

**ADVISORY COMMITTEE ON VOLUNTARY FOREIGN AID**

**Public Meeting  
October 2, 2008**

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## OPENING REMARKS

Dr. John Sullivan, ACVFA Chair, welcomed attendees and introduced Jack Galbraith, President and CEO of the Catholic Medical Mission Board and the newest member of ACVFA. ACVFA has been working on recommendations to the Administrator regarding the Foreign Assistance Framework. The Democracy and Governance and Economic Growth case studies, which give examples of how democracy is linked to economic growth, have been published and are on the ACVFA Web page. One item of particular importance to USAID and to the Administrator is the effort to develop a better outreach capability, to inform the public and build support for U.S. foreign assistance. To that end ACVFA formed the Public Outreach Subcommittee, co-chaired by Paul Clark, Principal of Paul Clark Communications, and Sig Rogich, Principal of the Rogich Communications Group. Its other members are Deborah Benson, ACVFA Member and Vice President of Media and Government Relations for Operation Blessing; Craig Charney, President of Charney Research; Mike Kiernan, Senior Director of Media and Communications for Save the Children; Mike McCurry, Principal of Public Strategies Washington, Inc.; William Reese, ACVFA Member and President and CEO of the International Youth Foundation; Johanna Schneider, ACVFA Member and Executive Director of External Relations for the Business Roundtable; Robert Alton Tappan, President of Weber Merritt Public Affairs; and Ellen Yount, Senior Associate and Chief Information Officer for Management Systems International. The Subcommittee has drafted an initial set of recommendations.

## ACVFA SUBCOMMITTEE ON PUBLIC OUTREACH RECOMMENDATIONS

**Paul Clark**, *Principal, Paul Clark Communications, and Co-Chair, ACVFA Subcommittee on Public Outreach*

Mr. Clark thanked the Administrator for her support and help as the subcommittee drafted its report; Jocelyn Rowe, ACVFA's Executive Director, for organizing their work; interns Rachel George and Amanda Pope; and the staff of USAID's Legislative and Public Affairs Bureau for talking frankly to the subcommittee about the bureau's successes and problems. He also thanked all the members of the subcommittee.

The world is shrinking. News cycles run 24 hours a day: if something happens anywhere in the world, it is instantly on the news. At the same time, the world is seeing the rise of new economic powers like India and China, and of nonstate, ideologically based security threats. In this changing world, public outreach is increasing in importance. USAID must understand that as important as its programs are, perceptions matter just as much. If USAID does good works and no one knows about them, or conversely if people think that the Agency is doing too much or spending too much money, then it hasn't accomplished what it could.

Research has shown that Americans' perceptions of foreign aid are mostly incorrect. Most Americans believe that 40 percent of the U.S. budget goes to foreign assistance. Perhaps as a

result, two-thirds want to reduce the amount of money going to foreign aid. A recent survey by the Gates Foundation shows that two-thirds of Americans have no opinion on whether or not foreign aid has been effective, and only one in five believes that the most needy people in the world are receiving aid.

Recipients' knowledge of U.S. assistance isn't much more accurate. In a 2004 survey, college-educated Egyptians and Indonesians estimated that over the previous ten years, U.S. aid to their countries had totaled a couple of million dollars. In fact, the United States provided \$7 billion to Egypt and \$1 billion to Indonesia over that period. That gap between perception and reality has a definite effect on opinions. Surveys conducted in Indonesia in 2006 showed a direct correlation between awareness of U.S. foreign assistance and favorable views of the United States.

The subcommittee's conclusion, therefore, is that USAID must take a more strategic and proactive approach to communications, both at home and abroad. In particular, the subcommittee recommends the following strategies:

