USAID FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

USAID Higher Education Solutions Network

Massachusetts Institute of Technology

International Development Innovation Network (IDIN)

Connecting to *Accelerate* Global Development

The Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN) is a partnership between USAID and seven world-class universities to create a constellation of Development Labs. This network harnesses the ingenuity and passion of university students, researchers, faculty, and their innovative partners to incubate, catalyze and scale science and tech-based solutions to the world's most challenging development problems.

Through support to the university-led Development Labs, HESN taps into a global pool of expertise to accelerate innovation through the discovery, creation, testing and scaling of efficient, cost-effective, accessible and sustainable solutions to global development challenges.

With $137 million over 5 years from USAID, and leveraging nearly equal investments from the institutions, the universities form a collaborative and vibrant network that extends beyond 100 partner institutions in academia, civil society and government across 38 countries.

The Challenge

How do we connect grassroots innovators to opportunities to accelerate development through engineering and design?

The Innovative Approach

The MIT-led International Development Innovation Network (IDIN) will nurture and sustain a new and vibrant international network of local innovators by giving them the tools they need to bring their ideas to fruition. For many of these entrepreneurs, this will be the first opportunity they have to carry their ideas from conception to implementation in an effort to directly benefit their communities.

IDIN is a consortium of universities tasked with building a vibrant global network of grassroots innovators who have the opportunity to interact with and learn from a diversity of specialists, students, entrepreneurs, and scientists from different countries. The goal is to create positive interaction that will encourage new ideas and new technologies that will make a difference in solving local problems. The consortium includes MIT's D-Lab, Franklin W. Olin College of Engineering, Colorado State University, UC Davis, Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology in Ghana, and the University of São Paulo in Brazil. The IDIN Lab is committed to a "bottom up" approach aimed at identifying, promoting and scaling up the valuable work of local innovators around the world.

To this end, IDIN is building a "villages to universities" global network. IDIN will host 12 international design summits and train 600 innovators over 5 years. This will create the backbone for new collaborative undertakings. It will also create 8 innovation hubs to provide innovators the support they need to steer their projects to results. IDIN will work on new ways to discover and incentivize innovators. it will do this by promoting the active engagement of locally based innovators with communities, so that together, through a process of "co-creation" they will be able to come with original, cost-effective solutions that may be scaled up with the support of the IDIN Lab.

Innovators all over the world are busy devising new systems and improving upon technologies; but they lack the visibility that gets them the funding they need to fully develop their concepts. IDIN will reach out to this international talent pool and offer them platforms through which they will be able to present their ideas. This way there will be a spotlight on what smart people around the world are doing, while giving them tools to refine and scale up their ideas. Down the line, USAID offices and other donors around the world will be able to benefit from the creativity of previously unknown innovators who understand the problems of their societies to increase development programs impact.

Through International Development Design Summits, the MIT-led Lab is bringing local innovators together to work with communities in order to identify and create solutions to local challenges. The most viable solutions become candidates for larger scale deployment. For instance, diverse groups of innovators, while working in Zambia, in one village came up with simple, practical and cost-effective ways to help women create easy to use pads for feminine hygiene. In another locality, an IDDS team worked with local aluminum casters to improve their manufacturing methods. This included designing a new furnace for melting the metal. The team also modified the workshop ventilation system, so that workers would no longer inhale toxic smoke. For the people living and working in these villages, these are significant, low cost improvements. For markets they represent potential new products and services. With backing of the vast IDIN network, these and other field-tested ideas that improve quality of life can be introduced elsewhere with huge benefits for the communities involved.

For more information

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