

2020-2021 ANNUAL REPORT



Building a world with more evidence and less poverty



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Front Cover: Evelyn, a longtime enumerator with IPA Sierra Leone & Liberia, conducts a socially distanced, open-air survey in Bong county, Liberia, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: IPA Liberia

Inside Front Cover: A field officer with IPA Tanzania receives a radio as part of an enumerator training / respondent simulation for a project on autonomous learning conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Frank Simon / IPA Tanzania

Back Cover: Andrew (right), an enumerator with IPA Ghana, interviews a respondent (left) as part of a study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Isaac Oteng / IPA Ghana

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A Letter from Annie

DEAR FRIENDS,

This past year, I often felt a mix of hope and despair: hope for those of us with access to vaccines and a beginning of the return to normalcy—but despair for many throughout the world where the pandemic continues to ravage health systems, families, communities, and livelihoods. I have been deeply proud that IPA is making meaningful contributions to the crisis response, that we have made progress in our efforts to bring more diversity to IPA and to our field, and that we continue to innovate and strengthen our research quality. I am also proud of how we have grown and strengthened in-country policy engagement—and with it our ability to expand the use of evidence not only at the organizational level but also at the government level to improve lives.

HERE ARE SOME HIGHLIGHTS FROM THE PAST YEAR.

We supported organizations and governments to scale up an approach to increase mask-wearing to over 100 million people, potentially saving tens of thousands of lives. In partnership with researchers from Stanford and Yale and with local partners such as a2i and the Bangladeshi NGO GreenVoice, we found that a four-part model which we have named “NORM,” tripled community mask-wearing at a low cost and measurably reduced community-based COVID-19 in Bangladesh. Based on the results, BRAC, the largest non-governmental organization in the world, decided to scale up the model to reach 81 million people in Bangladesh. In India, the Self Employed Women’s Association (SEWA) is scaling up the approach to 3-4 million people and expects to expand to millions more. In Pakistan, the model has been scaled in the city of Lahore to reach 4 million people and in Nepal the model was launched in three hotspot municipalities. **(Read more on pgs. 12-15)**

Through our Research for Effective COVID-19 Responses (RECOVR) initiative, we shared critical data with our government partners to answer their questions. Through this initiative, IPA developed the **(RECOVR) survey**—a panel survey that facilitated comparisons, documented real-time trends of policy concern, and informed decision-makers about the economic toll of the pandemic. The findings were used by government institutions in several countries, including Colombia, Côte d’Ivoire, and the Philippines. **(Read more on pgs. 9-11)**

We took meaningful steps to ensure our work is equitable, empowering, and driven by people living in the countries where we work. After gathering and analyzing internal data, we laid out concrete goals for where we want to be in 2025—including having 65 percent of IPA’s country leadership be from the countries or regions where we work, and ensuring that at least 60 percent of IPA-related projects include researchers from low- and middle-income countries. Read more [here](#).



A man wears a face mask while shopping at a traditional market in Indonesia during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Ika Hilal / Shutterstock

We established a Human Trafficking Research Initiative to expand the evidence base on effective solutions to reduce modern slavery and human trafficking. Over the next five years, IPA will facilitate and support meaningful, rigorous, and policy-relevant studies on trafficking to help combat this egregious and hidden global problem. The \$5 million initiative is funded through the US Department of State's Program to End Modern Slavery.

We became experts in remote research. Through our Research Methods Initiative, we developed technical tools, including phone survey templates, case call management, quality control guides, and handbooks for remote research. We also provided training, on-demand support, and troubleshooting, and we hosted regular knowledge dissemination and exchange events to share what we were learning.

IPA's Embedded Labs work continued to grow. We now have labs—teams of IPA and public sector employees working side-by-side to strengthen the use of data and evidence in public policy—in Ghana, Colombia,

Rwanda, Peru, Zambia, and the Philippines, and several in the pipeline for 2021. (Read more on pg. 27)

We continue to share evidence with the right people at the right time. In the last year, IPA hosted or participated in 72 events, started 92 new studies with our network of researchers, and disseminated results from dozens of studies. As of May 2021, IPA had completed 677 studies across 51 countries.

But IPA's comparative advantage is, above all, our record of demonstrated impact. Our research has improved hundreds of millions of lives, and we couldn't do any of it without you. It is thanks to IPA's strong partnerships that we have been able to continue generating and sharing rigorous evidence to reduce poverty and improve lives.



Annie Duflo
Executive Director

IN THE MEDIA

Last year, our work was featured in many respected national and international news outlets.



The Washington Post The New York Times

What We Do

We create and share evidence while equipping decision-makers to use evidence to reduce poverty.



A female street vendor wearing a face mask stands in a market in Mozambique during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: ivanfolio / Shutterstock

With a long-term presence in 22 countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America, IPA leads the field of development in cutting-edge research quality and innovation. We test promising ideas across contexts and along the path to scale, proactively engage key decision-makers throughout the research process, share findings with the right people at the right time, and equip partners with the skills and tools they need to co-create and use data and evidence.

Since our founding in 2002, our research has led to better programs and policies that have made a positive impact on hundreds of millions of people's lives worldwide.

OUR WORK AT A GLANCE

22

Country Programs

8

Program Areas

700+

Partners

850+

Researchers in our network

HOW DO WE BUILD A WORLD WITH LESS POVERTY?



CREATE STRONGER EVIDENCE

To deepen public knowledge on how to reduce poverty



SHARE EVIDENCE STRATEGICALLY

To influence conversations & inform decisions



EQUIP DECISION-MAKERS TO USE EVIDENCE

To improve the lives of the global poor



Elizabeth (left), an enumerator with IPA, interviews a respondent (right) as part of a study conducted in Bono Region, Ghana, during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Kamal-Deen Mohammed / IPA Ghana

650+

Completed evaluations to date across 51 countries

300+

Ongoing evaluations to date across 51 countries

18

Years of generating evidence and moving evidence to policy



Creating Stronger Evidence

To deepen public knowledge on how to reduce poverty

Over the years we have realized that what decision-makers need doesn't end with one study. "What works?" is rarely as straightforward as it seems. Knowing which solutions are effective requires understanding: Where do they work? Under what

conditions? Why do they work? How are they being implemented? At IPA we are strengthening our research to understand whether (and how) promising ideas work in different geographical or institutional contexts, and at a larger scale.