- Start by convincing USAID's own leaders that communications are important.
- Build upon existing strengths, notably USAID's strong partnerships with nongovernmental organizations (NGOs) and private voluntary organizations (PVOs).
- Be more proactive and less reactive in dealings with the media. Press releases are the worst possible type of communications, and if communications staff members are receiving phone calls and not initiating them, they are not communicating effectively.
- Expand USAID's own communications staff. Perhaps half a dozen people in the Agency handle communications, working with a total budget of \$1.7 million. Worse, those six people don't actually work for USAID but for the State Department, which has its own priorities and problems.
- Do more polling, and better polling. Without polling and focus-group testing, the Agency will never be able to measure the results of its communications efforts.
- Overseas, use local firms for communications and polling to avoid cultural and jargon problems.
- Train communicators. Communications is a skill like any other, and not an easy one to learn.
- Institutionalize the Development Outreach and Communications (DOCs) program as one of the most important venues for this training.
- Put human faces to communications outreach. Use local celebrities and avoid data and jargon.
- Provide adequate resources, especially for communications with Congress. Above all, Members of Congress want not to be surprised—they want to be informed in advance. Unfortunately, today communications with Congress is so understaffed as to be almost negligible.

**Respondent: Kristin Lord**, *Fellow in Foreign Policy Studies and the Project on U.S. Relations with the Islamic World, Brookings Institution*

Communications and public outreach are a serious and important part of USAID activities. Domestically, Americans need and deserve to know how their tax dollars are spent and what impact that investment has on the health and well-being of people around the world. They also need to understand how this investment serves global humanitarian interests and American national security and economic interests. Unfortunately, today Americans do not understand the level or focus of our country's foreign-assistance programs. Addressing the mismatch between perception and reality will serve a valuable purpose.

Internationally, public outreach also may advance development objectives, by spreading important information, encouraging citizens to work cooperatively with USAID and its partners, and giving people a more accurate view of how America is engaging with their country. This can lead to a more conducive climate for development work and advance national security and economic interests.

A few points of constructive criticism on the subcommittee's draft:

First, the subcommittee might more carefully delineate the various goals, audiences, and methods of public outreach. Though the current paper emphasizes similarities in the messages and means of communicating with domestic and foreign audiences, there are also some very important differences. What Americans see and hear in messages is not necessarily the same as what people from other systems and cultures hear. Even the most experienced communications professionals can be surprised at how messages they thought would be effective are in fact received.

Also, the means of reaching domestic and various kinds of foreign audiences must be quite different. For example, the paper calls for greater use of new communication tools such as social-networking technologies. That's a laudable goal not just in the West, but also in a country such as Egypt, now the home of the third-greatest number of Facebook users in the world. But at the same time we should remember that young Egyptians use Facebook, not all Egyptians, and in the rest of Africa very few people use social-networking technologies at all. In the rest of Africa radio may be a more effective communications tool. And even though newspapers may be suffering in North America, they are booming in India. In short, communications with foreign audiences must be carefully tailored.

Similarly, the paper calls for the continued use of celebrities to attract positive attention, a tried and true method of communication. But as Paul Clark noted, the celebrities must be carefully chosen. A Hollywood celebrity may not be as appropriate as someone who looks and sounds like the audience a particular USAID program is trying to reach.

Second, effective public outreach, especially overseas, requires much more study. Though the data available are useful, they are not sufficient to draw conclusions about

which efforts are effective and which are not. Anecdotal evidence suggests that disaster relief assistance is interpreted very differently than, for example, long-term educational assistance or infrastructure assistance. Along the same lines, research is needed to define what types of communication are most effective, under what circumstances foreign assistance leads to positive changes in public opinion, and for how long those changes endure. A dramatic effort like the humanitarian relief following the earthquakes in Pakistan can cause a positive change in public opinion, but that change subsides in a few months.

Third, the paper should rank the objectives of public outreach in order of priority and determine which strategies and tactics will best accomplish the more important objectives. It should also recognize that there may be tensions among objectives. For example, if one goal of a program is to bolster a struggling allied government, publicizing U.S. assistance may actually undermine that goal. If the goal is to encourage skeptical populations to immunize their children against polio, one might not want to publicize either the United States' or the national government's role. Conversely, if the goal is to promote positive opinions about America, then one wouldn't want to limit communications just to USAID programs but publicize all the other beneficial charitable and development programs undertaken by Americans.

Finally, we know very little about the effect of foreign assistance on public opinion at all. It seems intuitively correct that if we do something good for people and they know about it, they will feel more positively about us. But social science research suggests that the reality may be more complex. According to social psychologists, giving creates a social relationship between givers and recipients in which the former are placed in a position of superiority. That's why gift exchange is such an important part of most cultures. You give a gift to someone and they give you one back: that reciprocity underscores your equal footing. When the reciprocity breaks down recipients sometimes develop not gratitude but actual hostility.

