007) found positive but not statistically significant effects[48]. A 2011 systematic review (Perrier et al., 2011) found that the evidence in favour of interventions encouraging the use of systematic review by health policymakers was weak[49],

[44] Dobbins, 2009 "The three interventions, implemented over one year in 2005, included access to an online registry of research evidence; tailored messaging; and a knowledge broker (...) No significant effect of the intervention was observed for primary outcome (p < 0.45). However, for public health policies and programs (HPPs), a significant effect of the intervention was observed only for tailored, targeted messages (p < 0.01)." p.1
[45] Bornboum, 2015: "Owing to the conflicted findings and limited methodological quality of other existing evidence, findings are inconclusive regarding the effectiveness of KBs [knowledge brokers] in health-related settings", p.7
McCormack, 2013 "Change agency strategies currently used to foster knowledge utilization include opinion leaders, facilitators (internal/external), practice developers, education outreach, academic detailing, and the use of multiple change agents. While evidence of effectiveness is weak, in some cases in terms of outcomes data, there is evidence that supports the importance of opinion leader and facilitator roles" p.9
[46] Dobbins 2009 "The primary outcome assessed the extent to which research evidence was used in a recent program decision, and the secondary outcome measured the change in the sum of evidence-informed healthy body weight promotion policies or programs being delivered at health departments. (...) No significant effect of the intervention was observed for primary outcome (p < 0.45). However, for public health policies and programs (HPPs), a significant effect of the intervention was observed only for tailored, targeted messages (p < 0.01)." p1
[47] Beynon et al., 2012 "The regression results show that: the policy brief increases the fraction of respondents with an opinion with respect to strength of evidence by between 11 and 27 per cent points; the policy brief is not found to have a significant effect on the average evidence ratings" p 43
[48] Browson et al., 2007"Our analysis of longer-term change in awareness and uses of evidence-based approaches among public health practitioners showed positive net increases in awareness among local health departments as well as adoption and implementation in state health agencies. However, often these changes were not statistically significant partially because of the limited number of intervention states." p 1905
[49] Perrier et al., 2011 "The limited empirical data renders the strength of evidence weak for the effectiveness and the types of interventions that encourage health policymakers and managers to use systematic reviews in decision making." P 1

while a 2016 systematic review (Petkovic et al., 2016) on evidence summaries concluded that their effect was unclear.[50]

- **Media**: a 2017 systematic review (Bou-Karroum, 2017) found no reliable primary research from which to draw conclusions[51].

The literature reviewed provides some support for the following interventions supporting EBP:

- **Carrying out local research**: a systematic review (Clar et al., 2011) reports that carrying out local research is one of the most frequently cited components of interventions reporting positive effects on policy development.[52]

- **Fostering stakeholders and community participation**: Clar et al. (2011) claims that fostering stakeholders and community participation is one of the most frequently cited components of interventions that report positive effects on policy development.[53]

- **Training and mentoring**: a quasi-experimental study conducted on local health departments in the US (Jacobs et al., 2014) found some evidence that training improved self-reported skills[54]. Clar et al. (2011) claims that training is one of the most frequently cited components of interventions that report positive effects on policy development[55]. One literature review (Punton, 2016) reports that most studies suggested that training had improved skills, based on evidence from self-assessments[56]. A 2014 systematic review[57] (Gagliardi et al., 2014) found that mentoring had positive effects on knowledge, skills, or associated behaviour, though it stressed that several factors limited the interpretation and application of the results, including the heterogeneity and low number of studies included.[58]

[50] Petkovic et al., 2016 "Evidence summaries are likely easier to understand than complete systematic reviews. However, their ability to increase the use of systematic review evidence in policymaking is unclear." p1
[51] Bou-Karroum, 2017 "There is currently a lack of reliable evidence to guide decisions on the use of media interventions to influence health policy-making."p1
[52] Clar, 2011 "The most frequently cited components of interventions reporting positive effects on policy development included carrying out local research (e.g., for contextualisation), ensuring intensive stakeholder engagement and collaboration, including training and capacity-building activities, and fostering community participation."p 4
[53] Clar, 2011 see footnote 54
[54] Jacobs et al., 2014 "In adjusted models, significant differences (p < 0.05) were found in 'action planning,' 'evaluation design,' 'communicating research to policymakers,' 'quantifying issues (using descriptive epidemiology),' and 'economic evaluation.'" (p1). N.b. Results are only significant at the 0.05 level.
[55] Clar, 2011 "The most frequently cited components of interventions reporting positive effects on policy development included carrying out local research (e.g., for contextualisation), ensuring intensive stakeholder engagement and collaboration, including training and capacity-building activities, and fostering community participation."p4
[56] Punton, 2016 "The majority of the studies provided evidence (mainly from pre- and post-course surveys, and in some cases only post-course surveys) that participants felt their EIPM-related skills had improved (Pettman et al. 2013; Rowe et al. 2010; Rolle et al. 2011; Tomatis et al. 2011; C. J. Uneke et al. 2011)." P 59
[57] Gagliardi et al. 2014
[58] Gagliardi, 2014 "all but one of the 13 eligible studies achieved desired outcomes or improvements

Unfortunately, the reliability of these findings is constrained by the poor quality of the evidence.

Table 5 focuses on the risk of bias for the experimental and quasi-experimental studies listed in Table 4:

Table 5.

Review of risk of bias for experimental and quasi-experimental studies on EBP [59]

	Dobbins et al., 2009	Beynon et al., 2012	Browson et al., 2007	Jacobs et al., 2014
Random sequence generation	Y	Y	N	N
Allocation concealment	N	N	N	N
Blinding of participants and personnel	N	N	N	N
Blinding of outcome assessment	N	N	N	N
Complete outcome data	Y	?	?	?
Complete reporting	N	?	N	Y
Free from other sources of bias	N	N	N	N

Further limitations pertain to the type of results collected. Most results rely on self-reporting,[60] which can introduce the risk of social-desirability bias. Two of these studies focus on changes in policymakers' beliefs, knowledge, motivations, and behaviour, without tracking changes in policy. The other studies test effects on policy implementation (Browson et al., 2007; and Dobbins et al., 2009), but neither produces conclusive results. In the first study, the effect of guidelines on policy implementation was mostly not statistically significant.[61] In the second study, tailored targeted

in knowledge, skills, or associated behavior."
[59] The methodology and assessment from the first three studies are from Sarkies, 2017; assessment of Jacobs et al., 2014 is our own, following Sarkies 2017's methodology.
[60] Dobbins 2009 "The limitations in this study include: the source of data, participant turnover, exposure to the intervention, and self-reported outcome measures." p 12
Beynon et al, 2012 "a weakness of our study is of course that the actions are also self-declared, so people could potentially choose to appear consistent by pretending to have done what they intended to do." P 57
Jacobs a et al., 2014 "Respondents rated perceived importance followed by availability of each EBDM competency" p 6
Brownson et al., 2007 "The final questionnaire included 25 questions (some with multiple parts) that covered 4 major areas: (1) awareness and use of the Community Guide, (2) physical activity programs and priorities, (3) funding and the policy environment, and (4) biographical information about the respondent" p1902
[61] Browson et al., 2007 "showed positive net increases in awareness among local health departments as well as adoption and implementation in state health agencies. However, often these changes were not statistically significant partially because of the limited number of intervention states." p 1905

messages had a statistically significant effect on the number of evidence-based policies. However, no significant effect was found on the use of evidence, which suggests the improvement in policy might not have been caused by a more extensive use of evidence.[62]

Similar concerns arise when we consider evidence reported in systematic and literature reviews. Here, too, we find that studies lack quality[63], lack information about policy implementation,[64] and rely on self-reporting[65]. Most of the evidence focuses on the health sector: of the nine reviews we found on the topic, seven focused exclusively on health evidence and policy[66].

Overall, our review suggests that the evidence on interventions aimed at improving evidence-based policy is weak, due to paucity of high-quality research, lack of focus on effects on policy implementation, and reliance on self-reporting. The evidence does not strongly support any specific intervention, though it provides weak support for carrying out local research, fostering stakeholders and community participation, as well as training and mentoring.

