2023 Policy Platform
## Contents

- **Preamble** ................................................................. 3
- **About us** ................................................................. 4
- **Executive Summary** .................................................. 5
- **Increase impact by paying for success** ......................... 6
- **Make the United States’ approach to global development**
  synonymous with innovation ........................................... 9
- **Use accountability and country choice to**
  **drive results** ........................................................... 16
- **What comes next and**
  **where we need your help** ............................................ 19
We need to reimagine how we do global development.

While the international community spends approximately $200 billion each year to support developing countries, too little money reaches the communities these funds are intended to support. Sometimes it’s just pennies on the dollar.

Many of the world’s largest donors direct most of their global development investments through the same 10–20 government contractors they’ve worked with for decades. Most projects pay for activities instead of results. In the worst cases, global development projects displace local markets.

There’s a better way. Over the past two decades, a new generation of world-class innovators has emerged. Based around the world—headquartered in cities like Accra, Bangalore, and Bogota—they are solving some of the planet’s hardest problems. They’re delivering high-quality healthcare to remote villages using autonomous vehicles and telehealth-enabled pharmacies; combating the local effects of climate change with geospatial intelligence and advanced water-cleaning technologies; and using market-based approaches to empower farmers to increase crop yields and access credit for the first time. Yet innovators like these are often locked out of the $200 billion the international community spends each year to address these and other issues.

Many of the reformers who work at traditional donor agencies want to work with this next generation of innovators. They know these organizations can deliver impact faster, cheaper, and more sustainably than the status quo. But they’re struggling to make this transition within the constraints of their systems.

We need to bridge this divide to meet climate targets and achieve the 2030 Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). This document provides a blueprint for the way forward.
Unlock Aid started as a research project.

In 2021, a small group of people decided to do a short experiment: interview more than 60 world-class innovators on what kept them from working with the world's largest development agencies. We published a summary of our findings and twelve of these innovators decided to pool their resources to try to do something about the challenges we identified.

Since 2021, we've built a coalition of 50+ organizations, including leading social innovators, multinationals, research universities, and philanthropies, spanning more than 20 countries and in sectors like health, energy, food, education, water, and more.

In August 2022, in Mexico City in partnership with the Federation of American Scientists’ Day One Project, we convened more than 70 individuals from 35+ organizations from 25+ countries about the future of global development, and used the findings to develop our first comprehensive Policy Platform.

We’ve come a long way, and we’ve methodically built our coalition, recommendations, and influence. But our North Star is unchanged:

Our world’s current, collective effort to achieve the Sustainable Development Goals does not operate with the urgency, flexibility and innovation required to succeed. Established systems perpetuate the status quo, pay for activities rather than results, and underutilize high-impact technologies and strategies that have enormous potential to address inequities and improve outcomes. Climate change, pandemics and humanitarian crises accelerate our rapidly closing window of opportunity. The time has come. We must act now.

Let’s get to work.
EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

What follows is a set of recommendations that governments and donors can adopt to work more closely with this next generation of innovators. These recommendations are the composite of 150+ conversations, including with members of our coalition. They were also informed by the SDGs Moonshot Accelerator, which we co-hosted in Mexico City in August with the Day One Project. We also looked at what models work at other government agencies and large institutions.

We’ve tailored most of the language in the below recommendations to things the United States can do. This is because both Congress and the Biden Administration increasingly want to reimagine the way the United States spends its $30+ billion official development assistance budget. USAID Administrators from both political parties, including Raj Shah, Gayle Smith, Mark Green, and Samantha Power, have made the case for reform. This is one of the few bipartisan issues still left in Washington, DC. We now have a narrow political window of opportunity to act.

Our recommendations also provide a blueprint that other governments and large international institutions can follow, including UN agencies and development finance banks.

Here are some of the highlights:

- **Innovators want to get paid to deliver results.** By shifting from pay-for-activities to pay-for-results we can cut red tape while increasing accountability and impact.

- **The United States is uniquely positioned to help countries use innovation** to leapfrog their economic and social development goals. But making this shift will require major changes in policies and programs.