An entrepreneur in her retail shop in Mexico during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Jesus Cervantes / Shutterstock

Understanding the Pandemic's Toll on Jobs, Businesses, and Food Security in Lower-Income Countries

THE ONSET OF THE COVID-19 pandemic caused a sharp decline in living standards and rising food insecurity in developing countries across the globe.

RESEARCHERS: Dennis Egger, Edward Miguel, Shana S. Warren, Ashish Shenoy, Elliott Collins, Dean Karlan, Doug Parkerson, A. Mushfiq Mobarak, Günther Fink, Christopher Udry, Michael Walker, Johannes Haushofer, Magdalena Larreboire, Susan Athey, Paula López-Peña, Salim Benhachmi, Macartan Humphreys, Layna Lowe, Niccolò F. Meriggi, Andrew Wabwire, C. Austin Davis, Utz Johann Pape, Tilman Graff, Maarten Voors, Carolyn Nekesa, Corey Vernot

The COVID-19 pandemic and the social-distancing policies put in place to contain the virus slowed economic activity around the world. Families in low- and middle-income countries faced potentially stark threats to their livelihoods, but governments lacked sufficient data on how these communities were being affected. During April-July 2020, IPA conducted rapid response surveys to directly inform

key government partners on the health, economic, and social ramifications of the pandemic. The Research for Effective COVID-19 Responses (RECOVR) survey was conducted in Burkina Faso, Colombia, Mexico, Ghana, Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, Côte d'Ivoire, and Zambia. Researchers used RECOVR data from Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ghana, Philippines, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone and findings from other surveys

conducted during this time frame to provide an in-depth view of the socioeconomic effects of the health crisis in low- and middle-income countries.

Across all countries, we found widespread drops in employment and income. Fifty to 80 percent of people interviewed in Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Colombia, Ghana, Kenya, Rwanda, and Sierra Leone said they had lost income during the COVID-19 period. By April 2020, many households were unable to meet basic nutritional needs. Forty-eight percent of rural Kenyan households, 69 percent of landless agricultural households in Bangladesh, and 87 percent of rural households in Sierra Leone were forced to miss meals or reduce portion sizes to cope with the crisis.

While many countries provided some form of social support, our data found that in most cases support wasn't enough to stave off the impacts—**hunger persisted, even with existing support.**

Businesses also took a big hit. Among those we interviewed, firm revenue and profits from businesses they owned were approximately halved during the COVID-19 crisis.

In response to these findings, IPA released a joint statement with researchers and partner organizations calling on the international community to **increase support in the form of cash and food** to people in low- and middle-income countries and to prioritize recovery strategies that address the protracted nature of the crisis.



COLOMBIA

Results from three rounds of the RECOVER survey helped the Colombia Department of National Planning (DNP) understand how people in Colombia have coped with the pandemic, and **informed the government's national economic recovery strategy**, which outlines a COP \$135 trillion (approximately US\$37.5 billion) investment in the Colombian economy.

Policy Influence

Government Partners Used Findings from the RECOVER Survey to Inform COVID-19 Response and Recovery

BURKINA FASO

In Burkina Faso, Development Media International (DMI) adapted its **radio communications campaigns** on family planning to include information on **protective measures against COVID-19**. RECOVER survey results on family planning, including contraceptive access and family planning behaviors, helped to inform DMI's content for these adapted radio segments.

PHILIPPINES

In the Philippines, IPA's RECOVER results and the Teacher Needs Assessment are informing both the **national learning continuity plan to engage learners and help teachers in ensuring quality of learning** through distance learning modalities, and the **national emergency subsidy and cash transfer programs (the Social Amelioration Program) for 14 million beneficiaries**. The findings from the Teacher Needs Assessment also contributed to the **national return-to-school plan for 27 million students**.

SIERRA LEONE

In Sierra Leone, the Ministry of Public Affairs was particularly interested in mental health challenges, given similar experiences with the Ebola epidemic. We worked closely with them to generate relevant information on mental health. The RECOVER results were referenced by the Ministry to **assess mental health impacts of the COVID-19 pandemic** and inform subsequent policies to respond to mental health challenges.

RWANDA

In Rwanda, the Rwanda Education Board used RECOVER data on students' time use and accessibility of educational materials to strengthen its **distance learning programming** during school closures. Findings on parents' concerns about children falling behind in their education have also supported ongoing discussions in-country about prioritizing targeted instruction as a way to stem anticipated learning losses from the pandemic.

CREATING
STRONGER
EVIDENCE



Increasing Mask Use and Reducing COVID-19 with the NORM Model in Bangladesh

The first randomized evaluation of its kind shows that mask-wearing reduces COVID-19 in a real-world setting. The study also found a precise combination of encouragement strategies to substantially increase mask use, now called the NORM model.

IMAGES Above and right: Credit: IPA Bangladesh

RESEARCHERS: Jason Abaluck, Laura H. Kwong, Ashley Styczynski, Ashraful Haque, Md. Alamgir Kabir, Ellen Bates-Jefferys, Emily Crawford, Jade Benjamin-Chung, Salim Benhachmi, Shabib Raihan, Shadman Rahman, Neeti Zaman, Peter J. Winch, Md. Maqsud Hossain, Hasan Mahmud Reza, Stephen P. Luby, Ahmed Mushfiq Mobarak

While scientific evidence suggests that face masks can protect against COVID-19, there has been limited rigorous evidence on the extent to which mask-wearing is effective in reducing COVID-19 in a real-life situation with imperfect and inconsistent mask use. IPA partnered with the Yale Research Initiative on Innovation and Scale (Y-RISE), Stanford University Medical School, the Government of

Bangladesh (through Aspire to Innovate), and a local NGO called Green Voice to rigorously test various strategies to increase mask-wearing and measure its impact on COVID-19. This research was funded by a grant directed by GiveWell from the Center for Effective Altruism. The large-scale randomized evaluation included 341,830 adults in 600 villages in rural Bangladesh.



Credit: IPA Bangladesh



COMBINATION THAT WORKS TO NORMALIZE MASK-WEARING



Credit: Gail Zuniga



NO COST

*free masks distributed
door-to-door*

OFFERING INFORMATION

*on mask-wearing via video
and brochures*

REINFORCEMENT

*in-person and in
public*

MODELING

*and endorsement
by trusted leaders*



Mask distribution by SEWA in India. Credit: SEWA

Researchers tested a portfolio of encouragement strategies to identify the precise combination needed to increase mask-wearing.

We found that a four-part model to change social norms of mask-wearing tripled mask usage at a low cost. We are calling the combination that worked N-O-R-M: No-cost free masks distribution, Offering information on mask-wearing, Reinforcement in-person and in public, and Modeling and endorsement by trusted leaders.

