

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
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GARTINI ISA

*Interviewed by: Carole Peasley
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TABLE OF CONTENTS

Early Family and Educational Background

Joins USAID/Indonesia – 1977

- Desire to work in environment which would be corruption-free
- Assistant Project Officer for Education and Participant Training
- Learning by Doing

Education and Participant Training Office (1977 – 1994)

- 10,000 Indonesian Participants to U.S. by 1996
- Higher Education Linkages with U.S. Universities
- USAID and Japanese Cooperation on Creation of Indonesia’s New Open University

FSN Management/Recruitment

- FSNs as Direct Hire USG Employees – not contractors
- Participation in Federal Service Retirement Program

Value of Participant Training Program

- Large Number of High Level Government Officials Studied in U.S.
- “Berkeley Mafia”
- Gender Distribution

USAID Field Office in South Sulawesi

Moves to Office of Voluntary Humanitarian Programs (OVHP) in 1994 – office soon becomes Office of Community and Civic Participation (OC2P)

- All non-advocacy and non-human rights NGO programs transferred from Office of VHP to technical offices
- OC2P builds new portfolio of advocacy and human rights projects
- Legal Aid Foundation – recipient of direct grants from USAID
- Consumer Rights Protection Organization – key to passage of new consumer law in 2000
- Increasing political sensitivity of work and need to protect identities of supported NGOs
- Asia Foundation Programs – including Islam and Civil Society
- Use of Unsolicited Grant Proposals to reach local groups
- Creation of New Legal Aid organization focused on women (LBA-APIK): \$200,000 seed grant leads to major success story
- Asia Foundation – Institutional Development and Legal Reform in Indonesia (IDeAL) Program

Expansion of Human Rights Programming by USAID After 1998

- Broad-based support to many organizations; some through direct USAID grants and some through intermediaries
- Relations with Embassy Political Section
- Her Personal Efforts on Human Rights Front
 - Attendance at trials of students
 - Prison visitations over two year period
- 1998 – Mission Evacuation and Expanded Responsibilities for FSNs
- Donor Coordination and Expanded Effort to Improve the Political Environment
- Electoral Assistance
- Independent Media Support
- Abdurrahman Wahid Elected in 1999

Sustainability of Former Grantees

Asia Foundation's Islam and Civil Society Program – began in 1997; long-term engagement created important communication channels after September 11, 2001

FSN Related Issues

- Collaboration with Other Mission FSNs
- Training
- Preference for Direct Hire FSN Status – and problems with contractual approach
- Salaries and Benefits
- FSN Committee

Evolution of the Office of Voluntary Humanitarian Programs to Civic Participation to Democracy and Governance

- Strong Embassy Support
- Confrontation with Mining Company over USAID Support to local environmental NGO

Concluding Thoughts

- Importance of General Participant Training
- Changed Relations with American Staff Over Time
- Winner of John Withers Human Rights Award

INTERVIEW

Q: Okay, This is Carol Peasley starting a telephone interview with Gartini Isa and it is Friday, January 27. So first of all thank you very much Gartini for agreeing to participate in the oral histories and I very much look forward to talking with you. If we could start and you could give us some background about when you were born, where you were born, your early education and something about your family that would be very helpful.

ISA: My name is Gartini Isa. I was born in a small town in Indonesia on May 14. I am a widow, I have two children and two grandchildren; all of them still live in Indonesia. Currently I live in Glen, New Hampshire.

Q: How did you well let me ask a question? Where in Indonesia were you born in Jakarta or elsewhere in Indonesia?

ISA: I was born in Sumedang in West Java and I went to school in Bandung until the fifth grade elementary because my father was assigned to Hong Kong in 1957 as an intelligence officer of Indonesian attorney general in Jakarta. We lived in Hong Kong for about two years where I finished my elementary school. Then we moved back to Indonesia, resided in Bandung, West Java where my father was a high-ranking officer in West Java government. I finished high school and attended university in Bandung. However, I did not complete my university study in Bandung. Instead I finished my undergraduate study in Jakarta in 2006, two years prior to my departure to the US.

Q: After you had been working you finished your undergraduate?

ISA: Yes, my undergraduate study in Bandung was terminated because I decided to move to Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. Moreover, my thesis was so disordered that I made up my mind to seek employment instead. Two years before I emigrated to the United States I completed my undergraduate degree.

Q: What did you study? What was your field of study?

ISA: I majored in English.

Q: In English okay, very good. When you left Bandung and went to Jakarta and started working did you do other work before joining USAID or was USAID your first job?

ISA: No, before USAID I worked for private companies such as a Philippine logging company, a German consulting company and a German steel manufacturing company.

Q: Aha and what kind of work were you doing was it administrative type work?

ISA: I worked as a secretary, liaison officer and different kinds of office administrative work.

Q: How long did you do that?

ISA: From 1971 until 1977.

Q: Is that when you joined USAID in 1977?

ISA: Correct.

Q: What was your first position with USAID?

ISA: My first position was assistant program officer.

Q: What prompted you to want to work for USAID? Was it you were just responding to an advertisement or did you know about USAID and therefore wanted to work with the program or did you have friends that worked for them? What prompted you to want to join USAID?

ISA: When I worked for private companies, part of my job was to liaison between companies and the government whereby I had to secure permits for logging, joint cooperation permits, manpower work permits for the company, secure permits for importing machineries and it became a rat race. Secondly, I had to bribe or pay under the table to speed up the process and that created a headache. So I decided that I wanted to work in an embassy where I would not be exposed to corruption and bribery. I did not mind working as a secretary at any embassy. A friend advised me to apply at the American embassy and so I went there not knowing whether there was a vacancy. I just applied and they responded that there was an opening at USAID. That was how I became an employee of the USAID.

Q: Huh, that's interesting. Had you heard of USAID before just as an Indonesian citizen? Did you know about USAID?

ISA: No I never heard before about USAID.

Q: So you came into a new job and had to learn what the organization was.

ISA: Yes.

Q: In 1977 do you recall how large the mission was at that time and who was the mission director.

ISA: In 1977 the mission director was Thomas Niblock. It was a large organization because some of the Americans had been sent from Vietnam to Indonesia. My former boss, Sturgis Carbin, came from Vietnam.

Q: Ah right, because Vietnam was 1975 so yes right.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Okay so you were an assistant in the program office. What kind of work did you do?

ISA: I managed education and participant training programs.

Q: Okay I'm sorry in the office of education and training. Did you get any training at the outset or were you just thrown into the job?

ISA: I was thrown directly into the job right away.

Q: How did you manage that?

ISA: It was confusing at first because I did not know what a project agreement was and it was all new to me. For example, my boss asked me to write a paper similar to a project paper. I said, "Okay I'll write about West Papua." So I collected information, a little brief document and he said, "Okay." I learned as I went along.

Q: Were there other FSNs and Indonesians in that office and did they help you?

ISA: I was the only education assistant at that time although there were other Indonesian FSNs in charge of participant training program.

Q: Were there equivalents to your position working in some of the other technical offices say agriculture or...

ISA: What do you mean by equivalent?

Q: Well program assistants that might have been doing similar kinds of work but for other program areas.

ISA: There were.

Q: But they didn't offer to help you either?

ISA: No because our field of work was different.

Q: When was the first actual training program that AID sent you to so you could learn more about the work you were doing?

ISA: It was in 1981.

Q: Four years later.

ISA: Yes in 1981 I attended a project analysis course in Manila, Philippines.

Q: So that was the first formal training program. Wow.

ISA: Yes, that's right.

Q: So can you tell us a little about what the education program was in Indonesia during that period when you first came in. Were you working in a program in the schools, or university or what level?

ISA: When I started working for the education office there was already an ongoing program called the PAMONG, in English is educating children by parents and community. Later on I assisted higher education project officer on two higher education projects called Eastern Universities Agriculture Education and Graduate Agriculture School Project. I also help the education project officer on the Self Instructional Learning System and Education Communications Development Project. I was also responsible for the management and supervision of the Education and Policy Planning Project which included reviewing budget proposals, preparing commitment letters and other documents for technical approval.

Q: So the education program was a very wide ranging program.

ISA: It was at that time which include general participant training whereby I helped in monitoring their financial aspect of the program.

Q: So the general participant training program was that sending people to the United States to universities?

ISA: Correct, . It ended in 1996 but it had been in place for a long time. I remember by the end of the program we had sent around ten thousand Indonesians to the United States.

Q: Wow, that's a lot. The university programs that you mentioned you were helping to manage do you remember were they linked with American universities?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Do you remember what American universities they were?