- By leaning more into transparency and putting USAID partner countries in the driver’s seat, the U.S. government can work more closely with innovators to drive better and more sustainable development outcomes.

None of the proposals below is a silver bullet. But taken together they can move the ball forward towards increasing equity, innovation, and results.

USAID has an annual operating budget of $30B+. But these funds are out of reach for the world’s best innovators.
Increase impact by paying for success

A ROADMAP TO ELEVATING INNOVATORS IN GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT
What matters is impact, not process. However, donors too often prescribe in public tenders exactly how they want something performed and leave the outcomes to chance.

To work effectively with next-generation innovators and solve more problems, it’s time we start paying for actual results.

Organizations that have built their businesses around winning international development grants and contracts will say whatever they need to say to win a government contract. Innovative firms with business models that don’t depend on donor dollars will not.

If countries and donors simply stated the results they want achieved — and left the “how” to doers — this will open the doors to more innovative players. We can cut red tape, increase impact, and generate greater interest from non-traditional market participants by rewarding well-designed, pay-for-results public tenders that do not require lengthy responses to jargon-laced requests.

**Increase the use of milestone-based grants and contracts**

Innovative players want to get paid to deliver results, not count beans. But in the present system, USAID reimburses for every hour worked and for every hammer, nail, and widget purchased — plus overhead. It can cost more than $200,000 to invest in systems just to apply for and comply with a single USAID award.

This kind of cost and complexity locks out players who aren’t part of the system. Awards that reimburse for time and activities also incentivize contract holders to drag out projects and use their own staff to increase billable hours instead of working closely with more local and non-traditional players to achieve results.

Paying for inputs is often more expensive, too. The U.S. Government can often acquire software or a technology product by buying commercially-available off-the-shelf software and then requesting the provider to make slight modifications to meet a country or community’s unique needs instead of paying an expensive government contractor to build a new piece of software from scratch.

Other U.S. government agencies have increased the use of pay-for-success milestone-based contracting. In May 2022, NASA Administrator Bill Nelson told lawmakers that awards that reimbursed for costs were a “plague” at his agency because they stifled competition and drove up costs. But by increasing its use of milestone-based contracting, NASA has been able to bring down barriers to entry to enable more innovative players like SpaceX to get in the door.

USAID should move in the same direction. In the 2021 Fiscal Year, just 1.3 percent of the total value of USAID’s grants paid against milestones delivered. In 2023, the agency signaled its intention to increase the use of pay-for-results contracting tools. Now USAID needs to follow through on these commitments – and it should provide appropriate training and incentives to its contracting corps to ensure these awards are designed well.

**Put proven solutions first in line to receive funding**

We have enough data from decades of investments to know what types of spending will have the most impact for every dollar spent. At the start of each fiscal year, USAID should make sure that these solutions are the first in line to receive US foreign assistance funding. The Offices of the Chief Innovation Officer and Chief Economist can lead an annual process to draw up this list of high-priority investments.

First on the list should be the highest-impact solutions supported by the agency’s Development Innovation Ventures (DIV) unit, which delivers a $17 to $1 social return on investment (SROI). DIV uses a tiered-based funding model that increases funding to organizations as they “demonstrate rigorous evidence of impact, cost-effectiveness, and a viable pathway to scale and sustainability.” USAID should use the agency’s best-resourced budgets to bring the DIV unit’s most effective investments to greater scale. This will leave the DIV unit with more resources to focus on earlier-stage investments and evaluations. In addition to DIV, other agency innovation programs like the Feed the Future Innovation Labs and Global Health Bureau’s Center for Innovation and Impact, also identify, test, and support high-impact solutions that should be prioritized for scale-up funding.
Next, USAID can look outside the agency’s walls to identify other high-impact, cost-effective solutions where it can co-invest funds. For example, philanthropic outfits like GiveWell spend 30,000+ hours per year updating a list of the top organizations that “save or improve lives the most per dollar spent.” Similarly, the Global Innovation Fund has identified dozens of the most cost-effective solutions that are having the biggest impacts in global health, food security, and clean energy. Organizations like GiveDirectly facilitate direct cash transfers, which evidence shows, often yield better outcomes than traditional development projects.

