

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training  
Foreign Affairs Oral History Program  
Foreign Assistance Series

**DAVID ADKINS ATWOOD**

*Interviewed by: John Pielemeier  
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**Background**

Born in Providence, Rhode Island, March 30, 1950

BA in Anthropology, Brown University	1968–1972
MS in Agricultural Economics, Michigan State University	1979–1981
MS in National Security Resource Strategy, Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF/Eisenhower School)	1999–2000

Central African Republic (CAR)—Peace Corps Volunteer Teaching English; community development/primary health care First encounters with USAID Jean-Bedel Bokassa President-for-Life/Coronation as Emperor	1974–1978
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North Providence, RI —Tri-Town Economic Opportunity Commission Employment counselor to high school drop-outs	1978–1979
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**Positions within U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)**

Washington, D.C. —Agricultural Economist, Africa Bureau (under U.S. Department of Agriculture Participating Agency Services Agreement (PASA) with University of Maryland) Project/strategy development and review; cost/benefit analysis	1981–1984
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Washington, D.C. —Natural Resource Economist,  
 Science and Technology Bureau, Rural Development Office 1984–1987  
 (S&T/RD), (Administratively Determined (AD) employee)  
 Manage university research grants: land tenure and food security  
 First U.S. food need assessment during Ethiopian famine, 1985

Entered the Foreign Service July, 1987

Bamako, Mali—Agricultural Economist, USAID/Mali 1987–1992  
 Food policy, food aid, agricultural research, economic analysis  
 Foundation laid for Mali tripling food production in a generation  
 Fall of dictator President Moussa Traore; inception of democracy

Dhaka, Bangladesh—Food Policy Division chief; deputy office director 1992–1996  
 Green revolution comes to Bangladesh; better nutrition  
 Reform of corrupt and inefficient food distribution channels  
 Bangladesh food success leads to end of global Title III food aid  
 Beginning of global decline of USAID agriculture budgets and staffing

Washington, D.C.—Chief, Agriculture, Environment, Private Sector 1996–1999  
 Division, Africa Bureau  
 Importance of regional programs  
 Nascent renewal of US support to agriculture/food/poverty  
 Africa Food Security Initiative and Seeds of Hope Act  
 U.S.G. reengineering: begin to focus/report on country-wide results

Washington, D.C.—Student/researcher at Industrial College 1999–2000  
 of the Armed Forces (ICAF/Eisenhower School)  
 Research report: *Cutting Hunger and Poverty in Half: Interest  
 Groups and a Renewed U.S. Commitment in the  
 Post-Cold War World*

Washington, D.C.—Deputy Director, Office of Agriculture and Food 2000–2001  
 Security, Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade Bureau  
 Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa

Cairo, Egypt—Team Leader, Economic Growth Team 2001–2003  
 9/11; Deputy Secretary Elizabeth Cheney oversees USAID policy  
 Middle East Partnership Initiative and 2003 Gulf War

Washington, D.C.—Director, Democracy and Social Transition Office, 2003–2007  
 Europe/Eurasia Bureau (E&E)  
 Working with State Department Assistance Coordination Office  
 USAID sectoral staff inform graduation criteria for assistance  
 Country graduation to EU/NATO vs. Russia’s shrinking democratic space

Washington, D.C.—Acting Deputy Assistant Administrator, E&E Bureau 2007–2008  
Secretary Rice and Administrator Tobias foreign aid reform

Washington, D.C.—Director, AFR Sustainable Development Office 2008–2011  
Support to missions/bureau across all sectors  
Time of hope: Peace, stability, democracy across much of Africa  
African progress in growth, investment, health status, and agriculture

Port-au-Prince, Haiti—Program Officer/Acting Deputy Earthquake Feb–May 2010  
Response Coordinator, Office of Response Coordination

Retirement from Foreign Service September, 2011

USAID Staff Position after the Foreign Service:  
Washington, D.C.—Food Policy Advisor, Policy Team, 2011–2019  
Food Security Bureau (under USDA PASA agreement with  
University of Missouri/University of Maryland)  
New Bureau for Food Security/President’s Feed the Future Initiative  
Inter-agency support to food policy capacity and dialogue  
Support to African Union capacity and peer review of member states

Post retirement activities  
Volunteer food policy analyst, Bread for the World 2020–2021  
Member of church board/co chair social justice committee,  
Immanuel Church-on-the-Hill (Episcopal)  
Chaplain’s volunteer, Arlington County Jail

## INTERVIEW

*Q: This is John Pielemeier on July 11, 2022. We’re beginning an interview with David Atwood, a well-known and respected agricultural officer with USAID for many years. David, let’s start this interview by talking a little bit about how you got involved as a young person. Was there something that led you towards international work?*

ATWOOD: Well, I’ve been thinking quite a lot about this over the past few months partly because the social justice group at our church has for a number of weeks been talking about race, social justice, family, and our own backgrounds. I’m not somebody who usually has thought about how things shaped me but this social justice discussion that I’ve been part of has led me to these reflections.

But before I start, I’d like to in a sense “bookend” this interview with two farewell messages I gave when I really finally retired in 2019, the first one right here in the beginning reflecting on my career with USAID, and the second one—at the very end of the

interview—reflecting on lessons learned and advice for newer employees. So let me start out with a summary of reflections on my career from that farewell message in 2019:

Dear friends and colleagues -

It has been such a blessing to be able to work with so many of you over the past eight years in BFS, and so many others over my 38 years with USAID. I will miss the work and I will miss all of you and even miss the times we disagreed!

I have always seen my job, as a project manager and later a manager and supervisor, as making it easier for people to do their jobs well. So, the “you” in this message actually begins with our USAID partners—the contractors and grantees, the NGOs, companies, universities, host country counterparts, research institutes, and others—that I have been privileged to work with over the years. You are on the front lines trying your best to facilitate and support the changes that we put into your scopes of work. You deal with tremendous uncertainty and often impenetrably mysterious changes, on budgets, priorities, and interpretations. Much of my job, in various ways, has been to create conditions where your development work can succeed.

For those who want to read on, I’m going to note a few formative moments in my 38 years and the importance of having a vision of hope and progress over all the ups and downs of personal and professional life.

As a Peace Corps volunteer in the Central African Republic, I spent a lot of time trying to gain support from the local authorities for the health and community development program that I was a part of. One day the regional governor told me: “If you want support here, you need to improve agriculture. The only time there is cash in the treasury to pay teachers and health workers is when the harvest comes in and people pay their taxes.”

So off I went to Michigan State for a Masters in agricultural economics, then to USAID/Washington for a few years doing cost/benefit analysis of agriculture projects, and then working on land tenure and land reform issues in Africa and Latin America, with a side excursion to Ethiopia during the tragic famine of 1984--85. It was during that time that I saw—in Ethiopia—the terrible effects of poor governance and conflict amplifying a natural disaster, and in Central America the even more personal stakes sometimes involved in our work, when two USAID-funded land reform advisors were murdered in an effort to slow the land reform process.

Starting out in the Central African Republic made it hard to have a real vision of development and prosperity. It took going to Mali and Bangladesh for most of a decade to begin to develop that vision. In both those countries from the late 1980s, a combination of fiscal constraints, and governments rethinking their failed attempts to control prices, food supply and markets, created an opening where trusted advisors and providers of evidence could really make a difference; USAID and key partners, along with local researchers and other donors, provided information, space and confidence for some

visionary decision-makers in each country to open up the agricultural sectors to market incentives at the same time that agricultural scientists were making more productive crop technologies available. In Mali, this led to a major expansion in grain markets, small and medium enterprise (SME) rice processing and productivity that has tripled Mali's food production in a generation. In Bangladesh, a similar major expansion of food production led to rapid reductions in food prices that translated month by month into reduced nutritional wasting by poor kids in cities and villages across the country. In retrospect, one of the most exciting parts of Bangladesh's amazing success in agricultural growth, poverty reduction and improved nutrition was the impact it had on the U.S. Government itself. Once Bangladesh—the major Title III food aid recipient worldwide—no longer had food deficits that required U.S. Public Law (PL) 480 food aid, then Congress ended the Title III program worldwide. I initially saw this as an unfortunate loss, realizing only later what a mark of progress it represented.

But at the same time that I was seeing agriculture transforming those two poor countries, USAID funding for agriculture fell precipitously. I came back to Washington in 1996 and became part of the decade-long dialogue with Congress and outside groups—NGOs, universities, producer groups, faith-based groups—regarding the importance of food, agriculture, and nutrition in reducing poverty and driving prosperity. Having a vision of what that looked like—based on solid research, and communicated openly to outside groups who trusted us—was a key part of the groundwork that eventually led to the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa and culminated in Feed the Future.

An excursion into Egypt for a couple of years, and then especially five years working on issues of post-Communist transition, provided a further antidote to the narrow vision I'd had from my experience in CAR. The incentives provided by potential membership in NATO and the EU may be the strongest incentives for national transformation and policy change in modern history. In a relatively short time governance structures, accountability, and market incentives were overhauled in much of Eastern Europe, so urgent and deep was the desire to join the West. USAID played a key role in this transition, helping countries put into place the policies and structures they knew that they needed, but often didn't know practically how to proceed to get there.

My final career job in USAID was as director of AFR/SD, a wonderful job working with the world's experts in mobilizing sectoral expertise (in health, agriculture, private sector development, democracy, conflict, and education) in uniquely African contexts. I realized pretty soon after taking that job that the Bureau's senior managers (and therefore senior staff meetings) were consumed by U.S.G. policy issues related to elections, disasters, and US policy towards whichever one of Africa's fifty-plus countries presented a crisis that week. So, I started a biweekly report highlighting development impacts which were improving ordinary people's lives in Africa, and every week brought one item of development success into the senior staff meeting, to keep us all focused on the possibilities of transformation and development despite the urgent crises demanding attention.

That vision—that we can have an impact, that people can change, that societies can

transform—is an important part of why we are all doing what we are doing. It's been a particularly important and rewarding part of my eight years here with so many of you in the Bureau for Food Security. It can be hard sometimes to maintain that vision, especially in certain down periods like the present where the nations are raging, and conflict appears to be everywhere, even in those countries that have made so much progress.

For twenty years—from that first time I came back to Washington in 1996 and found Washington consumed by issues of conflict and crisis—I've had on my wall these words of the prophet Jeremiah to remind me that, despite the transitory disappointments and noise, we can be facilitators of that better vision: “For I know the plans that I have for you, declares the Lord, plans for welfare and not for calamity, to give you a future and a hope.”

Thank you, vaya con Dios, and blessings on you all. With warmest regards and in friendship.

Those words, my farewell to colleagues in my final USAID position, are kind of the “executive summary” of my career. But, John, to get back to your introductory question, about influences as a young person that may have drawn me later into international work:

I had a great-grandmother who lost her youngest two children shortly after World War I, not to the influenza epidemic but to scarlet fever. She was a person of deep faith, and this tragedy led her to devote the rest of her life to support a missionary in south India to tell people about Jesus and also help make their material lives better. She never went there herself, but spent a lot of time for the rest of her life collecting money from her friends and family and anybody who'd talk to her to support this missionary work in southern India. As a little boy, I remember giving her a dime from my allowance once in a while to support those people in India. Many years later when we were posted to Bangladesh, we got to visit the church and also the training school for destitute girls that she had helped support in south India. So, from the time I was pretty young, I knew about my great-grandmother and her “mission in India.” That's about all I knew, but I think that affected me in ways I never had really thought about until recently.

I was also a very shy kid and because of that was very sensitive to me being left out of things, but also to other kids being left out or teased and was always sort of sensitive to that, to questions of who was being left out of something.

I think a few other things contributed to me thinking about people in other parts of the world, but in ways that I wasn't so conscious of at the time. Every Lent in the church I grew up in, there was a collection for the diocese in Dacca (now spelled Dhaka) in what was then East Pakistan, which later became Bangladesh. I saved my coins and put them in a little box that—alongside the other kids in church—we brought up to the altar at Easter. I don't think any of us had a clue where Dacca was or how the money would be used, but again that's just something out there in my childhood that I think I sort of took for granted and didn't think much about it until I went to Bangladesh. During our posting

there, our family started worshiping in an Anglican church that was part of that very diocese that as a kid I gave my pennies to in our annual Lenten collection.

My parents were very open, very sociable, they always had people over to their house. They often had people they didn't know well over to get to know them better. They weren't active in the civil rights movement, but I remember them talking about fair housing and being upset by segregation. None of my parents' friends were African-American until my mother, who worked at Brown University, became friends with an African-American man on staff at Brown; they had him over for dinner sometimes and it seemed to my youthful eyes that they all enjoyed each others' company. Because this was in the early to mid-1960s—the heart of the civil rights era—the potential importance of that friendship kind of stayed with me.

My mother grew up in the Deep South, in Georgia. She did not like the Deep South for a lot of reasons, partly because of the expectations on her as a girl and young woman; she preferred reading, outdoor activity, and camping to being a Southern Belle, and she got out as soon as she could, went to the University of Chicago, married my dad whom she met during the war, and moved north and spent the rest of her life in Rhode Island.

But my brother and I spent a week or so every year with my grandparents in Macon, Georgia; my mother's closest friend from school was—to us—a loving, lovely woman but at the same time was one of the most explicitly racist persons I've ever met, as were her husband and their kids. My brother and I played with these kids during our annual trips south. They were very vocal about what they thought about Black people; I knew that was wrong, and sometimes my brother and I argued with them about this, but I also just accepted their attitude as part of life. I didn't really think about it much. In addition, my closest friend growing up had southern roots. He had never lived in the South, but when his parents divorced, his father—who was from Alabama—moved back to Lowndes County, notorious (I learned much later) in the civil rights movement for a lot of terrible things that happened there. I spent some time in Lowndes County two or three times, accompanying my friend when he would visit his Dad; I was really shocked at the visual nature of poverty in rural Alabama for these rural Black people who were probably sharecroppers, a lot of them. There was of course poverty in Rhode Island when I was growing up, but I didn't see it, didn't know about it.

And then a little later between college and the Peace Corps I was hiking with friends in New Mexico not too far from Taos; we decided we'd visit Taos. I've since been back to Taos and had a totally different impression, but at the time, for me as a young, naïve person, driving that dirt road into Taos and seeing these native American kids running around in the dirt and people selling souvenirs, it was just again, as in Alabama, the shock of the visual nature of poverty that stayed with me. I now realize that there's a lot that I was erroneously reading into the situation and a lot that I was missing, and not seeing or knowing about the strong community nature of many native American towns and villages, where there's a richness compared to my own experience growing up. But for me, at the time, what I thought I was seeing was the nadir of physical poverty.

So—as superficial as it was, and even with me also maybe overinterpreting or missing a lot of things—those experiences of overt racism and of poverty stayed with me.

*Q: Where did you go to high school? Where were you living?*

ATWOOD: I grew up in East Providence, Rhode Island, spent my entire childhood and youth there. Then after college spent a couple years in Denver, Colorado and then joined the Peace Corps from there, which I'll talk about in a little while.

I attended a diverse public high school; I didn't think of it as "diverse;" it just seemed normal to me. But it did help me many years later with the regional USAID Mission in Budapest, Hungary when I was on temporary duty (TDY) there and they asked me to make a speech to the Roma (who used to be called Gypsies) in a small city in Hungary. There was a regional USAID project in Hungary, Romania, and a couple of other eastern European countries in the 2000s that was trying to expand communication and cooperation between Roma communities and several local municipalities that were open to better integrating the Roma. When the mission asked me to give that speech—to both Roma people and local government officials in this Hungarian community—I focused a lot of that speech on my own high school experiences growing up in this very diverse high school where the school represented and included every community in our town. Anyway, who knows how attending a diverse high school affects you, but I think it does affect you in some ways. I was also a Boy Scout during this time. I did pretty well in Boy Scouts and got invited to be part of the "host corps" at the 1967 World Boy Scout Jamboree, which took place in the U.S., in Idaho. You were paired with troops from other countries and available to them as a resource and to welcome them.

So, all these things sort of in a way I didn't realize at the time made me think about poverty, about the bigger world around me. I didn't think about poverty really in Providence, Rhode Island although there's plenty of poverty there too, but seeing what I saw, or thought that I saw, in these other places made me think about poverty, about different kinds of people, about racism,

*Q: Where did you go to college and why?*

ATWOOD: I went to Brown University, which was three miles from my house. I'd hoped to go away to college but then just in terms of acceptances that seemed the best place for me to go. My mother worked at Brown at the time, and I tried to pretend I was more independent, farther away by trying to avoid her on campus (laughing)! I lived in the dorm which was very nice of my parents to pay for, when our house was just three miles away. Brown and other Ivy League schools at that time cost much, much less than what I saw my younger colleagues at USAID pay for a year of day care! I think tuition was \$2,000 for a full year tuition. It was a lot of money for my parents but compared to now it's kind of shocking.

I majored in anthropology partly influenced by a couple of friends. I was easily influenceable. But that got me really exposed to and thinking about other cultures not at



all through a poverty lens, which these shocks in my teenage years kind of gave me, but thinking about other cultures as being strong, resilient, having a lot to offer, being as worthy of respect as any kind of modern or Western culture.

There were kids at Brown that were thinking of joining the Peace Corps. Some of them did. I didn't have any contact with them after they did. And in high school I'd also had a high school teacher who was a long-term substitute teacher and had been in the Peace Corps. One day he showed us slides of the Peace Corps in Kenya. I don't remember very many classes in my high school years at all, but I remember that class. That stuck with me.

A few things at Brown in addition to anthropology were important. I never accepted a lot of the disagreements that characterize academic disciplines. I thought that with most disagreements that if people talked together, they'd come to some agreement on some basic things about which they were disagreeing, and I have always tried to be a consensus builder, maybe partly because of that.

Like many other college students in the late '60s, early '70s, I was reading a lot of Marx's philosophy and economics, and also various Marxist journals including—I can't remember it exactly—something like the *World Socialist Review* might have been the name. This was right at the time when a lot of American Marxists were making major changes in their thinking about economic development, moving away from a singular focus on industry and recognizing that agriculture and rural people were crucial to economic and social development; this was obviously influenced by Mao Tse Tung and the Chinese Revolution and the Vietnam War and everything else that was swirling around in the 1960s. But I remember that argument in some of these Marxian things I was reading, and I think that stayed with me.

There were two very influential things that directly affected my interest in joining the Peace Corps. One was in one of my anthropology classes. Most of anthropology at that time was focused on cultures as unchanging, you know, worthy of respect but like these pristine unchanging cultures which almost all anthropologists now recognize as false. All cultures change and are shaped and have crises and opportunities and things change. But anyway, in one class I took we read a book that was totally different from that unchanging culture perspective, Eric Wolf's *Peasant Wars of the 20<sup>th</sup> Century*. He was trying to explain what happened in these cultures that led people to completely sacrifice a lot to engage in war or rebellion or revolution. And then I took a course taught by a Marxist economist who was not allowed to teach in the economics department; he taught in the sociology department; it wasn't a course on Marxism, it was a course on how societies and economies change. We spent a lot of time studying Brazil, studying Vietnam, and he introduced economics to me for the first time, as well as theories of conflict and culture.

And all this was of course in the context of the Vietnam War; being in college from '68 to '72 my world was shaped by the Vietnam War. After college I worked full time in the McGovern presidential campaign. During the Vietnam War I wondered who's right and

who's wrong, how did good people get to this point where good people on both sides were doing things that are causing them to kill each other. Why does the United States have interests in a country so far away? A close friend of my mother who was radical politically, as well as a friend of mine who had returned from college, started talking about both U.S. involvement in Vietnam and also about the world food problem, and why there are so many hungry in a world full of abundance. I had a friend, a close friend from elementary and junior high school who ended up getting in trouble with the law, becoming quite radicalized politically. So, I think these alternative, radical views—which I didn't fully accept but which did challenge me—shaped my view of things, too.

When I finished Brown, and after McGovern lost the election, I didn't know what to do and I didn't want to stay near home because I'd been in college three miles from my home, so I hitchhiked to Colorado and spent a couple years there working construction, working as a teachers' aide, doing various things, hanging out with former VISTA volunteers; that also made me start thinking about things like Peace Corps and volunteering, things like that. However, the few volunteer experiences I did have didn't go well. I volunteered at a YMCA to work with poor kids while I was in Colorado, but I was kind of a failure as a volunteer. Similarly at Brown, I had wanted to help people, so at Brown I volunteered for one or two things, volunteering to work with elementary kids in a settlement house in a poor part of Providence, but I was just too shy to be effective with them. I wasn't good at managing and exciting the kids; then in Colorado I volunteered at a weekend YMCA camp. That didn't work out. Again, I was too shy and inexperienced and unconfident to deal with these kids.

Anyway, two things in my time in Colorado led me right into the Peace Corps, one intellectual, one personal. Having read that Eric Wolf book on peasant wars led me to do my own personal research on culture change and war. I thought that on my own if I just read enough and thought about things, I could figure this all out for myself. So, I spent a lot of time reading about Vietnam, about China, about other countries and rural people, rural poverty; I had this journal I was writing trying to figure this all out, why did people fight each other in these poor countries? And I never got anywhere. But it was kind of a useful exercise in both writing and thinking and learning a lot. Then the personal thing was that I had one good friend that I made in Colorado; he decided to apply to the Peace Corps. But when he got his invitation to join, then he wasn't so sure and so he and I spent whatever time they gave you at that time thinking together about this, five or 10 days to make your decision. He could have done that before he applied, but going through that process with him made me decide that actually I did want to join the Peace Corps. So that's how I ended up in the Peace Corps. (He ended up deciding not to join, and he spent the rest of his life teaching in Denver, Colorado, a rich and rewarding teaching career and grounded in one community all the years that I was moving around. He just retired three years ago, and I saw him a couple years ago for the first time since this time in 1974.)

*Q: Did he have a country assigned that he didn't want to go to?*

ATWOOD: I don't remember if he had a country assignment or not, but I think he probably must have, because I think always by the time you were invited, you were offered a country assignment, I think. But it wasn't the country, it was just, he had strong roots in Colorado and a lot of friends, and he just didn't want to give all that up and go overseas. Then I applied, a few months later got my invitation to join the Peace Corps and go to the Central African Republic.

*Q: Had you said you wanted to go to Africa?*

ATWOOD: You know I had French, and that's why they assigned me to a French-speaking country, and most Peace Corps countries where French was the language were in Africa.

*Q: How did you have French?*

ATWOOD: Just high school and college French. I wasn't going to mention this, but I will: During this kind of fraught time in the late '60s and early '70s, Brown University was kind of a minor Ivy League school, now it's super selective and popular. I was there during a time of tremendous student activism and protests. There was a very active student protest movement, focused at Brown on two things: One was the Vietnam War and the invasion of Cambodia and the other was educational reform. At that time—the Cambodia invasion—most of the students went out in the college green in the middle of the invasion of Cambodia during the Vietnam war after Kent State, after the several students were killed by the national guard at Kent State and Jackson State, and successfully closed the university down for the rest of the semester. But we also protested in a proactive way for major reforms of the Brown curriculum—this was a very active student-led educational reform movement. So, in addition to Vietnam War protests, we also demonstrated to get the faculty to abolish all specific course distribution requirements; if you want to take all science and no humanities, fine; if you want no grades, fine. If you want to drop any foreign language requirement, fine. So, you had to get a certain number of credits to graduate but those credits could be in anything you wanted. This led to a lot of creative course offerings, but having no requirements and newly created cross-disciplinary courses really propelled Brown to move from a lower tier Ivy League school when I was there to become one of the most popular universities in the country in the years that followed.

