

VII edición

Premios Fundación BBVA Fronteras del Conocimiento

BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards

7th edition

## Helen Keller International takes the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in Development Cooperation for its family-led agricultural programs, of proven effectiveness in the fight against malnutrition

- Helen Keller International was initially a relief organization dealing with blindness, a condition suffered by its founder, but its campaign against the vitamin A deficiency behind many cases of blindness and disability convinced it to shift focus to the broader problem of malnutrition
- The American NGO, which celebrates its centenary in 2015, operates across some twenty countries in Africa and Asia promoting a family-led model of cultivation that encourages healthy eating
- Its programs seek to empower women while focusing on communities with difficult access to labor and food markets

**Madrid, February 24, 2015.-** The BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award in the Development Cooperation category goes in this seventh edition to American NGO Helen Keller International (HKI) for agricultural programs that help families and villages to raise their own nutritious foods. "Hunger and low dietary diversity reduce cognitive function, physical capacity, resistance to disease and quality of life and lifetime earnings. Helen Keller International champions Homestead Food Production, an innovative, interdisciplinary program that promotes improved agricultural and nutritional practices in a synergistic fashion. This approach is mostly applied to communities that have difficult access to labor and food markets," in the words of the jury's citation.

Helen Keller International, now into its hundredth year, "is widely recognized," the citation continues, "for developing, testing and scaling up programs to combat malnutrition, blindness and disability on a global scale, and for striving to integrate these evidenced-based strategies within local government and community structures so that they are sustainable."

The organization was nominated for the award by the International Food Policy Research Institute and Ángel Gil Hernández, professor at the University of Granada and President of the Sociedad Española de Nutrición.

Helen Keller was born in Alabama in 1880. At just 19 months, she contracted an illness that left her deaf and blind. When she was seven, she was put into the care of Anne Sullivan, who taught her to read, write and communicate. In 1904, she graduated *cum laude* from Radcliffe College in Massachusetts, becoming the first deaf-blind person to graduate from college.

In 1915, she joined forces with magnate George Kessler, who had survived the sinking of the Lusitania after it was torpedoed by a German submarine, to found a relief organization to help soldiers blinded by mustard gas during the First World War.

Yesterday, Kathy Spahn, HKI President, looked back at the history of the organization: "In the 1950s, we evolved from treating blind people to working to prevent blindness, and this got us involved in vitamin A deficiency, the main preventable cause of blindness in children. Then in the 1970s we collaborated in a groundbreaking study run by the John Hopkins Bloomberg School of Public Health, which proved that vitamin A deficiency is also linked to childhood mortality, and that got us all the more focused on the importance of vitamin supplements. But we also felt that there was no golden bullet, so we wanted to broaden our approach. And this took us to our Homestead Food Production program and the industrial-scale enrichment of foods with vitamins and minerals."

Helen Keller International is also a leader in optimizing delivery efficiency. As the citation points out, its work with local partners ensured that "last year alone 54 million African children received vitamin A supplements" to protect against blindness.

The organization currently has over 180 programs in 21 countries that benefit some 100 million people.

According to Spahn, "the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Award will give us major visibility, which is among the goals we set ourselves to celebrate our centennial year."

### **The Homestead Food Production program**

Malnutrition affects two billion of the world's people, and each year causes 6.6 million deaths among children under five. The Homestead Food Production program trains local communities with difficult access to labor and food markets in advanced, environmentally-friendly cultivation techniques that allow them to conserve soil and water resources while improving production and extending it year-round. These techniques include integrated pest management, composting, intercropping and crop rotation, raised beds and mulching. Most crucially, the program encourages the growing and consumption of a more diverse selection of vegetables and fruits, with a particular emphasis on species rich in vital micronutrients such as vitamin A and iron, thereby ensuring their year-long dietary

availability. Communities are also introduced to the raising of poultry and small livestock animals.

Homestead Food Production (HFP) started in 1990 as a pilot project in Bangladesh, and by 2012 had reached 900,000 households and 4.5 million people in that country. It is now being rolled out in Cambodia, Indonesia, Nepal and Vietnam, as well as five African countries: Burkina Faso, Côte d'Ivoire, Mozambique, Senegal and Tanzania.

The evaluation conducted by Helen Keller International in the four Asian countries where the program has been running longest has found that participating households cultivate an average of 45 varieties compared to the ten of traditional gardens, and that there are significantly fewer cases among their members of anemia and childhood blindness. The program encourages families to improve not only their nutritional standing but their economic standing as well.

Among the keys to HFP's success is the ability to involve local communities in its planning and implementation. Its work seeks to empower women and reduce inequalities. And to this end, in the words of jury secretary Norman Loayza, Lead Economist in the World Bank's Development Research Group in Washington (United States), employs "a methodology that relies less on teaching and more on evidence-based behavioral change. Its teams use village model farms to demonstrate the techniques and results achieved, so households sign up on their own initiative. The three steps the organization follows are: teach, demonstrate and motivate."

On the role of women, Spahn explains: "It is they who feed and care for family members. Given enough resources, they will lift their families out of poverty. But that doesn't mean we should ignore the men. For if they can be brought to understand the benefits of nutrition, they will help as well. In one of our Bangladesh programs, we invited men to cookery lessons and other classes, and now they help the women with the crops."

Another HKI hallmark is its accent on ongoing program evaluation. This enables them to make adjustments as needed and to detect, for instance, that models that work in Asia may not fit well in African countries, because it is not enough just to identify local farming practices, you also have to know and understand the local culture. It is for this reason that the organization sets such store by pilot programs.