USAID should prioritize investments in proven solutions. And it should robustly fund organizations and agency units that are expert at sourcing and evaluating evidence-based solutions, like DIV and the Global Innovation Fund.

**Build and support pay-for-outcomes marketplaces**

While not every global development goal can be quantified in dollars and cents, many can — the cost per vaccine administered, per farmer served, or per megawatt of clean energy generated, for example. We should begin to more routinely measure impact according to standardized, universally-accepted indicators.

We need a 24/7, 365-day marketplace that describes USAID’s willingness to pay for clearly defined, high-priority results. More like Upwork.com than SAM.gov. Providers should be able to publicly register their ability to deliver against specific goals, costs, and timelines. No complex RFPs. Just simple contracts. Every transaction executed in the open. Funds can be held in trusts until the results are delivered. The U.S. government has done this before. For example, during the New Deal, the U.S. government published how much it wanted to pay to electrify rural areas. Large incumbent utilities scoffed at the idea, but more scrappy rural cooperatives did not, many of which used federal payment guarantees to secure private financing to power rural America. USAID can take a similar approach today.

**To start, USAID can pilot and/or co-invest in existing “outcomes funds” or “outcomes marketplaces” in environments where key prerequisites exist:**

- Measurement of the outcomes is clear and simple;
- Achievement of the outcome would be a good thing no matter who does it (e.g. increasing vaccination rates, increasing access to food);
- There are multiple providers to ensure the U.S. government gets the benefit of different approaches and competition;
- The marketplace can create a forum for managed competition where USAID need not be overly prescriptive on how the outcomes are achieved.

Successful pilots could pave the way for executing outcomes marketplaces at much greater scale and in a variety of sectors and geographies that meet the above criteria.
Make the United States’ approach to global development synonymous with innovation

LET’S OPTIMIZE FOR REAL WORLD RESULTS, NOT PROCESS
The United States can become the partner of first resort for entrepreneurs and countries that want to innovate and leapfrog their development goals. USAID will need to reimagine how it sees its own work, however. Not merely as the provider of traditional aid or humanitarian assistance, but as a catalyst for the kind of innovation the world needs to solve 21st-century challenges.

To do this, it will need to more closely model how the world's most successful companies operate. When high-performing companies miss their targets, they identify what went wrong and then figure out how to solve the problem. A company's Chief Innovation Officer (CIO) is on the lookout for innovative startups that can solve core business needs. Or to run processes to incubate ideas and bring better products to market. CIOs lead internal go-to-market teams that serve as the company's connective tissue, linking business units with problems with innovators with solutions.

With programs in more than 100 countries, USAID's overseas missions are uniquely positioned to identify some of the world's best innovators — and then partner with them to scale their impact. USAID staff around the world should be building a funding pipeline to the next-generation of innovators based in Africa, Asia, and Latin America. They should be nominating high-performing innovators into the agency's DIV program and other innovation programs and introducing promising startups to the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation (DFC). Conversely, USAID is also well positioned to facilitate two-way innovation by connecting countries in search of world-class technologies with the innovators behind those solutions, too.

USAID could create a designated role within its Office of the CIO to have its finger on the pulse of every bureau, understanding each unit's challenges and pairing them with solutions. Innovation should never be done for innovation's sake. Always to solve problems.

**Bring down barriers to entry and expedite vetting**

USAID's Office of the CIO is best-suited to run regular processes to fast-track vetting on behalf of the agency for high-impact innovators — and then proactively connect those innovators with the agency units that need them the most. The CIO could start by sourcing and expediting vetting for the best-in-class innovators identified by other trusted partners.

**For example:**

- **Gavi's Infuse program** has identified **100+ organizations** that provide “scalable, high-impact, proven innovations” that are rapidly accelerating progress towards vaccinating children around the world.

