

Innovate to progress

Sixty years ago, persistent food shortages threatened India's young democracy. In response, six American universities sent their first agricultural researchers and scientists to work in India to help establish a network of Indian agricultural universities. Those universities helped sow the seeds of a new agricultural era, ushering in the Green Revolution that saved millions of lives around the world. Today, more than 40 state agricultural universities operate across India, fostering innovation and driving the adoption of new seed varieties and cutting-edge technologies that have the potential to revolutionise farming worldwide.

Since that first partnership, the India-US relationship has transformed dramatically, delivering meaningful results for our people. Once donors and recipients, we are now economic, security and development partners. Today, India is a pioneer of game-changing innovations, which are pushing the boundaries of what is possible in development. We want to work in partnership with India's knowledge base to raise incomes and improve livelihoods. By fostering new ideas and forming high-impact public-private partnerships to bring those ideas to scale, we can work with Indian organisations to drive meaningful solutions to global development challenges.

With a grant from United States Agency for International Development's (USAID) Development Innovation Ventures Fund, the Jameel Poverty Action Lab (J-PAL) South Asia, in Chennai, is designing a simple way — capturing thumb impressions through mobile phones — to address absenteeism among health workers. We are also working together to expand access to critical health services among rural populations in India. A partnership with ITC Limited is leveraging its rural agricultural distribution and communication network, e-Choupal, to build demand for health products and services. For a small commission, Village Health Champions supply rural communities with health products like water purification devices and menstrual hygiene products. They also serve as community-based public health entrepreneurs, raising awareness and linking the community with key health programmes.

To strengthen food security across India, we are working with ITC and Hariyali Kisaan Bazaar — the agricultural supermarket chain — to set up Rural Business Hubs that have provided agricultural extension services for more than 190,000 farmers. As a result, nearly two-thirds of these farmers have increased their productivity by 25%.

As India continues to grow, we hope to work with the government to channel its experience to less developed nations. Through partnership arrangements, we are working with India to strengthen food security in Africa. During the first years of these partnerships, we hope to reach thousands of African farm households with technologies like drought-tolerant, insect-resistant seeds, which can increase yields by as much as 30% with 25% less water.

A dynamic, democratic global power, India is now one of America's most significant trading partners and a

growing source of investment back into the US. The progress that both nations have made in the last two decades is a testament to our strong partnership. We hope to add a new chapter to that partnership, as we work together to confront some of the greatest development challenges of our time.

(Rajiv Shah is administrator, USAID)

The views expressed by the author are personal

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