

Making Aid Work Better

Innovating models for
impact with better evidence,
sustainable funding models,
and behavior change

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Smarter Investments, Better Aid: Navigating Evidence and Human Behavior

This paper seeks to offer a pragmatic set of solutions for all institutions concerned with aid, philanthropy, and global development that want to maximize the impact of their funds today and pave the way for a future-proof path forward. By combining and weaving together years of thought leadership from some of the most innovative, rigorous, and established institutions at the intersection of impact investing and evidence creation, this brief reveals a vital answer to a critical question: how can we do aid better?

The insights presented here were co-drafted by experts within the Global Behavioral Evidence Network for Development (GBEND).

Founded by the UAE government Office of Development Affairs (ODA), the Behavioral Science Group (BSG), the World Bank's Mind, Behavior and Development Unit (eMBeD) and the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT), GBEND is a growing cohort of 45 leading experts working to make development more effective through evidence and behavioral science.

Together, this expanding network of multilaterals, research centers, delivery organizations, and funders shares a common goal: ensuring development resources are directed toward what works, delivered so they actually reach people, and structured to sustain impact over time.

A Conversation between Thought Leaders

In February 2026, the network convened on the sidelines of the World Government Summit in Dubai. There, thought leaders from the network met with policymakers and decision-makers to help shape the next phase of global development. Amid ongoing changes in geopolitics and funding models,

these conversations pointed to a pathway robustly rooted in pragmatism, evidence-based behavior change, and a deep belief that investing in the innovation happening in the Global South—to grow localized solutions—is the definitive route forward.

Specifically, this brief draws directly on the work of four core GBEND member organizations that together span the full pathway from evidence to delivery to finance. It was crafted by drawing directly on the insights, experience, and speaking

points shared by the specific experts from these organizations who convened in Dubai. These contributors represent some of the most senior figures within their respective organizations, standing at the very pinnacle of their institutional thought leadership:



The Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL)
Founded at MIT, generating and curating rigorous evidence on what reduces poverty.



The Behavioural Insights Team (BIT)
Designing and testing behaviorally informed programs across the world.



The Behavioral Science Group (BSG)
The central behavioral science unit for the UAE government, based within the Office of Development Affairs and supporting positive social impact in the UAE and beyond.



The Global Innovation Fund (GIF)
Investing catalytic capital in innovations with the potential to scale, measured on a common impact framework.

The Opportunity: Applying a New Lens to Impact

Using evidence and pragmatic innovation to deliver aid more effectively is where the new opportunity lies in accelerating impact. Leaders overseeing large-scale aid initiatives face an overwhelming number of choices across competing priorities, and even the most experienced are swayed by what is recent and vivid rather than what the evidence supports or how that evidence drives policy making and aid allocation decisions.

Part of the challenge is that the global aid system has no single allocation logic. Some donors allocate primarily on the basis of need, directing resources toward the poorest countries or the most acute crises. Others allocate according to where expected returns are highest, or according to thematic priorities set by boards, parliaments, or founders. Still others default to status quo programming, renewing what they have always funded, or follow the lead of peer institutions. Each logic can be defensible on its own terms. But because these choices are made independently, with no mechanism to reconcile them, the collective result is a coordination failure. The clearest illustration is the persistent imbalance between reactive and anticipatory spending. Systematic evidence shows that acting ahead of predictable disasters delivers returns of several dollars for every dollar invested, with syntheses reporting ratios from 2:1 to 7:1.¹ Yet less than 1 percent of international humanitarian assistance is allocated to anticipatory action, even though around a fifth of humanitarian responses address crises that could have been

anticipated.² Money is far easier to approve from contingency budgets once need is visible and obvious. The result is a system that consistently pays more to respond to suffering than it would have paid to prevent it. The vividness effect is long documented: a foundational study found that for every person killed by a volcanic eruption, roughly 40,000 people must die in a drought for the disaster to stand the same chance of making the news on US television, and relief follows coverage.³

A second, well-documented bias is herding. Decision-makers tend to mimic the choices of other major funders. Davies and Klasen (2019) show that a donor’s bilateral flows to a country rise significantly when other donors fund the same recipient, with the effect most pronounced for large donors and established “darling” recipients, and conclude that herding remains a dominant feature of aid relationships.⁴ The result is a handful of over-funded “donor darlings” in the spotlight while equally deserving ‘aid orphans’ are starved of capital.