ISA: The contractor for the Western universities of culture and education was probably Kentucky University or Michigan University. I knew there was a Kentucky University and a Wisconsin University.

Q: So just to ask a question not so much on what you did but generally in Indonesia did USAID historically play an important role in university development and were there strong linkages with Indonesia historically through USAID through the university system?

ISA: Yes, especially during 1970 to 1994 mostly with the agriculture faculty of the university. However, USAID/Indonesia sent participants to various US universities

Q: Oh okay with the agriculture, very good. Was the education program working throughout the country or was it focused on certain parts of Indonesia?

ISA: I think it only focused on certain parts of Indonesia.

Q: What parts were you working in?

ISA: Jakarta, Bali and West Java.

Q: Bali and West Java, okay. Was that true the entire AID program was more or less focused in those two areas?

ISA: No. The self-instructional learning systems, was only in Java and Bali but the Western University Agriculture Education was in the western part of Indonesia. There is also an Eastern University Agriculture Education, concentrated in the eastern part of Indonesia.

Q: Right because Indonesia stretches a long way.

ISA: Correct.

Q: How many miles does it stretch from one end to the other?

ISA: Oh I don't know but it is separated by water; it's not like the United States. Indonesia comprised of many islands.

Q: A lot of islands yes, okay. So you continued to work on the education program through 1981. So after the training you went on did that result in increased responsibilities? Were you going from one position going to higher positions during this period or did you pretty

much stay at the same level? I'm just curious about your career development in those very early years that you started working with USAID.

ISA: During 1977-1994 I cannot say whether I improved in my career but I know that I improved in knowledge.

Q: Right and throughout that period you were in the education office?

ISA: That's right.

Q: Over time did more Indonesian FSN staff come into that office and take on broader responsibilities?

ISA: Yes, we had recruited another FSN which was on the same level as me. She handled Eastern University Agriculture education and another higher education, which I do not remember.

Q: Do you remember what your grade level was during that period?

ISA: My grade level was grade nine.

Q: Grade nine, okay, because it would be interesting to understand how long it took to get promotions as you advanced; remind me to come back to that. During that period 1977-1994 when you were in the education office were there changes in the education program? Did it remain the same size or did it grow or get smaller, did the focus change at all?

ISA: There were some changes in the education office in terms of program size and budget. However, as years went by, the education office was reduced which effected the size and budget. Due to financial or staffing issues, the Education office was merged with the health office.

Q: Because there wasn't continuity of staff and so the interest in the programs depended on the individual personalities.

ISA: More on USAID policy and individual education officer discussion with government counterpart. For instance, USAID funded the establishment of the Open University, which until now continues to exist.

Q: It continues to exist?

ISA: Yes.

Q: And what do you mean by Open University?

ISA: Open University is a type of university where students do not have to attend classes, it's like distance learning methodology. They study at home and maybe once a month they come together where there will be tutorial teaching. It's not like attending lectures regularly.

Q: And USAID helped to establish that in Indonesia?

ISA: Yes, USAID together with the Japanese government. The Japanese government built the infrastructure and USAID provided technical assistance and equipment.

Q: Ah, that may have been in the early 1980s because I was in Thailand during that time and we were doing a collaborative university project with the Japanese so it might have been at that same period. The idea for the Open University was that an Indonesian idea or did that come from USAID or from the Japanese?

ISA: I don't remember but it might come from the Indonesian side. At that time the would be first rector was Professor Setyadi and he might have been the one who asked USAID for support to establish an Open University in Indonesia.

Q: Because they were aware of similar institutions in other countries?

ISA: What do you mean?

Q: That the rector may have been aware of similar Open Universities in other countries so he wanted to see one in Indonesia.

ISA: Yes, probably.

Q: It's interesting that the Indonesian mission maintained a strong focus on university level education throughout that period, is that correct?

ISA: Yes until 1998. After that, gradually the program was reduced and then the entire education office was abolished. In 1998 or approaching 2000 there was no education program anymore.

Q: So it phased out pretty much.

ISA: I believe in early 2000.

Q: During that period 1977 to 1994 the education office you had multiple Americans coming through how many on average Americans would have been in that office in any point of time?

ISA: I have had many bosses from 1977 to 1994, maybe around seven or eight starting with Sturgis Carbin.

Q: Seven or eight different heads of the office. Were there other Americans in the office besides the heads?

ISA: Yes, there were.

Q: So there were multiple Americans. Did it work out well the division of responsibilities between the FSN staff and the American staff?

ISA: Oh yes, we had good cooperation.

Q: Was there in terms of just management of FSNs was there an FSN committee or were there issues related to benefits or anything during that early period up until the mid-1990s?

ISA: I was actually lucky that I entered the service in 1977 because in 1978 I was offered by the embassy human resources whether I would like to join the Federal Service Retirement Program to which I applied. They deducted seven percent every two weeks to put toward my federal service retirement plan; which I received in dollars upon my retirement. I was lucky because they told me that if I came in after 1980 they were not offered anymore. Federal Service Retirement Plan was not offered anymore to FSNs who came in after 1980.

Q: Then they were dependent on local retirement systems, right?

ISA: Yes and Foreign Service Nationals who came on board prior to 1980 were regarded as direct hire and not contractors. After 1980 Foreign Service nationals had to sign contracts every year, renewed every year. I was glad that I was a direct hire.

Q: Oh so you maintained your direct hire status...

ISA: Until the end.

Q: ...until the end even, oh that's very interesting.

ISA: Since I was under the Federal Service Retirement system and was a direct hire FSN, I felt secure in the sense that when one of my bosses in later years wanted to fire me, the USAID/I Human Services office said, "You cannot fire Gartini because she is a direct hire. We have to go to Washington for abolishment of position or something like that. She is not a contractor."

Q: Interesting, interesting. And so you get a retirement check does it come through the Social Security system?

ISA: No, it comes from Federal.

Q: Oh, okay but I mean the American Social Security system or does it come through the State Department?

ISA: State Department.

Q: State Department okay. That's very interesting I had forgotten about the change that had taken place in 1980. Since FSNs were then working under different arrangements in a mission like Indonesia that had many FSNs as new FSNs came in did that create many issues within the FSN community that some people had a different status than others?

ISA: No.

Q: Okay, huh, interesting. There are other thoughts on the education program that you are particularly interested in sharing with us and your thoughts on it. Let me just ask, were you able since your program was in West Java were you able to travel to visit your programs very frequently?

ISA: Oh yes I did travel to visit some of my education programs.

Q: Did the American staff go as well or did you do most of that traveling?

ISA: The American staff went as well.

Q: So in those days it was easy to get out into the field and to visit projects unlike today.

ISA: Yes even today I think it is easy to make site visit.

Q: Good, is there anything else on the education portfolio that you would like to talk about?

ISA: Yes, I would like to say that with regard to the general participant training which ended in 1996 I would like to applaud the American government for supporting the participation of government employees as well as civil society because many participants from the government when they came back most of them were promoted to higher ranking positions in the government. At that time USAID had a complete profile of names of returnees and each time there was an appointee of a certain person to the level of director, director general, governor or other promotions, we always informed either the mission director who then informed the ambassador that this person was sent under USAID to pursue his or her graduate study in the United States.

Q: Absolutely that's wonderful and that would suggest that relationships were probably very good with those individuals in those ministries because there was a strong bond.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Just in general, were many of the senior ministry of education officials former participants?

ISA: Yes.

Q: So that made for a very effective and close working relationship?

ISA: Yes, because most of them were trained in a U.S. university.

Q: Okay, huh, interesting. Do you know of the current officials in Indonesia were many of them former USAID participants or have most of those people retired who had been part of USIA?

ISA: I'm sure most of them are retired now.

Q: But for some period of time they were an important part of the leadership in the country?

ISA: Correct.

Q: I know that you probably may be aware but may not be personally involved I think that there were many economists from the United States in different universities that I think spent a long time in Indonesia working very closely with the ministry of finance and the Central Bank.

ISA: During the early period of President Suharto's term, all of the high ranking officials in charge of the country's economy were graduates of Berkeley University. They were called The Berkeley Mafia. I am certain during that period there were many US consultants helping Indonesia embark a new economic system.

Q: The Berkeley Mafia, that's right. Everybody around the world knew about the Berkeley Mafia.

ISA: But they were not insulted, they were proud, "Oh yeah we are the Berkeley Mafia."

Q: Well that's good obviously good relationships. Just out of curiosity those were the days when USIS was working, the U.S. Information Service, did you do very much work with USIS during that period or did you have much contact with them?

ISA: Not at that period.

Q: Not on the education project.

ISA: At that time I had no working relation with USIS because USIS at that time were on the verge of being moved to the State Department and became Public Affairs Services.