[62] Dobbins 2009 "The primary outcome assessed the extent to which research evidence was used in a recent program decision, and the secondary outcome measured the change in the sum of evidence-informed healthy body weight promotion policies or programs being delivered at health departments. (...) No significant effect of the intervention was observed for primary outcome (p < 0.45). However, for public health policies and programs (HPPs), a significant effect of the intervention was observed only for tailored, targeted messages (p < 0.01)." p1

[63] Clar et al. 2012 "This review encountered challenges in assessing the quality of the intervention studies included, which has implications for the strength of recommendations. These difficulties arise not only from the composite nature of the interventions, but also the lack of detail in some study reports which, in turn, made it hard judge quality against selected criteria." p41
Bou-Karroum, Lama, et al. 2017 the study judges the "confidence in the available evidence as limited due to the risk of bias in the included studies and the indirectness of the evidence" (p1)
Sarkies et al, 2017 "This systematic review was limited both in the quantity and quality of studies that met inclusion criteria" p17
McCormack et al. 2013 "The review highlights significant gaps (...)The literature would benefit from better descriptions of interventions and determination of outcomes, as well as more detail on the context, intensity and levels at which interventions are implemented." p9

[64] Gagliardi "Studies examined impact of mentorship on self-reported overall job performance [51-58], and objectively assessed business performance [59], teaching skills [60-62], and research skills [63" p7
Perrier "Implementation of policies is implied. No specific examples are given" for three of the four studies included (p 5). Six out of the seven studies included in Petkovic et al 2016 focus on knowledge, skills, satisfaction and preferences (p 6)
Bornbaum et al. 2015 "Following assessment of methodological quality [24], two studies (i.e., Russell et al. [39, 44, 52] and Dobbins et al. [21, 38, 46, 49]) met standards for acceptable methodological rigour. One study reported a positive effect of the KB strategy on stakeholders' knowledge and practices [39, 44, 52], while the other did not identify a statistically significant effect on stakeholders' practices [21, 38, 46, 49]."

[65] In Perrier et al., 2011 all included studies use self-reported data (p5)
Same is true for Petkovic et al., 2016 (p6)
Punton 2016 "Although the overall quality of studies is medium-high, the majority of studies are based on self-assessments of EIPM skills through pre- and post-course surveys, and involve limited triangulation with other sources of evidence. This raises some doubts about the reliability of the findings given the risk of self-esteem bias. Only two studies provided more objective evidence of individual and organisational increase in the access, appraisal and use of evidence" p63

[66] See also Punton, 2016

A1.2. What are the most important barriers and facilitators?

While little attention has been given to the effectiveness of different types of interventions, the literature on evidence-based policy has consistently collected information on barriers to the use of evidence, as well as effective ways of overcoming them. This section focuses on evidence pertaining to these insights.

Importantly, the relevant data is simply a reflection of stakeholder perceptions, and therefore does not provide strong evidence of causal effect. However, the opinions collected do seem to converge, which indicates that the barriers and facilitators identified might in fact play a role in hindering and supporting evidence-based policy.

We focus on systematic and literature reviews. Aside from the studies reported in Table 2, we also considered those listed in Table 6. Due to time constraints, we were unable to check whether studies were repeated among the different papers considered[67] or to analyse the quality of the individual studies cited.

Table 6.

Systematic and literature reviews on barriers and facilitators for EBP

Title	Area	Type of study	Type of publication
Orton, L. et al., 2011. The use of research evidence in public health decision making processes: systematic review. PloS one, 6(7), p.21704.	general	systematic review	peer reviewed
Mitton C, Adair CE, McKenzie E, Patten SB, Waye Perry B. Knowledge transfer and exchange: review and synthesis of the literature. Milbank Q. 2007 Dec;85(4):729-68. Review.	health	literature review	peer reviewed
Innvær, Simon, et al. "Health policymakers' perceptions of their use of evidence: a systematic review." Journal of health services research & policy 7.4 (2002): 239-244.	health	systematic review	peer reviewed
Oliver, Kathryn, et al. "A systematic review of barriers to and facilitators of the use of evidence by policymakers." BMC health services research 14.1 (2014): 1.	health	systematic review	peer reviewed
Wallace, J. et al., 2012. Making evidence more wanted: A systematic review of facilitators to enhance the uptake of evidence from systematic reviews and meta-analyses. International Journal of Evidence Based Healthcare, 10, pp.338–346.	health	systematic review	peer reviewed

[67] We do not, however, include Innvær et al. 2002, which is the original review updated by Oliver 2014.

The evidence pointed to the barriers and facilitators presented in Table 7.

Barriers and solutions identified

Barrier	Effective solutions identified in the literature
Academic research lacks policy relevance[68]	Incentivize research of local issues[69] Incentivize co-production of knowledge: policymakers are involved in the planning and development of research[70]
Governments face capacity and resource constraints on ability to use evidence[71]	Building capacity to access, apply and appraise evidence[72]

[68] Clar et al., 2011 "BARRIER: Lack of research relevance / unrealistic research recommendations (5)", p.37
Oliver, 2014 p.6 "Top 5 facilitators of evidence use: Availability and access to research/improved dissemination (n = 65), Collaboration (n = 49), Clarity/relevance/reliability of research findings (n = 46), Relationship with policymakers (n = 39), Relationship with researchers/info staff (n = 37), Top 5 barriers to use of evidence: Availability and access to research/improved dissemination (n = 65), Clarity/relevance/reliability of research findings (n = 54), Timing/opportunity (n = 42), Policymaker research skills (n = 26),
Costs (n = 25) " p.6 (n = # studies in which factor reported)
Mitton, 2007 "The researcher incentive system in universities also has been cited as a barrier. Fraser (2004) commented that the current professional incentive system (i.e., including publishing in peer-reviewed journals and acquiring grants for academic, as opposed to applied or translational research) is "diametrically opposed" to the needs of potential research users." p.739
[69] Clar et al., 2011 "FACILITATORS Local and policy-relevant research / embed policy in existing context (9) p.37
[70] Oliver, 2014 p.6; see footnote 59
Mitton 2007 "Another frequently recommended facilitator is the inclusion of key individuals, either decision makers or opinion leaders, in the research planning and design stages (DeRoeck 2004; Lomas 2000b; Ross et al. 2003; Vingilis et al. 2003; Whitehead et al. 2004; Willison and MacLeod 1999)." p.738
[71] Oliver, 2014 p.6; footnote 59.
Orton et al., 2012 "Three further studies found that policy makers were not supported (through training, the structure of documents used to inform decisions, and the expectations of senior managers) to acquire the required skills or to use research evidence" p.7.
[72] Clar et al., 2011. "FACILITATORS Training professionals / flexible training (7)" p.37
Orton 2011 "Capacity building was also seen as important(…) to improve policy makers' abilities to critically appraise and interpret these outputs" p.10
Sarkies, 2017 "Policy-makers (…) desired (…) education (…) to improve understanding" p.17

Barrier	Effective solutions identified in the literature
Communication of research is challenging[73]	Long-term support and relationship building [74]
	Local and in-person presence[75]
	Use of non-technical and accessible language [76]
	Tailored messages[77]

[73] Oliver, 2014 p.6; footnote 59.
Orton et al., 2012 "Three further studies found that policy makers were not supported (through training, the structure of documents used to inform decisions, and the expectations of senior managers) to acquire the required skills or to use research evidence" p.7.
"Practical constraints on the use of research evidence in decision making were also commonly reported. They included: (…) problems in disseminating and accessing research evidence (…); and in its presentation (which was seen to be aimed at an academic audience)"p.8 Total studies included in synthesis: 18 .
[74] Orton, 2011 "Evidence on how to overcome these barriers to the use of research evidence in public health decision making is less extensive. Included studies reported a request for improved communication and sustained dialogue between researchers and end users (…). In one study, the importance of trust, between researchers and policy makers was emphasized (…)" p.8
Sarkies,2017 "The importance of trusting relationships between managers, researchers, change agents, and staff was emphasised in a number of studies" p.15
Clar et al., 2011. "FACILITATORS: Stakeholder involvement / collaboration / participation / networks (32);
Oliver, 2014 p.6, see footnote 59
Mitton 2007 "The *quality* of relationships and the *trust* developed between the research partners were critical components. The mutual mistrust between policymakers and researchers has been noted elsewhere as a barrier to the use of research (Choi et al. 2005; Trostle, Bronfman, and Langer 1999)." p.738
[75] Mitton 2007 "[as well as Innvaer 2002] Others have also supported the use of face-to-face encounters as being key to KTE (Greer 1988; Jacobson, Butterill, and Goering 2003; Lomas 2000a; Roos and Shapiro 1999; Soumerai and Avorn 1990; Stocking 1985)." p.737
"The EUR–ASSESS project concluded that personal contact with policy staff was more effective than printed material (Granados et al. 1997). This conclusion coincided with reviews by Grimshaw, Eccles, and Tetroe (2004) and Grimshaw and colleagues (2001), which examined interventions used to influence the uptake of knowledge to change clinical practice." p.739
[76] Sarkies, 2017 "Policy-makers (…) desired (…) avoidance of technical language to improve understanding" p.17
Mitton 2007 "Research should be presented in summary format, in simple language, and with clearly worded recommendations (Reimer, Sawka, and James 2005; Willison and MacLeod 1999)." p.738
[77] Mitton 2007 "In their examination of pharmaceutical policymaking, Willison and MacLeod (1999) suggested that to improve the use of research, researchers must first decide who their audience is. Similar to what Lavis and colleagues (2003a) recommended, Willison and MacLeod emphasized that each audience has different information needs and communication styles and therefore the information must be appropriately tailored", p.738
"Policy-makers (…) desired experientially tailored information(…) to improve understanding" p.17