There's clearly no direct correlation between foreign assistance and positive opinions about the United States. If there were, Egyptians would be the most America-loving country in the world. On the other hand, certainly some development work does engender positive opinion. We need to understand this relationship much better, and should be careful about jumping to conclusions about the likely impact of our outreach.

It is worth remembering that everything USAID and its partners and workers do is part of its message. People do not distinguish between official public service announcements from USAID and their own observations about how aid workers behave, where they live, what kind of cars they drive, how they spend their time, who they work with, who they don't work with. USAID activities communicate all the time in ways that are intended or not intended, accurately perceived or not accurately perceived. Though public outreach is important, if USAID spends too much money or effort on outreach, people may actually question its priorities.

## Discussion and Questions

Panelists:

**Robert Tappan**, *President, Weber Merritt Public Affairs, and Member, ACVFA Subcommittee on Public Outreach*

**Craig Charney**, *President, Charney Research, and Member, ACVFA Subcommittee on Public Outreach*

**Ellen Yount**, *Senior Associate and Chief Information Officer, Management Systems International, and Member, ACVFA Subcommittee on Public Outreach*

**William Reese**, *ACVFA Member, President and CEO, International Youth Foundation, and Member, ACVFA Subcommittee on Public Outreach*

**Deborah Benson**, *ACVFA Member, Vice President of Media and Government Relations, Operation Blessing, and Member, ACVFA Subcommittee on Public Outreach*

**Mike Kiernan**, *Senior Director, Media and Communications, Save the Children, and Member, ACVFA Subcommittee on Public Outreach*

**Mr. Charney** said that much of what Kristin Lord said is valuable and he would endorse her call for the collection of more data on the impact of communications programs. But a little bit more is known about the nature of communications than her remarks might have suggested. One of the key things we do understand is that what matters is not just communications at a given moment but the flow of communications. Humanitarian assistance has a fading impact on public opinion partly because it's a momentary thing supported by free media exposure that is not sustained. One of the most remarkable exceptions to that pattern occurred in Indonesia where after the humanitarian crisis of December 2004, USAID launched a communications program to publicize aid efforts, which lasted through most of 2005 in Indonesia's five big cities. During most of 2005, America's image as a whole was relatively positive in Indonesia. The communications program went off the air in December of 2005 and by April of 2006 America's stock in Indonesia had nosedived.

If USAID does not push its own messages in earned media, in paid media, through the actions of private and voluntary partners, then other messages will fill the vacuum. Those messages include images of America as the dealer of death, destruction, and domination.

The series of case studies that includes that Indonesian example also examined USAID's communications efforts in Lebanon, Bosnia, and various other countries. Those studies showed a correlation not just between a communications effort and the image of USAID, but between the image of USAID and the image of the United States. Promoting American overseas efforts does help. Likewise, as Kristin Lord said, there is no reason to focus only on American official development assistance. PVOs represent important facets of American aid that should also be explained.

**Ms. Yount** said that the subcommittee agreed unanimously about the need for more polling. In the last four years USAID has conducted polls in only ten countries. That is not to say that USAID alone has to bring resources to the table. For example, the State

Department's research arm does polling continuously. But the State Department does not ask questions about foreign aid consistently; its questions have been much more focused on U.S. foreign policy.

**Mr. Clark** noted that the report does not address various proposals to reorganize USAID or grant the Agency cabinet status.

**Sam Worthington**, ACVFA Member, observed that in many ways the U.S. international nonprofit community has been the face of effective development to the American people. The organizations in the InterAction community together probably spend \$500 million a year in fundraising messages aimed at the American people. Some organizations have communications budgets in the range of \$50 million a year and conduct thousands of focus groups. Since USAID's communication budget is so much smaller than some of its larger NGO partners, he asked, how can the Agency work best with this community?

