Innovations for Poverty Action is a nonprofit dedicated to discovering what works to help the world’s poor. We design and evaluate programs in real contexts with real people, and provide hands-on assistance to bring successful programs to scale.
Dear Friends,

A decade ago, many in the development community acted with the best of intentions, but without the best of evidence. If households lack clean water, help build wells; if people suffer ill health, improve health services; if the poor lack capital to start businesses, give them credit.

Reality is more complicated than the best intentions allow. Well water can be contaminated, people don't always use their local clinic, and savings or insurance for some may be better than credit. When resources are limited (and when aren't they?), we should strive to do the most good with the resources we have.

IPA’s Proven Impact Initiative is now working to bring key lessons about what works to donors and practitioners. We now know that chlorine dispensers installed at water collection sites decrease water-borne illness. Deworming programs for children increase school attendance and, later, earnings. People save more when offered goal-oriented savings accounts.

We have by no means exhausted the questions out there. Quite the opposite; we feel we have far more to go. For that reason I take particular pride in three new research initiatives that came to fruition in 2010.

The Teacher Community Assistant Initiative (TCAI) in Ghana is scaling and evaluating a proven program from India. TCAI trains community members to assist in elementary classrooms with poor-performing kids. Ghana is the fourth and largest site in which the model has been rolled out with a rigorous evaluation.

Second, the Small & Medium Enterprise Initiative (SMEI) brings together researchers, practitioners and policy makers interested in promoting growth for high-potential business owners. IPA strives to put forward the right questions and priorities to test projects that allow us to answer them—SMEI takes exactly that approach.

Third, our Ultra-Poor Graduation Initiative (UGP) launched its seventh and largest evaluation in Ghana, partnered with Presbyterian Agricultural Services. UGP is a collaboration between the Ford Foundation, the Consultative Group to Assist the Poor, and USAID to learn how to provide a safety net for the ultra-poor.

These efforts, combined with an increase in demand, drove us to make significant investments in our capacity in 2010. We launched a new office in Bangladesh, our field staff grew from 278 to 513 worldwide, and we now have over 150 researchers in our network. We invested in intensive training and capacity building for our field staff and close partners—in Kenya alone more than 100 employees working in Africa attended trainings to increase their research skills. To maintain our high research standards, we’ve hired full-time project development managers whose oversight greatly increases our capacity to take on new projects, and we have invested in statistical and survey support in New Haven. Finally, we have hired a general counsel and undergone a transition to a new accounting system to handle the variety of grants and contracts we process.

There is still much work to do. I am heartened by the programs we are now able to promote based on clear evidence, but I am also struck by how much more we must learn.

Thank you for being part of this journey.

Sincerely,

Dean Karlan

IPA’s focus is two-fold: We build knowledge about what works to help the world’s poor and we communicate that knowledge to the people who can use it—the practitioners, policy makers and funders who design and finance programs.

Our 150-strong network of researchers designs rigorous evaluations of anti-poverty programs and our staff of more than 200 field officers implements those programs with our partners on the ground. We repeat promising studies in different contexts to make sure the findings hold and to test additional theories. When a program has been tested and proven, we communicate our findings and work with partners to bring those programs to scale.

What We Do

Letter from the President

What We Do

Letter from the President

What We Do

Letter from the President

What We Do

4 po36 06 annual report

330 713 2014

5 po36 06 annual report

Innovate new approaches to alleviating poverty

Evaluate programs to find out what works and why

Replicate successful programs in new contexts

Communicate what we learn to donors and implementers

Scale programs that have been tested and proven
RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT:
LONG-TERM IMPACTS OF SCHOOL-BASED DEWORMING