These are problems of allocation. There is also a second set of problems on the other side of the equation. Even where money is directed well, programs routinely fail at the “last mile”.⁵ For example, the vaccine goes unused, a benefit goes unclaimed, or a mosquito bednet is left discarded. These failures can be due to inertia, mistrust, and friction. They can be anticipated and can be designed for.

1 Start Network (2025) Anticipatory Action in Humanitarian Interventions – Impact, Challenges & Best Practices in Uncertain Times. <https://startnetwork.org/whats-new/resources/anticipatory-action-humanitarian-interventions-impact-challenges-best-practices>

2 Development Initiatives (2024) Falling short? Humanitarian funding and reform. <https://devinit.org/resources/falling-short-humanitarian-funding-reform/>

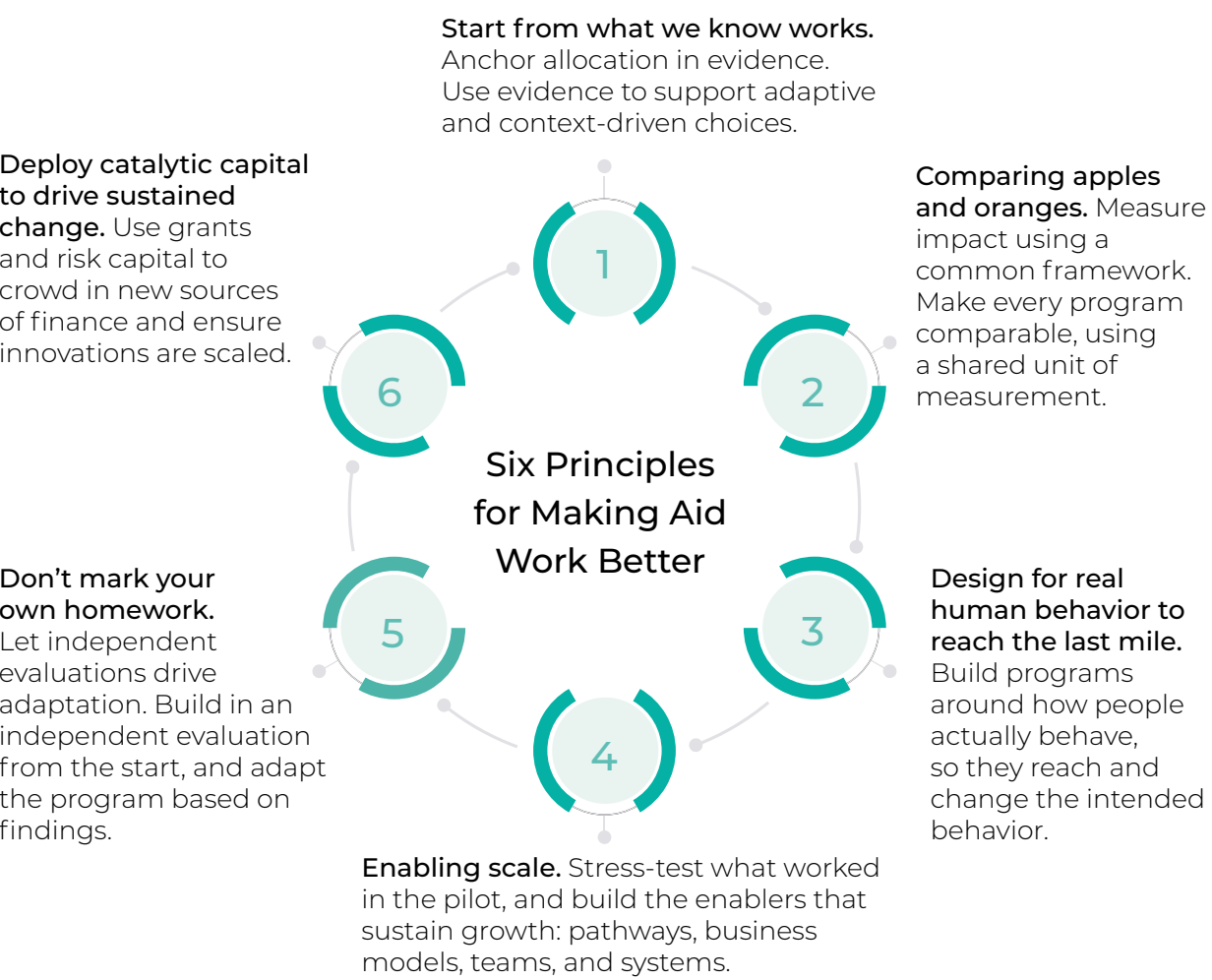
3 Eissensee, T., & Strömberg, D. (2007). News Droughts, News Floods, and U. S. Disaster Relief. *The Quarterly Journal of Economics*, 122(2), 693–728.

