

EPoD INDIA at IFMR



UNITING
RESEARCH & PRACTICE
FOR
SMART POLICY
IN INDIA

ABOUT US



Evidence for Policy Design (EPoD) at Harvard Kennedy School is a research program that works to improve citizen well-being by creating and enabling research-led solutions to policy implementation challenges. We believe that one of the best ways to improve the lives of the most vulnerable citizens is to collaborate directly with governments to ensure effective and efficient provision of services, and protection from exploitation and environmental health challenges.

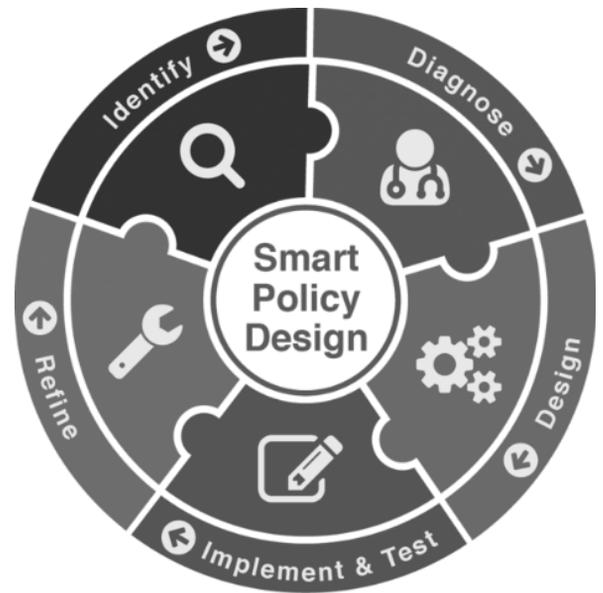
We collaborate closely with policymakers to develop customized policy solutions that remove implementation bottlenecks and enable effective implementation of public policies. Our work is based on economic theory and the best available empirical evidence. We initiate collaborations that evaluate and align incentives across all stakeholders, implement independent technology solutions (particularly those that harness the power of big data), test and refine policy solutions, and construct effective routes for implementation. Our engagements include **research, teaching and capacity-building** initiatives.

Our vision for India is simple

To make policy work for all Indians

OUR APPROACH

SMART POLICY DESIGN AND IMPLEMENTATION



Like constructing any lasting structure, designing and implementing effective public policies requires accounting for a multiplicity of complex factors. And just as building a new structure involves more than planning its appearance, policies require more than an appealing design. Effective policies have two additional requirements: implementation must account for the environments in which they function, and they must use rigorous testing and feedback loops to address problems and ensure that systems function as they were intended. At EPoD, we highlight how the principles of modern product engineering – such as identifying problems, diagnosing underlying causes, and then designing, testing and refining solutions based on continuous feedback – can be used to develop sustainable solutions to the most challenging policy issues. At EPoD, we call this process Smart Policy Design and Implementation (SPDI).

At each stage of SPDI, we incorporate economic theory and rigorous evidence, and we intentionally make evidence accessible to policymakers through dialogue, training, support for innovation, and interactive tools employing data visualization. We work alongside policymakers, government departments, and states committed to making meaningful progress on key development challenges. Our engagement focuses on gaining contextual understanding of issues at hand through identifying knowledge gaps, current performance and known challenges, and people and processes involved. Since policy cycles are usually short, we target a broad range of stakeholders to develop innovative, modular solutions that offer long-term strategic direction in addition to short-term policy wins.

OUR PRIORITY AREAS & VISION



GOVERNANCE

Improve public service delivery for vulnerable citizens by increasing transparency and accountability in the public sector.



ENVIRONMENT

Improve environmental outcomes and safeguard India's future by partnering with regulators to test and refine policies to curb pollution, while encouraging growth.



GENDER

Increase women's economic opportunities and empowerment, and raise awareness of the role of economics and policies in women's outcomes.



CAPACITY BUILDING

Build a culture of evidence and increase data literacy throughout the public sector, strengthening leaders' ability to promote evidence-informed policies.

