

IPA's Cross-Country Lab Exchange

Kigali, Rwanda



Overview of the Event

During the week of November 14, 2022, IPA convened education policymakers from several countries to enable cross-country learning on key topics related to evidence-informed policymaking and building embedded labs. We brought together 24 officials from Rwanda, Ghana, Côte d'Ivoire, Zambia, Kenya, Uganda, Nigeria, and Liberia to discuss strategies for building capacity for evidence-informed decision-making in government units. Our objectives for the cross-country learning exchange were:

- Observe, participate, and exchange best practices on evidence-informed policymaking and creating embedded evidence labs, including cocreating research, MEL strategies, and using evidence in policy.
- Learn from policymakers' experiences launching and institutionalizing embedded evidence labs in Ghana, Rwanda, and Zambia and how they are leveraging the labs to build a culture of evidence-based decisionmaking.
- Explore potential lab activities and how they might be useful for Ministries
 of Education, including disseminating evidence, data mapping,
 developing monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) tools, conducting
 research and MEL training, creating research coordinating committees,
 and research agenda, and scaling up evidence-informed programs.

Key Learnings

Lessons in organizing successful lab exchange events

One of the most successful aspects of the exchange was how we were able to hand over much of the content of the event to our government partners who shared their thoughts and best practices directly and authentically. We found it to be most effective for government partners to share their successes and lessons learned so that partners in attendance in similar stages of lab development could learn directly from them. Perhaps obviously, this also enabled these partners to demonstrate ownership of the work that they are leading, rather than hear about their own experiences through IPA. It was a foundational principle of the event organization that this should be a true two-way exchange, rather than one-way lecturing by IPA.

Feedback from attendees

Towards the end of the cross-country learning exchange, we asked lab teams to share feedback on the event. The main points of feedback were as follows:

- Participants, both government partners and IPA staff, reacted positively to the event, remarking they were able to form or strengthen meaningful connections related to labs.
- Particularly, government participants found sessions on Lab Institutionalization, Building and Improving Data for Decision-Making, and Generating and Using Evidence for Policy as the most useful sessions, whereas IPA staff found sessions on Pitching Labs to Ministry Partners and Prospective Funders, How to Work Effectively with Government Partners to Secure Buy-In, and the Building and Improving Data for Decision-Making sessions as the most useful.
- Government partners expressed interest in more learning exchanges. In the future, government partners would like to take advantage of virtual platforms to engage more frequently on topics including Lab Institutionalization, Lab Design, and Lab Inception but would also like IPA to develop more practical guides and toolkits on how to run an embedded lab.
- To improve the next exchange, participants suggested having fewer panels and more interactive conversations among lab teams.

Lessons in developing embedded labs

Over the three day event, we had the opportunity to learn from government partners in different phases of lab development on how they have approached the set-up, design, and institutionalization of their labs. We have summarized some of the key learnings below:

1. Evidence labs have the best momentum when the movement comes from the government itself.

For example, in Ghana, in 2019, IPA brought together counterparts from Peru, Zambia, Ghana, and Côte d'Ivoire to share practices on (i) linking evidence to sector planning and (ii) setting up embedded evidence labs in government. This was catalytic: Zambian colleagues observed Ghana's Education Evidence Summit, which IPA has co-hosted with the Ghana Ministry Education for several years, and which takes place alongside Ghana's National Education Week (Ghana's education sector annual review gathering). In early 2022, our Zambian colleagues launched their own Education Evidence Summit, which took place alongside their Annual Joint Sector Review.

2. Identifying champions at both the technical and political level can further lead to government buy-in and ownership for the lab and build momentum for the lab's activities.

Several of our government colleagues who attended the lab exchange event shared how they were able to be champions for the labs within their respective governments, advocating for the use of evidence-based policymaking. They found it important to identify champions at both the technical and political levels, to attain the high-level political buy-in needed to get approval for key activities, but then also to keep the work moving forward in partnership with technical-level staff and sustain changes in government.