In villages that received the intervention, **mask use increased by 29 percentage points** (from 13 percent in the comparison villages to 42 percent in treatment villages). Mask use was sustained 10 weeks into the intervention, even after the mask promotion ended. **The intervention also increased physical distancing by 5 percentage points**, contrary to concerns that mask-wearing would promote risky behavior by giving people a false sense of security.

This increase in mask use from the NORM model reduced rates of COVID-19 by 9 percent. Surgical masks were particularly effective, and distributing and promoting surgical masks prevented 1 out of 3 infections in community members 60 and older.

The study provides clear-cut evidence that **increasing community mask-wearing, particularly with surgical masks, can save lives.**



POLICY INFLUENCE

Expanding an Evidence-Based Model to Save Tens of Thousands of Lives

Given the compelling evidence and low cost of the NORM program, IPA and coalition partners moved quickly to advocate for large-scale implementation. **Coalitions emerged within weeks of initial results in several places including Bangladesh, Pakistan, India, and Nepal.** In India, the Self Employed Women's Association (SEWA) scaled up the NORM approach to reach 0.5 million people and is expanding further to reach 4-5 million more. In Bangladesh, BRAC—the largest non-governmental organization in the world—began implementation in rural areas to reach half of Bangladesh (81 million people), and the Shakti Foundation began scaling to reach 8 million people in urban Bangladesh. In Pakistan, the City Administration of Lahore implemented the model to reach 5 million people. The program was noted as the first policy priority in Pakistan's recent nationwide COVID mitigation strategy and is expected to expand across the country. In Nepal, the NORM model was launched in 3 hotspot municipalities (Thimi, Sunsari and Melamchi) by the Covid-19 Rapid Action Taskforce (C-19 RAT), a coalition of organizations that have expertise in volunteer mobilization and disaster relief work.

CREATING
STRONGER
EVIDENCE



Listening to Refugees: Do Syrian Refugees Want to Return Home?

MOST REFUGEES IN LEBANON *wanted to return home at some point in the future, but felt conditions in Syria weren't safe enough to return in the next few years.*

IMAGE Credit: Ashraf Saad Allah AL-Saeed / World Bank



Credit: Ashraf Saad Allah AL-Saeed / World Bank

RESEARCHERS: *Ala' Alrababa'h, Daniel Masterson, Marine Casalis, Dominik Hangartner, Jeremy Weinstein*

In Syria, the ongoing civil war has caused large-scale forced displacement, both within Syria and to the neighboring countries of Lebanon, Turkey, and Jordan. Lebanon, a country of 4.5 million Lebanese nationals, hosts approximately 1.5 million Syrian refugees. With the Syrian regime retaking control of the majority of Syria's territory, many are speculating about the end of the country's civil war and whether Syrian refugees will return home, with some regional governments taking active steps to encourage return. Missing in these discussions, though, has been the voice of Syrian refugees themselves.

With support from IPA's Peace & Recovery Program, researchers from the Immigration Policy Lab (IPL) conducted a representative survey of 3,000 Syrian refugees in Lebanon from August - October 2019 to learn about their return intentions. They found that **most refugees wanted to go back to their place of origin**, and local conditions in people's hometowns—namely safety, economic conditions, availability of public services, and personal networks—were most important in determining if people wanted to return. Conditions in Lebanon, such as socio-economic well-being and access to services, did not play an important role in return intentions.

These results suggest that efforts to push Syrians out of the host country are unlikely to be effective as long as there is little change on the ground in Syria.

Even refugees facing significant hardship in Lebanon would not want to return as long as local conditions in their places of origin remain unsuitable.



POLICY INFLUENCE

Influencing Local and Global Debates on Refugee Policy

Given demand for data on this issue in Lebanon, researchers with IPL circulated English and Arabic versions of an IPA policy brief to more than fifty organizations working on the regional Syrian refugee response. Soon after the results were released, the UN's International Organization for Migration posted the findings in a repository on return and reintegration. *The Economist* also covered the study in a January 7, 2021 article entitled, "Making life hard for Syrian refugees will not compel them to leave."

CREATING
STRONGER
EVIDENCE



The Challenge of Taking Back Control of Gang-Run Neighborhoods in Medellín, Colombia

A PROGRAM THAT INTENSIFIED *government outreach to gang-controlled neighborhoods was unable to reduce gang rule, highlighting the challenge of rooting out deeply entrenched gangs.*

IMAGE Credit: IPA Colombia

RESEARCHERS: *Christopher Blattman, Gustavo Duncan, Benjamin Lessing, Santiago Tobón*

After five decades of civil war and drug trafficking conflicts, Colombia has made significant improvements in security across the country, but urban gangs remain a threat to state authority in many neighborhoods. To support the city of Medellín in tackling this issue, IPA's Colombia team and researchers spent two years conducting hundreds of interviews with community members and leaders, experts, police, gang members, and other criminal leaders.

In partnership with the City of Medellín and community officials, researchers and IPA then co-designed and evaluated an intervention to increase state presence and improve access to government services in gang-controlled neighborhoods. Conventional wisdom suggested that improving state services and increasing state presence would “crowd out” the gangs.

But the evaluation found that in this case, conventional wisdom was wrong. The approach didn't reduce gang activity, and in fact, in some places **gangs increased their activity once the state came in**. Researchers found that, on average, while the government was the predominant provider of governance for residents, gangs were seldom far behind and, in dozens of neighborhoods, they were the leading provider. Through complementary qualitative interviews with gang members and leaders, the team found that gangs consider neighborhood protection as part of their business, and dedicate resources accordingly. They found that providing order and protection fostered citizen loyalty and, in turn, reduced the chances that residents will inform authorities of the gang's illicit activities, mainly drug selling.

The findings suggest that common policy interventions, such as police crackdowns, ease of anonymous reporting, or coordinating neighborhood merchants to resist extortion could fail in the presence of gang rule. In addition to prosecuting criminal leaders and governing better, researchers believe the government may be better off focusing energy and resources on reducing gang revenues. This could potentially reduce the success of organized crime, as lower profitability of drug markets could reduce optimal gang size as well as incentives to govern.



Credit: Milo Miloezger via Unsplash



BEHIND THE DATA

“We knew if we wanted to study crime, we had to find criminals, and prison was a good place to do that,” said Juan Pablo Mesa Mejía, a Research Coordinator with IPA Colombia.