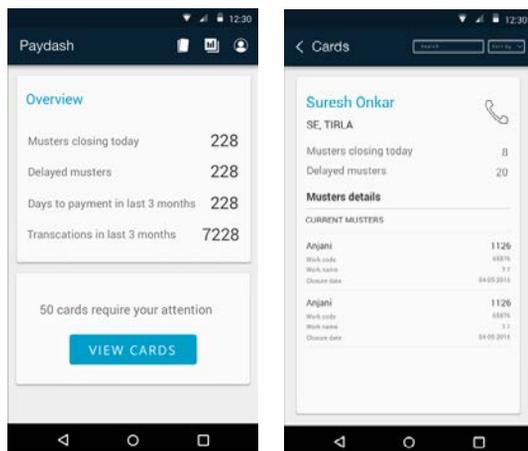
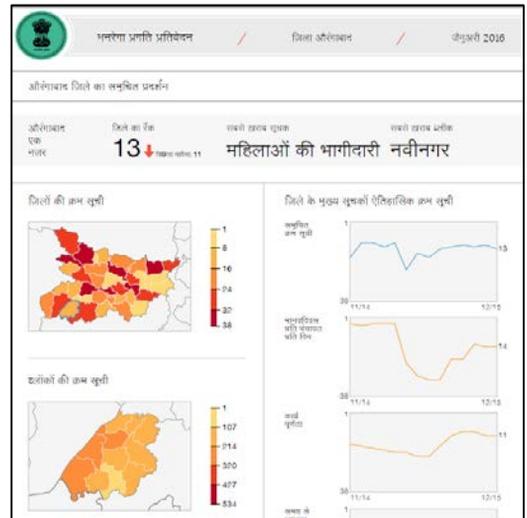


GOVERNANCE

Recent technological innovations — like the spread of inexpensive mobile technology among poor populations and the advent of big data — are creating a base of real-time evidence that is unprecedented in size and scope. Possibilities for empowerment through new knowledge abound. But knowledge, even when it is relevant to policy, is not enough. At EPoD, we work to ensure that this data is accessible to those who can utilize it. We constantly test and refine ways to leverage big data to improve public sector delivery for India's most vulnerable citizens.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Launched the MGNREGA Public Data Portal & Reports Dashboard** in partnership with the Ministry of Rural Development. The portal provides public access to one of the world's largest development databases and enables administrators to use that data more effectively.
- **Partnered with India's Comptroller and Auditor General** to provide technical assistance and capacity building to the office responsible for evaluating the performance of India's public sector spending, enabling them to test digital data collection for the first time.
- **Hosted PolicyHack**, a novel event uniting technical developers, researchers, and policymakers to tackle key policy challenges.
- **Developed and tested MGNREGA Report Cards in Bihar** (below), showing that local workfare administrators are more responsive to visualized data than tabular data, the latter of which has been customarily used to monitor work progress.



WORK IN PROGRESS

- **Rolling out PayDash**, a web and mobile app for government administrators. PayDash aims to decrease delays in payments to workfare recipients by leveraging big data to increase transparency and accountability in the wage payment process.
- **Piloting innovative technologies to track and better understand government officials' time use** in order to identify ways to improve bureaucratic functioning. These methods promise to shed light on the inner workings of India's bureaucratic machinery and highlight ways to improve the system.

ENVIRONMENT



Unlike some other policy issues, the effects of environmental challenges are widespread, and solutions entail cooperation from many different sectors. Tackling pollution requires collaboration between policymakers, industry, and society. By working with local and international environmental research centers, EPoD has brought together these stakeholder groups and harnessed the power of different approaches, including both technology- and policy-focused solutions.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- In a long-term partnership with the Gujarat Pollution Control Board, our research, conducted with JPAL South Asia and affiliated academics, quantified the extent of misreporting in industrial environmental audits and illustrated how independent audits can produce impressive improvements in reporting and an equally remarkable reduction in pollution. This led to the institution of third party audits in environmental compliance, whose initial evaluations lowered inaccurate audit readings by 80 percent and led plants to decrease pollution by 0.21 standard deviations on average. The most culpable industries (plants) were the likeliest to pollute less under the new system.
- We have helped 3 states pilot and test Continuous Emissions Monitoring Systems (CEMS), a data system crucial to the implementation of a market-based emissions trading system and a critical means of increasing transparency and accountability in pollution monitoring.
- We have designed and deployed customized training for state pollution regulators to improve how they analyze and interpret data, thereby enabling better decision-making by regulators.
- Our research has been promoted widely in the popular press and has raised public awareness regarding India's pollution problems, paving the way for meaningful policy-research engagements in this important sector. Other states and municipal bodies throughout the country are now exploring options similar to our third party auditing model.