Barrier	Effective solutions identified in the literature
Timing mismatch: time constraints on policymaking vs. longer research times[78]	Long-term support and relationship building[79] Timely support[80]

In short, evidence points to a variety of barriers and facilitators that respectively hinder and support the success of evidence-based policy projects. Since evidence collected mainly consisted of stakeholders' perceptions, we have only limited confidence in the results. We do, however, take them as weak evidence of the effectiveness of programs that work on evidence-based policy.

[78] Oliver, 2014, see footnote 59
Orton 2011 "Practical constraints on the use of research evidence in decision making were also commonly reported. They included: incompatible timeframes for research and policy making."p.8
[79] Orton, 2011 "Evidence on how to overcome these barriers to the use of research evidence in public health decision making is less extensive. Included studies reported a request for improved communication and sustained dialogue between researchers and end users (…). In one study, the importance of trust, between researchers and policy makers was emphasized (…)" p.8
Sarkies,2017 "The importance of trusting relationships between managers, researchers, change agents, and staff was emphasised in a number of studies" p.15
Clar et al., 2011. "FACILITATORS: Stakeholder involvement / collaboration / participation / networks (32); BARRIERS: Problems with stakeholder engagement / collaboration / communication between stakeholders 13)" p.35
Oliver, 2014 p.6, see footnote 59
Clar et al, 2011. "FACILITATORS: Stakeholder involvement / collaboration / participation / networks (32); BARRIERS: Problems with stakeholder engagement / collaboration / communication between stakeholders (13) " p.35
Oliver, 2014 p.6; see footnote 59
Mitton 2007 "The quality of relationships and the trust developed between the research partners were critical components. The mutual mistrust between policymakers and researchers has been noted elsewhere as a barrier to the use of research." p.739
[80]Clar et al., 2011. "FACILITATORS: Timeliness (5)" p.37
Mitton, 2007 "Timeliness and the relevance of research also are important (Dobbins et al. 2001; Frenk 1992; Hemsley-Brown 2004; Hennink and Stephenson 2005; Jacobson, Butterill, and Goering 2004; Mubyazi and Gonzalez-Block 2005; Stewart et al. 2005; Trostle, Bronfman, and Langer 1999)" p.738

Appendix 2. IGI's Advisory Board

IGI's Advisory Board currently includes[81]:

- Abhijit Banerjeem, Ford Foundation International Professor of Economics at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, co-chair

- Iqbal Dhaliwal, Executive Director of J-PAL, co-chair

- Martina Björkman Nyqvist, Associate Professor in Economics, Stockholm School of Economics

- Aprajit Mahajan, Associate Professor in Economics, UC Berkeley

- Claudia Martínez, Assistant Professor of the Institute of Economics at Pontificia Universidad Católica de Chile

- Michael Rosholm, Professor at the Business and Social Sciences School at Aarhus University

- Dean Yang, Professor of Public Policy and Economics at the Ford School of Public Policy and Department of Economics at the University of Michigan

---

[81] "Government Partnership Initiative (GPI) | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."
https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GPI

Appendix 3. IGI's First Case Study

In this appendix we explore in detail the first case study used to assess IGI's track record. We first describe the policy change, then we describe IGI's role in bringing the change about, and finally we discuss our estimate of the benefits brought about by the reform.

A3.1. The policy change

The Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS) is India's largest social-protection program. It provides 100 days of employment to all those who request work. The program is financed by the Central Government and delivered by local authorities.

Large sums are transferred through this program. In FY 2015–16, spending on the program was roughly $5 billion.[82] The fund flow has two broad stages: fund request (i.e., local authorities requesting funds from the Central Government), and fund transfer (i.e., the money being disbursed from Central Government to beneficiaries).

The payment process for this scheme was initially very complex, including several layers and required approvals. The diagram below illustrates how the system worked in 2012 in Bihar. The 'Gram Panchayat', 'Block' and 'District' are different levels of local authorities. Blue arrows represent requests, while red arrows represent transfers. Fund flows were not based on actual participation in the scheme, but rather on expected participation within each Gram Panchayat (village). Basing flows on expected (rather than actual) expenditures is common in the financing systems of many low-income countries because it helps avoid delays when communication may be slow.[83] Another reason payments are made as advances is to avoid local bodies having to borrow, in the interest of fiscal prudence.[84] In Figure 6, continuous arrows represent flows based on actual participation in the scheme, and dotted arrows represent flows based on expected participation.

---

[82] "Budget Brief 2015-16: Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme | Centre for Policy Research," accessed July 13, 2018, http://www.cprindia.org/research/reports/budget-brief-2015-16-mahatma-gandhi-national-rural-employment-guarantee-scheme.
[83] Banerjee et al., "E-Governance, Accountability, and Leakage in Public Programs." p.2
[84] Banerjee et al.2017 p.2

Figure 6.

Bihar funds flow in 2012 [85]

Continuous arrows represent flows based on actual participation in the scheme, and dotted arrows represent flows based on expected participation.

Under this system, a large part of the flow was based on expected participation in the scheme in subsequent months. The local village authority (Gram Panchayat) estimated the number of participants and days that would be worked, and thus the amount of funding needed. This estimate was then assessed by higher-level (Block and District), but sub-national, authorities. If the request was approved at the District level, District authorities would use the Central Government's electronic fund-management system, called CPSMS, to transfer money from a state pool to the Gram Panchayat's saving account. The Gram Panchayat then transferred the funds to beneficiaries according to the work they had performed. In a separate fund-flow process, money was transferred from the central government to the state pool, based on expected need.

A3.2. IGI's role

Starting in 2012, the Government of India began multiple reforms to the MGNREGS fund-flow system, to be implemented through 2015. For this evaluation, we focus on the last phase of the reform, where IGI played a role. J-PAL research might have informed other phases of the reform, but we do not focus on this, since our evaluation focuses on IGI exclusively. Below, we present

