

Inspiring Innovation: A Discussion with USAID Administrator Rajiv Shah

Speaking before packed pews at Saint Mark's Cathedral on Friday, August 13, 2010, USAID Administrator **Dr. Rajiv Shah** shared his, and indeed our collective charge: to identify better ways to solve global problems at lower cost, using strategies that can scale and sustain. Driven by an enthusiasm to experiment and measure results, Shah and a panel of government, philanthropic, education, non-profit and business leaders reflected on the role of technology in development and brainstormed together about how best to stimulate and apply innovation to achieve these goals.

After an introduction from Tim Hanstad, President and CEO of the Rural Development Institute, Congressman Adam Smith offered opening remarks to a crowd of over 400. He expressed optimism for the growing momentum to advance global development: 'I doubt there has been a time in the history of the global development effort where so many people are working so hard and making so much progress.' The challenge, Rep. Smith noted, is to better coordinate these efforts and to accomplish more with the foreign assistance funds we already have.

"We have to be more concerned about how the entire world is getting along and make sure it is a fairer and more just society so that we can have a more stable and prosperous world for all of us."

– Representative Adam Smith



What brings us together

- 2.6 billion people living in poverty
- 1 billion people living in hunger
- 8.8 million children dying before their 5th birthday, largely from preventable diseases
- 1 million children not attending primary school

Sources: World Bank, FAO, UNICEF

Administrator Shah began his keynote speech by reminding the development community of their *raison d'être*:

'I want to recognize for a moment what brings us together this morning. ...More than 2 billion people live in a state of extreme poverty ... a significant number of our fellow brothers and sisters. ... And they work very, very hard to pull themselves and their families out of that living condition and provide the kinds of opportunities for their children, that we try to provide for ours. This administration shares that commitment to fundamentally solve and address the challenge of extreme poverty around the world.'

Shah then described USAID's renewed emphasis on evidenced-based development strategies. Measuring impacts will both provide accountability to taxpayers that resources are being used in an effective way and demonstrate that seemingly intractable problems are in fact solvable. From market pricing to prenatal counseling, Shah highlighted the application of simple technologies for information sharing in two of the Administration's major development initiatives: Feed the Future, a \$3.5 billion commitment to end global hunger, and a six year \$63 billion global health initiative to strengthen health care systems across the world. Concluding with a call to action, Administrator Shaw charged Washingtonians to use their voice and capabilities in innovation and technology to solve problems in a different way.

Following Shah's remarks, he was joined by Dr. Prema Arasu, Vice Provost and Associate Vice President for International Programs at Washington State, Dr. Akhtar Badsha, Senior Director of Global Community Affairs at Microsoft, Dr. Christopher Elias, President and CEO of PATH, and Congressmen Adam Smith and Jim McDermott for an interactive panel discussion, moderated by Sylvia Mathews Burwell, President of the Global Development Program at the Bill & Melinda Gates Foundation.

'The key thing is innovation and partnership.'

Dr. Christopher Elias, PATH

These internationally recognized Washington State leaders offered examples of using innovation to approach persistent problems in new ways: tapping interdisciplinary strengths to translate basic science discoveries into real world application, aligning scientific and development communities to conduct impact assessments in a rigorous and timely manner, and applying commercial





technologies to health and social problems. In addition to highlighting successes in technology, panel members also acknowledged the importance of the human dimension of development and of thinking broadly and strategically, beyond just the gadgetry to innovations in program content, delivery systems, human resource training and retention, and cross-sector collaboration.

Questions from the audience built upon these themes and offered the panel the opportunity to more deeply consider not simply whether, but also the complexities of how best to use innovation in ways that address root problems and reach remote communities, how to measure effectiveness

and identify unintended consequences, how to utilize technology as a means to achieve the end of poverty and disease. In response, Administrator Shah provided three specific examples of how USAID is enhancing institutional learning to better address the 'how,' by convening evidence and failure summits, collecting baseline data and conducting counterfactual analyses against which to compare later program outcomes.

Congressman Jim McDermott offered closing remarks, looking ahead to the future and reflecting on how to prevent people from entering the pipeline of poverty. Using his water glass to create an analogy on how to think innovatively, he called upon the audience to reframe our perspective from the standard glass half full/half empty debate, and question instead how we can think creatively about how to fill the glass in the most effective way: 'I hope you'll keep filling the glass.'

The entire event is available on Seattle TV, and was covered by the Associated Press, Seattle Times, Kaiser Family Foundation and KPLU's Humanosphere.

Share your innovation!

The Global Washington 2010 Showcase is a celebration of the dedication and hard work that has created an extraordinary global development community in our state. To be considered for the Showcase, participants are asked to submit a video that illustrates critical issues in global development and what their organization is doing to tackle them. The top showcases will be screened during the Global Washington 2010 Conference luncheon on November 15th, 2010, be featured on Global Washington's website and promoted as part of the organization's national and local press activities.

To learn more about the Showcase, Global Washington's work, upcoming events and the 2010 Conference, Bridges to Breakthroughs November 15-16th, visit: www.globalwa.org

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