

J-PAL Co-Founders Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo Awarded Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics

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Photo: J-PAL co-founders Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo with J-PAL senior leadership at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in July 2019. (Left to right: David Sears, Paula Pedro, Benjamin Olken, Lina Marliani, Anna Schrimpf, Esther Duflo, Iqbal Dhaliwal, Mary Ann Bates, Anja Sautmann, Abhijit Banerjee, Shobhini Mukerji, Laura Poswell, John Floretta.)

Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) co-founders Abhijit Banerjee and Esther Duflo, with longtime J-PAL affiliate Michael Kremer, were jointly [awarded](#) the 2019 Sveriges Riksbank Prize in Economic Sciences in Memory of Alfred Nobel. The prize was awarded “for their experimental approach to alleviating global poverty.”

Banerjee and Duflo co-founded J-PAL with Sendhil Mullainathan at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2003 with a mission of reducing poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. J-PAL conducts randomized evaluations of innovative policy ideas and programmes to identify what works, what doesn’t, and why in the fight against poverty; and works with partners to bring the most effective programmes to scale.

J-PAL began with just six staff members in 2003 and has since expanded to become a global research center with 181 affiliated researchers and 400 staff at leading research universities around the world. Its work is focused on research, policy engagement, and training:

- **Research:** J-PAL’s researchers and staff design and support innovative, large-scale randomized evaluations to identify the most effective approaches to reducing poverty. To date more than 950 randomized evaluations have been conducted by J-PAL affiliated researchers.
- **Policy engagement:** J-PAL policy experts work with high-level decision-makers in government and other organizations to help them understand and apply results from randomized evaluations, and to scale up programmes found to be most effective. [More than 400 million people have been reached](#) by scale-ups of programmes found to be effective by J-PAL affiliates.
- **Training:** J-PAL’s researchers and staff lead trainings for government officials and practitioners seeking to adopt evidence-based approaches to social policy and development. More than 7,000 people have participated in J-PAL training programmes around the world.

When Banerjee and Duflo founded J-PAL in 2003, randomized evaluation was a relatively new methodology in development. Today, 2,900 randomized evaluations have been registered with the American Economic Association, and training in this methodology is standard practice in many university development economics programmes.

J-PAL Africa, based at the University of Cape Town, leads J-PAL’s work in sub-Saharan Africa. Flagship work includes [Teaching at the Right Level \(TaRL\) Africa](#) in which the team works with education NGO Pratham and many organisations and governments to develop, pilot, and scale the evidence-informed Teaching at the Right Level approach that builds foundational skills in mathematics and reading for all children before exiting primary school. This work currently spans more than 10 African countries. J-PAL Africa has also recently launched the [Digital Identification and Finance Initiative in Africa](#). This initiative aims to support governments in monitoring and evaluating the impact of reforms in digital payments, especially those leveraging digital IDs. In South Africa, research and policy engagement focuses on evaluating the impact of social programmes and policies, covering a range of sectors including labour markets, urban services, and political participation.

Abhijit Banerjee noted, **“J-PAL has and always will represent a shared bond between our affiliated researchers, more than 400 dedicated staff worldwide, and hundreds of funding and implementation partners. Without their incredible commitment, creativity, and hard work, this journey would not have been possible. I am so grateful to all of them.”**

Iqbal Dhaliwal, Executive Director of J-PAL, said, **“Abhijit and Esther are the rare founders who hit the incredible balance of providing a challenging and creative vision for the organization’s growth, while giving huge freedom to staff to innovate. A lot of us joined J-PAL because we were inspired by them, and it is an honor to work alongside them every day to seek out the most promising approaches to ending global poverty.”**

Esther Duflo—the youngest person and second woman to win the Nobel Memorial Prize in Economics—said, **“This recognition signifies the critical importance and urgency of our work. We have seen the great potential of experimental research and policy engagement to make change on a global scale. I look forward to taking this work forward with J-PAL’s incredible affiliated researchers, staff, funders, and implementers to reach hundreds of millions more around the world.”**

Laura Poswell, Executive Director of J-PAL Africa notes **“This award is a wonderful recognition of the effort of so many researchers, policymakers and implementers to carefully understand how to design and implement policies that positively impact the lives of the poor. We are inspired to continue to work hand in hand with our partners across Africa on this important mission of ensuring policy is informed with scientific evidence and affecting positive change for millions of people.”**

J-PAL’s work is supported by visionary foundations, governments, and individuals. Major donors include Arnold Ventures, Community Jameel, Echidna Giving, Google.org, The John D. and Catherine T. MacArthur Foundation, The Douglas B. Marshall Jr. Family Foundation, the Omidyar Network, The Alfred P. Sloan Foundation, the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, and the UK Department for International Development. Major donors to J-PAL’s work in Africa include The Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation, Co-Impact, The William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, and the United States Agency for International Development.

For more information, visit <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/africa>.

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The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) is a global research center working to reduce poverty by ensuring that policy is informed by scientific evidence. Anchored by a network of 181 affiliated professors at universities around the world, J-PAL draws on results from randomized impact evaluations to answer critical questions in the fight against poverty. We build partnerships with governments, NGOs, donors, and others to share this knowledge, scale up effective programmes, and advance evidence-informed decision-making. J-PAL was launched at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in 2003 and has regional offices in Africa, Europe, Latin America & the Caribbean, North America, South Asia, and Southeast Asia.