But how does this affect my Peace Corps and Foreign Service story? I quickly dropped French and never took it up again at Brown. So, four or so years after that I'm sitting, my first morning in Bangui in the Central African Republic, and the Peace Corps language teachers are coming around to meet us for the very first time. I had good reading French (from the courses I'd taken before Brown dropped the language requirement), but my speaking and comprehension were terrible. Our chief language teacher came around and said, *Bonjour je m'appelle M. Sandoa, Joseph*. ("Hello, I'm Mr. Joseph Sandoa.") I could not understand what he was saying! The most basic phrase in any language! Then this little light bulb went off—maybe we shouldn't have abolished the language

requirement a few years ago at Brown! If I'd taken a couple more French classes, I'd be able to understand this guy. Fortunately, my speaking and comprehension picked up fast because I did have solid French reading and writing. I was able to get to pretty good fluency quickly.

A long answer to the question but yes, I think I had no country preferences on my Peace Corps application and was probably offered an African French speaking country because I had (on paper if not in reality) decent French.

*Q: What was your assignment? What were you doing as a Peace Corps volunteer?*

ATWOOD: Well as a humanities major with apparent French of course Peace Corps made me an English teacher! And this was important to getting me to AID and agriculture because from the very beginning even though—unlike my friend in Denver—I accepted the Peace Corps invitation, I felt very ambivalent about teaching English. Here I'd been reading all this stuff about rural poverty and how important agriculture was, and I'm teaching English in this country where kids come into secondary school (I was teaching in a secondary school (*lycée*) in a rural town), they come into secondary school already knowing at least three languages! Their local language, the trade language, Sango, which is close to Lingala in Zaire, and French. And they get to secondary school, and this is the middle of the cold war, and they have American teachers teaching them English and Soviet teachers teaching them Russian. So, they have two more languages that most of them are never going to use because they're not going to go to college, they're going to do something else and drop out.

So, from the very beginning I felt very ambivalent about teaching English. I think I became a pretty good teacher, and it was good for me, and I enjoyed it, but the Peace Corps director knew that I felt ambivalent about teaching English. Geographically I was in a town where there were volunteers not too far away doing all sorts of other things—fish culture, school construction. Because the Peace Corps director knew of my interests, he had me be the interpreter for a geologist on an AID consultancy to investigate the possibility of a well drilling program. I also spent a lot of time with some AID people who were planning the first health program that AID would have in the CAR. So, I had a lot of contact with AID, but more importantly, a lot of contact with other more developmentally appropriate things that Peace Corps was doing.

I guess I will carry that thread further, eventually AID was going to start a small community development project. AID in the CAR was run out of the regional Cameroon mission at the time, called the regional development office in Yaoundé. John Koehring was head of that for most of the time I was in Peace Corps. So, the Peace Corps director knew that I was interested in doing something else. He knew that I was willing to stay another year if there was something more developmentally focused that I could do. So, he asked me to work in this, to be the initially one of the first two volunteers in this new AID community development project.

So that's what I did, and that was a great experience. I started out spending a week or two in the new UN funded community development training center and then moving back to my town (where I had taught in the high school) but now serving as regional supervisor and coordinator for local central African community development agents working in villages. I got to know foreigners and Central Africans with tremendous experience and perspective and insights into local level development. I spent a lot of time with villagers. I perfected my Sango, the trade language, so I could talk to people and run meetings in Sango. The CAR was not a place with great development prospects or experience but there were some projects that had had an impact. I could see—in the villages where we worked—the remnants and positive impact of French aid projects that had been there 10 or 15 years earlier.

And agriculture was key to everything there. But a lot of what we were doing was health education and wells building. The local governor was not supportive at all. I mean he didn't try to stop us, but he had no interest. If we needed any kind of help, he wasn't going to go out of his way to help us. And one day I asked him why, and he said something like, "You know, you're not doing anything to help us in agriculture. Agriculture pays the bills when the cotton harvest comes in; that's the only time we have revenue to pay teachers, to pay health workers." People would go for a year or a year and a half without getting paid in cash and when the cotton harvest came in that cash would go out to pay them—teachers, nurses, agricultural extension agents.

So that all got me even more interested in agriculture. And the role I had in this new village community development project gave me a great set of experiences in a lot of areas of development, exposed me to a lot of people I came to like and respect, who'd spent their careers working in Africa on development.

A few other things happened to me there.

First, teaching was really good for me personally. I was a very shy person, but teaching, whether you're shy or not, you've got to be 100% on for teaching; teaching is very good for that. You have to be confident; you have to be in charge, you have to project energy and control or there's chaos in the classroom. And then being in this regional coordinator position, I kind of found my voice in a sense and became a lot more confident as well.

Second, I got my first exposure to AID in the Peace Corps, and related to that, I learned how vulnerable the people on the sort of "front line" of development can be to bureaucratic decisions made far away from them that they have no input on and often no understanding of. This was true first and foremost for the Central African village agents I was working with. They were affected, in sometimes capricious ways, by decisions made by the CAR government, by Peace Corps, by the UN project supporting them, by USAID.

And I experienced this myself directly, as well. I was a privileged volunteer at this point, working in the community development project with a lot of support. AID gave me a motorcycle and they gave me a truck, and I worked in an AID project managed out of

Yaoundé by this guy named Norm Green who was just a very sweet dedicated guy, very supportive. But I also had very negative experiences. There was a USAID planner for the health project they were starting, whose name I won't mention. He came to my town. Peace Corps volunteers always think of it as "my town" or "my village". But he came to my town, and he wanted to see the nightlife. I took him to the one bar where there was music. We had a beer. He said something like, "That music's terrible. Can you have them turn it off?" I said I'm not going to do that. He said here's 50 francs, give it to them; they'll turn it off. He eventually went up himself and got the manager to turn off the music.

More importantly, I also ended up being asked to run the admin side of a health project training program in my town, the first time we'd done training outside of Bangui in the Peace Corps there. And USAID never came through on anything. We had eight or 10 health volunteers all ready to go. The idea was they would staff a larger regional AID primary health care project. But the AID people were months late, leaving these Peace Corps volunteers stranded with no larger project and no mentoring or technical supervision. It was really disappointing to me, partly because I'd worked my heart out on this training program and then for what I saw as a very resource heavy rich organization and people and money not to be able to come through on their commitments, that kind of stayed with me, and made me very sensitive to the ways in which faraway decisions and organizations can negatively affect people doing work in rural areas.

But probably the most important thing that happened is that I met another volunteer, Nancy Reuschel. She and I have been married 41 years now. Nancy was very interested in Africa and languages and other countries and other cultures. She had traveled in Europe by herself. She had previously—before joining the Peace Corps—gone on a three-month trip from London to Kathmandu overland. You can't do this now, through Iran, Pakistan, Kashmir, Afghanistan. She and I really hit it off, eventually came back and got married, but with her and my experiences both, in addition to having a loving home and marriage and family and children, we were both very comfortable and even eager to be living and working overseas again, having some of the upbringing of our kids in overseas locations.

*Q: You were dating, or you were just friends at that point?*

ATWOOD: Well, friends and then dating and then we decided when we came back, we'd live together and then we eventually got married, yeah.

*Q: Where was your local draft board all this time?*

ATWOOD: I got a pretty high number in the 1970 draft lottery so I was safe from being drafted, I think it was January 1970, the lottery was. I didn't have to worry about that. I do remember the speech President Nixon gave around this time; this may have been a speech around the time of the invasion of Cambodia. He had this famous line, famous anyway among anyone who knew or thought about Peace Corps, something like not

liking “those bums in the Peace Corps who are avoiding the draft!” Do you remember that, John?

*Q: Yeah, I do.*

ATWOOD: I wasn't in the Peace Corps at the time but that sort of stuck with me.

*Q: Anybody else you met in CAR? Did you meet President Bokassa? You must have met Bokassa, right?*

ATWOOD: Didn't meet Bokassa. I don't know if you know the name Bill Swing who became very big in the State Department subsequently?

*Q: Yes, he was my ambassador in Liberia.*

ATWOOD: He was Deputy Chief of Mission in CAR, probably went to Liberia from CAR. He was really on the fast track. You know, he visited my town a couple of times. He brought us a bottle of scotch, *Newsweek*, the *International Herald Tribune*; he really knew how isolated Peace Corps volunteers can feel, and that's why he brought us things like that. Anthony Quainton was our ambassador. He was later the first counter-terrorism czar, possibly in part based on his dealing with Bokassa when he assaulted two American journalists at the Presidential Palace and also imprisoned a Peace Corps volunteer for stopping his motorcycle outside one of his palaces. Because I spanned four years, I met a lot of people who were Peace Corps volunteers in CAR and we get together every two years for a reunion. Admittedly those who choose to attend the reunions of CAR volunteers are a self-selecting group, but I've found it interesting that among the volunteers how many of them in our group went on to work either in international development, social work, teaching or NGO or foundation work either overseas or in America, including to some influential positions—one of them ran the FAO fisheries program worldwide, another one the global UN humanitarian operation.

*Q: Did you know a guy named Bob Gribbin?*

ATWOOD: Oh yeah, absolutely! He was a junior officer. It was his first post. He was the economics officer. And then he was replaced by Don Steinberg, who also in CAR was a first tour junior officer economist, and went on to a long career, eventually serving as deputy administrator of AID.

And then Bob Gribbin went back as an ambassador to CAR after he'd been ambassador in Rwanda I believe, or maybe just before Rwanda. Anyway, he went back as ambassador in the early 1990s, which was the most exciting time to be in CAR. Emperor Bokassa, the dictator, had been overthrown about 10 years earlier, but there was this flowering of democratic NGOs and there was real contestation for elections. It was an exciting time when he was there. I've heard him speak about it.

*Q: Bob's a good friend. So, at some point you decided it was time to leave, and what were you and your friend planning to do.*

ATWOOD: First, let me just say a bit more about the broader political and institutional situation. I didn't have anything to compare CAR to, but in a way, it was a good experience for someone spending a career in development because it turned out it was really at just about the lowest rung globally, whether you are looking at indicators of poverty, of institutional capacity, or political development. These things did affect me directly, as I have alluded to a bit earlier. For example, our teaching counterparts—like pretty much all other Central African civil servants—were seldom paid. Yes, they got their monthly pay stub, but to turn it into cash or bank assets, they had to find a government cash window that had any cash. They seldom did, and this became a bigger and bigger problem, sometimes with people even having 18 months or more of arrears in pay, as Bokassa prepared to crown himself Emperor: He was having his treasury agents go throughout the country and getting all the cash so he could pay for his coronation. Similarly, people were scared to talk about Bokassa. There was no political talk at all, really. So, when I did a TDY to Latin America a few years later, and even when I traveled to Nigeria and Senegal after Peace Corps, it was refreshing to hear people and see the press talk about politics. Finally, while I was there, Peace Corps (through professors teaching new CAR teachers in the teacher training school), the UN (for example through the community development school in Damara) and many others were trying to build up CAR's very low institutional capacity. Everywhere I went after CAR, whether long term or short term, was more advanced; certainly, Mali and Bangladesh (which people see as very poor countries) were so much ahead of CAR institutionally and politically.

But in answer to your question about what was next for me: Well, my time to leave kept getting extended, which was kind of nice from the point of view of Nancy and me spending more time together, but they kept recruiting volunteers to replace me who got sick or terminated. So, I ended up spending not just a third year but almost all of a fourth year. And finally recruited a guy—Roger Clapp—who had been teaching at the high school. A very solid guy, very dynamic who used the ambassador's self-help fund to get another classroom built at the *lycée*. And he was really interested in what I was doing, so he ended up replacing me and allowing me to finally leave.

So, then Nancy and I met up a few months later when she finished her teaching time in the Peace Corps. She just had a few more months there to finish her teaching time. We then moved together to Providence, near my parents. She got a job teaching in a poor community called Fox Point—a Portuguese-American and Cape Verdean-American community in Providence—while I worked at one of the old economic opportunity commissions (from President Johnson's War on Poverty) as an employment counselor for kids who'd dropped out of school. We each did that for about a year while we were applying to grad school. She applied to the School for International Training in Vermont to get a Masters in teaching English as a second language. I applied to two kinds of grad schools in agricultural economics and in applied anthropology and it's kind of funny how these random events shape you. Michael Horowitz, who's this guy at State University of



New York in Binghamton who started the Institute for Applied Anthropology, you've probably run into him at some point.

*Q: I sure did.*

ATWOOD: And I really liked what they were doing but he was on sabbatical, and he never replied to my letter. He hadn't put in place any kind of process to reply to letters of interest from prospective students, so I never heard from him! I heard from him a year later when I was on my way to Michigan State grad school. Anyway, for agricultural economics I applied to two very good schools, very applied and very internationally focused. One was the University of Wisconsin, and one was Michigan State. I had no economics other than sitting in one course in the evening in Providence. I had not taken economics at Brown. I had almost no math. And the University of Wisconsin had no interest in me because I had no math or economics. They figured it would be too much trouble to start me over again.

Michigan State loved French-speaking former Peace Corps volunteers. They figured it's a piece of cake to get people to take a couple of basic economics courses. It was harder for them to find grad students they could deploy overseas as researchers and sometimes policy advisors. Michigan State had grad students doing research all over the world, acting as policy advisors while they're doing their research. It was a good model that would not work in a lot of other schools, but it worked there because we were closely supervised, and we had this very strong overseas experience, most of us coming into the program.

*Q: Who was the person running that program? I'm trying to think of the name.*

ATWOOD: You may be thinking of Charlie Steadman at University of Michigan in Ann Arbor and their strong economic research program focused on the Sahel and West Africa. But at Michigan State there were a number of senior faculty who'd spent their careers working internationally. Carl Eicher was the man who really was the leader and visionary for a lot of the Michigan State's Africa work on food, agriculture and employment in Africa when I was there. But there were many others as well whose presence benefitted me also.

*Q: Yes, yes right.*

ATWOOD: In that environment, with a lot of African grad students who came back to school after serious, often senior, responsibilities as government officials in Africa, and with so many internationally focused and committed faculty and students, I got exposed to a lot. And in that way, it was kind of like working in the community development project in CAR as a Peace Corps volunteer; it put me in contact with so many people, not only faculty, but some of the more senior grad students who were spending way too long getting their dissertations done but it's because they were off for two or three years working on an AID project in Burkina Faso or somewhere else.

So, I just got such a depth and breadth of exposure to the importance of policy, to the way you can use the tools of economics to solve certain problems, to how research must be applied and practical and understandable to people who are going to use the results of their research, to what it takes to put together a team in Africa to get anything done. Anyway, I just got exposed to both theory, practice, and a bunch of people who were really dedicating their lives to making African agriculture better to reduce poverty.

*Q: Great. And that was a two-year program?*

ATWOOD: Yeah, Master's program.

*Q: Did you travel at all during that period?*

ATWOOD: I did. Michigan State was a valued research and policy partner with AID and they still are, so they had a number of grants and contracts across Africa. USAID in Cameroon negotiated a small contract to evaluate a farmer training program in northern Cameroon. At the same time, Michigan State had a much bigger USAID program with PhD students doing research in north Cameroon, so they already knew the USAID Mission there and had some working knowledge of north Cameroon. Carl Eicher and another faculty member, Jim Bingen (who was supervisor for this research) talked the AID mission into putting a little more money into the evaluation to permit a grad student to drill down more and visit farmers over a period of three months and see what the real impact of this program was. So I was that person. I did that research. That was a great opportunity for a Master's student to have a three-month field assignment and get a Master's thesis out of it! And also, to contribute to a fuller understanding by both USAID and the Cameroonian officials of the impact of the program on the ground.

*Q: This was in northern Cameroon, you said?*

ATWOOD: Yeah, not too far from Maroua, in a smaller regional town called Dadjamka, near Yagoua, and a number of small villages surrounding it.

*Q: I remember Maroua, Garoua, one of those places*

ATWOOD: Yeah, a wonderful part of the world. Now, like so much of that part of the world, Boko Haram is wreaking havoc there.

*Q: And so, going back to Michigan State. You did your thesis on the work related to your trip to north Cameroon, the evaluation?*

ATWOOD: Yes.

*Q: And your wife, you said she was teaching at that point? What was she doing?*

ATWOOD: She'd finished her Master of Arts in Teaching in Vermont. Her program was one year, mine was two years. She came out to Lansing to live, and we eventually got

married at the end of my time there. For better or worse, right around the time she arrived in Lansing, probably in September 1980, Carl Eicher made me the offer that I felt like I couldn't refuse, which was to spend the winter in north Cameroon. Nancy and I talked about it, and she was okay with it, partly because she's a very generous person and knew how important it could be to me to do this field research, even though she knew no one in Lansing before she came out to be with me. So, we spent the fall in Lansing, but I left her alone in the winter in Lansing, Michigan, which can be a rough winter. She's from Los Angeles by the way and never experienced winter except for one year in Vermont and one year in Providence. So, she was all alone in Lansing while I was living it up in the tropics for those three months. And I came back, finished my degree; she was teaching English to Cambodian refugees outside of Lansing, Michigan that year. I finished my degree and—she still wanted to marry me after spending the rough Michigan winter by herself, which I'm still grateful for!—we got married in June of 1981, three months after I returned from Cameroun.

*Q: And then what were your interests work-wise? You realized you weren't going for a PhD. Going into the workforce, what were your thoughts?*

ATWOOD: Well, because I had had such a positive impression of all these people UN, UNICEF, FAO, people that I'd met in the Central African Republic, I really wanted to do the kinds of work that they were doing, which was kind of on the ground working with rural people doing something related to rural development or agriculture. It was all vague in my mind. I mean, I was an economist. I wasn't going to be doing crop experiments or teaching people how to raise fatter chickens; I wasn't going to be an ag extension agent. I didn't have the skills for that. But I thought that there were some jobs where I could work successfully at field level directly with village people.

And then a couple of things happened. Carl Eicher had a heart-to-heart conversation with me. In the past, in the Vietnam era, AID people did that kind of village work. But that's not the work that my generation and your generation in AID did, the post-Vietnam generation. Some people before us in USAID were lucky enough to do some of that kind of work on the field, helping village people. Carl Eicher said something like, "David, to do that work you pretty much have to be a contractor operating on two- or three-year contracts with groups like AID or FAO or the UN; you really do not want to be a contractor; it can be rewarding in the beginning. But then your first job comes to an end, you spend a year and a half looking for your next job. You might not have a next job. You might be unemployed back in the States looking for your next job. You want to do something where you have a career trajectory." So, that's when I started thinking about working for AID, but my impressions of AID were mixed, as I stated earlier. AID had funded my Master's research, gave me my truck and my motorcycle in the Peace Corps, gave me the extra two years in the Peace Corps where I met my wife, funded my assistantship at Michigan State (allowing me to pay only in-state tuition.) But I also had this whole other set of experiences with USAID which were pretty negative related to lack of support for projects that I'd been very much involved in in CAR. At one point I even wrote a song, whose lyrics I long ago lost, called the *AID Blues*, cataloging all my sad experiences with USAID in the Peace Corps.

Because of those negatives, I did not want to work for AID. But the other thing that happened was that Nancy and I applied for all sorts of jobs in Africa, and it just didn't work. You know, there were a couple of jobs she was interested in, but there seemed to be nothing for me. There were a couple of things I was interested in, but there seemed to be nothing for her. So, at one point, Carl Eicher picked up the phone and called his old buddy, Lane E. Holdcroft, who worked for AID. Lane had spent a sabbatical at Michigan State working with Carl, but currently headed the office in Africa Bureau responsible for technical support to Missions across all the sectors (a job I later held at the end of my foreign service career). Carl gave me a good recommendation and asked if Lane had any way to put me to work for him. And, as often happens in AID, they had an opening that was going to be filled by a Foreign Service Officer (FSO) but one who really didn't want to go into that job. So, the assigned FSO ended up finding something else; as a result, Lane's office needed a French-speaking ag economist until they filled the slot with an FSO. The office had an umbrella interagency agreement with the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) to provide technical expertise, so Lane said that they could definitely use a French speaking ag economist who knows West Africa for a few months until they filled their slot, and so they hired me short-term under that USDA agreement. So, that was my way in at AID. It took them a long time to fill the slot, and a few months became almost three years, eventually on a longer-term contract. So, my first job with AID was as a job suited to my skills, for which I was pretty well qualified, but probably not the most qualified, because I got it thanks to my professor knowing the head of the office in AID where I ended up working.

Then, in 1984, I was offered a direct Federal job, but not a career slot. I don't know if you remember when Peter McPherson brought Nyle C. Brady into AID as head of what we now call a pillar bureau. At that time, there was just one pillar bureau where much of the AID expertise across development sectors resided. Nyle Brady—who at this time had a global reputation as one of the people who'd helped drive the Green Revolution, and so was a real asset for AID—had set out two conditions for taking that job at AID early in the Reagan Administration. One condition was that Peter McPherson—Reagan's Administrator of AID—appoint him as uber Bureau head, that is change his title to not just one (of several) Assistant Administrators, but make sure that he is the senior-most bureau head, with the title, Senior Assistant Administrator. I think that as a result Nyle Brady was probably the only person, before or since, who's ever been a "Senior Assistant Administrator" in AID.

But his other condition was to give him half of the political jobs in AID, to depoliticize them, and to use them to hire technical/sectoral experts into Federal positions, albeit non-career positions. So, I got hired into one of these formerly political, non-careers "Administratively Determined" (AD) jobs, a political job that had been sort of depoliticized by Nyle Brady so he could staff his bureau with technical people in agriculture and health, education, everything.

*Q: AD is ...*

ATWOOD: Administratively Determined, and you don't have to go through any Civil Service or Foreign Service competitive hiring process. It's just determined administratively that you're going to be hired. Noncompetitive.

I want to reflect a little bit though on my time in Washington, if I could.

*Q: Sure!*

ATWOOD: So just a couple things about my Africa Bureau job and then about my time in Science and Technology (S&T) Bureau job. My job in the Africa Bureau was one of many staff level people in agriculture, health, education, across the sectors. Basically, reviewing documents from the field. You remember that time, John, where for a while every AID mission had to have a five-year strategy that they came up with every year. A CDSS, the "Country Development Strategy Statement," would be produced every year for most AID countries. In addition, missions had to come in with a pre-project paper for review and approval by Washington, and then after that a project paper for review and approval from Washington. This is why it took so long for anything to get done in the field; it also may be why AID never came through in time for the CAR health project that I was involved in as a Peace Corps volunteer.

I was part of that review machinery. And for me it was a great way to understand a couple of things, how projects get developed and some of the pitfalls of faulty reasoning, lack of data, but also some of the pitfalls of a heavy review process. By the time the review is done, and the approval comes, things could have changed so much that it's no longer the appropriate project to be doing.

But I also got exposed to how bureaucracies make decisions, which was important not just in terms of my functioning in USAID but in working with host country ministries overseas and how important a good presentation is. How a good presentation of faulty reasoning often goes forward because it's the presentation that's sometimes more important than the substance. Well, anyway, that was a very good learning experience for me to be part of. It turned out I was a pretty good analyst and writer and was kind of valued in that process. I met a lot of older AID people, all guys in agriculture, all of them men. Almost all of them had worked in Vietnam. Many of them had had direct jobs as ag extension agents, some of them as personal advisers to ministers, things like that.

In addition to the project reviews, I also did a lot of cost benefit analysis of projects, which was good for me for two reasons. It really showed me that, yes, there are some economic tools that are useful. At the same time, it also taught me skepticism about anyone who claimed with any degree of certainty to know what would happen in a development project, because doing the cost benefit analysis you make so many assumptions and the assumptions you are making are sometimes as important as anything else in determining rate of return or the benefit cost ratio of a project. So, it caused me some skepticism about some of that.