Colleagues from Côte d'Ivoire shared an example of when we held a meeting with all of the directorates and technical advisors of the Ministry of Education and National Literacy (MENA), including the Director and Deputy Director of Cabinet, with the goal of introducing the lab and getting buy-in for our design phase activities. Mr. Faustin Koffi, the General Inspector of the MENA, mentioned how the Director and Deputy Director of Cabinet were explaining to the directorates themselves what the lab is in their own terms, a concrete example of buy-in.

3. Demonstrating proof of concept for a lab—that a lab can operate and add value in a specific context—is a way to gain government buy-in and ownership.

For example, in Rwanda, the request to initiate the lab came from the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB) Director General following the demonstrated impact of the

pay-for-performance (P4P) study conducted by researchers Clare Leaver, Owen Ozier, Pieter Serneels, and Andrew Zeitlin in partnership with IPA, the IGC, and REB, which showed that working under P4P contracts motivated teachers to achieve better learning outcomes for students. The P4P study results were presented to the Minister of Finance and the Minister of Education as well as representatives from the Office of the President, with considerable interest demonstrated for the scale up. At the request of the Rwanda Basic Education Board (REB), the partnership expanded its technical and analytical support by embedding three IPA staff in MINEDUC and its affiliated agencies to enhance two new critical national education systems needed for the potential scale up of P4P: (1) the centralization of teacher recruitment and management and (2) national comprehensive assessments. The lab has achieved a lot to move these activities forward, including finalizing the teacher recruitment framework, incorporating modules into the teacher management information system (TMIS), and conducting the national rollout of the comprehensive assessment management information system (CAMIS).

As the Rwanda Minister of State of Primary and Secondary Education, Honorable Gaspard Twagirayezu noted during his keynote speech at the event, these activities will help MINEDUC to use this data in future years in order to get an accurate picture of student learning outcomes and inform decisions on teacher recruitment and management.

4. Following government priorities—and clearly demonstrating that alignment—is key to designing successful evidence labs.

Research coordinating committees are one way for labs to follow government priorities, aligning data and research needs with government policy priorities and questions they may have about implementing specific policies or programs. As colleagues from Zambia and Kenya noted during the lab exchange, the research agendas they have developed in partnership with government colleagues align with each country's Education Sector Plan. In Ghana, the Education Sector Research Group of the Ministry (of which IPA is a member and co-chairs) led the development of the Research Agenda.

As Ms. Simuchembu, Principal Planning and Policy Officer at the Zambia Ministry of Education (MoE) conveyed during a panel, the Zambia lab relies on the research coordinating committee (RCC) to define the scope of work of the lab to address the needs of the Ministry of Education (MoE). The coordinating body grounds research in priority policy areas and decides which policies require monitoring and evaluation.

Spearheading the development of the MoE's research strategy and monitoring its implementation, the RCC became a product of the lab that is dedicated to ensuring lab activities are also working towards Ministry goals. The committee has defined priorities, including implementing the Education for All (EFA) free education policy, improving the Education Management Information System (EMIS), and formulating the 2022-2026 strategic plan. Through these lab activities, the lab remains focused on gathering research aligned with government priorities and is demand-driven.

5. Having internal buy-in and interest in embedding the lab will generate enthusiasm for the lab from the onset, and will enable us to work towards our goal of building a culture of evidence-based decision-making.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the team focused on co-creating the design of the lab by building engagement with stakeholders whose buy-in is critical for the lab to have its intended effect on improving learning through applying evidence to policy. Mr. Koffi explained how the team hosted consultations with key stakeholders to discuss the feasibility of the lab and key priorities the lab would work to address, held a design workshop to finalize key decisions, developed a joint workplan, and engaged the Ministry of Education and National Literacy (MENA) leadership team throughout the process. By working to secure engagements from key actors, the lab is built in a co-created way that is context-relevant and receives full buy-in from key actors.

6. Leveraging existing education sector efforts enables partners to see the value of labs and how they can generate and use evidence to inform what's important to them.