IPA staff conducted 61 interviews with criminals in prisons as part of this study. “Crime is often studied from the government or public’s point of view in Medellín, but not really from the criminal’s perspective.” Juan Pablo added, “If we want to understand how they see the world, we have to talk to them.”

CREATING
STRONGER
EVIDENCE



Cash in Crisis: Evidence on the Impacts of Cash from Kenya and Colombia

GIVING CASH TO THE POOR *helped shield households—but didn't completely protect them—from hunger and income losses during the pandemic period.*

IMAGE Credit: Jessica Hoel



Credit: Paul Smith

The COVID-19 pandemic and related lockdowns pushed tens of millions into poverty. To inform policies during the pandemic and beyond, IPA worked with researchers in different countries and contexts to understand to what extent cash was able to help poor households make it through the crisis. Here are two examples of what we found:

RURAL KENYA

Universal Basic Income Modestly Reduced Hunger, Non-COVID Illness, and Depression

RESEARCHERS: *Abhijit Banerjee, Michael Faye, Alan Krueger, Paul Niehaus, Tavneet Suri*

A universal basic income (UBI) pilot program, implemented by GiveDirectly prior to the pandemic, provided three types of payments to 295 villages: a lump sum of US\$500 for all adults, a short-term UBI of US\$0.75 per day for two years, and a long-term UBI of US\$0.75 per day for 12 years. The average monthly wage among households receiving transfers was US\$167.37 (PPP).

All transfers modestly increased food security with respect to comparison villages, with the greatest effect from the long-term transfer. **Both regular UBIs reduced depression.** The cash may have had public health benefits, too, as recipients visited the hospital less often and had fewer social interactions. During the pandemic and simultaneous agricultural lean season, recipients lost the income gains that they had initially obtained from starting new businesses, but also experienced less

hunger. In other words, the UBI mitigated many of the harmful consequences of the pandemic and lean season and allowed recipients to take on more income risk.

COLOMBIA

Emergency Cash Assistance Helped Shield Households from the Pandemic's Worst Effects

RESEARCHERS: *Juliana Londoño-Vélez, Pablo Querubín*

The Government of Colombia delivered a transfer as a lump-sum every five to eight weeks to 1 million households. The amount was modest—approximately US\$19 per household or 8 percent of monthly minimum wage. Researchers found that more than 90 percent of households reported spending the cash transfer on food, which was unsurprising given high levels of food insecurity among recipients. However, it was not possible to detect an impact on food security. The transfer also modestly reduced the likelihood that households had to deplete savings, borrow money, miss loan payments, or pawn their belongings. The transfer appears to have improved mental health and possibly parental investment in children's education.

The rapid rollout was not without challenges. Limitations in infrastructure for digital payments meant that many people had to leave their homes to get the cash out at a bank or mobile money agent despite the quarantine. Fostering digital infrastructure and the use of mobile money can greatly support the rapid rollout of assistance in emergencies.

More Results



A patient receives a dose of the COVID-19 vaccine in Nigeria.
Credit: i_am_zews / Shutterstock

HEALTH

Global

COVID-19 vaccine acceptance is higher in low- and middle-income countries than in richer countries

RESEARCHERS: *Julio S. Solís Arce, Shana S. Warren, Niccolò F. Meriggi, Alexandra Scacco, Nina McMurry, Maarten Voors, Georgiy Syunyaev [...]* (see full citation on pg. 39)

Researchers surveyed nearly 44,260 individuals in 10 low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), the United States, and Russia between June 2020 and January 2021 on vaccine acceptance and trusted sources for vaccination advice. They found **high levels of vaccine acceptance in LMICs**, with an average acceptance rate

of 80 percent among respondents, with self-protection as the primary motivation. Respondents' top cited concern with the vaccines are potential side effects. Finally, health workers are considered the most trusted information sources on vaccines. These results suggest governments can improve vaccination campaigns by appealing to self-protection and partnering with health workers to promote public health messaging.

PEACE & RECOVERY

Philippines

Community policing had no impact on citizen attitudes or public safety

RESEARCHERS: *Graeme Blair, Jeremy Weinstein, Fotini Christia, Eric Arias, Emile Badran, Robert A. Blair, Ali Cheema [...]* (see full citation on p. 39)

Community policing—or cooperation between the police and communities—is thought to increase citizen trust as well as police forces' ability to enforce the law. In the Philippines, researchers examined the effects of a community policing program, which combined community engagement with problem-oriented policing, on attitudes towards the police and public safety outcomes. Researchers found that **the intervention had no effect on crime victimization, perceptions of insecurity, citizen perceptions of police, police abuse, or citizen cooperation with the police**. These results were consistent in all countries examined under Evidence in Governance and Politics (EGAP)'s Metaketa Initiative, Round IV: Brazil, Colombia, Liberia, Pakistan, the Philippines, and Uganda.

EDUCATION

Uganda

Training teachers to teach students to learn “like scientists” is one of the most effective educational interventions ever evaluated

RESEARCHERS: *Nava Ashraf, Abhijit Banerjee, Vesall Nourani*

While massive learning gaps remain in most developing countries, there is little evidence of the success of introducing new pedagogy to teachers. In Uganda, a curriculum called Preparation for Social Action trained teachers to teach students to learn like scientists: to pose questions, frame hypotheses, and use evidence and data. The program **raised the pass rate in the national exam** that determines progression from elementary to secondary school from 51 percent to 75 percent, placing the program in the top five percentile of all rigorously evaluated education interventions.

FINANCIAL INCLUSION

Bangladesh

Paying workers electronically, rather than in cash, increased their savings and ability to cope with emergencies

RESEARCHERS: *Emily Breza, Martin Kanz, Leora Klapper*

In Bangladesh, researchers worked with a bank, a mobile money operator, and garment manufacturers to measure the impact of introducing electronic wage payments to employees who used to receive their salary in cash. The intervention **increased savings**

and improved the ability of the workers to cope with unanticipated expenses in the event of an emergency. A complimentary audit also suggested that mobile money agents were less likely to overcharge customers in areas with higher payroll rates.

