

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
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**TODD AMANI**

*Interviewed by: Marcia Bernbaum  
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**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Background**

Born and raised in Dodge Center, Minnesota  
BA in Political Science from Wartburg College, Waverly, Iowa  
taking time off to bike to California and hike  
the Appalachian Trail  
Graduate studies at School for Advanced International Studies,  
Johns Hopkins University

**Prior to joining USAID**

Assistant Director, Self-Help Foundation, Waverly, Iowa	1979-1980
Community Development/Health Promoter, Peace Corps. Costa Rica	1980-1981
Board of Directors, Greenbelt Homes Incorporated, Greenbelt, Maryland	1985-1986
Political Science Instructor, Wartburg College, Waverly Iowa	1986-1987
Legislative Director/Assistant for Congressman Tim Penny, House of Representatives, Washington, DC	1987-1990

**USAID Career**

Program Officer, USAID/Nicaragua and USAID/Egypt	1990-1994
Chief of Mission Democracy Unit, USAID/Nicaragua	1994-1995
Democracy and Human Rights Deputy Team Leader, Latin America-Caribbean Bureau	1995-1997
Governance Senior Advisor/Team Leader, Democracy &	

Governance Center USAID/W	1997-1998
Strategy and Program Support Office Director, USAID/Honduras	1998-2001
Democratic Initiatives Office Director, USAID/Guatemala	2001-2004
Deputy Mission Director, USAID/Guatemala	2004-2007
Mission Director, USAID/Mozambique	2007-2012
Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator, Africa Bureau, USAID/W	2012-2014

### **After retiring from USAID**

Executive Director, Safe Passage, Guatemala City, Guatemala	2014-2017
Chief of Party for USAID/Guatemala Transformative Action Project, IREX, Guatemala City, Guatemala	2017-2019

## **INTERVIEW**

*Q: Welcome Todd, I'm very eager to hear your story. Let's begin with where you were born and raised*

AMANI: I'll try to start at the beginning. I was born in Minnesota, I grew up there. My dad had a short spell in the Army so for a while we were in the Washington, DC area, as he was located in Maryland, but only for a year or so. I grew up in the small town of Dodge Center, Minnesota, which is south of Minneapolis, just a little bit west of Rochester, Minnesota where the Mayo Clinic is. My father was a veterinarian. I spent a lot of time with him helping him with animals or surgery in his office and sometimes visiting farms around while he did his work. The town was just 1200 people and I went to school there from kindergarten to graduation. I enjoyed what you can do in a small town. One of the nice things about a small school is everybody does everything. I played football, basketball, I did track, I played golf one year. I got to know people – both in town and in the country. My class was around thirty or thirty-five kids so we knew everybody pretty well.

When I finished high school I decided I wanted to go to a very interesting program at Wartburg College in Waverly, Iowa - a program called Chrysalis. It was a new-age type seminar program - kind of a hippy-type thing. Our "classroom" had beanbag chairs for discussion or furniture in the "living room" of the dorm; when we had our discussions a lot of it was just engaging each other and a professor regarding the issues facing us. It was a different way of learning and it was meant to be that way. I really flourished in that. While I was in college I took some time off to do some different things, which this program allowed me to do in some ways. The college had a 4-4-1 course setup that meant we had two semesters with four courses and a "May Term" with a focus on one course that opened up various opportunities off campus (for example, my first May Term class was in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area in northern Minnesota and another was a month in Chicago learning about programs to address poverty in a big city).

After my freshman year I took the year off to bicycle from my home in Minnesota out to the West Coast through Yellowstone and other parts of the scenic areas of the west, ending up in Seattle. I spent a month or so in Seattle trying to make some money so I could go the rest of the way, then went down to San Francisco, stayed a while in San Francisco. Then down to San Diego, just went into Mexico for a day, then came all the way back through the Grand Canyon and other things along the way. I took a whole year off to do that – the first half with my cousin and second half with a good friend at Wartburg/Chrysalis. A year later I decided to hike on the Appalachian Trail and Wartburg professors helped me find ways to get college credit while on the trail by focusing on the geography and weather on the trail, the flora and fauna of the Appalachians, and how to function well on the trail (equipment, food, etc.).

The May Term of my senior year was a trip to London, Egypt, Kenya, Tanzania, and Geneva with an Economics professor extremely interested in addressing Third World poverty. This was my first real opportunity to see the reality of poor countries and the people there and I was able to see the work of some missionaries in Tanzania who received some funding from college our efforts to raise funds for their work. After I graduated, my two younger brothers and a friend from college spent a month in the Boundary Waters Canoe Area starting in late September into October. After that, as part of the bonding process with my brothers, we bicycled from Minnesota to New Orleans.

So I did a lot of things that were fun, enjoyable, and interesting – and I developed an interest in how to address poverty in other parts of the world. But another key outcome of my college days was meeting Mary Jo Felderman, daughter of a Navy captain, who had lived overseas in Italy and Japan and had similar interests. Our relationship led to our marriage in a park outdoors in a nearby park along the Cedar River. As we thought through the marriage process, we decided to change our last names. My surname was Hanson, hers was Felderman. Basically the “Amani” comes from our decision to take a new name together. Amani is a Swahili word that means peace. We’re kind of in a new-age marriage, I guess. It’s worked out well for us....

*Q: Love it.*

AMANI: But also, on our honeymoon, we took time to go to Peru with the Economics professor mentioned above who showed us some work being done in Quechua communities - and we went to Machu Picchu and got to see different parts of Peru. All of that came together for us as we decided to go into the Peace Corps. We were posted in Costa Rica, but in a very rural area which was an indigenous area for Costa Rica. So the people we worked with spoke Spanish as a second language – and many men and women in the village had limited Spanish. Our job was to help them to improve their health and build their abilities to grow different kinds of crops that might be good for their families, vegetables and things like that. It was a very poor area and their first language wasn’t Spanish. We learned Spanish and conducted ourselves with them in Spanish but neither of us were all that great in our Spanish at the beginning. We developed a great relationship with the teachers in the village when we arrived who were really good

teachers and got to know the village well. We grew vegetables there, had goats, and spent a lot of time with the kids. We organized the kids to play soccer and things like that through a 4S (4H) Club we started. But compared to the other Peace Corps volunteers in our program at the time, we were really out there. We had to walk half an hour from any road to get to the village we worked with. But we loved it, it was really cool and we learned a lot living in that small village.

I bring that up because there was a big event in my life when I decided I would put a hammock (which was made by the people in the village) up into a tree, because we had built our own house right near the school and we were working with the kids. I decided that I wanted to put a hammock high in the tree to get away from all the kids who were around the school. Unfortunately, I didn't put that hammock up exactly right. It was pretty high up and one morning I climbed into it and shortly something broke and I fell and injured my spine. So I was medically evacuated from my Peace Corps site. It took quite a bit of work to figure out how to get me out of there, first of all because we were a long way from a road and, even then, a long way from a hospital that could handle a spinal cord injury. Eventually I ended up being flown out from Costa Rica to Washington DC for medical attention. In the process, about three days passed during all of that effort. Once in Washington DC, I got the medical attention I needed. But partly because of the delay in getting there, unfortunately I've been a paraplegic and have had to deal with the fact that I needed to use either a wheelchair or crutches. Since I was young and athletic, I was pretty good with crutches, so most of the time at that point I did use crutches, but I used a wheelchair at times at home.

I bring all that up because I was really interested in being a Foreign Service Officer with USAID (United States Agency for International Development). But part of getting there was that, for my rehabilitation, the U.S. government or the Peace Corps people who were helping me figure out how to move into the next stage for me, were willing to provide some funding for graduate study. So I was accepted by the Johns Hopkins School of Advanced International Studies (SAIS), and I spent two years of study with SAIS. During that time I had a couple of summer jobs, one with the U.S. Information Agency and one with the State Department (Cuba issues). Then I found that USAID was recruiting, so I went to talk to the people there about that and put in a request for considering me as a Foreign Service Officer with USAID - and got an interview. I was really excited, the interview went well, and I really liked the people I interviewed with. They were ready to say this is somebody we'd like to have work at USAID. But they also said "you'll have to go through the State Department's medical people to see if you can go as a paraplegic". State/Med basically told me that, "you have a spinal cord injury and are paralyzed, and Foreign Service Officers have to climb mountains and swim across seas" and this won't work, so we can't give you an okay on the medical side.

I told them that I have had no problems dealing with the work assigned to me at USIA or the State Department. They said some of the houses will have steps, and I told them that I can go up steps, I can use crutches and go up steps if necessary (we had stairs in our house at the time). I told them that "I really think I can serve USAID well with the disability I have and I don't think it should be a problem."

Anyway, that caused a delay because I made a formal issue out of it. I told them I think I can do the job, I would like to be able to do that job. That led to a process internally within the State Department (I don't know how much it was USAID, I think it was the State Department that had to deal with it). In the meantime, my father had a visit from a person who was seeking the representative from our home area in southeastern Minnesota - a candidate trying to win his seat in the House of Representatives. He won the election for south-eastern Minnesota, so he was newly coming to Washington as a member of the House. He stopped by to see my dad while he was electioneering, and my dad said "My son is in Washington, he's been in the Peace Corps and is interested in politics and he's been at SAIS." He said, "Have him come in and talk to me and my staff." The result was he hired me to handle foreign affairs issues, and other issues that were associated with that. It was a bigger portfolio than that but he particularly wanted me on staff there to help with the international issues.

So I had a nice job with him for a couple of years with great staff members who were smart and fun. I continued to engage with the State Department regarding my interest in working with USAID and made it a formal issue. Then, out of the blue, a former college professor called me and said they would be interested in having both me and Mary Jo fill a tandem professor position and come back to Wartburg College. So, while I was waiting to see if it might be possible for the State Department to give me an okay for work with USAID (they were dragging their feet), I went back to Wartburg College to teach political and international classes and engage in the programs there.