WORK IN PROGRESS

- Emissions Trading. We are spearheading a project to develop an Emissions Trading System to regulate industries' release of harmful particulate matter, in conjunction with top researchers from the University of Chicago and Yale University.
- Environmental Clearances. We are exploring ways to use publicly available data to increase transparency in the environmental clearance and compliance process. We are also studying how greater transparency can incentivize more accurate compliance reporting and improve environmental outcomes.

GENDER



Indian female labor force participation lags far behind similar economies, and India underperforms on a variety of economic and social outcomes for women overall. EPoD surveys show that many unemployed women, especially in rural areas, want jobs. Multiple research studies demonstrate a positive link between women’s engagement in labor markets and their own wellbeing, as well as that of their children and siblings. Indications of low and declining female empowerment have worrisome implications for the wellbeing of India’s women, their households, and the broader economy and society. Our work on women’s economic empowerment highlights how major initiatives in India today have the potential to empower women.

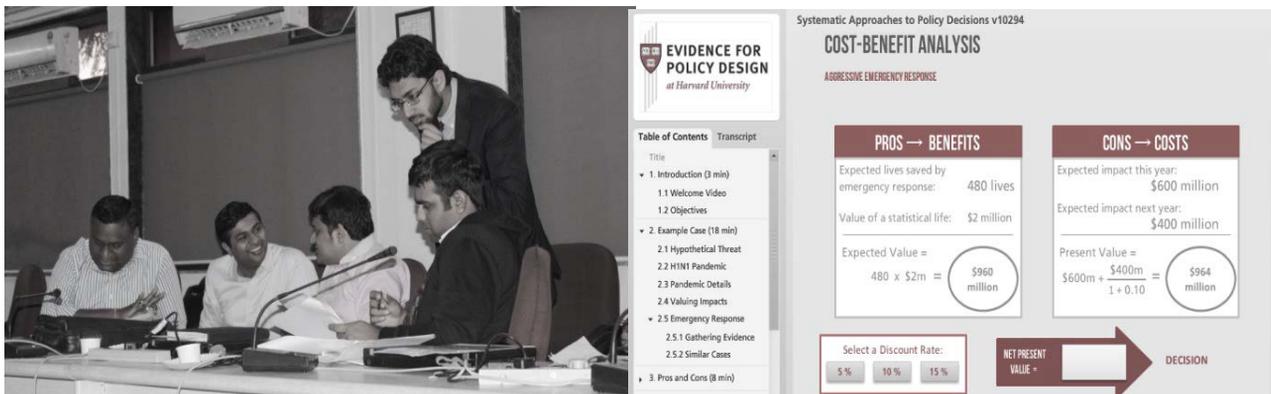
KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- Our research has highlighted the importance of the **design of microcredit contracts** frequently used by women. We found that instituting a two-month grace period on individual-liability microcredit loans doubles new business formation & investment of the loan in the business, leading to long-term gains in income & business profits.
- Our work has also drawn attention to the value of **women’s networks** for increasing financial inclusion. A randomized field trial conducted by EPoD and affiliated researchers uncovered the value of more frequent meetings between microfinance borrowers. More meetings produced greater social connections and risk sharing, and decreased future loan default rates. These group-based financial practices can help women overcome mobility restrictions, and also increase social capital, long-term usage of financial products and, in the case of business counseling, labor supply (FFP 2013).

WORK IN PROGRESS

- **Shrinking Shakti.** We have established a forum for discussing the constraints on women’s labor force participation, as well as their macro- and microeconomic implications, through the Shrinking Shakti dialogues. These events convene policymakers, private sector actors, researchers, and the NGO community to examine and debate the most recent research findings on women’s economic opportunities.