SOCIAL PROTECTION

Niger

Providing psychosocial services boosted the cost-benefit of a poverty reduction program

RESEARCHERS: *Thomas Bossuroy, Markus Goldstein, Dean Karlan, Harounan Kazianga, William Parienté, Patrick Premand, Catherine Thomas, Christopher Udry, Julia Vaillant, Kelsey Wright*

Little has been known about the impact of multifaceted graduation-style programs when implemented at scale within national safety net systems or about the optimal combination of interventions. **In Niger, all versions of a program targeting psychosocial, capital, or both constraints had positive impacts on households 18 months later.** The versions of the program targeting both psychosocial and capital constraints—through cash grants—together outperformed those that addressed them separately, indicating that psychosocial and capital interventions are not substitutes for each other. After 18 months the benefit-cost ratio for the psychosocial, full, and capital versions were 126 percent, 95 percent, and 58 percent, respectively.

Sharing Evidence Strategically

To influence conversations & inform decisions

Going from simply sharing evidence to doing so strategically requires a strong understanding of the local context and the issues being discussed, deep connections with decision-makers, and a knowledge of the forums where decisions are taken or influenced. IPA continues to build our ability to share evidence strategically by deepening our understanding of the local context and building strong, iterative relationships with the players.

KENYA

Responding to COVID-19 with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development and Precision Development

During the early days of the pandemic, IPA shared with the Kenya Institute of Curriculum Development (KICD), responsible for Kenya's distance learning initiatives, evidence of the types of innovations that could reduce learning loss and improve educational engagement. In particular, we shared evidence from other countries on the effectiveness of mobile phones to deliver low-tech distance learning interventions. This evidence informed the creation of an interactive SMS platform to learn basic mathematics called ElimuLeo. Results from the randomized evaluation of ElimuLeo are expected in the third quarter of 2021.

PERU

Sharing Evidence to Develop an Interactive Remedial Radio Instruction Program

Radio instruction has played a central role in many education systems during the pandemic. However, when limited to simply transmitting content, by reading a textbook or reciting facts and figures, the impact of radio instruction on learning could be limited. IPA and the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB) shared evidence and lessons learned with Peru's Ministry of Education to produce a high-quality, engaging, and interactive remedial mathematics program for preschoolers in rural areas, funded by the Old Dart Foundation and the IDB.

COSTA RICA

Supporting Preschool Students to Learn At Home During The COVID-19 Pandemic

Distance education is particularly challenging for preschool-age children. Young children learn through their senses, limiting the effectiveness of digital lessons. To support preschoolers during COVID-19 school closures, IPA, the Inter-American Development Bank (IDB), and the Ministry of Education of Costa Rica designed, implemented, and evaluated a text message program that guided parents on how to continue learning from home during the COVID-19 pandemic. Preliminary results of the evaluation revealed that the program increased students' cognitive skills. The research team presented the results to the Ministry of Education, which decided to scale the program nationwide in light of the positive findings.



GLOBAL

Launching the RECOVER Survey in Burkina Faso, Colombia, Côte d'Ivoire, Mexico, Ghana, Philippines, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Zambia

In early 2020, IPA launched **Research for Effective COVID-19 Responses (RECOVER)** to generate rigorous evidence, advise governments, and bring together partners across the research and policy sector. RECOVER rapidly provided decision-makers with rigorous data and evidence to mitigate the impacts of the crisis. To date, we have held more than 30 meetings with partners and decision-makers to disseminate results. RECOVER has also brought **over 12 million data points to 65+ government departments' decision-making.** (*Read more on pgs. 9-11*)

BANGLADESH

Sharing Evidence on the Impact of COVID-19 on Women and Girls

IPA launched the Women's Work, Entrepreneurship, and Skilling (WWES) Initiative to improve and deepen the existing data and evidence on the impact of the COVID-19 pandemic on women and girls. Through two roundtables, we shared the preliminary results of different studies on women's work and skills development, girls' education, and livelihoods with policymakers and practitioners from Bangladesh—including *Aspire to Innovate (a2i)* and the Ministry of Education—to help inform policymaking in Bangladesh.



KENYA

Using Evidence to Inform Kenya's Population Policy for National Development

IPA and our colleagues at J-PAL organized and participated in a series of policy events with Kenya's National Council for Population and Development and several policy partners to inform the review of the 2021 Population Policy for National Development and the Demographic Dividend Roadmap. As inputs to the policy revision process, IPA shared evidence on promising soft skills training and innovative business training programs with gender-intentional content that build skills and improve business outcomes. This evidence will also be presented at the National Leaders Conference, which underlines the priorities of the National Gender Equality Commission for the fiscal year 2021-2022.

PHILIPPINES

IPA Presents on Evaluation of Judicial Reforms to the Supreme Court

The Supreme Court of the Philippines has introduced several reforms to address the longstanding issues of high volume of pending cases and severe delays in case disposition. Researchers working with IPA and the Philippine Institute for Development Studies conducted an evaluation to measure the impact of some of these reforms, including the introduction of an electronic court system and new procedures and guidelines for criminal cases and small claims. IPA and the research team shared the results with the Supreme Court of the Philippines, key judiciary officials, and other interested stakeholders.



Equipping Decision-Makers to Use Evidence

To improve the lives of the global poor

Our ultimate goal is that the evidence we generate is used to improve the lives of the global poor. This means we must move from simple partnerships to deeply supporting ongoing learning throughout an ecosystem of decision-makers. At IPA, we work closely with decision-makers to create evidence that

helps close the gap between academia and policy throughout the life cycle of a study and beyond. We support our partners in improving their data and evidence capacities and provide technical assistance to scale and monitor effective programs.

IMAGE Government representatives from the Ministry of Employment and Social Protection in Côte d'Ivoire and representatives from IPA Côte d'Ivoire gathered to sign a Memorandum of Understanding in May 2020. Credit: IPA Côte d'Ivoire



In Colombia, IPA has partnered with the Inspector Attorney General Office to develop an embedded innovation lab, called ProcuraLAB, to support the office in making policy decisions based on data and rigorous evidence. This diagram illustrates how the ProcuraLAB works to build evidence-based policymaking capability. Credit: IPA.

Expanding and Strengthening our Policy Embedded Evidence Labs

WE HAVE COME a long way since the creation of our first Embedded Evidence Labs in 2014. We are successfully adapting the MineduLAB model in Peru to three different contexts (Rwanda, Zambia, and Ghana). Today, we have Embedded Evidence Labs in Colombia, Ghana, Peru, Rwanda, and Zambia, and we are in the process of launching others in the Philippines and Nigeria.

IPA's Embedded Labs are a fundamental element of our strategy to equip decision-makers to generate and use evidence. Embedded Labs are teams of IPA and public sector colleagues working side-by-side to strengthen the use of data and evidence in public policy. Each lab works on a variety of activities to equip IPA's partners to regularly use evidence to improve their decision-making, policies, and programs.

