



# USAID Alumni Association

## February 2021 Newsletter

### Note from the UAA Board

The first few days of the new Biden Administration have brought new energy and a strong commitment to international development. We want to express our appreciation for the new Administration's nomination of Ambassador Samantha Power, a superbly qualified candidate for USAID Administrator, and the January 20<sup>th</sup> appointment of an experienced interim leadership team for USAID, headed by Acting Administrator **Gloria Steele**. See additional acting leadership appointments [here](#). We welcome them to their new roles and are offering to provide assistance by UAA volunteers wherever that might be useful.

### Calendar of Upcoming UAA Events

**Friday, February 12, 2021, 12 noon to 1:00 p.m.** – At the **UAA/DACOR Development Dialogue** virtual meeting, **John McArthur**, Director of the newly formed Center for Sustainable Development and Senior Fellow of Brookings Institution, will address **“The Sustainable Development Challenge Ahead.”** McArthur, as head of Brookings new Center and given his major recent efforts to catalyze action for the Sustainable Development Goals and Millennium Development Goals, is especially well positioned to address these challenges. This virtual event is open only to UAA and DACOR members. To register please click [here](#). All those who register will be sent an email with information on how to join the meeting.

**Sunday, February 14, 2021, 4:00-6:00 p.m.** – The **UAA Winterfest**, our first social event of the year, will be held virtually via Zoom on Valentine's Day. UAA registrants and guests are invited to beat the winter doldrums and pandemic isolation by sharing this time with friends and former colleagues. Please see invitation below, and sign up to join us.

**Wednesday, February 17, 2021, 1:30-3:30 p.m.** -- The **UAA Book Club** will hold a virtual meeting via Zoom for which **Neil Levine** and **Grande Lum** have volunteered to lead a discussion of *America's Peacemakers: The Community Relations Service and Civil Rights*, University of Missouri Press, 2020, by Bertram Levine (Neil's late father) and Grande Lum. As one-time director of USAID's Office of Conflict Management and Mitigation and the Center of Excellence for Democracy, Human Rights and Governance, Neil Levine is well-placed to draw connections between the CRS mission and USAID's work on peacebuilding, human rights and reconciliation as well as our shared experience in working with a small, mission-driven organization dealing with complex and critical issues. A summary of the book will be circulated before the meeting. For more information on the book and how to order a copy, please refer to the UAA website home page. Please note that this meeting is open only to UAA contributing members and those who register no later than **February 15** by clicking [here](#). Those who register will receive information on how to join the virtual meeting.

**Wednesday, March 10, 2021, 12:00 noon to 1:00 p.m.** – The

**UAA/DACOR Development Dialogue** will host a virtual meeting with **Jerry Hyman**, former Director of USAID's Democracy and Governance Office. He will speak on "**Whither or Whether Democracy Promotion? Democracy Assistance, Development and Foreign Policy.**" Please join us to hear – and comment on – Jerry's unconventional view of what has been done and what the future of democracy programs should be. Watch for an email with further details closer to the event.

## SAVE THE DATES

**Thursday, April 8** (time TBD) – The **UAA/DACOR Development Dialogue** will host a virtual meeting to enjoy a conversation between **Rick Barton** and **Bob Gersony**. For a preview of the Gersony book, please note the Bulletin Board item, below, with sign-up information to join a **special feature on February 2 in which Andrew Natsios interviews Robert Kaplan** on his new book, *The Good American: The Epic Life of **Bob Gersony**, the U.S. Government's Greatest Humanitarian*.

**Sunday, May 23, 2021, 4:00-6:00 p.m.** – The **UAA Spring Reception**, our second social event this year, will be held virtually via Zoom. More details will be provided closer to the event.

**Saturday, September 11, 2021, time TBD** – The **UAA annual Summer Picnic** will be held at a gathering in the D.C. area or virtually via Zoom, depending on the coronavirus pandemic situation nearer the planned date. A hybrid picnic, held both in person and virtually, is also being considered. Stay tuned.

**Friday, October 29, 2021, time TBD** – The **UAA Annual General Meeting** will be held this year at the Center for Global Development in Washington, D.C. More details will be provided nearer the event.

## **New!** on **USAIDAlumni.org**

### **Bulletin Board:**

- The Bulletin Board offers a special feature for February 2, 2021, 5:30 p.m. CST or 6:30 p.m. EST. **Andrew Natsios**, former USAID Administrator and currently Director of the Scowcroft Institute of International Affairs, will interview **Robert Kaplan** about his new book, ***The Good American: The Epic Life of Bob Gersony, the U.S. Government's Greatest Humanitarian***. The book is an extraordinary narrative account of Bob Gersony's life and humanitarian work, and what USAID and State do, in particular, in crisis management and human rights. It is the first recent book written by a well-known writer about the good work of the Agency. Many senior USAID officers were interviewed for the book. The Natsios-Kaplan interview is open to the public on Zoom; RSVP by clicking [here](#) to receive Zoom link or visit [bush.tamu.edu/events](http://bush.tamu.edu/events).
- The Bulletin Board features five new items in January: (1) Sustained Poverty Reduction vis Inclusive Agriculture and Rural Development: Laying the Foundation for a Call to Action (David Bathrick); (2) OECD Development Co-Operation Report 2020; (3) ADST: Reiterating Strong Support for the Democratic Process; (4) ADST: American Diplomacy, the Democratic Tradition, and the Attack on the Capitol; and (5) MFAN statement delivered on recommending withdrawal of the Trump Administration last-minute recessions package.

