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January Newsletter: Reflections on 2024 and new directions for 2025; launching a website for ADEPT, the global learning alliance; and unlocking AI for social good

1 message

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NEWSLETTER
January 2025

Animation credit: J-PAL

A year of collaboration, scaling, and impact

2024 was a landmark year, shaped by pivotal global elections and the rapid rise of AI as a powerful tool for tackling urgent social challenges. At J-PAL, we met the moment by strengthening existing partnerships and forging new ones to improve the lives of people experiencing poverty.

From launching new Air and Water Labs around the world to building innovative collaborations with USAID and the UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office to improve evidence use in bilateral aid, our work has pushed the boundaries of what research can achieve.

The 2024-25 edition of *Improving Lives Through Evidence* highlights these transformative efforts and previews how we will advance a bold vision for more equitable and evidence-informed policies in 2025.

Read more

Discover ADEPT: Explore our global training network's new website

J-PAL's Alliance for Data, Evaluation, and Policy Training (ADEPT) is a global network of campuses and partners committed to training the next generation of researchers and decision-makers in policy evaluation and data analysis. We're seeking new partners—check out the network's website to learn how to get involved. Visit the new site »

Unlocking the potential of AI for social good

AI has transformative potential for the social sector, but may not be the silver bullet that it is hyped to be. In the latest issue of the Stanford Social Innovation Review, Iqbal Dhaliwal (Global Executive Director) and Michael Hou (Senior Policy Associate) discuss five paths with the highest potential for AI to increase program effectiveness, and how rigorous impact evaluations can help maximize AI's benefits while mitigating its risks. Read more »

Stay tuned for more announcements about J-PAL's work in AI. Subscribe for the latest »

NEW POLICY INSIGHT

Photo credit: Elen Marlen, Shutterstock.com

Increasing small-scale farmers' access to agricultural markets

In a new Policy Insight coauthored with the Center for Effective Global Action, J-PAL's Agriculture sector reviews evidence from 29 rigorous evaluations on strategies to support small-scale farmers' access to markets to improve their livelihoods.

Policy issue: In remote areas of many low- and middle-income countries, transport costs are high and agricultural market actors, including farmers, traders, and consumers, are not well connected to each other. Policies that address market access are complex and can range from national-level infrastructure projects to digital platforms that facilitate connections between farmers and traders to improve input quality and access.

Results: When small-scale farmers had better access to both markets where they bought inputs, such as fertilizers and seeds for their own farming, and markets where they sold their goods, farmers invested more in their farms, had higher yields, and could trade more easily. This led to the production of higher-value crops, greater incomes, and, in some cases, more stable food prices for consumers.

Read more

FEATURED BLOGS

Photo credit: Kwantu Communications and Marketing

Boosting jobs and entrepreneurship in Africa

Last November, J-PAL Africa brought together leading economists, South African policymakers, and entrepreneurs to discuss the pressing challenge of unemployment on the continent and explore innovative strategies to address it. During this event, J-PAL Africa officially launched the Jobs and Entrepreneurship in Africa Portfolio (JEA), supported by the Kuo Sharper Foundation. This new effort aims to generate insights on boosting small and medium enterprises' productivity to drive job creation in sub-Saharan Africa. This blog post shares perspectives from event participants on building Africa-specific evidence to inform employment policies and programs, and outlines JEA's research priorities for tackling unemployment across the continent. Read more »

What does it take to sustain a government-researcher partnership?

For nine years, the Government of Tamil Nadu and J-PAL South Asia have partnered to address the challenges of India's growing elderly population. Together, they worked with researchers to evaluate and shape impactful policies to improve elderly people's quality of life, establishing a model for meaningful and long-lasting collaboration between researchers and governments. Read more »

Leveraging evidence to support displaced communities in Somalia

Africa is home to over 40 million forcibly displaced individuals. Norwegian Church Aid Somalia and its partner, the Center for Research and Integrated Development, attended J-PAL Europe's Humanitarian Action Research Incubator in Nairobi to deepen their understanding of randomized evaluations to evaluate and enhance their relief programs for displaced communities in Somalia. A new blog post highlights their journey and the transformational role impact evaluation can play in addressing humanitarian changes.
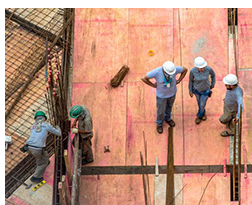
Read more »

MORE BLOGS

Photo credit: Alf Ribeiro, Shutterstock.com

How can we support workers in their search for quality jobs in Brazil?

Read more »

Photo credit: Nikhila Vijay, IDCA

Investing in data talent for social impact matters now more than ever

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.