In Côte d'Ivoire, the lab introduced the use of evidence in policymaking through the planning process of the États Généraux de l'Éducation Nationale et de l'Alphabétisation (EGENA), a national framework and reforms aimed improving the education system in Côte d'Ivoire. IPA mapped existing rigorous evidence to the priorities outlined in the États Généraux framework, in order to ensure evidence-informed solutions would be prioritized in the framework. Mr. Koffi highlighted that this work was an early demonstration of the application of evidence to policy—a way to show stakeholders that the lab model works and is applicable to their priorities.

7. The scope of a lab should evolve and be responsive to changing government priorities so that it stays relevant and useful.

For example, in Ghana, although the initial approach for the lab (modeled on IPA's experience in Peru) was to provide technical support from a central location within the Ministry, it became important to structure our support to fit the way the Ministry's work is structured: along the lines of priority programs of its various agencies and sub-groups. Colleagues from Ghana explained how we have supported different agencies within the Ghana Ministry of Education in a demand-driven way, further outlined in this case study.

8. When designing evidence labs, a starting point is to consider what data is available for decision-making and how the government is currently generating and using data and evidence.

In Côte d'Ivoire, we are currently conducting a capacity assessment to gather this information. Colleagues from Côte d'Ivoire shared some preliminary results, including the need to assess and strengthen the capacity for Côte d'Ivoire Ministry of Education and Literacy (MENA) departments to facilitate actionable research that informs their day-to-day decision-making. Once we have a full picture of the capacity assessment results, we can use this to determine which activities the lab should carry out and what our goals are for the lab's progress.

9. Designing labs in a learning-by-doing approach is key to setting up a sustainable model that does not rely on outside actors.

During the exchange, colleagues from Ghana explained how when we started to work with the National School Inspections Authority (NaSIA), they were conducting all school inspections using paper tools and did not have a rigorous system for sampling schools to inspect. To alleviate these challenges, IPA worked with NaSIA to support the design and piloting of the KoBoCollect (digital) classroom inspection tool and give advice on managing, validating, analyzing, and visualizing data from the tool. IPA also supported the drafting of a data management and analysis plan that outlined staffing requirements to ensure the smooth running of the data management system. Based on this experience, NaSIA adopted a rigorous sampling system as well as a more robust data collection and analysis process. They hired a data analyst to manage the inspection data and trained their IT technician to program the inspection tools on KoBoToolbox. NaSIA was successfully able to implement the first round of their inspection exercise and come up with an analysis of the results. In 2021, NaSIA was able to draft a KG inspection tool with minimal support from IPA.

10. It is important to develop labs with sustainability in mind, to ensure that labs can last beyond IPA's support and become fully operational by themselves.

There are several strategies we can employ to ensure the sustainability of the lab, including formalizing the lab's processes and financing and deciding where to host the lab. Formalizing partnerships through an MoU, integrating the lab into a Ministry's budget priorities, and establishing clear processes in line with the lab's mission can help maintain the focus of the lab through changes of staff.

Our colleagues from Peru explained how when the Peru Ministry of Education in partnership with IPA started developing MineduLAB, there was no office of Monitoring and Evaluation at the Ministry of Education. To institutionalize the MineduLab in Peru, they decided to situate the lab and the M&E office in the Secretariat of Strategic Planning. The secretariat provides M&E and budgeting services to implementation units and controls budgetary decisions and accounts for the lab during annual planning processes. This unit also has access to administrative data to leverage for evaluations and low-cost interventions to inform policy and program development. IPA Peru also mentioned the importance of maintaining low costs associated with labs to support their sustainability through political cycles. Modest budgets minimize the risk of inviting undue scrutiny from new administrations that have not yet had the time to understand and appreciate the value of a lab.