Q: Yes, that happened in the early 1990s.

ISA: Years later we had programs with the Public Affairs Services as well as the embassy.

Q: Right we will come to those on the democracy front. I believe that some of the Asia Foundation and the Rockefeller Foundation and the Ford Foundation were also very active in Indonesia. I don't know if they were working in the education sector or not but if so, did you have any contact with them?

ISA: I had close contact and cooperation with the Asia Foundation in democracy and human rights programs.

Q: But not on education?

ISA: No.

Q: Okay. Were there other donors working in education during that period from 1977 until 1994?

ISA: Yes, I can name UNICEF.

Q: Okay, UNICEF was. Were you involved with coordination efforts with the other donors?

ISA: No, not on the education program but coordination with other donors on democracy program yes.

Q: Let me just ask one more question about the participant training. You had mentioned gender I think. Was there much sensitivity during that period to looking at gender and who was participating? Do you think there was a correct percentage of women taking advantage of the participant training program?

ISA: The candidates for the general participant training was initiated by the government. The number of male candidates was greater rather than female because at that time for female participants to leave the country to pursue further study and left behind family was difficult. As years went by, things changed and more women now do not hesitate to further study and career.

Q: It changed over time the social attitudes in Indonesia changed? It made it easier for women to go?

ISA: Yes, that's right.

Q: You said that some of the participant trainees you were glad that people from government were able to participate as well as civil society? Do you have a rough idea of

the percentage of the I think you said, ten thousand participant trainees, would have been government and what percentage was civil society?

ISA: I would say 99 percent government and one percent civil society.

Q: Oh wow, okay. Well it sounds like it had a very significant impact on government.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Again, I know nothing about Indonesia so I am going to ask a question that may not make any sense but if one were to look and again I'm talking mostly about that early period 1977-1994 the composition of the FSN staff was it representative of the entire country or representative of I don't know whether there are different ethnic groups within Indonesia or was it more or less concentrated with people who were resident in Jakarta?

ISA: FSN do you mean?

Q: The FSN community yes.

ISA: The FSN community came from different parts of Indonesia but they lived in Jakarta.

Q: But if one were to look at a representative group of Indonesians the AID group would have looked like the country as a whole?

ISA: More or less so. However, the embassy or the USAID did not look for an employee of a different region. Prior to computers, the important thing was they are capable to do the work and can speak and write English.

Q: But in spite of that it was still reasonably represented.

ISA: Yes.

Q: During that period were there any USAID staff stationed anywhere else in the country outside of Jakarta? Or was everyone in Jakarta?

ISA: Everyone was in Jakarta except USAID had a field office in South Sulawesi because USAID had big programs in the eastern part of Indonesia. USAID set up a field office that assisted employees from Jakarta who made site visit to the eastern part of Indonesia. They arranged for transportation, accommodations and other necessary arrangements to ease staff from Jakarta travelling to eastern part of Indonesia. For several years we had a field office run by an Indonesian contractor.

Q: Was it run by an Indonesian was that done by a contractual basis or was that person an FSN who was stationed there?

ISA: It was based on a contract.

Q: It was based on a contract with a firm to provide those services.

ISA: No, it was not with a firm but with an individual. She opened a USAID representative office. When we planned to visit a certain part of the eastern part of Indonesia we called her and said, "We are coming, so please arrange for transportation to go to this place as well as accommodations." Something like that.

Q: Then she, through her own network, would arrange for the transpiration and various things?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Okay. Well that sounds like a good idea. Why don't we step back were there any significant changes within this period within Indonesia itself between 1977 and 1994?

ISA: No, there were no changes during the period of 1977 to 1994 but I will tell you on my next job which I found very interesting.

Q: That's right, okay. So it is 1994...

ISA: We might go beyond 4:30 PM, hence we might need to continue another time.

Q: That's fine, that's very good.

ISA: Because there are lots of things that I would like to tell you what transpired from 1994.

Q: Okay, excellent. Well let's get started 1994 then was when you moved to a new office a new office was created?

ISA: It's not actually created. The office was formerly called VHP (Voluntary H? Program) dealing mostly with civil society organizations on various programs such as environment, health, agriculture, consumer and human rights. In 1994 Mark Johnson came on board and he restructured the office that dealt mainly with human right issues

Q: Mark Johnson, okay.

ISA: There was an opening for another FSN to apply as project officer. I applied and he tested me by making me write a few sentences about democracy to be written in thirty minutes only. When I started working for Mark Johnson, the name of the office was changed from VHP to OC2P, which stood for Office of Community and Civic Participation. The first priority of the office was to transfer programs not dealing with advocacy or human rights to other relevant offices such as health program to health

office, agriculture to AGR office etc. Only programs that had human rights component even if it was on agriculture for instance, remained in OC2P. So this OC2P continued to support civil society organizations that dealt in advocacy, human rights, governance. The reason the office was initially named Office of Community and Civic participation instead of Office of Democracy as we later changed and is known today as Office of Democracy and Governance, because in during that period (1990's) we could not use the word democracy. Even the government was really sensitive if we said, "Oh, I work in the Office of Democracy."

Q: Yes, well that was a very clever title, I think, for the office.

ISA: They changed the name all the time, they changed it twice.

Q: Let me just ask a quick question. Do you know if Mark Johnson had worked in South Africa?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Because he had worked in the early days of the program on the anti-apartheid group.

ISA: Actually, I'm still in contact with him. We are good friends.

Q: Would you send me contact information for him?

ISA: His phone number?

Q: No, no just send me his email address.

ISA: Oh yes.

Q: So you were working with someone who had a lot of experience working at the community organization level?

ISA: Oh yes.

Q: So the first task in this office then was to get rid of some of the program to give it to the technical offices?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Then did you begin to build some new programs as well?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Could you talk about some kinds of programs you were building?

ISA: The first one was strengthening the administration and financial aspects of existing organizations such as The Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation, The Consumer Rights Foundation and many other organizations which were managed by my colleagues. As program development specialist in the area of democracy, human rights, and advocacy, my specific responsibility was backstopping ongoing and future international and Indonesian advocacy organizations, reviewing and analyzing their proposals, drafting project agreements based on proposals to comply with USAID Indonesia regulations. Besides managing projects, I worked closely with the USAID Indonesian mission Gender Committee.

Q: Wow, were there other FSNs in the new office?

ISA: Yes, the office hired one other FSN in addition to the four already on board before the creation of the newly named office.

Q: Okay, very good. So you were then involved with designing the new activities?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Do you recall what the first new one was that you designed?

ISA: I beg your pardon?

Q: Yes, the first new one that you designed what was the focus of it?

ISA: We had several existing programs at the time I entered this office and each of us had to choose which program and organizations we would like to continue working and/or we wanted to pick up as our new portfolio. I picked up the Asia Foundation, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation; the Consumer Rights Foundation and many more. I think I had seven in my portfolio and as the years went by we added more to it. Later years I identified new organizations for funding support. These organizations focused on advocacy and human rights.

Q: Maybe if we could just start talking about what some of those groups were doing and how AID was supporting them. For example, on Legal Assistance?

ISA: In 1990's, the Indonesian Legal Aid Foundation was in disorder both in management and in financial. It was part of the grantees funded under the old office, Voluntary Humanitarian Program (VHP). However, it was retained and continued for support under the new office (OC2P). USAID/Indonesia helped this organization in both their program and financial capabilities. Prior and after the fall of the then President Suharto, the Legal Aid Foundation office became the hub and the center of movement as well as meeting place of activists fighting for justice and human right.

Q: Do you know the history of the legal aid foundation did AID support it from the very outset or was it an Indonesian organization that AID began to support after it had been

around after it had been around for a long time or was AID involved from the very beginning.

ISA: The Legal Aid Foundation was established in 1972 when the then governor of Jakarta wanted a legal aid foundation established as a critical body that would monitor and/or critic the manner/program he carried his duty as governor of Jakarta, the capital city of Indonesia. USAID provided initial support in the early 1990's.

Q: Ah so it was a long standing organization that ended up becoming very strong. But it was weak at the time that you, in 1994, began to work with them?

ISA: Yes, it was weak.

Q: Good, so did AID do a direct grant to them or was AID working through a different grantee to work with them?

ISA: We worked directly with them.

Q: So you gave direct grants to them?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Excellent, that's very good. Consumer Rights, you mentioned a consumer rights organization, was that an existing organization or was that something new?

ISA: The Indonesian Consumer Rights Protection was established in 1980s but received initial support from USAID in the early 1990's.

Q: But again it was an existing Indonesian organization?