4 Davies, R.B. and Klasen, S. (2019), Darlings and Orphans: Interactions across Donors in International Aid†. *Scand. J. of Economics*, 121: 243-277. <https://doi.org/10.1111/sjoe.12261>

5 Wills-Silva, M. (2025, April 24). Behavioural science and rigour at the last mile of aid. The Behavioural Insights Team. <https://www.bi.team/comment/behavioural-science-and-rigour-at-the-last-mile-of-aid/>

Six Principles for Making Aid Work Better

These principles are complementary, not sequential. Together, they tackle both sides of the problem diagnosed above.



1. START FROM WHAT WE KNOW WORKS: ANCHOR ALLOCATION IN EVIDENCE

The landscape of international development is vast. For anybody concerned with aid and philanthropy entering it with ambition, the sheer volume of causes, geographies, and intervention types can be paralyzing. Without a clear framework for choosing where to act, the risk is fragmentation: resources spread too thin across too many priorities, with too little impact to show for any of them. The answer is to start with what the evidence shows. Grantmakers and international donors need not start from scratch. Over the past two decades, researchers and development organizations have tested thousands of interventions across health, education, agriculture, financial inclusion, and social protection in more than 90 countries worldwide. The evidence base is

deeper than it has ever been. Evidence is most powerful when placed in the hands of partner governments and presented with real choices and tradeoffs rather than predetermined answers, creating a shared basis for decisions and mutual accountability.

This creates an opportunity for all bodies concerned with aid and philanthropy to adopt a balanced portfolio approach: anchoring thematic portfolios around evidence-backed interventions while reserving a smaller share

of funding for higher-risk innovations that could generate future breakthroughs.

J-PAL, a global research center Founded at MIT, works to reduce poverty worldwide by ensuring that policy and funding decisions are informed by rigorous scientific evidence. Drawing on more than 20 years of experience and over 2,600 rigorous impact evaluations, its **Evidence Effect⁶ has identified more than 30 effective, scalable programs** ready for greater investment. Two examples:

Boosting vaccine coverage

This means tackling supply and demand at once. Where access is limited, securing supply and properly incentivizing health workers raises coverage. Where vaccines are available, simple demand-side measures such as reminders, small incentives, and information from trusted community members make parents more likely to vaccinate. Bundling these works best.⁷

Giving cash simply works

Giving cash directly to poor households, with no conditions attached, reliably improves food security, income, savings, and well-being. The benefits spill over: as recipients spend locally, nearby households and firms gain too.⁸ Outcomes improve further when cash is paired with complementary support, such as women-centered delivery or financial coaching.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Start from your priorities, then anchor each in evidence:** Define the thematic portfolios that matter most to your institution and, within each, anchor funding to at least one proven program as its evidence backbone. This gives every portfolio a foundation of rigorous evidence while keeping the funder's core objectives at the forefront.
- **Reserve a portion of funding for emerging ideas, but with guardrails:** Not everything worth funding has been fully tested yet. An Evidence Generation Fund can support early-stage innovations, putting them through rigorous evaluation before any significant capital is committed. This ensures that even exploratory investments are held to a clear evidence standard. This model sits most naturally with private philanthropic capital, which can take on early-stage risk that public aid budgets are often less legally or politically equipped to carry.

6 Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). (2025). *The Evidence Effect*. Last modified July 2025. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evidence-effect>

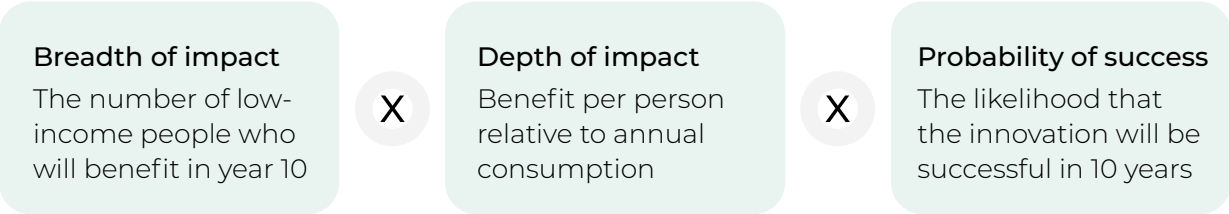
7 Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). (2025). *Boosting vaccine coverage to save children's lives*. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evidence-effect/child-immunization>

