



February 2025 Newsletter: Informing the AI conversation at Davos, reaching a J-PAL milestone, and empowering women through mobile money

4 messages

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NEWSLETTER

February 2025



Photo credit: Nicolas Duc, World Economic Forum

Insights from Davos: Advancing AI for social good

At this year's World Economic Forum (WEF) Annual Meeting in Davos, [Iqbal Dhaliwal](#) (Global Executive Director, J-PAL) took the stage to explore how AI can drive social impact. In his opening remarks at the WEF session "How Can AI Help Society?," Iqbal highlighted the highest potential areas for AI in the social sector and laid out a framework for piloting, evaluating, and scaling for impact. Later at an MIT reception, he joined MIT President Sally Kornbluth as the two of them discussed the most promising applications of AI in health.

[Read more about J-PAL's approach to AI for social good »](#)

A new milestone: 1,000 researchers in our network

J-PAL has reached an extraordinary milestone: Over 1,000 researchers are now part of our research network, and are transforming the fight against poverty through evidence-informed policy. Their work spans more than 2,450 randomized evaluations across 121 countries, influencing policies that have improved millions of lives. Discover how the network grew from eight founding affiliated professors in 2003 to 1,207 researchers who are helping shape the future of policy today. [Read more »](#)

J-PAL North America launches new decarbonization Learning Lab for state and local governments

 **Apply by March 31**

State and local governments in the United States are enacting a broad range of policies and programs to support the transition to a low-carbon economy. But how can they identify which approaches are most effective, and for whom? [J-PAL North America](#) is inviting government leaders to apply for a newly launched Learning Lab to identify and scale effective decarbonization strategies. From May to July 2025, the lab will provide selected state and local jurisdictions with free and customizable trainings, strategy sessions, peer learning opportunities, and connections to researchers that can strengthen their long-term capacity to leverage data and evaluation to advance solutions that work. [Learn more and apply »](#)

FEATURED EVALUATION SUMMARY

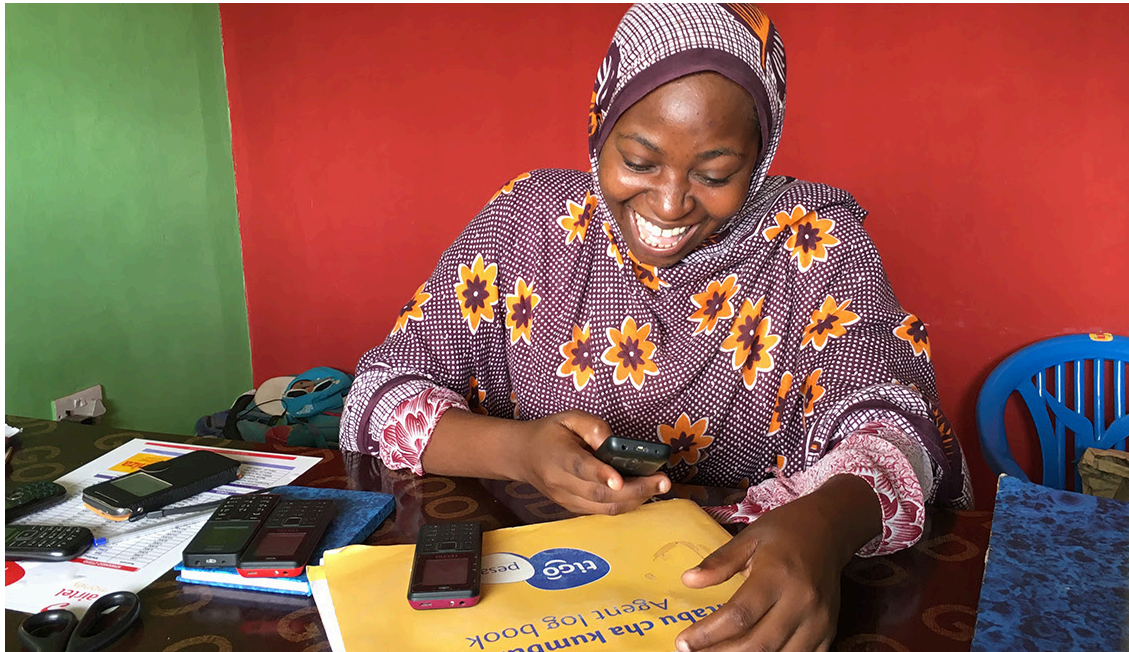


Photo credit: Fiona Graham, WorldRemit, CC BY-SA 2.0

Empowering women through mobile money

Tanzania

Policy issue: Women's ability to control their resources and make their own choices is a key policy goal and is important for economic growth. Many empowerment programs aim to support women's ability to generate their own income, but women must also be able to maintain control over their income over time.