I learned a lot about missions and got to know a lot of people in missions because of numerous Temporary Duty (TDY) assignments. My TDYs were mainly to redo or deepen the economic side of projects when there was a controversial project, or one people had questions about, or one that needed to be redesigned, or where people wanted to deepen the economic analysis before the project moved forward; that's when I got involved.

An example of one of the things that I was involved in was in Mauritania. There have been a number of recent studies by USAID and the World Bank about how important rural roads were for agriculture and rural development. And there was a rural road project that USAID/Mauritania wanted to build there; it would link up the most productive region in the country with another bigger road being built by another donor, but even then, the road network wouldn't fully connect the producing region with any major center. People in Washington wanted to kill the project because they couldn't see sufficient economic benefits from it. So, I was sent out for a couple of weeks with a consulting engineer to deepen the earlier superficial economic and feasibility analysis for the road. We found that, indeed, Washington was right – without a fuller road network there weren't sufficient benefits to justify the road. But we also discovered that the USAID Mission was having trouble finding viable projects to program its food aid money towards. When we get to Mali and Bangladesh, I'll talk a bit more about food aid monetization, but basically the government of Mauritania and the U.S. had a pile of local currency from food aid sales that needed to be used to finance good development projects. We proposed that the missing road links be funded with that money, convinced Washington that the road was a good idea, if these additional links were built, and the project went ahead.

After these two plus years in the Africa Bureau, I moved to the S&T Bureau in that AD position. This was in the rural development office of the Bureau, which was one of the most creative offices in AID. At that time or maybe any time. The office was just doing exciting things, making new discoveries and turning them into practical policy and project advice related to rural financial markets, micro-enterprise, regional development, rural-urban linkages, food security, local organizational strengthening, and land tenure. It was a very creative time when they were enlisting the U.S. university community in doing applied research on a lot of important and interesting topics and coming out with very practical guidelines and handbooks and project design in those areas.

I was the grant manager for a grant we had with the Land Tenure Center at the University of Wisconsin, which was doing exciting work on land law, land reform, land ownership in developing countries, mainly focused on Latin America. Both AID and the Center were interested in focusing more on Africa. I helped them to get more economic expertise on Africa, which they didn't have, and helped develop AID mission interest and support for these issues, and their work, in Africa. And that's where I realized that a lot of the job of many AID people including my job was not just to shape what my grantee was doing but to help them navigate the totally confusing, not malicious but just totally confusing, mysterious, and not very reliable AID bureaucracy. My last year or so, I also served as grant manager for the latest incarnation of the applied research grant that AID

had with Michigan State university on food security, the grant for research done by many of the faculty and grad students I had worked with when I was in grad school there.

It was in these two grant management roles that I sort of developed my idea of my role as a project manager where, yes, I would shape some of the work our grantee is doing, make sure they deliver what they agreed to deliver, help make sure it's valuable to AID and helpful to missions, but I also would try to in a sense "modulate the noise" from the AID machine. So just getting them focused on their work and not to worry too much about changes they've heard on policy or budget, that I would take care of that and kind of protect them so they could do their work. And I've always seen my job since then in AID partly to kind of protect and shield the people who are actually implementing our projects—and as I became a manager, for my own staff as well—sort of shield them from that noise in the AID machine that we all have to deal with and manage, so they can just get on with their work.

Probably the three most important and formative things I did during that time were in Ethiopia and Madagascar and also working on USAID policy on land reform. I did the first U.S. government food needs assessment in Ethiopia during the famine of the mid-1980s. You will probably remember that Ethiopia, at the time a Marxist, more or less Communist, dictatorship was not an ally of the U.S. by mutual agreement. They certainly weren't an AID recipient. And it took Peter McPherson—and some on the outside, I think possibly Catholic Relief Services—going to Ronald Reagan and talking about children dying of starvation in order for the U.S. government to actually mobilize food and humanitarian assistance on any scale commensurate with the tremendous need there. You may remember President Reagan's words when he announced that we were going to provide assistance to this Communist country in great need. He famously said, "A hungry child knows no politics." Anyway, my TDY was not until the summer of 1985, and the famine had started a year earlier, but that's because the U.S. was really playing catch up with a terrible situation that had been unfolding for a year or more at that time.

When I got there, there were a lot of misconceptions about where the needs were, how much food was needed to solve the needs. Again, as with leaving Nancy earlier, in the winter in Lansing, Michigan when I went off to Cameroun, I am eternally grateful to my wife for being okay with me being away from her in Ethiopia for two months, leaving her alone with our not quite two-year-old son. But that really shaped me, being in Ethiopia, and seeing how misconceptions about what's really happening on the ground can affect—can lead to very bad decisions that affect—that are life and death decisions for some people in terms of there not being enough food. My food needs assessment helped verify that significantly more food was needed, as the NGOs had been saying based on their site-specific experience, but no one had yet put all the numbers together rigorously at national level to document it until I did that assessment.

My other major trip during these early years in Washington was being part of a country development strategy team for Madagascar, the first time they'd had an AID team like this in probably 15 years because in the 1960s and maybe the early 1970s Madagascar decided that the North Korean development model was the one that they wanted to

follow. By the early 1980s, Malagasy politicians and policymakers saw that that wasn't working too well for them, so they were welcoming AID back. Being with so many experienced people, big thinkers some of them, and doing a country strategy focused on agriculture was a great experience.

One of the things that always has stayed with me came during that trip. Several of us on the team had pretty good French and several of us had weaker French, and those who had pretty good French were the junior members of the team; so, we didn't speak much in government meetings. But in the big wrap up meeting with senior officials there was a pretty sensitive and important linguistic confusion. In French, you use the same word, *la politique*, to mean both "policy" and "politics." In this big final meeting, making recommendations about the government opening up the rice sector to higher prices, less government control, more outside crop production research and so on, in effect recommending that the government consider changing some of their current rice policies in order to be able to feed their people, our team leader was laying this out to still somewhat skeptical Malagasy senior officials. He was speaking in French, but not fully aware of the ambiguous meaning of saying "*la politique*." He kept using that word, and those of us who were more fluent in French could see the chagrin this engendered in the government officials, since they thought he was telling them they needed to change or improve their "politics" rather than their rice policies, something that it's not appropriate at all for AID people to be talking about with officials of a country who are trying to exit their North Korean style approach to things. What they were hearing was him saying that their politics are all screwed up, and what he was really saying was you need to look at your agricultural policies because that's why farmers aren't producing more rice. And so finally I didn't have any mandate to do this, but I jumped in and said I think they're not understanding what you're saying and then I explained in French that he was using the word to mean policy not politics. I explained what he meant, so again that was a formative experience for me, just one little word and it totally set off the alarm bells in these people who had been pretty open to thinking about changing their rice policy.

And the third major accomplishment I feel good about in those early Washington years was related to USAID and World Bank land policy, especially in Africa. This was the Reagan era, where there was a tendency to want to privatize everything, and this included land tenure in Africa, where there were still, outside of urban areas, very strong communal, traditional authorities and customs that worked pretty well to get land to people in a community commensurate with their family size and needs. Research undertaken by the Land Tenure Center, with funding from my project, complemented ongoing global research at the World Bank, to identify the circumstances in which providing a clear, transferable, private land title would benefit individual poor families and promote faster agricultural growth, and where it would not. The research was pretty clear – based on work in a number of African countries, in Thailand, in Latin America – that in situations with still-viable traditional land authorities, outside of urban areas, and where there wasn't yet a severe land shortage, private land titles would be very expensive, not provide additional benefits to poor rural people and in some cases would actually increase the risk of them losing their land.



So, a few of us at USAID, in the World Bank and at the Land Tenure Center got involved in these major policy debates with pretty high stakes, because some senior people at USAID, but especially at the World Bank, were ready to put hundreds of millions of dollars of ag and rural development money – which otherwise would have gone to more productive rural roads, crop improvement and other activities – into land title programs. Thanks to this research, and turning the research into practical policy advice, that didn't happen. (I even produced a peer-reviewed publication on this for *World Development*.) I will note that the situation now is very different in many parts of Africa – there is growing land tenure insecurity in a number of areas, and those traditional authorities have sometimes broken down or become corrupted; in addition, now, very different from that time, you have had very low global interest rates that produced a land rush of international purchases of African and Asian farmland creating much greater land tenure insecurity for many poor rural people; and now also, the costs of providing land titles is just only a fraction of what it once was due to new technologies. But at the time, and under those circumstances, I think we all felt pretty good that we had discredited this idea of widespread land privatization in Africa and made a significant difference not only on USAID policy but World Bank policy as well at a time when that kind of privatization would have been very costly, would have starved agriculture budgets for other more important things, and in some cases would have led to less, not more, secure land rights for poor people.

*Q: So, you moved to Washington. Had you lived there before?*

ATWOOD: No, I had not. I'd spent a lot of time in Washington; with all those family trips to the Deep South to see my grandparents, we would always stop in Washington for a night with my Aunt Mary, who had also grown up in Georgia but had come north and lived with her husband who was a civil servant in Washington.

*Q: And your wife was not with you or was she with you?*

ATWOOD: Yeah, we came to Washington together, and she got a job teaching English as a second language in D.C. We were married at that point. We'd gotten married earlier that summer, in 1981.

*Q: Did you have a long-range thought about your career after working for a couple of years in AID as a contractor on those programs?*

ATWOOD: Well, the only long-range thought was we both wanted to move and live and work overseas preferably in Africa. And I guess I'd sort of gotten used to the idea of working for AID. Also, by this time, I'd worked with a lot of junior and some more senior AID people who I really had grown to like and respect and even in some cases wanted to emulate. And I'd seen some good and impressive things that Mission staff and projects were able to do, which in a sense was a bit of an antidote to my very negative impressions of USAID being able to deliver and perform in CAR. At some point during this '81 to '87 period in AID Washington, possibly after I moved into my AD position, I started applying to the AID's International Development Intern (IDI) entry program. I

was a terrible interviewer, and I was rejected several times! Finally, again this is another example of the flukes and luck involved in navigating the AID personnel system, I became an FSO with AID. Did you ever know Tom Warwick, John?

*Q: I know the name, yes.*

ATWOOD: Tom Warwick and his wife Roberta died—

*Q: I know who they were, yes*

ATWOOD: —in a plane crash in Ethiopia with Congressman Mickey Leyland, and I knew a lot of people on that plane. My D.C. neighbor, Hugh Johnson, Jr., a staffer for Congressman Leland was one of them; Gladys Gilbert was another, who you probably knew from your work in Health and Population; the FSN that I had recruited as the first aggie for the Ethiopia mission when I was there on the food needs assessment, named Debebe Agonofer, also was on that plane. Anyway, Tom Warwick was in Ethiopia and therefore on that tragic plane flight there, because he turned down an earlier assignment to Mali.

I was the person who ended up getting hired in a career track FSO job to go to Mali into the slot that Tom turned down. Tom was assigned to the ag economist slot in Mali but he didn't have any French, he'd spent his career in East Africa and I think the Philippines, maybe Ethiopia. He was assigned by the AID personnel system to Mali in the Sahel, a tough place if you haven't been there, wonderful place to those who like it, and we loved it there. But Tom—who had been my Africa Bureau supervisor and division chief—saw this as a nonsensical assignment for him, given his background and experience and language. HR was going to make him learn French, and he said something like, “You know, if you go through with this assignment for me, I'm just going to retire.” So, they gave him an alternative assignment to Ethiopia, where tragically he and everyone else in that plane that went down was killed.

But that was a year or two later. In the meantime, summer of 1987, Tom's assigned to Ethiopia now, HR has an open slot for Mali and there aren't a whole lot of French speaking ag economist FSOs kicking around unassigned. People in HR and Africa personnel knew me because I'd explored converting from my AD status to the Foreign Service in several conversations with them, since I was already a U.S. government employee. I asked them “Can't you just convert me to the foreign service?” and they always gave me the right answer, which was “No,” because Foreign Service and Civil Service are competitive services; there are legal requirements. You can't just convert someone non-competitively from a non-competitive status (which was what my AD status was). But now they were really stuck; I don't know how they did it, but HR converted me to Foreign Service! From an AD position when they were unable to fill Tom Warwick's job! So that's how I got into the system!

*Q: My goodness! What year was that?*

ATWOOD: 1987.

*Q: HR is Human Resources. Wow! So, you immediately packed your bags and headed off?*

ATWOOD: Yeah, I remember, let's see—we had—I'm trying to remember how we did this. We had two rental cars or taxis that took all our things to Dulles Airport, so we had two kids at the time so there were four people and that entitles you to a lot of baggage. Maybe three or four pieces per person when you are transferring to post internationally so we had like 12 or 16 pieces, so we had two cars, maybe a van and a station wagon, and I remember riding out to Dulles Airport from our house in Washington trying to get all that stuff checked through to Bamako. Yeah, we packed our bags and went off to Bamako.

*Q: I had a question for you. During the period that Peter McPherson was USAID Administrator he pretty much stopped the agriculture program partly because of the Bumpers Amendment. How did that affect your career?* (Transcriber's note: In November 1985, Senator Dale Bumpers first offered an amendment intended to prohibit foreign aid activities that would encourage export of agricultural commodities from developing countries. The bill stressed competition for world markets between potential exporters from the developing world and U.S. farmers.)

ATWOOD: Hmm—was it under Administrator McPherson that agriculture funding stopped?—let's think about this. From '81 to '84 when I was in Africa Bureau, we were going full throttle with plenty of agriculture funding for new AID projects everywhere in Africa. This continued into the '84 to '87 period, but then there was a change. We can talk about the Bumpers amendment, but the major change that I remember was the child survival revolution, when Jim Grant, head of UNICEF at the time, got Congress very excited, and rightfully so, about how a very limited, practical set of health interventions could save millions of kids' lives per year around the world. Basically, vaccinations together with oral rehydration (ORT) to address life threatening diarrhea, were cheap, relatively easy to administer, and had tremendous impact. That's when I remember AID leaders in ag and rural development really spending a lot of time trying to “tell the agriculture story” in the same compelling way that Jim Grant, and then health officers at USAID, were telling the child survival revolution story. And the fact is, we couldn't do it. Congress loved child survival—it was easy to understand, and easy to measure success, in terms of numbers of children whose lives were saved. It had some of the same appeal, and ethical, moral attraction, that PEPFAR (the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) had a couple of decades later under President Bush.

Agriculture is a lot harder to get people excited about: Do you talk about success in terms of tons of crops produced? Income of poor farmers? Lower prices for consumers? Higher prices for farmers? Productivity of an acre of land? What about the number of jobs created but indirectly created as farmers have more income and more need for food processing facilities? It's complicated and not always very exciting. And it changes according to the weather, and often the successes are long-term rather than immediate. Much more complicated than documenting how many kids were still alive thanks to

vaccines and ORT. So, over the years, health budgets started to increase and agriculture budgets started to decrease. This became even more pronounced with the 1990s when both the end of the Cold War and the impact of year-after-year Federal budget pressures started to decimate AID budgets outside of the newly independent former Communist countries, and a few other key countries (e.g., Israel and Egypt).

So, it probably is the case that the Bumpers Amendment affected that. But Bumpers wasn't a particularly important issue in the countries and programs I served in. So, '87--'92 I was in Mali. We had some exciting programs, and we had plenty of funding. I think possibly our funding did decline a little bit. But it was in 92-96, when I was in Bangladesh, that the ag funding really fell off. But my understanding of that has always been that the primary driver of that was the end of the Cold War so a decline in AID budgets overall while health funding was increasing within an overall declining budget situation, except for aid for Europe and Eurasia. Members of Congress were thinking, "These child survival programs really work, they can tell us what they're doing, they're saving tens of thousands of kids' lives every year, and we want to fund this," and that ate into other AID programs including agriculture within a major overall aid budget decline as a result of the end of the Cold War and the protracted Federal budget crisis.

So, in my experience of Bumpers—I never saw Bumpers as affecting our budget, but it affected what we did with our budget in relatively minor ways.

*Q: OK, we don't have to go into it much, but when I was in McPherson's front office, the Bumpers Amendment basically said AID couldn't fund projects that would lead to exports from that developing country that would compete with American exports.*

ATWOOD: Right.

*Q: So, a lot of the programs that were sort of export oriented were cut off and as I understood it, AID stopped hiring agriculture officers.*

ATWOOD: Yes, absolutely, reducing ag slots and ag hiring did affect me so I'll talk about that in a minute. But I think that was a function of the much larger budget trends, including agriculture budgets in particular. Bumpers may have been one factor in that, but it wasn't by any means the most important one. The most important one was overall AID budgets outside of Europe were declining, health budgets were increasing, and we couldn't or didn't tell a good story about why agriculture made any difference to the things Congress cared about, which was tangibly and quickly helping poor people.

But let's talk about where Bumpers did affect programs where I was and then come back to the ag staffing issue.

So, my one experience with Bumpers in Mali was that we had one pretty successful area development program that was working on a range of crops, including cotton. Cotton at that time was the lifesaver of Mali. It was the major source of export revenue, a major source of employment, and—it turns out, unlike in some other countries—cotton

production itself was intimately tied up in getting higher productivity from food and feed crops as well (because of the residual effects of cotton fertilizer on the next season's rotation to grain crops.)

I wasn't so involved in this, but the agriculture office where I worked in Mali spent a lot of time with the Bumpers Amendment because of that program. Whether or not it was the intent of the legislation, the Bumper amendment as I recall was written very narrowly so that the prohibition was not on export crops in general, and not even on export crops which were the same crops as US export crops. Rather the prohibition was on export crops that competed *in the very same export market* with US export crops. So, for example, helping rice production in Mali, all sorts of export vegetable production in Mali, Egypt, Bangladesh, across Africa, cotton production in some countries who don't sell their cotton in the same export markets as US cotton—none of those things are prohibited under Bumpers.

Even in Mali we were able to provide to our major area development program trucks, marketing advice, but not directly supporting export cotton production. So, the way I looked at Bumpers, the way I think a lot of us looked at it, is: Okay, here's one more of hundreds of legal restrictions on how we use our aid program; it just got added to the mix; you find what you can do legally that makes sense and you move on and do the best programs you can. Maybe we'd have more money for on the ground aid if we didn't have to use and service US vehicles in our projects, but Congress says "Buy American," so that's what we do and we make the best of it and move on. Same with Bumpers. I may be wrong, but I can't think of a single ag situation worldwide where the Bumpers prohibition would prevent developing a solid, performing ag program that would lead to better lives for rural people, because agriculture always involves a mixture of crops and enterprises.

But yes, in answer to your question about ag staffing: Yes, the decline in ag funding and ag jobs affected me. For more than half of my Foreign Service career with USAID, I was not replaced in the jobs I held. I was in offices that each hiring cycle, each assignment cycle, whoever was rotating out, those jobs weren't filled but instead were eliminated, as ag staffing kept ratcheting down and down. So, I started out in both Mali and Bangladesh in offices with six direct hires; and when I left, there were only three or four. When the people left, we weren't replaced. So, maybe four or five years after I left Mali, there was only one direct hire ag officer left there. This was of course sad to see, but it very much affected me directly. And it affected how I spent my time when I came back to Washington in 1996 from Mali and Bangladesh. We can talk about that later when we get to it. But I spent a lot of time back in Washington in the mid- to late-1990s as part of a group that really worked with U.S. universities, Bread for the World, other NGOs, and agricultural producer groups, to make a strong case for why agriculture should be restored as a key part of what AID does. And we were successful, ultimately, but it took 10 or 12 years.

In the meantime, as we come to Egypt and the Europe and Eurasia Bureau in my later career, I can talk about how I ended up in the non-agriculture jobs that I took, but it was

largely a result of there being fewer and fewer ag staff, and even fewer agriculture jobs, in AID from the 1990s into the mid-2000s, until Administrator Andrew Natsios, then Administrators Fore and Shah, with the help of the Congress, reversed that trend.

*Q: Mali, what kinds of work were you doing?*

ATWOOD: This was back in the days when we had “technical offices,” such as the agriculture office that I joined in Mali, with six direct hire FSO Americans; I was recruited to fill the FSO ag economist job. That may seem like a luxury today—to have had a direct hire ag economist as part of a large office with six direct-hire agriculture slots, but that was the situation in both Mali and similar in Bangladesh. I spent much of my time in both Mali and later in Bangladesh on food policy and on managing our regular food aid programs that were supportive of each government’s food policies. In addition, in Mali, I was asked to take on a wide range of analytical tasks for the office, often related to project planning. In both Mali and Bangladesh, USAID was part of a larger group of food aid and agriculture donors using food aid to help both those governments and reformers in those governments put in better food policies, including making food programs more targeted on the people who really needed them while providing greater incentives for farmers to produce more and adopt more productive technologies. The food aid provided assurance to the host government that they would have the food they needed in a period of transition as they became more market oriented.

In Mali I ran a small food aid program, but it was part of a much bigger multi-donor effort called by everyone by its French acronym, the PRMC, or “Cereal Market Restructuring Program,” which became pretty well known in French speaking West Africa. This multiyear, multi-donor program was a way to help formerly socialist Mali that had been trying with little success to control producer and consumer prices and supplies, to get out of the business of market control and try to be more market-oriented while being sure that in the transition food supplies would be there for its relatively poor population. A couple of years before I arrived in Mali, the donors had come up with this agreement with the government that every year you let prices rise, let farmer prices rise a certain amount and we know that you’re going to have the supply you need because that’s going to give farmers an incentive, but you don’t trust us, we know that, and you don’t trust the market. So, we will have what was called a “food wedge” to fill the gap between supply shortfalls and consumer need, and for a transitional period between low consumer prices and increasing producer prices. We will guarantee you x amount of food aid ahead of time so that you know you have this as an insurance policy if the market doesn’t respond as quickly as we think it will in expanding food supply (and therefore moderating prices) now that you have freed up prices and sales. That worked pretty well and the big cereals market parastatal agency became much more of a kind of a market information group and emergency food distribution entity. We set up a separate market price reporting system. Food aid was the tool that enabled the policy change. Food aid became the tool for policy dialogue with the government of Mali.

*Q: Would you say the program was successful?*

ATWOOD: Yeah, it was very successful. We had a grain market policy analysis project with Michigan State University that was also providing information on what was happening in the market, what the constraints were, and later on how farmers were responding to the next incentives. That also provided government leaders better information on what farmers and traders needed, what they were doing, and where they were most important in ensuring supply. With all of this, government decision-makers came to rely a lot more on the market. They saw that what they thought was only the cash crop “cotton zone” was also a major breadbasket for the country, producing a lot of grain. No one had realized how cash crops and food crops in Mali interacted in a very positive way: fertilizer they put on cotton would stay the next year for the cereal crop that was put on the field the following year. At the same time, we and other donors were investing a lot of money in improved crop varieties and strengthening the capacity of the Malian scientific ag research system. Yeah, it was very successful. The government freed up prices and farmers, traders, and millers all responded pretty fast. Suddenly private rice millers started investing a lot of money in little rice mills all over the central part of Mali, the Niger delta where the big rice producing area is. It was cheaper and easier to get rice milled, rice production increased, farmers adopted more productive varieties coming out of Mali’s agricultural research institute. There was a significant increase in rural incomes, especially in zones like the Niger Delta and the cotton zone that could rapidly expand food crop production.

While all this was happening, AID/Washington loved the market-oriented policy change, but was skeptical of our investment in agricultural research to increase productivity. One of my analytical jobs was to look at the numbers, make projections and scenarios about future crop productivity versus growing food demand, in order to justify the agricultural science parts of our project portfolio. We had to justify why we were focused on food crops in Mali. Jim Elliott, the mission economist (with far more experience than I had as an economist) and I did this analysis together, which took us I think a couple of months. He actually mentored me in this work, both how to set out realistic scenarios, but also how to talk about them in the report to non-economists. We did this big paper, making all sorts of projections about what might happen under what circumstances, and presented it to AID/Washington. We convinced AID Washington that investing in agricultural science to increase the productivity of food crops was a good bet and also absolutely necessary to complement the policy changes the government was making. So, they allowed us to go forward with a lot of money going into ag research there.

