

**The U.S. Global Development Lab Looking Ahead:
Lab Advisory Group Recommendations
An ACVFA Working Group**

The external Advisory Group of USAID’s U.S. Global Development Lab is pleased to submit the following recommendations regarding the operational and strategic work of the Lab. These recommendations are based on the Advisory Group’s involvement with the Lab through quarterly strategic meetings and visits to USAID Missions in Uganda and Colombia. Our engagement has been focused on observing the role of the Lab and advising on the impact and value the Lab can bring to the work of USAID and its Missions.

We continue to focus on the Lab’s mission in the following areas:

1. Sourcing innovative ideas from all parts of the world via academic, government, and business relationships to solve the most challenging problems in international development;
2. Taking risks in incubating and developing viable ideas to prove viability and scalability;
3. Implementing innovation in conjunction with the Missions and partners while being aligned with broader USAID priorities;
4. Serving as a clearinghouse, networking center, and resource for innovators throughout the USAID network to strengthen the culture of learning.

As an Advisory Group looking at the inner workings of government, and in particular USAID, we have come to recognize the challenges associated with innovation and risk taking in the pursuit of change. We commend the leadership and staff of the Lab for the courage and skill they have shown to bring about innovative methods of delivering development in a sustainable and economically sound way.

Recommendation 1: TALENT ACQUISITION

The Advisory Group recommends that USAID use the Lab as a means of attracting talent who will bring new perspectives and expertise in the effort to incorporate innovation across USAID. These assignments should allow for shorter terms of employment and encourage a “public service tour of duty” for the brightest and most successful people from industry and academia. The Lab should actively seek “outsiders” with a passion to give back and help invent the future of international development. In addition, the Lab should seek a wide and varying range of outsiders and should avoid becoming committed to one methodology or approach.

Recommendation 2: FAST AND MEASURABLE MILESTONES

The Lab needs to be the standard for fast and measurable results. It should champion designing programs with timely and continuous metrics to provide objective feedback during the development and implementation process. The Advisory Group recommends treating the feedback process as both quality control and transparent mechanisms for abandonment or acceleration of a program. The Lab should strive to instill a culture of decision-making on

measured milestones that are articulated before launch and held as a standard for “go or no-go” decisions.

Recommendation 3: PARTNERSHIPS

The Advisory Group recommends that the Agency actively seek partnerships from industry (technology, finance, academia, and agriculture) and make the Lab the convening entity for such partnerships. The Lab should continue to create new opportunities to work with the private sector, especially when investing in innovations and bringing them to scale. Partnering with the private sector can support the Lab’s efforts to invest in sustainable and impactful innovations.

Recommendation 4: BUSINESS MODELS

To implement solutions and provide innovation, the Advisory Group recommends seeking new business models. To ensure success, the Lab should invent new ways of scaling the agreed upon programs in the field and understand the path to sustainability before launching new ideas. The Lab will need to find partners to carry things forward in the long term in addition to becoming the founder and inventor of development solutions for the future. The Lab’s goal should be to source many innovative improvements, pick a select few, and understand when to quickly exit and move on to launching the next program. New business models of speed and partnership will allow more innovation to find its way into valuable uses at the Mission level of execution.

Recommendation 5: PARTNER CLOSELY WITH MISSIONS

The extensive resources of USAID Missions are a unique resource and “customer” of the Lab. The Lab should continue and expand the practice of gaining feedback and working closely with the Missions to ensure their “buy in” to programs that will scale and be sustainable in their geographic areas. Mission visits are essential to learn about the challenges in the field and to understand the priorities for each developing country. The Lab should communicate often its purpose and results of working with Missions and share stories of innovation so that all can benefit from the Lab’s work around the world.

The Lab Advisory Group is pleased to submit these recommendations for review and discussion in hopes of providing outside expertise and opinions for the betterment of the U.S. Global Development Lab and USAID.