**Mr. Kiernan** responded that the NGO community and USAID alike are much more aware of the importance of branding than they were even five years ago. Interestingly, in the field branding is not necessarily a good thing. When Save the Children responded to the humanitarian crisis in Burma, in some areas the local authorities wanted to see the organization's brand, and in other areas they didn't. Both USAID and the NGO community need to be much more creative and flexible in how they use their brands. He also noted that USAID never has coordinated its messages with the NGO community. NGOs are in a branding war at the moment, among themselves and with USAID, and that must stop.

**Ms. Yount** added that that was why it was so important to have communications professionals in the field speaking for USAID. For many years there was only one individual authorized to speak for the U.S. government apart from the ambassador, which was not effective. Many State Department officers don't understand development and can't speak for it.

**Ms. Benson** said that USAID should emphasize its partnerships with other entities—including well-known NGOs, universities, and other government agencies—in its communications with Americans.

**Mr. Worthington** noted that one of the key lessons USAID has learned is that development education is one of the best ways to reach the American people. He asked whether the subcommittee had considered some of the successful European models for development education.

**Ms. Yount** said that the subcommittee did consider development education, though not in a historical context. This portion of USAID's funding is abysmally low at present, perhaps \$25,000 or \$50,000. Other international development agencies have much more robust programs at the primary, secondary, and university level. Given the Agency's relationship with universities across the country, that's one area that could definitely see improvement.



**Judith Hermanson**, ACVFA Member, asked how USAID should incorporate the idea of reciprocity Ms. Lord mentioned into its messages.

**Mr. Tappan** said that in part it required using language carefully, talking in terms of true partnership.

**Mr. Charney** said it was possible to overstate the potential negative consequences of foreign aid. In focus groups, people in Muslim countries that are today hostile to the United States have very positive recollections of getting food assistance from USAID, for example, or studying at USAID libraries. But today USAID projects have become much less visible. USAID is helping the Egyptian government overhaul the Cairo sewers, and the Egyptian public doesn't know about it. But they know that the Japanese built them an opera house. Likewise, no one in Indonesia knew that the United States provided \$75 million to help with that nation's first direct elections in 2004, but everyone knew that the Japanese provided the ballot boxes because the rising sun was there on the bottom.

On the other hand, the right language is very important. Mr. Charney said his group had tested two alternative messages: The first said, "We are helping you, we want to see you develop because you are helping to fight the war on terror." That message was very unpopular. The second focused on the idea of respectful partnerships, saying, "You are the forces of change and we are going to help you because it's in our interest as well as yours." People were much more open to that message.

That was also the message that worked best in the United States. USAID can't have a message of partnership abroad while using a domestic message that says, "We've got to give money to these people so they don't fly airplanes into our tall buildings."

**Ms. Yount** noted that in every country where USAID has worked on an integrated, paid media campaign, the Agency has tried to test its messages with focus groups and polling. But that requires resources, and in many cases USAID has been hamstrung by the lack of them.

**Ms. Lord** agreed in general that if people are more aware of foreign assistance, they will feel more positively toward the United States. But the public diplomacy world, for example, often assumes that all one has to do is to let people know all the good things the United States is doing for them. That kind of mindset leads to messages that don't emphasize partnership and empowerment, and those messages are more likely to lead to bad outcomes.

**Elise Fiber Smith**, ACVFA Member, asked how USAID could take big issues like the food crisis and organize its messages around them to make an impact.

**Mr. Kiernan** said that one of the key things to understand is that USAID can't describe everything it does or NGOs do. The Agency needs to pick one or two signature activities

that reach people's heads and hearts. For example, helping girls attend school can be a powerful story. USAID can also argue that it is an innovator: it frequently goes to areas where others fear to tread, sets up programs, and watches as others follow. Finally, in terms of "reciprocity," USAID has a huge program training community health workers to save the lives of children under five throughout the world. It's a highly successful program, and those community health workers should be celebrated as an example of true reciprocity: USAID is providing the training, but they are doing the work.

**Corey Griffin**, ACVFA Member, wondered why no one had yet mentioned the appropriations constraints on USAID's messaging to the American public. He also said that while USAID's communications team at USAID is small, it is nimble, and has been very impressive in announcing public-private partnerships.

**Ted Weihe**, ACVFA Member, said that there were in fact no prohibitions preventing USAID from delivering messages to the public, so long as they were "not propaganda." USAID has in the past tried various types of communications, on its own and with partners, but there hasn't been much discussion of those experiences.