Over 400 million schoolchildren worldwide suffer from intestinal worm infections that affect children’s health and development—and their long-term earning potential. In 1998 IPA affiliates found that a school-based deworming program in Kenya improved health and reduced absenteeism by 25 percent. Ten years later, researchers followed up on that first cohort of beneficiaries—now adults between the ages of 19 and 25—and found that deworming affected more than just their time in school. The adults who had benefited from school-based deworming programs ate more meals and lost fewer days of work to illness. Those with wage-earning jobs earned around 25 percent more than their peers, and the self-employed had higher earnings. Estimates suggest that the rates of return for deworming are enormous, with collective social benefits that easily justify government subsidization of school-based deworming programs. This study also makes clear how important long-term results can be. It is often practically difficult to track study participants over the long term, but research involving children gives us an opportunity to check back on them 10 or more years later. When such a long view is possible, we should apply the limited resources for scale-ups to the next cohort of students, not to the control, so that long-term effects can be measured.

Part of our strategy at IPA is to communicate what we learn to practitioners and policy makers providing services to the poor. Toward that end, in October of 2010 IPA co-sponsored the three-day Microfinance Impact and Innovation Conference in New York City. The event brought together the researchers investigating impacts of financial product access and design with the practitioners and partner institutions best able to put frontier knowledge to use.

Exciting discussions at the conference addressed the ways in which small changes in product design create out-sized benefits for the poor. In Ghana, for instance, the average return to capital for women entrepreneurs was zero, but a group of exceptionally “high performing” women saw better returns; when a microfinance institution in India delayed the start-point for repaying loans by two months, the borrowers on average earned 25 percent higher returns; Dominican business owners who received “rule of thumb” training in business accounting grew faster and weathered bad sales months better than their peers; and holistic programs aimed at “graduating” the ultra-poor out of extreme poverty produced income increases of between 15 percent and 25 percent after one year—we are continuing these studies to see if longer programs produce higher impacts. These results and others put knowledge in the hands of practitioners who design products and programs.

Impact and Innovation Conference

Rapid growth in microfinance has provided over 150 million of the world’s poor with access to microcredit and savings services, but for many these services remain out of reach. What is the impact of microcredit, microsavings, and microinsurance? How can we help facilitate access to credit and savings services? How can microfinance reach the ultra-poor?

Finance & Entrepreneurship

In 2010 we continued to expand our understanding of the impact of microcredit. IPA studies with borrowers in South Africa, the Philippines and India previously showed that credit has a moderate positive effect: Entrepreneurs invest more in their businesses, non-business owners consume more, and wage earners are better able to get through crisis without losing their jobs. “Microcredit seems to have delivered exactly what a successful new financial product is supposed to deliver,” wrote IPA affiliates Esther Duflo, Abhijit Banerjee and Dean Karlan in an Op-Ed on Nick Kristof’s NYT blog. “[It] allowing people to make large purchases that they would not have been able to otherwise.” Consistent with our goal of replicating studies in different contexts to confirm findings and test new theories, 2010 saw the launch or continuation of microcredit impact evaluations in Morocco, Mexico, India and the Philippines. Results from these evaluations will further expand our knowledge of the ways that microcredit assists the poor.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT
FINDINGS ON CREDIT FROM 2010

IPA 2010 annual report
Agriculture

Around 70 percent of the world’s poor rely on agriculture for all or some of their household income. Yet this income is at risk from unpredictable weather and crop price variation, which may affect how farmers choose to borrow and invest to improve their business. Our research aims to help farmers increase productivity and deal with the risks inherent in farming.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT:
THE POWER OF COMMITMENTS

Poor farmers know that even a small amount of fertilizer applied at the right time can increase yields significantly, but few farmers use it. When asked, they say they lack the funds at planting to buy it. To improve cash flows, a group of IPA researchers set out to test a commitment savings product that restricted Malawian farmers’ access to savings until planting time. Previous work by IPA researchers in the Philippines has shown that commitment contracts effectively help savers maintain self-control by making the funds unavailable. The product worked in Malawi too: In the subsequent season, those farmers with a commitment account planted more land, used more fertilizer and reaped yields that were 22 percent larger than their peers. Commitment savings helped by making funds inaccessible to family, friends and neighbors seeking loans. This project is a great example of how we apply what we learn to new contexts.