- **The i3 program** has identified **30+ of the leading healthcare companies** in Africa that are changing the way health supply chains on the continent operate.

- **The U.S. Government’s Development Finance Corporation (DFC)** has invested in many of the **most promising companies from around the world** solving problems in energy, food, and health. There should be a formal link to ensure that USAID and U.S. government development programs like PEPFAR evaluate which DFC-backed companies can best drive results — and integrate them into their programs.

In tandem with expediting vetting, USAID should also make it easier to apply to work with the agency. To do this, it will need to rapidly move away from using complex RFPs and start using open calls for proposals and concept notes to start the application process.

**Create a Commercialization Innovation Pipeline Program to promote more startups and market-based solutions**

There's a tried-and-true playbook for sourcing, testing, and deploying new solutions. It starts with problem identification, and then leads to a multi-phased process that involves prototyping, testing, and iteration. The most viable solutions that graduate through this model are the ones a company brings to market. This is how the world's most innovative firms — from Google to Unilever — develop and deploy new solutions.

It's also how eleven of the federal government's most innovative agencies work, too, including NASA, the U.S. Air Force, and the National Science Foundation. Each of
these agencies participates in the Small Business Innovation Research (SBIR) and Small Business Technology Transfer (STTR) program, which encourage small businesses to invest in research and development that have the potential for commercialization — with additional incentives to work in partnership with larger research institutions and universities. The SBIR and STTR programs have created tens of billions of dollars in economic output, and have led to scientific breakthroughs in sectors like space and biotechnology. Congress recently voted to reauthorize the SBIR and STTR programs by a 441–8 vote in the House and unanimously in the Senate.

The United States needs a program that functions like SBIR/STTR for global development. Such a program would enable innovative companies from around the world to test, replicate, and commercialize new models that contribute to better, more market-based, and sustainable development outcomes. Modeled after SBIR and STTR programs in other sectors, a global development Commercial Innovation Pipeline Program (CIPP) should:

1. Provide tiered-, milestone-based contracts (e.g. Phase I, Phase II, Phase III) to companies that scale in value as a firm can show scientific and technical merit for a new innovation, potential for replication, and viable pathway to commercialization;

2. Encourage technology transfer between small businesses and research institutions;

3. Become a hub for global innovation by making eligible organizations from any country that USAID supports to participate in the program. USAID and the DFC’s overseas missions should proactively recruit promising firms into CIPP.

Distinct from USAID’s Development Innovation Ventures program, CIPP’s purpose would be to incubate, test, and deploy sustainable commercial solutions. It could be housed at an agency like the DFC, Department of Commerce, or State Department, which have more experience vetting and partnering with private sector players.

“A program to incubate, test, and deploy sustainable commercial solutions should be housed at an agency that is expert at vetting and partnering with private sector players.”
CIPP must still be well-integrated with other US global development agencies and programs, including USAID and PEPFAR. This is to ensure that CIPP-supported innovations address core priorities, so there is internal demand to scale up funding for CIPP’s most promising solutions.

**Hasten the transition from “aid to trade” by betting on existing markets**

Congress created the DFC to finance private sector solutions to the most critical challenges facing the developing world. However, when USAID gives billions of dollars in contracts for commercial products and services to international contractors in sectors where a private market already exists, this displaces local economies and limits free and fair competition. It also undermines the DFC’s potential for impact.

In sectors that are ready to transition from aid to trade, USAID and the DFC should work together to invest in more sustainable, market-based approaches. For example, USAID can start by experimenting with new models within the current suite of $17 billion health supply chain awards, which are up for public tender in 2022 and 2023. There are already established logistics companies operating across Africa, Asia, and Latin America that deliver goods to last-mile communities every day. These are mature markets, so using international contractors to administer other countries’ supply chains runs the high risk of distorting local economies.

Instead, the DFC should open a financing window to provide existing, established logistics and healthcare companies that already operate in these economies with upfront working capital to expand their footprint and make other operational investments. In parallel, USAID should pay against pre-defined performance metrics, such as the number of on-time deliveries made, just as private markets would. This kind of approach would strengthen existing economies rather than displace them. It’s also the fastest way to hasten the transition to a world that does not depend on foreign aid.