CAPACITY BUILDING



With the rapid growth in technology and the availability of big data, decision-making that does not incorporate the newest methods and research is quickly obsolete. Our goal is to help policymakers demand and leverage data and research more effectively for the decisions they have to make. From training Indian Administrative Service officers – India’s District Collectors and senior bureaucrats – to Scientists for state Pollution Control Boards and the country’s senior auditors, we provide practical teaching customized to the needs of different groups.

EPoD training incorporates a blended learning approach, combining in-class sessions customized to the specific trainees’ needs with interactive digital modules produced at the Harvard Kennedy School. This approach equips policy decision-makers with practical skills and standard frameworks necessary to better apply data and evidence in their jobs.

EPoD faculty also teach a variety of graduate-level courses, executive education courses and other workshops in areas such as finance, education and gender inclusion. Through pedagogical engagements, EPoD is training senior policy actors and future policymakers to develop effective systems for incorporating data and evidence into policy design within governments and other implementing institutions. We are training a rising generation of leaders in this field and building capacity among external audiences for real-world impact.

KEY ACHIEVEMENTS

- **Developed a six-unit training curriculum** & accompanying digital training modules.
- **Delivered two-day seminar** for senior IAS officers in Washington, DC.
- **Trained over 300 civil servants** at LBSNAA, India’s prestigious civil servant training institution, the Comptroller & Auditor General, and the Gujarat Pollution Control Board, building and delivering customized in-class sessions to accompany our digital modules.

WORK IN PROGRESS

- **Expanding training** across South Asia
- **Developing a long-term training strategy** to leverage capacity building to promote program sustainability.
- **Seeking financial support** to continue to train key cohorts of senior civil servants and meet new requests for training.

HELPING TO MAKE OUR WORK POSSIBLE



United States Agency for International Development
The Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation
The National Science Foundation
The National Institutes for Health
The U.K. Department for International Development
Deutsche Gesellschaft für Internationale Zusammenarbeit
The International Initiative for Impact Evaluation (3ie)
Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT) Jameel Poverty Action Lab
Innovations for Poverty Action
The John Templeton Foundation
Target Corporation
United Nations Development Programme
The Mastercard Foundation
Center for Economic Policy Research
AusAID (DFAT)
College of William and Mary
The Aman Foundation
The Hewlett Foundation
International Growth Center
International Development Research Centre

GROWING GLOBAL REACH

Currently, the EPoD team based at the Harvard Kennedy School has more than 25 active projects in close to 10 countries. EPoD's core team of managers, operational staff and research fellows have the experience and expertise required to deliver high impact results around the world.

IN CAMBRIDGE, EPoD is supported by a dedicated team of almost 30, as well as by the robust institutional infrastructure and vibrant intellectual environment of Harvard University. This ecosystem allows our projects to thrive while also contributing to the School's core mission to train public leaders and generate solutions to public problems.

IN THE GULF, EPoD is engaged in a unique 6-year, multi-million dollar research collaboration with the Human Resources Development Fund of the Kingdom of Saudi Arabia (HRDF), where we have cultivated a strong network of mid- and senior-level champions of evidence-based policymaking through research partnerships and strategic capacity building programs.

IN SOUTH ASIA, under the Building Capacity to Use Research Evidence Program, which has benefitted from the support of the UK's Department for International Development (DFID) in South Asia, we have trained 1000+ mid- and senior-level policymakers from countries across South Asia and incubated 14 research-policy engagements.

IN INDIA, we established an on-the-ground presence in 2013, from which we have led a growing number of research-policy engagements focused on policy challenges in environment, gender, and governance, with a variety of state and central governments throughout the country. We also train senior officials in the principles of smart policy design and implementation.

Today, our staff in India comprises a team of nearly 20 managers, research associates and administrative personnel that work across 12 states and territories in the country. We continue to field a high level of demand from partners and potential new partners for EPoD's core research and training programs. Our work in India is facilitated by our host organization, IFMR LEAD.

To learn more, visit epod.cid.harvard.edu or find us on Twitter [@EPoDHarvard](https://twitter.com/EPoDHarvard)