Lasse Brune; Xavier Giné; Jessica Goldberg; Dean Yang. “Commitments to Save: A Field Experiment in Rural Malawi.”

Water & Sanitation

Two million children die of diarrheal disease each year and contaminated water is often to blame. IPA’s work in the water sector identifies the health impacts of interventions that aim to prevent diarrhea and other water-borne diseases, such as point-of-use water treatment or piped household connections.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT:
WATER AND HAPPINESS

Many poor people in developing countries know that contaminated water can make them sick, but the quality of their water is not the only problem. Limited access also forces women and young girls to walk long distances to collect water supplies. A team of IPA researchers conducted an experiment in urban Morocco to find out whether poor residents would pay to have water connections installed in their homes. Through a program that offered loans that residents could repay through their utility bills, the researchers found that participants were very willing to pay for home water connections. Participants reported that the time saved also made them more satisfied with their lives. Though health was unchanged (the water came from the same public source), people spent more time relaxing or at social activities and there was less conflict among neighbors.

The research team on this project includes Esther Duflo, Pascaline Dupas, Florencia Devoto, William Pariente and Vincent Pons.

“Happiness on Tap: Piped Water Adoption in Urban Morocco”
The world’s poor often suffer from ill health, which makes adults less able to work and children less able to go to school. Unexpected health expenses can also devastate a poor family’s fragile household budget. Our health studies identify effective interventions for changing health outcomes and improving lives.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT: HEALTH IN THE HOUSEHOLD

Many poor people burn biomass (wood, dung, leaves, etc.) in indoor cook stoves, which pollutes the air in the home and leads to respiratory illness, especially for the women who do most of the cooking. In an effort to improve health, IPA affiliate Mushfiq Mobarak set out to promote cleaner-burning cook stoves to households in rural Bangladesh. He finds that women are more likely to choose a cleaner stove than men, but since the man is in charge of the household finances, few women have access to the cash needed to make the healthy choice. “The next step is testing a stove that bundles the health-benefits for women with a benefit for the man,” says Mobarak. “A promising idea is a Biolite stove which generates enough electricity to charge a cell phone—win-win for the whole household. We also need to offer free trials or money-back guarantees. Improved stoves are an expensive and unknown new product for poor households, which are rightly risk-averse.” Taking what we learn and creating new innovations from it is one of the hallmarks of IPA’s approach.

RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT: FAMILY PLANNING

A woman who hears about family planning services when she is alone is more likely to use them than a woman who learns of them with her husband. This fact, among others, suggests that man and woman have different ideas about how many children they want—and that a husband’s preference may sway his wife’s. IPA affiliate Nava Ashraf is currently working in Zambia, which has one of the highest maternal mortality rates in the world, to find out more about men’s reproductive preferences, and to see what happens when men learn about the risks their wives face in pregnancy and childbirth.

Nava Ashraf, Erica Field and Jane Lu, “Household Bargaining and Excess Fertility: An Experimental Study in Zambia”

The world’s poor often suffer from ill health, which makes adults less able to work and children less able to go to school. Unexpected health expenses can also devastate a poor family’s fragile household budget. Our health studies identify effective interventions for changing health outcomes and improving lives.
RESEARCH HIGHLIGHT

COMMUNITY-DRIVEN DEVELOPMENT

In theory, the poor themselves are in the best position to know what their communities need and to demand accountability from their governments. In reality, however, “community-driven development” is one of the least understood areas of poverty work. To answer some questions, a team of IPA researchers evaluated a “community-driven development” project in Sierra Leone. The program included basic skills training and new business development, as well as efforts to involve women and young people in the democratic process. Despite skilled implementation and well-delivered services, however, the program had no effect on local decision making or “collective” processes. Women participants showed no increase in their tendency to share opinions about important decisions and the participating communities were no more successful at generating support and raising funds for projects that would serve the whole—such as road maintenance or school building. These findings suggest that successful programs in this field are going to require very specific goals, focused interventions and a long-term view. IPA researchers are continuing to test community development efforts, with projects underway in Northern Uganda, Liberia and Ghana.