USAID can first pilot this model by setting aside $300 million of the planned $17 billion award in five countries where there are already thriving and well-established private markets, like Ghana, Kenya, and Rwanda. A successful model could be scaled up and later applied to sectors like agriculture and clean energy.
Champion advanced science & technology to solve hard problems

Imagine a world where famine no longer exists because genome mapping has enabled us to identify drought-resistant food products. Or consider the impact of cheap, energy-efficient refrigeration and air conditioning on countries exposed to extreme heat due to climate change. These kinds of breakthroughs would cut carbon emissions and save millions of lives every year.

The U.S. Government funds multiple Advanced Research Projects Agencies (ARPAs) at agencies like the Department of Defense (DARPA) and Department of Energy (ARPA-E). The Biomedical Advanced Research Projects Authority (BARDA), part of Health and Human Services, was the agency behind Operation Warp Speed, which gave us three Covid-19 vaccines in less than a year. The Biden Administration recently proposed a new ARPA for Climate. Each of these ARPAs work on challenges that are interconnected to global issues.

Congress should direct existing ARPAs (e.g. DARPA, ARPA-E, etc.) with proven models to explicitly consider how their investments could be applied to low- and middle-income country contexts. Then, place staff from USAID at that agency to connect new science and technology research to core development challenges. Ensure that innovators and universities from USAID partner countries participate in the work.

In parallel, every year, Congress should direct USAID to make one or more major Advanced Market Commitments to catalyze new R&D investments in breakthrough innovations in food security, global health, or other priorities (e.g. an AMC for therapeutics for tuberculosis, for example). AMCs are an example of a pay-for-success model — the U.S. Government only pays when the innovation has been developed. But the promise of funding at the end of the tunnel creates strong market incentives for firms and universities to invest R&D to develop new solutions.

Support innovation ecosystems around the world

Many cities around the world like Lagos, Nairobi, and Mumbai already have thriving innovation ecosystems. Other cities’ innovation ecosystems are emerging. To help countries build markets and develop new innovations and technologies to solve development challenges, USAID should support countries and communities as they build their own innovation ecosystems.
First, USAID should partner more with scores of innovation hubs across Africa, Asia, and Latin America. Organizations like Afrilabs have links to 500+ innovation hubs across Africa, for example, which in turn have links to thousands more Africa-based innovators. Working through existing hubs can help USAID build a funding pipeline to the next-generation of Indigenously-led organizations that have more market-based, sustainable solutions to achieving the SDGs. Hubs can also manage back-office functions for non-traditional USAID partners.

The agency should also proactively seek out and support strong higher education programs focused on innovation, entrepreneurship, and technology to build the next generation of talent. It should additionally promote greater links between U.S. institutions of higher education with schools across Africa, Asia, and Latin America.

Solve the problem of the “Missing Middle” in global development

We know groundbreaking innovations already exist. However, many of them languish because entrepreneurs lack clear pathways to scale them.

Entrepreneurs tell us the biggest problem they experience when attempting to scale their own organizations is the “Missing Middle” — the treacherous period between when they secure early-stage capital and start making money. The vast majority of startups close their doors before exiting this phase. This is especially true for social entrepreneurs who may find it harder to profit from their company or product.

While philanthropists and socially-minded investors have been the primary sources of funding for these kinds of organizations at their early stages, in many sectors it is only public institutions that have the kind of resources needed to bring social enterprises’ impact to larger scale.

USAID should create a process to identify promising ideas that come out of early-stage incubators, other partner donors’ innovation programs, and trusted philanthropies, and help them scale for the long haul, including by providing both operational and programmatic funding.

Creating a systematized pathway to scale proven innovations will galvanize social entrepreneurs around the world and give us a fighting chance to solve societal challenges within increasingly narrow timeframes.

If outside investors and philanthropists knew they could count on the U.S. government to scale the most promising organizations they back, this would also crowd-in new early-stage capital for global development organizations and research and development.