I’ve stayed in touch with Mali over the years, especially after I left the Foreign Service and had a contract staff position in the new USAID Food Security Bureau from 2011 to 2018. Mali continues to face major challenges, in nutrition, health, education and now is close to being a failed state with the fallout and threats from Al Qaeda, ISIS. It’s tragic. But in agriculture, in food availability, they even surpassed Jim and my most optimistic projections and have tripled food production in a generation. A major accomplishment, that even we weren’t sure about at the time. A lot of the reasons are those market reforms and because of investing in ag research, and a lot of that tripling of production came from more productivity, not more land area.

*Q: That's great. Who was your supervisor there?*

ATWOOD: Tracy Atwood.

*Q: Another Atwood?*

ATWOOD: Another Atwood, yeah. It was funny. Our kids were the same age and became pretty good friends at the American School. Initially I was worried that it would be very confusing for everyone with kids the same age with the same last name. But it turns out there are a limited number of family names in Mali, so this was a quite normal occurrence for the Malians. On the name coincidence, years later when Tracy was acting director of the S&T Ag Office and I was head of the Ag Division in Africa Bureau, we got on Administrator Brian Atwood's calendar to have what we considered an important discussion—we wanted to engage him on the issue of the precipitous drop in support for agriculture and how to address this. This was in the late '90s. When we finally got on Brian's calendar for like 20 minutes to talk about how important agriculture was, Brian didn't want to talk about that, probably because there wasn't much he could really do about it given budget realities at the time. He just wanted to talk about the Atwoods and wanted to know if we might be related, since all three of us have families in southeastern New England. So, it was pretty clear that that was not going to be the hoped-for meeting to revitalize agriculture in USAID, but there were subsequent meetings I'll discuss later that did help! But we didn't get anything we wanted out of that meeting! It was especially under Brian's tenure that ag funding and staffing fell so far.

But he also, at some significant personal cost, defended AID from its detractors and had a vision for what we could do, and why we needed to be separate from the State Department, why we needed new tools (such as the Office of Transition Initiatives) to rapidly respond to the many good (democratic transitions) and bad (ever increasing complex humanitarian crises) in the world. He identified USAID as a key lab for the results-oriented reengineering that was good for our programs and impact. He stood up to Senator Jesse Helms, who wanted to eliminate AID. He was denied an ambassadorship to Brazil as a result.

*Q: All right. So, you're not related to Brian Atwood directly.*

ATWOOD: No, not that I know of.

*Q: All right, David, back to Mali.*

ATWOOD: A couple of other things work wise I wanted to say about Mali.

One of the many rewarding things I did in Mali, beyond the policy and food aid, was (after Washington approved it) I got very involved in supporting agricultural scientists and the Malian agricultural research institute that was trying to develop more productive crop varieties adapted for the relatively harsh conditions there. We were working closely with the World Bank and the Malian research institute on a new program for ag research



where it would no longer be donors and administrators deciding what the priorities were; instead, we set up a mechanism by which the researchers figured out what the research priorities were based on their best understanding of farmer conditions and crop possibilities. And I guess this is part of, one of the many things that I got out of grad school with Carl Eicher—how essential building local capacity is. This was one of these areas where I was passionate and felt like I and the World Bank people involved, Tracy Atwood, a bunch of us, were very effective with the Malian officials in trying to build capacity. We drew on the knowledge the Malian researchers already had, instead of the head of the research institute or World Bank or AID deciding on what the priorities should be.

And similarly, we built a capacity for market information in a system that still exists in Mali. It helps farmers, traders, everybody, know what the prices are everywhere. I do feel that this kind of capacity development and policy were the key things that I was involved in, left behind, but also learned quite a bit about in Mali.

But there can be downsides or at least unanticipated outcomes as well. Regarding the system we put in place for researchers closest to the work to identify key research priorities, I had a disappointing conversation a few years ago. I was working on a regional West African project with one of the senior Malians involved in that World Bank-AID project and I asked him what happened with it, and he said something like, “Yes, it was great for a while. The researchers established their own research priorities. We were doing program budgeting so we could tell how much money was going into each crop and how much that crop was producing for the country. But then that software package the World Bank put in place to do the program budgeting and prioritization, the software license ran out and people left the project who knew how to use it.” I hadn’t realized at the time (possibly because I wasn’t wise enough to ask the question, possibly because I did leave before the project actually started being implemented) the whole thing relied on this very sophisticated software package that the World Bank had put into place which 10 years later either ran out, or stopped working or no one knew how to use it any more.

One positive lesson for me from Mali which I also took on to Bangladesh and then back to Washington (even working on U.S. policy related to ag funding) is the very important role of trusted advisors, of research and analysis packaged in a way that government decision makers and others can understand it. In Mali, both the contractors we were working with in Mali, and even Tracy Atwood and myself and others like the mission director, were seen as trusted advisors by the Malians. And we had a similar experience I could talk about in Bangladesh as well.

I should also say a bit about the political situation in Mali, as well. I arrived and spent my first three years under a fairly stable dictatorship by a general, Moussa Traore, who had overthrown the first Malian government many years earlier. Then in my fourth year things started happening. I am a bit mixed up about timeframes and what preceded what, but there were four important political developments in our last two years. First, there was a new restiveness in Mali, even under dictatorship. There were a few small

demonstrations; there was some anger against foreigners that I hadn't seen before; the President had opened up a very small space for the press to operate and a former friend of his used it very aggressively to ferret out high level government corruption. Then there was the Gulf War. We didn't know what to expect in Mali and were told to lay low. There were one or two demonstrations in northern Mali in support of Saddam Hussein. But then the Gulf War was over very fast. In addition, the northernmost ethnic group, the Tuareg, who had always been somewhat disaffected from the central government became unable to control its young men, who started stealing NGO vehicles, including USAID-supported vehicles. Culturally, this was a bit akin to some Tuareg traditions of cattle rustling, but it had of course bigger implications. This was the beginning of the Tuareg rebellion, that got much worse when Libyan president Khadafi's Tuareg and other Malian mercenaries returned from Libya many years later (after Khadafi's death) and began Mali's long and quick slide into state failure, abetted by Al Qaeda, ISIS, Boko Haram and now the Wagner group. But that was all in the future.

The final major political event was a student revolt which President Traore tried to quell by having the Army fire on and kill students. There was a week of disorder, school cancellation, not-so-distant gunfire, and Embassy families just laying low to see what would happen. I happened to be duty officer that week, and didn't want to take the risk of driving across the river in my car with all the disorder, so I paid someone in a dugout canoe to take me across the river and then walked a mile to the Embassy. For former Peace Corps volunteer, this didn't seem like a big deal, but this made me a bit of a hero for a few hours at the Embassy! They were astonished that anyone would take a dugout canoe across the river! I also remember being at the USAID Mission when demonstrators torched the underground gas reservoir of the gas station across the street and heard that explosion. Anyway, firing on and killing students was so traumatic for the Army that a group of young colonels overthrew the dictator and promised to have free elections within a year, an almost impossible timeframe that hardly anyone believed. But they were true to their word. My brother who was visiting later that year got to be an international election monitor. It was a very heady time, the new democracy. But the corruption, and the northern Tuareg restiveness, got worse, laying the basis for the falling apart of Malian politics and security that you see today.

*Q: Who was the mission director?*

ATWOOD: Gene Chiavarolli was the mission director for most of my time there and then Dennis Brennon was mission director.

*Q: Yeah, good people. Let's stop for a minute. Your kids were how old when you were in Mali?*

ATWOOD: Our son was 3 1/2 and our daughter was 8 months when we arrived and we stayed five years; they were both in elementary school when we left.

*Q: And was your wife interested in working or was she—*

ATWOOD: Not immediately because she wanted to be able to spend time with our 8-month-old daughter. She ended up our last couple years working as the librarian of the little American school, we had an American school with about 90 kids 1<sup>st</sup> through 8<sup>th</sup> grade. Wonderful little school that was a key part of our life and social life there. And she loved that librarian job there, and the teachers loved her book recommendations for their classes! That school—and the American Club—were two important parts of our family life and our social life, especially spending time with other young families from around the world there.

*Q: And you were on the FS cycle at that point. You're raising kids in Mali, going to school there.*

ATWOOD: Yeah.

*Q: And you applied to Bangladesh, is that where you were wanting to go next?*

ATWOOD: No, Nancy and I wanted to go somewhere else in Africa, but we weren't sure where. But there just weren't many jobs for me because this was kind of the beginning of the decline in ag jobs. There was an interesting job in Gambia where I would be in charge of the ag program because I'd be the only ag person there, but in the end the school situation and other things led us to just decide not to go there. So, I somewhat reluctantly applied for the ag economist slot in the mission in Bangladesh. But I also thought I'd give it a shot and also apply for the open division chief job there. That was a big job compared to what I'd been doing in Mali, and the mission discouraged me from applying for that job, thinking I wasn't ready and that they had a stronger candidate, but I applied anyway, and I assumed that I wasn't going to get it. But—as had already happened to me twice before (in my first AID/W job, and then in Mali when Tom Worrick didn't go into the job there)—once more, the person they had their eye on who'd sort of given them a handshake on that job ended up taking something else. They were stuck, they knew me, and I'd applied; so, they put me into the division chief job. They didn't think I was quite ready for the division chief job, managing the biggest Title III food aid program in the world, plus a big water and irrigation policy program.

That was a great job, challenging in many good ways, and interesting and often even fun. I couldn't get used to the scale of things for a while. Bengali is one of the six most used languages in the world, the country has among the highest population densities in the world. The government was managing close to a million tons of food in its food distribution system, of which sometimes as much as half came from donors. Several hundred thousand tons of that was the Title III program that I was managing, with additional Title II food aid coming through a U.S. agreement with the NGO CARE. Here I was coming from little Mali. In Mali, the food aid that I was managing to support the policy program was about 2,000 tons a year. It wasn't much food, but it was an important part of the food wedge, which amounted to 15 or 20 thousand tons a year when you counted all the donors. But 2,000 tons a year, that was like the error term in the food aid we had for Bangladesh; if there was a little extra shrinkage in our food in Bangladesh, it would be 2,000 tons shrinkage between getting on the ship and arriving in port in

Bangladesh. So, the stakes, the number of different actors involved, the size of the program, the number of people depending on it, were all huge compared to Mali. It was exciting for me.

*Q: Who was your supervisor?*

*ATWOOD: Kevin Mullaly the first two years and then John Swanson.*

*Q: And you were there for how long?*

*ATWOOD: Four years.*

*Q: Remind me what four years were those?*

*ATWOOD: 1992-1996. As a few markers, I was there at the beginning of the decline in agriculture, the end of the Cold War, the first four years of the Clinton administration. For USAID, the Clinton administration was very interested in poverty reduction (which is a major role for agriculture) but they were interested in direct kinds of things, Grameen Bank, microenterprise, child survival. They didn't want to hear so much about complicated things like ag research, policy reform, capacity building. And the money for agriculture started drying up.*

Bangladesh in a lot of ways was like Mali on a much bigger scale. A lot of donors together were using their food aid supporting kind of visionary reformers. You remember Bangladesh had had this terrible civil war and famine in the early '70s and independence and post-independence war with Pakistan? So, Bangladesh was very focused on the downside of what can happen in food and agriculture when there's a famine. And so, they really wanted to make sure they had enough stock, cereal stock, they wanted to make sure they were in control of it. They didn't trust the private sector. But because of that they weren't providing sufficient incentives—or technology—to farmers and they had missed out on the first two decades of the Green Revolution.

So I happened to be there at a very good time when there were no natural disasters during the four years that I was there, very unusual for Bangladesh, and there were reform minded ministers and permanent secretaries who wanted to make changes and make the agriculture sector perform better and be more productive, and again as in Mali the donors got together with the government and provided this guarantee, we're there, we have the food supply you need if there's, if farmers don't respond the way you expect, the way we expect them to, and so it was an exciting time because the Green Revolution had already come to India, to the Philippines, many Asian countries, but not to Bangladesh. There were some farmers growing high yielding varieties but not very many, and so during the time I was there, farmers moved from single cropping to double cropping with shorter season varieties. They were planting much higher yielding varieties, some even moved from double cropping to triple cropping. Bangladesh became self-sufficient in wheat and much more comfortable relying on commercial world markets for rice. And as a result,

working on this food aid program with other donors and the government, as a result of all those changes, Bangladesh was producing a lot more.

So, because of all this major increase in productivity and supply, consumer prices started falling rapidly. This was of course very good for poor families, both landless rural people and also people in cities. Poor people had been spending a very high percentage of their income to buy basic grain, basic calories, just to survive. We had a group called Helen Keller International that really kind of, they started out as a nutritional blindness group, but they do a lot of work in nutrition. Helen Keller was monitoring nutrition levels, wasting, and stunting of kids and acute malnutrition levels of kids. Every month in cities and rural areas throughout Bangladesh, we could trace productivity increases against the price of rice, the key staple, against children's wasting. And you could see child nutritional status being affected as a direct result of a decline in the rice prices, because there were a lot of very poor people in Bangladesh who spend most of their money on foodgrains, including rural people because there are so many landless people. And they were able to buy more food and eat a more diverse diet as a result of changes in the price of rice.

So that was an exciting time, and we were sending cables into Washington telling this success story to Washington at a time when ag funding was in decline.

ATWOOD: The other exciting thing we did with Helen Keller was we wanted to see if there could be a more direct agriculture to nutrition linkage. We had Helen Keller expand a home gardening project that they had started, including with landless people who had enough land for their house but not fields, but helping them do home gardening around their houses. And we had the International Food Research Policy Institute (IFPRI). It had become a very trusted policy advisor to these reformers in the government. We had IFPRI start doing research to see if home gardening affected people's nutritional status and at the time I left it was inconclusive, and we had child survival funding to fund an agriculture program, the home gardening program, because of the possible nutrition and health impact. We worked this out with the health office in Bangladesh and the nutrition office in Washington and the global health bureau or whatever it was at the time.

Initially the results were inconclusive but after I left, they started doing something I think called Serum Retinol, some special kind of blood test and they found that the home gardening did improve people's access to vitamin D in a way that it affected nutritional status. So that was exciting too.

One other thing in Bangladesh was that the government became more and more willing to shift towards a focus on the market and close out a lot of their big food handout programs that benefited mainly middle-class people in cities. They became more interested in targeted programs for the poor. And one of those programs was something that IFPRI developed with the ministry of food called the Food for Education program, and IFPRI then monitored how it was affecting people's poverty and nutrition. It was one of the earliest successful programs using food as a way to get more kids in school and to improve child and family nutritional status. So that was exciting, kind of being part of

that and providing tools to the government to move away from managing the market but towards more effective food programs that really did help poor people.

Some of this interest on the part of the government in doing this was based on analysis that IFPRI had done: it broke down the cost of the government's untargeted food programs and how much was administrative expenses, how much was leakages and corruption, and how much really got to poor people. Basically, IFPRI found that the least targeted and most corrupt programs were costing multiples of a dollar, sometimes six or seven dollars to deliver a single dollar of food benefits to poor people. Basically, only ten or fifteen cents of every dollar of government food was actually getting to the intended poor beneficiaries. That made a big impression on the government reformers trying to better manage this million tons of government food programs a year for which they were responsible.

*Q: Oh, my goodness!*

ATWOOD: A major shock to the ministry that really jolted them and made these visionary reformers want to really get serious about targeted programs that worked and getting out of the business of these other food programs. As a result of their tenacity, but also the policy information we were providing them, they made major changes to the public food distribution system, eliminating the most corrupt and inefficient food channels and creating some new better targeted ones that really did get benefits to poor people.

*Q: Who was the mission director?*

ATWOOD: Mary Kilgore was the mission director and then she was succeeded by Dick Brown. They were both very supportive of the food aid and food policy programs there, and had a lot of credibility with the Embassy and with Bangladeshi officials.

My time in Bangladesh reinforced those lessons that I got in Mali about how important evidence, analysis and research packaged the right way by trusted advisors and winning that trust is, but also it got me recognizing that you can be creative in aid and as long as you make a case for it and find the right people to support you, you can do all sorts of things that go beyond the confines of what Washington, or your mission director, or your program were initially expecting. So, showing the impact of food production programs on nutritional status was a big deal and then getting child survival funding for an ag program, they knew what we could do, that became pretty important too.

I did spend a lot of time with AID/Washington because of Bangladesh becoming self-sufficient in rice and needing to document that; we had to do an annual legally required "Bellman determination" to show whether food aid was needed or not. And I think it was in 1994 that our Bellman determination said we don't need the Title III wheat in Bangladesh anymore—they have succeeded in producing enough of their own wheat, and relying on the world market in years they have a shortfall. As a result of that, Bangladesh, which had been only one of two and by far the biggest Title III PL480 food

recipient globally, the Title III program ended globally a couple of years later because of that.

*Q: Just for the readers, what is Title III?*

ATWOOD: There's food aid that comes as a grant and food aid that comes as a loan. Title III was a provision in the U.S. farm bill related to food aid administered jointly by AID and USDA. Title III was a special "forgivable" loan program so Bangladesh was accepting U.S. food aid but with a promise to repay the value to the U.S. Treasury over a long period of time. Title III permitted that debt to be forgiven if the recipient government put the equivalent value of that food into a bank account in local currency and used that local currency for development projects. Bangladesh and Senegal were the only two countries worldwide that used this program even though it's a great program because it wiped away your entire food debt. But it required a level of planning and management that some countries didn't have.

For Bangladesh, it was great, because Bangladesh had incurred about a billion dollars' worth of Title III food aid debt since the '70s, from shortly after the independence war with Pakistan. As the Title III program was ending, one of the last big things I got involved in in Bangladesh was working with the Embassy and USDA to get Bangladesh the loan forgiveness they were entitled to. For years, the mission had had a whole infrastructure, we had three FSNs documenting the uses of that local currency that the government had programmed for development purposes, consistent with the loan forgiveness terms under Title III. We had these guys go out every week visiting sites, seeing that the programs actually existed that the government claimed they were using this money on, and over probably two decades the mission had records, so when we stopped having Title III food aid, that's when it came time to go back to Washington and say, okay here's Bangladesh. Now it's time for you to forgive the billions of dollars of food aid they incurred since independence. And it was all laid out in the law, and all the procedures, but nobody had ever done this before, and nobody—including at USDA—knew how to actually get the debt forgiven, despite the provision in the law. It took my last year and a half working closely with the controller, with USDA, the mission director, the Embassy going to senior officials in USDA and AID to get Bangladesh's food aid debt worked out. The main burden on this was on the senior FSN I was working with, a very talented and committed man, A.S.M. Jahangir and the USAID controller and his senior Bangladeshi staff. Without the two of them, and others, the food debt would not have been forgiven.

So that was another lesson for me. The rules are all there. They're all laid out on paper. We'd done everything meticulously to show that the government had done what they needed to do, and because it had never been done before, no one knew how to forgive the debt.

*Q: Laughing. Wow. That's impressive. But it was finally done, right?*

ATWOOD: Finally, maybe a year, year and a half, after I left it finally got done.

*Q: And the utilization of those local currencies from the Government of Bangladesh food aid sales, did you find those were appropriate?*

ATWOOD: It was irrigation projects, rural road projects, agriculture, a wide range of rural development and food production related projects, yeah. The roads, the irrigation, our staff saw them on the ground. The government held up its part of the deal, to use the equivalent value of our food for development purposes. This was all implemented locally through government and local government and ministry of agriculture and other ministries. So, the implementation wouldn't be what it would have been if you had an AID contractor doing things, but the money was definitely spent on projects that left something in place that affected agriculture and rural development.

I should say something about the actual food involved in Title III food aid and food aid in general that is relevant to my time in both Bangladesh and Mali. During much of my career, while emergency food aid has been crucially important in getting people fed in humanitarian situations, a major part of food aid, both Title III but also Title II programs going to NGOs for their ongoing programs, has been sold, thereby providing a boost to local supply in food deficit countries while also generating local currency for development projects. This is what we did with Title III in Bangladesh. But in terms of the money generated, this is a very awkward and less than ideal way to do things, as everyone involved in food aid knows. But most of us have seen this food aid as an additional development resource despite those headaches. That's because it comes out of the USDA and farm bill budget, so it is in addition to the foreign operations budget that funds USAID and the State Department. But it takes a huge amount of effort to manage.

I knew from my time in the small food aid program in Mali, that staying on top of the actual food commodity itself was important, and we had to devote staff time to tracking where USDA transport contractors were delivering the food, what shape it was in, and then how well the government stored our food aid. Reed Whitlock, our food aid advisor in Mali, spent some time checking out the trains bringing our food aid from Senegal to Mali and found people breaking through the wooden boxcar floors to try to steal it. I had to fly to Timbuktu to prove what we already knew to a U.S. contractor who didn't want to be bothered finishing his required contract delivery up there—that the Niger River was perfectly navigable not long after the end of the rainy season to get the food up there. I also remember visiting a lot of warehouses in Bangladesh and Mali both. Some were well managed, some were not. I remember visiting one warehouse and just hearing this loud almost humming sound and asking what it was. It was millions of weevils eating into thousands of tons of food. In Bangladesh, Jahangir, the senior and very experienced FSN I worked with, and I spent time in both of the major ports attempting to monitor and reduce waste and, in some cases, pilfering of U.S. food aid. If you can't stay on top of handling and managing the commodity itself in food aid programs, nothing else you do will matter much because vulnerabilities or losses of the commodity can put the whole program at risk.

*Q: And you were supervising the staff there?*



ATWOOD: I had in my division one American (Craig Anderson) and one senior FSN (A.S.M. Jahangir) and then four, trying to think, four mid-level FSNs, three of whom are the people who were out monitoring both these local currency projects and the food aid itself, and then a couple of secretaries, FSNs. And then I became deputy office director when Kevin Mullally left. John Swanson moved into Kevin's position, Helen Gunther left as deputy office director, and I became deputy office director my second two years.

*Q: I was a good friend of Helen Gunther and Steve Haggblade. And I assume Steve was involved in some of those analyses.*

ATWOOD: Well, let me tell you a story about that which is important.

When I arrived in Bangladesh, we had a pretty good IFPRI research program, but it was run by somebody who wasn't as skilled at presenting research results in policy-relevant ways to busy senior government people. They were more interested in the research, not so much in presenting research results to decision makers whether they were in AID or in the government, and because of that the government just wanted us to close out the IFPRI project. They said they were getting nothing out of it.

The mission had—just before I arrived—asked IFPRI to replace this chief of party with somebody else as a result of that. So right around the time I arrived in Bangladesh Steve Haggblade, Helen's trailing spouse, was looking for a job, a great researcher— Steve by the way was with me in Madagascar on the strategy trip that I talked about earlier.

Steve took over as chief of party for the Bangladesh food policy program right at the time that there was a new permanent secretary in the ministry of food who really wanted to do more and stop focusing on these untargeted programs and be more market oriented. Steve just took all this research that had been done by IFPRI and started packaging it in a form that really spoke to this guy. He did one page policy briefs. He became the food secretary's kind of personal advisor on these issues. He couldn't have done that without the research because the previous chief of party had gotten the research done but the research was useless without somebody like Steve to package it in a practical way and talk about what the implications were. Based on those interactions, then he started a second generation of food research programs, including some related to food for education and things like that; it was Steve and his team that did the work to show how few benefits the untargeted programs were providing to their intended beneficiaries.