Katherine Casey; Rachel Glennerster; Edward Miguel. “Reshaping Institutions: Evidence on External Aid and Local Collective Action”
IPA’s initiatives are dedicated efforts to bring attention to and learn more about specific development issues. Each initiative has its own leadership, dedicated staff, and an individualized research agenda. IPA’s five initiatives include the Small & Medium Enterprise Initiative, Microsavings, Ultra Poor Graduation, the US Household Finance Initiative, and Post-Conflict Recovery.
Many development strategies focus on helping poor people create microenterprises, yet most microentrepreneurs are simply looking for a way to earn income; their efforts do not usually create jobs for anyone beyond themselves and their immediate family members.

In contrast, small and medium-size enterprises (SMEs) can play an important role in fueling jobs, yet few developing countries have a strong SME sector. There are many theories as to why this may be, but very little evidence from which to design programs that help firms grow.

IPA’s Small & Medium Enterprise Initiative (SMEI) builds necessary evidence on the real barriers and enablers of SME growth. Our network of researchers, practitioners and policymakers innovates new programs and policies to help SMEs thrive and expand, and tests those ideas in real contexts with real people.

In October of 2010, the SMEI launched with a roundtable event attended by researchers and practitioners. Participants helped solidify our research agenda around three key enablers of SME growth: Access to finance, access to human resources and access to markets.

From that agenda, we have launched a project in India with Magma and Ebay Motors India to test a credit product that used-car dealers can use to bid on resale assets.

We hope that improved access to finance for dealers can contribute to the formation of functional local resale markets. In the area of human resources, we are also evaluating the “Women Mean Business” entrepreneurial training program offered by the NGO TechnoServe. This effort will measure whether Women Mean Business overall brings higher earnings and growth for participants, and whether certain modules work better than others.

IPA is not content to just ask questions. Our Small & Medium Enterprise Initiative pursues innovative projects and creative partnerships to examine programs that can produce real and lasting change.

The poor can save. More importantly, they do save. But often the savings instruments available to them are unsafe, inefficient and costly. This is slowly changing. Increasingly, actors in the field of financial access are providing the poor with more formal options to save.

Given the promise and proliferation of savings, we at IPA are working to learn more about the role that savings can play in poverty alleviation. We want to learn how savings affect the lives of poor people and understand which design features help people save. In close partnership with Yale University under the Microsavings and Payments Innovation Initiative, IPA is overseeing a growing portfolio of research projects that address some of these questions.

IPA affiliates Pascaline Dupas and Jonathan Robinson conducted a savings study in Kenya which showed that women entrepreneurs who were randomly offered a savings account at a local bank invested more in their businesses and enjoyed higher earnings than their peers (men account holders saw no change). The women were also better able to deal with health events or other unexpected expenses without dipping into their business resources. IPA researchers are now replicating this project in the Philippines, Chile, Uganda and Malawi to see whether the findings from Kenya hold true in different contexts, and to dig a bit deeper to find the patterns of impact.

Pascaline Dupas and Jonathan Robinson “Savings Constraints and Microenterprise Development: Evidence from a Field Experiment in Kenya”
Ultra Poor Graduation

People living in extreme poverty have distinct needs from their slightly better off peers. These needs led BRAC, a Bangladeshi nonprofit, to develop the “Targeting the Ultra-Poor” (TUP) program. Ultra-Poor Graduation Pilots, modeled after TUP, seek to graduate households out of extreme poverty by providing a holistic set of services, including livelihood training, productive asset transfers, consumption support, savings plans, and health services. Early results from West Bengal, India show that this type of ultra-poor program leads to a 15-25 percent increase in household consumption in the first year. Follow-up surveys will determine if these increases are sustained over time. IPA is working with CGAP and the Ford Foundation to evaluate ultra-poor graduation pilots in India, Pakistan, Honduras, Peru, Ethiopia, Yemen and Ghana.