[85] Author's own elaboration, adapted from Figure 1, Banerjee et al., 2017. The following explanation is equally based on Banerjee et al., 2017.
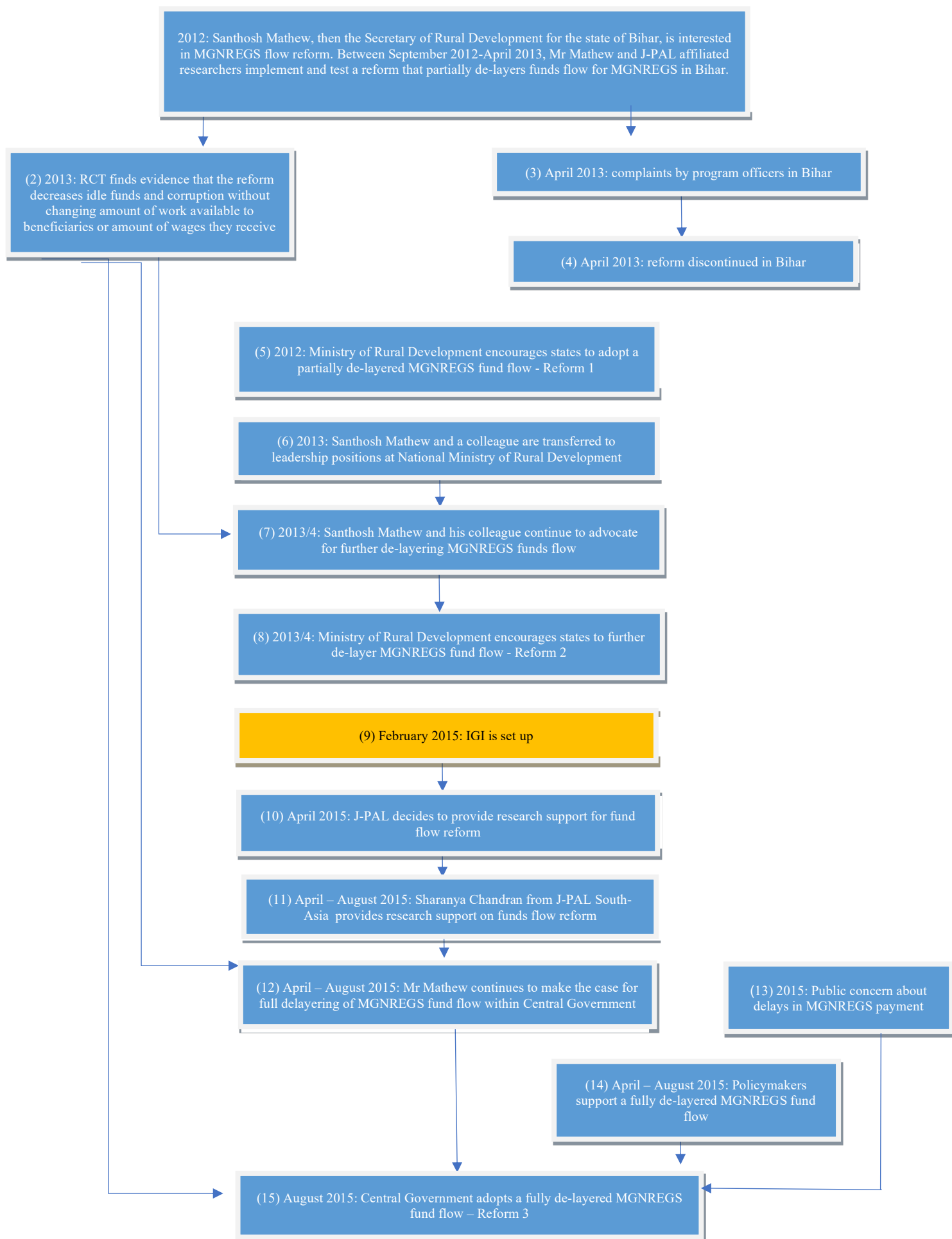
events leading to the policy change in 2015. Each step is explained further in the list that follows, and Figure 7 summarises the process.

Figure 7.

Stages and causal links leading to a 2015 reform

2012: Santhosh Mathew, then the Secretary of Rural Development for the state of Bihar, is interested in MGNREGS flow reform. Between September 2012-April 2013, Mr Mathew and J-PAL affiliated researchers implement and test a reform that partially de-layers funds flow for MGNREGS in Bihar.

(2) 2013: RCT finds evidence that the reform decreases idle funds and corruption without changing amount of work available to beneficiaries or amount of wages they receive

(3) April 2013: complaints by program officers in Bihar

(4) April 2013: reform discontinued in Bihar

(5) 2012: Ministry of Rural Development encourages states to adopt a partially de-layered MGNREGS fund flow - Reform 1

(6) 2013: Santhosh Mathew and a colleague are transferred to leadership positions at National Ministry of Rural Development

(7) 2013/4: Santhosh Mathew and his colleague continue to advocate for further de-layering MGNREGS funds flow

(8) 2013/4: Ministry of Rural Development encourages states to further de-layer MGNREGS fund flow - Reform 2

(9) February 2015: IGI is set up

(10) April 2015: J-PAL decides to provide research support for fund flow reform

(11) April – August 2015: Sharanya Chandran from J-PAL South-Asia provides research support on funds flow reform

(12) April – August 2015: Mr Mathew continues to make the case for full delayering of MGNREGS fund flow within Central Government

(13) 2015: Public concern about delays in MGNREGS payment

(14) April – August 2015: Policymakers support a fully de-layered MGNREGS fund flow

(15) August 2015: Central Government adopts a fully de-layered MGNREGS fund flow – Reform 3

Stages

(1) Bihar state-government officer Santhosh Mathew was interested in reforming the MGNREGS funds-flow process. In 2012, he worked with J-PAL-affiliated researchers to design and evaluate the impact of a reform that simplified the MGNREGS fund-flow system in Bihar. Figure 8 depicts the reform that was evaluated.
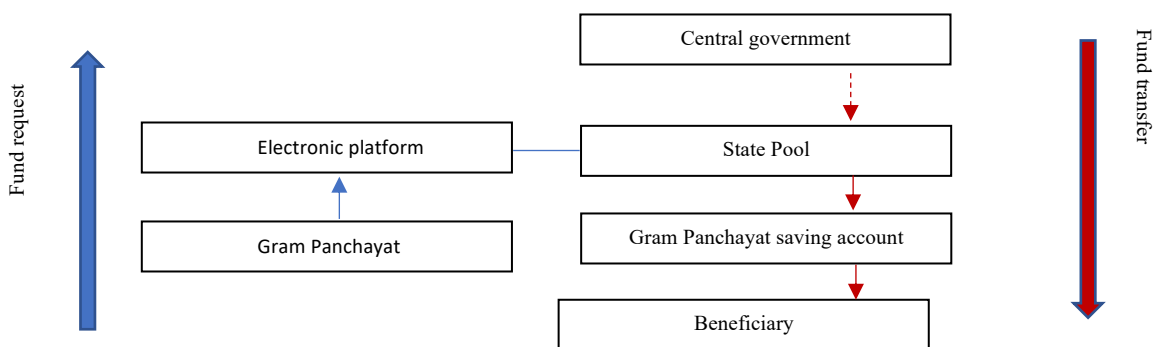
Continuous arrows represent flows based on actual participation in the scheme, dotted arrows represent flows based on expected participation.

The reform allowed Gram Panchayats to use the existing CPSMS electronic fund-management system to directly enter the details of the workers participating in the scheme. Money would then be disbursed directly from the state pool to Gram Panchayats' accounts. This had two advantages: it decreased the number of layers in the flow (removing the block and district officials' review), and based the funds requested and received by Gram Panchayats on actual, rather than expected, participation.

(2) The effect of the reform was tested through a randomised control trial. Evidence suggested that the reform reduced expenditures by 17% and reduced the idle funds sitting in Gram Panchayats' accounts by 30%. Overall, the evidence suggests that the decline was explained by a decrease in

[86] Author's own elaboration, adapted from Figure 2, Banerjee et al., 2017. The following explanation is equally based on Banerjee et al., 2017.

corruption, rather than a decline in the number of days worked by the program's beneficiaries, or number of workers benefitting from the scheme.[87]

(3)–(4) Before the results of the experiment were made public, the reform was discontinued, due to complaints by government officials in charge of deploying the funds, payment delays, and the fact that public records showed declining expenditures. The latter was interpreted as evidence of the reform decreasing MGNREGS uptake, and it was made before the RCT results were fully analysed.[88]

(5) Concurrently, in 2012 the Ministry of Rural Development started encouraging states to implement a new funds-flow system. This was in part due to Mr Mathew's starting to make the case in favour of a reform.[89] The system is depicted in Figure 9.

Figure 9.

MGNREGS funds-flow Reform 1, 2012-2015 [90]
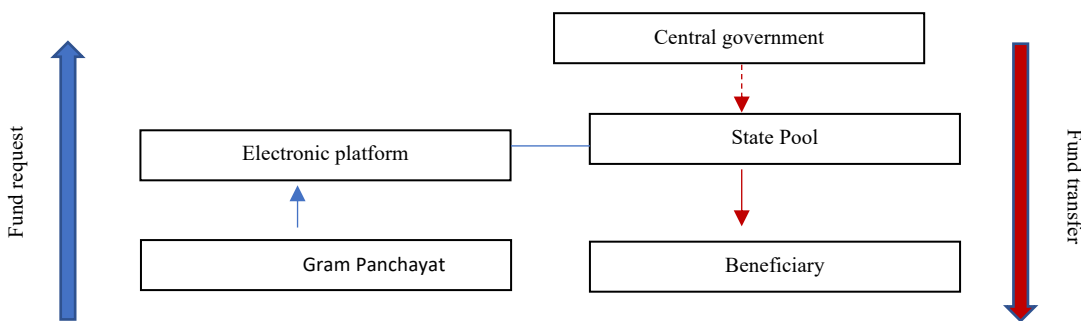
Continuous arrows represent flows based on actual participation in the scheme, and dotted arrows represent flows based on expected participation.