*Q: Two questions. First of all, when you were working for the congressman, did you have any cause to have any interaction with USAID during that period?*

AMANI: Not really. I knew about USAID, partly because of our experience in Costa Rica as Peace Corps volunteers; we knew what USAID was doing a little bit. I did bone up on things when I was trying to get a job there, but was being held off. Ultimately the wheels of government go slowly so all of a sudden I got something back from USAID saying they had decided they could take a risk with me. They didn't put it that way, but they were willing to hire me, let's put it that way.

*Q: What year was this?*

AMANI: 1987. So anyway, we left our job - we shared the job, my wife and I - at Wartburg College. Once we got the okay we had to ask ourselves "do we want to stay here and do this or try with USAID?" We decided to make the move back to Washington DC, and started working - we heard back that they were going to give me a shot. So I joined, I forget what it's called, how you spend the first year ---

*Q: You were an IDI (International Development Intern). You came in as an intern. I came in as an IDI, I have my own story to tell about Congress. But you were in many ways a pathbreaker for the future. Based on your experience, has AID brought in other people who were wheelchair bound since - to your knowledge?*

AMANI: I can't say that I ran into anybody else who had to deal with the things I had to deal with. They had decided I would be going into the next group of IDI's. I don't know if we had the assignment right away but we ended up going to Egypt as our first post. So I spent a year in Washington with our new group of people who were coming in – I felt this was a good group and we stayed somewhat in contact for years. I forget how long that preparation course was but it was a pretty good process where we were learning about USAID. Then I worked in the Middle East bureau while I was in Washington to get to know what was happening, given that Egypt was our assignment coming up.

So we spent some time in Washington working with USAID and getting ready to go overseas and learning all the things you need to learn about how USAID works, getting a sense of what programming we were doing in the Middle East and Egypt. During the period I was working with the Congressman and working with USAID in Washington we also adopted two children from Colombia. So we were building our family at that time before we went to Egypt and when we actually went overseas we had expanded our family.

*Q: I do have a bunch of questions. I'm curious, did you have much contact with USAID when you were in Costa Rica? Not much?*

AMANI: Not really. I think we met some people working there, but we didn't get to know people working in USAID. We knew they had projects there.

*Q: Okay. I'd be curious to learn about your rotations in Washington, whether you did rotations, and what your initial impressions were of USAID coming in? Not just with the history of your challenges getting in but your impressions of how the U.S. government is operating from the perspective not of the Peace Corps but of the other side.*

AMANI: I liked the people that came together in our group. We got to know some of them fairly well, they weren't people we necessarily ended up doing a lot with later in our time with USAID, but it was a nice group that had come together, a lot of different kinds of backgrounds, all seemed very bright and ready to do good work. I was impressed with the people that came together in that cohort.

I also liked very much other people I worked with in USAID. I can't remember exactly which office it was while I worked in preparation for going to Egypt as a Program Office. I generally had a really positive impression of the people there. I think I met Tish Butler during that period who was really helpful and have been in touch with her over a period of time. I was impressed with the kind of people they were and the kinds of things they knew how to do working in a bureaucracy, overseas, and all the kinds of things you have to deal with as a person working for the U.S. government in another country and all of that.

From there, I had my assignment and we did what we needed to do to get to Egypt, my first post. We met some great people there as well. I was a Program Officer, primarily

focused on infrastructure stuff that we were doing in Egypt. They had made roads and we had done some sanitation stuff. It was big infrastructure. I was the program officer linked to all of that work that was being done. Part of it was learning the ropes regarding what happens in a USAID mission. We made some good friends there, we lived in Maadi which is the southern part of the grand area around Cairo. There was a nice little club there both for the embassy and USAID; it had a pool I could use for swimming laps. I was a USAID board member for a club that ran a grocery store kind of thing and ran this little club area with the pool and everything. One of the guys in USAID asked if I was interested in learning how to scuba dive. I said, “You think I can do that?” and he said yes, so I learned from him how to scuba dive and went scuba diving in the Red Sea.

I was just impressed with the quality of the people. Vikka Moldrum was my overall supervisor. Dan Leaty was the guy who took me under his wing and served as a mentor for me. Tony Doggett and his family connected with us and he and Peter Kresge enjoyed playing the guitar and singing together, and we shared some sing-a-longs with others at parties.

*Q: You went into, at that point, by far the biggest mission in the world and by far the most political one. As you reflect later on in your years, because you went on to very different programs, what was it about that mission that was unusual or different from other missions you were involved in including as Mission Director later on?*

AMANI: Just the size of the program. The kind of infrastructure that was being done – these were big projects and the amounts of money were incredible. In thinking of what came later, Egypt was just in a whole other role because of the politics of it all and the amounts of money that were available. All of the places we worked had political issues, but Egypt was just a really big and important area for USAID work. Just the scope of it all was amazing, a huge mission, lots of people and lots of money and politically important for the U.S. government.

*Q: Did you have much contact with the State Department while you were there?*

AMANI: No, I didn't. I worked with some of them in relation to other things – like I was on the Board of the USAID pool area Maadi and USG grocery store, so I interacted with people from there, but not so much on political issues. I got to know them more from working together rather than their work. I don't think any of the other programs are quite like it - Egypt was at a whole different scale, we didn't have that much money elsewhere. That much money and so many people and so many political issues behind it.

I only stayed in Egypt two years because USAID was looking for people to go to Nicaragua, they were looking for Spanish speakers who could be available quickly – and I was interested given our time in Costa Rica. They just needed people because there was an opening for the United States government to engage – the USAID program wasn't really functioning in a significant way during the time of the war in Nicaragua.

*Q: Let's start again with Nicaragua.*

AMANI: While we were in Egypt, the word came that they were looking for people to go to Nicaragua. We thought that would be fun to do, though we'd only been in Egypt for two years. I went and talked to my superiors and said "we have some experience in Central America and speak Spanish, they're looking for people, would it be all right if we put our names in to go there?" They were willing to let us do that. So we went to Nicaragua, and I went there as a Program Officer.

The real need for the Program Officer was to figure out what the strategy should be and how should we spend good money to make a difference in Nicaragua and support this opening they were trying to see with Violeta Chamorro being elected. Our Foreign Service officers wanted to do some important things that would make a difference and create a different relationship with Nicaragua. We moved to Nicaragua and my job in the program office was primarily to put together a new program based on my discussion with all the other technical people who were brought in there. Janet Ballantyne was the mission director, Ken Schofield was the deputy director, Bob Burke was the head of the program office. He was an economist and not really a Program Officer, so a lot of that program work fell to me, putting things together, talking to people in the technical offices and what they thought should be done to address the issues in each area, whether health, the economy, all the other areas that USAID worked in: what could we be doing? I was the key person putting the strategy together based on input from everyone else, and still feel some pride in pulling all that input together into a coherent strategy that addressed the key issues facing Nicaragua and guided our work over the next few years.

Democracy programming was also an important area and eventually I moved into that because it was an area of interest to me, but I started as the Program Officer and spent quite a bit of time putting together the plan that would go to Washington for approval. I can't remember what the amounts of money were but they were significant because of the political importance of getting Nicaragua out of the Sandinista programs and trying to rebuild a different approach to the economy and the country as a whole. I ended up being the author for the program plan, based on my talks with everybody else and input from many other people. We got it approved. We were growing in numbers as the program grew, there were issues about housing, a whole process of getting back into a more usual kind of mission, because during the Sandinista period there really wasn't a lot of work going on through USAID because of the political nature of what was going on.

*Q: As I recall, Ken Schofield was program officer when we were in Nicaragua years earlier. Did he ever reflect on what it was like to come back?*

AMANI: I don't really remember him telling us stories from the past, we were so focused on what we were doing then, how we would address the incredible issues we had to deal with. Including some debt issues. I understand why Bob Burke was brought in as an Economist because there were so many issues associated with how the whole economy would stand up.



I was proud of the fact that I could play a role in hearing from all these technical experts and bringing it together into a document that would get approval from Washington and play a role in making decisions about what was most important, how to spend the money to have an impact. It was a heady time, lots of work to do but very interesting.

*Q: That's a lot of responsibility given you were a new USAID officer.*

AMANI: That's really true because I didn't have a lot of experience on how USAID works. And here I was with some people who were really top of their game, dealing with a very important political issue for the United States government. Here I was, someone who had only been working for two years in Egypt, trying to pull all that together.

*Q: Do you want to stop here or continue beyond Nicaragua?*

AMANI: I'm just trying to think if there's anything more. We were there five years. We did get to see how things worked out. I shifted while in Nicaragua from the Program Office into the democracy part of the program. Part of that was focusing on funding another election and what USAID could do, given the reality on the ground, to make sure the election was free and fair, and how to deal with how things might undermine the process – the Sandinistas had their ways of working to get people to vote for them. So where would the other alternative come from? It was really interesting stuff. My own experiences in Congress in the United States were helpful, I liked the idea of democracy stuff even though I came in as a Program Officer. I was there five years in Nicaragua and the last couple of years, I was no longer part of the program office, I shifted into a democracy officer at that time.

*Q: The U.S. has not shied away from helping to influence elections, even though we do want to ensure that elections are free and fair – what was our role in helping with the elections in Nicaragua?*

AMANI: I think it was, or part of it was, what are the political parties? What is the alternative to the Sandinistas as we move forward? How much of what we were doing as the U.S. government could be appropriate and helpful. It was a little dicey in the sense of how much do they want the U.S. government to push into that area? But I think I needed to go back and look at who we were really working with at the time, to figure out how we move from the kind of Sandinista juggernaut for a while. Where is the alternative really coming from? There were still some really big issues in terms of the economy and all of that. I feel like in the first few years things were just “it has to be this, it has to be this, it has to be that”. As I moved into my final years there, years four and five, it was like okay, how are we going to make this a functioning democracy. That wasn't so easy to figure out. There wasn't a lot in Nicaragua that showed any significant experience with democratic government. There had been the Somoza period before the Sandinistas. So that whole idea was difficult, how do you move from a dictatorship almost into a democratic government? I'm not sure we really were able to make the kind of impact we would have liked in that area. It was interesting to think about and try to figure out. I would say, based on what happened later, we didn't quite get there. It was an interesting

thought process of what can we do with U.S. government money to help this country really become a democratic state, when there's hardly any experience with that. The future of Nicaragua doesn't show that there's a whole lot of democratic improvement there.