**Ms. Yount** added that it was a common misperception that USAID is subject to the Smith-Mundt Act, which prohibits the State Department from propagandizing in the United States. USAID is not subject to the same provision, according to the USAID general counsel's office.

**Queen Mother Dr. Delois Blakely**, Community Mayor of Harlem, asked how USAID is communicating to leaders around the world what it is doing in their countries. Is the Agency meeting their needs in its communications or its own needs? She said it was important to build consensus from the bottom up, reaching out to civil society.

**Dustin Tinkley**, graduate student in political science, Princeton University, said that other aid agencies around the world, notably Norway's, have been conducting this kind of outreach and research into the results for many years. He asked how the subcommittee has drawn on their experience. He noted that various groups of people in the United States may be more or less receptive to messages about foreign aid and asked whether the subcommittee had considered the prospect of microtargeting. Finally, he asked what does the subcommittee hope to convince people to do once they know more about U.S. foreign aid.

**Mr. Tappan** said that the goal is to convince Americans to support rather than oppose legislators who appropriate funds for foreign aid.

**Mr. Charney** said that the question of objectives is a good one. Domestically, the goal has to be a better-informed public whose preferences are better reflected in public policy. Those preferences are poorly reflected at present, but they are also ill-informed. When it comes to foreign audiences, there are several objectives, not all of which will coincide with other foreign-policy aims. One objective might simply be to communicate about programs so that people know why health inspectors or vaccination teams are

coming to their village. A second might be to win friends and influence people in favor of the United States. A third might be to demonstrate through the act of communication a different kind of relationship, because explanation, not doing things in secret, is an aspect of a respectful relationship.

The subcommittee wasn't aware of Norway's work, he said, and would love to hear more about it.

Microtargeting is certainly a good idea, but in this country there's hasn't even been any macrotargeting because there still is not enough good communications research on this topic. We also should recognize that at this point the public knows so little about foreign aid that most opinion polling is actually misleading. People have to know that only 0.5 percent of the federal budget goes to development assistance before opinion polling about foreign aid can be credible.

**Mr. Reese** said he was uncertain how great the payoffs of renewed Biden-Bell-type investments of U.S. government money could really be. For example, colleges and universities are already doing so much more to study the Third World today than they did thirty years ago. The important question is how to explain to professors and students that foreign aid is effective and important. It doesn't matter whether the public knows we spent 0.5 percent of the U.S. budget on foreign aid rather than 2 percent or 40 percent; what matters is whether the public sees impact and believes that progress is being made. Meanwhile, USAID and its NGO partners have assets in the United States public that they don't use well. There are U.S. soldiers fighting in Third World countries rather than in Europe or parts of Asia as in previous generations. There are American churches all over the world. American students now study all over Africa and Latin America rather than merely Italy, Germany, and France. There are many, many immigrants with special knowledge of their home countries' languages and cultures. How might we use these Americans—who understand the world today better than their counterparts of a generation ago did—to improve public awareness and understanding? USAID must convince Americans that America's engagement with the world is important to national security and our long-term economic health, as well as appeal to our humanitarian instincts. And yet NGOs and USAID are often reluctant about being tied to national security interests or foreign policy. We need to help the American public see the link between a good foreign-aid program and our long-term foreign-policy and national security interests.

**Jennifer Guertin** of Johns Hopkins asked whether the subcommittee's recommendations included better use of local media.

**Ms. Yount** said that all overseas campaigns do use local media.

**Pamela Mandel**, a retired foreign-service officer from USAID, said that recently a group of USAID alumni met to discuss creating a working group, one of whose purposes will be to do outreach communications within the United States. As a retired member of the

government one can work on campaigns and speak in communities in support of foreign aid. Turnout to the first meeting suggests that there is significant interest.

**Ms. Benson** said that the subcommittee would like to speak with that working group soon. USAID's current public relations strategy includes an effort to bring retired foreign-service officers, or former Peace Corps workers, to local gatherings to talk. Their stories could also be posted on social-networking sites like YouTube.

**John Sullivan**, ACVFA Chairman, invited further comments. They should be e-mailed to Jocelyn Rowe at [jrowe@usaid.gov](mailto:jrowe@usaid.gov).