In addition, as things advanced in food policy and reform, we and the government knew that there needed to be some in-house food policy analysis and research capacity. So, we worked with IFPRI and the Ministry of Food to put into place (and for the government to partially fund) an internal food policy monitoring unit in the Ministry. I was very pleased to learn, when I went back to Bangladesh in 2013, almost two decades after I had been there, that that unit was still functioning and staffed and providing policy advice and an important policy convening function, though not at the levels we had hoped the government would support.

*Q: Good. And your wife was, your kids were at this point in private school?*

ATWOOD: Our son did fourth through eighth grade at the American International School of Dhaka and our daughter was in kindergarten through 3<sup>rd</sup> grade. My wife taught at the school for I think three of those years.

*Q: I think the school had a great reputation.*

ATWOOD: It was a wonderful school. It went through high school. And it was a wonderful facility. It was kind of again like Mali. The school was kind of the center of the American and expat, or one center of the American and expat community.

*Q: And then you had to bid for your next position.*

ATWOOD: Yeah. Shall I talk a little bit more about personal life in Mali and Bangladesh a little bit?

*Q: Sure!*

ATWOOD: I guess in both these posts a lot of our social life revolved around the school, other parents with kids our age. We spent a lot of time, there was an American Club in Mali. That was the center, the school and the American Club were the center of our social lives, also the English language churches and Bible studies we attended, and we spent a lot of time with parents of other young kids. There were a lot of parents who weren't American at both of those schools. In Mali there was only one Malian family because the Malian middle class couldn't afford to send their kids to the American school. In Bangladesh there were a lot of Bangladeshi kids at the American school and people from India, Sri Lanka, Korea, all over Europe, the United States, Japan. I was a Scout leader in both of those places. Nancy was a Girl Scout leader. We did a lot of traveling, kind of hard in Mali but we'd travel up country and just visit things. Also, Scout camping trips. In Bangladesh we did a lot of family trips to India. So, from a personal point of view, it was great. The schools were wonderful. The teachers were almost with no exceptions good teachers— small class sizes. Anyway, we loved living in Mali and in Bangladesh.

I feel bad that there are now so many high threat and unaccompanied posts, and that this younger generation of AID people coming in, they're going to spend a lot of their time without their families or going to be very limited in the posts they can be at.

*Q: Right. Well, I know there were a lot of interactions between the American schools in the region. I coached a young woman who is very short, and she joined AID as a foreign service officer. She said she grew up in Bangladesh and despite being very short, she was able to play on the girls' basketball team because there were only about six girls that tried out for the team! They would travel to Nepal and India. Good places to play basketball!*

*If there's nothing else about Bangladesh, what happened next?*

ATWOOD: So, we felt that it was time to come back home. Our son would be going into high school soon, and we'd been out nine years. The job I really wanted wasn't available, which was the head of Africa Bureau's agriculture division. Somebody else, a good friend of mine, was in that job, Curt Reintsma. But the office director, Jerry Wolgin, who was both a professional and spiritual mentor to me for much of my career, needed someone to head up the Bureau's economics and private sector division, which I didn't feel like I was really qualified for, but Jerry respected me, and maybe saw some skills that I didn't see, and so he put me in that job, but partly because they couldn't find anybody else.

When Curt left the ag job after about six months, I moved over and replaced him as head of the ag and environment division in the Africa Bureau. That was a great job, really wonderful staff, very few of whom were direct hires but most of them were USDA PASA or contract staff. It was a time when there was some really serious work on environment, more than just the earlier 1980s environmental rhetoric and guesswork in Africa; USAID environmental staff as well as outside think tanks and NGOs and contractors by the 1990s had figured out how to program and implement some serious work on environment. In addition to that, we were helping NGOs all over Africa to put into place environmental guidelines to make sure that their broader development programs didn't harm the environment and, in some cases, also had a positive environmental impact, training their staff in environmental analysis to a fixed set of standards.

In addition, we were very involved with African agricultural science institutions, the World Bank, and other donors and foundations, on Africa-wide programs to expand capacity for agricultural research in Africa. This included supporting and expanding networks of African scientists working cross-country on the same research themes to develop improved crop varieties and planting practices that would be applicable across many countries. In addition, I was in an office with great colleagues working in other sectors. In the health sector, they were helping to build up regional disease surveillance capabilities in Africa. In the area of economics, we were providing support to a regional MS and PhD program in economics, tying a number of African economics departments with Cornell University to provide an Africa-based, and U.S. quality, graduate program across a number of African universities. In all these sectors, while our job was to provide support to USAID Missions in Africa in their strategies, plans and programs, it was also to support these kinds of regional initiatives.

This was the first time I had been exposed to the idea of regional programs in Africa, something very supportive of the broader political aspirations of many African governments and institutions, and also something that made sense on a continent with so many countries, with such widely varying skill levels (whether in agricultural science, economics training, disease surveillance capabilities, and so on). I became, and have remained since then, a strong advocate and supporter of such programs as a way to empower African institutions and strengthen networks among them that draw on the

strengths of the stronger institutions to expand capacity of the weaker ones while accomplishing Africa-wide priorities in a number of development sectors.

This was also the heyday of Administrator Brian Atwood's reengineering period in AID. He had responded to Vice President Gore's "Reengineering Government" initiative and volunteered USAID as one of the first Federal agencies to rethink how we did business and carry that down eventually to all staff, programs and countries. Vice President Gore had this vision of making federal agencies more efficient and more responsive to citizens and was seeking a few agencies to sort of experiment and be in the lead here. Brian Atwood—in the middle of multiple battles to protect USAID's budget, staff, mission, and programs from Senator Helms and also from State Department encroachment—saw this as a way to get out in front on a major Federal initiative and show that USAID was needed and effective and innovative.

This had actually begun towards the end of my time in Bangladesh. Mission director Dick Brown volunteered Bangladesh to be a mission re-engineering lab. We spent a few months having retreats, rethinking everything, all sorts of naval gazing; we had a very painful reorganization there that was part of reengineering, really letting some people down in terms of promises that were made about their careers. Not me at all but some people I cared about, respected. But we also did some pretty innovative and interesting things in Bangladesh related to this; we basically sent the entire staff out to do a customer survey, a survey of USAID potential or existing beneficiaries, which seemed like a crazy idea in its ambition. But it turned out to be incredibly good, wise, and effective for both American staff and the FSNs to talk to poor people all over Bangladesh. And it's funny what not only we Americans, but also the FSNs knew and what they didn't know and were amazed to learn about. We tend to think FSNs know everything, but the fact is as Americans, or even as Arlingtonians or Rhode Islanders, which I am, we here don't know everything about our own country, town, or state; it's not really fair of us to then think or assume that FSNs know everything about Bangladesh. We learned so much and the FSNs learned so much about poor people in Bangladesh and how that knowledge could shape better programs. One of the starkest things that some of the FSNs, and myself as well, came away with was impressions of poor people working in the tea plantations in the hill country, far away from Dhaka. The Dhaka sense was that these were some of the poorest people in Bangladesh, at the mercy of plantation owners in a company-town type situation. And there were elements of truth in that. But the company towns had services, they had schools, they had things that the actual poorest people in Bangladesh had no access to, so that was one among many of the insights that we, including our FSNs, learned as a result of the reengineering push.

Anyway, when I came back to Washington, Administrator Atwood's reengineering push was in full swing, not just with a few experimental Mission "labs" anymore. One of the very positive aspects of reengineering was putting as much emphasis on what results we were getting as on keeping the money flowing. So, Jerry Wolgin, my office director, started this annual program in Washington where we would take the new results reporting from all our missions in health and agriculture and education, across all the sectors, and try to come up with a composite picture of trends, changes, prospects at country and

continental level. This took us far beyond your typical Mission and Bureau reporting up to that point, asking questions like what difference does it make having aid, how are these African countries progressing and what difference does AID make in that progress?

It became a really good way to get the head of Africa Bureau and senior people in the Africa Bureau giving serious thought to development challenges but also real progress. You would think that would be what senior managers in Africa Bureau spend most of their time on, but the fact is that there are 53 or 54 countries in Africa. Senior managers are almost totally consumed with crises, conflicts, elections, and also political issues. With 54 countries, just about every day there's a burning issue, multiple National Security Council meetings on such issues. So, Jerry's annual review of high-level development indicators, and where USAID was contributing—and not contributing—across Africa was a key time where everyone in the Bureau, including senior managers, got deeply into development issues and how they related to our programs in Africa. One thing we found out, it wasn't my area, but it was the middle of the AIDS epidemic and before the PEPFAR program to address AIDS, we found out that even with the tragedy and terrible impact of AIDS in the late 90s, suddenly child mortality rates really started falling in Africa and we were able to document that, partly because of the combined impact of a decade of vaccinations and addressing diarrheal disease. There was a key role that AID played in that because we were such an important donor in child survival. We couldn't tell quite that story in agriculture but there was a growing story about ag productivity in Africa as well.

Just one other note on reengineering. This continued into my time in Egypt a few years later. When I was in Egypt, 2001-2003, once more out in a Mission working with grantees and contractors, it was really remarkable and impressive to me that the focus on high level results, and results common across grantees and contractors, in terms of the higher-level goals they were trying to achieve at national or sectoral level, were ingrained across projects, contractors, and NGOs. That had definitely not been my experience in Mali or Bangladesh, but Reengineering now gave us tools and methods to get everyone working together towards the same explicit higher-level goals and objectives. So, in the economic growth area I was working on in Egypt, all of the staff or all our partners were aware of, focused on, and fully bought into the sectoral goals at country level that we were pursuing. (In the language of the day, that was our "Strategic Objective" and the higher order goals it was contributing to.) This was very different from my first decade in AID where things were more just project by project and contract by contract without as much sense—on the part of our partners—of the common larger goal they were all contributing to.

Anyway, coming back to my time in Africa Bureau, and that focus on sectoral changes at national and continental level as a result of reengineering, that was pretty exciting being part of that continent-wide view of things. Whereas my earlier time in AID Washington was all about reviewing the strategy and the PIDS and the PPs and the designs of projects. It had been all very microproject focused when I started in the 1980s. When I came back a decade later to Washington in 1996, suddenly we had this big picture look.

Are we making a difference in Africa? Are there good things happening in Africa? How should we use that information?

So that was exciting. But the biggest thing I did was start working with Curt Reintsma who I replaced in the ag job. He moved to Legislative and Public Affairs (LPA) to continue a dialogue he had started about renewing support to agriculture in USAID, centered on an initiative that Curt called the African Food Security Initiative. I started working with Curt and LPA with a few people in AID and then with NGOs, U.S. producer groups like the Soybean Association. Some of the producer groups used to hate AID because they saw us (not without reason) as partly responsible for helping Brazil outcompete the US in soybean exports. (This was of course the rationale for the Bumpers Amendment that we talked about earlier.) We were talking to some of the other commodity groups, U.S. universities. A bunch of groups that were very concerned that agriculture was falling off the radar screen in AID because of Congress. And so, again, some of what we were doing had to do with, you know, you want to have solid evidence and you want to be trusted in presenting that evidence.

Curt had been talking to these groups and then I and a few other people joined him, talking to these NGOs and the producer groups about agriculture, food, nutrition, and where funding and staffing were going in USAID. But we also had to win their trust, showing the NGOs that we really cared about poverty and hunger, that we weren't just trying to renew agriculture in order to support mega farms. We also had to demonstrate, and Curt had run into people on the outside who were already doing this, we had to demonstrate that support to agriculture in poor countries actually had economic benefits, not only to the US in general but to US agriculture and to farm states.

We also had to show people the data on the actual decline in USAID resources for agriculture: Here's how many ag officers we had in 1985. Now we have a fraction of that in 1997. Here's how much funding we had going to agriculture in 1985. Here's what's happening in 1997, and I spent a lot of time on the nutrition impact of that. Because this was my experience in Bangladesh, documenting, using existing research to show the major extent to which malnutrition was part of child mortality. And then: Where agriculture—especially helping small farmers increase their incomes and their food production—can be an important part in reducing child malnutrition and therefore child mortality. Some of these other groups were skeptical of AID's commitment to poor people, and just seeing the people at AID who care about poverty, who can connect agriculture to food security to poverty and nutrition was important in gaining their trust. I mean just about everybody in AID cares about poverty, but these groups didn't know that. We were able to show them our own and our institutional commitment especially to agriculture having a major role on nutrition and on poverty and why our program should be impacting these things—that won a lot of trust from these NGOs. Anyway, the result of all of this, was a formal approval to the Africa Food Security Initiative, with some but not a huge budget, but that was nevertheless very important symbolically, and also the passage by Congress of the supportive Africa Seeds of Hope Act, supporting nutrition, poverty reduction, microenterprise and agriculture in Africa.

I then went on to a year of training in one part of National Defense University, what was then called the Industrial College of the Armed Forces (ICAF) now called the Eisenhower School. ICAF is a 10-month program for rising colonels basically who have excelled in whatever their tactical or program area is, but they are now moving into a more complex world of both strategy and dealing with officials from other agencies, who — let's say — don't take orders well. Where there's not necessarily a clear person in charge. Where outcomes are murky and longer term, and tinged by politics—they're going to be moving into a world where nobody's in charge, where you're working with other agencies. Partly for this reason, about a third of the student body at ICAF and the National War College, as well as Army War College, are civilians, Foreign Service Officers, Civil Service from FAA and groups like that. So, I was one of those. Every year AID sends a few people to these post graduate Defense Department institutions.

*Q: I did that*

ATWOOD: Where did you do that John?

*Q: I did the ICAF program.*

ATWOOD: Okay, well you also know what a great program it can be. When I was there, you could have your choice—in addition to the core curriculum in the morning—of either taking electives in the afternoon or doing an in-depth research project. So, I did a research project on why these different groups that all support food, agriculture, nutrition, and poverty reduction—the groups that Curt and I and many others had been talking to and that came together to work with Congress to pass the Seeds of Hope Act, why they then immediately started competing for funds instead of working together to grow the size of the budget. I did content analysis of documents, I looked at how much even in the academic world at that time in the 1990s there'd been this huge reduction in how many academic publications were dedicated to poverty, how many people were doing research on poverty, there was this huge decline. I talked to a lot of people on the Hill and in the NGO community about what their priorities were, how they saw the USAID budget and prospects for increasing it related to poverty, hunger, and agriculture, things like that. I actually got an award, the “Association of the U.S. Army Award for Research Excellence” for this which I proudly displayed in my office for a number of years until I lost it! It was a great year, getting immersed in strategy, having to grapple with how the military and sometimes also State Department colleagues at ICAF, are forced into very short-term thinking in the face of problems whose solution is necessarily long-term, and where USAID fits in with and can help moderate that a bit. I made some good friends and colleagues.

At the end of this, I came back to AID, worked as deputy director in the Agriculture Office of what was now the Bureau for Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade. Felipe Manteiga was the Director and Emmy Simmons was in charge of that larger part of the Bureau (and a year or so later, after retiring, became the confirmed head of the entire Bureau under Administrator Andrew Natsios in the George W. Bush Administration.) While Felipe did a lot of the “outside” work within the Agency and

beyond, as office director, I focused on the inside, dealing with office management, staffing issues, budget and program office issues and so on.

At the same time, I was encouraged to take my research at ICAF about the common interest that many interest groups had—but didn't realize—in promoting a renewal of USAID agriculture support. I was encouraged to do something with this research. By this time, there was a growing coalition of people talking to USAID and to Congress about renewing U.S. support for agriculture in poor countries, and specifically about returning USAID to a global leadership position on this issue through expanded staffing and budgets. The Seeds of Hope Act and the African Food Security Initiative of a couple of years earlier were only a start, but were way too small to return USAID to a position of influence and leadership on food security and agriculture. I started presenting my research results to some of these groups formally, showing them the common interests they had across commodity groups, NGOs, anti-poverty groups, and faith-based organizations. I also talked a lot to Curt Reintsma, who put me onto the Washington-based public affairs guy at Michigan State University who worked directly for Peter McPherson. Peter McPherson, AID Administrator under President Reagan in the 1980s, had become President of Michigan State University and then around this time he was in transition to become head of the association of land grant colleges in the U.S.

I realized that Peter McPherson representing the universities, Emmy Simmons representing AID and a very great presenter, and David Beckmann who was head of Bread for the World, and who had tremendous respect on the Hill, and among all these NGOs, I realized that they'd never spoken to each other, together, about their common interest in revitalizing greater support to agriculture. So, I talked to Emmy and then she got Peter McPherson, David Beckmann, and herself to have a meeting on this and talk about it. Then David Beckmann and McPherson really started reaching out, using the very high credibility they each had in their own communities, to bring a much bigger coalition around expanding support to agriculture, especially but not only in Africa.

There were also some really frank discussions with a number of us at USAID, Curt, Emmy, myself, several others, about the AID budget. Many organizations use their lobbying power to seek an earmark for their programs within existing budget levels, but by the late 1990s, the USAID budget for Africa was already nearly totally earmarked; any new earmark would not in fact lead to additional resources for agriculture without simultaneously reducing some other area like basic education for example that was also helping poor people. We had a number of discussions, especially with Bread for the World and NGOs, encouraging them to really understand the USAID budget and not seek earmarks in it. They finally understood that this meant arguing for an overall budget expansion in order to permit a true expansion of funding for agriculture, food security and nutrition, and that's what they started talking to Congress about.

Basically, we had to help them understand that if they're only talking to Congress about earmarking—within existing budget levels—more money for agriculture, then that's going to reduce money that's going to help the same poor people in some other way, if they're talking about earmarking more money for nutrition programs, there's going to



mean either less ag money or less health money that's going to be helping those same poor people. Without expanding the total envelope, a specific earmark isn't ultimately going to increase the number of poor people put on a more sustainable path out of poverty. So, if they're only going after earmarks, that is ultimately not going to expand the resources available to help poor people. They didn't initially understand that. So, through this series of meetings that we had with David Beckmann and a larger NGO coalition, we helped them realize that if they really wanted to be more effective in lobbying on the AID budget for greater impact on poor people through agriculture, food security and nutrition, they need to think of the overall size of the budget. I was also pleased to be invited by Bread for the World to help contribute language to Bread for the World Institute's annual hunger report that year, focused on foreign aid for poverty, hunger, agriculture, and nutrition, and my language (which I felt was most appropriate to provide anonymously) is part of that report which was somewhat influential.

So, when Emmy and Peter and David Beckman got together in 2000 or 2001, that was the focus of their getting together. How can we create a coalition to expand the resources envelope for hunger and poverty in Africa? That set of informal conversations then transformed to become the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa, that Peter McPherson funded, that Julie Howard (a Michigan State agricultural economist, later the first Senior Scientist for the Feed the Future initiative under President Obama) ran for a number of years, and that eventually turned into a big AID program called the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa in the Bush administration, the George W Bush administration. And the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa provided the foundation for, and a number of relationships and programs, for what became President Obama's Feed the Future program.

The Feed the Future program under President Obama built on the lessons and grafted onto the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (started under Administrator Natsios) and ultimately built on the Africa Food Security Initiative and the Seeds of Hope Act from the late 1990s. The most exciting moment for me of this story was hearing President Obama's first inaugural speech which had an important sentence that was in a sense the ultimate outcome of all the work of those inside and outside of USAID, NGOs, US universities, producer groups, faith groups, and many others. It was so exciting to hear these words from President Obama in January 2009 at his first inaugural: "To the people of poor nations, we pledge to work alongside you to make your farms flourish and let clean waters flow; to nourish starved bodies and feed hungry minds." That one sentence became the billion dollar a year Feed the Future initiative, focused on agriculture, nutrition, and food security.

*Q: Wow, I didn't know that! Amazing! How long were you in Washington?*

ATWOOD: Five years. So, three years in Africa Bureau, one year at ICAF, and another year in the Ag Office of the Pillar Bureau.

*Q: And then what happened?*

ATWOOD: Then we decided it was time to go overseas again. When I bid on Cairo, I was coming up against the standard five years in Washington. I knew that I would have to go back overseas very soon, since as an FSO we all sign up for worldwide availability and not staying in Washington usually beyond five years.

*Q: And your work in Egypt?*

ATWOOD: That was exciting, but also disappointing. It was much more disconnected from on the ground projects and real relationships with counterparts. It was very disconnected from interactions with government decision makers, so that's what I'd gotten used to in both Mali and Bangladesh, and even in Washington, being able to talk to people who were willing to listen to policy advice, whether it was the head of Mali's agricultural research service, or the deputy secretary for food in Bangladesh, or in Washington David Beckmann or Peter McPherson. Ostensibly I was team leader for the Egypt economic growth team, with one of the largest AID economic growth portfolios in the world. The way the mission was staffed, I was in fact the deputy to Associate Director of Economic Growth, Roberta Mahoney, who was really overall responsible for that portfolio. So, practically speaking my job was really an "inside" or deputy job, dealing with a big office, with personnel issues, interoffice turf battles, annual personnel evaluations. It was the first time that I began to see things from a mission-wide perspective. When Roberta was on TDY or traveling, I was in the mission senior staff meetings with the mission director, so that was the first time I saw how a mission management team really worked from the inside.

Our team was involved in some pretty important issues, economic reform issues with the government in Cairo. But it was much more complicated, and opaque, working on policy reform with the Egyptian Government than in Mali or Bangladesh. And it was also very different because a lot of it was working through contractors who had relationships with the decision makers. In addition to the major policy reform program, we had some pretty interesting private sector programs, a major commodity import program helping Egyptian businesses to grow, some innovative horticulture export programs, and expanding microfinance for very small businesses. But probably the biggest – and most frustrating—thing in Egypt from a professional point of view was a new push by new political appointees in the State Department to redirect the USAID program and be very hard-nosed and demanding of the Egyptian Government, but without really knowing how to do that effectively.

This was post 9/11, the George W. Bush administration, and Elizabeth Cheney—Vice-President Cheney's daughter—was appointed to be deputy secretary of state for the Middle East, in charge of foreign assistance in the region. Egypt was the big program in the Middle East. I don't know if she set herself the goal or somebody else set her the goal, but her goal was to whip the Egypt program into shape because that was where the money was. Jordan was starting to get big, but it still wasn't very big yet. And she felt like Egypt had been—this was back when people were still thinking the world is on a trajectory of more and more democracy and we've got to make that happen faster—she felt like Egypt had been handled with kid gloves and we needed to really come

down hard on them and get them to open up the economy, institute democracy, and open up more opportunities for women.

Egypt had been under a state of emergency for many years. It was a very repressive police state, and in the view of Liz Cheney, we the U.S. were providing them a huge amount of money and not getting anything back in terms of moves towards greater democracy and moves toward a more open economy and so on. She assembled a team of very smart but inexperienced, ideologically committed people, who thought that we're going to use our money to get the Egyptian government to do what we want, become more democratic, more market oriented, help poor people and women more. I mean their intentions were good, but they had no diplomatic experience, were poor negotiators, and most importantly had no clue that Egypt has been dealing with people like us, dealing with the world's most powerful empires, for not hundreds but thousands of years! They were out-negotiated, often without realizing it, at every turn. But the process took more than a year, a very painful process. And so, they didn't accomplish much of what they wanted, and Egypt is still getting significant amounts of USAID money and is even more repressive now than it was then. But that took up a lot of everybody's time in the mission, especially those of us who were working on economic growth, because that's where the big money was.