This new system (Reform 1) was similar to the one tested in Bihar, as the Gram Panchayat could request funds directly, without the approval of Block and District authorities. However, it improved

[87] Banerjee et al., 2017.
[88] Banerjee et al., 2017, p 28
S. Mathew, "Enhancing Delivery through Financial Reform of MGNREGS",
https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=IU01Ga5EsJM
[89] JPAL, 2018 "Funds-Flow Reforms Timeline" – draft; p.1
IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft, p.1
[90] Author's own elaboration. Information represented in the picture and discussed below is from Banerjee et al., 2017.

on the Bihar reform, as funds could be directly transferred from the state pool to beneficiaries, without having to go through the Gram Panchayat's account.[91]

However, this system still required the Central Government to make transfers to state pools based on expected participation in the program; the states would then transfer funds to beneficiaries. The fact that Centre-State transfers were based on anticipated need led to idle funds sitting in state pools.[92]

(6)–(8) In 2013, Mr Mathew was transferred to a new role as a Joint Secretary at the Ministry of Rural Development.[93] Together with a colleague, he successfully made the case for further change. Figure 10 depicts this second reform.

Figure 10.

MGNREGS funds flow Reform 2, 2013 [94]
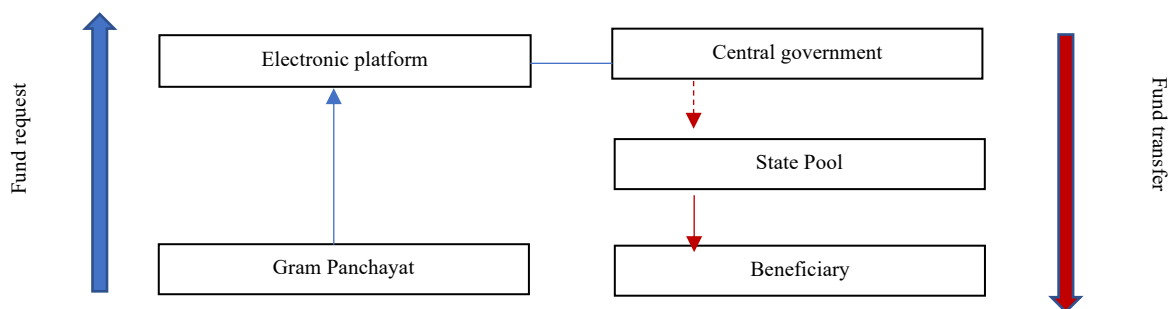
Continuous arrows represent flows based on actual participation in the scheme, dotted arrows represent flows based on expected participation.

This reform integrated the electronic platform with CPSMS, the central government's fund-management system. However, idle funds still accumulated within the State Pool because funds transferred from the Central Government to the state were sent to a State Consolidated Fund, from

[91] Banerjee et al., 2017 p.29
[92] Banerjee et al., 2017 p.30
[93] JPAL, 2018 "Funds-Flow Reforms Timeline" – draft;
IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft
[94] Author's elaboration. Information represented in the picture and discussed below is from IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft and JPAL, 2018 "Funds-Flow Reforms Timeline" – draft.

which the state then had to transfer money to the State Employment Guarantee fund before it could be transferred to beneficiaries. Several states experienced long delays in the transfer of money from the consolidated fund to the Employment Guarantee fund.[95]

(9)–(12) In April 2015, Mr Mathew asked J-PAL South Asia to support research on reforming the funds flow. At the time, J-PAL South Asia lacked the resources to provide long-term research support. However, J-PAL leadership had already announced the creation of IGI to all J-PAL offices in February, so J-PAL South Asia knew that they would be able to apply to IGI for funding to hire a full-time staff member to work on the project within a few months. In light of this future option, they decided to undertake the research support. J-PAL Policy Manager Sharanya Chandran started working on it in April 2015 about half-time. She worked on a variety of tasks, including documenting the existing landscape of fund-flow reforms in India, researching international best practices in fund transfers, elaborating the implications of J-PAL's impact evaluation in Bihar, and preparing presentations for meetings with stakeholders.

(13)–(14) Mr Mathew worked with a coalition of other interested policymakers to further simplify the fund flow to remove the final layer from centre to state so that funds could flow directly from the central government to beneficiaries, and base that payment on actual rather than expected expenditures.[96] Aside from concerns about idle funds, further support for the reform came from concerns about delays in payments to beneficiaries.[97]

(15) In August 2015, the Indian Cabinet approved a proposal by the Ministry of Rural Development, and further reformed the MGNREGS fund-flow system, allowing wages to be transferred directly from the central government to beneficiaries through a new electronic platform called PFMS (an improved version of the CPSMS).[98]

---

[95] IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft, p.2
JPAL, 2018 "Funds-Flow Reforms Timeline" – draft, p.2
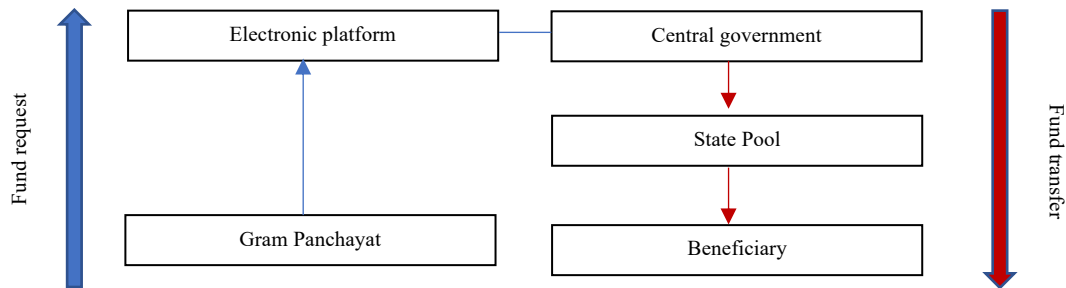[96] IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft p.3
[97] " Workers would be assured of payment of wages in the second day of the pay order generation, official sources said"
https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/cabinet-approves-direct-release-of-wages-to-mgnrega-workers-1204382
"In an effort to prevent delay in payments to workers under the rural employment guarantee scheme, the Union Cabinet has approved direct benefit transfer to beneficiaries of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS). Delayed payments has been one of the biggest criticisms of the scheme "
https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/cabinet-approves-direct-release-of-wages-to-mgnrega-workers/articleshow/48365291.cms
[98] Ministry of Rural Development, 2015 "Note for the Cabinet: Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)-direct release of wages to workers for better implementation and empowerment of the States", unpublished.
https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/cabinet-approves-direct-release-of-wages-to-mgnrega-workers-1204382
https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/cabinet-approves-direct-release-of-wages-to-mgnrega-workers/articleshow/48365291.cms

Figure 11.

MGNREGS funds flow Reform 3, 2015[99]

Continuous arrows represent flows based on actual participation in the scheme, dotted arrows represent flows based on expected participation.

In this last version of the fund flow, funds are still routed through the state account, but they are automatically disbursed to beneficiaries within two days of the funds-transfer order (FTO). This reduces the time funds spend in the State account by making the transfer automatic and based on expenditure. Once they get to the state, the funds are disbursed directly to the beneficiary.[100]

IGI supported two full-time staff members to support research from August 2015 to July 2017: first, Ms Bhumi Purohit (August 2015 to July 2016) and then Ms Miral Kalyani (August 2016-July 2017). They supported research on fund reforms in other central and centrally-sponsored schemes.[101] Partly thanks to their and Mr Mathew's efforts, in July 2016, the Ministry of Finance mandated that all central government schemes join PFMS (the new e-platform) by March 2017 to facilitate delayered and expenditure-based fund flows.[102] This is the first step required for other government programs to move to the fund-flow system implemented in Reform 3 of the MGNREGS flow reform. This request was repeated in October 2017.[103] However, aside from MGNREGS, no other scheme

---

[99] Author's elaboration. Information represented in the picture and discussed below is from IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft and JPAL, 2018 "Funds-Flow Reforms Timeline" – draft.
[100] Funds pertaining to expenses for materials and administration are still released through State funds. Ministry of Rural Development, 2015 "Note for the Cabinet: Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)-direct release of wages to workers for better implementation and empowerment of the States", unpublished.
[101] JPAL, 2018 "Funds-Flow Reforms Timeline" – draft; p.4-6
IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft p.3-4
[102] JPAL, 2018 "Funds-Flow Reforms Timeline" – draft; p.4-6
IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft p.3-4
[103] http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=171984

has yet completed the transition to the simplified fund-flow system. For our cost-effectiveness analysis of organisations' past work, we focus only on benefits that have already occurred or are highly likely to occur. For this analysis, we therefore set aside reforms to other central schemes and focus on the role played by IGI in moving forward Reform 3 of the funds-flow reform at MGNREGS in August 2015.