8 Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL). (2025). *Giving cash simply works*. <https://www.povertyactionlab.org/evidence-effect/unconditional-cash-transfers>

2. COMPARING APPLES AND ORANGES: MEASURE IMPACT USING A COMMON FRAMEWORK

One of the most underappreciated barriers to effective aid is the difficulty of choosing between programs. How does a decision-maker weigh a vaccination program against a cash transfer, or a new school for girls against agricultural technology that will feed more families? These are not easy comparisons, and when they are hard, human judgment fills the gap. That is precisely where bias creeps in.

Without a shared framework around impact and results, funders default to familiar proxies. Standard metrics like “people reached” sound intuitive, but can be deeply misleading. Two people who heard a radio message about vaccination would count equally, regardless of whether either acted on it. “Dollars spent” is worse still: it inadvertently rewards expensive programs over lean ones that achieve far more per investment. The result is that well-funded but inefficient programs can look more substantial than highly effective ones simply because they cost more.



Before committing capital, GIF forecasts all three. The ten-year horizon is long enough to capture the time an innovation realistically needs to move from early funding to scale, but short enough to remain useful as a planning tool. To judge the portfolio as a whole, GIF

A common methodology removes that cognitive strain. It makes trade-offs apparent and readily comparable. It gives decision makers a consistent basis for judgment.

GIF’s Practical Impact Framework does exactly this. It is built around a single unit of measurement: the person-year of income-equivalent (PYI). One PYI means one person receives a one-time benefit equal to their full annual consumption; equally, twenty people each receiving a benefit worth 5 percent of their annual consumption also equals one PYI. Because the measure is expressed relative to consumption, it deliberately gives more weight to gains among the poorest: a \$1-a-day gain matters more to someone living on \$2 a day than to someone living on \$5 a day.

The framework rests on three factors, multiplied together:

runs thousands of simulations, varying outcomes across investments to produce a probability distribution of total impact. Thus, it can see not just whether individual bets look promising in isolation, but also how the portfolio is expected to perform as a whole.

Case Study Apples vs. Oranges in Action

To see how the Practical Impact Framework handles the “apples and oranges” dilemma in practice, imagine an aid agency evaluating two competing, high-quality proposals:

- Proposal A (Climate Adaptation):** A tech-enabled micro-insurance and data platform that provides smallholder farmers in drought-prone regions with automated, weather-indexed payouts when crops fail.
- Proposal B (Maternal & Child Development):** A localized, home-visiting program that trains community

mentors to coach vulnerable first-time mothers on early sensory stimulation, nutrition, and responsive care during the critical first 1,000 days of a child’s life.

Intuitively, these projects trigger opposing institutional biases: maternal care feels urgent and emotionally immediate, while climate fintech feels technical and systemic. By applying the Person-Year of Income-Equivalent (PYI) framework, decision-makers strip away this subjectivity, translating both interventions into identical, measurable units of net social value:

The Factor	Proposal A Climate Adaptation	Proposal B Maternal & Child Development
Breadth (How many?)	Massive Scale Reaches 1.5 million farmers digitally by Year 10.	Local Focus Constrained to 20,000 homes due to physical visits.
Depth (How much change?)	Modest Simply insulates a farmer’s existing income (protects 5% of their annual budget from a climate shock).	Transformative Permanently alters a child’s brain development, boosting their future adult earnings by 25%.
Probability (Will it work?)	High Risk (20% chance) It is an unproven tech startup; there is an 80% chance it might fail completely.	Sure Bet (85% chance) Based on decades of rigorous trials, we know exactly how to deliver it.
The Net Result	High-Risk, High-Reward A massive gamble, but if it beats the odds, it scales to millions of people.	Deep, Certain Impact A guaranteed, life-changing victory for a smaller, targeted community.

Multiplying these three factors yields a clear, objective comparison:

- **The Climate Adaptation:** Offers a small depth of impact per individual (saving 5% of income from climate shocks) and a high risk of failure (only a 20% probability of success), but can scale digitally to reach 1.5 million farmers.
- **Maternal & Child Development:** Offers deep, lifelong impact per child (a 25% earnings premium) and a high certainty of success (85%), but faces limited geographic breadth (20,000 households) due to the physical nature of home visits.