In Ghana, our evaluation is part of a research project “clustra.” This combination of programs was designed so that we could evaluate both the overall impact of the program and the part played by individual components. This work allows us to identify which pieces and combinations are the most important. For instance, we will be able to measure the impact of just receiving assets, or just receiving a savings account. The studies will look at a range of outcomes, including employability, labor market activity, and the stress levels of those living in extreme poverty.

US Household Finance

With the recent economic downturn, more American families live in fragile circumstances. People need help building assets, controlling debt, and planning for the future. Yet evidence from economics and psychology show that even educated people make some common, costly mistakes when it comes to their finances. The response from government has been to build stronger consumer protection systems and to sponsor financial education, yet these interventions are expensive and it’s not clear that they help. The IPA US Household Finance Initiative takes a different approach. We innovate and test new approaches from behavioral economics to help people make better financial decisions. The initiative focuses on measuring the impact of behavioral techniques that help people increase savings and manage debt; we are also building knowledge about how financial planning tools affect financial health and how financial consumers respond to marketing. Current projects underway include an effort to assess whether mobile text reminders and commitment contracts can help individuals pay down high interest debt and increase their savings.
Post-Conflict Recovery

Unstable incomes, high rates of infant and maternal mortality, water scarcity, low agricultural yields, weak educational systems: the systemic challenges of poverty typical to so many low-income countries are even more acute in societies that are recovering from a recent conflict or disaster. The development challenges are largely the same, but magnified. According to the World Bank Development Report 2011, people living in conflict environments are more than twice as likely to be undernourished and to lack clean water, their children are more than twice as likely to die before the age of five and three times as likely to not attend school. As a result, affected communities find it more difficult to address basic needs—no low income post-conflict country has achieved a single millennium development goal.

The scale of the problem is huge—one in four people lives in fragile and conflict-affected states. At IPA, we aim to identify programs that address core issues and help communities rebuild and recover. Our researchers are currently working with local governments, leading academics and NGOs on the ground to evaluate interventions in fragile states. For instance, in Liberia our researchers are evaluating a program that focuses on young people, many of them former combatants, who suffer high rates of unemployment, homelessness and drug abuse, and are vulnerable to re-enlistment. This new youth reintegration program brings together agricultural skills training, conflict resolution skills, literacy and numeracy training, assistance returning to home communities, and help starting a small agricultural enterprise. Another innovative program in Northern Uganda supports young women and girls, who suffer economically and educationally during war. The micro-enterprise development program presents an excellent model for assisting the large number of extremely vulnerable young women, especially young mothers, in Northern Uganda.
Part of IPA’s mission is to bring effective programs to scale. Our current scale up programs include the Proven Impact Initiative, the Deworm the World Initiative, the Safe Water Program and the Teacher Community Assistant Initiative (TCAI).
Proven Impact Initiative

IPA’s Proven Impact Initiative guides donations and advocacy towards programs that have been tested and proven to help the world’s poor. Each idea we support has achieved stand-out results in at least one rigorous evaluation. 100% of all donations go directly to organizations working to bring these programs to scale.

School-Based Deworming
Children in schools with deworming programs are absent from school 25 percent less than their peers, a significant improvement for just pennies a pill.

Commitment Savings
People save more, and are more likely to meet their goals, when they commit to saving a set amount and give up access to saved funds for a period of time.

Incentives for Vaccines
Parents are more likely to bring their children to the clinic for vaccinations if offered a small, non-cash incentive in return.

Remedial Education
Low-performing students show improved learning when they work outside the classroom for a few hours a day with community teacher aides or volunteers.

Chlorine Dispensers
Placing chlorine dispensers at water sites dramatically increases the number of people who treat their water, improving community health for less than $.30 per person per year.

Reminders to Save
Simple reminders sent via text can help bank clients increase savings and meet financial goals.
Over 400 million school-age children worldwide are infected with parasitic worms. These infections threaten children’s health and development, limit their participation in school and dramatically reduce their income potential. But there is a proven way to combat this challenge: Children who receive deworming pills at school suffer fewer infections and miss 25 percent fewer days than their peers, at a cost under 50 cents per child per year. Long term studies show that regularly treated children earn around 25 percent more than their peers as adults.