Causal links

For simplicity, we focus on the causal links most directly leading to Reform 3 and set aside the causal links explaining the previous phases of the reform. We focus on Reform 3 because this is the phase on which IGI had the most direct effect.

(10)–(12) We are highly uncertain about the extent to which IGI caused J-PAL to allocate Ms Chandran's time to support research. A note by J-PAL states that the decision was in part due to the knowledge that IGI funding would soon become available.[104] We think this is plausible. It is difficult to estimate the timeline of policy changes, and they often require prolonged engagement; had J-PAL South Asia not known IGI funding would become available, it would have been reasonable to judge that providing short-term research support was not a worthwhile investment of limited resources at the time. On the other hand, J-PAL South Asia and IGI are both part of the J-PAL network, and ideally we would not base the case for an organisation's causal role only on evidence provided by related organisations.

(12)–(13) IGI and J-PAL reported that Ms Chandran supported research on detailing, documenting, and presenting a case for the reform. Mr Mathew believes J-PAL's research played an important role.

(13)–(16) Mr Mathew feels that his efforts would have had an impact on the policy change. He said so during a public conference and in J-PAL's reconstruction of the case study.   We think this is plausible: Mr Mathew had been interested in fund-flow reform for some time, as shown by his engagement in the 2012 RCT. It is also likely that his position as Joint Secretary gave him the opportunity to affect such a change. However, ideally, we would not base the case for his causal role only on evidence provided by Mr Mathew himself.

---

[104] IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft, p.2

(14)–(16) Evidence suggests that concerns about idle funds and corruption (pressed by Mr Mathew) were not the only reason behind the reform. The Indian press mentioned decreasing delays as one reason for the change.[105] Delays are also mentioned in a Note for Cabinet outlining the advantages of the reform, written by the Ministry of Rural Development[106]. Mr Mathew was also not the only person supporting the change. J-PAL has reported that at least two other policymakers supporting the reform. [107]

As we discuss in more detail above, to estimate the impact of an organisation working on policy, we estimate the amount of time the organisation advanced the policy (compared to when the policy would have happened without their involvement).[108] We use five years as a baseline (that is, we start by assuming that an organisation that is responsible for implementing a policy moves a policy forward by five years), and we then use forthcoming information to update this estimate. We estimate IGI moved forward the reform by 0–3 years. The estimate is lower than our baseline for several reasons: lack of independent evidence of Mr Mathew's role in bringing the reform forward (ii) lack of independent evidence in favour of IGI's role in J-PAL's decision to provide research support full time (iii) presence of other policy-makers, aside from Mr Mathew, supporting the reform (iv) existence of other reasons to implement the reform, aside from the arguments championed by Mr Mathew.

A3.3. The reform's benefits

In this section we discuss our estimate of the benefits brought about by the MGNREGS Reform 3. The estimate consists of two steps: calculating the savings brought about by decreased idle funds and calculating the effect these savings had on outcomes.

[105] " Workers would be assured of payment of wages in the second day of the pay order generation, official sources said" https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/cabinet-approves-direct-release-of-wages-to-mgnrega-workers-1204382
"In an effort to prevent delay in payments to workers under the rural employment guarantee scheme, the Union Cabinet has approved direct benefit transfer to beneficiaries of the Mahatma Gandhi National Rural Employment Guarantee Scheme (MGNREGS).
Delayed payments has been one of the biggest criticisms of the scheme " https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/economy/policy/cabinet-approves-direct-release-of-wages-to-mgnrega-workers/articleshow/48365291.cms
[106] Ministry of Rural Development, 2015 "Note for the Cabinet: Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)-direct release of wages to workers for better implementation and empowerment of the States", unpublished
[107] IGI, 2018 "Fund-flow reforms in India: Role of J-PAL and IGI"- draft p.3
[108] Founders Pledge, 'Policy intervention: impact and evaluation'.

Estimating savings

We do not have direct evidence of the savings brought about by the reform. We base our estimate on predictions made by the Ministry of Rural Development when proposing the reform to Cabinet, according to which the reform would lead to savings of roughly $78m a year thanks to a decrease in idle funds.[109] Since the note does not provide any indication of how the estimate was arrived at, we discount the estimated benefit. We only account for benefits in states where the reform has already been implemented and assume the actual yearly savings to be between 0% and 75% of the prediction provided by the Ministry of Rural Development. The resulting estimate is that the savings are between zero and $48m.

To check whether this assumption is plausible, we also provide an alternative estimate of the savings deriving from a reduction in idle funds. First, we estimate the cost of fund float before any reform was implemented, using information from Banerjee et al. (2017). We then assume that float is fully eliminated by the implementation of Reform 3, since the reform requires funds to be directly requested and transferred. We estimate that Reform 2 had no direct benefits and was only a prerequisite for Reform 3. By subtracting the benefit from Reform 1 from the initial estimate of the cost of float, we estimate the reduction in float deriving from Reform 3. The resulting estimate of reduced float is larger than estimate obtained by discounting the prediction provided by the Ministry of Rural Development, roughly between $35 million and $155 million. This increases our confidence we are not over-estimating the benefits brought about by the reform.

Estimating effect of savings on outcomes

Since we are interested in calculating the effect the policy had on outcomes, it is not enough to show that it led to increased savings. We must also estimate the extent to which increased savings were used in programs leading to improved well-being of Indian citizens.[110] To do so, we focus on funding used on social programs on health, education, and social protection—areas in which we are most confident that increased spending will lead to increased well-being. We collect information on the percentage of government spending directed towards each of these areas, and assume savings acquired thanks to Reform 3 are used according to this split. We use data from our research partner GiveWell to estimate how expensive it is to bring about an outcome as good as

[109] Ministry of Rural Development, 2015 "Note for the Cabinet: Mahatma Gandhi Rural Employment Guarantee Act (MGNREGA)-direct release of wages to workers for better implementation and empowerment of the States", unpublished
[110] See out methodology page for a distinction between outcomes and outputs

averting the death of a child younger than 5 through government programs on health, education, and social protection in low- and middle-income countries.

Appendix 4. IGI's Second Case Study

In this appendix we explore in detail the second case study used to assess IGI's track record. We start by describing the policy change, we then discuss our estimate of the benefits brought about by the reform, and we conclude by describing IGI's role in bringing the change about.

A4.1. The policy change

A 2014 national assessment of the state of education in Zambia reported a "stagnation in learning achievement amidst exponential growth in the area of access".[111] A group of NGOs and funding partners have supported the Ministry of education in designing 'Catch Up', a program delivering remedial education for grade 3-5 students. This type of intervention consists of grouping children according to their learning level, rather than age or grade, for a portion of instruction time.[112] The program was pioneered by Indian NGO Pratham,[113] and has been shown to be effective in improving learning.

The Zambian Ministry has recently piloted the program, and plans to scale it up to 1,800 schools across Zambia over the next three years, reaching an estimated 286,000 students in grades 3-5 once at scale.[114]

A4.2. The reform's benefits

IGI has invested $250,000 in the project, supporting the exchange between Pratham staff and Zambian officials, and monitoring the pilot program conducted in 80 schools.[115]

Remedial education interventions have been assessed by a variety of studies. Due to time and capacity constraints, a comprehensive review of this type of intervention is beyond the scope of this report.[116] Below, we report the results of systematic reviews and meta-analyses evaluating the impact of this type of program.

