

Summary of USAID Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) Bureau Briefing for UAA Development Issues Committee (DIC), April 14, 2021

Steve Giddings, Co-Chair with Steve Haykin of the UAA Development Issues Committee, opened the Zoom meeting open to all alumni registered with the UAA by providing some background on the Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) between the UAA and USAID signed in June, 2020 and the subsequent Gratuitous Services Agreement (GSA) Template. The MOU provides for collaboration between USAID and the UAA in a number of areas, including leadership and mentoring, public outreach and communications and support to USAID strategy, policy, program and activities -- the focus of today's discussion. The GSA Template provides a framework for UAA members to volunteer their services to USAID. The briefing from the Policy, Planning and Learning (PPL) Bureau is designed to bring alumni up to speed on recent developments in policy and programming in the hope that it will pique the interest of those participating in the meeting to volunteer their expertise, knowledge and perspectives to further USAID's mission. Including the USAID briefing team 102 people participated in the session.

After the background introduction, Steve Giddings introduced Michele Sumilas, recently appointed as Assistant to the USAID Administrator for PPL. Michele had been the Chief of Staff at USAID under the Obama administration and subsequently the Executive Director of Bread for the World before being selected to participate on the Biden transition team and then appointed as the AA for PPL. Michele said she was delighted to be back at USAID and to be working with Samantha Power once she is confirmed as Administrator. She also highlighted the inclusion of USAID in the NSC and the appointment of Gayle Smith as the lead at State for the COVID-19 international response. Her attention during her first few weeks has been on the COVID-19 response and U.S. border issues -- including assistance to the Northern Triangle. She also highlighted the need for attention to diversity and inclusion issues at USAID and backsliding on democratic governance in a number of countries.

She then introduced those in the leadership of PPL who provided briefings on various aspects of the Bureau's priorities: Joshua Kaufman, Director of the Policy Office; Kathryn Stevens, Director of the Strategic and Policy Planning (SPP) Office; Aye Aye Thwin, Director of the Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research (LER) and Courtney Maloney, Deputy Director of the Program Office.

Josh Kaufman highlighted 6 major challenges confronting USAID today: COVID-19, climate change, strategic competition with China, conflict and state collapse, democratic backsliding and diversity, inclusion and racial equity. Policy work will focus on participation in the National Security Strategy, the Joint (with State) Strategic Plan and the USAID Policy Framework. He noted PPL is working with the newly created COVID-19 Task Force to ensure an Agency-wide response to the pandemic and highlighted the \$5 billion allocated to USAID for the COVID-19 response.

Kathryn Stevens noted that over 60 Country Development Cooperation Strategies (CDCSs), Regional Economic Cooperation Projects (RECs) and Strategic Frameworks had been approved in 2020 and the design processes streamlined (35 page limit and a 9 month time limit). In 2021

SPP will focus on implementation and adaptation, improving Agency processes throughout the program cycle and technical assistance and capacity building of Missions. She noted that recent revisions to ADS 201 will allow for traditional “projects” to be optional (depending on country conditions and Mission capacity) with a shorter design process and streamlined requirements and that the focus will be more on activity design to allow for quicker design and adaptation. Planning and reporting requirements are also being streamlined. She sees several areas for collaboration between the UAA and USAID, including mentoring and knowledge exchange with UAA members, building “links between UAA members and Missions and learning from UAA members on policy reform and negotiations.

Aye Aye Thwin highlighted the priorities of LER are: strengthening the capacity of USAID to build and use evidence to support decisions; providing support to operating units and Missions on how to measure and evaluate programs as part of an integrated program cycle (e.g. annual evaluation plans); and supporting knowledge management and organizational learning (KMOL). LER will be working with a new cohort of 10 Missions on KMOL in 2021. She also cited the need to incorporate learning from local stakeholders and knowledgeable local experts.

Courtney Maloney noted that the Program Office’s (PO)s major function is to support USAID’s 300+ Program Officers and is responsible for recruitment, career management, training and education and professional development of the Backstop 2. The PO does surveys of Mission Directors, Deputy Directors, Program Officers and FSNs to identify professional and career development needs, core competencies, skill gaps and engagement preferences. The PO makes monthly calls to the field to share information, provide guidance and answers to frequently asked questions such as assignments and bidding and performance and promotion.

After the USAID presentations, Steve Haykin fielded questions from the participants and responses from the USAID staffers. Responses included : (1) On the Journey to Self-Reliance (J2SL), USAID anticipates a new policy framework under Samantha Power which will incorporate the principles of J2SL. The Country Roadmaps have enabled a standardized set of goals which may evolve into some sort of Country Development Dashboards. (2) Food Security has taken on new aspects as the COVID-19 pandemic has affected broader development issues (e.g. loss of household income). (3) On the personnel side the Agency is bolstering efforts to recruit new FS and CS staff as it expects new responsibilities under the Biden administration. (4) Michele Sumilas highlighted the need to reunite the policy, planning and budget within USAID, as State’s F Bureau still maintains overall budget responsibilities for USAID. (5) On the Northern Triangle, USAID has created a Task Force to work with State and the NSC, which includes OTI and the Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance, to address the root causes of the migration problem but solutions are complicated and will take time. (6) On China, a “Tri-Agency” group, which includes USAID, is in the process of determining just how it will respond to the challenge. (7) USAID is ramping up its efforts around climate change in coordination with Special Envoy Kerry’s Office. While adaptation and resilience have traditionally been a focus of USAID, new aspects include climate change finance and mitigation (e.g. low carbon growth in energy programs). Climate change cuts across all USAID bureaus and PPL tries to coordinate efforts.

Steve Giddings concluded the session by noting that this session represented the beginning -- not the end -- of UAA collaboration with USAID on PPL related issues. The UAA will follow up with members on ways in which they can contribute, on a voluntary basis, to PPL efforts to improve the program cycle, from strategy to activity development and implementation to evaluation and learning. Some pilot efforts will be discussed over the coming weeks with the PPL staff and the UAA. He again thanked the USAID PPL staffers for their willingness to share their thoughts with the UAA and reiterated that the UAA is excited to explore areas of further collaboration between our organizations.

The slides from the USAID presenters can be accessed by clicking here. (*Tish - please include a link to the slides*)