ISA: It was.

Q: What kinds of consumer rights were they focused on?

ISA: The focus of their program was protecting and advocating for the rights of consumers, besides drafting a new law on consumers' rights which through USAID support, was passed in 2000.

Q: And that law was enacted by parliament?

ISA: Yes, it went through the parliament, discussed and debated. Finally in 2000 it was approved and enacted by the parliament.

Q: Since the Consumer Rights Organization was pushing for this new law and working with parliament and the organization was getting assistance from USAID was that ever

raised as a political issue that they were getting support from USAID and did that affect, in any way, the passage of the law?

ISA: The government was aware that USAID supported non-governmental organizations but they did not know exactly the names of NGOs supported by USAID. Until late 1990's, the government regarded NGOs as "enemies of the state." When the office of Community and Civil Participation was newly, we were often asked to release the names of the NGOs that received support from USAID. Our response was for the government to question the NGOs directly. In addition, USAID provided information annually to the Indonesian Planning Board of its programs including work with civil society organizations. At that time it was very sensitive to release to the government information of our grantees.

Q: Okay so you obviously didn't publicize when you signed new grants? There were no press releases.

ISA: No, we worked closely and signed documents directly with the respective organization without government involvement.

Q: The Planning...

ISA: Yes, I did not understand why the Indonesian Planning Board did not pay attention or read USAID annual report sent to them where the report mentioned the names of USAID counterparts both in the government as well as NGOs.

Q: You mentioned the Asia Foundation that you did a lot of work with them. Can you talk a little bit about some of the work that USAID supported that the Asia Foundation was doing and how that relationship was?

ISA: I could not recall the existing programs with The Asia Foundation when I started working at OC2P. In 1998 The Asia Foundation had a new director named Douglas Ramage. It was during his leadership, that USAID provided a large amount of support in various programs such as Islam and Civil Society (ICS), Democracy and Civil Society (DCS), Women in Politic (WIP) program, legal reform advocacy programs. Relationship between USAID and The Asia Foundation was excellent and their programs were in keeping with the political situation in Indonesia at that time.

Q: Those were over a ten-twelve year period that you were working with Asia Foundation on those?

ISA: yes, the working relationship existed beyond my retirement.

Q: Right. So starting as early as 1994 you were working with Asia Foundation. I know that one of the programs Asia Foundation did do in Indonesia related to you, you mentioned on Islam...

ISA: Islamic and Civil Society (ICS) program.

Q: ...programs. When did that program start do you recall?

ISA: The first phase of the ICS started in 1997 to 2000, then continued to the second phase from 2000 to 2003.

Q: Were you involved with the design of that program or was this an Asia Foundation...

ISA: The Asia Foundation designed the program and sent us an unsolicited proposal.

Q: A proposal to...

ISA: After we received the unsolicited proposal from The Asia Foundation, the USAID Mission reviewed and commented on it. After receiving the green light from the Mission to proceed, then I drafted project agreement in compliance with USAID rules and regulations.

Q: Was this the first time the mission had done any direct work on Islamic issues?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Was there a lot of discussing within the mission before embarking on this program or was it one that your office has the authority to make the decision on by itself

ISA: All proposals in particular on Islamic issues were thoroughly discussed in the Mission. Most of key offices within USAID, such as Program, Legal, Finance and Contract Management, met together to review programs.

Q: Do you know if the mission director got involved in any of the discussions about whether USIA would support it?

ISA: Yes, I think so because working on Islamic issue, the Mission needed to be very cautious to avoid any contradiction that this program was not an expansion to teach Islam

Q: Okay, so it went all the way up to the top of the mission.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Obviously they decided that they wanted to go forward with it and could you describe some of the things that the program did?

ISA: The main object was getting a diverse group of NGOs whose activities were explicitly designed to encourage and support the engagement of Indonesia with the majority population and the development and democracy and civil society in Indonesia.

During that time most of the Muslim groups were of the understanding that democracy and human rights issues came from the western. Thus, it was important to change the mindset and attitude of these people that democracy and human rights did not derive from the western minds.

Q: Its' not a foreign concept.

ISA: It is what you call changing the attitude and mind of the people in particular fundamental Muslim groups who thought that democracy and human rights came from the western but was in fact fully compatible with Islam in an ethological sense.

Q: Were there discussions with different Imams around the country and different mosques about this program?

ISA: We supported The Asia Foundation who then worked closely with several secular and Muslim groups on the same objectives of the program. Some of these groups worked with Muslim women organizations, moderate religious imams and preachers to convey pluralistic messages in their Friday sermons at the mosques, as well as Islamic universities.

Q: Okay leadership and that is whom the program was working with.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Do you think the program was a successful program?

ISA: Yes, it was.

Q: I had heard at some point that Asia Foundation was also supporting some programs on religious tolerance.

ISA: Yes, the second phase of the Islam and Civil Society program was to promote religious tolerance and political pluralism through the use of valued and simple Islamic language.

Q: How did that second grant work? Was that as successful as the first?

ISA: Yes, the second grant to The Asia Foundation was to emphasize pluralism and tolerance because when democracy reigned again after the fall of President Suharto, there was a friction among the Muslims, particularly between those who are moderate liberal Islam and those who were fundamentalists.

Q: So it was recognizing what was happening in the environment and government work. And you worked directly with Asia Foundation on this?

ISA: Correct I was the grant manager.

Q: You were the grant manager. Was it a grant or a cooperative agreement?

ISA: It was mostly a grant agreement.

Q: Did you make heavy use of grants to the locally based groups?

ISA: Yes, we did heavy use of the grants to individual organization.

Q: You did grants so that was the policy at that point of time was to...

ISA: Small grants.

Q: Did you go to the organizations directly or did they submit unsolicited proposals or was there a competitive process to do this?

ISA: It was based on unsolicited proposals.

Q: Well for the Legal Aid Foundation and Consumer Rights Foundation did you just go directly to them and talk to them and talk about doing a grant program?

ISA: Mostly unsolicited grant proposals.

Q: Unsolicited grant proposals.

ISA: I do not know if the following is unsolicited but there was a very prominent female lawyer who has been promoting women's rights. She was influential and she told me of a vision to create a legal aid foundation specifically intended for women. In 1997 Indonesia encountered economy crisis which led to financial and political crisis. Many businesses had to close down and laid off employees. The first to be laid off were mostly women which was unfair. Then if the men were laid off, the women had to work harder and they often encountered domestic violence. This newly established organization was called is called LBH-APIK. This organization then flourished up to now in different parts of Indonesia.

Q: So you actually helped the creation?

ISA: Yes, with USAID support.

Q: And the USAID financial management helped them set up their systems?

ISA: Once we decided to provide grant to a new organization, the USAID Financial Management Office than looked at their management and financial records. If the Financial Office thought that it needed improvement, a contracted audit firm would work with the organization in setting up a good management and financial system.

Q: Wow that's a real success story.

ISA: I would say yes.

Q: So did USAID give them their first grant then?

ISA: Yes it was seed money.

Q: It was seed money. Do you remember how much the seed money was?

ISA: About \$200 thousand.

Q: About \$200 thousand and then did you do any follow-up grants with them?

ISA: Oh yes we did another follow up grant with this organization until they succeeded in seeking assistance from other donors or through fundraising.

Q: That's an excellent success story of an AID mission being very creative and taking risks.

ISA: Gradually women activists and lawyers in different parts of the country wanted to set up its own LBH-APIK and now there are LBH-APIK in big cities around the country.

Q: So it also then spurred similar organizations to emerge, something you should take great pride in.

ISA: At the end of my career, I was awarded the John Withers Human Rights reward in Washington.

Q: Yes, we will get to that. That's interesting. So we've talked a little about the Asia Foundation, the Legal Aid Foundation, the Human Rights Foundation...

ISA: The legal program with The Asia Foundation was big about \$6 million.

Q: Which the...

ISA: The program was called the Institutional Development and Legal Reform in Indonesia (IDeAL) with the Asia Foundation.

Q: And that was the Asia Foundation. That was separate from the program on Islam right? This was a different program so this was probably a more formal cooperative agreement or something.

ISA: It was a grant agreement also.

Q: Oh, it was a grant agreement as well.

ISA: The Asia Foundation worked to strengthen the Supreme Court, the attorney general and working with civil society organizations to work together with the Supreme Court and the attorney general.

Q: So they were working with both civil society and the government.

ISA: Correct.

Q: That's somewhat unusual because sometimes programs are either only working with civil society or only with government so that's very interesting they are dealing with both. Did that work out? Was the government receptive having them work with civil society at the same time?