Depending on the pre-existing experiences with data and evidence of our policy partners, an embedded lab can focus on goals ranging from strengthening their data collection, management, and use, to institutionalizing evidence used to adapt, replicate, and scale programs that address the partners' policy priorities.

IPA has worked with public sector partners in human rights, citizen security, and consumer protection on embedded lab projects. We have also supported four embedded labs in education in Peru (MineduLAB), Rwanda, Zambia, and Ghana.

In Peru, we have launched two new joint evaluations with MineduLAB, have begun work on our new machine learning initiative to reduce school dropout rates, and are working with the Ministry of Education to build on the

successful scale-up of a program found to reduce dropout rates. In many cases, our partners are directly managing the activities, and the role of IPA is shifting to support.

In Ghana, we have achieved policy impact by supporting the Ministry of Education in the development of evidence-based policy and programming for differentiated learning and early childhood education, and are now turning the corner to supporting the data-driven implementation and monitoring of these evidence-based programs.

In Zambia, we have been supporting the Policy & Planning Unit on several key projects, including investigating the consequences of lowering school fees on access to education and advising the Ministry of General Education on its Joint Sector Review.



Credit: Glenna Gordon

Strengthening Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) Systems of a Large International NGO

EVIDENCE-BASED DECISIONS can not only inform policies and programs, but can also change the way we run organizations.

Data and evidence have the potential to improve program management and organizational functioning. However, it is often a challenge to grasp how to use the available data or collect the right data to improve operations. **IPA's Right-Fit Evidence (RFE) Unit** supports NGOs, social businesses, funders, and governments to make learning-oriented monitoring and evaluation (M&E) a reality.

This year, we partnered with BRAC—the world's largest NGO, with operations in 10 countries and dozens of projects in education, health, poverty alleviation, and humanitarian assistance—to identify systematic challenges across their organization. **What began as a single diagnosis of the M&E practices of a large agricultural program in Liberia evolved into an organization-wide effort to enable**

continuous improvement in program design and implementation.

IPA's RFE unit conducted a participatory analysis of BRAC's M&E practices and formulated recommendations and concrete action plans for improvement. In this process, we worked intensively with the BRAC team, but also with key BRAC international stakeholders at regional and global levels, to ensure wide visibility and ownership of the project. We also provided support and technical assistance in the implementation of the plans, both at the organizational and staff levels. Additionally, we conducted an analysis of the technological needs and capabilities and selected specific technology solutions to facilitate the MEL improvement process.

As a result of our work, BRAC International has formally updated its Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning (MEL) standard operating procedures to reflect best practices, which has already led to stronger MEL practices across the organization. Now, the management team is in the process of digitizing its MEL process, which we are sure will lead to a better operation of the programs and the organization as a whole, ultimately benefiting the poor populations served by BRAC.

MEL PLAN WORKSHOP SERIES



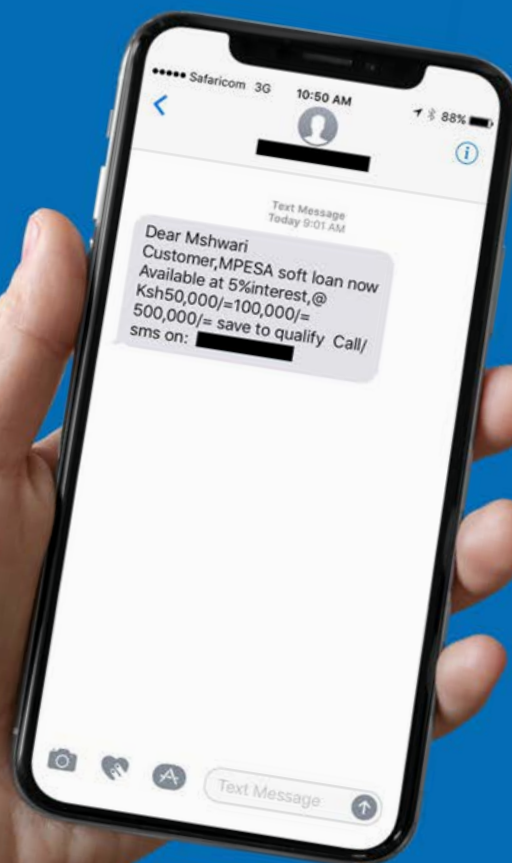
MEL DIAGNOSTIC



TECHNICAL SUPPORT



EQUIPPING DECISION-MAKERS TO USE EVIDENCE



An example of a fraudulent SMS message. Credit: Rafe Mazer

Equipping Regulators to Fight Fraud and Phishing Scams in Uganda and Kenya

IMAGINE IF ONE in every three people who used a bank teller had to pay the teller “something extra” just to do the transaction.

It seems inconceivable, but an IPA survey in Nigeria found that 33 percent of consumers who used a banking or mobile money agent said they had to pay extra just to complete a simple transaction like depositing money, withdrawing money, or paying a bill. If this happened to you, how likely would you be to continue using that bank branch?

In Uganda, IPA is supporting the government in its efforts to fight fraud and phishing scams.