Edward Okeke
Pardee RAND Graduate School

Christopher Roth
University of Cologne

Maisy Wong
University of Pennsylvania

FEATURED EVENTS

Understanding the Impacts of Cash Transfers on Health Outcomes

📅 **March 18**

As cash transfer programs gain popularity in the United States, randomized evaluations of these programs can help us understand how they impact people's lives—including their health and health care use. This webinar, hosted by J-PAL North America, will bring together the researchers from three different randomized evaluations to share their findings, insights on how these findings shape our understanding of cash transfer programs' impact on health, and how policymakers can apply these findings. Learn more and register »

ICYM: Sharing scalable solutions for climate resilience at COP29

📍 **Baku, Azerbaijan**

In November 2024, J-PAL MENA's Hub of Advanced Policy Innovation for the Environment (HAPIE), in collaboration with Community Jameel, hosted a roundtable at the 29th Climate Change Conference of Parties. The session showcased evidence on scalable solutions for food and water security in the face of worsening climate impacts. Representatives from HAPIE, J-PAL South Asia's Solutions and Advancements through Research for Water and Air, and the UM6P-J-PAL Agricultural Lab for Africa also shared insights on J-PAL's model for embedded labs in the private and public sectors and the power of tailored partnerships to address critical climate challenges.

A blog post recapping the event delves into the unique approaches of these labs, regional climate vulnerabilities, and actionable strategies to align with countries' climate commitments, providing a roadmap for accelerating effective, evidence-based climate action. Read more »

FEATURED TRAININGS

Open enrollment and scholarships for the DEDP MicroMasters Program

📅 **Courses started January 21**

The spring term of the MicroMasters program in Data, Economics, and Design of Policy started on January 21. Enrollment is open until February 18. Participants who complete the program are eligible to apply for an accelerated master's program at MIT or one of our pathway universities.

Scholarships are available to learners from Brazil thanks to the generous support of the Lemann Foundation. Enroll today »

Humanitarian Action Research Incubator in Asia

📅 **Applications due February 14**

Applications are now open for J-PAL's 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 on April 7–10. Participants will engage with content tailored to organizations implementing livelihoods programming for displaced persons and learn how to design a randomized evaluation to better understand their program's impact. Register for an informational webinar on February 4. Apply »

Reflections from participants of J-PAL Europe's "Summer School"

📅 **Applications due February 14**

Since 2021, J-PAL Europe has held an annual "summer school" for Africa-based researchers. Organized in partnership with the French Development Agency, the Fund for Innovation in Development, J-PAL Africa, and local institutions, the program helps researchers deepen their understanding of rigorous impact evaluations and gain practical experience. Participants shared their experiences in a recent blog post, with one researcher highlighting that the program helped foster "a network of researchers from a variety of nationalities. We hope to stay in touch and be able to build projects together going forward." Read more »

J-PAL Europe and Africa are now accepting applications from researchers for the 2025 summer school edition. This year, the training will take place July 7–11 in Dakar, Senegal at the African Center for Higher Studies in Management. Apply »

🔭 **MEDIA HIGHLIGHTS**

7 global buzzwords for 2025: From 'techquity' to 'climate displacement' to 'belonging'
NPR

Buoyed by response to pilot phase in Tiruchy, TN expands community-based programme for elderly women
The New Indian Express

South Africa's big social grant dilemma
BusinessTech

Ushering in reforms in school education in A.P. with priority on students' welfare
The Hindu

📄 **NEW RESEARCH PAPERS**

The Power of Personalised Feedback: Evidence from an Indoor Air Quality Experiment
Rita Abdel Sater, Mathieu Perona, Elise Huillery, and Coralie Chevallier

Gender-Based Violence in Schools and Girls' Education: Experimental Evidence from Mozambique
Sofia Amaral, Aixa Garcia-Ramos, Selim Gulesci, Sarita Oré, Alejandra Ramos, and Maria Micaela Sviatschi

Diffusion in Social Networks: Experimental Evidence on Information Sharing vs Persuasion
Marcel Fafchamps, Asad Islam, Debayan Pakrashi, and Denni Tommasi

The Impact of a Monthly Unconditional Cash Transfer on Child Brain Activity: A 4-Year Follow-Up
Sonya Troller-Renfree, Molly A. Costanzo, Greg Duncan, Katherine Magnuson, Lisa A. Gennetian, Hirokazu Yoshikawa, Sarah Black, Debra S. Karhson, Michael D. Georgieff, Jennifer M. Nelson, Timothy Nelson, Nathan Fox, and Kimberly Noble

🚨 **FEATURED JOBS**

Research Associate, Cape Town, South Africa
Public Policy and Communications Associate, Paris, France
Research Associate (Morocco Innovation and Evaluation Lab), Rabat, Morocco
Senior Research Manager (Morocco Innovation and Evaluation Lab), Rabat, Morocco
Policy Associate (Artificial Intelligence for Social Good), Bangalore, Karnataka, or New Delhi, Delhi, India
Research Associate (Social Networks), Bangalore, Karnataka, India
Finance and Operations Manager, Jakarta, Indonesia

Grants and Finance Manager, Cambridge, MA, US

Senior AI Policy Associate, Cambridge, MA, US

Senior AI Policy Manager, Cambridge, MA, US

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

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