### KEYNOTE ADDRESS

**Henrietta H. Fore**, *Administrator, USAID, and Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance, U.S. Department of State*

Administrator Fore thanked ACVFA for its work over the past year, in particular for the constructive recommendations of its subcommittees and its outreach to the public. She thanked John Sullivan, ACVFA Chair, and Carol Adelman, ACVFA Vice-Chair, for their leadership. She welcomed the newest member of ACVFA, Jack Galbraith, President and CEO of the Catholic Medical Mission Board and previously a member of the Presidential Advisory Council on HIV/AIDS. Finally, she thanked ACVFA Members Helene Gayle and Michael Nyenhuis for helping to organize ACVFA's recent meeting in Atlanta, of which she said she'd heard glowing reports.

Case studies on the linkage between democratic governance and economic growth are available at today's meeting. These studies examine fourteen countries, showing the positive and durable results of foreign-assistance projects. One case study in Egypt highlights the work USAID and its partner, the American Development Foundation, have done to help small business associations build effective networks and thus become better advocates for small and medium-sized enterprises with local and national governing authorities.

The principles of free markets and free societies highlighted in these studies are those that the United States believes in strongly:

- Growth begins with competitive firms.
- Economic governance, laws, and environment drive growth.
- The availability of finance, infrastructure, and an educated and healthy workforce can influence the rate and direction of growth.

Other important principles include the enforcement of anticorruption measures and an independent banking system that is fairly regulated.

The Administrator said that last February she asked ACVFA to consider establishing a new subcommittee focused on ways to strengthen the American consensus for foreign

assistance. ACVFA has done so, and the Administrator thanked the Public Outreach Subcommittee's co-chairs and members for their work. It is very important to increase public knowledge and understanding of U.S. foreign-assistance activities. The American people need to know how their tax dollars are being used overseas and the successes that their resources have engendered. Overseas, the citizens of countries partnering with the United States must know that the support of their national development plans comes from the American people.

The subcommittee's report highlights the fact that knowledge of U.S. foreign assistance is limited. Neither Americans nor nationals of the more than 100 countries where USAID and its partners have worked, in some cases for decades, know very much about the Agency's efforts. The report encourages USAID to ask current and former USAID staff to explain the Agency's work in their hometowns and overseas, and to continue to make use of the excellent public affairs officers in USAID missions. The draft report reflects numerous consultations and the best thinking of leaders in public affairs. The Administrator said she looked forward to receiving the final version.

At the country level, USAID has successfully implemented public affairs programs in countries such as Indonesia and Lebanon. Within the past few days, the Agency has taken a significant step forward by initiating a new campaign in Pakistan, with the aim of increasing the Pakistani people's awareness and understanding of USAID's partnership with their nation. The campaign, modeled on best practices from the private sector, will be multifaceted, using radio, television, billboards, and print ads. There are still many challenges, but the Agency is seeing better coordination between missions and U.S. embassy public affairs officers. Missions must be sure to allocate the funds needed for public outreach and evaluations to monitor the effectiveness of that outreach.

USAID has now graduated its first two classes of foreign-service officers under the Development Leadership Initiative, and is training a third. John Sullivan and Ted Weihe have had a chance to address these classes, educating them about the important role ACVFA plays in providing advice on behalf of the NGO and PVO community. These new officers are brimming with enthusiasm, idealism, and talent. Again and again they say that working for USAID is a special calling for them.

They represent the talent and diversity that USAID needs: they include an Eagle Scout, a military serviceman, a former Capitol Hill aide, a former aide to a U.S. Supreme Court Justice, journalists, lawyers, social workers, business executives, and entrepreneurs. They speak many languages, all of which will be important for the years ahead. About half are former Peace Corps volunteers. About half have some experience in business. More than half are women. Almost all have experience overseas.

The Administrator thanked all those in the ACVFA community who have helped bring USAID these new foreign-service officers.

The previous week, the Administrator said, she attended the United Nations General Assembly. After President Bush spoke to the General Assembly he attended a USAID

working group meeting on food security. The President cares deeply about how public and private sectors can work together to solve global hunger. The working group included the leaders of NGOs, corporations, universities, foundations, and the major multilateral institutions responsible for food assistance. The President talked about how he feels that hunger represents the next wave of assistance challenges, and explained that while the U.S. government has responded with a two-year, \$5 billion initiative, the real onus now lies on the private sector.

