DEVELOPMENT IMPACT LAB

A USAID Development Lab
Headquartered at
University of California, Berkeley

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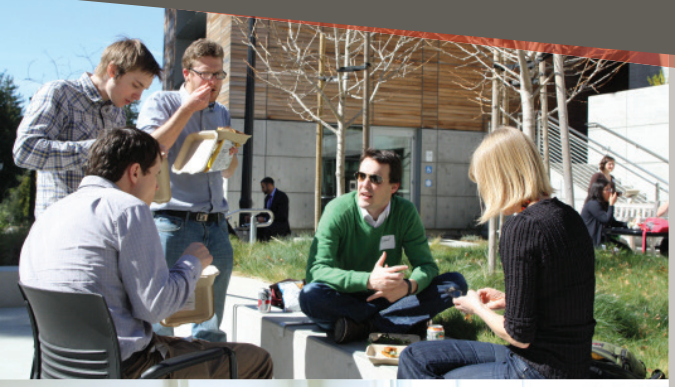
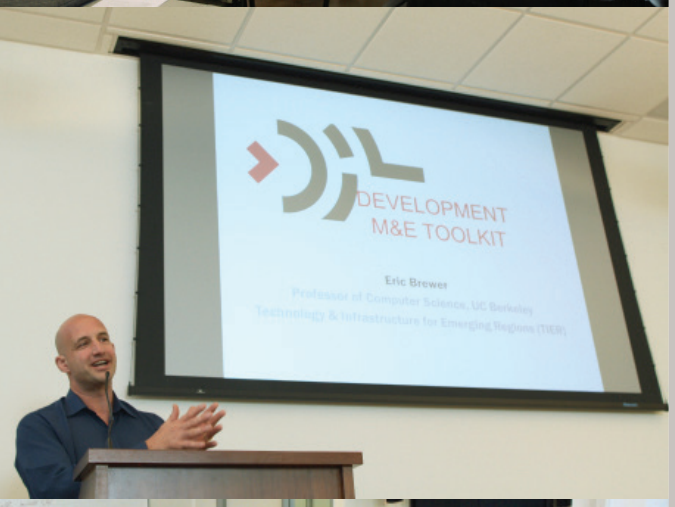
UC Berkeley's Development Impact Lab: "Greater than the Sum of Its Parts"





By Luis Flores
Blum Center Student Writer

BERKELEY -- Brought together by the common goal of reinventing the role of Universities and of quantitative sciences in development practice, a seemingly unlikely group gathered at Blum Hall on the UC Berkeley campus earlier this month; guests came from labs 200 yards away, offices in nearby Silicon Valley, prominent international NGOs and nimble start-ups, and universities near and far. At this one-day conference, the worldwide consortium of the Development Impact Lab (DIL) was launched with a blend of presentations, workshops, and conversations. These activities aimed to facilitate novel collaborations that will lay the foundations of Development Engineering, a new approach to applying science and technology to global development. In the words of Marion Adeney, a USAID AAAS fellow and the UC Berkeley manager of USAID's Higher Education Solutions Network (HESN), the conference "opened …doors to let more minds in," redefining university engagement with USAID and the broader development community. The talented minds in attendance included a "who's who" of engineers, economists, and practitioners—from the private sector, universities, and NGOs—who together compose DIL's contribution to HESN.

Throughout the event, a set of foundational principles eased the process of cross-discipline dialogue. The "pillars" of DIL's methodology include iterative and evidence-based design of support infrastructure for individual initiatives; competitive funding for potential breakthrough approaches; and the development of novel measurement and evaluation tools for rapid and actionable project evaluation. These efforts are supported by a fourth pillar that creates an overarching ecosystem for learning, collaboration, and the dissemination of insights.

UC Berkeley engineer Ashok Gadgil's call to allow "no silent failures" was illustrative of DIL's methodological approach. DIL will be engaging "not

textbook problems," Gadgil reminded the group, "but real problems that are messy, with politics and culture involved." DIL's pillars will ensure that unsuccessful efforts will be visible and integral to DIL's technology design process, and consequently, that meaningful lessons will be learned, shared, and applied to achieve the greatest possible impact.

The conference kicked off with presentations by DIL partners. These included UC San Diego economist Eli Berman's Policy Design Evaluation Lab, UC Berkeley professor Dan Fletcher's CellScope initiative, and from the University of Washington, professor of computer science and engineering Gaetano Borriello. These presentations were followed by brief "research snapshots" in which partners, including the design firm IDEO.org, Intel Labs, and the Aga Khan Development Network, explored avenues for cross-sector collaboration.

After a lively lunch, smaller workshops engaged specific DIL projects. One workshop focused on the establishment of UC Berkeley's Designated Emphasis in Development Engineering (DE2), an educational program that will strengthen and institutionalize a "pipeline of knowledge" for graduate candidates in fields spanning engineering, economics, business administration, city planning, and public policy.

UC Berkeley's geographical location and history of practical innovation made it an ideal setting to host these conversations on interdisciplinary, cross-sectoral, and intergenerational innovation. As DIL's Executive Director Temina Madon explained to participants, "We are all DIL," a group that is "moving outside the boundaries of a traditional academic setting."