The Portfolio Takeaway

The common framework prevents a false choice. Instead of rejecting one, a funding body can take a balanced portfolio approach: anchoring core capital in the deep, reliable returns of early childhood care, while allocating a ring-fenced portion of risk capital to the climate tech platform for its massive breakthrough potential at scale.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Adopt a single impact measure:** a common unit lets programs as different as education and public health be assessed on the same terms, making trade-offs explicit rather than leaving them to judgment.
- **Take a portfolio approach:** view investments as data points that form a larger whole, including ring-fenced capital for riskier bets, with the understanding that some will fail. Run simulations to assess how investments will perform and produce probability distributions of total impact.

3. DESIGN FOR REAL HUMAN BEHAVIOR TO REACH THE LAST MILE

Evidence can tell us which programs work. But even the most effective intervention fails if it does not reach the end users. For example, a vaccine may be readily available at a hospital, but uptake may be undermined by misinformation spread in the waiting room. Funding can produce better-designed vaccination programs and stronger health systems, and still fail to vaccinate the people

who need it most. This is what is known as the **‘last mile problem’**: the final, often most fragile stretch between a well-designed program and the person whose life it is meant to improve.⁹ Here, traditional approaches to aid delivery can fall short. The conventional assumption has long been that if supply is in place, that is, if clinics are built or schools are funded, better outcomes will follow.

In practice, it often does not. Behavioral barriers such as inertia, mistrust, confusing processes, and social pressure can undo the impact of even the best-funded initiatives.

Applying a **behavioral lens** means designing programs around **how people actually think, decide, and act**, rather than how policy models assume they will.

Behavioral science can bridge the gap between a program and its uptake. In a randomized trial in Argentina involving roughly 250,000 people, a behaviorally informed chatbot sent appointment reminders, personalized clinic information, and simple conversational prompts to those who had not yet received their COVID-19 vaccination. It more than tripled vaccine uptake compared with a no-contact control group, and nearly doubled it compared with a standard one-way reminder.¹⁰ It worked because it tackled the last-mile barriers directly: reducing the friction of getting information, building trust through personalized interaction, and using timely prompts to overcome inertia.

Results like these suggest behavioral science should be a core part of making development programs work. This is why GIF has supported the development of behavioral capabilities worldwide. In 2016, it made a £3 million grant to BIT to scale applied behavioral science across governments in Guatemala, Bangladesh, and Indonesia.¹¹ The grant supported 39 projects and 23 randomized trials, including measures that:

- Brought forward early tax filing, reaching more than 11 million taxpayers in Indonesia
- Used heuristics, ‘rules of thumb’, to improve the quality of school management practices across more than 4,000 high schools in Guatemala, and
- Used posters to encourage bystander interventions in cases of sexual harassment on public buses in Bangladesh

A single, well-placed investment can stretch across multiple borders and demonstrates that behavioral approaches are not only effective at the last mile but highly scalable.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Build a behavioral lens into program design from the outset:** design for how people actually decide and act, not how plans assume they will, anticipating the friction, mistrust, and inertia that derail delivery.
- **Treat last-mile testing as a standard step before scaling:** it is cheap relative to the cost of a program that reaches no one, and it surfaces failure points while they are still fixable.

9 Wills-Silva, M. (2025, April 24). Behavioural science and rigour at the last mile of aid. The Behavioural Insights Team. <https://www.bi.team/comment/behavioural-science-and-rigour-at-the-last-mile-of-aid/>

10 Brown, D., et al. (2024). A behaviourally informed chatbot increases vaccination rates in Argentina more than a one-way reminder. Nature Human Behaviour, 8, 2314–2321

11 Global Innovation Fund (GIF) Webpage (n.d.). Behavioural Insights Team (BIT). Retrieved April 1, 2026, from <https://www.globalinnovation.fund/investments/behavioural-insights-team>

4. ENABLING SCALE

A commitment shared across J-PAL, GIF, and BIT is the determination to understand not just whether a program **works**, but **for whom** and in **what context**. As Nobel laureates and J-PAL co-founders Banerjee and Duflo argue in Poor Economics, poverty is not one problem but many.¹² It is a series of specific, overlapping challenges that differ by place, population, and circumstance. That demands rigorous evidence, so we can tell what works in a single setting from what can be relied on more broadly.

The randomized controlled trial is the tool of choice. By assigning some participants to receive an intervention and others not, it compares like with like, isolating a program’s true effect from everything else that might explain an improvement. J-PAL is built on this foundation, GIF applies the same standard when choosing which innovations to back, and BIT embeds evaluation as business-as-usual wherever it can. RCTs are not the only valid evidence, but without rigorous testing, it is hard to know which programs genuinely work and are worth backing further.