*Q: Excellent. Fascinating times. You moved from one very political program to another very political program.*

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*Q: Todd, welcome, please continue telling us your fascinating story.*

AMANI: Thanks. I think when we last spoke, it was about my time in Nicaragua and I wanted to go back and talk about the fact that I switched from being a Program Officer in my first few years in Nicaragua, to being a Democracy Officer, partly because of the importance of the upcoming election that would determine whether the Sandinistas would take over again, a lot of concern about the election and whether it would be free, fair, and open. I was really interested in that and, based on my experience in the U.S. Congress and other areas of study, I was interested in being involved in that. So I switched from being a Program Officer to being a Democracy Officer in the last two years I was in Nicaragua. It was an exciting, interesting time, and also really difficult because there was a lot of concern about whether a free and fair election could be held, even though Violeta Chamorro had won the last election. Still a lot of concern about how democratic the election would be and whether it could be free, fair, and something we could trust.

Ultimately, I don't think it was. It was interesting to work with people who were focused on having a free and fair election and trying to ensure that a really important part of a democratic system would be handled appropriately in Nicaragua. I really did switch from being a Program Officer to doing something almost completely different. Then I ended up going back to Washington, I think before the election was held. I went to Washington to work in the Latin America and the Caribbean Bureau, focusing on the broader democratic issues in Latin America. So I was still in touch with what was going in Nicaragua but then I was involved in a bunch of other things and the broader kinds of programs that were being developed as the Agency became more involved in ensuring that democratic issues were dealt with in many countries, not just Nicaragua - recognizing there was more need for work in democracy.

*Q: When did the democracy office come into being? You were there at the beginning of the formation of the democracy office?*

AMANI: No, the democracy office in LAC was already in place, I don't know when that started. I think it was already operating, I just came in and joined that team. But my recollection is it was fairly recent and expanding more broadly. They had a team of mostly local people, not Foreign Service officers, but a couple of Foreign Service officers as well.

*Q: Do you remember who some of the key people were?*

AMANI: I'd have to go back and look. LAC was somewhat forward leaning on this and we had a team there focused on democratic issues, including some programmatic focus on local governments. I remember going to Bolivia to help develop a local government program that was just getting underway. While I was in Washington there was an effort to develop a focus on democracy in the Global Bureau. Chuck Costello and Jennifer Windsor were part of that effort and they recruited me to help with that endeavor with a particular focus on local governance. I learned a lot in both LAC and the Global Bureau and was stimulated by these new efforts focused on democracy and governance. I'm a real believer in the need to see development through a democracy lens and the need for people to address issues of corruption, elect their leaders, and find ways to improve policies that have positive impact. I enjoyed focusing on the democratic issues we faced in so many countries.

*Q: May I say that Chuck is one of my heroes, I always admired him. Later on he was the head of the Central America Desk.*

AMANI: Anyway, after Nicaragua I was in Washington working on DG (democracy and governance) efforts. And then my next post ended up being Honduras.

*Q: Can you comment at all about what was happening in the Global bureau at that time on the focus on democracy and issues?*

AMANI: I think many of us felt that it was important to focus on the issues of democracy. It wasn't really development if people were living under strongmen without a democratic process or weren't involving the people in decision-making or even free and fair elections. There was a sense this democracy programming had been a missing part of what could really be a key focus in developing a country. I thought it was a really interesting time because there was a need to figure out what we can do in an organization like USAID, what we would be allowed to do in some countries, what are the really important structures that keep a democracy working and staying focused. For me it was interesting intellectually in figuring some of this out – to figure out what we can do as a foreign country working in other countries on issues like democracy, and what are the things that are most important: what could we do that would be helpful to many countries? And then there are also the issues of so many countries having strong men or strong women who don't want to see a democratic process taking place. So how do you deal with the issues of going to another country and trying to remake a system into something more democratic, knowing that the people in power don't want to see that because they came to power apart from much of a democratic process.

I found it intellectually stimulating to figure out the kinds of programs we might be able to do and to try things and be innovative about dealing with issues associated with democracy in the countries we worked in.

*Q: Can I play devil's advocate here? I agree that working in democracy is critical but there have been a number of observations that the U.S. exports its use of democracy without taking into consideration the realities of countries. I'd be interested in your comment on that.*

AMANI: Moving toward democracy in a poor country when there are “strong men/women” in power unwilling to share some of that power is one of the hardest things to make happen. In the United States we have a pretty literate and educated population, and many of the countries in which we work don't have that. That is a hard hurdle for us to deal with when there are so many people who aren't educated, who haven't lived under a country with democratic principles. There's a whole issue of the history and mores that are difficult to overcome. The way things have worked for so long in so many countries, pushing for democracy can be really difficult and sometimes that turns to violence. The issue of strongmen/strongwomen in many countries, that's just what's expected by so many people, and trying to move from those kinds of states into a democratic country, is a long-term thing and there's lots of setbacks.

But I think it's a worthy effort, and I think it's good for people and I believe it is empowering for people, but it's very difficult. It's one of those things you just plug away on and maybe sometimes find an opening, but very difficult.

Anyway, I did find it stimulating to work in that area while in Washington. Then I'm not sure exactly what led me to go to Honduras as a Program Officer, but shortly after we went to Honduras, Hurricane Mitch hit. That was one of the biggest hurricanes ever to hit Honduras, if not all of Central America. So very quickly I ended up having to put together a whole new strategy based on dealing with the impact of Hurricane Mitch, just a tremendous impact. Even in Tegucigalpa, it was hard to move around, and that wasn't the most heavily hit. There was concern about whether we needed to evacuate. Once it was all over, there were tremendous needs in the country. We were lucky to have Elena Brineman as our Mission Director and Wayne Nilsestuen as Deputy Director as they were both seasoned and smart about dealing with all the issues and contacts needed to develop a response to help those in need after the hurricane. And we were also fortunate to have former USAID Mission Director Frank Almaguer as the U.S. Ambassador during this crisis. I was the Program Officer at that time, so it was my job to pull together, from all of the people in the mission, what were the things that needed to be done, how do they need to be done, what do we need to get them done, and come up with a proposal for review by USAID Washington about the hurricane response. A lot of work. I had pulled it all together but we had lots of people to help out. Bob Gersony was there and he went to one part of Honduras to see what was really happening up there. We had lots of people checking out other parts of the country. So the process required figuring out what was most important to do right away, what was most important to do long-term, and put together a strategy for what USAID was going to help Honduras recover from a really massive hurricane that touched almost all parts of the country.

I was really busy. I felt like -

*Q: At one point Elena Brenaman appeared, right?*

AMANI: Yes, she was there when I got there. She was great! She helped us to really get down to the nitty gritty and say, “here’s what needs to be done, here’s what doesn’t need to be done right now, here’s how we want to focus on this, and we need to start with information”. That’s where Bob Gersony was so good. Of course all of the staff had worked in different parts of Honduras on different things. Elena did a great job of sending out, here’s what we need to do, let’s go find out what most needs to be done, let’s come up with ideas about what we can do to have an impact in the recovery of people throughout Honduras that were affected by the hurricane. She was so on top of things. I really appreciated what she brought to that role as Mission Director at a time it was really critical to move fast. We had the potential to bring in a lot of resources but we needed to make sure, if we were going to bring in a lot of resources, we were doing the right things. She was on top of that all the time.

*Q: This might be premature but you yourself eventually became a Mission Director and it would be interesting to have you reflect, maybe not now but later, each mission director you worked with brought different strengths and weaknesses, and what you learned from these experiences and molded the role you played.*

AMANI: I’ll think on that because I really feel I worked with some of the best Mission Directors USAID had. I’ll do some pondering about that.

*Q: So Ricardo Maduro was president at the time, I believe. He had an interesting history. I was there at that time too, doing a couple of consultancies. What can you say about what was happening in Honduras in terms of the politics, issues of violence, the beginnings of the whole trend towards where Honduras is now?*

AMANI: I didn’t have a lot of patience with much of the leadership in Honduras. I didn’t feel like they were very good leaders. It’s unfortunate. I don’t remember feeling like they really had the capacity to work together with us in ways that would be helpful. I didn’t have a high opinion of the leadership in Honduras at that time. Unfortunately. But it didn’t matter much, in terms of our program they didn’t get in our way, but I didn’t think they had a sense of where to go.

*Q: You also had as your ambassador Frank Almaguer who was USAID, a friend of mine. What was it like, I’m not sure if you had much contact with him, but it would be interesting, your perspective of the role of a USAID person as Mission Director during that period.*

AMANI: That was nice. Throughout my career, some ambassadors were good, some not so good. Frank of course was great to have as ambassador at that time, because he knew how USAID worked, he was just a great leader anyway. So I think we were so fortunate to have him at the helm in the embassy at that time. It was providence in some way that, at a time when we needed a lot of focus on development and disaster assistance, we had a guy as ambassador who knew all about that stuff. That was the one fortunate thing. We

worked really well together with the Embassy largely because Frank had that background with USAID and knew what we could do and where the line should be drawn and help the embassy people focus and do their part during that period.

*Q: Do you want to pause here or continue to your next post?*

AMANI: Let's stop now and give me time to look back at that. I just wanted to add that while we were talking about Honduras and the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch, it reminds me of a guy I just have the highest opinion of who worked with us both in Nicaragua and Honduras and that's Bob Gersony. When we were in Nicaragua there was a lot of concern about poverty and issues in the Atlantic coast area of Nicaragua. As a new Program Officer I was very much involved in identifying what were the most important things we needed to do in Nicaragua, and Bob came in. There was a lot of concern about what was happening on the Atlantic coast, the poverty there and what was going on there after the election of Violeta Chamorro. Bob went there by himself and sometimes with his wife and identified the need to find jobs for people (not handouts), and there were a lot of things that needed to be fixed down there – so what we can do is give them work to do to fix them. He had this way of figuring out how to engage them to help themselves, we weren't just going to give them stuff but what we were going to do was give them a job and that creates respect. That is a different way of dealing with disasters.