Homestead Food Production centers on the so-called "thousand-day window" from the time of conception until a child's second birthday. The cultivation side is accordingly supplemented by a mother and child nutritional support program, educating new mothers about the benefits of breastfeeding – which they are urged to do exclusively for the first six months and keep up until the child reaches two for its considerable immunological benefits – what foods to eat for a healthy pregnancy and lactation, and how and when to introduce new, nutrient-rich foods as the child develops. At times this may mean finding persuasive ways to

challenge local food myths, like the long-held suspicion of chicken and eggs in Nepalese culture.

Asked which results she feels most proud of, the HKI President recalls a personal experience: “We called in without warning on one of our Homestead Food Production programs in the south of Nepal – a garden we had started ten years back but were no longer running. And there was this little house, standing in the middle of what had once been a small garden and was now a huge cultivated area full of magnificent legumes and all kinds of vegetables. It was so moving. The matriarch of the family was 101 years old and there she was looking out at it all... beautiful. The project had taken on a life of its own.”

### **About the BBVA Foundation Frontiers of Knowledge Awards**

The BBVA Foundation promotes, funds and disseminates world-class scientific research and artistic creation, in the conviction that science, culture and knowledge hold the key to building a better future for people. The Foundation implements its programs in partnership with leading scientific and cultural organizations in Spain and abroad, striving to identify and prioritize those projects with the power to move forward the frontiers of the known world.

The BBVA Foundation established its Frontiers of Knowledge Awards in 2008 to recognize the authors of outstanding contributions and radical advances in a broad range of scientific and technological areas congruent with the knowledge map of the late 20th and 21st centuries and, representing cultural creativity at its expressive height, the area of music. The Awards also reserve space for two central challenges of the present, those of climate change and development cooperation. Their **eight categories** include classical areas like *Basic Sciences (Physics, Chemistry and Mathematics)* and *Biomedicine*, and other, more recent areas characteristic of our time, ranging from *Information and Communication Technologies, Ecology and Conservation Biology, Climate Change and Economics, Finance and Management to Development Cooperation* and the innovative artistic realm of *music, both classical and of our time*.

The **juries** in each category are made up of leading international experts in their respective fields, who arrive at their decisions in a wholly independent manner, applying internationally recognized metrics of excellence. The BBVA Foundation is aided in the organization of the awards by the **Spanish National Research Council (CSIC)**, the country's premier multidisciplinary research body. As well as designating each jury chair, the CSIC is responsible for appointing the Technical Evaluation Committees that undertake an initial assessment of candidates and draw up a reasoned shortlist for the consideration of the juries.

Committee members in the Development Cooperation category were José Antonio Berenguer Sánchez, scientist and coordinator of the CSIC Humanities and Social Sciences Area; Juan Antonio Cebrían de Miguel, a scientist in the Instituto de Economía, Geografía y Demografía (CSIC); María Herrero Moreno, Research Professor at the Estación Experimental Aula Dei (CSIC); Luciano Mateos Iñiguez, Senior Scientific Researcher at the Instituto de Agricultura Sostenible

(CSIC), and Juan José Villarías Robles, a scientist at the Instituto de Lengua, Literatura y Antropología (CSIC).

### Development Cooperation jury

The jury in this category was chaired by **Pedro L. Alonso**, Director of the WHO Global Malaria Programme in Geneva (Switzerland), with **Norman Loayza**, Lead Economist in the World Bank's Development Research Group in Washington (United States) acting as secretary. Remaining members were **Vicente Larraga**, Research Professor in the Center for Biological Research of the Spanish National Research Council (CSIC); **Clara Menéndez**, Director of the Maternal, Child and Reproductive Health Initiative and Research Professor at ISGlobal, the Barcelona Institute for Global Health (Spain); **José García Montalvo**, Professor of Economics at Pompeu Fabra University and Research Professor at the Valencian Institute of Economic Research (Ivie) (Spain); and **Francisco Pérez**, Research Director of the Valencian Institute of Economic Research (Ivie) and Professor of Foundations of Economic Analysis at the University of Valencia (Spain).

### Previous laureates

Last year's winner in this category was **NGO Pratham** for "its outstanding contributions to improving the education of disadvantaged children in India and other countries in South Asia and Africa." The award in the fifth edition went to **Drugs for Neglected Diseases Initiative (DNDi)** for "developing and delivering new, effective and affordable treatments for poverty-related diseases." Preceding them were **Ciro de Quadros** for "leading the efforts to eliminate polio and measles from the Americas," in the words of the award citation, and the **International Rice Research Institute (IRRI)** for its contribution to "reducing poverty and hunger in the world by means of rice research and farmer training." In the second edition, the winner was the **Development Research Institute (DRI)** at New York University (United States) for "its contribution to the analysis of foreign aid provision, and its challenge to the conventional wisdom in development assistance." Finally, the inaugural award went to the **Poverty Action Lab at Massachusetts Institute of Technology (MIT)** (United States) for "promoting the use of scientific methods to assess the effectiveness of development assistance funding."

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#### LAUREATE'S FIRST DECLARATIONS AND IMAGES

A video recording of the new laureate's first interview on receiving news of the award is available from the Atlas FTP with the following name and coordinates:

Server: **213.0.38.61**

Username: **AgenciaAtlas4**

Password: **premios**

The name of the video is:

“PREMIO FRONTERAS DEL CONOCIMIENTO EN COOPERACIÓN AL DESARROLLO”

In the event of connection difficulties, please contact Alejandro Martín at ATLAS:

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