

## **Structured Abstract**

### **Background/Context**

Governments—given their unmatched reach, widespread infrastructure, and mandates to provide critical public services—are some of the most important actors in addressing pressing social challenges like poverty and inequality. Administrative data and evidence from randomized evaluations are tools that have the potential to help governments identify solutions that are more likely to achieve their desired outcomes, monitor and improve program implementation, and design and test innovative programs before scaling them up.

Despite these potential benefits, few governments use monitoring data and evidence from impact evaluations systematically in the program design, implementation, evaluation, and learning cycle. Collaborating with external researchers and evidence-to-policy organizations may help encourage greater data and evidence use, but policymakers and researchers often face barriers to working together, including competing priorities and mismatched timelines.

In spite of these obstacles, many governments around the world are eager to use data and evidence more regularly in their decision-making. At J-PAL, we have been fortunate to collaborate with governments at the forefront of the evidence-informed policymaking movement around the world. Many of these partnerships have centered around evidence-informed approaches to improve the effectiveness of education, including our work with governments in Argentina, the Dominican Republic, and Peru. In some cases, these partnerships establish an Evaluation Lab to systematically pilot, test, and scale new policy innovations; in others, they work to improve administrative data systems and analytics to help governments use data more frequently and systematically. No matter the specific activities, all of our government partnerships are co-designed and co-managed to ensure they bring value to the government.

The purpose of this report is to share examples and lessons we have learned about building a culture of data and evidence use in government. We hope these insights will be valuable for both government agencies that are eager to increase the use of data and evidence in their policy processes and organizations working on evidence-informed policymaking. While the focus of this report is our work in Latin America and the Caribbean, the lessons may also be relevant to other regions and countries.

### **Objective and Scope**

This report summarizes J-PAL's experience working with governments in the LAC region to increase the use of data and evidence in policy and shares key lessons for governments and other organizations working on evidence-informed policymaking. The report begins by describing the challenge of evidence informed policymaking, and the approach that J-PAL takes to working with governments in the LAC region. The report then shares some practical insights for evidence-to-policy organizations about how to design and manage these partnerships, as well as promising areas for governments to invest to make evidence-informed policymaking more common throughout the region.

To generate these insights, in 2017 we conducted detailed interviews with 39 officials in 14 of our partner agencies, as well as staff from organizations like Innovations for Poverty Action (IPA) who have worked with us to manage these partnerships. We also interviewed a number of researchers, both from J-PAL's network and outside, who have worked with governments in the region to evaluate social programs and policies. Last, we compared our experiences with those of other evidence-to-policy organizations working in the region, like IPA, and multilateral institutions like the World Bank and the Inter-American Development Bank.

## **Findings**

### *Key Insights for Evidence to Policy Organizations*

1. Proactive support from a senior official is crucial to advancing data and evidence use.
2. Increasing data and evidence use is an incremental process. It is important to meet governments where they are.
3. Different types of government agencies require different approaches.
4. Respond quickly to opportunities and policy windows where there is interest and authority to use evidence.
5. Fostering broader institution-wide support is crucial for sustainability.
6. Invest in and formalize long-term partnerships.

### *Key Insights for Governments*

1. It is important to allocate resources to evidence use, and make it someone's job to apply evidence in policy design.
2. Similarly, creating dedicated spaces where evidence use is encouraged and rewarded can help build a culture of evidence-informed innovation.
3. Greater investment in administrative data collection, management, and inter-agency data sharing can go a long way in helping advance the evidence use agenda.
4. Collaborating with evidence-to-policy organizations and researchers can help establish a culture of data and evidence use.

## **Conclusion**

Administrative data and evidence from randomized evaluations can help governments innovate and improve social programs in a number of ways. From evaluating new programs and scaling those that are found effective, to connecting administrative datasets to better track the quality of program, the achievements of the governments featured in this report demonstrate that strengthening government capacity for data and evidence use, not only data and evidence generation, can have high returns. Dedicating resources to evidence use is critical for achieving the ultimate goal of evidence-informed policymaking—that data and evidence are actually translated into better policies that improve lives.

The examples featured here just scratch the surface of a much larger movement among governments across Latin America and around the world to use data and evidence to address pressing social challenges. While this work can be challenging, governments are some of the most critical actors in reducing poverty and inequality at scale and in improving systems in education, health, social protection, and governance. We hope that sharing our experiences will

inspire more governments to move in this direction, and more researchers and practitioners to collaborate with governments to improve social policy