What that ended up being was mostly building infrastructure that had been destroyed or was newly needed – that's what they needed. But what they most needed was jobs to help them feed their families and the infrastructure effort brought them jobs. There was a similar need in Honduras. After the hurricane, again there was a lot of stuff broken that needed to be fixed, and Bob helped figure out what were the most important things to be done, where we can get people to do things, to build back, to actually find ways for them to get employed and not just get handouts from us because of an emergency like that.

I really appreciated the opportunity I had to work with Bob Gersony, and how he looked at things and went all by himself (sometimes with his wife) and did these interviews to find out the things we most needed to do, the things that were going to make a difference in these areas, which are somewhat forgotten by the capital city and those in power. It wasn't a handout, it was giving people the respect they had to actually build back their own needs, with help from USAID and the U.S. government. I just wanted to bring that to the fore, because, as a Program Officer helping to put that together, I thought that was a unique way of bringing USAID assets to help people in a way that was respectful of their needs and of them as people. I have the highest respect for him, and I enjoyed reading the book about him recently as well. I learned a lot from watching Bob at work in those two places – Nicaragua's Atlantic coast and the aftermath of Hurricane Mitch.

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*Q: We're picking up a little bit of a last interview that somehow didn't make it in and then we will continue. Todd please go ahead and speak about Gersony.*

AMANI: I wanted to say a little something more about Bob Gersony, in particular because I recently read the book about him. I ran into him in two places, in Nicaragua where he went to the Atlantic coast to see what was happening there after the election of Violetta Chamorro, and then in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch, when he went to figure out what was really needed on the coast. I just really was amazed at his methodology. Basically, he didn't assume what should be done or the usual approach to adversity, things like a hurricane. He went to find out, and he was a little skeptical about what the needs were in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch. He had this way of just going out and talking to people. He went by himself and sometimes with his wife, and they just talked to people to figure out what they really needed. He didn't believe in giveaways, just pouring out stuff to people and assuming that's what they needed. Sometimes they did need food, for example. Mostly he wanted to give some level of providing their own sense of what they needed. What he tried to do is develop a programmatic approach to people who suffered in difficult situations like in the Atlantic coast in Nicaragua and in the aftermath of the hurricane in Honduras. He just went and talked to people and found out what it is they really needed. Sometimes it was to fix a road, not a handout. I really learned a lot about how to manage crises like that from Bob Gersony and his approach to those issues. He's done it all over the world. The book about him is amazing. I was fortunate to be in a position as a Program Officer in both places where his insights and experiences in dealing with the people who were affected by these disasters: he really found a way to look at it that was out of the usual for USAID. I learned a lot from him, I think he was on the right track all the time. I just wanted to say that so others might think about his approach to these things in the future.

*Q: Excellent, thank you I'm so glad you provided that, that's very helpful.*

*So we're now going to proceed to your next assignment, right?*

AMANI: I guess so. This is going back to Guatemala, right?

I wanted to pick up where we left off. I was working in Washington for a while and then went to Honduras, where the hurricane was the big issue all along but we also had some democracy issues to deal with and we had some good work done by the team there. From there I went to Guatemala and went back to being a democratic initiatives team leader. We were focusing on the issues associated with democracy in Guatemala, which unfortunately has a lot of issues to deal with in terms of having a country or a government that actually cares about its people. A lot of human rights issues and some real issues with the military which are very hard to address. We worked primarily in our portfolio of about \$25 million focused on how to promote democracy, how we can really find ways to make a democracy work in Guatemala. Very difficult, frankly. We worked very closely with a number of human rights organizations and we had a lot of work around elections.

*Q: What year were we talking about?*

AMANI: Peace accords, the peace accord was signed.

*Q: Right, so just tell us the context for this country, the AID program, what was happening following the peace accords*

AMANI: Right. I moved to Guatemala at an important time for Guatemala in terms of addressing some of the issues that had been rampant in Guatemala related to a democratic system. The Peace Accords that were signed tried to address a range of issues, particularly the problems with the army but also with a number of things that needed to be addressed around the country. That created a particularly important focus for the democratic initiatives office in Guatemala at the time. George Carner was there as Mission Director – I had worked with him in Egypt briefly. We really did make an effort to support the efforts of human rights organizations to address the issues of rule of law, civil society, local governance, human rights, and to develop in some ways an understanding of what real democracy is, including educational efforts to address the needs for Guatemala to address those things I just mentioned. In particular we had a program with the government's justice system. Steve Hendricks did a lot of work with judges and connected well with people working in that system. We worked heavily with local governments, with mayors for example. A lot of focus on human rights - we worked with many human rights organizations in Guatemala. And trying to work to make sure elections were free and fair.

It was not an easy area to work on in Guatemala. There are a lot of issues to deal with. I don't know how much of a success we had but we certainly did make an effort and some very innovative programs. We provided a lot of support for organizations like the human rights organizations who were doing great work but didn't have a lot of resources. We could help them by bringing resources to the table. Eventually, (this happened after I moved from the democratic initiatives office to the deputy director position after a couple of years), there was an effort put in place that I think was particularly innovative and had some impact, and that was CICIG (*Comisión Internacional Contra Impunidad en Guatemala* – International Commission Against Impunity in Guatemala) which was an anti corruption effort supported by a number of countries, not just USAID, that were providing assistance to Guatemala and recognized that human rights issues were a major problem in Guatemala. It was an effort to have an outside organization review issues of corruption in Guatemala. I can't remember seeing anything quite like this, as it brought in an international organization to help sort out and oversee issues of corruption. It didn't allow for the government to throw them out. Eventually they were thrown out, but years later. I happened to be in Guatemala when they did throw them out – but for a period of six to eight years, this outside organization CICIG played a critical role in overseeing much of what was happening in the justice sector and in elections, as well as some other areas, but mostly focused on corruption.

CICIG is the only thing that I have ever seen that I really felt like, wow, this is a process that is actually significantly addressing corruption. So much so that later, the Guatemalan elites threw them out. But for a while, there was at least something happening to address corruption, to find it and address it. I keep thinking, because corruption is such an issue in so many places, that if something like that could happen more generally, we could take a



big bite out of the corruption problem. Even though, after a number of years, it got thrown out by corrupt politicians, that ceding of power, of some oversight, from an international organization, really made a difference. It's so hard to address corruption, I felt like wow, this is something we should think about more and more.

I was at that time Deputy Mission Director. I worked on a lot of things there and it was a good opportunity for me to learn how things worked in a front office. I appreciated working with George Carner very much, Glenn Anders, and later with Wayne Nielsestuen when he came in. We had worked together in Honduras during Hurricane Mitch, and he came in to be the director in Guatemala. I learned a great deal from them and we did some really good things across the portfolio. I appreciated the opportunity to work with the FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals) there because they had so much to offer, we had some really good staff in Guatemala and I wanted them to be really appreciated in what they could bring to the table as we continued to work on various issues in Guatemala. Debbie Kennedy, who was the Deputy Director for some time in Guatemala during the time I was there, was also a great role model, especially given her work with democracy programming. I essentially took over from her.

That was a good opportunity for me to think about what would be my next step, what I had learned from the years in Guatemala. We had been there long enough that we had really come to love the country and appreciate the difficulties they had to deal with on the political side. But not just there, the huge importance of improving education and addressing poverty in the country. Guatemala has a special place in my heart for the time we were there, the things we did as a family in Guatemala, and the friendships that we developed there. I have a soft place in my heart for Guatemala after the years we were there.

*Q: You were in Guatemala for I think five years? You left in early 2000?*

AMANI: I went there in 2001 and left in 2007 so it was really about six years. I had two positions while I was there.

*Q: You mentioned one that I think is of great interest in these interviews; that is your views of the very talented FSNs. Tell me a little bit about your role, it sounds to me like you did some mentoring when you were there, is that part of the things you did?*

AMANI: I did have ideas about how to manage a team, in particular when I was working as the democracy officer there and worked with this team. I felt like, here we are in a situation where we're working together and we want people to learn from us – these are management skills, you know? So I was actually really thoughtful about working with my staff because I wanted to show them how I thought things should be done in a team like ours. I wanted to show that in the way I managed my staff, I wanted to give them opportunities to grow, I wanted them to offer ideas, I wanted to show them what I think a leader should do.

I felt that if we were working in the democracy area, that would be an important thing to do. I really got good feedback on that from, not just the FSNs, but also the few U.S. direct hires – we had a direct hire and also someone who came as a local person but a U.S. citizen. I really was thoughtful about how to manage that team. Later I heard back from them that they really appreciated “how you managed our staff.”

When I became Deputy Director, I spent a lot of time with the FSNs; George and Wayne were very busy at another level and I felt as Deputy Director part of my job was to really make the teams work. I wasn’t so much the outside guy as the inside guy. We actually had some really difficult issues to work through. There were some concerns raised by the FSNs and I took it upon myself to work through those with them and build their understanding of what we could and couldn’t do, but also recognizing they had some good ideas and we could take those ideas and run with them a little bit.

*Q: You’re now moving on from Guatemala to your next posting.*

AMANI: Right. For my next post, I was looking for someplace interesting to go. I had been a Deputy Director so I was thinking about my next post. I happened to be in Washington for something and I walked around to different bureaus to hear what positions might be open. I went to the Africa Bureau and asked what they had. I remember talking with Wade Warren about possible opportunities for me in Africa, and my interest in looking for a Mission Director position after having been a Deputy Director in Guatemala. He quickly said “We’ve got an opening in Mozambique coming up.” It wasn’t one of the countries I was thinking of, but it sounded interesting - so I talked to him about it a bit and went back and talked to my wife, “they’re saying I could go to Mozambique - I found someone to talk about Mozambique and they said it was great.” Mary Jo said, “Why not? Mozambique sounds really interesting.” I didn’t know a lot about Mozambique frankly. But ultimately it was my favorite post. It was near the end of my career and sounded like an interesting place. She actually talked to somebody, a family we’d known who had been to Mozambique, and they spoke really highly of it. So I went back and told the Africa bureau folks, “I’ll go there.”