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>R&amp;D with Universities and Private Sector Partners</th>
<th>Development Grants, Pitch Competitions, and Accelerators</th>
<th>Early-Stage Venture and Initial Scale-Up Capital</th>
<th>Needed: Payors at scale to maximize impact for proven solutions</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>THE MISSING MIDDLE</strong></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
<td></td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

There are potential payors-at-scale like USAID that manage tens of billions of dollars every year, but donors do not typically provide contracts to innovators of meaningful size (e.g. $15M-$100M+).
Solving the “Missing Middle” in global development

Too often, donors provide early-stage funding for pilots, but not enough to scale up what works. Social innovators then get stuck in what’s known as the “Missing Middle” or “Valley of Death.” US global development agencies can fix this by creating end-to-end innovation funding pipelines.

**PHASE ONE**

Validate Early Models

Donors’ innovation programs like Grand Challenges and innovation units, like USAID’s Development Innovation Ventures, presently source and validate early-stage ideas.

**PHASE TWO**

Equity & Debt for Validated Models

Validated, commercializable solutions can presently obtain equity and debt financing from the DFC, Global Innovation Fund, and other trusted financing partners.

**PHASE THREE**

Blended Financing to Quickly Scale Proven Solutions

Agencies like the DFC and USAID need to start systematically providing innovators with blended finance vehicles (e.g. working capital from the DFC to expand an innovator’s footprint coupled with revenue via pay-for-performance contracts from USG agencies like USAID).

**GRADUATION**

Innovations Identified as “Proven Solutions” Become Preferred Vendors

USAID should then identify which of these solutions are highly impactful, replicable, scalable, and cost-effective, and label them “Proven Solutions.” “Proven Solutions” then receive fast-tracked scale-up funding. Eligible solutions can originate at USAID or via other pre-approved funders’ innovation programs. Scale-up funding draws against USAID’s multi-billion dollar accounts, not its smaller early-stage innovation programs’ budgets.

Agencies like USAID and the DFC need to create end-to-end innovation funding pathways to help social innovators overcome the “Missing Middle” or “Valley of Death” in global development.
Drive results using accountability and country choice

IT’S TIME TO TRUST THE EXPERTS: THE PEOPLE WHO LIVE AND WORK IN THE COMMUNITIES USAID SERVES
Every system responds to incentives and checks and balances. By putting countries in the driver’s seat and enforcing accountability through transparency, USAID and other US foreign assistance agencies can become more results-oriented and innovator-friendly.

**Put countries in the driver’s seat by letting them pick vetted partners**

Countries and community-level players should be empowered to determine who they want to work with, especially if they want to work with a specific service provider, technology, or innovator to achieve a specific goal — and they should be able to count on USAID, PEPFAR, and other U.S. global development agencies to be a partner in this effort.

People living in communities that receive development funding know what they need. Donors and international aid contractors should not presume to know more than the people who live and work in their own communities.

Putting more decision-making power in the hands of communities and countries yields more dignity, more sustainable results, and greater impact. When a community or country wants to work with an approved, vetted innovator, the USAID mission office in that country should be able to access designated centralized, regional, and mission-level resources to work directly with the approved firm(s). This might sound like a simple idea, but too often international contractors or a USAID mission will choose a solution for a country — and not the other way around.

Further, once selected, a chosen innovator should not be forced to have their funding buried deep within a larger award. Awards should go out the door in the way that makes sense for the innovator’s business model (i.e. as a license for a technology firm with commercially-available off-the-shelf solution or as a fixed-price contract or grant for an organization delivering against pre-defined milestones).

The U.S. Government should make it as easy as possible for countries to access best-in-class innovations to make faster progress towards achieving their development goals. It should prioritize investments in solutions that governments are also using their own funds to support, or where private markets can sustain the solution. The U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation already uses a model that does this well. USAID can follow suit.

“Putting more decision-making power in the hands of communities and countries yields more dignity, more sustainable results, and greater impact.”