We went through multiple painful portfolio reviews, designs, redesigns, explanations. The sad thing was that we had been very excited when Liz Cheney was assigned to this job, because Liz Cheney had worked for the International Finance Corporation (the private sector arm of the World Bank) for a couple of years, and before that she had done a several months long internship in Cairo with USAID. She knew international development, knew Egypt a bit, knew USAID, so you know when you get a political person coming in, they don't always have that kind experience, so she had good solid development experience, and she knew the AID mission. But that didn't matter. This was a painful process. It took up everybody's time. It didn't improve any programs. It bred just a huge amount of mistrust. So, I'm glad I have something else now that I can respect Liz Cheney for, in this year 2022 when she has really in her own state and in our own country, stood up for democracy at some significant personal risk, losing her House seat as a result of her principled stand, and risking attack for her role on the House Select Committee on January 6, calling out the lies of former President Trump.

I should also mention that in the middle of all of this, we got an overnight tasker from the State Department, that the embassy and USAID were to put together a substantive outline of what was to become the Middle East Partnership Initiative. And we were to do it by the end of the next day! Up until then, I was pretty good at turning around complex taskers in missions and in Washington, but I was also someone, like most of us in USAID, who recognized the complexity of the world we worked in, the dangers of designing programs oblivious to that complexity and therefore the necessity of taking an informed, considered approach to designing new programs, marshaling evidence, talking to experts, seeking differing perspectives. An overnight tasker to "design" a new major funding initiative across one of the most complex and conflict-ridden areas of the world

seemed both crazy and irresponsible. But of course, a number of us in the mission and the embassy did what we could.

Then, during my entire second year, there was the drumbeat of nearby war, the coming invasion of Iraq which was clearly coming, the need to pretend that this was in support of expanding global democracy. Our family took a Nile Cruise right as the fake “WMD” (Weapons of Mass Destruction) evidence was being presented at the UN just before the invasion, and watched a bit of that on the boat, a cruise with just a handful of people because of fears of terrorism driving away tourists to Egypt. The war in Iraq certainly colored much of that second year; if we were drafting a speech for the Mission director or Ambassador at an event with our economics and business partners, everything had to be put in the context, which was hard to believe under the circumstances, of how economic growth and democracy and invading Iraq were all part and parcel of the same progressive march of history and freedom and so on and so on. It was disheartening and tragic.

There was an Embassy FSO who talked about organizing a protest when Secretary of State Colin Powell (an admirable figure who by this time was already being discredited by having been the voice that presented the fake intelligence on WMDs to the world) came to encourage the Embassy community I think just before the invasion. But nothing came of that. That invasion spelled the end of the U.S. budget surplus, the end of trust in government, the beginning of cynicism by left and right about the government, and in my mind is in no small part responsible for the awful time we are now living through in U.S. politics, not to mention in the Middle East.

*Q: Did you travel when you were in Egypt?*

ATWOOD: Not very much. It was right after 9/11. We’d been in Mali and Bangladesh, two places that it’s not easy to visit. My parents and Nancy’s mother visited us in both posts; my brother visited in Mali, and a close Australian friend in Bangladesh. But Egypt was the post we thought, this is the post we’re going to have people come visit us. We’re going to go to Petra, we’ll visit the Holy Land. But in fact, we had no visitors, other than a friend who was there on TDY. And we didn’t travel in the region for security reasons and related border closures after 9/11. But we traveled within Egypt, and that was wonderful and so different from anywhere we had been. We took several trips to the desert, visited Alexandria, went all over Cairo, took that Nile cruise. Egypt was my one Foreign Service post where culture was physically very easily accessible. We lived in Maadi, where the USAID Mission was, a suburb right on the subway line. It was a 15-minute walk to the subway, hop on the subway, four stops later you get off and you’re in one of the oldest parts of Cairo. You have to walk down 20 feet of steps because it’s lower than modern Cairo and we could visit a synagogue that was probably 1,500 years old, Coptic churches that were probably 1,700 years old, old mosques. There were a lot of wonderful things you could do in Cairo. Opera, music, culture, bookstores, lectures, so it was a wonderful place from that point of view. We didn’t visit places outside of Egypt, except we spent New Year’s in Prague, which was a lot of fun. In terms of work-related travel, in my job as a deputy I hardly ever went on a field trip. Two or three times.

Let me just see if I have anything else to say about Cairo. I guess it's in Cairo when I first started thinking, you know I could probably become a mission director. At that point I was thinking that maybe I could replace Roberta as associate director when her tour was up. I think people in the mission thought highly of me. They hadn't made any commitments, but I was a serious candidate to go into Roberta's associate director job. But in the end, for family reasons, we left after only one tour. It turns out that that saved me having to participate in a major and painful mission of downsizing both American and FSN staff. It turned out that the job I sort of thought I might go into, Roberta's Senior Management Group associate director job, got eliminated in that downsizing.

I felt like I learned a lot in Egypt, but that second year in Egypt— for professional reasons related to the MEPI, the Middle East Partnership Initiative, and Liz Cheney, and then the fiasco of the U.S invasion of Iraq which had various ramifications in Egypt and on USAID—that was probably the most difficult year of my AID career, that second year in Cairo.

From the personal point of view, it wasn't easy for our kids either, but despite that they both made good use of their time in Cairo. Our son explored widely, learned some Arabic, volunteered at a Sudanese refugee school and was pretty interested in the culture. He edited the Embassy weekly newsletter over the summer. Our daughter got pretty interested in photography and art, was accepted and went on two art trips that Cairo American College did to Europe, and volunteered at a pet rescue shelter, and she found a very good online home-school program to complete her sophomore year. But after two years, we decided it was time to come home.

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*Q: Good morning. This is John Pielemeier. I'm doing a second interview today July 18, 2022. We're with David Atwood and we've just finished talking about David's work at the mission in Egypt and he's come back now on assignment to Washington. David, we'll let you pick up the story there.*

ATWOOD: Okay, thank you, John. One of the most interesting things about coming back to Washington in 2003 is that I couldn't find a job in either my areas of expertise (agriculture and economic growth) or my geographical areas (Africa especially). We knew we were coming back to the States after two years in Cairo, but I was really having trouble figuring out what I was going to do. I put out feelers for a few things, and then I heard from an old friend, Gloria Steele, who had started out at AID around the same time I had (also as a PASA/USDA staffer in the Africa Bureau in around 1981) and who had risen pretty rapidly through the ranks. Gloria was a DAA in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau and wanted to know if I was interested in an open office director job there. A reminder here that – at this time in 2003—it was after the biggest transitions in that region. The Balkan wars had ended; the former Yugoslavia was now a bunch of separate

states. The Soviet Union had broken up, Vladimir Putin was well ensconced as president, but those countries of the former Soviet Union (FSU as we called them at the time) were all limping along at roughly half of the GDP they'd had just before the breakup. So, in 2003, it was in a sense a second phase of transition in the post-communist world.

I was happy to be recruited for an office director job, but disappointed to be leaving agriculture as well as countries and regions that I knew well. I wanted to do some research about the job before I said yes, and of course the AA, Kent Hill, wanted to interview me as well. The job would be running the office that had those sectors that I really didn't know much about, with the economic growth office job already filled by someone else. Those sectors were in the title of the office: Office of Democracy, Governance and Social Transition (social transition referring to those sectors which hadn't been given so much thought by AID earlier in the E&E transition – education, health, social services, safety net programs.)

When I started looking into what USAID was doing in these sectors, I was pretty excited. One of the things that got me most interested was an annual review and index that USAID and its partners did every year in every E&E country called the NGO Sustainability Index. This was a pretty good, empirical tracking of progress in both policy for and capacity of the very wide range of civil society organizations that had come into existence as part of the transition away from communism. I was pretty impressed that AID was putting resources into, and finding empirical ways to measure, progress in civic life and democracy in this way. So that predisposed me to be interested in the job also.

When Gloria arranged for an interview with the AA, Kent Hill and I hit it off, partly because Kent and I approached our work from a faith background, and were both interested in interreligious dialogue issues and working with Muslim communities on development issues. Not only was Kent interested in this, and had already had some active involvement in interfaith dialogue, but in addition, the Bureau's environmental officer, a man named Mohammed Latif, was doing a lot in this area as well.

This turned out to be a pretty exciting job partly for those reasons. We had a lot of travel money and I felt from the very beginning I needed to travel a lot both to get to know the missions where—if I'd had a job in Africa—I would have known many of the people in all the missions, but knew very few mission people in E&E. Also, I really didn't have any feel at all for the countries or the programs in the region, certainly not these programs that were beyond my sectoral expertise. So, I traveled.

*Q: And there were very few agriculture programs because?*

ATWOOD: Well, we talked last week about the global decline of agriculture funding and therefore AID agriculture positions. Within E&E programs, there were some agriculture programs in the region, but very few agriculture jobs. There was one person overseeing those programs in the other "technical office" in the bureau, the office whose director job was already filled, that was focused primarily on economic policy and on energy. I think

there was a feeling – in the State Department and at AID—that in the economic sectors the key priorities were overall economic restructuring, banking sector reform, energy sector reform, things like that.

So, anyway, yes, I came into a job with no involvement in my areas of expertise (agriculture or economic growth) in a region totally new to me, so I came into this job with trepidation, but also where I was really learning a lot and having a great time getting to know people, missions and programs. As an office director, and I continued this in Africa Bureau, too, you need to make time for mission staff, it's one of your most important roles. A key reason for Washington staffing is to provide support to mission staff and management. So, I really made a point of making myself available to both staff coming through, that is education staff, democracy staff, health staff, but also to mission directors and deputies, partly because I felt like I could learn a lot from them, partly because I've always considered, as I started out almost in the beginning of the first interview, that I consider my role in AID partly to be a facilitator and protector of contractors and grantees because they're the people on the ground doing the work. I kind of felt that way about mission staff as well, when I saw how hard it could sometimes be even for mission directors to get anybody's attention in Washington. So, if anybody wanted to stop by and see me, I would drop what I was doing if I could, talk to them, hear what their programs were doing, hear what problems they were having, if there were things going on that my staff or I could help with. And I really learned a lot doing that and establishing some relationships with people as well.

I had a great staff, with tremendous field knowledge of the region and technical knowledge of their sectors, and wonderful relationships overseas. Initially, I felt a bit uncomfortable supervising health staff, education staff, staff supporting election monitoring NGOs. but I pretty quickly learned that whether you're an agricultural expert in Africa or an elections expert dealing with Russia and Ukraine, or an education expert supporting AID Missions in the Balkans, that you need just a couple of things. You need a supportive environment, and you need people to recognize that your expertise counts for something and can really make for better programs and better policies. When I figured that out, then I felt much more comfortable supervising my staff people even though I didn't – at least in the beginning—really understand their sectors very well. A significant part of my job was on the phone and in email kind of paving the way for improving this Mission program by getting my education expert out to an AID mission, or getting another mission to reconsider their decision to stop the program in some area, and so I got comfortable pretty quickly supervising these experts in areas I really didn't initially know much about. And I learned quite a bit at that time.

In addition, beginning with E&E Bureau, and then continuing with my final years as a career FSO in the Africa Bureau, I got involved in a range of issues related to the future of AID and the future of foreign aid more generally. That period of eight years from 2003 into 2011—was really important in a lot of ways for AID. And if you worked for AID, especially in any kind of management job including an office director job, you got involved in these issues.

One of the developments was a major expansion of foreign aid, a quadrupling of aid for Africa—we'll get to that when I talk about Africa Bureau—but also creation of these two new huge initiatives, PEPFAR (the President's Emergency Program for AIDS Relief) and the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), President George W. Bush's initiative to identify key development problems that required a huge infusion of very focused money to solve and to make a difference in national growth in those countries.

My time back in Washington was really against this background of major expansion of foreign aid, confusion of the U.S. aid landscape by these two new actors, and there were also other things going on alongside of this. One was a major emphasis on metrics versus expertise. So, the Clinton reengineering effort did really rightly put a much bigger focus on results, looking at results, measuring results, but now the specific metrics of how you measure results became far more important than any kind of understanding of what went into those changes, whether they were the right metrics, whether there were important things we should be doing that are not so easily measurable. So, this metrics vs expertise was another thing happening at the same time.

What was USAID's real role or value added was another really big kind of existential question during that period because you had not only PEPFAR and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, you had this realization that in that more than 50 percent of Africa that was now very stable, all of a sudden private investments and private money were far greater than foreign aid would ever be. So, what is AID's role there?

There was also a lot more emphasis on the private sector and specifically USAID's relationship within the private sector and so what should our relationship with the private sector look like? Well, in my world of policy and economic policy and agriculture, we always saw—in the '80s and '90s and then later in Egypt—we saw our role as helping to create an environment in which the private sector could do more, could invest more, provide more services. That meant investing USAID efforts in policy and regulatory changes that created more opportunities for the private sector. It didn't always mean deregulation either. So, in E&E, a key shift was moving the energy sector from what had become highly inefficient and corrupt public providers, to private providers. But moving to a private energy sector meant helping countries create a public sector regulatory apparatus and institutions to carry it out. That was a major effort in E&E Bureau. Similarly, in AFR, the Bureau had done work for some time, as the internet became more and more important, on helping countries create an enabling regulatory environment for internet service providers.

Anyway, that had been a major part of my entire USAID career to this point – focusing on the enabling environment and policies to bring in more private sector activity, to create more employment opportunities for poor people, more ways for farmers to support themselves, sell some of their production, buy better seeds. At some point later in the Bush Administration, certainly in the Obama administration—but preceding that, this was initially Andrew Natsios' initiative in the early 2000s—all of a sudden there became a really big emphasis on a very different role for USAID: as a direct participant in transactions, in deal-making, with the private sector. How can USAID be a transaction



facilitator for a specific deal with the private sector, but a deal that could have development impact? And so there really became a tension between those people who saw the agency as a facilitator of transactions with the private sector versus those people—like me and many of the long-serving agriculture and economic growth staff—who saw the agency as still having a key role in bringing about systemic change in societies, whether in the health sector, agriculture, in education, whatever, with the idea that those systemic changes, those policy changes, that capacity-building, that enhancement of government regulatory functions, would then create a more self-sustaining push on private sector activity to support development outcomes.

One other major trend in this period, and these were all of course related to each other, was the problem of earmarks. This certainly affected us in E&E Bureau even with our ostensibly “unrestricted” funding provided by Congress. But it especially hit Africa very hard. With so many earmarks and directives in the AID budget, who was in charge of making strategic decisions? And it turned out that really no one was; you had USAID missions preparing strategies, you had all this emphasis put on five-year country strategies sometimes now they had to be done with State, sometimes they were AID strategies, but all this emphasis on five-year strategies, but in fact when Congress got done slicing and dicing the budget by how much has to go to x country, how much has to go within the health budget to this disease, that disease, the other disease, the fact was that there was very little strategic decision making possible given this near 100% earmarking of the budget.

We in Africa Bureau had a very good program officer director, Dana Ott, who analyzed all this and had this huge chart of like 45 countries on the vertical axis and literally 60 or 80 earmarks and directives on the horizontal axis and then there was this little cell at the bottom, which was discretionary “development” assistance funding! That discretionary development assistance accounted for I think 2 percent of the entire AID budget to Africa, even after it had quadrupled, and that was the only part of the budget over which a USAID mission could really make strategic programming decisions! And so, for any given country or mission director, they do their strategy and they make some decisions, but they had really had very little room to make trade off decisions about where’s USAID’s value here, what is the country not getting from others that it can get from us that would really make a difference.

So that was this kind of very challenging and confusing background that I came into in the E&E Bureau and then in the Africa Bureau five years later. And as an office director, I spent a lot of my time dealing with those issues, sometimes dealing with them directly; the AA would be going to an Administrator’s retreat and want to help shape new Administrator Tobias’s vision of what is AID’s value added, but quite often more indirectly: a country programming or a strategy decision would come up and immediately engage one of these issues. Are we focused on transactions or systemic change? Are we doing things only because we can measure them, and are we avoiding things that are more important because we can’t measure them? So, whether it was a program or mission specific things or directly taking on some of these issues at agency level, if you

were an office director or higher in AID Washington at the time these issues took up probably more than half your time and that was certainly the case with me.

Let me just say a bit more about the rationale for USAID that one of our most important jobs is to promote systemic change and building host country capacity: E&E Bureau was a great place for that because the post-Communist countries had a strong base of educated people, and our budgets from Congress – while often expected to contribute to very narrow Congressional earmarks (e.g., the microenterprise earmark or the TB earmark, as just two examples) were not themselves earmarked so our Missions had a lot more flexibility in how to program funds. So, Missions were doing some pretty innovative and ambitious things. For example, in health – while the rest of USAID was programming by disease or problem area (e.g., maternal and child health, or TB or family planning/reproductive health)—several of our Missions, especially in Central Asia, were building on the strong medical base left by Soviet Communism to build strong health systems, putting in place a stronger system of medical protocols, making fees transparent etc. Similarly, in Romania – whose pronatalist policies under Ceausescu had hurt women, created incentives for very high abortion rates, and created the greatest orphan population in Europe – USAID helped create a new profession of social worker, supported institutions such as a university school for social work and a complete rethinking of orphanages as humane, caring places rather than corrupt child dumping grounds. And through training, support, and policy dialogue missions across the region helped create a strong and vibrant civil society, whether in supporting political parties (regardless of ideology) in training candidates and developing party platforms, or NGOs to monitor elections, or advocacy NGOs to lobby for government policy changes.

*Q: Talking about working with the State Department, you alluded to the relationship which was unique with the State Department, could you describe that a little more, about how that actually functioned?*

I came into the Europe and Eurasia Bureau into a situation where the State Department assistance coordinator made the key strategy and program decisions about foreign aid in each country. His staff was often quite capable but tended not to have the same field experience, or sense of long-term dynamics, that USAID staff has. Working in that kind of political program, with State at every level of program decisions, colored everything we did. That State Department Assistance Coordination for Europe office had started with the fall of the Berlin Wall and especially the dissolution of the Soviet Union where I think—Do you remember, I think it was early in the Clinton Administration rather than late in the Bush Administration—whichever it was, there was a decision, and I think Congress probably supported this decision, that this was so important for U.S. national security and the future of the world that it couldn't be left to USAID? This wasn't just a development issue, there had to be a very senior State Department coordinator working across the U.S. government on how we provided assistance to the countries, especially the former Soviet Union but also Eastern Europe and especially the former Yugoslavia, which was emerging from these terrible ethnic wars.

So that coordinator quickly developed a staff, and that staff essentially took on kind of the role of an uber program office in USAID lingo, deciding which programs would get funded, what was important, how the money would get spent, often down to trying to select contractors until people in AID said, “We can’t do that! There are legal guidelines, competition guidelines, on how to let contracts and grants.”

We had both a tense but good working relationship when I was there. I think it had been much more difficult in prior years. It was good partly because I was in E&E when—let’s see, Kent Hill was our AA, we had two very good DAAs sequentially, who knew how to work with the State Department. They didn’t shy away from conflict, but they were constructive in how they dealt with the State Department coordinator’s office. They were respected by the State Department. The same with Kent Hill. And then we had former USAID employee Carlos Pasqual who became the coordinator at the State Department after having been ambassador to Ukraine.

*Q: Carlos served in South Africa, one of the first people in the South African mission.*

ATWOOD: Oh, is that right? I think he’d switched over to State Department at some point and had been an Ambassador to Ukraine I think just before coming into that State Department Assistance Coordinator for Europe job. Having somebody who really knew AID very well had advantages and disadvantages. It meant that we couldn’t—we had been supplementing mission programs by using carryover funding, for example—but Carlos knew all about that. He knew everything about the AID budget, and missions could no longer—if the coordinator’s office said we don’t have funding to extend this program another year and the mission felt it was really important, they would use funding like carryover funding that they hadn’t spent or something—but Carlos knew the ins and outs of carryover, no-year funding, two-year funding. We couldn’t supplement mission programs on our own anymore!

*Q: [Laughing]*

ATWOOD: But having someone who knew and respected AID was also very helpful. And he really saw the AID E&E Bureau and AID missions as partners in his coordination role, which hadn’t always been the case as I understand it prior to that time.

Then he had a deputy, Tom Adams, a prince of a guy, Senior Executive Service, who eventually took over from Carlos when Carlos left. So, we had two coordinators who were easy to work with and they had a good staff. It was collegial even though it removed from USAID a lot of decision making, basically AID missions and our staff and leadership in the bureau had to always carve a place for us at the table in any important decision. So, that took a lot of effort and room and we did that largely by virtue of the knowledge of the countries and the sectors we had.

This mutual respect, and Carlos’s deep knowledge of USAID, became pretty important when Carlos realized that by the 2000s, we were in a new era and Congress was tired of funding these programs that they had been told in the 1990s were short-term. Many

people after the Wall fell, after the Soviet Union imploded, expected that this was going to be a very rapid transition: the thinking was that these countries have deep, strong institutions, highly trained people, all these countries need is a little market economics, get rid of some communist bureaucracy, open up to private investment and the transition will be done. You know they've got educated capable staff. We just go in and out in a few years and they're going to be transformed into Western democracies and market economies.

But that initial vision had at this point been more than a decade before I came in in 2003. And then Carlos came in maybe 2004, Congress was getting impatient, so he realized that we need to have a graduation process planned. We need to have it based on something real, and his staff didn't have all the expertise to do that so he relied on people in the E&E Bureau. This meant relying on some people in the E&E program office that did a wonderful job tracking a range of open-source macro indicators, on economic progress, civic freedom, education attainment etc. But those indicators were often out of date and weren't informed by country and sectoral knowledge and nuance. So, both my office and the companion economics and energy office came up with graduation criteria for these countries that supplemented that grosser macro information. And, again, then there was tension between the sort of on paper metrics, the numbers that we have that are not always reliable and are often out of date, versus the real expertise that staff in missions and then especially in the bureau (because we were seen as more objective than missions) could provide. It was believed that staff in missions are always going to argue for their programs and their countries. So, there was a period of maybe a year, a year and a half, when we spent a lot of time coming up—together with the office of the coordinator at State Department—with graduation criteria on what it would take for a country to cross the threshold to where it no longer needed our aid.

One other thing about this job that was really pretty exciting. The graduation criteria we came up with were: let's look at where these countries are in democracy, governance, press freedom, management of elections, health care, educational attainment. We're going to have to graduate those countries that have gotten close to where Romania and Bulgaria were when they were invited to join NATO and the EU. Because this is kind of an interesting thing with Ukraine right now, and EU membership. You know the criteria to join the EU and NATO were very specific and very strict on all those things. On human development and especially on economic policy, democracy and capable governance. And so, we spent a lot of time figuring out what would it take for each of these countries to get to the level of Romania and Bulgaria?

The interesting thing about that is well, that was kind of a technical challenge that we worked with the coordinator's office on, but in geopolitical terms the interesting thing about that is joining the EU and joining NATO for Romania or for all these countries of Eastern Europe was such a huge incentive, everybody in these countries wanted to join NATO and wanted to join the EU. They wanted to join NATO to protect themselves against a still weak but still powerful Russia. They wanted to join the EU because they wanted to be able to travel, they thought this would lead to major economic growth, which it has in most places but not everywhere.

So, joining the EU and NATO is a huge incentive and very exciting to see at the time for somebody like me, who has at this time most of my career been working on policy because EU and NATO membership were by far the greatest policy incentives I'd ever seen. Compared to you know, providing some of our food aid to Bangladesh or Mali or whatever. So that was pretty interesting, working on that. And we came up with good graduation criteria that you could measure, and that became sort of the standard by which graduation plans were made for some of these countries.

One interesting sidelight of that was the way Carlos had conceptualized this. Okay, we have to start looking at graduation of countries from U.S. foreign assistance when they have attained the same level of economic policy reform and democratic governance that Romania and Bulgaria attained when they were invited to join the EU, because we know that in Romania and Bulgaria and all these other new EU members, those policy changes are irreversible!

