

ASU's USAID projects provided economic benefits to US

Arizona businesses and citizens also reaped rewards

By Scott Bordow, ASU News

March 5, 2025

For more than a decade, Arizona State University has helped people around the world — and advanced interests in the United States at the same time — through its collaborative projects with the U.S. Agency for International Development.

The projects are global in nature, stretching to places like Ghana, the Philippines, Egypt and El Salvador, but they are vital to the U.S. on issues like border security, reducing reliance on global competitors like China, creating skilled labor forces and building alliances in parts of the world that are strategically important.

USAID has been in the news as one of the federal agencies whose funding has been frozen, and ASU's work on the projects has been halted.

[Lara Ferry](#), vice president of research in ASU's [Knowledge Enterprise](#) and a President's Professor in the New College of Interdisciplinary Arts and Sciences, said the USAID projects fulfilled the United States' long-held spirit of "people helping people" and were of strategic importance to the country.

"Generally speaking, I think we're trying to be the good citizens that the world would like us to be," Ferry said.

"The other reason is a bit more calculated," she added, summarizing [a statement by McCain Institute Executive Director Evelyn Farkas](#). "If we're a good guy in the eyes of many of these nations, then that is leveraged for us in terms of our national security and our standing within the global community. When we go into these spaces, we are producing a lot of goodwill for our country. And when we pull out, we leave a vacuum that a lot of countries will enter readily and will

happily leverage, creating goodwill for their countries. That's a risk for us.”

Glen Goodman, interim executive director of ASU's International Development Initiative and a clinical assistant professor of Brazilian studies in the School of International Letters and Cultures, said ASU has helped provide more than \$200 million in aid through the projects, which he called “transformative” in advancing two U.S. pillars of engagement abroad: diplomacy and economic development.

“It is an incredibly important piece of how the U.S. and Americans are seen and understood, often in (places) where most U.S. citizens are not thinking about where we need or want to be exerting influence,” he said. “But how I view it is that every dollar spent on development and diplomacy is \$10 we don’t have to spend on defense.”

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Since 2015, ASU has provided expertise, research, staffing, technical support and administrative expertise on 22 USAID projects. Four unifying themes are keys to ASU's portfolio:

- **Economic growth and trade:** Initiatives focused on U.S. economic interests by creating new markets, improving supply chains and developing skilled workforces that reduce reliance on global competitors like China.
- **Border security and immigration control:** Initiatives focused on stabilizing regions such as El Salvador and Africa helped reduce migration pressures on the U.S.
- **Strategic influence and national security:** Objectives were to strengthen U.S. alliances by supporting economic and infrastructure development in key geopolitical regions, countering foreign influence.
- **Innovation and workforce development:** Initiatives fostered job growth, advanced STEM education and created skilled labor forces aligned with U.S. business and trade interests.

“ASU’s USAID work impacts not just our nation’s humanitarian mission but also catalyzes economic development here at home — at the national, state and regional levels,” said [Sally C. Morton](#), executive vice president for ASU’s Knowledge Enterprise. “Strengthening our partners abroad opens up new markets aligned with U.S. trade interests, thereby benefiting Arizona businesses and citizens.”

Here’s a deeper look at three projects that ASU has worked on with funding from USAID:

Center for Applied Research and Innovation in Supply Chain-Africa (CARISCA)

Objective: *To improve supply chains in Africa through innovation and workforce development, strengthening American economic interests by reducing reliance on China and providing alternative sourcing options for U.S. businesses.*

ASU, through its top-ranked Department of Supply Chain Management in the W. P. Carey School of Business, partnered with Kwame Nkrumah University of Science and Technology to strengthen local capacity for improved supply chains in Ghana and throughout Africa.

KNUST’s leadership enabled CARISCA to co-create local solutions with more than a dozen enterprise partners with large operations in health care and agriculture — leading to alternative sourcing options for U.S. businesses.