USAID also hosted a working group with African heads of state to share thoughts about how to help small farmers throughout Africa and big agribusiness around the world. This interesting discussion will be continued at the World Bank meetings in mid-October. USAID also sponsored an event called MarketPlace, showing some of the videos the Agency has produced about the challenges that we all face and the solutions that the development community has devised. Thousands of people attended.

USAID discussed literacy with First Lady Laura Bush, and took part in the launch of a new literacy fund. The Agency participated in dozens of bilateral meetings with heads of state and senior government officials, discussing malaria, HIV/AIDS, education, science, the environment, elections, democracy, laws, economic growth, and more.

A month ago, the Administrator also represented the United States in Accra, Ghana, at the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, the midpoint review of progress three years after the Paris Declaration. These three days of intense discussions showcased multidonor projects in which Denmark, the United Kingdom, the Netherlands, Norway, the United States, host countries, and NGOs all worked together. The result of these discussions was a realistically ambitious agenda to accelerate progress toward the goals of the Paris Declaration, called the Accra Agenda for Action (AAA). A few key points about the AAA:

First, it reflects American values. It deepens democratic ownership, recognizes civil society organizations as actors in their own right, and strengthens transparency and mutual accountability for development results.

Second, the AAA arose from broad and deep consultations. Partner countries in the developing world were well prepared and highly organized to achieve their priorities.

Third, the U.S. government and elements of U.S. civil society involved in delivering assistance will have to change in order to meet their commitments and make their aid more effective. It is essential that all reorient their programs so that host country governments are at the center of planning.

USAID also continues to make progress in advancing toward its vision of a Global Development Commons. During the Commons' pilot phase, the Agency has chosen to focus on demonstrating the potential of information and communication technology to transform how the development community discusses issues, does business, and communicates with new partners. Through the Commons, USAID is building

partnerships to use Geographic Information Systems (GIS) to track, report, coordinate, and share information. The Commons' first pilot program involves a GIS partnership in West Africa, supporting the African Union's efforts to develop better functioning trade corridors, which should improve the region's prosperity and food security. Its second GIS pilot program focuses on disaster management in Bangladesh.

USAID is also working with Google to upgrade its search tools. Soon any USAID-funded Web site will be accessible through these search engines, as will development information from all U.S. government agencies and departments.

The Administrator closed by offering her thanks again to those in ACVFA for their ideas, energy, and excitement. It is in no small part due to ACVFA's assistance and guidance that USAID is now in the midst of a renaissance. Day by day USAID is building a stronger foreign-service officer corps and stronger partnerships. USAID knows that it must lead among the agencies in the U.S. government, just as the United States must lead in the international community.

### **Discussion and Questions**

**Carol Adelman**, ACVFA Vice Chair, asked whether the idea of public-private partnerships was embedded enough in the foreign-assistance mindset to be bipartisan.

**Administrator Fore** said that many people do have a new outlook, seeing foreign assistance as part of the national interest, their corporate interest, or their organizational interest in a way that crosses all sectors and both parties. But it is not yet embedded enough. USAID is still struggling to open its procurement process, and to overcome limits set internally and by Congress.

**John Sullivan**, ACVFA Chair, noted that Sen. Richard Durbin (D-IL) has submitted legislation to dramatically expand the number of foreign-service officers, as ACVFA has recommended. He asked about the outlook for that legislation in the next Congress. He further noted that there is a pent-up demand for staff in all areas, and opinions may differ about which demands should be met first.

**Administrator Fore** said that Sen. Durbin's bill is a good step forward, but will need to be matched by appropriations. In the spring, Members of Congress who believe in this bill must educate their colleagues.

**Ritu Sharma Fox**, ACVFA Member, pointed out that as people consider new structures and ideas for USAID in a new presidential administration, they tend to talk about what they would like to change. She asked what the Administrator thought USAID should try to retain.

**Administrator Fore** offered two items. First, the new commitment to hiring more staff, because without new blood, organizations become inward-looking. Second, she said her second position as Director of U.S. Foreign Assistance had greatly helped her affect

USAID's future. Any function that can unite what are otherwise fragmented efforts is very helpful.