Proving an intervention works, whether through experimental or quasi-experimental methods, is only part of the challenge. The harder question is whether it keeps working when it grows. John List, one of the world’s leading economists on behavioral science, has shown that programs producing striking results in a controlled setting often deliver far less once expanded: a phenomenon he calls a **voltage drop**.¹³ The reasons are predictable. Pilots run under idealized conditions: talented staff, close oversight, and motivated participants. Scale strips those away. Staff quality varies, costs mount, and the population reached is broader and

different from the group originally studied. Testing for the voltage drop is therefore a critical proof point for scale, but it is not the only one. GIF’s decade of scaling experience shows that innovations also need credible and planned pathways to scale, sustainable business models, strong and effective teams, and strategies that address systemic barriers. Timely evidence has proven as important as methodological purity: quasi-experimental findings have often been sufficient to drive government adoption, and speed matters for commercial scale.

Pathways to scale are not always commercial. GIF has partnered with organizations such as J-PAL and the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) to fund early-stage, behaviorally informed healthcare delivery models. By funding the initial high-risk testing phases, GIF generated the hard evidence needed to demonstrate that the interventions saved lives and reduced costs. This data gave national governments the confidence to absorb these innovations directly into their public health systems, instantly scaling the impact across millions of citizens.

The practical lesson for those funding and delivering is to design for the real world, not just the pilot. That means testing under realistic constraints from the start; asking early which parts of an intervention depend on rare expertise or exceptional individuals, and simplifying where they do; and thinking about the population a program could eventually reach, not just the group in the pilot. It also means accepting List’s harder implication: if you take evidence seriously, you have to be willing to discover that something you have already scaled isn’t working.

Emerging AI-enabled methods may further strengthen this. Synthetic participants, AI-assisted interviews, and rapid experimentation tools are beginning to reduce the time and

cost of testing program design, messaging, and implementation before a full rollout. These should complement, rather than replace, rigorous real-world evaluation.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Build a scale-testing function:** a dedicated team, for instance, an embedded policy innovation lab, could stress-test proven programs under realistic constraints before larger funding is released, identifying which components to keep and which to drop.
- **Commit to rigorous evaluation:** default to RCTs where possible; where they aren’t, use quasi-experimental or other rigorous methods.
- **Assess scale-readiness holistically:** evaluate pathways, business model, team, and systemic barriers alongside the evidence base.

5. DON’T MARK YOUR OWN HOMEWORK: LET INDEPENDENT EVALUATIONS DRIVE ADAPTATION

Entities should create a clear feedback loop to integrate findings from independent evaluations into their programs. By this, we mean testing conducted by others not deeply involved in funding the program.

Evidence Action’s experience with chlorine dispensers shows what this looks like in practice. After scaling rapidly across East Africa, an independent evaluation found that far fewer households were using the dispensers than the organization’s own

monitoring had suggested. Evidence Action wound down operations in Malawi and scaled back sharply in Uganda, redirecting resources toward delivery models where impact was higher and could be sustained.¹⁴

The lesson is not that evaluation is infallible; their own routine monitoring had missed the gap for some time. It is that when rigorous, independent evidence revealed the problem, Evidence Action acted on it rather than explaining it away.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Establish a clear protocol for acting on findings:** every evaluation should feed into a defined decision-making process that results in programs continuing, being modified, or ending.
- **Publish results openly, including uncomfortable ones:** make both positive and negative findings public. This builds credibility and contributes to wider sector learning.

12 Banerjee, A. V., & Duflo, E. (2011). Poor Economics: A Radical Rethinking of the Way to Fight Global Poverty. PublicAffairs. <https://economics.mit.edu/people/faculty/abhijit-banerjee/poor-economics>

13 List, J. A. (2023). The Voltage Effect. Revue économique, 74(5), 673–680. <https://www.jstor.org/stable/48767004>

14 Evidence Action. (2026, March 5). Following the evidence, even when it’s hard: An update on chlorine dispensers in Uganda and Malawi. <https://www.evidenceaction.org/insights/following-the-evidence-even-when-its-hard-an-update-on-chlorine-dispensers-in-uganda-and-malawi>

6. DEPLOY CATALYTIC CAPITAL

Once you have identified what works, you then need to finance its expansion. Many proven innovations subsequently stall because they fall into a structural financing gap. Grants typically fund early experimentation, whereas commercial capital wants proven, lower-risk models. Between these two sits a “missing middle” of organizations that are too advanced to receive grant funding but not yet investable. Capital exists, but it doesn’t flow to them.