---

[111] Zambia's National Assessment Survey 2014 Report. Accessed at: http://www.exams-council.org.zm/wp-content/uploads/2016/04/2014-NAS-Report.pdf, p xii
[112] "Remedial Education | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."https://www.povertyactionlab.org/scale-ups/remedial-education
[113] "Remedial Education | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."https://www.povertyactionlab.org/scale-ups/remedial-education
[114] "What Have We Learned about Building a Culture of Data and Evidence Use in Government? | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."
[115] "What Have We Learned about Building a Culture of Data and Evidence Use in Government? | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."
[116] This assessment is partly justified by the fact that our current cost-effectiveness analysis suggests the Zambia scale up accounts for less than 10% of IGI's impact

Table 8.

Systematic reviews and meta-analysis reviewing the effectiveness of remedial education interventions

Title	Study type
Snilstveit, Birte, et al. "The impact of education programmes on learning and school participation in low-and middle-income countries." (2016).	Meta-analysis
Evans, D and A Popova. "What Really Works to Improve Learning in Developing Countries? An Analysis of Divergent Findings in Systematic Reviews." World Bank Research Observer, vol.31, no. 2, 2016, pp. 242-270. DOI: 10.1093/wbro/lkw004	Analysis of systematic reviews
Masino, S and M Niño-Zarazúab. "What Works to Improve the Quality of Student Learning in Developing Countries?" International Journal of Educational Development, vol. 48, May 2016, pp. 53-65. DOI: 10.1016/j.ijedudev.2015.11.012	Systematic review
Kremer, Michael, Conner Brannen, and Rachel Glennerster. "The challenge of education and learning in the developing world." Science 340.6130 (2013): 297-300.	Systematic review
Petrosino, A, et al. "Interventions in Developing Nations for Improving Primary and Secondary School Enrollment of Children: A Systematic Review." Campbell Systematic Reviews, 2012: 19. DOI: 10.4073/csr.2012.19	Meta-analysis
Conn, Katharine M. "Identifying Effective Education Interventions in Sub-Saharan Africa: A Meta-Analysis of Impact Evaluations." Review of Educational Research (2017): 0034654317712025.	Meta-analysis

Evans and Popova (2016) analyses of systematic reviews of what improves learning in developing countries, and concludes that remedial education is "the intervention category which most commonly produces large improvements in student learning is pedagogical interventions that match teaching to students' learning".[117]

Two of the three meta-analyses find similar results. Conn (2017) finds that the pooled effect size of interventions akin to the Catch Up program (which she categorises as 'teacher-led pedagogical methods that emphasize formative assessment and targeted instruction') is 0.214, significant at the 10% level.[118] This means that average person in a group receiving the intervention would be above roughly 60% of the group not receiving the intervention.[119] Snilstveit et al. (2016) finds a similar effect size (0.22), with a large amount of heterogeneity. Petrosino (2012) reports zero effect.[120]

---

[117] Evans, D and A Popova. "What Really Works to Improve Learning in Developing Countries? An Analysis of Divergent Findings in Systematic Reviews." World Bank Research Observer, vol.31, no. 2, 2016, pp. 242-270., p 12
[118] Ibid, Table 7.
[119] Robert; Coe, "It's the Effect Size, Stupid: What Effect Size Is and Why It Is Important," September 25, 2002, https://www.leeds.ac.uk/educol/documents/00002182.htm., 2002
[120] Ibid, Figure 12

However, since the analysis is based only on Banerjee et al. (2005), which is also included in Snilstveit et al. (2016), we give more weight to the later, more comprehensive analysis.

Systematic reviews also report positive results. Kremer et al. (2013) only focuses on one program, and reports a 3.01-SD test-score gain per $100 spent. Masino (2016) reports that the outcomes of remedial programs are generally positive and driven by the lowest performing pupils. A 2016 study tested the effectiveness of this type of program when implemented at scale in two Indian states, and reported positive results.[121]

To estimate the counterfactual value of the intervention, we focus on income benefits deriving from increased educational attainment. To estimate the counterfactual impact of the intervention, we calculate the difference between benefits accrued by implementing remedial education and a benefit accrued by implementing an alternative policy. Since we have no information about actual plans of the Zambian government, we select a policy that we think would provide a plausible alternative: scholarships. We use scholarships for this estimation for two reasons: first, we were able to find evidence that this intervention is effective in more than one context; secondly, we found cost-effectiveness estimates for this intervention, which makes it possible to calculate the counterfactual value of the funds spent on remedial education.

The estimates of the cost-effectiveness of remedial programs and scholarships, as well as the income benefits deriving from increased educational attainment, are based on our forthcoming report on education.

---

[121] Abhijit Banerjee et al., "Mainstreaming an Effective Intervention: Evidence from Randomized Evaluations of 'Teaching at the Right Level' in India," Working Paper (National Bureau of Economic Research, October 2016), https://doi.org/10.3386/w22746.
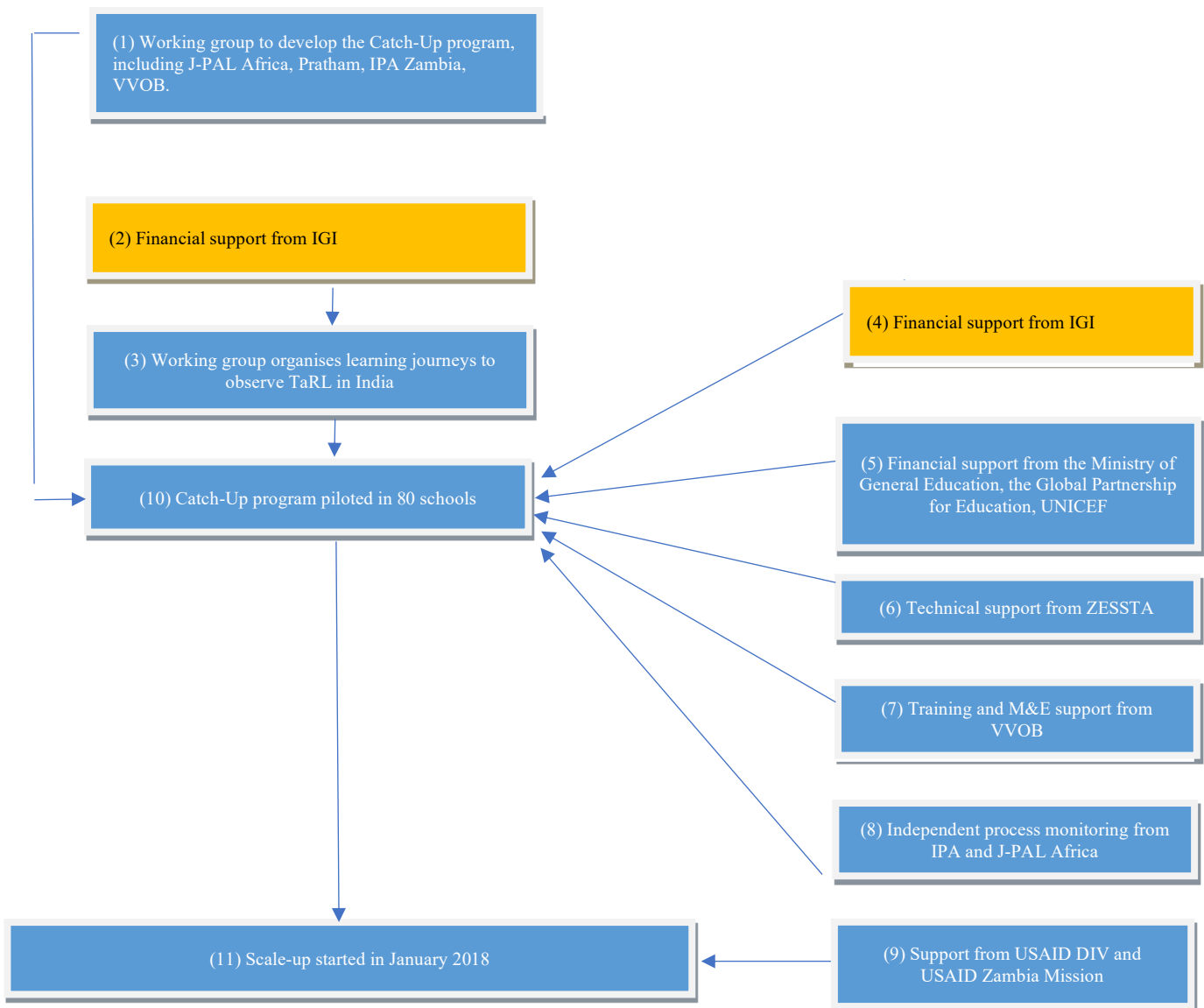
A4.3. IGI's role

The diagram below depicts the chain of events leading to the scale-up of the teaching-at-the-right-level intervention in Zambia.