Next Steps

We also asked lab teams to document next steps they will take for their labs following the event, to drive accountability and actionability. Below is a table demonstrating these next action items:

Lab Team	Next Step
Colombia	 Work on data mapping and a capacity assessment Review current MoU being drafted based on experiences and lessons learned from other lab teams Define role of embedded staff within Instituto Colombiano de Bienestar Familiar (ICBF) based on learnings gathered from other country teams
Côte d'Ivoire	 Sign MoU Develop 2023 workplan and roles for Ministry staff Facilitate lab design workshop and draft design document Facilitate education sector research group workshop and draft research agenda
Ghana	 Renew MoU Develop 2023 workplan, focusing on integrated MEL dashboard with the Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring & Evaluation (PBME) unit Meet with high-level Ministry stakeholders to generate visibility for the lab
Kenya	Analyze quick wins that we could achieve together with MoE to strengthen their buy-in and demonstrate the value of the evidence hub

	Add evidence-based inputs into MoE's strategic plan
	Get buy-in for Terms of Reference document for the lab among high-level Ministry stakeholders
Liberia	Move forward data collection for the learning assessment project (the hope is that this will lead to strengthened engagement with the MoE and clear a pathway for a lab)
Nigeria	Prepare a concept note to share with the Ministry of Education about proposed lab activities to generate support for a lab that we can pitch to prospective funders
Peru	 Work with the Ministry of Education to develop a plan to improve the use of evidence generated by the lab Scope lab projects beyond RCTs Sign an MoU outlining key areas of collaboration
Rwanda	 Launch the scale-up of the pay-for-performance intervention Add the embedded lab to IPA's existing MoU with the Rwanda Ministry of Education Provide feedback on the Ministry's M&E framework
Sierra Leone	Complete lab scoping activities, including conducting a feasibility assessment and drafting a research and learning agenda
Uganda	 Hold a roundtable discussion with key government stakeholders about a potential lab Develop a Terms of Reference document as a key step in formalizing our engagement

Zambia	 Conduct a comprehensive data mapping assessment Identify key staff at the MoE for capacity building sessions
	Organize monthly meetings with the Director of Planning and Information to coordinate lab activities

Appendix

Attendees

From IPA, 37 staff from 10 countries (the aforementioned countries as well as Peru and Colombia) were in attendance as well as 24 government partners (see the table below for more details):

Name Title		Organization
Max Okiror	Assistant Commissioner	Uganda Ministry of Education
Cleophus Mugenyi	Commissioner	Uganda Ministry of Education
Brighton Barugahare	Commissioner	Uganda Ministry of Education
Jemba-Makii Aziz- Kamara	Delivery Team Coordinator	Sierra Leone Ministry of Education
Faustin Koffi	General Inspector	Côte d'Ivoire Ministry of Education and Literacy
Joe Gbasakollie	pe Gbasakollie Portfolio Coordinator, World Bank Education Project	
Edward Appiah	Director General, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment	Ghana Ministry of Education
Mavis Asare- Donkor	Director, Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring & Evaluation	Ghana Ministry of Education
Abdulgafar Otunola	Assistant Director	Nigeria Ministry of Education
Besnart Simunchembu Principal Planning and Policy Officer		Zambia Ministry of Education
Joshua Mwangi Director of Policy and Partnerships		Kenya Ministry of Education
Richard Limo	Richard Limo Deputy Director of Policy and Partnerships	
Eveline Owoko	Director of Quality Assurance	Kenya Ministry of Education
Ann Gachoya Deputy Director of Policy Partnership		Kenya Ministry of Education
Lilian Karanja	Librarian	Kenya Ministry of Education

Dr. Lucy Ogol	Senior Lecturer	Kenya Ministry of Education
Daniel Wesonga	Advisor	Kenya Ministry of Education
Milton Nzioka	Director of Education	Kenya Ministry of Education
Twagirayezu Gaspard	Minister of State	Rwanda Ministry of Education
Leon Mugenzi	Head of Department of Teacher Development	Rwanda Ministry of Education
Bella Rwigamba	Chief Digital Officer	Rwanda Ministry of Education
Bernard Bahati Director General of the National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA)		Rwanda Ministry of Education

Agenda

During the three-day event, session topics included how to create and institutionalize embedded evidence labs; develop theories of change for labs; practical tools for conducting lab activities such as data mapping, MEL training, developing research and learning agendas; and providing technical assistance on the path to scale with examples from various contexts. We have included the agenda for each day below:

14 November, 2022

Time	Activity	Presenters
8:30 AM - 9:00 AM	Registration	
9:05 AM - 9:15 AM	Welcoming Address and Overview of the Week	Cassien Havugimana, Deputy Country Director, IPA Rwanda
9:15 AM - 9:45 AM	Keynote 1	Twagirayezu Gaspard, Minister of State, Rwanda Ministry of Education
9:45 AM - 10:15 AM	Keynote 2	Bethany Park, Senior Director of Policy, IPA
10:15 AM- 10:45 AM	Snack Break	

10:45 AM - 12:00 PM	Lab Inception: Why is an embedded evidence lab valuable for policymakers and decision-makers? How do embedded labs start? How have embedded labs contributed to generating and using evidence to inform policy within different contexts?	 Juan Manuel Hernández Agramonte, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, IPA Mavis Asare-Donkor, Director, Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring & Evaluation (PBME), Ghana Ministry of Education Cynthia Bosumtwi-Sam, Policy Advisor, IPA Ghana Victoria Isika, Associate Director of Policy, IPA Leon Mugenzi, Head of Department of Teacher Development, Rwanda Ministry of Education Besnart Simunchembu, Principal Planning and Policy Officer, Zambia Ministry of Education
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	Lunch	
1:00 PM - 2:15 PM	Lab Design: Where should labs be hosted? What projects would fit within a lab? How do you build the design and support of a lab with key counterparts?	 Abdoul-Aziz Adama, Policy and RFE Manager, IPA Côte d'Ivoire Bella Rwigamba, Chief Digital Officer, Rwanda Ministry of Education Tamara Billima-Mulenga, Senior Policy & Programs Manager, IPA Zambia Faustin Koffi, Côte d'Ivoire Ministry of Education and Literacy Shahana Hirji, Senior Policy Manager, IPA

		 Juan Manuel Hernández Agramonte, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, IPA Mavis Asare Donkor, Director, Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring, & Evaluation (PBME) unit, IPA Ghana Leodomir Mfura, Research & Policy Manager, IPA Rwanda David Nkrumah Boateng, Head of Policy, IPA Ghana Nahema Sylla, Embedded Lab Coordinator, IPA Côte d'Ivoire
2:15 PM - 2:30 PM	Snack Break	
2:30 PM - 3:15 PM	State of the Evidence in Education	Sarah Kabay, Education Director, IPA
3:15 PM - 4:30 PM	Lab Institutionalization: How do you institutionalize a lab and help it become sustainable?	 Mavis Asare-Donkor, Director, Planning, Budgeting, Monitoring & Evaluation (PBME), Ghana Ministry of Education Faustin Koffi, Inspector General, Côte d'Ivoire Ministry of Education and Literacy Juan Manuel Hernández Agramonte, IPA David Nkrumah Boateng, Head of Policy, IPA Ghana Jose Pinilla, Policy Manager, IPA Besnart Simunchembu, Principal Planning and Policy Officer, Zambia Ministry of Education

4:30 PM - 5:00 PM	Closing Remarks		Bernard Bahati, Director General of the National Examination and School Inspection Authority (NESA), Rwanda Ministry of Education
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15 November 2022

Time	Activity Presenters	
8:30 AM - 9:00 AM	Registration	
9:00 AM - 10:15 AM	Embedded Evidence Lab Activity 1: Research Coordinating Committees*	 Tamara Billima-Mulenga, Senior Policy & Programs Manager, IPA Zambia David Nkrumah-Boateng, Head of Policy, IPA Ghana David Limo, Deputy Director of Policy and Partnerships, Kenya Ministry of Education John Ochieng, Policy Manager, IPA Kenya Besnart Simunchembu, Principal Planning and Policy Officer, Zambia Ministry of Education
10:15 AM - 10:45 AM	Snack Break	
10:45 AM - 12:00 PM	Embedded Evidence Lab Activity 2: Building and Improving Data for Decision-Making	 Prof Edward Appiah, National Council for Curriculum and Assessment, Ghana Ministry of Education Cynthia Bosumtwi-Sam, Policy Advisor, IPA Ghana Camille Kanamugire, Head of Basic Education and TVET Examination