A catalytic capital approach addresses this gap by using public or philanthropic funding to reduce risk and unlock additional

investment. Rather than funding delivery directly, it supports organizations to become viable at scale. It deploys capital across a continuum: grants for validation, risk capital for growth, and blended finance to crowd in private investors.

Whether a solution lasts depends on the organizations, markets, and policy environments around it. A catalytic approach addresses all of these, defining impact not by what is delivered once, but by whether a solution continues to deliver and expand after the initial funding ends.

Catalytic Capital in Practice: The GIF Approach

A premier example of this coordinated approach is the Global Innovation Fund (GIF). Operating as a non-profit multilateral investment vehicle, GIF bridges the gap between early-stage innovation and large-scale commercial or public deployment. It takes a venture-capital approach not to maximize financial returns but to maximize social returns for people living on less than \$5 a day.

To do this, GIF uses a staged funding model in which capital commitments scale with empirical evidence. Untested but high-potential ideas receive modest grant funding to demonstrate proof of concept. As an innovation proves its cost-effectiveness and market viability, GIF steps in with larger risk capital injections—including equity investments, loans, and convertible grants—making the enterprise highly attractive to commercial funders.

Case studies of how catalytic finance can drive smarter change

The power of combining flexible instruments with clear pathways to scale is best understood through real-world examples from GIF’s portfolio:

Case Study 1 From Grant Validation to Financial Independence (Climate-Smart Agriculture)

GIF frequently deploys early grants to help social enterprises break the cycle of grant dependency. For example, by providing patient grant capital to validate and de-risk viable, climate-smart micro-irrigation and weather analytics platforms in emerging markets, GIF helped these startups establish a rigorous

track record of impact and commercial viability. This validation effectively “crowded in” private capital, allowing the enterprises to transition away from donor funding entirely and scale sustainably through commercial markets.

Case Study 2 Blended Finance for Vulnerable Ecosystems

The same logic is being applied across the sector. The Global Fund for Coral Reefs, a UN-supported blended finance vehicle, invests in commercial projects and companies with business models that reduce threats to coral reefs, and supports innovative, replicable, and scalable solutions. As a blended finance

vehicle, the Equity Fund includes a junior anchor investment from the Green Climate Fund. By absorbing early-stage risk, this concessional capital unlocks institutional investment that would otherwise view fragile geographies and underserved sectors as too risky.

RECOMMENDATIONS

- **Deploy a coordinated mix of instruments:** Combine grants, risk capital, and blended finance to carry innovations through the transition to scale, rather than relying on grants alone. Private philanthropic capital is the natural anchor for risk-absorbing instruments, while public aid agencies can participate through co-financing and by aligning their broader programs with scaled innovations.
- **Prioritize scale-enabling pathways:** Back innovations with credible routes to scale, including those that can attract follow-on capital or integrate seamlessly into existing public and private systems.
- **Use public capital to crowd in private investment:** Absorbing early-stage risk can mobilize many times more external capital, significantly raising the total impact achieved per dollar spent.

From Principles to Practice

GBEND spans research, delivery, and funding. Its next task is to turn shared thinking into shared tools: the evidence, skills, and partnerships that let every member act on these principles, instead of each building them alone. This means:

Know your best buys. GBEND can build a clear, shared list of what works, for whom, and at what cost. Members should build on existing work, such as the Evidence Effect, and use new tools to keep this list alive and current. Anchor funding around this proven core, and set aside a smaller share for new ideas where the evidence is still thin.

Share the risk. GBEND spans many sectors. That gives it a rare chance to test new ways to fund and deliver shared goals across public, philanthropic, and private capital. No single funder should carry the full cost of taking an idea from pilot to scale. Set up partnerships from the start so each type of capital bears the risk it fits best: grants to test an idea, risk capital to grow it, and blended finance to draw in private investors once it has a track record.

Adopt common measurement tools and language. GBEND can help set a shared standard for how members measure impact.

One shared unit, backed by forecasting and simulation tools, lets every funding choice rest on the same basis, not on instinct, habit, or the best pitch in the room.

Build the right skills in house. These principles need people who can use them: staff trained in evidence review, behavioral design, and impact measurement, backed by units such as a policy innovation lab. Without this, even the best evidence and tools sit unused.

