

Case Study: Science and Technology Fellowships at USAID

Fellows Support Innovative Scientific Tools and Approaches to Enrich Monitoring, Evaluation, and Learning at USAID



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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. Monitoring, evaluation, and learning (MEL) is a significant and cross-cutting feature of USAID's work, helping USAID and its partners track progress, measure impact, and continually improve efforts. Monitoring entails gathering data to help USAID and its partners understand whether an activity is on track or if adjustments are needed, while evaluations help answer questions related to the implementation and outcomes of activities. Learning involves analyzing information on what is working, and what isn't, to adapt and improve programming.

Bringing rigorous understanding of data collection and scientific methods, S&T fellows at USAID have offered valuable insights supporting USAID's efforts to measure, monitor, and improve impact. For example:

- A fellow with a background in ecology helped design an evaluation of a program to reduce greenhouse gas emissions from cacao farming in Ghana and West Africa. The evaluation helped identify areas of success and those needing improvement.
- Another fellow deployed geographic information systems skills to gather macro-level data in South America on activities that covered rural and Indigenous peoples' lands. The data gave USAID greater information on the impact of current programs than had been collected through limited interviews.
- Two fellows leveraged their complementary expertise in agriculture and veterinary science to lead a mini program evaluation in food security.

Read on to learn the stories of two fellows who used their scientific expertise and USAID experience to address MEL opportunities.

“I was able to encourage the program to think more about restoration... using my scientific expertise fostered during my PhD on agroforestry.”

– Fellowship Alum

CASE STUDY: FELLOWS SUPPORT INNOVATIVE SCIENTIFIC TOOLS AND APPROACHES TO ENRICH MONITORING, EVALUATION, AND LEARNING AT USAID

Impact Story #1: Sonak Pastakia, PharmD, PhD, Jefferson Science Fellowship Alum

A Public Health Specialist Helping Reshape Key Outcomes of Global Health Initiatives

Sonak Pastakia, a public health specialist, was a 2017 Jefferson Science Fellow on the USAID Africa Bureau Health Team for Sustainable Development in Washington D.C. During his fellowship, Pastakia promoted multisectoral efforts to enhance the depth, breadth, and quality of service delivery for programs supported by USAID in the African region. “My one-year fellowship at USAID enabled me to identify critical groups I needed to work with to be able to scale programs and interventions that we have started,” Pastakia said. “I saw and appreciated how policy solutions are made to shape decision-making for international development activities of U.S. government agencies, such as...universal health coverage in sub-Saharan Africa.”

The program encourages fellows to understand the connection between science and policy through six- to nine-month placements in USAID offices in Washington D.C. and one year working in development roles in Kenya. Following the fellowship, Pastakia was appointed associate director for the Purdue University Center for Health Equity and Innovation, which also manages a Global Health Equity Fellowship.

Beyond sustaining partnerships with USAID and establishing additional public-private sector partnerships, Pastakia’s current efforts are now focused on setting up a MEL program he calls “practical but meaningful to move the needle” to support the measurement of global health outcomes. “I want to contribute to developing ways to track and monitor the outcomes and impacts of global health equity programs for those who need it the most and identify existing or needed metrics and data that will monitor and inform our ongoing health equity strategies,” Pastakia said. “It isn’t enough to be well intentioned in our development efforts; we must continue to track and identify the most impactful strategies for assisting underserved populations around the world.”

Bolstered by his experience at USAID, Pastakia continues to work at the forefront of groundbreaking initiatives and transformative work in global health, reshaping views and perspectives and designing ways to more holistically respond to the underlying drivers of poor health.

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

A Marine Biologist Supporting Impactful Monitoring and Learning on Ecosystems and Ecology

Kelvin Gorospe, a marine biologist, was a fellow at USAID’s Bureau of Development, Democracy, and Innovation which is presently known as the Bureau for Inclusive Growth, Partnerships, and Innovation from 2021 to 2023. Gorospe helped design and monitor sustainable fisheries and marine biodiversity programs supported by USAID in South America, the Caribbean, Africa, Asia, and the Pacific Islands.

Gorospe was motivated to apply for the fellowship because of his interest in “explor[ing] the opportunities in marine conservation at the international level.” During his fellowship, Gorospe facilitated multi-stakeholder workshops to analyze and refine key programmatic assumptions and advise on the development of workplans and results frameworks. He co-managed the USAID Distant Water Fleet Research Agenda, which aims to understand the scale and form of distant water fishing on the marine resources of USAID’s partner countries. He also engaged with the United Nations Committee on Fisheries, drafting position papers on fishery management and seafood trade.

Gorospe also supported the Agency’s Health, Ecosystems, and Agriculture for Resilient, Thriving Societies (HEARTH) initiative—a cross-sectoral venture funded by multiple USAID bureaus. Specifically, he helped provide MEL support. With expertise in data collection, Gorospe helped refine performance indicators and data management and standardize datasets for quantitative evaluation by internal and external researchers. He also led the development of the HEARTH learning agenda, exploring the program’s overarching theory of change. He presented at multiple HEARTH convenings, which featured several USAID Missions, to discuss their MEL strategies. Throughout his fellowship, Gorospe realized the “the importance of social science and building relationships – specially making sure that all the right people are in the room in designing programs and formulating policies.”

Following the fellowship, Gorospe has served as an adjunct professor at Georgetown University’s Walsh School of Foreign Service, teaching ocean science and policy. He has also worked as a senior technical associate in fisheries and natural resource management with Resonance, a global development consulting firm.

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