The Deworm the World Initiative (DtW), a collaboration between IPA and the Partnership for Child Development, helps governments and development partners launch, strengthen and support sustainable school-based deworming programs. We provide technical assistance directly to Ministries of Education and Health to help them develop, implement and monitor programs and build the skills and capacity to operate and maintain school-based deworming over the long-term. We also coordinate strategic support, such as donated medicine and program financing; and we advocate for large scale programs with global, regional and country leaders.

To date, DtW has worked with the governments of Kenya and Andhra Pradesh to launch new programs that have already benefited over 5.7 million children. We’ve coordinated deworming medicine and some additional technical and financial assistance to programs serving 15 million more.
Safe Water Program

Millions of people each day draw dangerously contaminated water from their local wells and streams. Even clear-looking water can contain microorganisms that make children sick, contributing to the 1.8 million children who die each year from water-borne diarrheal diseases. The good news is that water-borne illnesses are highly preventable: Adding a small amount of chlorine effectively makes water safe to drink. Yet less than 10 percent of surveyed households in Kenya treat their drinking water with chlorine, despite its local availability and low cost.

IPA researchers have worked to boost chlorine use by placing chlorine dispensers near public water sources. The public location of the dispensers reminds people to treat their water when they collect it, and dispensers decrease the cost of chlorine by limiting packaging and distribution expenses. Three-to-six months after the dispensers were installed, 61 percent of households had detectable chlorine in their drinking water—a more than 750 percent increase.

These dispensers cost as little as $0.30 per person per year. At scale, they could improve the health of millions and save up to 150,000 lives per year. IPA’s Safe Water Program is currently working in Kenya, Ethiopia, Swaziland and Bangladesh to promote chlorine dispenser use. Through our efforts, we seek to protect 5 million people around the world from unsafe drinking water by 2015.

Teacher Community Assistant Initiative

Primary school enrollment in many countries is now close to 100 percent, but learning levels are still very low. Part of the challenge is that students in the same classroom vary greatly in their skills, which makes it difficult for teachers to deliver lesson plans that most students can follow.

The Indian education nonprofit Pratham designed the Balsakhi program to address uneven skill levels in India’s public schools. Balsakhi, which means child’s friend, trains teacher’s assistants and community volunteers to tutor low-performing students in basic reading and writing skills. This program has been tested and proven to significantly improve student performance at a cost of only $2 per child per year.

In 2010, IPA began working in Ghana to bring Pratham’s Balsakhi program to the West African country, where fewer than 20 percent of 3rd graders meet proficiency standards in reading, writing and math. The Teacher Community Assistant Initiative (TCAI) is a partnership with the Ghanaian Education Service, the National Youth Employment Program and the Ghana National Association of Teachers. IPA is piloting a number of models to define the program features with greatest impact for Ghanaian students. This knowledge will ultimately allow us to expand the program throughout the country.
In 2010 IPA had over **230 projects** completed or underway in more than **40 countries** around the world.
To view detailed information about IPA’s financials, please visit www.poverty-action.org/financials
Dean Karlan  
President and Founder of IPA, Professor of Economics at Yale University

Gregory M. Fischer  
Co-Program Director in Finance, International Growth Centre and Lecturer in Economics, London School of Economics

Joseph (Jerry) McConnell  
Retired Partner of Goldman Sachs, Investor and Vice-Chairman, Hudson Green Energy

Paras Mehta  
Principal of Black Canyon Capital

Jodi Nelson  
Director, Impact Planning & Improvement for Global Development at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation

James J. Prescott  
Assistant Professor of Law at University of Michigan Law School

Stephen Toben  
President of the Flora Family Foundation

Kentaro Toyama  
Professional Researcher at University of California, Berkeley’s School of Information

Delia Welsh  
Vice President and Managing Director

Kathleen Viery  
Vice President and Chief Financial Officer

Annie Duflo  
Vice President and Research Director