Evaluation: In partnership with Innovations for Poverty Action and BRAC Tanzania, researchers evaluated a program that encouraged women microfinance clients to make weekly loan repayments with mobile money, instead of cash.

Results: This encouragement led to an increase in women's use of mobile money for repayment and other transactions, like savings. It also increased their financial control and decision-making power, but not business profits or sales. Based in part on these promising results, BRAC Tanzania is rolling out optional mobile money loan repayment to all branches nationwide in 2025.

[Read more](#)

Research by: Rachel Heath (University of Washington) and Emma Riley (University of Michigan)

FEATURED STORIES



Photo credit: Sawiris Foundation for Social Development

Scaling the Graduation approach in Egypt

Bab Amal—meaning “Door of Hope”—is the Egyptian adaptation of BRAC’s [Graduation approach](#). A pilot evaluation in Upper Egypt found that Bab Amal improved people’s lives across a number of dimensions, including women’s empowerment, household assets, income, consumption, and other key outcomes.

At a recent event hosted by [J-PAL Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\)](#) sharing these results, the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development, the Ministry of Social Solidarity, and the American University in Cairo, where J-PAL MENA is based, announced plans to scale Bab Amal to reach 100,000 households by 2028. [Read more »](#)

Meet the future of evidence-based research in MENA

[J-PAL Middle East and North Africa \(MENA\)](#)’s [Egypt Impact Lab](#) proudly welcomed the second cohort of the MENA Scholars Fellowship program. Supported by Community Jameel and the Sawiris Foundation for Social Development, these exceptional researchers from Egypt, Morocco, and Lebanon are tackling critical issues in labor markets, gender, climate finance, and health. Over the next two years, they’ll receive specialized training, mentorship from experienced researchers, and the opportunity to shape impactful randomized evaluations that fight poverty across the region. [Learn more about their journeys »](#)

DEDP learners spotlight: Hasto Narendra and Farhan Husain's paths to development

With backgrounds in physics and mechanical engineering, Hasto Narendra and Farhan Husain were not typical economics students—but they share a common passion for exploring meaningful work in development. In a recent blog post by [Ulayya Gempur Tirani](#) (Training and Policy Associate, J-PAL Southeast Asia) Hasto and Farhan share how their interests inspired them to complete the [Data, Economics, and Design of Policy MicroMasters](#) program, which played a key role in their career transitions, including their roles at J-PAL Southeast Asia. [Read more »](#)



Hasto Narendra (left) and Farhan Husain (right).
Photo Credit: J-PAL

FEATURED RESEARCHER



It's important [for aspiring researchers] to be willing to be thrown into things and try lots of different things."



Sarah Baird on global health and adolescent well-being

In the latest installment of our Affiliate Spotlight series, we profile [Sarah Baird](#) (George Washington University) and her efforts to use research to improve the lives of adolescents. Sarah is participating in the Gender and Adolescence: Global Evidence study that follows 20,000 adolescents from Bangladesh, Jordan, and Ethiopia over a decade. This work underscores her belief in the value of interdisciplinary methods and the importance of partnerships for long-term impact. [Read more »](#)

WELCOMING OUR NEW AFFILIATED PROFESSORS

In summer 2024, we welcomed 35 talented researchers to the J-PAL network. We will feature a few of them here each month.



Daron Acemoglu
Massachusetts Institute of
Technology



Tania Barham
University of Colorado
Boulder



Cristine Campos de Xavier
Pinto
Insper Institute of
Teaching and Research

FEATURED EVENTS

Upcoming webinars: Transportation decarbonization and residential energy efficiency

 **February 27 and March 6**

J-PAL North America (NA) is offering two webinars that explore how generating data and rigorous evaluation can inform the scaling of decarbonization and energy efficiency solutions that work. Researchers in our network will share their randomized evaluations of transportation decarbonization and residential energy efficiency programs conducted in partnership with state and local jurisdictions. Participants will also learn about J-PAL NA's new [Learning Lab](#) for US state and local government leaders.

