PRESS RELEASE

The Government of Tamil Nadu today signed a Memorandum of Understanding (MoU) with the world renowned Abdul Latif Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) based at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology in USA and Institute for Financial Management and Research (IFMR) in Chennai to institutionalize an evidence-based approach to policymaking in order to maximize the impact of its anti-poverty programmes. This follows the announcement under Rule 110 made by the Hon'ble Chief Minister Puratchi Thalaivi Selvi J Jayalalithaa in the Legislative Assembly on 08.08.2014 stating that evidence based policy making is an important element in effective governance and hence the Government will lay emphasis on the proper monitoring and evaluation of ongoing schemes and projects. Accordingly, the Government has entered into a Memorandum of Understanding with the Abdul Latif Jameel – Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) of the Massachussets Institute of Technology, USA, which will enable the involvement of some of the best development economists and social scientists in the world in the formulation and evaluation of various schemes in the State in key sectors like school education, health, poverty alleviation and skill development.

J-PAL, headquartered at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, is a leading international research network known for its rigorous impact evaluations of development programmes, and has over 100 affiliated professors from top universities including MIT, Harvard, Yale, Stanford,

Princeton, London School of Economics and IIM Ahmedabad. IFMR is the local host institute for J-PAL in India and is a 44-year old not-for-profit society engaging in research, training and education.

The MoU is a step towards realizing Tamil Nadu Vision 2023 goal of becoming India's most prosperous and progressive state, and having fully eradicated poverty. The key elements of the draft MoU include a Policy Dialogue as part of which, Government of Tamil Nadu and J-PAL will identify the top policy priorities of Government of Tamil Nadu and conduct discussions to jointly come up with innovative potential solutions that can be then field-tested rigorously before a state-wide scale-up and identify policy innovations tested elsewhere in India and globally that could be replicated in Tamil Nadu. Based on the Policy Dialogue with departments five projects have been identified for evaluation during 2014-2015 including Evaluating Primary School Education Interventions with the School Education Department; Improving Youth Labour Market Outcomes through Skilling- A firm level survey in four districts with Labour and Employment Department; Inculcating Healthy Habits to Reduce the Burden on Non-Communicable Diseases, Engaging Women to improve Breastfeeding Outcomes in Tamil Nadu, Evaluating Weekly Iron Folic acid Supplementation (WIFS) and School Anaemia Monitoring with the Health & Family Welfare Department. More projects would be identified for evaluation in the next two years.

J-PAL will assist the Government of Tamil Nadu in building internal capacity to carry out Monitoring and Evaluation (M&E) of ongoing or new

schemes. J-PAL will conduct a diagnostic/needs assessment exercise to identify existing sources of M&E information, their use in monitoring, and gaps in relation to a Results/Outcomes-based approach. The exercise will initially be undertaken with Planning, Development and Special Initiatives Department and 3 selected line departments. Based on the needs assessment, J-PAL will provide technical assistance to Government of Tamil Nadu formulating guidelines on managing and commissioning evaluations. J-PAL will provide hands-on training to Department of Evaluation and Applied Research and to selected line departments, on relevant monitoring and evaluation topics. J-PAL will assist Government of Tamil Nadu in adopting outcome based monitoring frameworks and strengthening systems for effective monitoring and decision-making in Government.

Speaking on behalf of J-PAL on the occasion Dr Esther Duflo, Director J-PAL and Professor of Economics, MIT stated that they were honored that the Government of Tamil Nadu has partnered with J-PAL to promote evidence-based policy in the state and that they were particularly impressed by the commitment of Tamil Nadu Government to challenge its officials and others to find creative solutions to reduce poverty as evidenced by the launch of the Tamil Nadu Innovation Initiative. This continues the strong tradition of Tamil Nadu being at the forefront of finding innovative solutions to tough challenges in development.

The MoU was signed in the presence of the Hon'ble Chief Minister Thiru O. Panneerselvam, Thiru S.Krishnan, I.A.S., Principal Secretary (Planning, Development and Special Initiatives) on behalf of Government of

Tamil Nadu and Dr. Shobini Mukherji, Executive Director, J-PAL, South Asia on behalf of J-PAL.

Tmt. Sheela Balakrishnan, I.A.S. (Retd.) Adviser to Government, Thiru K.Ramanujam, I.P.S.,(Retd.) Adviser to Government and Thiru T.Udhayachandran, I.A.S., Principal Secretary to Government i/c, Finance Department were present. On behalf of J-PAL, Mr. Iqbal Dhaliwal, Deputy Director, J-PAL, Mr CV Krishnan, President, IFMR, Mr John Floretta, Deputy Director, J-PAL South Asia, Mr Jasmine Shah, Associate Director, J-PAL South Asia, Ms Aparna Krishnan, Project Director, J-PAL South Asia were also present.

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