**In Memoriam:** The [In Memoriam](#) page features obituaries of USAID colleagues, including **William T. Dentzer, Donna Baltz, Arthur Danart, Daisy Portee Withers, Frank D. Correl, Elaine Stahl Leo, Don Boyd, Jr. and William H. ("Bill") Lyerly, Jr.**

**Articles:** On the Front Page (bottom) and under the Development Resources tab, we posted 13 articles published in January, many of them focused on the new leadership at State and USAID. The most recent of them featured here:

- [What Antony Blinken's nomination hearing says about US foreign aid](#) (Devex by Adva Saldinger, January 20, 2021)
- [Biden fills out State Department team with Obama veterans](#) (Associated Press by Mathew Lee, January 16, 2021)
- [USAID officials prepare for higher profile role under Samantha Power](#) (Devex by Michael Igoe, Adva Saldinger, January 13, 2021)
- [USAID Chief Plans to Block Last-Minute Push to Add Trump Loyalists](#) (Foreign Policy by Column Lynch/Jack Detsch, January 13, 2021)
- [How Samantha Power Can Restore USAID's Crucial Role in US Foreign Policy](#) — (Just Security by *Ambassador Donald Steinberg*, January 13, 2021) — referenced by George Ingram in today's DACOR session)

**Bibliography of USAID Authors:** There is one new addition to the Bibliography section -- **How to Optimize your Wellness, a Population and Reproductive Health Oral History program at Smith College:** The one new addition to the Bibliography of USAID Authors is a book we can all use by Dr. Joseph Speidel, former director of USAID's Office of Population, entitled *The Building Blocks of Health- How to Optimize Wellness with a Lifestyle Checklist*. Dr. Speidel says that by using the checklist, we can possibly add 10-15 years to life. Dr. Speidel's oral history can be found at the Smith College Sofia Smith Collection as part of the Hewlett Foundation-funded Population and Reproductive Health Oral History Project. Please click [here](#) to visit the Bibliography page.

**Development Resources:** Under the UAA and American University Archives – Opportunity for USAID Alumni, an item has been added on **Where to Place your USAID Archives**. Leslie Nellis, the Associate Archivist for Digital Initiatives and Records Management at the American University Library, can be reached at 202-885-3204 or [lnellis@american.edu](mailto:lnellis@american.edu).

#### **Job and Volunteer Opportunities:**

- One new part-time job opportunity is posted for a Senior Leadership Group (SLG) candidate to work in tandem with the Director and Deputy Director of the Foreign Service Center, the SLG support team, and the Assignment and Career Counselor Team. The incumbent will also play an instrumental role in advising and assisting Deputy Mission Directors, HCTM and regional bureaus on issues related to human capital, talent management, and operational matters.
- USAID-Devex Career Fair will be held on February 17, 2021, 10:00 a.m. to 4:00 p.m. Eastern Time. The Career Fair, hosted by Devex in partnership with USAID as part of a broader initiative, is geared specifically towards development professionals and USAID's open Foreign Service positions. Individuals interested in learning more about USAID, its open positions, and the application/hiring process are encouraged to attend. For more information, see UAA website link [here](#).

## **Annual UAA Winterfest**

**Join us for the Annual UAA Winterfest!  
Sunday, February 14, 2021, 4:00 to 6:00 p.m.  
to be held virtually via Zoom**

UAA alumni are invited to this year's annual Winterfest, a casual late-afternoon gathering in a virtual Zoom setting to help get us through the pandemic and the remainder of the cold winter weeks.

It's **Valentine's Day**, so bring your special guest or come alone to join the

fun with many UAA friends, including:

- Enjoy the opportunity to see and hear from friends and former colleagues worldwide.
- Share with us an interesting story about you and your Valentine, past or present – your most memorable Valentine’s Day, first date, marriage proposal, or other notable event in your lives together.
- Participate in a chance to pit the quick thinking of men against women in a game of “Battle of the Sexes.”
- Bring your own personal choice of food and refreshments to the cocktail hour.
- Dress casually for the video gathering.

This is the perfect way to spend Valentine’s Day enjoying your special Valentine and UAA friends, all from the comfort of your own home. And at no cost; it’s free!

Please let us know if you plan to attend the Valentine’s Winterfest by **signing up no later than Wednesday, February 10.**

[Click here to sign up](#)

Those who have signed up will receive UAA instructions on how to join the Zoom meeting a few days before the February 14th Winterfest.

