

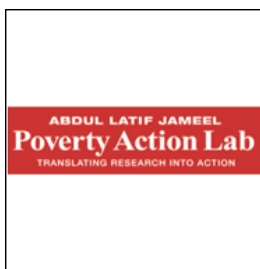
BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards

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ABDUL LATIF JAMEEL POVERTY ACTION LAB (J-PAL) AT THE MASSACHUSETTS INSTITUTE OF TECHNOLOGY (MIT)



The BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Development Cooperation category goes to the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). The Lab, founded by economists at MIT, promotes the use of scientific methods to assess the on-the-ground effectiveness of development assistance funding.

Between 1960 and 2008, a total of USD 2.7 trillion was spent worldwide on development cooperation. But until very recently no techniques were available to gauge the real effectiveness of this effort. J-PAL analyzes development assistance programs to determine whether the funds invested are being properly utilized and are delivering the desired results, something similar to the way an audit works in the corporate environment. Experts in development economics believe the scientific tools this laboratory deploys represent a before and after in aid program evaluation.

The scientific method applied to aid evaluation

J-PAL, founded in 2003 by three economists at MIT, has successfully built up a worldwide network of experts. The laboratory promotes the use of "randomized trial" methods to evaluate development interventions, similar to those employed to test experimental drugs and vaccines. J-PAL has applied them, for instance, to measure the effectiveness of bednet campaigns in the fight against malaria or of strategies to reduce teacher absenteeism. The U.S. laboratory's advocacy of this approach has led to it being taken up by numerous international institutions.

In its award certificate, the jury cites J-PAL's success in promoting "the scientific evaluation of development interventions by using randomized trials applied to areas including education, health and financial markets". The methods used by J-PAL have been shown to be "a valuable tool for answering specific policy questions", and its work "has led to the expanded use of this approach by development practitioners and researchers".

It goes on to remark that "the method has been extended to policy questions where nobody had previously thought to use it and, in some cases, has led to important policy actions".

J-PAL's current directors are Abhijit Banerjee, Esther Duflo and Rachel Glennerster.

Abhijit Banerjee (India, 1961) is a professor of economics at MIT and co-director of J-PAL. With Esther Duflo, he has conducted randomized evaluations in the education sphere. He has also assessed reforms of informal schools in tribal areas in India, working with local NGOs.

Esther Duflo (France, 1972) is a professor of economics at MIT and co-director of J-PAL. She has evaluated policies to promote agricultural productivity in Kenya as well as the impact of women and lower caste members of village councils in India.

Rachel Glennerster (United Kingdom, 1965) is Executive Director of J-PAL. She is currently researching into community-driven development in Sierra Leona, the empowerment of adolescent girls in Bangladesh and health, education and microfinance in India.

SEE ALSO

Video



The Poverty Action Lab at MIT Wins the BBVA...

The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) has been granted the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge

Audio



Phone interview with Abhijit Banerjee

Phone interview with Professor Abhijit Banerjee, co-director of the Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT). J-PAL

Other winners

- Basic Sciences
- Ecology and Conservation Biology
- Economics, Finance and Management
- Information and Communication Technologies
- Biomedicine
- Arts
- Climate Change