*Q: [Laughter]*

ATWOOD: Well within a few short years of that Carlos might have even been—Yeah, he'd left by that time—But anyway within a few short years of that you had Victor Orbán in Hungary who was really, you know—Hungary wouldn't be invited to join the EU now because of their fairly repressive nontransparent democratic norms and governance and so on. And so those changes have turned out, and we see this even in our own country, to be reversible, not irreversible. Even though joining the EU and NATO were such huge incentives to get these changes made in the first place.

*Q: In the criteria for graduation, did any countries graduate while you were there?*

ATWOOD: Well, Romania certainly did, and Bulgaria did. Ah, let's see. By the time I was there the northern tier of—basically I came into the Europe and Eurasia Bureau at a time when we were focused on the problem countries. So those parts of former Yugoslavia that hadn't made it, that hadn't already joined the EU or were about to, so we had no programs in Croatia, Slovenia, but we had programs in those countries that were really the heart of the worst fighting and wars in the Balkans: Kosovo, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Serbia, also Macedonia; they were the ones that hadn't made it. Similarly with the countries of Eastern Europe outside of former Yugoslavia, Poland, the Czech Republic, Slovakia, Hungary, those countries had already joined the EU and were doing well and were getting little, almost no aid, they had all graduated. There were a few regional programs like the regional program in support of communities that were working with Roma communities in Hungary and several other graduate countries for very specific reasons, but those countries had graduated, no bilateral aid programs. And there wasn't really talk of graduation of countries in the former Soviet Union, and I think all those countries even now, the Caucasus countries, Moldova, Ukraine certainly, I think they're all receiving USAID funding except those that have kicked AID out like Belarus and Russia.

The graduations that took place when I was there during that five years were Romania and Bulgaria, but nobody behind them at the time I moved to Africa Bureau in 2008,

*Q: One of the topics that I'm a little bit familiar with is even though they weren't graduated there were some foundations established, some endowments. Were you involved in any of that process?*

ATWOOD: I was acting DAA for most of a year and a half, but wasn't involved in any of the endowed foundations. But was involved a bit in the enterprise funds that were set up. The idea of the enterprise funds was to kick start investment in these countries and then as they very rapidly (so it was thought at the time) transition into market economies this will lay the foundation for stock markets and a financial sector and everything else. It didn't work out that way. Some of the enterprise funds had problems, and two years before I left the Europe and Eurasia Bureau, Congress put a hold on any further funding including using existing funds that were in them already, those enterprise funds, and I think that the hold continued for like four, five, or six years. I don't know what happened to them. There were some significant positive investments that came through them, but they weren't the dynamic market movers, investment movers that had been intended.

*Q: Why did they do that, why did Congress put a hold on them?*

ATWOOD: What was the issue? I don't think there was an issue about financial management or corruption. I think the money wasn't moving but I cannot remember and I wasn't directly involved in this.

John, there's one final trend or change that I should discuss that started when I was in E&E, indeed was in a sense patterned on the USAID-State relationship there or built on it anyway, that was very important for my time in E&E and later in AFR. It was the "foreign assistance reform" initiative started by Randall Tobias. Randall Tobias came into USAID from having managed PEPFAR, as you know. He came into the U.S. government from being CEO of Eli Lilly and Company and then I think he was a senior vice president or something at one of the telephone companies. Anyway, he really got Congress excited about President Bush's AIDS initiative, PEPFAR, because after a relatively short time, he was able to tell Congress how many people we were giving anti-retroviral drugs to. So, he actually had metrics. He had numbers that members of Congress and their staff who were just normal people could understand, like there are 10 million people getting drugs to help keep people alive who were living with HIV/AIDS!

Based on that experience, he was recruited to replace Andrew Natsios during pretty much the second four years of the George W. Bush Administration. He came in not liking AID; thinking that we were all screwed up; knowing that Congress loves the numbers; not particularly interested in what AID did; not willing to listen to senior staff; not wanting to hear about complicated things like systemic change, long term development, nutrition interactions with health affecting people with HIV/AIDS; not even really caring much about the complexities of the USAID budget. And not too long after he came in, Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice was in a State Department senior staff meeting and

said, “I want to know how much money we as the U.S. government spend from all our assistance monies for democracy, State Department, National Endowment for Democracy, USAID. Can you tell me that next week?”

Well actually USAID could answer the question but nobody else could. So as far as Condoleezza Rice was concerned, she didn’t want to know how much one agency spent. She wanted to know overall how much. And nobody could tell her the answer because the other agencies didn’t have the same tracking systems we did. So out of all of this she tasked Tobias with coming up with a reform foreign assistance that would rationalize foreign aid and track it so that she could get the answers that she needed. Everybody in AID got involved in this in one way or another and this became a huge thing where that just engaged all sorts of questions. All of a sudden people at AID started talking about “assistance,” not development, because assistance includes security assistance, it includes things that clearly are not development. And it was much harder, and the whole emphasis became on the inputs, not the outputs. The input is the money we put in, the “assistance;” while the outputs and results are development and other things. So, it’s kind of a reversal of the re-engineering that had been introduced under Brian Atwood in the Clinton Administration, much more focused on outputs and results.

Again, as with the graduation experience, we had to kind of fight to get a seat at the table, but then when we had a seat at the table people recognized that USAID had the needed sectoral and country knowledge. So, just as one example, when the foreign assistance reform exercise was trying to put together the template for public health, who could you get to say what to aim for, and how to measure it, in tuberculosis. The USAID expert in TB is the person you want to talk to if you’re trying to figure out what a TB program looks like. If you want to know what to look for, and how to measure, financial sector reform, or agricultural technological change, you go to the USAID experts in those areas. You remember the foreign assistance framework was sliced and diced into all these sectoral, sub sectoral, sub, sub sectoral programs. Except for security assistance, that was largely USAID staff, including staff in my E&E office, that helped create the new foreign assistance framework that came out of that, which—for all its flaws—was at least a fairly good framework of what we give assistance for and why.

In the middle of all of this also, Tobias is asking all sorts of very fundamental questions about why do we give aid? Why do we exist? We’ve got PEPFAR; we’ve got MCC; we’ve got the State Department. Why does AID exist? So, the acting AA/E&E at the time in our region spent a lot of time for a period of a few months going to senior staff retreats and I was working with him on helping to frame what our value added is. In our formulation, our USAID value added is we build capacity, and we bring about systemic change.

That didn’t get that far with Tobias but again it was one of these fundamental questions—Why does AID exist? Why are we giving aid? —that I got involved in during that time through these discussions of the foreign assistance reform framework—It’s been modified slightly but it’s still the framework that State and AID and other federal agencies providing assistance are using today.

Again, this was a very difficult time because foreign aid reform also involved downgrading the role of the USAID administrator, really further downgrading any discretionary decision making on the part of missions and mission directors because basically not only was Congress now slicing and dicing the aid so there was very little discretion, but now the executive branch itself was doing this in the foreign aid framework. When missions got their money each year it was allocated by these categories and subcategories in this foreign assistance framework, leaving even less room for discretionary, country-specific decision-making.

*Q: I also think that Tobias was dual hatted. He was not only an administrator of AID but he was head of the Foreign Assistance Bureau (F) in the State Department, which he was doing sort of like the work that was being done in the E&E Bureau; sort of overseeing most of the foreign assistance programs.*

ATWOOD: Yeah, absolutely, and they used the E&E Bureau as a model for how to do that. Yeah, the double hatting of Tobias as both head of the Foreign Assistance Bureau (State/F) and USAID administrator was meant to be a signal that this was all very supportive of AID but also it meant that in the future there could be a separate head of the foreign assistance in the State Department who is not the head of AID, and the head of AID would report to that person. And that's what happened during the Obama Administration. Jack Lew, a very good guy, head of the OMB under Clinton, anyway, he was head of F and Raj Shah was head of AID. So, under the Obama Administration they separated out the head of F from the head of AID.

*Q: Really Tobias did not last very long. He had some personal issues that came up. I grew up in Indiana and one of my former classmates worked for Eli Lilly and so I was aware of some of the issues that could come up with Tobias.*

ATWOOD: Tobias was so scornful of USAID that people weren't unhappy when he left abruptly. I remember I was in some important meeting with a few people in my office the afternoon that it was announced that Tobias was resigning. I see this crowd of people outside my door and I really didn't want to interrupt my meeting, but they were insistent. It's all my staff, so I knew who they were. I really didn't want to talk to them, but they basically barged into my meeting and told me what had happened. Their eyes were alight, they were so happy! Well for some of them they were happy that something had happened to Tobias but mainly they were happy because the long, not nightmare, but difficult time, where everybody in AID felt really kind of undervalued and disrespected, was over with his departure.

*Q: Were you involved in decisions on mission directors in the region?*

ATWOOD: Yes, as DAA, that's one of the times I've worked hardest in my career, because I was helping manage the Bureau day-to-day, but then staying very late most days to deal with recruiting Mission managers. Plus, I was spending a fair amount of time helping the person who was replacing me (while I was acting DAA) as my acting



office director. This is the time when I learned that when you are DAA, you're just dealing with every conceivable kind of issue. There's somebody attacked and the wife of somebody is attacked in a country and you get involved. People are concerned about stealing an election. Somebody sees a five-year-old video of the previous AA interviewing the mission director in a country and they're using the wrong term to refer to the country's enemy and then all of a sudden there's a complaint to the State Department and the State Department comes to AID and gets mad, and so, as DAA you're supervising the bureau in contact with missions but you're also dealing with the most off-the-wall issues all the time.

Anyway, to answer your question, yes, so in addition to that, a key part of the DAA job is recruiting country directors and deputies. I had to figure out how to recruit new mission directors and deputy directors. Basically, I would spend from like 5 to 7 or 7:30 PM most nights for a period of two to three months, the high recruitment season for senior staff recruiting. It involved emailing, then getting people on the phone, seeing if there's a good fit and if so seeing if they'd be willing to be our number one, talking to them about the bureau, explaining what the mission is like, stuff like that. In a couple of cases, it also involved finding two nearby missions for tandem couples where both were good candidates for director or deputy jobs, but wanted to be close enough to visit each other. That recruitment part of the DAA job was very rewarding but I've probably never worked harder than that in my AID career. There were a couple of times I worked almost as hard.

*Q: So, let's see. You were working in that region, which is so different from where you'd been. You'd been in some of the poorest countries of the world in the Africa region and all of a sudden, you're working with E&E and you're trying to move them to capitalist societies from a socialist state—quickly. And as we know it hasn't really finished that process yet! Tell me why did you leave the region?*

ATWOOD: Well, I spent five years in that job. It was a great job but I'd never spent more than five years doing anything in my AID career. I did spend five years in Mali. And my development commitment has always been primarily to Africa. I really wanted to come back to Washington in 2003 and work on either Africa or agriculture and working on agriculture anywhere in the agency at that time meant partly or mainly working in Africa, but as I noted earlier, there weren't any jobs for me in Africa or agriculture at that time.

I talked to people in Africa Bureau a couple of times during my E&E stint, and it hadn't worked out; the time wasn't right. By 2008, after five years, I just felt it was time to move on from the E&E job. I knew that the AFR/SD directorship was opening up and I bid on that and talked to DAA Franklin Moore and other people in senior management in the bureau about that job and eventually got selected for it. So that's what I really—Had that job been offered to me in 2003 I would have taken it immediately.

*Q: So, when it was open you bid on it and you were selected. And you'd been away from Africa for five years? More?*

ATWOOD: If you don't count Egypt because Egypt is different from a lot of African countries, but include my time in EGAT/AFS where I was mainly focused on Africa, I'd been away for seven years from African issues. It was great for me to be back when I went into the Africa SD office director job in September 2008.

*Q: I was going to ask you: since you had been away for so many years, how different was the Africa program when you had left it?*

ATWOOD: It was different in a lot of ways. The things that I'd worked on in Mali and Bangladesh – helping the agricultural economy to become more productive and market-oriented and produce more food – were nevertheless pretty painful in some ways for a lot of people. Eliminating or reducing ineffective and corrupt government subsidies led to loss of income and employment in the short term. Eliminating a parastatal or price enforcement role also. And that was a small part of much bigger World Bank and IMF structural adjustment programs that had, over a period of years, pretty big negative effects on employment, government services and so on in the short-term, from the late 80s into the 90s. But by the time I came back to Africa Bureau in 2009, the results – the very positive longer-term results on millions of ordinary people – were palpable. Those painful changes had brought big benefits in terms of much faster economic growth, poverty reduction, more diverse economies, and international investment.

So, a couple of things were happening, positive things coming out of those painful economic changes in the 90s. African economies were growing like gangbusters, attracting a lot of international investment and also providing a lot of space for local companies, small and big, to start doing things and deliver services. This led to major new employment opportunities, opportunities for young people. And when you combined it with the cellphone and internet revolution, all of a sudden there was tremendous dynamism and opportunity in a lot of African economies. And these positive changes led to something else, something intangible, a growing sense by Africans of Africa's possibilities. Instead of Africa's leaders looking back 40 years to the persisting negative impact of colonialism or looking back fifteen to twenty years to the heyday of structural adjustment they were really taken with the future. You had African countries – when I came in in 2008 – saying for the first time that they were going to achieve middle-income status in the near-term, unheard of in my prior periods working on Africa. I didn't believe it at first, but then all of a sudden you had some of these countries actually growing so fast they did cross the threshold to middle income.

The other thing that happened was the end of a terrible period of instability that lasted from the early 90s into the early 2000s. Again, we're back now in another bad period, even a worse period, in terms of instability and war in many parts of Africa, but my time in AFR from 2008-2011 was great in terms of growing economies, growing democracy and civic space and freedom, and safety from war and instability for most people in Africa.

Whereas you had Liberia's civil war causing dominoes to fall around the West African region back in the '90s, and protracted instability in the Horn of Africa. Things had

calmed down quite a bit in the Horn of Africa by 2008. It was a period of calm stability, economic growth, private investment, real dynamism, and a new generation of African decision makers who didn't spend all their time carping about colonialism or about the IMF or the World Bank. You had a female president of a stable Liberia now, someone who had come out of the movement of women in Liberia who were just fed up with war and took actions to put a stop to it. Now this new generation of African leaders just wanted to get on with things, to improve their countries. One example, in the 2008 financial crisis everyone thought that this would hit Africa very hard and that African ministries of finance and presidents would make really bad decisions for short term political gain. Africa was affected, but not very much. It continued its growth rates, and they didn't make any kind of self-destructive economic decisions for six or eight months of short-term gain.

Also, part of the stability was much deeper roots for democratic governance, although with retrospect now I can say that we in general, and myself in particular, weren't paying enough attention to corruption and its corrosive effect on ordinary people's faith in and participation in new democratic opportunities. Mali, the country I knew by far the best, and where I had enduring friendships, is for me the prime example of the blindness that I personally and the international community more generally had, when we saw Mali's democracy through rose colored glasses. Corruption, and its corollary of failed governance, is the fundamental reason that we now see ISIS, Wagner Group, and ethnic militias tearing Mali apart, and we weren't paying enough attention at the time to the total loss of faith in their government that many in Mali had at the time; instead, we in the international community were somewhat obliviously celebrating the superficial aspects of free and fair elections there.

In any case, it was a very different Africa, a much more forward looking, positive, stable Africa. Poverty was being reduced in a lot of countries, and even when I was in Africa Bureau in the late '90s, we'd started to see child mortality rates fall pretty rapidly. That was continued at an even faster pace a few years later when I came into Africa Bureau in 2008.

Then you had the president's malaria initiative and there were people in my office who were overseeing this with the Global Health Bureau, but the president's malaria initiative learned some of the lessons of PEPFAR in that it created space for these two very competitive agencies, USAID and the CDC under HHS, but it put it all under the authority of AID and the mission director, but the CDC had a key role and place at the table. The president's malaria initiative worked quite smoothly administratively, but more importantly, it just brought down child mortality rates, you know within two or three years, rapidly scaling up across much of Africa some simple, low-cost interventions such as bednets and house spraying. In all my time in Washington, my most memorable TDYs, in terms of the interactions I had with people, were in Hungary and in Senegal. (In Hungary, I had been asked to give a speech in a small Hungarian city trying to better integrate the Roma and have good relations with them.) In Senegal, in around 2009 I visited this village to see USAID-funded health work: they had all the women's group dressed up dancing and singing, and the chief and then the regional medical officer were

there from the local Senegalese regional provincial medical office. At one point the chief of the village came up to me and he said, “Thank you for saving the lives of our children!” Of course, I hadn’t saved their lives, but he was really thanking AID, thanking America, and it was because of the president’s malaria initiative, so much impact just in a short time.

Another change was—with the exception of some very traditional countries like Mali and Niger—you also had a huge expansion of basic education so that almost all kids were in elementary school, boys and girls. Were they proficient in reading? Well, that became an issue, the quality of education, outcomes. Could they go on to secondary school? Most of them no, but for the first time in Africa you had almost every child in elementary school. So, it was a very positive forward-looking time with a lot of possibilities. It was very different from the Africa I knew, and the first time I’d ever been really optimistic about Africa actually, and the ability of our programs to really make a difference in the past and to make even more of a difference in the future.

*Q: Interesting to hear.*

ATWOOD: It was also a time when we were hiring a lot of young people and so each bureau would have somebody go down and speak to the new employee classes a few times a year, so I often did the spiel for Africa. I put up the map of Africa and I’d talk about here’s what it looked like when I left the Africa Bureau in the ‘90s, in terms of conflict, economic growth, and human development indicators. I’d show how much it had changed, because I wanted people to have a sense of progress and possibility.

*Q: You were with the Africa Bureau then for three years. What were the major issues you were involved with at that point?*

ATWOOD: Any office director in the bureau at that time got involved in managing the process of convincing the new political employees that you were on their side and wanted them to do a good job and help them. I spent a lot of time with one great guy, a mid-level political appointee who was a senior advisor to the AA on the private sector, helping him understand how we worked, where we could support him, where he could build on our skills and knowledge. I loved doing this. And we had a lot of political appointees at that time. We also had somebody directly working on issues that we were working on in gender and democracy and stuff, so it was a matter of helping them see how we could help them, and helping them understand what our missions were doing and where they could help our Missions. So that was one thing.

Related to that was one of many new initiatives. It’s always been a mystery probably to you as well as to me, that for most of my career the Democrats when they’re in charge are all gung-ho on private sector development. And the Republicans when they’re in charge are all gung-ho on meeting the health needs of poor people! Not what you’d expect, in terms of domestic policy, but that was the pattern with international aid.

Anyway, the Obama Administration was very serious about development, and they recognized they had this sort of input-output relationship of money to development. And they knew that in your wildest imaginings of congressional generosity there was never going to be enough money to meet all of the development needs and opportunities there were in the world. So, their view was that part of AID's job is to leverage the private sector because that was where the big bucks were, and if you could leverage private sector investment you could turn it towards things that would have positive outcomes on development, economic growth and improvements in the lives of ordinary people. This got into the transactional approach that I talked about earlier. I spent a lot of time trying to shape some crazy ideas about transactions to leverage the private sector for development in Africa. Just as one example, there was a political appointee who wanted to ship—to dismantle an old fertilizer factory somewhere in Alabama or somewhere, put it on a ship—send it up country in Nigeria, re-assemble it, sell it to a rich Nigerian businessman and really crank up fertilizer production in Africa! On paper maybe a good idea, but it engaged so many issues, of technology, corruption, Nigerian customs, etc.

There was another major initiative that actually ended up coming to fruition, to start—and essentially without calling it that—our own enterprise fund for Africa ran directly out of an Africa Bureau office. So, I spent a lot of time on that, trying to—you know, a lot of it was damage control—trying to mobilize experts in my office or in other bureaus to help shape crazy ideas into something that at least would do no harm and might have some positive impact.

Let's see. I was pretty far away from this but there were many mission issues with PEPFAR, with MCC, so I spent some time with missions, people in the regional offices in dealing with these turf issues with these other new actors in development but it was mainly country missions and the Global Health Bureau that was managing all of that. This was the biggest job I'd ever had in AID other than my acting stint as DAA/E&E. I had 60-70 people working for me, four divisions. I had a budget of over \$100 million, so just managing all of that—I had a great deputy and a great staff, but just managing all that took a fair amount of time.

As an office director in Bureau senior staff meetings, it took me not very long to realize that in every senior staff meeting the only thing we talked about was the presidential election in Zambia; imprisonment of the opposition candidate in Zimbabwe; the crisis in whatever country; the ambassador's ticked off at the mission director in x country; and who is going to go out as the next Ambassador or mission director. You know, in the Africa Bureau there were so many countries. There's an interagency meeting on some country in Africa roughly every day, so the senior staff of Africa Bureau spent a lot of their time just prepping bureau management to go to whatever interagency meeting there was on whatever problem or country that day. I got involved in some of that.

But, as the person in charge of the one office in the Bureau that was tracking progress, problems and possibilities across all the development sectors, I wanted to bring some of the very positive longer-term changes going on to the attention of the Bureau. I rapidly realized that the only thing the senior staff focuses on is all of this stuff, these crises,

interagency meetings, elections, all of this higher-level stuff that is really the purview of the State Department that affects the environment in which our missions work but that shouldn't be the only thing we're thinking about because we're the development agency. So, I made a commitment, which people liked—I mean this wasn't an intrusion on the senior staff meeting. I said, "I feel like it's my job to tell you once a week something exciting and positive that's happening in development that we are responsible for in AID, that our missions have done." I started doing that. I'd get reports from missions, and my sectoral staff would get stuff from their colleagues and field missions, feed it up to me, we put together a biweekly report that we would send back out to the field and to the front office. Here are all the exciting positive things happening; here's some of the problems happening in our countries in these development sectors. And I'd take one of these stories or accomplishments and highlight it in the weekly bureau senior staff meeting to make sure we had a bit of focus on USAID's mandate: development, not just on the crisis and political stuff.

Probably the most important initiative during that time was the Feed the Future Initiative. I mentioned earlier President Obama's first inaugural speech where he laid the basis for a new US food security initiative. Secretary of State Hillary Clinton took that and made it a reality with very high-level ongoing support. Even before she was confirmed she was already engaged in this Feed the Future Initiative, a big initiative to restart the U.S. commitment to food and agricultural development and nutrition in poor countries around the world. I mentioned before the series of events that had led up – over a period of years—to a groundswell of support for restoring US leadership in global agriculture and food security; this a culmination of all of that.

*Q: David, wasn't that a period when there had been at least one major food crisis, sort of similar to right now?*

ATWOOD: Yeah, there was a confluence of three crises in 2008. So, you had this growing movement of outside support, congressional support, to do more in agriculture. Then you had the food price crisis that went alongside the 2008 financial crisis. You had these triple crises at the same time 2007-2008; you had a fertilizer crisis where fertilizer became almost unaffordable in poor countries, which was one of several causes of lower production and higher global food prices; and then you had the financial crisis of 2008. You had this triple whammy. So, the confluence of those crises with this growing buzz and support for food agriculture and nutrition led to somebody—I think it may have been Gayle Smith—getting that little line into President Obama's inaugural speech – the line about helping poor farmers around the world—and then Hillary Clinton was already very supportive of these things. There was a UN high level meeting on food security in Madrid just a couple of days after Secretary of State Clinton was sworn in. She made a video to speak to this meeting to show the world the support of President Obama and her as secretary of state for doing more in food and agriculture in developing countries.

She brought into her front office a core group of people, very committed to Hillary Clinton and very committed to her vision, which was the U.S. government's new food security initiative. Not knowing anything about USAID; not knowing anything about

food or agriculture in developing countries; that core group of people were the people that she designated to design this new food security initiative that became Feed the Future.