ISA: When the IDEAL program started, the head of the Supreme Court, Bagir Manan, was very open to cooperating with civil society organizations. Bagir Manan was also a former USAID participant

Q: Okay you'll have to remind me when did things change in Indonesia that it became difficult?

ISA: In 1998.

Q: In 1998 so this program with Asia Foundation was prior to that.

ISA: The Islamic Civil Society was prior to that.

Q: And the Legal Aid one was prior to that as well?

ISA: I think at the same time.

Q: About the same time.

ISA: okay.

Q: I know that you were doing a lot of work on human rights as well. Would that start at the very beginning when you entered the office in 1994 or was that post 1998?

ISA: When I started as the grant manager for Legal Aid Foundation and other civil society organizations, I encountered other human rights activists who were not necessarily supported by USAID and we discussed the political and human rights situation at that time. From then on I became interested in human rights.

Q: You became interested in human rights what prompted that sudden interest?

ISA: I got to know the gradual level what the people were thinking of the government and all those work they had done. I managed the Legal Aid Foundation when Indonesia became worse. The office of the Legal Aid Foundation became the meeting place and "sanctuary" for activists. I participated and listened to their discussion on the human rights as well as the political situation that time. This increased my interest.

Q: You saw the need emerging.

ISA: Yes.

Q: So then you began to think more about the human rights issues and then that resulted in some new grants and program work?

ISA: Yes, new grants and program work. In addition I had the benefit of working for Mark Johnson that allowed me to pursue my interest beyond the normal office work.

Q: Okay well why don't we start with we could talk a little bit about some of the human rights grants that you say began to support some of the groups and some of the work that you were doing and then talk about what you were doing as an individual as well.

ISA: I don't remember each of them now as there were so many that I had managed...big and small organizations.

Q: Or even a illustrative ones to give a feel for the kind of work that we were supporting.

ISA: We worked with the National Human Rights Commission along with other donors. We also supported the National Commission On anti-Discrimination against Women. Then we had, of course, that Legal Aid Foundation for Women, INFID (International NGOs for Indonesia Development), KontraS (Commission for the disappearance and Victims of Violence) and many more organizations that we supported directly or through an umbrella organization such as The Asia Foundation.

Q: That's fine and were these organizations all over the country?

ISA: The Legal Aid Foundation is all over the country, National Commission for Human Rights was about to set up regional offices at that time. The Legal Aid Foundation for Women were set up in almost all the provinces. We also supported The Indonesian Corruption Watch.

Q: And that was an NGO civil society organization?

ISA: Yes. And we also helped in setting up through the Asia Foundation, the National Ombudsman Commission. We also gave funds, in coordination with other donors, to the establishment of the Indonesian Commission for the Eradication of Corruption (KPK), which actively investigate and court trial government and business corruptors.

Q: How did you manage were these all individual grants the mission had with different groups or was there an umbrella organization? Were you doing individual grants with all of them?

ISA: I managed programs under an umbrella organization like the Asia Foundation as well as many individual NGOs by extensive communication and attending workshops or seminars carried out by these organizations and also met and discussed the progress and problems of implementing the program.

Q: So some of the support for these groups went through the Asia Foundation?

ISA: Some went directly.

Q: And some went directly so it was both.

ISA: Yes.

Q: As you began to support more and more groups that were probably criticizing the government did that create issues for the mission or other mission programs or for you all?

ISA: No. The other programs were not affected by what the OC2P or later called DG office, had been doing.

Q: So the government didn't make any protests or complaints.

ISA: No.

Q: That's good. You said Mark Johnson encouraged you to go beyond what you were doing. Do you want to talk a little bit about what you were doing individually?

ISA: It started when a group of students who formed a People's Democratic Party (PRD) was the scapegoat for the 1996 attack on the Indonesian Democratic party (PDIP) headquarter. The attack was backed by the then president Suharto, his cronies, the military using militia groups killing many people and activists defending the headquarter. As a consequence, the PRD leaders and activists were arrested, court trialed and later sentenced to 7 to 15 years imprisonment. From the onset of the trial, with Mark Johnson's permission I attended the session almost regularly and through the help of an activist, I was given access to visit them in prison. That was where I also met other political prisoners that have been jailed for more than three decades.

Q: To visit the students.

ISA: To visit the students and other political prisoners imprisoned since the 1965 coup, prisoners who fought for independence for East Timor and West Papua and many others for their political aspiration.

Q: You were going on a weekly basis to the prison, how long did you do this?

ISA: Two years

Q: For two years?

ISA: They were released in 1999-2000 when we had a new president.

Q: Was any pressure put on you by the government or by anyone else for doing this or was it perfectly okay for you to do that?

ISA: No, I had no resistance except my phone at home was bugged. A friend warned me that when I was in the midst of talking on the phone and suddenly heard a buzzing sound that meant someone was listening. So one day I was talking to a friend about the 1998 riot against the Chinese and when I mentioned the name of an activist, suddenly I heard a buzzing noise and I was not able to continue listening or talking.

Q: But no one ever contacted you or put any pressure on you one way or the other?

ISA: No.

Q: And the USAID mission was comfortable with you doing this as well?

ISA: Oh yes, even the political section.

Q: Did the political section ask you for information?

ISA: Sometimes especially with regard to East Timor because a prominent figure for East Timor independence by the name of Xanana Gusmão was also in jail that time. Hence, when the embassy political officer needed some information or had to deliver a note, they asked my help.

Q: Generally how your offices worked was obviously very political. Did you as an office have much work with the political section in the embassy and talk to them a lot about what they were seeing and what you were seeing? Was there much interaction?

ISA: Yes.

Q: And this was the entire office would meet with them?

ISA: Occasionally on a case by case basis because my friend managed programs in West Papua and so if they wanted to go to Papua and learn something about Papua especially the Freeport issue then they contacted my colleague or my boss. However, if there were demonstrations in front of the embassy and the political office did not know the organization, then they asked me to find out from my contact.

Q: So you were actually helping the embassy better understand the situation in the country?

ISA: Yes, at that time.

Q: That's a very valuable function that USAID often can play in countries. Mark Johnson was probably coordinating closely with the political section as well?

ISA: Yes, Mark Johnson and the political office worked closely.

Q: So there were good relations between the embassy and USAID?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Were there FSNs in the political section as well?

ISA: Yes, there were.

Q: Did you have contact with them as well?

ISA: Not as much as my contact with their supervisor.

Q: Well it sounds like you were very trusted and they trusted you a lot in your judgment.

ISA: I hope so.

Q: That's very interesting. So you were continuing with your interest in human rights and visiting prisoners over a two year period. So that takes us to about 2001?

ISA: In 2001 we were quite comfortable with political environment, so we changed the name to Office of Community Participation and later on to Office of Democracy and Governance until today.

Q: I'm not sure I completely understood. So as transition took place in the country the office began to change as well?

ISA: Only the name was changed but the programs were the same.

Q: Was the program getting larger during this period from the late 1990s to the early 2000s? Were you getting more money or less money?

ISA: More.

Q: Good. The work you were doing was very important to Indonesia and it was also very important got everything else the mission was doing. Was there much discussion more

broadly within the mission about the work you were doing? I mean did you have an opportunity to discuss with others in the State office to talk about the work you were doing or for them to lean about it?

ISA: Not exactly, maybe with other donors because they had also the same kind of programs on human rights with similar organizations such as for example the Legal Aid Foundation etc. We regularly met to discuss and share information on programs we were doing to avoid overlapping as well as to see what progress these organizations had made.

Q: Who were the major other donors involved in that sector?

ISA: Sweden, AusAid (Australia), UK, Netherland, World Bank, ADB, Ford Foundation and others.

Q: So did you have regular donor coordination meetings or was it on an as needed basis or was there meetings schedule monthly?

ISA: Maybe bimonthly.

Q: Bimonthly.

ISA: Depending on gender issues, legal issues, something like that.

Q: And who attended those meetings.

ISA: The representatives from the organization.

Q: Did you attend them and Mark attend them or did...

ISA: Most of the time I represented USAID and sometimes accompanied by another American depending on the topic of discussion such as gender and judiciary programs. Then the gender coordinator came along.

Q: You attended only. Were the other people attending these meetings also Indonesians or were they from the donor countries.

ISA: From the donor countries and Indonesians representing their offices.

Q: So it was a combination?

ISA: A combination.

Q: Obviously they gave a lot of responsibility to you within the mission.

ISA: Yes.

Q: By this time what grade were you?

ISA: When I came to the new office they gave me a grade 11 until I retired.

Q: Grade twelve so you were up at the top.