The project also improved the quality of KNUST’s scholarly publications, created a Career Services Office and kick-started an alumni relations program. It also formed partnerships with industry leaders and funded scholarships for more than 140 graduate students. In spring 2024 alone, 17 CARISCA scholars graduated with a PhD in a supply chain management-related field.

Finally, a consortium of firms including Intel, Applied Materials and Chemonics — a firm that finds solutions to transform development — worked with CARISCA on applying artificial intelligence to improve pharmaceutical distribution in Ghana.

“It was a great match between our capabilities and what the U.S. government wanted to accomplish, which was to make a sustainable impact around supply chain education and research,” Goodman said. “It advances U.S. interests because of the greater capacity for local players to operate more efficiently and the openness of these economies to grow in their orientation toward the West and away from China.”

LibrES (El Salvador)

Objective: *Improving security and reducing violence in El Salvador through legal, educational and economic initiatives, supporting U.S. border security by addressing one of the root causes of illegal immigration.*

According to a World Bank report in 2019, at least 21 out of every 100 women in El Salvador age 15 years and older had suffered some form of violence in their lifetime, including sexual assault, intimate partner violence or abuse by family members.

LibrES, led by ASU in partnership with local organizations, universities and private-sector entities, focused on violence prevention and systemic approaches to safer and more productive lives for women in that country, thus decreasing the likelihood of irregular migration to the U.S.

The Walter Cronkite School of Journalism and Mass Communication led the design of media campaigns to address violent, controlling and abusive behavior by influencing how people think about gender roles and about violence against disabled and LGBTQ people.

The Thunderbird School of Global Management trained partners in El Salvador to use its DreamBuilder curriculum, which has been used by female entrepreneurs around the world to build skills to launch or improve their own businesses, thus raising the standard of living among people who might be tempted to migrate, and allow female survivors of gender-based violence to move toward economic independence.

The Sandra Day O'Connor College of Law helped train Salvadoran prosecutors and law professors to develop more effective ways to bring gender-based violence cases into the legal system and to recognize how victims' advocates can play a role.

The Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering looked at public infrastructure for parks and transportation in El Salvador to consider modifications that will decrease the harassment that is common in those spaces.

By the end of the five-year timeline in 2027, LibrES would have provided services to 3,000 people, trained 1,000 people to advance gender equality and female empowerment outcomes, facilitated 250 training events, and generated more than 100,000 interactions with the public through communication campaigns.

Goodman said the U.S. government identified years ago that the migration of women in El Salvador was a result of violence from family members or gangs.

"The thought is, if you can disrupt some of those phenomena, including intimate partner violence, and there's an economic empowerment, which is the female entrepreneurship piece of this, you can break certain cycles of violence," he said. "And by doing so, you create conditions so that

people don't feel they need to migrate.”

USAID Higher Education Partnership Initiative (Indonesia)

Objective: *This initiative built collaboration between U.S. and Indonesian universities to improve STEM education, ensuring a skilled workforce for industries critical to U.S. economic and technological interests, including cybersecurity and chip manufacturing.*

The program established industry-linked curricula and student experiential learning, helped students learn about suitable international degree programs, and encouraged engagement between faculty from the United States and Indonesia. In addition, the program promoted partnerships between universities and companies to increase student employability.

Goodman said the Ira A. Fulton Schools of Engineering program with USAID is “basically the gold standard worldwide in how to match public-sector goals and private-sector needs with education-sector abilities and create synergies so that you can build the workforce and provide investments for the future as we’ve done with semiconductors here in the Valley.”

The partnership with Indonesia, in addition to providing resilience in microelectronic supply chains, de-emphasized a yearslong overreliance on China, Goodman said, thus furthering economic security and growing U.S. partnerships in the Association of Southeast Asian Nations.

He said the project also fulfilled one of the goals of USAID, which was to help governments “accomplish what they wanted to and build allies for the U.S. by doing that.”

