

The Khorana Program™

Promoting scientific cooperation between India and the United States

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NEW PARTNERSHIP FOR INDIAN RURAL DEVELOPMENT

The Khorana Program at the University of Wisconsin-Madison (UW) will partner with a leading global agricultural implement producer, Mahindra and Mahindra, and the Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust to promote rural development in India. The Khorana Program has just received a grant of US\$950,000 from the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), and the two partners will provide more than three million dollars for their parts of the program. “This represents the latest approach to development, linking university research and expertise with the private sector’s financial power and on-the-ground experience,” says project leader Kenneth Shapiro, associate dean in the UW College of Agricultural and Life Sciences and professor of agricultural and applied economics. “This approach is especially appropriate for India, where rapid economic growth has benefited 300 million, but 800 million, mostly rural residents, are left behind, and over 25% of children are malnourished.”

The Khorana Program, jointly directed by Shapiro and Professor Aseem Ansari, honors Har Gobind Khorana, the Indian-born scientist who won the Nobel Prize in 1968 while a member of

the UW Biochemistry faculty. In addition to rural development, the Khorana Program also promotes scholarly exchange and industry-academia links with India. In August, 2009, the UW-Madison Biochemistry Department will host an international symposium entitled, “From Synthetic Biology to Synthetic Life,” which builds on Khorana’s pathbreaking work on the genetic code and DNA synthesis. This work is the foundation for much of the modern biotechnology industry.

Last summer, the Khorana Program placed 14 Indian students with leading UW research mentors in six departments. Ansari points out that “These were top students who worked with top researchers, and after just ten weeks, half of them had papers pending publication.” Next summer the program will be expanded to include placing UW students in Indian research institutes and pharmaceutical companies. These exchanges are expected to continue and grow in the future to build seamless scientific communities between the two nations.

Under the new rural development program, UW soil scientist John Peters will be stationed in India working with Mahindra and Mahindra to establish a



nationwide network of 200 soil testing laboratories with associated demonstration farms and extension staff. UW dairy scientist Robert Kaiser and others will work with the Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust to improve dairy productivity among 9,000 women's self help groups in Uttar Pradesh. Horticulture professor Phillip Simon and others will provide their expertise to assist vegetable and potato production among these women's self help groups. They will also work near Pune with Tasty Bite and near Chennai at the Agricultural Consultancy Management Foundation.

Mahindra and Mahindra's vision is to aid rural development and poverty alleviation by becoming a comprehensive provider of agricultural inputs, services and advice. The Rajiv Gandhi Charitable Trust has a broad program to aid women and their families in one of India's poorest states. Women's self help groups have proven very effective in empowering women and



creating income opportunities. The Trust's programs reach more than 100,000 families in Uttar Pradesh.

The Khorana Program was launched last year with seed money from the UW Chancellor's Office, the College of Agricultural and Life Sciences, the Indo-US Science and Technology Forum, and private donors. "UW's Indian alumni in the U.S. and India and Dr. Khorana's former students have expressed keen interest in the program," according to UW's Asian Representative, Kimberly Santiago. Santiago organized alumni meetings in India this past year aiming toward possibly creating a new chapter of the Wisconsin Alumni Association. "New opportunities appear at each gathering, as alumni seek ways of helping to develop a new generation of scientific and social leaders in India and the U.S.," she notes.

Support for the Khorana Program

The Khorana Program leadership is working to identify grants that may be applicable for certain program elements, such as specific rural development projects. We also look to private donors and corporations for that ongoing margin of excellence that can make the Khorana Program truly

extraordinary and a fitting tribute to a great scientist shared by two countries. Those wishing to become contributing Friends of the Khorana Program are encouraged to contact the co-directors, Aseem Ansari (ansari@biochem.wisc.edu) and Kenneth Shapiro (kshapiro@cals.wisc.edu).



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