ISA: I'm sorry, I am wrong it is not grade twelve it was grade eleven. That was my highest

Q: Well that is interesting maybe we can talk at some point too on your thoughts on the HR assistance for FSNs. But you were doing a lot of work on donor coordination, you were visiting political prisoners, you were helping form new civil society organization like the Woman's Legal Aid Foundation, you were very busy and managing grants. Sounds like you were working much longer than a forty hour week.

ISA: I loved it.

Q: To what degree were senior mission managers involved because this was such important work that you were doing? Was your office meeting frequently with the more senior mission management to talk through what you were doing and what the issues were and what it all meant with regard to relationships with the Indonesian government?

ISA: USAID held weekly meetings but it was more a broad discussion on each office programs, its progress, problems, solution and current situation.

Q: There were weekly staff meetings and that was an opportunity to talk about what you were doing.

ISA: Yes.

Q: But there weren't specific meetings just on what was going on in the democracy office?

ISA: The Office Director had one to one discussion with the Mission Director. However, in 1998 two weeks before President Suharto resigned there was an evacuation of the mission and every non-essential American. So the mission had only a few Americans and at USAID it was the mission director, deputy of the program and finance and a few other Americans. So my friend and I were left behind to manage the office and that was when we had to stay after office hours because Washington wanted an update of the situation in the country.

Q: So on telephone calls with Washington to advise them what was happening.

ISA: Yes by video conference.

Q: Yes, video conference calls. How long a period were the staff non-essential personnel out?

ISA: It was May until September before they started to come back.

Q: So several months all the work was totally dependent you and the FSN staff. It is now 4:30 and we've been talking about two hours should we try to reschedule a follow up time because you might be getting tired and I might be getting tired. This might be a good starting place for us to come back to. I'd really like to talk through a little bit when we get back about this period when you all were really absolutely essential for the mission and how that worked.

ISA, Gartini

DB – 2

Q: This is Carol Peasley and it is February 2nd, I believe, continuing a telephone interview with Gartini Isa. Gartini when we finished up the last time you were talking about the evacuation of non-essential USAID staff in the spring and summer of 1998 during the time of demonstrations and political turmoil, which followed the financial crisis in 1997. I'm wondering if you can pick up from where we left off and explain a little bit about what happened in Indonesia and then how quickly the USAID staff came back and what kind of changes, if any, took place in the USAID program as a result of the political changes taking place in Indonesia.

ISA: It started in July 1996 an attack against the Democratic Party (PDIP) headquarters killing many people who were inside the building. The government blamed students who earlier had formed the People's Democracy Party (PRD). Between 1996 and 1997 there were students and activists kidnapped and some were still missing until to date. In 1997 Indonesia and a few other Asian nations, experienced financial collapsed. This was followed by political crisis. Then on the 13th of May 1998 big demonstrations against the government by students occurred. Four students were killed. The next day a bigger demonstration including rapes, looting occurred. May 14 all non-essential Americans were ordered emergency evacuation. May 21 President Suharto resigned and replaced by his vice president Habibie. When President Habibie called for an election as early as mid-1999, American staff started to return. In the meantime programs in my office continued without interruption.

Q: So he resigned at that time. What kind of process did it lead to a call for elections?

ISA: When President Suharto resigned, he was replaced by his vice president Habibie who called for an election as early as mid-1999.

Q: That would have been in May?

ISA: In May President Suharto resigned and May 15th non-essential Americans departed, May 21st was the resignation of President Suharto and in 1999, we had an election.

Q: So as soon as the government said they were calling for a new election had you been providing support before this and did you then become mobilized to begin to support the electoral process?

ISA: Yes, as soon as election was announced, we began to design election programs.

Q: Had you been doing that before or was this something new for you to be doing?

ISA: This was something new.

Q: The assistance for USAID for the elections.

ISA: This was the first time.

Q: So it was the first time. Were you involved with the democracy office in helping figure out how best to do that?

ISA: The office was highly involved but I did not manage the bulk of the election program although the Asia Foundations helped set up a coalition of Muslim groups, called the People's Voter Education, which informed the public about the election, as well as monitoring the election itself. My colleague managed the election program.

Q: Do you recall which other implementing partners might have been involved in the election support group work?

ISA: IRI, NDI and IFES are the main implementing partners during the election.

Q: The International Foundation for Electoral Support.

ISA: the Carter Center was involved in monitoring the election.

Q: Yes, that's right. So you had all of the major groups were helping?

ISA: yes.

Q: Excellent. In order to start this new work did USAID have to terminate any other activities in the portfolio or did it get new funding from USAID to do this from Washington?

ISA: We got new funding.

Q: Were there any other changes made to the program as the result of this kind of the movement toward a more democratic...

ISA: Yes, we were promoting more programs in freedom of the press which was managed by another FSN.

Q: So they had been working with the independent media.

ISA: Yes.

Q: So that would have been new as well. So it sounds like a significant expansion in the portfolio of the democracy office.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Were additional FSNs hired to help manage that work load?

ISA: Yes.

Q: So you were part of the growth of the AID mission?

ISA: Yes.

Q: So some other offices weren't growing.

ISA: I don't know.

Q: When the election took place you mentioned the Carter Center worked as observers. Did the USAID or embassy staff serve as observers during the election? Do you recall?

ISA: USAID as well as the embassy were involved and had an interest in monitoring the election.

Q: Right but as observers do you recall whether any people were certified as observers and then on election day went around to polling stations?

ISA: I would say yes but I was not sure.

Q: I'd say yes, right. The FSN staff were there any special issues? As the mission began to increase its support for this kind of democracy work including work with the media and with political parties did this create any tensions within the mission for the FSN staff or did you begin to see the FSN staff become more politically themselves in the office as part of this?

ISA: I would say there was no tension among the FSNs in the mission and they understood and were interested in current politics of the country. The FSNs at least in my office were more empowered.

Q: Okay they were more empowered to take on greater responsibility for the USAID program. But did the FSN staff represent different political view points as well?

ISA: We did not talk nor discuss the individual FSN's politics or aspirations.

Q: Okay so it wasn't an issue because you didn't discuss it. So the election took place and you'll have to educate us on who was elected and what then transpired with the USAID program.

ISA: Abdurrahman Wahid was elected as the new president. The USAID program in democracy was to empower the legislative both at the national and provincial levels. USAID also created Office of Decentralization and Management which was separated from the DG office. Both these two office had programs in strengthening the capacities of the legislature bodies.

Q: Did that have implications for the USAID program? Were there any changes that occurred after he became president?

ISA: The implication in my opinion was the civil society organizations were now able to provide inputs to the government program because President Abdurrahman Wahid was himself a very respected and very moderate head of a large Muslim organization called the Nahdlatul Ulama (NU).

Q: Okay so you were able to expand some of the work that you were doing on human rights and on gender issues during his presidency?

ISA: Yes.

Q: So it was a hospitable environment to do that kind of work?

ISA: Yes.

Q: I know you spoke earlier about some of the work you had done including with the Legal Aid Foundation. That was around this same period is that correct?

ISA: The Legal Aid Foundation received funding before the OC2P was created. However, when OC2P was in place, we had programs in legal and justice, mostly in partnership with The Asia Foundation.

Q: Okay. So we are now into the year 2000 or so and you retired in 2008 is that correct?

ISA: That is correct.

Q: During that period in the 2000s did you continue to work on the same kind of democracy programs that you had been working on earlier? Or were there any significant changes in the kind of work you were doing?

ISA: Normally it was the same but more emphasis on women's political rights and in collaboration with the Asia foundation strengthened the management capacity of the working with the Supreme Court and the Attorney General (AG) office.

Q: You were doing grants with the Asia Foundation and the Asia Foundation was doing sub-grants to local Indonesian groups, is that correct?

ISA: Correct.

Q: Were you also doing some direct grants with Indonesian organizations?

ISA: Yes.

Q: And when you were doing the direct grants with Indonesian organizations how was the decision made to do that rather than doing it through, for example, Asia Foundation or another intermediary? Was it because of the importance of the organization or the size of the grant? What kind of thinking did the mission do to make the decision to do a direct grant with an Indonesian human rights group or legal aid foundation a direct grant between USAID and that organization?

ISA: When we received unsolicited proposals we then looked to see if it was in line with the mission strategy whether it was from the Asia Foundation or the Indonesian grantees. We also looked at the creativity and uniqueness of the proposals.

Q: It's interesting that the Indonesian mission made very good use of unsolicited proposals as I recall from our earlier discussion. Was that always the case because many missions are not very good about responding favorably to unsolicited proposals? I'm wondering how much of that was the spirit that was set by mission directors or others in the mission that allowed that kind of flexibility that wasn't always the case in all USAID missions.