**Enforce accountability through transparency**

USAID spends money via a small cohort of government contractors. This needs to change. However, as long as the status quo remains, the agency needs to do more to ensure these contractors work more closely and equitably with local communities and frontline innovators. “It’s just not true that USAID’s American implementing partners pass on most of their money to local organizations via subawards,” wrote the Center for Global Development.

USAID can start by banning practices like “bid candy,” where contractors promise smaller organizations significant involvement in a project at the proposal stage to win an award, only to later renege on the deal once the work begins. USAID can require the holders of large awards to publicly disclose the percent of funding they promised would go to their sub-partners at the proposal stage compared to the percent actually devolved.
USAID should also offer sub-partners a standing invitation to every work-planning session that occurs between USAID, the prime contractor, and host government. Every work plan, budget document, evaluation, and legal agreement made between USAID and the prime recipient of a large award should be made public. Some of these requirements are already codified in law, but compliance is lax, so new accountability tools are needed.

Additionally, USAID maintains many approved vendor lists. For example, the agency’s Global Health Bureau maintains a list of all of the types of health products the agency is allowed to buy, for example. The Chief Information Officer maintains a list of technology providers that are approved to do business with USAID. But the process to get on these lists is opaque. USAID needs to publish its list of lists, data on who is on those lists, and information about how new organizations can apply.

Finally, USAID requires many of its overseas missions to develop internal strategies to work with the private sector, local partners, new and underutilized partners, and other categories of organizations. These strategies should be made public so that innovators can see where they can fit in.

Recruit and develop a next generation of talent to drive results

U.S. global development agency performance systems reward compliance when what we need are systems that optimize for performance. HR incentives must be more closely aligned with USAID’s highest-priority objectives and incentivize better results.

In addition, agencies like USAID need to hire a new generation of personnel who have best-in-class management and operations expertise. This is as critical as hiring individuals who have thematic and sectoral expertise, especially given the volume of money USAID needs to manage each year. USAID will find this new generation of talent by proactively recruiting outside of traditional development circles, including by recruiting new and more diverse talent from multinationals, startups, and other private sector players.

A new generation of personnel recruited from USAID partner countries with these skills and experiences can also support development of innovation ecosystems around the world.
What comes next and where we need your help
We’re asking you to believe in what’s possible. Not just incremental changes, but big ones, too.

We understand why some of these proposals (and other similar ones) have not been implemented. U.S. Government agencies are constrained by budget flexibility and fungibility issues, rigid procurement rules, human resource gaps, and other challenges. Some of our recommendations would require Congressional action to address these very weedy but important structural issues. You can read about some of those challenges — and potential solutions — in our Substack or in Foreign Policy Magazine.

However, there’s incredible untapped potential to work better within the existing constraints, too. You can read more here about things that USAID can do today to increase transparency, innovation, and impact, for example.

While we’ve done our best to capture the best ideas and solutions shared with us we know that there’s more to do! Tell us what’s missing! We’d also welcome your commentary on the specific in-the-weeds barriers we’ll need to address to make these ideas happen. Please write to us at any time at policy@unlockaid.org with your feedback or visit us at unlockaid.org.
Our plan to build political momentum for innovation in global development

BUILD ENORMOUS OUTSIDE PRESSURE
Global development funders including USAID must diversify their partner bases and incentivize performance, especially to direct more funding to local, national, and front-line innovators with sustainable business models.

PASS LANDMARK REFORM LEGISLATION
Re-architect the U.S. approach to global development by prioritizing sustainable economic growth, innovation, and transitioning away from project-based aid models in favor of direct partnerships with countries and communities.

MAKE GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT INNOVATION AMERICA’S CORE COMPARATIVE ADVANTAGE
The Biden-Harris Administration must reimagine how America’s global development investments can be more effectively leveraged to help LMICs access world-class technology and innovation to achieve the SDGs.

It’s time to reimagine the future of global development. We’re excited to work with you.
WE ARE

A global coalition of next-gen innovators driving a campaign to achieve the SDGs by 20230