## UAA Development Dialogue



On January 13, 2021, exactly one week before the inauguration of the new Administration, **George Ingram** spoke online to a crowd of more than 150 USAID alumni and DACOR members on the timely topic of "What should be the big priorities for development in the Biden Administration?" George, currently a senior fellow at Brookings, has spent his career dedicated to strengthening international development. That wealth of experience

was evident as he highlighted, in his opening comments and in the lively Q&A session that followed, the array of issues and choices the new USAID Administrator-designate Samantha Power will need to confront. View the video of this event [here](#). If you wish to learn more, see George's recent Brookings policy paper [here](#).

## Development Issues Committee

The Development Issues Committee held its first meeting of 2021 on January 28. The virtual meeting, attended by 57 UAA members, featured a robust discussion on **Inclusive Agriculture and Rural Development as a Priority for the New Administration**. Panelists leading the discussion included **David Bathrick**, former Director of the USAID Office of Agriculture; **Emmy Simmons**, former USAID Assistant Administrator for Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade (E3); and **Paul Dorosh**, Director of the Governance Strategy and Development Division of the International Food Policy Research Institute (IFPRI). David Bathrick summarized his recent White Paper, *Sustained Poverty Reduction via Inclusive Agriculture and Rural Development: Laying the Foundation for a Call to Action*. Emmy Simmons’s comments drew on her recent White Paper for CSIS, co-authored by Julie Howard, *Agriculture Under Pressure: Implications for Feed the Future*. Paul Dorosh’s comments drew from his extensive research on agricultural development for IFPRI. All

expressed a hope that the new leadership team at USAID would boost the U.S. Government efforts for inclusive agriculture and rural development as a priority. A lively Q&A session followed the panelists' presentations. David Bathrick's and Emmy Simmons's White Papers are available on the UAA website that can be visited [here](#).

## UAA Book Club



The UAA Book Club held a virtual meeting via Zoom on January 27, 2021, during which **Jon O'Rourke** led a discussion, with 18 participants, of Daniel Kahneman's *Thinking, Fast and Slow*. The overall intent of the book is to convince readers that, while we think of ourselves as rational beings, the truth is we make many decisions unconsciously on an irrational base. It

catalogues numerous examples of irrational thinking and together represents a humbling comment on human fallibility. Being aware of these distorting influences in ourselves will reduce judgment errors in our personal lives, in financial and legal matters, and in leadership and management. For comprehensive reviews by Jon O'Rourke and others, visit the UAA website by clicking [here](#).

## Alumni Profile: Toni Christiansen



Toni and daughter Kristin

Inspired by her studies in the Soviet Union, Greece, and Fulbright scholarships in India as an educator writing curriculum for secondary teachers on cultural awareness and diversity, Toni Christiansen's second career began when she joined the Agency for International Development (USAID) as an International Development Intern in 1979.

Introduction to various leadership, management, and negotiation styles by dynamic officers and mentors in USAID/Washington's Latin America and Caribbean Bureau and the Middle East prepared her well for working with diverse teams and country representatives.

The USAID knowledge and experience advancing programs and contracts in many challenging environments proved to be an excellent platform for her transition to an international career in the private sector after retiring from USAID in 2003.

Although cooking and auto repair were never among Toni's top interests, after retirement from USAID, she was hired as Chief Operating Officer (COO) and General Manager of a start-up Jordanian company that grew to be a multimillion-dollar catering business. She joined a second company as COO and Regional Vice-President for Business Development, with a leading, multibillion-dollar U.S./Jordanian/Saudi Arabian company dealing with U.S. Government vehicle maintenance, design-build, supply chain management, and food supply contracts. During the time she worked for ME companies, Toni lived in Dubai, U.A.E., Jordan and traveled extensively throughout the Middle East, Afghanistan, and Central Asia.

Most recently, Toni has consulted on contracts related to demand-based workforce development, India/Afghan hospital and university partnerships, and a policy paper for an Afghan master's degree for Education Leadership and Management. Of late, she developed a business/design curriculum for Afghan women entrepreneurs that is featured on "The Diplomatic Society Review" website. Toni also moderated a high-level United Nations Development Program panel on Syrian refugee issues in Jordan and presented the findings at a European Bank for Reconstruction and Development donor meeting in London. She also serves on education, business boards and is a partner of a company doing business in Mozambique.

Toni's experience in C-Suites and as an executive in both diplomatic and corporate entities has been invaluable in advancing business/development goals, leading multicultural teams, and achieving compliant results. That said, throughout her careers, her dedication, cultivated at USAID, to economic growth emphasizing education and workforce preparedness endures.

In her leisure time, Toni swims, skis, and travels to see her multi-lingual daughter who is based in Geneva, Switzerland working for a non-profit organization focused on international conflict resolution and mediation. Toni currently resides in the Washington DC area.

## **Newsletter Schedule**

The next UAA newsletter will be sent on March 1, and subsequent newsletters will be published on the first Monday of each month. If you have information you would like to share with your fellow alumni, your contributions are welcomed. Please send the information and, if possible, include a captioned picture of the event, date, and people shown to [office@usaidalumni.org](mailto:office@usaidalumni.org).

**Make Your 2021 UAA Membership Contribution**

**USAID Alumni Association**