We took some time in Portugal to learn Portuguese, six or eight weeks in Portugal, which was probably not totally enough, but I was pretty good in languages and kept learning after we arrived. From Portugal we went to Mozambique. Wow, what a different bunch of things from Latin America. It was a whole different range of programmatic things we had there, from food security – it’s just a much poorer country - to the issues of the war that had occurred there earlier – and were still there. A huge project on HIV/AIDS which wasn’t something we had dealt with much in Central or Latin America. That was really the big project we had there. Also, it was not just USAID working on that, CDC (Centers for Disease Control) was and we ended up trying to work together, each of us, USAID and CDC, wanting to take a bigger part of that.

At the beginning, when we arrived, there was not an ambassador there because the person who had been chosen was not qualified for some reason and didn’t come. So, I worked

with the DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) there for almost two years before an Ambassador arrived.

The biggest part of our work there was addressing the issue of HIV/AIDS. A huge program. It was a \$260 million program for both HIV/AIDS and other health issues, but also agricultural productivity, food security - a range of issues that were significantly different from the Latin American experience. An incredibly interesting country. Just being on the African continent was a whole new thing for me, just understanding what was happening on the larger issue of the continent, being next door to a country in Africa, South Africa, that did have significant wealth but also huge areas of poverty. And just the opportunities we had to see Africa.

We had a project that worked with Gorongosa National Park to help rebuild the park as a national treasure. There was a multi-million-dollar guy who was willing to help with that but could also benefit from the support of the U.S. government. I got to visit the project every so often and fly in his helicopter. It was a whole different kind of program there. I go to be part of an effort to provide a place for wild animals to prosper and develop opportunities for others to see them in their native habitat. Despite all the time I spent in Latin America and all the good work we did there which I enjoyed, I appreciated just being on the African continent and soaking up the way things were there, and having the opportunity to work in some very different kinds of activities particularly in terms of agriculture and health. It was a time where we were fighting with CDC about how we were going to address the AIDS issues there. But it's just a beautiful country.

I also had particularly good contacts with other countries' foreign assistance programs. I was part of a group of all the foreign assistance directors from various European countries and Canada, and we had a good group of people who met regularly to exchange information about our programs and what we were trying to do, but also working together to address things that we all wanted to see happen in terms of government action or certain issues that would pop up. I had much more of a relationship with some of my peers, like the United Nations people. (We even had a group of them who played music - mostly guitar - and regularly met to play and sing together). I just really enjoyed the people I worked with from other countries, as well as the Mozambicans who are just wonderful.

Unfortunately, when I arrived in Mozambique, it turned out that the staff was kind of a mess. People in the health program were totally upset with the leadership there. The person who was leading that office was not capable of managing the huge health program and relationships with CDC and other donors, so we needed some new people there. The EXO (Executive Officer) was problematic. Even the person that had been there as Mission Director of the program before me kind of left under a cloud; things had happened, I don't know totally what, but there were reasons he had to leave. It was clear that I needed to make some initial important personnel changes.

So it was a real challenge to come to Mozambique as a new Mission Director, still working on my Portuguese and a lot of issues to deal with. I had an initially good

relationship with the DCM who was acting as the chargé d'affaires. But then we had some issues come up between us. He thought I shouldn't be doing something in USAID and I thought – well anyway, we had a bit of an icy relationship for a time but we started out really well.

I felt like this was a place that had huge opportunities and I felt like we had some good ideas about what to do, but we hadn't articulated them very well. At that time headquarters was talking about a different way of approaching the plans for all of the USAID programs. So they proposed a new way of approaching things – I guess there was probably a change of government in the United States. But anyway, I took advantage of taking another shot at exactly what our plan was, what was the strategy for the U.S. government – and USAID headquarters had come up with a new approach that helped us focus on that...

We brought together all of the organizations at post - that included the Embassy staff, CDC, and other USG programs, everyone – using Open Space Technology (I'm a huge fan of this – it really works) as a way of bringing everyone together and ensuring we hear from everyone engaged. This was the embassy, the food programs, all of the people at post, all of the U.S. organizations that worked with the embassy. Open Space Technology asks people to come up with what they think is some important thing to talk about, and then whoever wants to talk about that with them does that in small or large groups and shares their views with others. All of the information from each of those people who choose to talk about a certain thing gets written up and shared. We had over 100 people from every U.S. organization in Mozambique and we all came together to share our views about what the strategic emphasis should be in the next few years. We brought them all together and focused on, "Okay we're going to take another look at what are the most important things for us to do as a U.S. government here in Mozambique."

I'm a real advocate of Open Space Technology. It is relatively simple to do it and has really worked for me in a couple of different cases. For example, what I just talked about, which was the strategy for the whole U.S. government in Mozambique. But we also used it with smaller groups, like when we had off-site meetings with the CDC and USAID, because we needed to understand each other and each of us wanted an expanded part of that. So we had a couple of offsites where we used this particular approach, Open Space Technology, as a way of getting some concordance and some agreement on what each of us was going to do and what were the most important things for us to be doing. I highly recommend Open Space Technology as a means of bringing people together and putting things on the table and coming together about an approach, in this case about a strategy, both in the health area, and also what we did in the broader area where we put together a new country program.

I found that energizing. I felt like we had gotten through some of the issues that brought me there, which was a team that wasn't working. I felt like some of that effort to go back and look at strategy and identify what is most important, and using that particular way of bringing people together was important. I felt like it worked. I was happy to see that we were making progress in terms of the larger team, both within USAID itself but also with

the other organizations of the U.S. government who were there. We actually put together a new strategy under the new guidelines that were shared with us from headquarters. I felt like that all brought us together in a really important way. We still had issues with CDC but we had built some understanding and relationships that I felt were really helpful there.

It also took bringing in some new personnel, because we did have some people who weren't performing very well. I felt like I was at the top of my game at that time. I had found ways to address the issues that I saw when I came in, I was making some key personnel changes that were critical, we had some really good people who came in to help fix things.

We had Polly Dunford who came in and managed the health program which was huge. We had Tom Ray as an EXO who had lots of experience and knew how to do things. And we moved some people out that needed to leave. I felt like I was able to bring people together, see some impact, and just enjoyed Mozambique so much. I felt like I was at the top of my game in terms of being a Mission Director. I just felt like Mozambique had so much going for it, though sometimes so difficult. But we also had this ongoing division with CDC and others.

Looking back, I think Mozambique was my favorite post. As much as I spent time in Latin America and loved that part of the world, just that new continent to be working on and the kinds of issues I dealt with and the position I had to address those issues in ways that I think worked. I felt really good about all that. Like I said, I loved going around the country. It wasn't so easy to do that. I had some issues with the chargé d'affaires (Mozambique was without an Ambassador for some time because a political nominee was not approved due to some of his previous activities) that were not easy to deal with. But I felt I did a good job, and it made me feel like I was actually doing what a good Mission Director should do – both in terms of managing the Mission and the impact of our programs. I felt good about that and I felt like there was a lot of innovation we were able to put in place there. So I ended up being there for five years, and I really enjoyed that. I enjoyed being on the African continent and learning more about that area. I enjoyed going to the World Cup in South Africa. That was for me a real highlight. So Mozambique was a great post.

Then my time was over, I was there for five years. Somehow I ended up being the Senior Deputy Administrator for the Africa Bureau in Washington. I had learned a lot about being in Africa but I had only been in one country. So it was eye-opening for me to be back in Washington and working with the team we had in Africa, the various Mission Directors in the African continent, some of whom I had gotten to know in various ways over the years. And, of course, that was during the Obama era, so there was a lot of interest in the White House about what we were doing in Africa, a little more than had happened before. A lot of interagency work to be done that I was involved in. I remember going to the White House for some meetings. I was in meetings with the White House and the State Department, and to me that was all an eye opener, how things work at that level. And some interest from agencies working on the African continent that probably

hadn't been there before. That was interesting to me, to see how things worked at the Washington level.

I was there for two years. I worked with Linda Etim and Earl Gast in the Africa Bureau, and with David Eckerson and Susan Reichle up in the USAID front office, that was a good team. I felt good about being part of that team there. I guess it was the first couple of years that Raj was there, he was interested in that kind of stuff, too.

*Q: What were the big topics at that time in the Africa bureau, what was going on politically, and where were your programs?*

AMANI: Feed the Future was an initiative particularly focused on agricultural productivity and food supplies that became a big portion of what I was working on at the end of my time in Mozambique and then when I went to the Africa Bureau in Washington. It was fascinating for me to be in these interagency meetings with the State Department and elsewhere that were largely political issues. I also felt that the Africa Bureau needed to have a little bit more supervision and focus. There were a lot of internal issues, some staff who were not carrying the load. For a while people could work from home, and a lot of the people working from home weren't really putting in the time. Some of that was just because there were supervisors who allowed them to do that, to work from home, and it wasn't clear that they were actually working all the time. So there were issues like that to deal with.

But I was fascinated by the interagency stuff that happened with other agencies, the coordination with them. It was fascinating to be in the White House for some meetings. I felt like there was an important need for the Africa bureau to come together a little more. Earl Gast was a really smart guy but he wasn't someone who worked to bring together the teams, so I took that on as my responsibility. We did this Open Space Technology thing for the whole Africa bureau. We took two days and this approach: anybody who has anything to talk about, we'll find a way for them to talk about it. It got all written down, I felt like it was a really effective means of hearing from people, bringing people together around the most important things as we start to think a little bit more about strategy. I felt like I could make a good contribution there, but I was only there for a couple of years.