Register for the transportation decarbonization webinar on [February 27](#) »

Register for the residential energy efficiency webinar on [March 6](#) »

FEATURED TRAININGS

J-PAL Europe's 2025 Summer School: Development Methodologies

 **Apply by February 14**

J-PAL Europe and Africa are now accepting applications from researchers for the 2025 Summer School. Organized in partnership with the French Development Agency, the Fund for Innovation in Development, and local institutions, the advanced program offers Africa-based researchers an opportunity to deepen their understanding of rigorous impact evaluations and gain practical experience. This year, the training will take place from July 7–11 in Dakar, Senegal at the African Center for Higher Studies in Management. [Learn more and apply »](#)

Humanitarian Action Research Incubator to develop projects in Asia

 **Apply by February 14**

Applications are now open for the Humanitarian Action Research Incubator, as part of J-PAL and Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA)'s [Displaced Livelihoods Initiative](#) and [Humanitarian Protection Initiative](#). The incubator will be hosted by IPA Philippines and J-PAL Europe in Manila, Philippines from April 7–10. Participants will engage with content tailored to organizations implementing livelihoods programming for displaced persons and learn how to design randomized evaluations to better understand their program's impact. [Learn more and apply »](#)

Enroll now in the Data, Economics, and Design of Policy MicroMasters Program

 **Enroll by February 18**

The MicroMasters program in [Data, Economics, and Design of Policy](#) (DEDP) courses started on January 21, but it's not too late to enroll. Spring term enrollment is open until February 18, or enroll now for summer courses that start on May 13. Those who complete the DEDP MicroMasters credential can apply for the residential master's program at MIT or pursue accelerated studies through one of our pathway universities. [Learn more and enroll »](#)

J-PAL Africa's Evaluating Social Programs course in Cape Town

 **Apply by March 31**

How do you know if your organization's programs are achieving their intended impact? Join J-PAL Africa's upcoming [Evaluating Social Programs](#) course to learn why and when

randomized evaluations can be used to rigorously measure the impact of social programs and how findings can inform decision-making. Participants will explore these topics through interactive lectures and real-world case studies, while forging connections with fellow policymakers, practitioners, and researchers. Applications are due March 31, but candidates are encouraged to apply at their earliest convenience as space is limited. [Learn more and apply »](#)

Building capacity for evidence-based agricultural programs in Africa

Agriculture in Africa is a large source of employment, but small-scale farmers face barriers to adopting innovations that can boost their profits. The [UM6P-J-PAL Agricultural Lab for Africa](#) hosted a three-day [custom training](#) for participants from the private sector and academia who are implementing programs for small-scale farmers across ten African countries. Participants learned strategies to measure the effectiveness of their own farmer-focused programs and applied evaluation tools to real-world challenges, such as fertilizer adoption. A new blog post shares insights from the training and how it supported evidence-informed decision-making in African agriculture. [Read more »](#)

MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS

[Schools failing to teach students to apply math in real-world settings, study reveals](#)
Indian Express EdexLive

[Study in India shows kids use different math skills at work vs. school](#)
MIT News

[Using research evidence to shine a light on pressing policy issues](#)
National Conference of State Legislatures

[Pierce County partners with J-PAL North America to evaluate opioid treatment programs](#)
Hoodline Seattle

[Building state capacity in fragile states: Evidence from Afghanistan](#)
CEPR - VoxEU

NEW RESEARCH PAPERS

[Long-Term Employment and Health Effects of Active Labor Market Programs](#)
Martin Baekgaard, Søren Albeck Nielsen, Michael Rosholm, and Michael Svarer

Can a Trusted Messenger Change Behavior when Information is Plentiful? Evidence from the First Months of the Covid-19 Pandemic in West Bengal

Abhijit Banerjee, Marcella Alsan, Emily Breza, Arun G. Chandrasekhar, Abhijit Chowdury, Esther Duflo, Paul Goldsmith-Pinkham, and Benjamin A. Olken

Children's Arithmetic Skills Do Not Transfer Between Applied and Academic Mathematics

Abhijit Banerjee, Swati Bhattacharjee, Raghavendra Chattopadhyay, Esther Duflo, Alejandro J. Ganimian, Kailash Rajah, and Elizabeth S. Spelke

Toward an Understanding of the Political Economy of Using Field Experiments in Policymaking

Guglielmo Briscese and John List

Combating the Harassment of Online Activists in Authoritarian Settings

Romain Ferrali and Horacio Larreguy

 **FEATURED JOBS**

Research Associate, Cape Town, South Africa

Research Manager, Cape Town, South Africa

Research Assistant (Pre-Doctoral), Paris, France

Research Associate (Long-Term Effects of Cash Transfers to Women), Rabat, Morocco

Research Manager (Education), Rabat, Morocco

Project Manager (The India Climate and Health Data Capacity Accelerator), Bangalore, Karnataka, or New Delhi, Delhi, India

Senior Finance and Operations Manager, Cambridge, MA, US

Senior Human Resource Associate, Cambridge, MA, US

Senior Research, Education, and Training Associate, Cambridge, MA, US

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400 Main Street, Cambridge, MA, 02142 US