Other projects

Here’s a list of other USAID projects ASU has worked on since 2015:

Young African Leaders Initiative Legacy & Localization Activity (YALI L&L, terminated) —

The objective was to establish YALI Africa as a self-sustaining, African-led leadership network, equipping young professionals to drive economic growth and governance. Strengthening operational and financial capacity aimed to ensure long-term stability, reducing aid dependence while supporting U.S. strategic interests in Africa.

YouthMappers — This initiative aimed to enhance geospatial data through student-led mapping projects, supporting infrastructure planning, agriculture and health. It contributed to U.S. economic and security interests by strengthening disaster response, supply chains and workforce development.

Center of Excellence for Energy (Egypt) — The goal was to strengthen Egypt's energy sector through research and industry partnerships, fostering stability in the region while creating opportunities for U.S. companies in energy infrastructure and technology development.

Advancing Modern Power through Utility Partnerships (AmpUp) — The project aimed to modernize energy infrastructure through training for engineers and regulators, strengthening energy reliability in developing regions while fostering opportunities for U.S. investment in energy markets.

Global Locust Initiative — By improving locust outbreak management, the program protected agriculture-dependent economies, ensuring food security and reducing economic instability that could contribute to migration and regional unrest.

Educating the Future (Georgia) — The project aimed to improve teacher training and academic institutions, strengthening workforce development and national stability and thus contributing to U.S. strategic interests in the region.

UPSKILL (Philippines) — This program enhanced workforce development and innovation in the Philippines' higher education, strengthening trade relationships and economic stability, ultimately benefiting U.S. businesses and supply chains.

Teacher Excellence Initiative (Egypt) — The project improved teacher training and education delivery, promoting regional stability and strengthening Egypt's workforce, benefiting U.S. interests in security and economic development.

Pacific Islands Renewable Energy Technical and Vocational Education and Training Project — The objective was to train technicians in 12 Pacific Island nations to install and maintain solar power systems, reducing reliance on foreign energy sources and promoting U.S. strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region.

Shikshak Quest (India) — The project aimed to improve teacher education in India, strengthening the country's workforce and economic stability while fostering U.S.-India collaboration in education and innovation.

U.S.-Pakistan Centers for Advanced Studies in Energy (USPCASE) — This initiative worked to modernize Pakistan's energy education and research, enhancing regional energy security and creating economic opportunities beneficial to U.S. energy companies.

BUILD-IT (Vietnam) — The project sought to advance STEM higher education and industry collaboration, strengthening Vietnam's workforce and making the country a stronger economic and strategic partner.

Healthcare Supply Chain Simulation for Developing Countries — The initiative improved health care supply chain management, reducing inefficiencies and enhancing public health outcomes, ultimately benefiting global stability and reducing potential pandemic-related risks to the U.S.

Global Development Lab Research and Innovation Fellowships — This program supported innovation by engaging U.S. graduate students in global development challenges, fostering economic opportunities and advancing American leadership in science and technology.

Middle East Water Security Initiative — The project addressed water scarcity in the MENA (Middle East and North Africa) region through desalination and water-capture technologies, mitigating resource-driven conflicts and promoting stability in a strategically important region.

Higher Education Activity in Malawi — The objective was to increase access to tertiary education, supporting workforce development and economic growth, reducing aid dependency and fostering long-term stability in the region.

Higher Education Partnership-Morocco (HEP-M) — This initiative strengthened digital education in Moroccan universities, improving workforce development and ensuring U.S. leadership in higher education partnerships.

This story originally appeared on [ASU News](#).

Main image



Women in El Salvador participate in LibrES, an ASU-led USAID project aimed at addressing one of the root causes of illegal immigration by focusing on violence prevention and systemic approaches to safer and more productive lives. Photo by Maité Portillo/Arizona State University

Text image(s)



Students taking part in the USAID-funded Center of Excellence for Energy project at Ain Shams University, one of ASU's partner universities in Egypt. Photo courtesy of the Center of Excellence for Energy