*Q: Open space technology?*

AMANI: Yes, Open Space Technology has always worked for me and has been really appreciated by those involved (which is everyone invited). The way it goes is at the beginning everybody is gathered together in one spot. In this case we had everybody from the Africa Bureau and we went offsite. To get started there is a process of determining what are the things we should talk about. There's a framework for how many different kinds of discussion we might have. So as it starts, there's something on the wall that says "Here's our timeframes, we'll have people get together at 9:00, 10:00, 11:00, 1:00, 2:00, 3:00 but we're not telling you what to talk about. You have two days and what we want to know is – what do you want to talk about?" It starts out with people saying I want to talk about this, and they walk up and put it in a time slot. We're going to talk

about, maybe, environment in Africa. Then somebody else wants to talk about food crises. So everybody puts up what they want to talk about and puts it in a time slot. At some point, all the hours get filled and people decide what groups they want to participate in considering each of those things – there could be five different things going on in a certain period, depending on what people felt they wanted to talk about. So you get some that might have three or four people talking about something, and then you might have some that might have twenty people.

We did this for two days, after people had talked together about certain things and maybe wanted to talk more about some part of that, the next day we'd do the same thing, here's all the places, put your topic in a time frame. It's not like, "we in the front office said here are the things we're going to talk about"; we wanted to know what they wanted to talk about, what they thought should be discussed. So the process starts with that. People take notes, write down, there's always someone who keeps tabs and takes notes of what was discussed. At the end of the day those people type that in so you have a record of all those little discussions that happened, and that's shared. Also, people come up with recommendations. The idea is to find out how we should deal with an issue. We used that same process when we had joint meetings with CDC in Mozambique, and we also did it with all U.S. agencies at post in Mozambique, like 300 people that time. This works for twenty or thirty people as well as it works for 100 or 200. It was something I had seen earlier and put it to use in Mozambique in ways that just really worked well.

*Q: That sounds like an amazing process, I'll look it up. A lot depends on what comes out of it and what's done with that.*

AMANI: I would say I was a little disappointed about the follow-up from the Africa Bureau Open Space discussions. But there were a number of things that did get done in the aftermath. But what we did in Mozambique was really useful both to bring us all together and to provide a focus for the future. I was really happy with how that worked out. It helped us overcome some of the lines between different organizations like CDC and us, so by doing that together, we made some progress.

*Q: Thanks for introducing me to that. Did you have anything else you wanted to say about your time as the DAA (deputy assistant administrator), or should we stop there?*

AMANI: I think we can probably stop there. That was my last job with USAID. I did work with a USAID project in Guatemala, we could talk about that some time if you want.

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*Q: Today we're going to focus on your post-AID career.*

AMANI: I left USAID as the SDAA, working in the Africa bureau in the front office, which I really enjoyed. We had reached a point where it was time to be closer to our family, we have a grandson in Guatemala, my son (his Dad) died some years ago so we

wanted to be close to him and his mom. Mary Jo, my wife, had been working while we were in Guatemala previously, she had worked with an organization called Safe Passage, which was focused on helping to educate the kids who live with families who made their living in the Guatemala City dump. So these are the poorest of the poor in the sense that they're using garbage to find ways to sell things that they can use to keep their home and feed their family. My wife had worked there years ago when I was posted there and we had maintained some connections with the organization. So we had heard they were looking for an Executive Director, and we thought here's an opportunity for us to go back to a place that both us, my wife and I, had put a lot of time and effort into, and a chance to live close to our grandson (and his mom) at the time, the only grandson we have, and just see Guatemala from a different point of view from when I was with USAID.

So I was selected as the Executive Director there and we moved back to Guatemala. It was a time of change for the organization. The people who were there before were really great people. One was a teacher and had developed a lot of the focus of how they did the teaching in this small school with the kinds of kids they had at the school. They had done a lot on that, but there were some infrastructure needs. We had some opportunities to buy some land and some buildings so I spent a lot of time working out those possibilities. In the end, we ended up doubling or tripling the amount of space that was available.

*Q: Can I ask, give us the context of what this organization was, how it was established and what it had accomplished.*

AMANI: Good story behind that. A young woman from Maine, Hanley Denning, started the program and helped build it through good fundraising and getting good people to help support the needs of the program. I can't remember how it was she came to Guatemala initially but she came to visit Guatemala and somehow went to see the garbage dump and saw all these people who were making their living from finding stuff in the garbage and selling it or whatever. She realized – this was an area of Guatemala City that was really poor to begin with - these were the poorest of the poor. She just felt for those people and decided she wanted to do something to help the kids of those families who were doing their best to keep that family going by finding stuff in the dump. She decided to start a school for the kids of the families that were working in the dump. She started with very basic stuff, find a building somewhere and start it up. She was good at going back to Maine and telling people what she was trying to do and how important it was. So she raised enough money to get supplies, have a good nutritious meal for the kids during the day, and she bought books. That's where my wife, Mary Jo, got involved. She went and visited and said "You need children's books, if you're going to have a school, you need children's books."

So that's what my wife focused on. She helped raise money to buy children's books, and went and read books to the kids. That was basically what she did while we were living in Guatemala the first time. So that connection – and then she brought in other people from the U.S. embassy who volunteered personal time. Basically, it ended up that there was a need for the families to do more in terms of getting them the money that was needed to keep their kids in clothing and all of that. It was a dangerous place, frankly, around the



dump. But eventually the program grew. My wife worked with them while we were in Guatemala but then, when we came back, there was other funding, a U.S. organization, so there were people who were really pleased to see what this young woman was doing and offered money. So there was a counterpart organization in the U.S. to raise funds.

While I was there, part of what I was interested in doing, and this also comes from my wife, was to really improve the level of teaching being done there. They were looking for something that would be perfect for the kids from those kinds of families in that kind of place. We hit on the idea of Expeditionary Learning, and we engaged – partly because it's so hands-on. While I was there one of the big things I was doing, with the support of my wife, Mary Jo, was to develop a curriculum around the idea of Expeditionary Learning which is really hands-on stuff. It is really good – it's the kind of learning I wish my kids had had, frankly. It was hands-on, kids would go to places, a place where they make something and watch how they do it. I think it's a wonderful approach to learning.

We were able to connect with some Expeditionary Learning schools here in the States. In fact, at one point I took a trip with a couple of teachers and the principal to visit a school where they were using expeditionary learning in Maine. That school decided to have a connection with them, and the guy who was the principal at that school was incredibly dynamic. He came down to visit twice, and helped develop the approach to learning that is what Expeditionary Learning is about, hands-on learning. I found it to be really fascinating, fun, and rewarding, to have spent some time there, establishing this focal point for the learning process through Expeditionary Learning. At the same time we were able to raise some money through supportive people to buy another building and another large area right next to the dump, it was almost part of the dump to begin with. We purchased some land so that there were recreational facilities, two large soccer fields, and some other things. The program also had something for the mothers to develop; they could make things and sell them. I just felt it was a really fun time to do something different. Rather than working at the level of the U.S. government, I was working right in the middle of the dump, basically. It was quite rewarding for me to have worked with that organization for a time. I felt really good about that.

At some point I was ready to look for something else. I saw something about a USAID program that was focused on developing youth interested in moving into politics and trying to be part of changing Guatemala in a political way. I thought that was really interesting because of my background as a democracy officer with USAID.

So I decided I would leave this NGO (non governmental organization) we just talked about in the dump and put my name in to be a Chief of Party for IREX. IREX contacted me and asked if I might be interested, and I said I would be. It was right up my alley as a former USAID democracy officer. And I really care about Guatemala and I think the politics of Guatemala are terrible in terms of meeting the needs of the people, and the kind of people it puts in power, there's so much corruption. I thought maybe the way to start is to work with youth who are interested in politics. So I put my name in, I think I was probably helpful for IREX to win the award for that since I knew a lot of the people in USAID and had been a democracy officer in Guatemala and all of that. So I worked

with IREX to develop what the program would be and we got some very good people. I had really good contacts with some of the other people running projects similar to that within USAID, so I knew some of the people involved, some of the NGOs I'd worked with previously. I was a pretty good fit for what they were looking for in that project. And I really enjoyed working with younger people.

Here I was at the end of my career and this was a project working with youth. It helped me feel a little bit younger somehow. I also felt like I had something to offer based on my experience both working in the United States as an aide to a congressperson and also the various places I had worked within USAID as a democracy officer.

So they hired me and won the award. It was a fun project to have. It was just so much energy from youth who were interested in making a change. There were things happening politically in Guatemala. Unfortunately in the presidential election that we had, the winner was a comedian. All of us were hoping this comedian could do something that would be different and better than the crooked government people in the past, but unfortunately he was no better and may have been worse. It was a time when there was a lot of frustration about politics.

*Q: Can you tell us what years we're talking about?*

AMANI: That would have been 2016 to 2019. Then in 2019, we came back to the United States and have been here since then. That was my real work associated with USAID. I did find it really rewarding but still frustrating just because frankly, USAID was so bureaucratic, I spent so much time writing stuff for them that they asked me to write, and then – I know this was just the person dealing with our project and maybe it was because of my past there, but she was so picky about every little thing in the reports we provided. I just knew that hardly anybody was going to read them other than that person and yet I had to go through various changes in order to get her approval. I thought it was a waste of my time, and I thought the information we were providing was quite good. It made me feel like oh jeez, USAID is still so picky and it was a waste of my time and my team's time to do that stuff. I know what's good and what we did was good. Anyway, I was frustrated at the end.

Unfortunately what happened in Guatemala is in large part because of what was happening in U.S. politics and the concerns about migration from Guatemala – Guatemala has the most people going across the border to the United States in Central America, I think. So especially after the election in the United States, it was just clear that all they cared about was migration and there wasn't a whole lot of follow-up. USAID, I think, was pushed around in trying to figure out what we can do about migration. It meant that many other things that would help keep people from migrating were then left off the table, and that included these young people who could be the next generation of politicians. The possibilities we had to help develop them as good people who could help address the problems of the country, unfortunately died because the funding died out.