**Craig Charney**, President of Charney Research and Member of the ACVFA Subcommittee on Public Outreach, said that some of the people who met with the Administrator at Columbia University are still trying to figure out how they should relate to the Global Development Commons. Is it merely a source of information? Can members of the public supply it with information?

**Administrator Fore** said that the first step is simply better access to information through a more powerful search engine. A second step will be to foster communities of interest to exchange ideas and best practices on important subjects. A third element will consist of a forum to buy and sell services.

**Sam Worthington**, ACVFA Member, said that the ACVFA community has been talking a great deal about earmarks. He asked whether there were ways to organize resources that offered more flexibility at the mission level and preserved funds at a time of potentially shrinking budgets.

**Administrator Fore** said that USAID has struggled to create pools of funds such that when the Agency has needs, it can move money to meet them. What USAID and ACVFA could do now is begin to discuss new ideas to offer the new Congress. Haiti is recovering from hurricanes at the moment, for example, and USAID has health funds to help but no education funds.

**Judith Hermanson**, ACVFA Member, asked how the ACVFA community might be better partners to USAID.

**Administrator Fore** said she would return to ACVFA with an answer.

**Queen Mother Dr. Delois Blakeley**, Community Mayor of Harlem, asked how USAID could improve its partnership relationships with respect to gender issues. She also offered her own product, Queen Mother Coffee, for potential USAID action.

**Bob McAlister**, a former member of the International Rescue Committee, former Peace Corps director in three countries in Africa, former foreign-service officer, and former aide to Sen. Claiborne Pell (D-RI), said that he was very impressed by Administrator Fore. He argued that there should be a bipartisan effort to keep her as Administrator no matter who wins the election.

**Charles Uphouse** of Bread for the World said he was interested in the Administrator's comment about putting developing countries in the driver's seat. He asked how that might come about, and whether it might offer a way of bypassing the earmark process, perhaps under a model similar to the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC).



**Administrator Fore** replied that USAID wants mission directors to work with host countries and follow their development strategies. Some countries have very good national development strategies, and USAID can use those strategies to focus its efforts. She said USAID is familiar with the MCC model because USAID is carrying out 70 percent of that work, and the Agency would be happy to discuss the issue more in the future.

**Dr. Sullivan** pointed out that some countries, like Ghana, have created a framework where private enterprise, civil society, and others have an opportunity for real participation. But in many countries, following the host country's direction ends up meaning government ownership of programs. He asked how USAID can make sure it reacts to more than just government cronies and elites.

**Administrator Fore** said she hoped the Global Development Commons could provide a forum for all partners within a country. USAID's budget planning process this Spring could provide the impetus for those parties to come together. If personal relationships can be forged, they will continue.

**Carol Moore** of Emory University asked about the Administrator's vision for the future of university partnerships.

**Administrator Fore** said that unfortunately, USAID is currently getting funding for basic but not higher education. The Agency did conduct a higher education summit, which included discussions of online research, distance learning, shared curricula, and exchanges of professors, students, and administrators. USAID has an extraordinary history of working with universities abroad and helping them develop links to American universities, but many of those programs have gone unfunded in recent years. The Agency has launched a number of regional higher education summits, including one in Kigali, Rwanda, October 22–24. USAID is particularly focused on science and technology and on ways to double the production of food staples in Africa. The Agency doesn't have enough funding for these scholarships and exchanges, but private foundations, institutions, and organizations could help.

**Dr. Sullivan** asked whether the incredible turmoil now occurring in global financial markets could harm efforts to advocate for the American model—that is, markets, democracy, open societies, innovation, and entrepreneurship.

**Administrator Fore** said that USAID had been thinking about the issue, because when this sort of problem happens at home, one wants to be sure to give the right advice abroad. Some elements that USAID always recommends are more salient than ever here in the United States: competition, a good business environment, regulatory oversight independent of the banking sector, anticorruption efforts. Credit has become a major question in the United States, and is important to businesses and markets around the world as the lifeblood of developing economies. We should gather the lessons learned in the United States, and make sure what we recommend abroad is what has served us well in the United States.