



Path-to-Scale Research Program

Identifying Evidence-Based Approaches

The Path-to-Scale Research (PSR) Program works to initiate and speed up the process of moving evidence-based interventions from proof-of-concept to scalable and adaptable programs and policies. PSR begins with evidence-based approaches that have already shown promise in rigorous impact evaluations and builds on these approaches by assessing how robust the original findings are, pursuing additional evidence on when, where, and why an approach is expected to work, and identifying ways to optimize program design and implementation at scale. Central to PSR's work is the identification of evidence-based approaches to prioritize for research. We have explored four techniques:

- 1. Producing an evidence review around a specific challenge and convening academic and practitioner experts to prioritize among the identified evidence-based approaches.** IPA's PSR team leads a thorough evidence review of interventions addressing a specific challenge, such as low immunization coverage of children under 12 months of age, to understand the state of the evidence. This review serves as the basis for discussion and input from academic and practitioner experts to produce a list of priority approaches and the necessary research questions to be answered to know if and how each approach can be effectively applied at scale.

Case study: The PSR team conducted an evidence review of interventions to combat childhood stunting and hosted a workshop with academic and practitioner experts to assess promising evidence-based approaches (EBAs) and identify research questions to move them along a path to scale. We chose four approaches for the child growth and development path-to-scale research initiative. Several workshop participants have stayed engaged with the initiative as we pursue the research agenda, and together we have secured funding for two large impact evaluations to replicate and extend one EBA and are currently seeking funding for path-to-scale research studies for the other three.

- 2. Sourcing nominations of the most promising evidence-based approaches from a network or community of practice.** The nominations method can be effective when most evidence-based interventions addressing constraints within an area of practice are in the "proof of concept" stage. A strong network of experts and practitioners can then be tapped into to request nominations of interventions with the most promise to be scaled up.

Case study: IPA's SME Program launched a call for nominations in December 2018 to identify evidence-based approaches that demonstrated rigorous evidence of impact, cost-effectiveness, and the potential to be sustainably scaled up and to award one finalist with funding for a path-to-scale research project. The review committee

shortlisted five approaches from the nominations, which formed the nucleus of the SME PSR initiative, and chose the study titled “[Boosting Small Business Growth with Mindset Training in Togo](#)” as the recipient of IPA’s Path to Scale Award, with funding for a new evaluation of the approach in [Ecuador](#). This path-to-scale study will not only test the approach in a new context but also try to identify which components of the intervention are crucial for success.

- 3. Conducting a broad review to identify stand-out evidence-based approaches across sectors for a larger research agenda on scaling effective interventions.** This is an approach to identify interventions with promising evidence without a specific sectoral focus with the dual intentions of advancing the science of scaling and generating evidence on how and when to scale specific EBAs.

Case study: IPA and Y-RISE, a collaboration between economists that brings rigorous evidence to the challenges of delivering policy interventions at scale, reviewed existing rigorous evaluations of policy interventions to develop a list of promising interventions with the potential to improve welfare and grouped them into cross-sectoral initiatives. While these initiatives were prioritized based on the Y-RISE objective of advancing the science of scaling up successful interventions, the process led to a larger list of promising evidence-based interventions across all sectors in which IPA works.

- 4. Rapid expansion of a promising evidence-based approach.** When a new concept is evaluated for the first time and found to be effective, there may be an opportunity to test the robustness of the results in the same context but at a larger scale. Moving quickly after the first study capitalizes on existing partnerships and buy-in and can demonstrate how the approach can be effectively implemented at scale in the same context as the original result. The objective of this approach is to test robustness at scale but not external validity. Replication and extension to assess external validity may occur simultaneously when new partners express interest in the EBA.

Case study: A study in eastern Zambia found that installing life-size growth monitoring posters in the homes of families with young children significantly reduced stunting one year later among the group of children stunted at baseline. IPA worked with the original study authors to secure funding to evaluate the innovative home-based growth charts at a larger scale across three regions of the country in partnership with the Zambian Ministry of Health.