I spent a lot of time kind of on the sidelines working with somebody on my staff, Jeff Hill, on this initiative. Jeff had been the architect of the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa of the early 2000s, knew and had had a hand in almost every Mission ag program in Africa and had a great vision of how to implement a major new agriculture initiative. Jeff Hill was working with my boss, Franklin Moore, with the newly appointed head of the EGAT (economic growth and trade) ag office at the time, Josette Lewis, and with someone senior in the humanitarian assistance and food for peace bureau, Susan Bradley. (Jeff and Susan got married a few years later.) They, together with Curt Reintsma, who joined a few months later, coming in from Malawi where he was mission director, became the core USAID team working with Hillary Clinton's staff and folks from other agencies to plan the Feed the Future (FtF) initiative. It was the five of them who – with no real authority other than their experience – were able to feed USAID's extensive experience in food security, agriculture, and nutrition into the design of FtF. They had to fight for a seat at the table but eventually the State Department people realized that AID actually had some experience and knowledge. But every single issue was a battle. Every single bad idea took days to shoot down. I spent a lot of time encouraging, giving them advice, working with our front office on what do we do next on this to kind of shape the food security initiative into something that wouldn't be a bad idea.

For example, one of the bad ideas that people always have when they come into agriculture, you know, we've got to fix this fast. So, we're going to give farmers and businesses a lot of money to grow more food. It's not actually particularly difficult to expand agricultural production when you throw a lot of money at it, but it's not sustainable. To make it sustainable you have to think longer term: where are the buyers, the millers, the wholesalers who are going to sustain the market on their own without AID? How do you get a fertilizer market going instead of just having a project give away cheap fertilizer to increase production? Otherwise, it's totally unsustainable. It's been done plenty of times. We had to argue people out of that.

Then we had tensions and confusion over early country planning and implementation. Jeff Hill knew that we would have to have plans and programs to put money against once the overall FtF strategy and negotiation among agencies was complete. So, he organized African missions to develop food security planning documents, and missions, sometimes with our help, put in a pretty serious and rigorous effort to go from low levels of funding to pretty significant funding levels for agriculture, food security and nutrition and thought pretty carefully and strategically, with many of their partners, about where and how they could have the greatest impact. But the administrator, who was brand new and didn't really know or trust USAID staff, brought the consulting firm McKinsey in to review what we in Africa Bureau had already started in terms of planning for FtF implementation with our missions. So, McKinsey had their teams, very smart, talented, but not knowing much about agriculture, Africa, AID or government implementation, going all over Africa second guessing AID missions, revising their plans that they had

done with partner governments and other partners. McKinsey is full of bright people who don't particularly know anything about your sector. So how do we come up with something that's going to make sense; be responsive to the administrator, but also make a difference on the ground? There were just a bunch of issues like that.

In the middle of all of this, Haiti had its terrible earthquake, and USAID asked for in-house volunteers to help in the relief effort. So, I went off to Haiti for three months, which we can talk about a bit later; after the earthquake, when I came back, there was a new team running Africa Bureau. Franklin Moore had left; Sharon Cromer was acting AA. There were some new political people; the upshot of the food security initiative and many other things was that Administrator Shah was going to take all agriculture staff from regional bureaus and put them in the new Food Security Bureau that was about to be created.

So, I came back and for my last—Let's see, I was in Haiti through May, 2010—For my last year plus in Africa Bureau before I retired from the Foreign Service, I was working on some of those issues and trying to help make this transition to a new Food Security Bureau (taking all of my agriculture staff) in as constructive a way as possible.

*Q: My goodness! Shall we talk about Haiti now or shall we come back?*

ATWOOD: Well, maybe we can finish talking about Africa Bureau.

I came back from Haiti in June, 2010, and I retired at the end of September 2011. So, it was really barely more than a year that I was back in Africa Bureau. In addition to the internal transition of my staff into the new food security bureau, the issues that we were dealing with when I came back were making sure that we abide by the so-called L'Aquila Principles, the principles of AID effectiveness: these were important, along the lines of: it's not our job as donors to decide how countries spend this money on food and agriculture. It's our job to work with them and program it against their priorities, not our priorities, but also help them to establish priorities if they don't have them.

There were a lot of discussions with State Department and others about how do we make sure that this funding is going against African countries' priorities, not the priorities of people in AID or the State Department. For us it was a little harder in some other parts of the world but in Africa one of the other things that had happened—You asked whether it was changed when I came back in 2008—one of the other changes in the landscape was the old Organization for African Unity, which was not very effective in a lot of ways and which spent a lot of time complaining to the rest of the world about Africa's plight: It transformed itself under the visionary guidance of several African presidents into the African Union, and the African Union saw its job as advancing development in Africa especially in agriculture. They had a new peer review process, where if a country had elections and they were crooked elections, the African Union would then get involved in that. They would suspend their membership in the African Union. This has been an aspirational goal rather than a real goal, but it has percolated down at least during that



time into several instances where the Africa Union and subsidiary regional organizations like the West Africa regional trade organization (ECOWAS) suspended Guinea when they had a dishonest election. So, there was this major push by the African Union to bring about responsible governance and better policies and planning by their member states, and especially with a focus on agriculture.

We're seeing this now with the new African CDC. I don't know how effective that is but they're trying to do the same thing – in the health sector—with this new African CDC that had been done in agriculture before, through the African Union. So, all of these African countries, with a lot of help from AID, and in particular from Jeff Hill and some of the European donors, all of these African countries started putting into place their own agricultural plans and increasing their own funding from their own revenue sources for agriculture and then we helped on the technical side of putting in an AU peer review process for African agricultural authorities to review their member countries' agricultural plans. We spent a lot of time, and I spent a lot of time with our front office, and my staff spent a lot of time, especially Jeff, making the case to the State Department that look, you have these countries that have really turned a corner. They're taking responsibility, they're using their own funds to do more in agriculture. Their own funds are going to be more than our funds! We need to work with them and help them in providing our funding to support their priorities. Eventually this all got accepted but it took a lot of time and effort to get accepted as a principle and a practice of the new food security initiative, because it did mean the US giving up some control.

So, I came back from Haiti and spent a lot of time working on that issue and then on the internal organization issue. The Administrator had made what I thought at the time was a very bad decision to start a new Food Security Bureau. How do we make this work since Africa Bureau and my staff had more people than any other part of AID in agriculture at the time. When the food security initiative had been announced a year or so earlier, our bureau went to the EGAT Bureau and said, "This thing is coming. This is a lot of money, a lot of missions, a lot of coordination. We need more agriculture staff in the agency." EGAT wouldn't hire anybody else. They had an acting head of EGAT, a political appointee who was just totally risk averse and was unwilling to take the risk of hiring new technical staff even with a major new need and initiative. So, Franklin Moore had gotten the front office to agree that as long as we justified it, we could hire additional staff. I think we created six or seven more ag positions, hired two or three of those people. We had by far the biggest regional ag staff and also the only new ag positions in the agency.

But now, where are these positions going to go? They're going to go to the new Food Security Bureau. All our regional programs were going to the new Food Security Bureau, how do we manage that? Jeff Hill refused to go to the new Food Security Bureau and I convinced him that it would be much better for him and for his vision for African agriculture and for the African Union and for our missions if he were inside making things work than outside just carping and telling them that they're doing everything wrong. As I was preparing to retire, my ag staff transitioned into this new Food Security Bureau so that's probably the thing I spent the most time on my last year in

Africa SD, how to make that transition work. Also, kind of informally advising Bill Garvelink – the first head of that new bureau – on what he needed and what my staff were good at. Anyway, that was probably one of the more difficult—If you work in AID for 30 years you get involved in a reorganization every five or so years—but this was probably the most difficult reorganization I’d ever been involved in.

*Q: Soon we’ll take a break, but do you want to talk about why you retired at that point?*

ATWOOD: Yeah. Maybe I could talk about Haiti too.

*Q: Okay. So, David, we were talking about a couple of last things before you retired. You had a TDY to Haiti; you said three months. Why don’t you tell us about that?*

ATWOOD: Okay, so there were two other times in my career—I’d never wanted to do an unaccompanied assignment—but there were two other times in my career when I’d gone off for what I considered a long time, three months in Cameroon in grad school, two months in Ethiopia during the famine; I knew absolutely nothing about Haiti but when the earthquake happened, I just felt like Haiti’s gotten such a raw deal out of everything for their entire existence and I think a lot of people in AID felt the same way, so a lot of us volunteered for a TDY to help out in Haiti.

*Q: This is 2010, right?*

ATWOOD: Yes, 2010. The day after Administrator Shah was confirmed he got hit with this. He set up a coordination office run by a man named Lou Lucke; AID was designated to be in charge of the entire earthquake response, including coordinating the military, which had a deputy commander of the Southern Command in Port au Prince for several months and his 6,000 to 8,000 uniformed military, either on ships off shore or in the capital, so it was a big coordination effort. After I put my name in to volunteer, I didn’t hear from them for weeks, and then Snowmageddon hit—You were in DC for Snowmageddon, right? During Snowmageddon, the series of blizzards that closed down Washington in early February, all of a sudden, I got a call from Phil Gary. Phil had been my agency advisor when I was at ICAF and he was on the faculty there in the USAID slot. He was now organizing AID volunteers for Haiti. In the middle of Snowmageddon, I got a call from him: “David, we want you to go to Haiti next week!”

I got to Haiti at the same time as Chris Milligan. The coordination effort was kind of a mess. It was such a huge, tragic, and complex challenge. So many agencies involved. And the coordinator’s office under Lou Lucke and the mission under Carleene Dei were not speaking to each other because Carleene—She had arrived in Haiti just the day or two days before the earthquake herself, and her biggest priority was just to get her staff organized and taken care of. I mean she’d had staff who had family members killed, she had a lot of American Haitian staff who couldn’t go back to their houses because of the earthquake. So, Lou Lucke working for the administrator just wanted to just chop, chop, chop. This is an emergency, which it was. You need to mobilize your staff and her staff were not mobilizable. So, he stopped talking to the mission, which was not a good thing.

So, it's now about a month or so later, mid-February. They asked Chris and me to go down. Chris as Lou's deputy, me as program officer. I'd never been a program officer in my life, but part of my job was to get things done and get the mission engaged and repair the bad blood between the mission and the coordinator's office and then try to get more coordination among the various agencies there, especially drawing the mission back into the effort as that became possible.

So, Chris eventually replaced Lou Lucke who said from the beginning he was just going to spend six weeks or whatever it was. So, Chris became interagency earthquake coordinator probably for the March through—I don't know—July period when he left. I was his deputy during part of that time. But my job was also inside the embassy coordinating with the military, coordinating across agencies, and mainly getting our corps of different people in the coordinator's office who came from a bunch of different agencies to start talking with each other and the mission, so everybody knew what everyone else was doing.

As just one of many examples of why coordination was important: At one point we had three different groups of people who were talking to different parts of the government, about resettling the same IDPs in three different areas before the rains started devastating some of the IDP camps. So, once we got people talking to each other those things changed. So that's one of the other times when I worked harder than any other time in AID. But it was all kind of getting people talking to each other and making sure that they were all working together in the same effort and not duplicating efforts or in the case of IDP relocation getting contradictory efforts blocking each other.

Another coordination example was when suddenly, with no advance warning, the military sent us about ten civilian and military engineers from the Seabees. We had to figure out what to do with them. They arrived at eight one morning, unannounced. Peter Natielo, one of the USAID FSOs in our coordination unit, spent some time with them and pretty quickly he and they decided the best thing they could do would be train a bunch of Haitian engineers in rapid structural assessment. The IDPs were staying on in the IDP camps long after the earthquake, months longer in some cases, something no one had anticipated, partly because people are so poor in Haiti that for some of them, they were getting better services in the camps than they would at home, but also because a lot of people were very fearful to return to their homes, not knowing if they were safe to live in. So, Peter and these Seabees pretty quickly put into place a cadre of Haitian engineers with a pretty simple structural damage assessment method and a way (with just red-yellow-green symbols painted on houses) for people to know if their house had been assessed as unsafe, marginal or safe.

I visited an Internally Displaced Persons (IDP) camp only once. I hardly did any traveling; just about everything was inside the Embassy. We did hire two very smart, experienced former Peace Corps volunteers who knew Haiti well and had Haitian Creole to give us a better sense of how things were in the camps, why people were staying so long after the earthquake instead of going home. We got some good things done like getting better coordination with the UN so we could get streetlights in the IDP camps

because women were getting raped going to the bathroom at night. We worked with the military to slow them down. You know the military, whenever they see a problem, once they've defined something as a problem, they have to solve it quickly, so we tried to slow them down in some of their initiatives in the way they were dealing with some of the IDP camps.

This was a time when Haiti's President Preval, who Carleene had gotten to know in her first month (before I arrived in late February) was really literally in shock from what had happened and was basically unable to do anything, so finally—I don't know if it was Carleene—but finally he agreed to visit the camps for internally displaced people (IDPs) with the deputy commander of the U.S. military's Southern Command, General Keene, and Chris Milligan, who at this time had taken over as overall U.S.G. relief coordinator. General Keene was out every day talking to people who had been affected by the earthquake, just in the same way he would be talking to his own troops, showing the flag, encouraging them, in a conflict situation. It's just what a good military officer does. But he was outshining President Preval in front of his own people. The president was not engaging his people in the IDP camp. He wasn't talking to anybody. His own house had fallen down, his office had been destroyed. People he knew had been killed. He was in total shock. But he agreed to go on this walk around an IDP camp and so General Keene at one point stepped forward and started talking to some of the IDPs and Chris took him aside and said, "General Keene, let's wait and see if the president will talk to these people." And so, there was the first time that the president actually started talking to people who had been affected by the earthquake. Which, you know, if a disaster occurs in America whoever is president, they do that. But General Keene was such a doer he'd taken charge. That's what the military does, but Chris got him to give that space to the Haitian president.

When you're doing coordination it's not a very tangible thing. So, we also spent a lot of time on the phone and in video calls with Washington. Every day. Twice a week we would have a video conference with the Haiti coordination taskforce, with the State Department Haiti coordination taskforce, who else was on that call? Just to tell them what was going on. I don't have a lot to say about that time other than I felt like the biggest thing I did was get people talking to each other and coordinating with each other within the U.S. government who were working often unintentionally at cross purposes or at least not seeing where they could get more done working together.

*Q: David, as I recall you mentioned the AID coordination group on Haiti. I was told by one of those people that Hillary Clinton's "person for Haiti" often overruled those decisions without a lot of knowledge.*

ATWOOD: Yes, this was the Clintons' personal lawyer, very hard driving, very committed African American named Cheryl Mills. She was the same person who was taking the lead on the food security initiative. She was under an enormous amount of pressure, trying to do the right thing, totally loyal to the Clintons, who themselves were very committed to Haiti. But yes, there was a lot of second guessing, a lot of not buying the recommendations of both the mission and of our coordination unit. Some of this,

however, was political – there was such interest and support in Congress for Haiti, that often what we considered off the wall priorities would come down to us and we'd have to move them forward, or if not off the wall, at least things that we considered lower priority in terms of the relief and transition effort. One other thing I'll say about Cheryl Mills is this, even though we often disagreed with her (on both FtF and Haiti) she was both totally committed, and really engaged, had probably one of the most demanding jobs in government at the time, and this while she had very young twins in her growing family.

My memory of that coordination function is more the metrics. Everyday Washington wanted to know the metrics. And there weren't that many things you can measure in Haiti. So how many had access to clean water? More people in Haiti had access to clean water as a result of the earthquake response from all the donors than had ever had access to clean water before. (This was half a year or so, however, before UN peacekeeping troops brought cholera to Haiti.) So, every week, how many people have access to clean water? Not every week! Sometimes every other day or twice a week! How many latrines have been built in the IDP camp? That was a key metric. How many latrines? Why didn't you build more latrines this week? Get the NGOs cranked up!

Another issue we had is OFDA, the Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance, the way they work. They are incredible. They can mobilize a DART team, Disaster Assistance Response Team, almost instantaneously when there's a disaster, which they did in Haiti. The DART teams have this incredible contracting authority where basically they have some of the best NGOs in the world on call for emergencies like hurricanes, which are somewhat predictable. You get a couple of days' notice, or things like an earthquake, which is not predictable at all. So, by the time Chris and I got to Haiti, which was late February of 2010, OFDA already had a number of super-competent NGOs on the spot getting medical supplies to the IDPs, getting latrines built, getting access to water for people, and providing food to them. Also, by the time we were there, the military was there, so Cheryl Mills and possibly President Obama, Raj Shah, all the people who were making decisions, felt that even though the military had no direct role by this time, they had an important intangible role. They had important roles in the first few weeks after the earthquake but by the time I got there six weeks later, late February, they had no direct role. The Brazilian military was there to keep the gangs from getting out of hand in the slums, to be there when food was given out so there wouldn't be a riot over the food. But that was the Brazilian UN-hatted military that was doing that.

The U.S. military was sometimes asked to be there to show the flag but not to do anything. So, you had all these men and women in the U.S. military who were about to rotate back to Afghanistan who thought that they were going to be on training and really basically be with their families for six months and all of a sudden, they're sent to Haiti for the earthquake.

One of the key things that we were supposed to do is come up with a strategy to get to the point where the military could leave. And this became a little bit of an issue because the military's role at this point was undefined. President Obama, Cheryl Mills, Secretary Clinton, Raj Shah, all thought that the U.S. military— given Haiti's sometimes violent

history—was very important to provide “ambient security.” The idea was that the “ambient security” environment is enhanced by having uniformed U.S. military there, but nobody had a role for them. And so there you have these enlisted guys who are sitting around the embassy front lobby eating pizza, which neither General Keene nor the ambassador liked. So, everyone wanted to get the military out of Haiti but everyone in Washington felt like we have to keep the military there another few weeks or otherwise things might fall apart in Haiti from a security point of view.

As a result of that concern, I helped organize a series of strategic transition plans: in the course of my three months, we had three strategic exercises in which we were trying to gather all the metrics and try to identify at what point the US military can leave and get back to their families before they have to redeploy to Afghanistan?

We first did this in house. That wasn’t good enough. Then we had a team from AID Washington come out. It wasn’t very well organized and they tried to put together a strategy, when can the U.S. military leave and when do we transition back to post emergency assistance programs? Then we got a team led by David Eckerson, former mission director, people who knew Haiti and they did a very good job of spelling out what it would take to move from emergency to regular assistance, how to build on the AID programs, and how to get to the point where the military could stand down.

By the time I left I think it had a slow drawdown of the military but they were still there in a lot of numbers when I left at the end of May.

*Q: Any lessons learned here for emergencies?*

ATWOOD: Okay, so here’s where I was going with this. The military uses contractors for their own security. They use contractors for food, for all sorts of things. They just don’t use them for their core mission which is combat. But USAID uses contractors for our core mission. The military guys in Haiti never understood that. I think they probably equated us using a contractor to do emergency relief to the equivalent of them using mercenaries in a war. In addition, there was some bad blood between one or two of the DART people and the military, some turf issues, some personality issues. But basically, the military could just not wrap their arms around the idea of, “Wait, you’ve got like ten people on your DART team and we have 6,000 troops helping out. Why do you have only ten people on your DART?” They didn’t see that the ten person DART team mobilized hundreds of people and many more local staff from the best emergency relief NGOs in the world. “We’ve got 6,000 people here! You sent ten people here on your DART team? And then you have a few contractors out there?” They hated that model. They absolutely hated it.

And then there was a move, which failed later on after the emergency, in the military to take on the OFDA model and get rid of it; to force the U.S. government, really USAID, to drop working through OFDA DART model. So that also took some of my time just working with the military to explain how this works. We have this incredible contracting authority, World Vision, Save the Children; these are the world’s experts on helping

people in an emergency, and we got them in one day to come to Haiti. But that took a lot of my time talking about that with—Oh, I also have a little anecdote on Haiti.

Before I went down to Haiti, I remember sitting in my bedroom room packing my two suitcases. One suitcase had my basic travel stuff – clothes, toiletries, a couple of books etc. But in the other suitcase I had thumb tacks, staples, paper, I had all the stuff you get in an AID supply cabinet because I knew that even if there weren't an earthquake in Haiti, USAID missions can be a bit disorganized. And certainly, in Haiti where they'd experienced the earthquake, I couldn't count on getting any help from the mission. So, I packed one suitcase full of stuff that I knew I could rely on so I wouldn't have to rely on the mission. Then I get to Haiti and my first or second day there's this little a former conference room in the Embassy, across the hall from USAID, now fitted out with equipment and it says "NGA." I'd never heard of NGA. NGA is the National Geospatial Agency. It's one of the like twenty intel agencies in the U.S. government intelligence community, it's part of the U.S. military. They make maps. I just wandered over. My timid AID thinking was that I can get no help from anybody. But I wandered over to the NGA and I said, "You guys make maps?" "Yeah, what do you want?" "Well, I don't know Haiti at all. Could I get a map of like roads, secondary cities, I don't know, rivers?" I added a couple of other things. They said, "When do you want that?" "I don't know." I figured it would take them a week or something. They said, "Come back in an hour!" So just as an example, here the AID mission is almost crippled because they suffered from the earthquake and AID tends to be not so organized anyway and I expected nothing from the mission. And my second or third day I wander into this other U.S.G. agency, a military and intel agency, and they can deliver me whatever I want in an hour! So that was a shock to me!

*Q: Any other lessons learned in an emergency such as that?*

ATWOOD: I think it's hard to learn lessons from Haiti. Haiti is such a difficult, challenging and unique place. Just that it's important to coordinate with everybody involved with something like that. Probably for me the most important development lessons in Haiti for USAID could be learned from Paul Farmer in Partners in Health where they were very involved in the emergency but at the very same time, they had the vision to build this teaching hospital upcountry in Haiti. They did that and they're creating a whole new cadre of Haitian physicians. I'm sure there are lessons learned from AID's longer-term programs there, but I didn't know enough about that to know what those lessons are.

*Q: So, you came back to the Africa Bureau, and you decided to retire.*

ATWOOD: I always thought that I'd probably work until I was 70. I loved working for AID and financially also that made sense. But I also was looking at the 65-year mandatory retirement for Foreign Service Officers. I'm 61, it's 2011. I turned 61 in March 2011 while I was in Haiti. Administrator Shah was in many ways great for AID and he made decisions that I thought were totally wrong headed, some of which turned out to be good decisions like creating the Bureau for Food Security. But it was a really

difficult time to be mid-level or senior career staff in AID. There was a very high level of distrust. A desire to change everything, a lack of buying into the paradigm of development that was most of my career – that policy change and building host country capacity are what we do. Then, I had just some difficult working relationships with some of the political people in the Africa Bureau. So, all of that led me to decide that—and it was pretty clear I wasn't going to go overseas again—all that led me to retire.

*Q: What grade were you at this point?*

ATWOOD: I'd been promoted into the Senior Foreign Service when I was in the E&E Bureau; I wasn't going to go any farther or get promoted unless I went overseas again which I wasn't ready to do. I was Counselor (OC) at that time, so I just decided that it was my time to retire, but that I would keep working in some capacity in development work.

I spent a lot of time talking, getting advice from people and I thought it might be fun working in a think tank on some of the issues I've worked with because I've always been very interested in strategy, analysis, using evidence in planning policies and programs, I had a bit of a publications record. I thought I could do that at a think tank. For a while Larry Garber was the DAA that I was working with in Africa Bureau and Larry Garber said and I knew this already, "Unless you're a big name, a think tank will hire you if you're very young and they don't have to pay you much, or if you're bringing business and money." So, I wasn't a name, and I didn't have connections to bring business or money. And he said, "There are places in AID where you can do the same kind of work you do in a think tank so think about that." So, I did think about that. And that's kind of what I ended up starting out doing in the Food Security Bureau after I retired, when I joined that Bureau as a PASA employee.

During my last year in AID when I started thinking about retirement and people knew about it, