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USAID invests up to \$20 million in UC Berkeley's global development initiatives

By [Sarah Yang](#), Media Relations | November 8, 2012

BERKELEY —

The University of California, Berkeley's leadership in developing innovative and practical solutions for global problems is being recognized in a \$20 million cooperative agreement with the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). The award will fund a new multidisciplinary lab to ready inventions for the developing world, train a new generation of development practitioners and innovators, and launch a brand new field of research — Development Engineering.

The funding is part of USAID's Higher Education Solutions Network, a bold new initiative [officially launched today](#), (Thursday, Nov. 8), that leverages faculty and student ingenuity at seven U.S. and foreign research universities to help fight global poverty. The entire network, which will establish development labs at each university, is based on UC Berkeley's Blum Center for Developing Economies, visited by USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah on Oct. 10.

UC Berkeley's new Development Impact Lab (DIL) will utilize mobile technologies to improve health care, expand communications services in remote areas, improve access to safe water and deliver new energy technologies.

"We recognized that the Blum Center represented something special: a center for deep analysis and broad engagement that not only generates new ideas, but also tests and applies real-world solutions," Shah said on campus last month. "In fact, we've admired it so much that it is now the model for a network of development laboratories we're forming across the country."

The new USAID higher education network is collectively being awarded up to \$130 million over five years — subject to the availability of federal funds — as part of USAID's new partnership with academia. Researchers will collaborate with USAID to channel innovative solutions into effective international development programs.



Researchers at UC Berkeley's Blum Center are designing and evaluating microgrids to serve villages without electricity. A new partnership with USAID will help support projects like this. (Photo courtesy of the Blum Center for Developing Economies)

"Through this network of Development Labs, we will recapture the legacy of science, technology and innovation as core drivers of development, as well as inspire and support the next generation of development leaders," said Shah.

At UC Berkeley, DIL Chief Scientist Shankar Sastry, dean of the College of Engineering, said the campus's interest is in making inventions and solutions practical, affordable and workable, and in ensuring they can be implemented on the ground in a way that directly benefits people and nations in need.

"Too often," he said, "inventions are tested in a pilot project, and victory declared before it's clear that the technology will work on a larger scale. At UC Berkeley, our model brings together world-class science, engineering and economics to change the way new technologies for development are designed, evaluated and successfully scaled in the developing world."

Sastry, who also serves as faculty director of the Blum Center, said the model forms the basis of a new field, Development Engineering, being spearheaded at UC Berkeley. The discipline's ultimate goal is to promote high-quality research and development that more reliably advances sustainable social and economic welfare.

For San Francisco philanthropist Richard Blum, the USAID award provides the validation for a vision he spearheaded six years ago [when he launched the Blum Center](#) with gifts to the campus of almost \$30 million, which included costs for the center's headquarters.

"At the heart of the center are the students and faculty who exemplify the UC Berkeley spirit of activism and who possess a fearless optimism that we can make a profound difference for the billions of people living in poverty," said Blum. "I am pleased to see this spirit carried on through the Development Impact Lab."

Building on the Blum Center's undergraduate minor in [Global Poverty and Practice](#) — the largest minor on the Berkeley campus — the DIL initiative will train a new generation of development practitioners and innovators, drawn from all academic disciplines. It also will integrate and expand its successful [BigIdeas@Berkeley](#) competition, which provides funding, mentoring and encouragement to promising student-led initiatives at the development, testing and scaling phases.

The Development Impact Lab will draw on the depth and breadth of UC Berkeley expertise in multiple disciplines — including development economics and business, engineering, science, health care services, infrastructure and agriculture — and leverage the pioneering work by the Blum Center and UC's Center for Effective Global Action (CEGA).

The two entities already have been strategically combining social science expertise with engineering, natural sciences and public health to generate comprehensive, demand-driven solutions to development challenges. This approach draws on innovative methods to identify, refine, rigorously evaluate and scale new technology solutions, with a focus on long-term sustainability and affordability. It will build a pipeline of development advances, paying careful attention to local context and the specific nature of social and economic challenges in different regions.

In the lab, and with this generous funding, these elements, together with student training and the launch of a new academic field of Development Engineering, will engage a rich ecosystem of scientists, engineers and economists working together on global development issues.

Ashok Gadgil, professor of civil and environmental engineering, will serve as principal investigator of the DIL, and Temina Madon will be managing director. The leadership team also includes Eric Brewer, professor of electrical engineering and computer science; Edward Miguel, professor of economics and faculty director of the UC Center for Effective Global Action; Ananya Roy, professor of city and regional planning and education director of the Blum Center; Daniel Fletcher, professor of bioengineering; and Sastry.

Other institutional members of the DIL include UC San Diego, Lawrence Berkeley National Laboratory, Makerere University in Uganda, Indian Institute of Technology Bombay (India), University of Washington, University of Michigan and Portland State University.

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