		Department, Rwanda Ministry of Education Melissa Mahoro, Research & Policy Associate, IPA Rwanda
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	Lunch	
1:00 PM - 5:00 PM	Kigali City Tour	

16 November 2022

16 NOVEMBER 2022		
Time	Activity Presenters	
8:30 AM - 9:00 AM	Registration	
9:00 AM - 10:15 AM	Embedded Evidence Lab Activity 3: Capacity Assessments	Abdoul-Aziz Adama, Policy & RFE Manager, IPA Côte d'Ivoire
10:15 AM - 10:45 AM	Snack Break	
10:45 AM - 12:00 PM	Embedded Evidence Lab Activity 4: Generating and Using Evidence for Policy	 Sophie Mushimiyimana, Senior Research & Policy Associate, IPA Rwanda Leon Mugenzi, Head of Department of Teacher Development, Rwanda Ministry of Education Ana Serrano, Policy Manager, IPA Colombia
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	Lunch	
1:00 PM - 2:30 PM	The Evidence Lab Exchange: Workshopping a concept for leveraging learning across embedded evidence labs	Juan Manuel Hernández Agramonte, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, IPA

		•	Victoria Isika, Associate Director of Policy, IPA Bethany Park, Senior Director of Policy, IPA
2:30 PM - 2:45 PM	Snack Break		
2:45 PM - 4:30 PM	Time to connect and plan next steps	•	Rebecca Smith, Policy Manager, IPA
4:30 PM - 5:00 PM	Reflections from the week / wrap-up		

^{*}We facilitated hands-on sessions to learn about the various activities that labs do to connect evidence to policymaking

The last day of the event was specifically for IPA staff to conduct trainings on how to conduct key lab activities, share tools, and learn how to approach difficult situations. The agenda for the IPA-only sessions is below:

17 November 2022				
Time	Activity	Presenters		
8:30 AM - 9:00 AM	Registration			
9:00 AM - 10:15 AM	How to pitch labs to both Ministry partners and prospective funders	 Bethany Park, Senior Director of Policy, IPA Leodomir Mfura, Research and Policy Manager, IPA Rwanda John Ochieng, Policy Manager, IPA Kenya 		
10:15 AM - 10:45 AM	Snack Break			
10:45 AM - 12:00 PM	Discussion and Sharing Best Practices: How to work effectively with government	Barbara Sparrow, Policy Manager, IPA Peru		

	partners and get their buy-in/ownership	 Celine Hylton-Dei, Senior Policy Associate, IPA Cynthia Bosumtwi-Sam, Policy Advisor, IPA Ghana Mwamba Kapambwe, Associate Embedded Lab Manager, IPA Zambia Leodomir Mfura, Research and Policy Manager, IPA Rwanda David Nkrumah-Boateng, Head of Policy, IPA Ghana
12:00 PM - 1:00 PM	Lunch	
1:00 PM - 2:30 PM	Training Sessions on the "How" and Sharing Practical Tools: How to conduct learning agenda / TOC workshops and incorporate these into lab institutionalization	 William Sims, Right-Fit-Evidence Manager, IPA Juan Felipe Garcia, Research Manager, IPA Colombia
2:30 PM - 2:45 PM	Snack Break	
2:45 PM - 4:30 PM	Training Sessions on the "How" and Sharing Practical Tools: 1. How to conduct data mapping and 2. How to conduct capacity assessments	 Abdoul-Aziz Adama, Policy & RFE Manager, IPA Côte d'Ivoire Juan Manuel Hernández Agramonte, Regional Director for Latin America and the Caribbean, IPA Barbara Sparrow, Policy Manager, IPA Peru
4:30 PM - 5:00 PM	Reflections from the week / wrap-up	Bethany Park, Senior Director of Policy, IPA

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