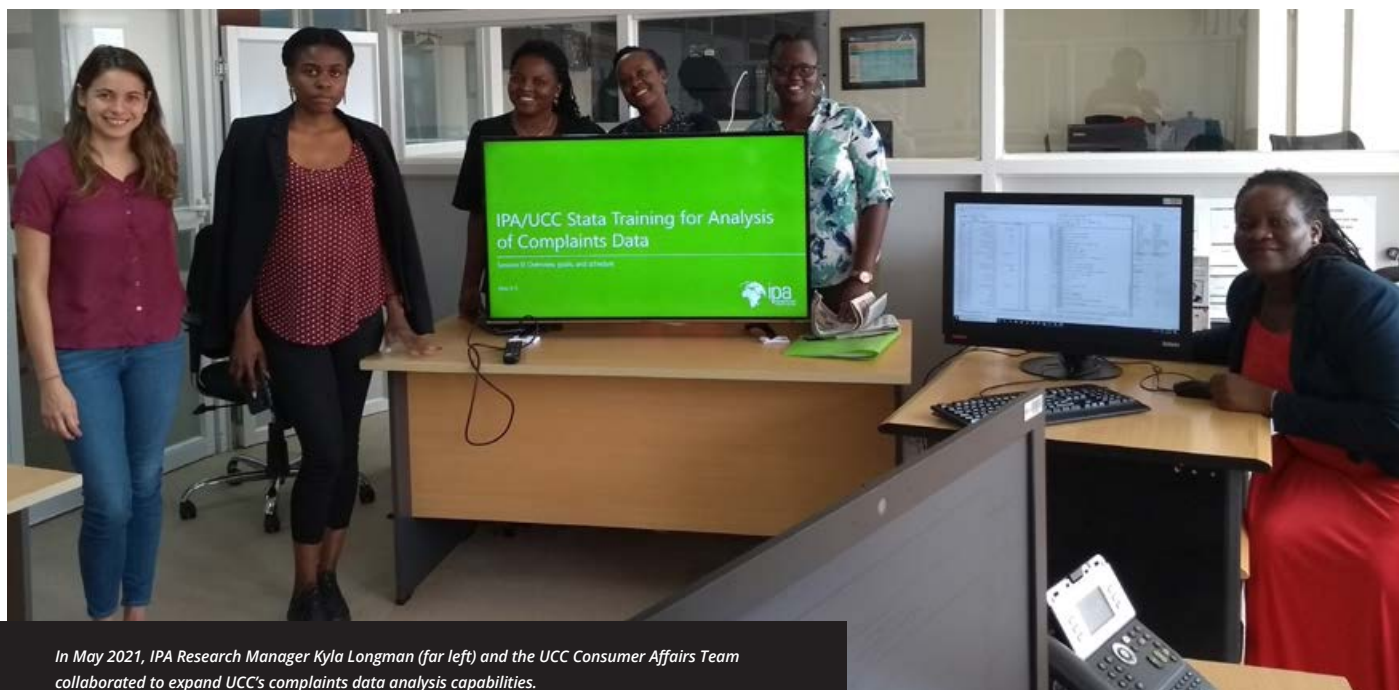
IPA and the Uganda Communications Commission analyzed nearly 4 million customer complaint records to determine the problems consumers face, and how the UCC can better protect these consumers. The commission has used these insights to update

their complaints reporting templates for mobile network operators (MNOs) going forward. IPA also has trained the commission team on how to conduct this analysis on their own going forward. Furthermore, we are developing a predictive model to determine what makes a consumer most likely to fall victim to fraud and phishing scams in mobile money, and have launched a pilot of a randomized evaluation to develop more effective fraud prevention and awareness messaging for Ugandan consumers.

In Kenya, we are helping the government develop new approaches to the growing concern over digital credit. These high-cost consumer loans delivered via mobile phones can have interest rates well over 100 percent. Working with the Competition Authority of Kenya (CAK), IPA combined consumer

surveys and data from tens of millions of mobile loans to identify Kenya's most urgent consumer protection challenges. The findings were presented in the CAK's Digital Credit Market Inquiry, which will help set the course for consumer protection policy in Africa's leading digital credit market.

IPA continues to push the frontier of research in consumer protection, leveraging new tools such as social media data, customer chatbots, and natural language processing to turn consumers' experiences and voices into consumer protection evidence. As IPA moves from data analysis to randomized evaluations in consumer protection, we look forward to developing innovative new solutions that help consumers safely take advantage of the many benefits banking on your phone can bring.



In May 2021, IPA Research Manager Kyla Longman (far left) and the UCC Consumer Affairs Team collaborated to expand UCC's complaints data analysis capabilities.



A photo from IPA's Africa Regional Research & Data (RAD) Summit, which was held in Ruhengeri, Rwanda in early March 2020 before lockdowns went into effect due to the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: IPA

What Are We Building?

IN THE COMING YEARS, among our ambitions we will generate evidence on seemingly intractable and understudied problems, work to address inequalities and support opportunities in the research-to-policy field, grow our capacity to lead research, and position ourselves for even greater impact. Here are some examples of what we are building.



A More Locally-Grounded Research Network

We believe that greater representation of researchers from low- and middle-income countries can produce better science and bigger impact.

In mid-2020, we started looking at ways to strengthen diversity, equity, and inclusion within IPA and the work that we do. Through this process, we learned that only 27 percent of researchers in IPA's network are from low- and middle-income countries (LMICs), and that project teams with an LMIC researcher are less able to access funding. This percentage is higher than five or ten years ago, but still offers room for growth.

In the coming years, we will work to make our research network more diverse and representative of the countries where we work. We will do this by **partnering with more academic researchers from LMIC countries, and also by creating more development and mentorship opportunities for our own staff to become researchers.**

We will provide technical training for potential LMIC researchers, mentoring programs with our network of researchers, pre- and post-doctoral programs within our countries' offices, active communication and policy support for LMIC research, and increase access to IPA research funds.

By 2025, our goal is for 35 percent of grantee teams for competitive funding to include LMIC researchers, and for 35 percent of funds to go to grantee teams with LMIC researchers. **We will ensure that at least 60 percent of IPA-related projects include LMIC researchers, and we will also build the pipeline of researchers across the countries where we work.**

We are convinced that the diversification of our research networks is fundamental to addressing inequalities in international development research. Moreover, we believe that greater diversity and insight into the local context can produce better science and bigger impact.



Josephine (right), an enumerator with IPA Ghana, interviews a respondent (left) as part of a study conducted during the COVID-19 pandemic. Credit: Prince Agyemang Boateng / IPA Ghana



Building the Evidence Base on How to Combat Human Trafficking

IPA's Human Trafficking Research Initiative will critically examine current anti-trafficking interventions and strengthen the evidence surrounding this understudied topic.

Despite the gravity and prevalence of human trafficking, there is a notable lack of evidence on what programs work to reduce trafficking and support victims. While there have been numerous high-quality studies to document the complex dynamics of human trafficking, there are very few rigorous impact evaluations that reliably test strategies for addressing trafficking and can be used to design evidence-based programs and policies.

In partnership with the Office to Monitor and Combat Trafficking in Persons (the TIP Office) at the US Department of State, and with scientific advisors Guy Grossman (University of Pennsylvania) and Cecilia Hyunjung Mo (University of California, Berkeley), IPA's Human Trafficking Research Initiative will **foster partnerships between researchers and practitioners; innovate on and improve the research methods for studying this challenging topic; initiate formative pilot testing of programs; and conduct large-scale studies on the efforts to prevent trafficking, prosecute crimes, and protect trafficked persons.**



The Applied Research & Methods Group

We are expanding and strengthening our capacity to serve as intellectual collaborators on research studies.