ISA: That's correct I would say.

Q: But did it remain that way in Indonesia regardless of who the mission directors were or did it fluctuate over time or was it deeply built into the operating systems of the mission that you were able to maintain it?

ISA: In the beginning we more or less accepted unsolicited proposals in line with the specific object of democracy in the country and in line with the mission strategy. As the years went by and new mission directors came in and depending on budget cuts, we became very selective.

Q: So it varied depending upon the sector the mission was working in.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Okay and the democracy sector you wanted to have direct contact with local Indonesian groups.

ISA: Yes. We encouraged actually the alteration between the type of sector and the government.

Q: Right, did the private sector contribute funds to any of these local NGOs that you were supporting? Would any of them been also contributing to the Legal Aid Foundation or to human rights groups?

ISA: I would say no because private companies are reluctant to provide funding for certain activities or dissident groups that they think are against the government. Toward the end of my career, however, sustainability corporate responsibility was on becoming more popular but they were likely to support community development rather than human rights issues.

Q: So it would have been in other sectors not in your sectors.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Just saying the word sustainability does remind me since you were supporting many Indonesian groups do you know whether they have been able to evolve into sustainable organizations and are they still operating?

ISA: Some yes, some no. Like the Legal aid Foundation, the Human Rights Foundation, Legal Foundation for Women and many others still exist.

Q: Do you know what their main sources of funding are today?

ISA: Today I do not know.

Q: Would it be donors or would there be Indonesian sources of income as well?

ISA: I would say donors such as Australia, UK, EU, World Bank.

Q: If you think back on that period from 2000 to 2008 are there some activities that you would like to highlight?

ISA: Let me think. What active programs you mean?

Q: Yeah. If there are any program activities you would like to highlight for that period.

ISA: The Islam and Civil Society program that we managed at the Asia Foundation.

Q: Right, yes we talked about that a little bit earlier. But is there anything more you would like to say about the work that was done under that grant?

ISA: The Islam and Civil Society? I mentioned earlier ICS started in 1997. In 2001 the World Trade Center was attacked. The program was right on target.

Q: Yes.

ISA: This program was useful in informing the public that the attack against the World Trade Center was not because of religion. The Mission was also able to communicate and talked about the 9/11 with Muslim organizations and groups. The program also strengthened relationship between the Mission and these groups.

Q: So that turned out to be very helpful then?

ISA: Yes it did because if we did not have the program earlier and September 11 happened it would be difficult for USAID to approach or cooperate with any organization without any suspicion. But with the Islam and Civil Society, which was already ongoing, made things a little bit easier.

Q: Right because there was already an ongoing relationship. Yes that was very fortuitous. Let me ask you about two things that were happening about this same time. One was in Aceh the tsunami did you get involved with that at all or was that other people in the mission who responded to the emergency relief needs.

ISA: There was another office within USAID who was heavily involved in the Aceh program.

Q: So the mission was large enough and had enough people so that it didn't need to mobilize people from other offices to help?

ISA: I think after the tsunami in Aceh, a separate office was created for the rehabilitation of Aceh.

Q: Did the democracy over time begin to do any work in Aceh as well?

ISA: Oh yes.

Q: Your grantees were working in Aceh?

ISA: Yes . Another colleague managed programs in Aceh.

Q: So the mission was actively involved across the board including in the democracy program.

ISA: Yes.

Q: The other important thing that was happening around there about this time was East Timor, Timor-Leste?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Were you involved at all in any of the work relating to either before Timor, East Timor became independent or afterwards did you have any involvement at all?

ISA: I was not much involved in East Timor programs although I visited East Timor twice . Another FSN in my office was extensively responsible for East Timor issue.

Q: Okay. After East Timor became independent did USAID Indonesia help to support the new USAID mission that developed in East Timor? Do you know whether there was any ongoing relationship between the two USAID offices?

ISA: I do not know but I am certain that when East Timor became independent, they had its own USAID office and as far as I know we did not support nor cooperate with USAID East Timor.

Q: I was just curious. Maybe we can talk a little bit about some of the FSN related issues. You had mentioned earlier about going to training programs in Bangkok on project management and I'm sure there were FSNs from throughout the region there. More generally was there very much communication or collaboration among FSNs in the region in different countries, was there very much communication and if not do you think that is something that would be helpful if AID could find ways to increase the collaboration across country lines among FSNs?

ISA: I would say that after training was done, less communication or collaboration occurred among participants from different regions except on personal basis. However, with new modern technology, it might be easier for participants to start exchange collaborate on similar topics .

Q: Okay soon a personal level people were able to.

ISA: Yes. on a personal level some of us still made contact through Facebook mostly.

Q: You mentioned were you able to benefit from other training at USAID? Did USAID sponsor you for any other training besides the Project Management course that you had?

ISA: Yes, I did. In 1998 for the first time I came to the U.S. to attend the Education and Human Resource Development State of the Art in education. Then, in later years I participated in democracy and gender training in Washington.

Q: Were those separate training on gender and on democracy?

ISA: Separate.

Q: You mentioned the State of the Art training programs. I remember they were doing them for a while did they continue doing that kind of training?

ISA: For education?

Q: In general for all the technical areas the State of the Art?

ISA: No, I don't think, I wouldn't know.

Q: Was that a useful kind of training and did it mix both FSNS and American staff from around the world together in courses?

ISA: Oh yes it was always useful for Americans and foreign service nationals to communicate with one another and exchange information on the program such as the Education State of the art training where we shared and exchanged information about the programs in each country.

Q: Were there also discussions of things that worked and successful programs and programs that might have been less successful so people could learn from one another?

ISA: Oh yes especially on democracy.

Q: Okay. Democracy is particularly difficult because every place is so unique but...

ISA: Yes and therefore we discussed and shared issues and problems in our respective country such as freedom of the press, corruption that hindered development, etc.

Q: Do you have any thoughts about the management of FSNS within USAID and how the personnel system works for them that you would like to share?

ISA: When I entered USAID in 1977, the human resources administration was under one roof, i.e. the embassy. They administered hiring, and other personnel issues for the whole mission including USAID, USIS, commercial, economic, political section, Library of Congress, Defense and Military Office. Then later on USAID set up its own personnel office and administration, separate from the embassy. Not only was USAID handled personnel but also managed the housing for the USAID American employees. It looked like USAID was "independent" from the embassy.

Q: Okay and that was when USAID on FSNS began to do contracts instead of direct hire.

ISA: FSN employment status from direct hire to contract began after 1980.

Q: It was after.

ISA: Those FSN who were on board before 1980 retained their direct hire status but FSN who were hired after 1980 were on contractual basis, renewed every year.

Q: So that was after that was not at the time USAID took it over it was later.

ISA: The change in status were applied across the board .

Q: You liked it when it was all under one house ion the embassy?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Can you explain why?

ISA: Because relationship between FSNs regardless of office or agency was very close. We knew the names and where they worked. We were bonded as a family of the American Embassy. When there were still many direct hires the turnover of personnel was low. But when more employees were hired on contractual basis turnover was quite high, especially when they knew that better opportunities in terms of salary and benefits were available in other places or other donors.

Q: Because they would be...

ISA: Some might stay for a year or two at USAID, and then they left if they were able to seek other employment.

Q: Because they would be recruited away by other donors?

ISA: Not only that but the benefits are better outside.

Q: The benefits were better outside the U.S. government.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Then once it moved to being contractual everything became more distant and benefits became worse. There were disincentives to want to work for the U.S.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Do you recall what other embassies or donor might have had better benefits?

ISA: World Bank, AusAid, ADB and other private companies.

Q: Was there much discussion among the Indonesian staff of the various donors? Did you walk and talk and compare benefit packages and levels of responsibilities and how one was generally treated? Was there much discussion among the...

ISA: When Indonesia experienced inflation, normally the FSN association carried out an investigation or inquired other big donors such as the World Bank about the percentage of salary increase and benefits given to their Indonesian employees. The American Embassy was always late in adjusting to the situation compared to other donors who took action as soon as possible. I understood that the Mission could not respond to the salary adjustment immediately because of the budget situation in each agency. Even though USAID handled its own personnel issues, announcement of salary increase within the US Mission was handled by the embassy and applied to all agencies

Q: Were FSNs when the comparator surveys were done by the embassy to look at salaries were FSNs from the embassy involved in that process?

ISA: Heavily involved.

Q: So it was a very transparent process.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Good, good. There were FSN committees at post?

ISA: Yes Indonesia employees association (IEA).

Q: Let me ask were there a couple of posts that I was in there were credit unions that evolved that the FSNs created was that the case in Indonesia by any chance?