Design for scale in the real world. GBEND can draw on its members' shared know-how and local reach to build programs meant to scale from the start. Proving an idea works in an experiment or pilot is only half the job; the harder part is to understand how the idea will perform in the real world, interacting with complex systems. GBEND could explore new approaches to forecast and test under real constraints at each stage, build in independent checks with power to expand, adapt, or end a program, and publish the results, even the bad ones.

About the contributors



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Iqbal Dhaliwal is the Global Executive Director of J-PAL, based at MIT's Department of Economics. He has led the organization since 2018, overseeing a major expansion of its research, policy outreach, and regional offices worldwide. Before joining J-PAL, he served in India's Indian Administrative Service, where he worked on policy formulation and program delivery, and later held roles in economic consulting.



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Joseph Ssentongo is Chief Executive Officer of the Global Innovation Fund, appointed in 2025 following several years in senior executive roles at GIF including Chief Operating Officer and Senior Vice President for Impact. Prior to GIF, he led evaluations of e-government initiatives across 15 African countries at the Investment Climate Facility for Africa, and worked at the Food and Agriculture Organization of the United Nations on gender and agricultural development.



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Mónica Wills-Silva is Director of International Programmes at the Behavioural Insights Team, where she has worked since 2015 across more than 15 countries in Africa, Asia, Europe, and Latin America. Her portfolio spans public health, tax compliance, anti-corruption, and gender-based violence. Before joining BIT, she worked with the German Agency for International Cooperation on youth violence prevention in South Africa and with a peacebuilding organization in her native Colombia.



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Rasha Attar is the Director of the Behavioral Science Group (BSG). She has over 18 years of experience in government, most recently embedding applied behavioral science into strategy and policy development across health, education, sustainability and social cohesion. She is co-chair of the Global Behavioral Evidence Network for Development (GBEND), convening multi-disciplinary experts to strengthen development outcomes by incorporating applied behavioral science.



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Nour Shammout is Associate Director for the Alliance for Data, Evaluation, and Policy Training (ADEPT) at J-PAL Global, where she works to build a global network of institutions advancing evidence-informed policy. Before rejoining J-PAL, she served as Deputy Director of the Economic Directorate at the Office of His Majesty King Abdullah II of Jordan, leading the team responsible for setting the strategic vision for Jordan's economic policy. Her career also spans the World Bank and the International Labour Organization.



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Shailaja Annamraju is Senior Managing Director for Impact at GIF, leading its Grants and Analytics teams. She brings 25 years of experience as a senior economist and civil servant, including at the UK Department for International Development, where she worked on climate adaptation policy and the establishment of the International Climate Fund, and at the UK Infrastructure Bank, where she set up its impact framework and analytical team.



ANTONIO HANNA-AMODIO
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Antonio Hanna-Amodio is Senior Advisor in the International Programmes team at the Behavioural Insights Team. His work involves designing behavioral policies that are tailored to a range of contexts and cultures, with a focus on impact and scalability. He holds a first-class honors degree in Economics and World Philosophies from SOAS University, and a Master's in Behavioral Science from the London School of Economics.



ZAIN HUSSAIN
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Zain Hussain is Advisor in the International Programmes team at the Behavioural Insights Team, where he designs policy solutions, conducts qualitative research and contributes to the delivery of behavioral insights projects. Prior to joining BIT, Zain worked at The Citizens Foundation in Karachi, working to establish quality education for underserved students. He has a background in consulting having worked at KPMG and PWC, and has worked across the UK, Canada, USA, Pakistan and China.



KATIE CHEN
Chief of Staff to the Global Executive Director



Katie Chen is the Chief of Staff to the Global Executive Director at J-PAL, where she helps define and execute J-PAL's global strategy and organizational priorities, manages key partnerships, special projects, and coordinates the Board and Executive Committee. Before J-PAL, Katie worked at Save the Children, BIT, and McKinsey, across seven countries.



CHIARA CAPPELLINI
Principal Behavioral Scientist



Chiara Cappellini is the Principal Behavioral Scientist at the Behavioral Science Group (BSG), based within the UAE's Office of Development Affairs, where she supports the strategic growth of the organization. In this role, she serves as a founding member of the Secretariat for the GBEND network. She coordinates cross-border research agendas and designs behavioral interventions for international development policy. Prior to her current appointments, Chiara worked for the Behavioural Insights Team (BIT) on projects spanning Europe, East Africa, and the Middle East for partners like the FCDO and Google.

