

A conversation with the Innovation in Government Initiative, October 21, 2020

Participants

- Gaëlle Conille – Policy Associate, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Global
- Anne Healy – Senior Advisor, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Global
- Robert Rogers – Senior Policy Associate, Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab Global
- Robin Dey – Content Editor, GiveWell
- James Snowden – Program Officer, GiveWell

Note: These notes were compiled by GiveWell and give an overview of the major points made by Ms. Conille, Ms. Healy, and Mr. Rogers.

Summary

GiveWell spoke with Ms. Conille, Ms. Healy, and Mr. Rogers of the Innovation in Government Initiative (IGI) at the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) to learn about IGI's progress and future plans. IGI's work, which is led by co-chairs Iqbal Dhaliwal and Abhijit Banerjee, was formerly managed by Claire Walsh, and is now being managed by Ms. Healy, Mr. Rogers, and Ms. Conille. Conversation topics included IGI's off-cycle COVID-19 funding round, its regular funding round, and its room for more funding.

Off-cycle COVID-19 funding round

In March 2020, IGI began accepting proposals for projects that aim to mitigate the spread and/or consequences of the COVID-19 pandemic in low- and middle-income countries (LMICs). Funding was limited to \$25,000 per project and was intended to provide short-term technical assistance to government partners. Some of the funding was also used to provide partial support to larger projects.

IGI received sixteen proposals requesting a total of \$420,000. It was able to allocate approximately \$200,000 across the following nine projects:

1. [Using Social Media to Spread Public Health Messages for COVID-19](#)
2. [Monitoring the Effects of COVID-19 in Indonesia through Government Conditional Cash Transfer \(PKH\) Facilitators & Beneficiaries](#)
3. [Using mobile phone and satellite data to target Togo's emergency cash transfer program](#)
4. [Accelerating Changes in Norms about Social Distancing to Combat COVID-19](#)
5. [COVID mitigation response for the elderly](#)
6. [Understanding and Reducing the Impact of COVID-19 in Rural India](#)
7. [Giving effective information to fight COVID-19](#)
8. [Mask Up! Testing strategies to increase mask use in Kenya](#)
9. [Intimate Partner Violence in the Era of Pandemic: Evaluating the Impact of COVID-19 and a Text-based Mitigation Campaign in Urban Peru](#)

Regular funding round

As part of its regular funding round in spring 2020, IGI reviewed twelve proposals requesting a total of \$2.2 million. It was able to allocate approximately \$260,000 across the following four projects:

1. [Using a Returns to Education Campaign to Avoid School Dropouts](#)
2. [School-based CBT to reduce violence and improve learning in South Africa](#)
3. [A Pathway to Pay-for-Performance Teacher Motivation in Rwanda](#)
4. [Training Local Leaders to Prevent and Reduce Domestic Violence in their Communities](#)

The three education projects were largely supported by funding from the Marshall Foundation.

Support for early-stage program adaptation

IGI's work supports the adoption at scale of evidence-based programs and policies by governments. It often provides support at an early stage, when a program or policy is still being adapted to suit a new context, piloted, and tested. This work may be followed by a randomized controlled trial (RCT) and subsequent scale-up. Alternatively, early-stage adaptations could find the core program model to be ineffective or unfeasible.

One example of the type of early-stage adaptation work that IGI supports is an active [project](#) to adapt the cognitive behavioral therapy (CBT) literature to a school-based context in South Africa with the aim of reducing violence and improving learning.

Limited available funding

Early-stage adaptation is often both inexpensive and highly impactful. However, this work remains underfunded. Donors typically prefer to fund, for example, RCTs of a well-defined program or policy or the scale-up of a program or policy that has already been evaluated, both of which may be simpler to understand.

Room for more funding

Current budget

IGI is currently planning to hold two funding rounds over the next 6-8 months. One round would be fully funded by the Marshall Foundation and Echidna Giving and would support education projects exclusively. This round would be conducted in partnership with another [I-PAL initiative focused on supporting research in education](#), so that the round will be able to support projects across the research-to-scale spectrum. The second funding round, scheduled for summer 2021, would likely have a special area of interest focused on supporting projects that deliver cash transfers for social protection, given the interest of one of IGI's donors. The remainder of IGI's funding from GiveWell and the Centre for Effective Altruism (CEA) would be allocated to support this second funding round.

IGI fundraising prospects

IGI has sufficient funding through its summer 2021 funding round. It has found it difficult to raise unrestricted funding for the type of early-stage work it supports. Most donors prefer to support larger projects and only provide restricted funding (limited to, e.g., a specific sector). Unrestricted funding from GiveWell and CEA, for example, has been instrumental in ensuring that IGI could support high-impact health projects. The IGI team will continue exploring fundraising prospects in 2021 to support its funding rounds in 2022 and beyond. In the case that IGI did not receive sufficient additional funding, staff roles would be shifted to support J-PAL projects that are funded.

All GiveWell conversations are available at
<http://www.givewell.org/research/conversations>