ISA: Yes at USAID.

Q: So there was a FSN credit union?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Did most people belong to it?

ISA: Oh yes. I even borrowed money from the credit union.

Q: So it worked quite effectively?

ISA: In the beginning but it did not exist now due to some financial problems.

Q: Oh okay. Other thoughts, let me just ask a question about whether U.S.-Indonesian relationships I think were probably pretty good most of the time during that period you were working for USAID? But I'm sure they were probably sometimes stronger than others. I'm just wondering whether, as an Indonesian did you ever confront any issues with family or friends that you were working for the U.S. government and for USAID? Was that ever a problem or did...

ISA: With my family?

Q: Or with friends or within Indonesia did it present any problems at all?

ISA: No, no problems at all.

Q: I think that does vary by country but I think relations between our two countries have always been good. Other thoughts that you have about your career and working for USAID and what were...

ISA: I would say that I was happy, satisfied and grateful that I had worked for U.S. government because of the experience and opportunity that opened my eyes and thinking about the culture and politics of Indonesia and the U.S.

Q: Well certainly you contributed yourself a lot to the success of Indonesia itself.

ISA: I hope so. Anyway, I should also be thankful to Mark Johnson who gave me the freedom and also the trust from the political section of the embassy.

Q: I think you had mentioned earlier that it was always a very good working relationship between the political section and the democracy office in USAID.

ISA: Yes, when a new political officer came on board in late 2000 , he always came to my office to talk about the political situation especially the human rights in Indonesia. I also introduced him some names within the civil society organization that he should meet.

Q: Well you were a very valuable resource for both USAID and the U.S. government more generally to enable people to better understand the country they were working in.

ISA: At that time yes especially during the earlier period after Suharto stepped down.

Q: It's almost the model one would hope to see around the world.

ISA: The establishment of the democracy and governance office at USAID Indonesia was exactly the right time in 1994.

Q: Mark Johnson was there at that period and he was the key person in establishing the office?

ISA: Correct.

Q: And moving it from a civic participation office to a democracy office.

ISA: Partly yes because if the word "democracy" was not a very sensitive item, the office was directly named The Office of Democracy instead of using OC2P.

Q: It's a wonderful success story of an office evolving and playing a very significant role.

ISA: Thank you. And yes Mark Johnson played a role and we had problems on the way from the beginning when Mark Johnson arrived at the office in terms of the Freeport Papua issue.

Q: I'm sorry can you explain that?

ISA: We had a program with WALHI (Indonesian Environment Organization) and one of their programs was in West Papua informing and/or defending the indigenous Papuan of their rights against the Freeport mining company. Freeport did not like USAID gave support to WALHI and they informed the ambassador about their displeasure and requested USAID for information on all correspondences with WALHI under the Freedom of Information Act. Freeport also tried to influence the Mission to stop funding to WALHI. However, the mission made a decision to continue support despite Freeport protest. It was a tedious and difficult process and my colleague who handled the program was exhausted at the end.

Q: Well in many ways because USAID had programs covering much of Indonesia you all were the most knowledgeable about really what was happening in the country and were a very valuable tool for the embassy's understanding.

ISA: USAID took a chance in supporting not only NGOs working on programs such as consumer rights, women rights but also hard core NGOs like WALHI for example.

Q: Did you know if any of those mining or any of the other companies complained to the embassy or to the U.S. government about support for those groups?

ISA: Yes.

Q: They did?

ISA: They did that was why they also sought requests for information under the Freedom of Information Act and we had to provide all correspondences to Freeport.

Q: The Freedom of Information Act?

ISA: yes.

Q: So they got information on our grantees?

ISA: No, only on one organization which was WALHI.

Q: Right but on the grantee that was criticizing them?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Wow but was there ever any pressure on USAID to stop providing grants?

ISA: Yes.

Q: Pressure from whom?

ISA: From Freeport.

Q: But not from within the U.S. government?

ISA: No, from Freeport and it was the decision of the ambassador to continue funding.

Q: That's important and that again shows the benefit of the close coordination with the embassy on all of these issues. You mentioned Papua that's the Papua in Indonesia which borders Papua, New Guinea, is that correct?

ISA: Yes that is correct.

Q: Right. Did the Indonesia mission provide any support for the programs in Papua, New Guinea?

ISA: No only West Papua which is part of Indonesia.

Q: So there were programs that the U.S. was supporting in Papua, New Guinea?

ISA: I am sorry I mixed up with West Papua. No. we did not have programs with Papua New Guinea.

Q: In Papua but I was wondering about in the other country of Papua, New Guinea.

ISA: No, we did not have any program with Papua New Guinea.

Q: You didn't so we weren't involved at all there?

ISA: No.

Q: Okay because I think USAID was has been doing things there but they managed them out of somewhere else I guess. Okay, any other final thoughts?

ISA: I do not know what you would like to hear from me.

Q: Well just if you would briefly sum up what you thought was the best part of your USAID career and maybe start with what were some of the things you could have done during your USAID career and then wrap up with what were the best parts of your USAID career.

ISA: I wished that USAID gave more support to the general participant training which ended in 1996 after existing for a decade. USAID in fact revived the participant training in mid-2000 but in a smaller scale and different methodology. The earlier general participant training encompassed a very broad sectors from government, NGOs and even individuals. The new participant training was done through individual office within USAID to name participants from their program. That was what I experienced from the time it was revived. I am not aware about the current progress of this program.

Q: You think today there still is a demand in Indonesia for general participant training?

ISA: Nowadays other donors such as Australia, UK and the Netherlands to name a few offer scholarship to continue study in their respective country.

Q: So then these other countries are still...

ISA: Yes other countries now offer such opportunity.

Q: So other countries are providing general participant training so that suggests there is a demand in Indonesia for it.

ISA: Oh yes.

Q: And the U.S. would benefit from having a similar program.

ISA: Oh yes.

Q: That's a very important point. I know historically Indonesia many, many of its leaders did study in the United States.

ISA: I remembered or learned from others that in 1955 just seven years after the independence of Indonesia, the United States and Indonesia had an agreement to send faculty members from two prestigious universities (The Bandung Technical University and the Bogor Agriculture University) to pursue graduate studies in different universities in the U.S. To fill in the vacancy the US universities sent their professors to lecture students.

Q: Yes during that period there were many of those kinds of programs around the world and they certainly helped to build strong institutions and were very valuable. So that's a very good suggestion about general participant training. Before talking about your major points of satisfaction in your USAID career perhaps I could just on the FSN front also ask if you had any observations on the management of FSNs and the ways in which the

Americans and the FSNs worked together. If you have any observations or recommendations related to that that would be helpful also.

ISA: When I began working for USAID the relationship between the Americans and the Indonesians were very, very close. It was not like supervisor and subordinate. We were treated equally but with respect. But in later years the relationship was more "I am the boss and you are just an FSN" especially when the FSNs are on contract basis.

Q: Then the Americans became more concerned about numbers of people they were supervising and things like that.

ISA: Yes.

Q: Yeah I think this is still a very big issue that folks need to grapple with. Multinational companies figure it out I would hope the U.S. government can as well. Well maybe any final thoughts about what you are most proud of in your USAID career and that you'd like to make sure is recorded?

ISA: I was really proud that toward the end of my career I was nominated by the mission director for the John Withers Human Rights Award. I knew about it during my farewell party. I again was stunned when in June 2009 the acting AID Administrator in Washington telephoned me that I did win the award.

Q: And which award was this?

ISA: John L. Withers Human Rights Award.

Q: Ah the John Withers Human Rights Award. Wow that's quite an honor.

ISA: I think I was one the two first recipients of the award.

Q: That is something to be proud of and reflects your work.

ISA: Yes and because of that award USAID/Indonesia had a conference named after me in their old building.

Q: Oh wow, you have a conference room named after you.

ISA: In USAID old office. They now occupied a temporary office while the new Embassy compound is being constructed.

Q: So USAID was not in the embassy compound?

ISA: No, USAID was and will be in the same compound as the embassy but now the U.S. embassy is renovating the whole compound and USAID and some of the embassy offices had to move to another building.

Q: So they are in temporary facilities now? I hope when that new facility gets built that there is a Gartini Isa conference room.

ISA: Well I don't look forward to it.

Q: Well again you've had a remarkable career and we very much appreciate your sharing some of it with us. Also, unless you have a final word I am going to turn the recording off but I am going to let you have the final word.

ISA: I hope that USAID actually in Indonesia will keep on helping the people of Indonesia.

Q: Okay well that's a good wish to end with. I will close this off now.

End of interview