Figure 12.

Stages and causal links leading to scale-up of remedial education programs in Zambia

Stages

(1)   A working group was set up to support the Ministry of Education in Zambia to implement a teaching–at-the-right-level program. The working group included J-PAL Africa, IPA Zambia, Pratham, VVOB (Flemish Association for Development Cooperation and Technical Assistance).[122]

(2) and (3) As part of this engagement, Zambian Ministry of General Education officials participated in 'learning journeys' to observe the program being implemented in India.[123] IGI supported these learning journeys.[124]

(10)   The Ministry decided to pilot the program in 80 schools.[125]

(4) to (9) Financial support for the pilot and the process monitoring of the pilot was provided by IGI, the Ministry of General Education, the Global Partnership for Education, and UNICEF. The British Council's initiative ZESSTA provided technical support and NGO VVOB supported training and monitoring and evaluation activities.[126] IPA Zambia and J-PAL Africa provided independent process monitoring.[127]

(11)   At the end of the pilot, the ministry started to scale up the program in January 2018.[128] The Ministry plans to scale up the program to 1,800 schools across Zambia over the next three years, reaching an estimated 286,000 students in grades 3–5 once at scale.[129]

[122] "Zambia to Scale Teaching at the Right Level Program to 1,800 Schools | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab," accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/8-8-17/zambia-scale-teaching-right-level-program-1800-schools.
"Presentation to Catch Up Working Group," Innovations for Poverty Action, November 9, 2015, https://www.poverty-action.org/event/presentation-catch-working-group.
[123] "From India to Zambia: A Learning Journey | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."https://www.povertyactionlab.org/news/india-zambia-learning-journey
[124] Email communication with IGI staff members Claire Walsh and Samantha Carter; https://www.povertyactionlab.org/GPI/funded-projects
[125] http://www.vvob.be/vvob/en/programmes/zambia-catch-pilot, accessed April 2018
[126] "From India to Zambia: A Learning Journey | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."https://www.povertyactionlab.org/news/india-zambia-learning-journey
[127] "Zambia Country Bried," Innovations for Poverty Action https://www.poverty-action.org/sites/default/files/publications/Zambia_Country_Brief.pdf
"From India to Zambia: A Learning Journey | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."https://www.povertyactionlab.org/news/india-zambia-learning-journey
[128] "Improving Literacy, Numeracy in Primary Schools – Zambia Daily Mail," accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.daily-mail.co.zm/improving-literacy-numeracy-in-primary-schools/.
"Zambia to Scale Teaching at the Right Level Program to 1,800 Schools | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/8-8-17/zambia-scale-teaching-right-level-program-1800-schools
[129] "What Have We Learned about Building a Culture of Data and Evidence Use in Government? | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab."

(11)   The scale-up is supported by USAID Development Innovation Ventures and USAID's Zambia Mission.[130]

Causal links

(1)–(4) It seems plausible that the working group was causally responsible for the pilot, and that the learning journey played a part in the Zambian government's decision to implement the 'teaching at the right level' program. Mr Hazemba is a Senior Officer from the Directorate of Standards at Zambia's Ministry of General Education, and one of the people in charge of Catch Up program. He reported that: *"What we have noted that is key to the success of the program is the teamwork between stakeholders, including the government, Pratham, and J-PAL. All three groups have a part to play in the success of the program… Also important is assessment and monitoring".*

(4)–(11) It seems likely that positive results from the pilot made the scale-up more likely. In an article on the topic, Mr Tukombe (Ministry of General Education permanent secretary) reported that "Preliminary results from Southern Province are also indicating much higher positive results in comparison to Eastern Province. The full results of this intervention will be compiled in 2017 and then the programme will be rolled out to all provinces in 2018".[131]

As we mention above, we use five years as a baseline (that is, we start by assuming an organisation that is responsible for implementing a policy moves it forward by five years) and we then use available information to update this estimate. In this case, we estimate that IGI advanced the reform by three years, since it seems plausible that IGI played an important role in shaping the nature of the reform (supporting the implementation of a 'teaching-at-the-right-level' program), but they were not exclusively responsible for implementing the policy .

[130]"Zambia to Scale Teaching at the Right Level Program to 1,800 Schools | The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab." https://www.povertyactionlab.org/blog/8-8-17/zambia-scale-teaching-right-level-program-1800-schools
"J-PAL Africa/UNICEF: Teaching at the Right Level in Zambia," August 10, 2017, http://giw2017.org/innovations/j-pal-africaunicef-teaching-right-level-zambia.
[131]"Improving Literacy, Numeracy in Primary Schools – Zambia Daily Mail," accessed July 15, 2018, https://www.daily-mail.co.zm/improving-literacy-numeracy-in-primary-schools/

Appendix 5. Limitations and Learning

This section discusses the limitations of the report and what we have learnt while working on it.

A5.1. The scope of this report

One major limitation of this report was its large scope. This meant our initial list included different types of organisations (e.g., think tanks, academic centres, and charities), as well as organisations working on different types of evidence (e.g., experimental or non-experimental), and different areas (e.g., health, economic growth, etc.). This made it difficult to compare across organisations. However, this broad exploration helped us get a 'lay of the land', which we hope to build on in future work.

A5.2. Heuristics used to narrow down the search

As discussed in section 2, to progressively narrow down the enquiry we use heuristics that indicated how organisations fare on the criteria we are interested in assessing. To make the first selection, we rely on an assessment of the organisations' website. In particular, to assess room for more funding, we consider whether organisations solicit donations on their website. We now believe these heuristics provide only weak signals for how well organisations fare with respect to our assessment criteria. For instance, organisations looking for more funding might decide not to solicit donations for a variety of reasons: for example, they might receive funds mostly from foundations and high-net-worth individuals, who are more likely to request information in person, rather than through websites. In spite of this limitation, we still believe this is a useful heuristic, given our time constraints. For future work, however, we plan to rely exclusively on experts' suggestions to generate an initial list, and not use websites to assess room for more funding. This would allow us to start from a narrower set of organisations, which would make it possible to contact all of them directly to gather initial information.

A5.2. Bias against organisations working on 'enabling' interventions

Policy interventions are indirect: they aim to improve the effectiveness of direct interventions. For instance, a policy intervention could persuade national governments to adopt national vaccination policies. However, the picture is often much more complex than the one depicted above: causal chains can be longer and more populated.

Assessing the impact of organisations becomes harder the further down the causal chain we go. For instance, it is difficult to determine the role of 'enabling' interventions like training civil

servants on the use of evidence, providing technology useful for collecting data, or organising conferences to foster the demand for evidence among policymakers. This might lead to a bias against this type of intervention. We are unsure about how to best address this issue. We do, however, believe that it will become easier to assess these opportunities as we gain experience in this area, and better understand gaps and opportunities.

A5.3. Insights on neglectedness

As we explain above, we do not narrow down the field to specific interventions on the basis of importance, neglectedness, and tractability, because it is difficult to find information on how different interventions with respect to those criteria. However, in conducting our research, we have acquired more information which could help determine the most effective and cost-effective allocation of funding. In particular, some of the organisations we have spoken to have stressed that it is especially difficult to find funding for two types of 'stages' in the chain from producing evidence to implementing evidence-based policy. The first is 'scoping' and 'early-stage engagements'—that is, early interactions between researchers and governments to identify problems on which collaboration might be useful. The second is providing technical assistance to implement programs at scale. We will keep collecting information to inform our future evaluations in the area.

Appendix 6. Experts Consulted for Charity Selection

Experts consulted for charity selection include:

- Abeba Taddese and Karen Anderson, Executive Directors, Results for All
- Louise Shaxson, Senior Research Fellow and Head of Programme (acting) in the RAPID programme at the Overseas Development Institute
- Fred Carden, Director of the Evaluation Unit, International Development Research Centre, Canada
- Isabel Vogel, Independent evaluation consultant
- Clare Richards, Senior Programme Specialist, INASP
- Rachel Glennerster, Executive Director, J-PAL
- Eva Vivalt, Assistant Professor, Australian National University
- Owen Barder, Vice President, Centre for Global Development