

2015 AGM Remarks by the USAID Chief of Staff

Michele Sumilas, USAID Chief of Staff, brought greetings of the USAID Acting Administrator, Alfonso Lendhardt, who conveyed his regrets at not being able to participate in the AGM due to travel commitments.

Ms. Sumilas noted that USAID's focus over the coming year is to solidify gains made over the past six years, including "USAID Forward" reforms and initiatives such as Power Africa and Feed the Future. Noting the theme of the AGM on strengthening collaboration between the Hill and USAID, Ms. Sumilas highlighted USAID's focus on results. This has been a longtime interest of the Congress and has thus helped to strengthen relationships, as did the exceptional outreach to the Hill by former Administrator Raj Shah and USAID's expanded relationships with the private sector.

The majority of the session was devoted to questions and discussion. In responding to a question about whether USAID could be more involved in urban areas given increasing global urbanization, she discussed current initiatives, focusing on Feed the Future and climate change. USAID leadership is seeking to build stronger connections between those initiatives, including in urban areas, as well as trying to scale up successes. For example, the Feed the Future initiative has made considerable progress against childhood stunting in pilot zones – but question remains whether these results can be scaled up to national levels.

Ms. Sumilas encouraged USAID alumni to view "Extreme Possibilities" on the USAID website. This is a series of videos and other materials that can be effectively used to tell the story of USAID working to reduce extreme poverty.

In responding to a question on how the Congressional Affairs (LPA) Bureau can continue to be effective at the end of an administration as political appointees begin to depart, Ms. Sumilas indicated that they had just recruited Jim Beaver to serve as the first-ever Foreign Service DAA in LPA. More generally, USAID political appointees are doing succession planning throughout the Agency, ensuring that strong senior FS and GS staff are in place as office directors and DAAs to continue to work and lead their bureaus as political employees depart. This is part of the effort to ensure sustainability of reforms and initiatives.

A number of comments were directed at staffing. There are about 30 hiring mechanisms employed in USAID. Appropriations legislation puts a cap on direct hire staff numbers. This is in keeping with a push to shrink government. FS-Limited program is being downsized.

The recently created Global Development Lab has undergone change. The focus now is on how the Lab interacts with Missions. This will help Missions move their agendas forward. There is a need to focus on results. The placement of science and technology in all plans is not a result, but science and technology helping save lives is a result. USAID is proud of its major contributions to reducing poverty and it will continue to carry out its mandate and reforms at least through the duration of this Administration.