At that point I basically just retired and came back to the United States. Tried to keep my eyes on things. I've served as a mentor to some people working in USAID now, and have enjoyed that. But anyway I'm out of USAID at this point and looking back on things.

*Q: This is part of the USAID alumni association. Tell us about it, how it's worked out.*

AMANI: I really enjoyed the mentor experience, I had two people working with me. One in Guatemala, interestingly enough, and the other in Mexico City. Both were program officers. I think we developed a good relationship. They shared things with me, concerns, frustrations, and I felt like maybe the most important thing I could do was just listen, but I usually had some words of wisdom to suggest to them. I think in some ways, USAID has changed, and of course it does, as we have different kinds of leadership going up to the president, for example. But I felt it was nice to hear what kinds of things they were doing. I liked hearing that they had – since I had left USAID - changed the way they determined who would get promoted and I think that was a welcome change. I think mostly they needed somebody to talk to, somebody who would understand the things that were concerning them.

I'm not sure I had the silver bullet for anything but I think it was helpful for them to talk to somebody and I could say, "Hey I think you're doing the right thing" or "I'm not sure that would be the way I would go." Part of it was they had a place to vent and a place to get some ideas. They asked good questions and I did my best to answer them. I enjoyed the relationship and I think I was helpful, somewhat. At the very least they had someone to talk to and could hear some thoughts from me at certain times that maybe was helpful.

*Q: Excellent, glad to hear that. All right, are we going to move on to reflections?*

AMANI: Sure. I've been doing some thinking about what I've learned over time. I've got some notes here I want to talk through because that's a really good question: what are the lessons learned that I would like to share with others. I thought it would make some sense to start with my mistakes. Things I didn't do so well and probably learned from. Some I don't think I ever quite cracked.

To start with, I didn't pull the plug on some things when it was clear they weren't really working. I think in the U.S., in the bureaucracy of an organization like USAID, I think we sometimes have an overly optimistic view of things, and if things aren't working, it's hard to pull the plug. At least for me personally I tend to feel like "oh we can do this, we can change things, we can make it better". Because I'm an optimist – if we work a little harder, if we make this change, whatever. As I look back, I think I should have pulled the plug earlier on things, hey this isn't working. When you have a bureaucracy like that and so many things that involve paperwork, it's really hard to do that. You have to tell people, sorry this isn't working, we don't need you any more. I wasn't willing to make the effort required, and I just hoped things would get better or this was as good as we could do. We have so much paperwork, it would be so much work to make changes to something that's not working that we tend to just let it go, just ride it out until it's over.

*Q: It certainly rings true with many of us in our career. What recommendations would you have for making it easier?*

AMANI: When things aren't going right, you mean? Ultimately what would have to be done is say, sorry this isn't working, we're going to stop and do something different. The thing is, these people have a contract and all of that, there's so much legal stuff to work with if you do that. So maybe there are ways of sitting down with the people who have already been contracted to work on this stuff and say, hey this isn't working. Maybe those people who already have started the work can do it. But there are times when I knew we didn't have the right people, and it would have been – we would have lost something, just by all the effort that would have been required to shift gears and go with somebody else.

I do think sometimes we do need to try some things and see if it works, and it's okay if sometimes things don't work. But it's just so difficult to kill it if it's not working that we just wasted time, effort, and money. So we either hide it or give up on it. I don't know the real answer to that, you put your finger on the right question, what can we do to do that. It's just not easy and it takes someone who is willing to put more effort than I was sometimes. It's not that I never criticized what we did. But the bureaucracy is so slow that by the time you get it, the funding's gone or something. I just feel in some ways, I can think of things throughout my career, oh you know this is not working so great, but it's not worth the time and effort and I have all these other things to do, we're just going to ride it out and chart it as something that didn't work, and don't do it again.

Another area I feel kind of bad about. When I was in Mozambique before I arrived to be Mission Director, it became clear there was this huge competition between USAID and CDC, the Centers for Disease Control, over what we would/should do to help address the issues of HIV/AIDS. We were just fighting about it, "well we're going to do this type of program: "Well, CDC should do it." "No, I think USAID should do it." We did overlap and I think it was okay if we overlapped. It meant that the embassy got involved sometimes – CDC was really working to gain more work in Mozambique and we felt this was our job as USAID. We just never could come together and be happy about how we were both working in this area. It was all competitive, who's going to get the money? There is a lot of money coming in for HIV/AIDS programming in Mozambique. We all wanted to show we can do this, we know what could be done. I did feel that USAID's experience in these kinds of things working overseas was an advantage we had. But we just fought about it. There was nobody who could really address this – even the Ambassador was trying to say, you do this and you do that. But they didn't have the background on it.

Given the dynamics of it I didn't really know how to deal with it in a way that I thought was appropriate. I wanted to fight for USAID because I did feel like we had the kind of programming that would be useful, we had the background. Of course, CDC felt the same way. We thought USAID had experience in developing countries in ways that CDC didn't, and I think that was true. But they had a lot of people with expertise in many of the things we were working on. Anyway, it was a failure on the part of the U.S.

government to see this, we were just fighting each other and it put us both in bad light for the Ambassador and people who were not part of either of those major organizations. I felt I didn't manage that very well. I didn't feel I should just back off, I thought I should appropriately be working to make the case that USAID can do these things better than CDC, but it created a difficult work environment for me as Mission Director having to fight with these kinds of things. I did feel like there needed to be somebody who could bring order to that.

*Q: That's right, what you're reflecting there is not so much your limitation but the lack of some other authority to arbitrate. I know it's happening in other missions; thanks for that observation.*

AMANI: Another thing that I see as a mistake, I guess, is that, I played a role – there were of course others, not just the United States, working on some of these issues in Mozambique, and they had developed a forum for discussion and agreements that included most of the European Union countries. I developed a relationship with some of those leaders, the Canadians were in it, too. But the U.S. hadn't really been part of this donor organization working on HIV/AIDS and all other kinds of programs. It was an organization, probably the best organization I'd seen in any of the countries I'd been in, in terms of dialogue with other countries providing development support to a country, in this case Mozambique. But the U.S. had not really been part of it. My predecessor in USAID Mozambique hadn't been part of that organization. So I developed a relationship with a number of people there and I was invited to join, which was a great thing I think. But what I didn't do very well was help to coordinate with these organizations in a way it would have worked. The thing that was my biggest mistake was that I developed such good relationships with some of these other organizations around the world working in Mozambique, that I gained support from them to provide some leadership within our group. We proposed something and put it in front of the Ambassadors and they chose me to help explain what we really wanted to do. It turned out I was the wrong person to do it. All these ambassadors were like, "Oh god here goes the U.S. government, they think they can run everything." It was just a colossal mistake to have me explain what we were trying to do, because these other ambassadors, particularly a couple of the European ambassadors, didn't want to hear that the United States was going to have a major role in this. I didn't see that coming. I felt really bad that just the fact that I was from the United States, and we had proposed something that would involve the United States, but involved others as well, I was the wrong person to do it. I should have let somebody else do it.

*Q: In retrospect I can see your view. What would you have recommended to be done differently?*

AMANI: They should have left me out of the explanation. When it came time for us to share our vision of what we could do with this organization of various chiefs of Missions, we had developed a good relationship and some people felt I was good at articulating it because I was helping develop this stuff. But it shouldn't have been me who presented it.

I was the one that knew the most about it because I was pushing it, thought it was really great. But yeah, it just...

*Q: So who should have presented it?*

AMANI: Somebody else from another country. Like a Mission Director from Sweden or something. It just hit a nerve with those ambassadors and I think that had more to do with the relationship between the ambassadors than it was about me. But it was just how they felt about the United States – and frankly the acting Ambassador (Charge de Affairs) for us at the time wasn't really that well liked – Well anyway, that was the mistake. It was a lesson learned for me, how people view the United States, including other ambassadors for example. Somebody else could have probably been more successful in making that happen.

*Q: Very useful lesson learned for many other AID people, all of us.*

AMANI: So those are the things I found as mistakes. I'm happy to talk about what I think I learned from the course of my career. The lesson learned that I can start with - and I think is really important (and I'm talking here from the position of a Mission Director, but not always) relates to communication and building connections with staff. I think communication with staff is really important and I didn't always see that in the places I worked. I had really good mentors that were Mission Directors, but I felt like sometimes they were a little aloof and didn't touch as much as they could directly with staff. I think there are things that are important to share with staff more often. Things like all-hands meetings and just sharing what's happening for people in that environment of a USAID mission. They crave really knowing what's going on. When I became Mission Director in Mozambique I made an effort to **have all-hands meetings once a month** just to let people know, here's what we're working on, this is the important thing, here are some things happening that some of our team are working on, here's what's coming in from Washington right now. Just bring everybody up to date so they feel like they know what's happening and they're just not somewhere in lower levels, "everybody else knows it but I don't really hear it." I think it was really useful and my staff really appreciated that I took an hour out of every month to say "here's what's going on." Usually, it was a lot of other people sharing what they were doing but it was a heads up. Here's what we're doing, and you're part of this. We care about the drivers and everybody who's working here, I want you to hear what's going on, so you realize you're a part of all this that we're doing. That's a lesson I learned. My staff, at all levels, appreciated that I was letting them know what this organization was doing and they they're an important part of it and should feel good about it, and there are things we should focus on, that need better work, but I'm letting you know this is what's going on, this is what's coming up."

Somewhat related to that, another lesson learned was to **make sure you get to know the FSNs you work with**. They are the milk and butter, they're the people that really make things happen. I learned this particularly when I first went to Guatemala and worked as the head of the Office of Democratic Initiatives. I don't know how I started this but my team really appreciated it – it was just an effort to get to know them better as people and

not just as workers. I would go around the table and ask about some favorite thing for them: “I’d like to know what your favorite book is” and we’d just go around and people would talk about “this great book I read”. Or I’d say, “What’s your favorite movie?” They were just questions to find out who they are as people. Favorite television show, your pets, what are your favorite sports teams, did you play this or that. It somehow just brought more cohesiveness to the team. It was simple to do and people really liked it. The fact they were sharing this with a group, it just helped create teamwork. It’s about getting to know them, not just seeing them as a worker but as a person. It’s a lesson I took with me later on as well, and it always worked. People like to be understood and to feel like you care about them.

