

## Case Study: Science and Technology Fellowships at USAID

# Fellows Deploy Scientific Skills to Support USAID Strategies and Policies



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Science and Technology (S&T) fellows at USAID deploy their academic and research skills to expand the impact of USAID programs around the world. Through research and technical assistance, fellows have helped the Agency develop policies, critical strategies, and more.

Contributing scientific skills and experiences over a broad range of disciplines, S&T fellows at USAID have offered valuable support to USAID strategies and policies. For example:

- a fellow reviewed climate and health programming at USAID, focusing on tuberculosis and malaria, and provided input to USAID's [2022-2030 Climate Strategy](#);
- a fellow contributed to an in-country assessment in Madagascar to provide inputs to the design of the Feed the Future Strategy; and
- a fellow supported work on the Agency's [2022-2026 Learning Agenda](#) and conducted policy review assessments, generating insights on the implementation of strategies over time.

S&T fellowships offer opportunities for scientists and technical experts to help shape how USAID prioritizes and delivers programs today and in the future. Read on to learn the stories of two fellows who used their scientific expertise to improve the development of USAID strategies and policies.

“I used my ability to systematize qualitative data across different areas... [I was] able to come up with an analysis of our strategy to think about where we're able to lean in.”

– Fellowship Alum

### **Impact Story #1: Lauren Baker, PhD, American Association for the Advancement of Science— Science and Technology Policy Fellow Alum**

#### ***A Political Ecologist Informing USAID Strategy Through Policy Advisory Work***

Lauren Baker, a political ecologist, was a fellow at USAID's Office of Policy from 2016 to 2018. Baker used her expertise in environment and climate change policy and inclusive development to support the creation of USAID's first Policy on Promoting the Rights of Indigenous Peoples. Later, Baker traveled throughout Latin America providing technical advice, training, and assistance to the Agency's in-country policy teams.

USAID "struck me as very collaborative," Baker said, highlighting how she was able to leverage her experience in academia and interests in human rights to work across sectors at USAID. Baker noted that she enjoyed the opportunity to work in different countries, trying to help each "align with and help advance good development practice and keep with the leading edge of high-quality standards and practices." As a trained social scientist, she has been able to have impact both within and beyond her areas of initial research training, informing USAID's Learning Agenda.

Baker was awarded the fellowship at USAID after completing a doctorate in Environmental Studies at Yale University. Her doctoral research included working with indigenous communities in Peru and tracking pan-indigenous social movements coping with the impacts of oil exploration and extraction.

Following her fellowship, Baker remained at USAID, taking on the position of Senior Policy Analyst in the Foreign Policy Engagement team of USAID's Office of Policy Implementation and Analytics.



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### **Impact Story #2: Cleo Chou, PhD, American Association for the Advancement of Science— Science and Technology Policy Fellowship Alum**

#### ***An Ecologist Working for a Greener Tomorrow through Support for USAID's Climate Strategy***

Chou, an ecologist, was a fellow from 2018 to 2020 in USAID's Office of Global Climate Change. During this time, Chou harnessed her technical expertise in ecological science to support USAID's Natural Climate Solutions program, which partners with governments to conserve, restore, and manage forests and other ecosystems to reduce greenhouse gas emissions while strengthening livelihoods, climate resilience, biodiversity provisioning, and other ecosystem services.

As a key collaborator in the program, Chou helped design activities in Madagascar, Papua New Guinea, West Africa, and other tropical forest regions. Chou also led an analysis to help USAID strategically prioritize budget allocation for its natural climate solutions program in a data-driven and impactful way.

"My academic background helped me navigate the fellowship," Chou said. "I was able to connect with USAID colleagues who also had academic backgrounds in ecology and environmental science and use my technical knowledge in tropical forests and ecosystems to help USAID develop and implement programs that mitigate climate change through nature while also supporting broader development objectives."

Chou, who holds a doctorate in ecology, worked at the Princeton Environmental Institute before coming to USAID as a fellow. "I have always been interested in connecting science and environmental policy to help address our global challenges of climate change and biodiversity loss," Chou said.

Following the fellowship, Chou has continued to work at USAID on natural climate solutions, fighting climate change and biodiversity loss as Senior Climate Change Advisor. She says developing policies, building institutional capacity, improving governance, leveraging finance, and supporting changing economic systems and Indigenous Peoples and local communities are essential to designing long term solutions to complex problems. "It is critical to continue pushing ourselves to figure out how to scale up solutions faster and find positive tipping points for change," Chou said.

**Learn more about the Science and Technology Fellowships by visiting:**  
<https://www.usaid.gov/science-and-technology-fellowships>