IPA is well-known for collecting high-quality data, helping to run evaluations, sharing findings with the world, and connecting research to policy. What we can also do increasingly well is support the conceptualization and design of research, make critical decisions about measurement and data, and analyze and interpret data. **In 2021, we expanded from a single internal researcher position to a cadre of internal researchers**—including full-time researchers and postdocs in our newly created Applied Research & Methods (ARM) group—a full-time global data scientist, and IPA staff with other roles who also serve as Principal Investigators or co-PIs on studies. These teams work on Research Methods, Path-to-Scale Research, Poverty Measurement, and other topics. With this capacity, we have started to provide our external collaborators such as academic PIs with intellectual partnership on study design, research methods, and manuscript preparation. **Our vision for the future is to continue expanding our expertise and supporting our partners by complementing their skills with our own.**

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We are grateful to all members of the global IPA community who support our mission to discover and promote effective solutions to global poverty problems. In addition to grassroots-level support of individuals around the world, our work in 2020 was made possible by grants and contributions from the following funders and donors.

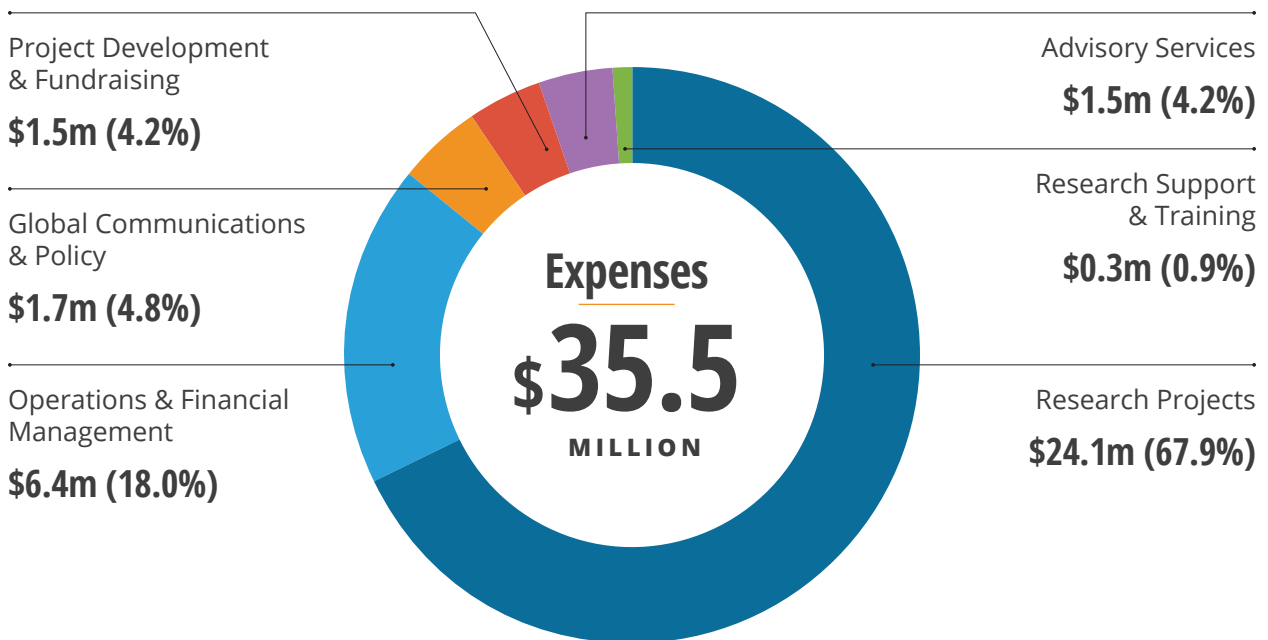
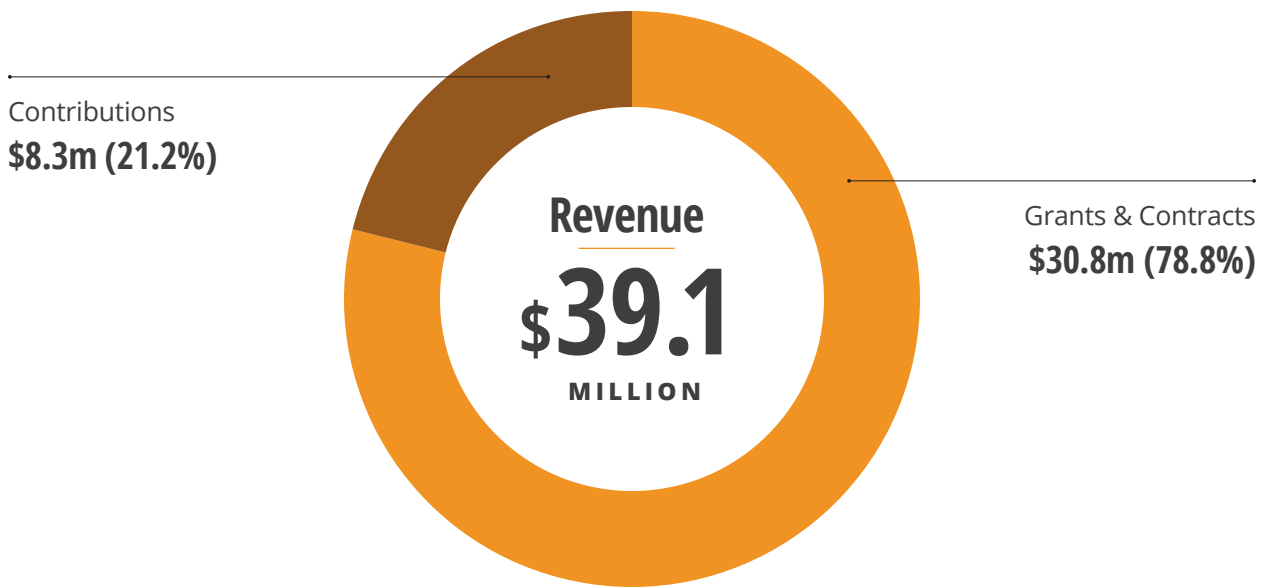
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2020 Financial Report



NET ASSETS

End of 2019 / **\$2.68m**
 End of 2020 / **\$2.52m**
 Change in Net Assets / **(\$0.16m)**

IPA's 2020 fiscal year covered January 1 to December 31, 2020. Percentages are calculated using exact amounts rather than rounded amounts. See our audited financials at: poverty-action.org/financials



IPA is recognized as a platinum-level GuideStar participant, demonstrating our commitment to transparency. We are also a BBB Accredited Charity and one of The Life You Can Save's top recommended charities for effective giving.

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