Another one is related I guess. I found it’s really important to **provide good feedback to staff**. Most of the people I worked with in USAID as Foreign Service officers failed to do this very well. I felt it was really important, partly because of how I felt about knowing what people felt about me, as a worker and as a team member. But somehow, I’m not sure how I came up with this, maybe I heard it from somebody or maybe I just made this up myself, but I decided I wanted to do “360 feedback” right, to really do it well. So I spent a lot of time doing it, maybe too much time, but I never felt it was time wasted. I would make a list for each person I was providing feedback to. This usually came at the time of the year when it was time to talk about what was happening next. Of course, if they were people who were U.S. direct hires, not FSNs, then there is a certain time when some of this happens as well. What I tried to do is find out who are the people who would know about their work better than me. So I would get a list of the people that I thought were the best placed to tell me how well this person was doing. I used four questions. One was, **what does Jane Doe do really well and should keep doing, or do more?** The second asked, **what could Jane do to improve?** Then third, **what advice would you give to Jane to improve her work?** And fourth, **what is the most impressive thing that Jane has done this year?** I would ask those questions to maybe ten persons for each person – enough to get a range of people who knew their work from different points of view. It took a lot of time and effort and I can understand why busy people wouldn’t want to put in that much time and effort. But it was really worth it for me. I had people cry and say, “I didn’t know that’s what people thought about me.” And I had people who maybe didn’t know that people were angry at them. But I did it in a way that the first question and the last question were going to be positive, and in between (how to improve and advice) would be things they could improve, what they could do better? It was never meant to be “I’m checking on you”, it was more like I want you to know what other people think about your work. It was amazing. I had people crying because they didn’t know how much their colleagues appreciated them. What I would do is write up what others told me. I didn’t name names, but I’d say “here is what I heard from people in these four areas: what you do well and should keep doing, what you could do to improve, some advice for you to give, and what was the most impressive thing you’ve done this year. I just got really good feedback on this – people were crying, usually not because they felt bad about what they heard but because they didn’t know that people felt these sometimes wonderful things, and sometimes they didn’t realize that some of the things they were doing weren’t well received. What was interesting to me was how important it was for them to know how other people looked at them. They hardly ever hear somebody talk

about how well they were doing something or what kind of work they did. It had an impact. I think people really appreciated that I would spend the time to do that. But I think they mostly appreciated this because they really heard it. They couldn't just say "oh, you didn't like me", because this was coming from sometimes as many as ten people. It took some time and effort from me but it really paid off. I think they appreciated knowing I had made the effort to get this feedback, and I think the feedback from their peers was far more important than what they just thought about me. I think it was a gift for them in many ways because very seldom do we hear how others honestly feel about our work. I know some people said, "god you're going to all this work to do this, is it really worth it?" I think it was. I think the idea of providing honest feedback to staff is really important and it's something I feel really strongly about.

I have a couple more things. I think it's really important to think out of the box and innovate. USAID is a big organization, and tends to operate like a government bureaucracy. We fall easily into being a typical USAID mission based on what we've seen in other missions we're in. I think there are ways to think differently about how we operate in a given place. We already talked a little bit about this, Bob Gersony for example.

There's a book out about him and I hope a lot of people read it because he has a unique way of looking at situations and finding the right thing to do that's not always the kinds of things a USAID bureaucracy would come up with. I worked with him in two different countries, Nicaragua where he worked on a program for those on the Atlantic coast, and then in Honduras after Hurricane Mitch, when he went to look at what was happening in part of Honduras after the hurricane to see what would be the right thing to address the impact of that hurricane in different parts of the country. It was really different than the usual stuff, "well we bring staff, we bring money". USAID does have a lot of experience dealing with natural disasters, but what was important here was that Bob Gersony talked to people, not just government folks. He went and just interviewed people and it's a little similar to what I was talking about, about the feedback. He went and found out, what do people really need? It wasn't always what USAID was ready to do, "this is a hurricane, this is what we do." I think there are ways that USAID staff need to think out of the box and innovate.

This idea, that Gersony says, "talk to people not just those in power", and his efforts to hear what the people impacted say they need - I think there's a lot to that. Talking to affected people rather than just to government folks and those in power is important at all levels of what we do.

I have two more things to share. I mentioned earlier about Open Space Technology. I think that's something every Mission Director should know how to do, because Open Space Technology involves all the people involved instead of just the senior staff. I think it should be done maybe once a year, or once every two years, bringing everybody together to talk about what we're doing. There needs to be a focus for it, but it engages staff and other people connected to what we're doing overseas or in the United States. I think Open Space Technology is a great mechanism for bringing people together because



everybody has some input into what you're going to talk about, what you think you need to do, whatever the focus is. I used it to address the issues we had in Mozambique between USAID and CDC and later had everyone in the U.S. Mission in Mozambique spend a day together thinking about our strategy there and what we should focus on there. And I've also mentioned how we spent two days with everyone in the Africa Bureau to clarify issues and hear from everyone what we could do better. And later, we held a full day with everyone in USAID Tanzania. By giving everyone an opportunity to provide their views on whatever issues they want to talk about, which is what Open Space Technology does, we get a lot of input and ideas. I think it's a great way to bring a team together, it's a thing you can do with the whole mission. Everybody has input, everybody can talk about the things they think are important to talk about, it all gets put together and shared. I am a strong advocate for Open Space Technology and I wish people at USAID would use it more. I think it would be really helpful to their work.

Should I quit there or what?

*Q: Please, this is very valuable, keep going.*

AMANI: All right. I guess there's one other thing I want to share that is a lesson learned for me and that was to overcome my own personal obstacles. I remember Bill Elderbaum, our EXO in Guatemala, called me in one time. He said, "I was just talking to someone in USAID headquarters." They had just told him that I was a hero.

I said, "What do you mean, me, a hero?"

He said, "Yeah, they said you're a hero." It was somebody who worked in bringing in different people. Anyway, they said "We've never had anybody else who has been a paraplegic and risen to the level of Mission Director. So, he's a hero in showing that it's possible for somebody with physical issues to be successful in USAID." He felt like it was showing it was possible for someone who was significantly disabled to go to the highest levels of USAID, and that's good for the agency and for people who can do that kind of thing.

I really did appreciate the fact that the various places I went to didn't see me as a person with a deficit, somehow, but someone who could be part of the team and be successful in what I was doing. There were things that were not easy for me to do. I was lucky, I spent some time in a wheelchair but I could walk with braces and crutches; not every disabled person could do that. Some of the things were hard to do. I remember when Rahm Emanuel was Obama's chief of staff, and Zeke Emanuel (his brother - a doctor), came to Mozambique. He wanted to go way out into the back country which we did. And we were staying in a place where I had to crawl to get to the bathroom. But we went there and I had this great conversation during a long car ride with Zeke Emanuel way out in the boonies of Mozambique, and he appreciated that I made the effort to go out there with him despite the physical issues I had to deal with. I guess the point is to recognize we all have parts of our work and personal lives that need work and seem difficult, and we need to find ways to get the work done and demonstrate our ability to deal with all these kinds

of issues which are different for all of us. My handicap was physical, but everybody has issues to overcome and to make the effort to do what needs to be done in our USAID programs, whether in Washington or in the field.

The lesson learned is we can do it, we can do it.

I guess the last thing I would talk about is to learn to clearly present and convince others to buy into a shared vision of what should be done. This relates a little bit to Open Space Technology because I think you can use that to do this. This is a lesson where it's related to another lesson that Bob Gersony has for me, anyway, and that was just to be present and convince others. I was pulled out of Mozambique for 7-10 days to work with Dave Eckerson to review the impact of an earthquake in Haiti. We had a team there of five or six people, and some people on the ground already from the Haiti mission. What we came up with was really more about presentation and convincing people than anything else. We decided we were not going to write a report, we were just going to do a PowerPoint. Of course in a PowerPoint you can put in photos and stuff, you can really show things. Bob Gersony when he provided his briefings on what he learned in Nicaragua and Honduras (and lots of other places in Africa and elsewhere), he put a whole bunch of different stuff put together, but a lot about what people told him, and it was a lot about presentation. So I learned, it's **really important to be able to present well**. You may know all the facts, but if you don't present it well, you're not going to convince people to go in the direction you think they need to go. So having some capacity or finding people with the capacity to really present in a way that people understand and can get their mind around – "okay, here's what you've shown me, here's what you're suggesting that needs to be done, we buy it." It's about getting to the point where you've convinced people what to do. I remember going, with Dave Eckerson and some other people on that Haiti thing, to the State Department to share with them what we had come up with. What we had done was work on a really great PowerPoint. We just presented all of our information on the screen, we were there, they could ask questions, we could share what they most wanted to know. It wasn't like "Here's our report, read it." It was, "Okay, here's what we heard from people, here are some photos of the destruction, here's how we've seen this come together with other donors and what they're doing." But it was all visual. It was visual, not just words on a page (we had that, too). Maybe some people would prefer to see the words on the page, but I'm sure we had much more impact by bringing the photos and putting it all together in a PowerPoint that was easily digested. I think that's something that's useful for people to know how to do.

*Q: Todd, this is incredible. I am extremely impressed with your lessons learned, in large part because they're excellent, and others because they cut to my philosophy. I wish we could have worked together at some point! I thank you so much, this has been an incredible interview, I have learned a great deal and I know that those who read it will really benefit. Thank you so much, Todd.*

AMANI: I appreciate that you're taking this on to share with people, and trying to cull from different people who've lived the life of a Foreign Service officer with USAID and

has something to share about what worked and didn't work, and can share that with folks who come in or are looking for that kind of information.

*End of interview*