



## DEVELOPMENT IMPACT LAB

A USAID Development Lab  
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# Big Ideas@Berkeley Contest and USAID: Student Engagement and Collaboration for Development



UC Berkeley undergraduate Rebecca Peters (left) of The Pachamama Project won the 1st place in the Promoting Human Rights category as well as the a Pitch Day Grand Prize. Standing beside her are Big Ideas judges including USAID AAAS fellow Marion Adney (center) and OST Deputy Director David Ferguson (far right).



UC Berkeley graduate students Sanat Kamal Bahl (left) and Jessica Watterson of Emmunify present their project at the 2nd annual Pitch Day event. Emmunify won the 1st prize in the Maternal & Child Health category.



Judges for the Big Ideas Pitch Day Grand prize, CEO of the Philomathia Foundation Wilfred Chung (left), USAID AAAS fellow Marion Adney, and Berkeley administrator Braden Penhoet, ask questions during the Global Impact pitch round.

By LUIS FLORES  
BLUM CENTER STUDENT WRITER

BERKELEY -- Concluding the Big Ideas@Berkeley Grand Prize Pitch Day event, at which six of the contest's top teams pitched their ideas to the campus community, Dave Ferguson, deputy director of the Office of Science and Technology at US Agency for International Development (USAID) pitched one final big idea.

"We are attempting to change the way we think about development and the way it is done," Ferguson explained about USAID science and technology initiatives aimed at fostering innovation and collaboration. "We think we're on to something."

To achieve their big idea, USAID has launched a series of Grand Challenges for Development, inviting problem solvers around the world to combine innovative collaborative approaches with the resources of USAID. Two of USAID's grand challenges, "Saving Lives at Birth," and "The Tech Challenge for Atrocity Prevention" were the inspiration for two new Big Ideas contest categories this year, "Maternal & Child Health" and "Promoting Human Rights." With the generous support of USAID, Big Ideas has awarded six prizes to high-impact projects that address two persistent but solvable problems.

As USAID administrator Rajiv Shah noted in his remarks at UC Berkeley last October, "Like Big Ideas@Berkeley, Grand Challenges for Development invite problem-solvers from around the world to generate high-impact innovations that address particularly pervasive problems."

Priyanka Athavale, member of the India Smiles team, was among the winners of the Maternal & Child Health category. A UC

Berkeley junior in Molecular Cell Biology and Public Health, Athavale agrees that the contest model fosters fresh and effective approaches. She explained that with the freedom and support promised by Big Ideas, “students have the drive and motivation to go out of their comfort zone and experience the problems first hand.” She added, “Students are bright, excited and not afraid to fail—it’s our greatest asset.” India Smiles, the idea of eight undergraduates, is a 3-year project aimed at alleviating childhood malnutrition and poor oral health outcomes caused by the transition from traditional agricultural-based diets to processed Snack and “junk foods” in India.

Like the Grand Challenges, Big Ideas is not only a competition—it is an “ecosystem” of social, student-led, innovation. This mission of collaboration is reflected in some of the Big Ideas projects like the Bay Area Resource Consortium, winner of the Promoting Human Rights contest category. The project, led by UC Berkeley undergraduate Sudi Bhat, will encourage collaboration between professionals in medicine and law, as well as undergraduates to provide social services to uninsured, high-frequency patients at Bay Area safety-net hospitals. “Our project is firmly rooted on the idea that students should be active community learners and participants,” explained Bhat. Adding, “this contest gave us the opportunity to try something new to address the current system of health care for patients in safety-net hospitals.”

Among the other winners in the Promoting Human Rights category was the interdisciplinary Pachamama Project, which takes a human rights and sanitation approach to eradicate taboos and stigmas associated with menstruation and improve clean water and education in Bolivia. Emmunify, winner in the Maternal & Child Health, is the idea of a team of UC Berkeley graduate students to provide a technological solution for patient identification and immunization tracking in rural India. Emmunify’s cloud technology allows medical records to be accessed by an electronically readable tab placed on a mobile phone.

The Big Ideas@Berkeley has become hub of innovation in an already pioneering institution. The contest also stands among the principal contributions of the UC Berkeley campus to USAID’s Higher Education Solutions Network. This collaboration between USAID and Big Ideas strengthens the common goal of expanding in the search for new voices and ideas. As Ferguson explained, “The challenges we face in this century are far more fluid, transboundary and shared... We need new approaches to attack these problems... Big Ideas is an example of one of these new ways USAID is approaching development.”

The 2012-2013 Big Ideas@Berkeley contest received over 160 team entries, representing over 500 students from 75 majors number, in 9 contest categories. For more information on the Big Ideas@Berkeley contest, visit: <http://bigideas.berkeley.edu/>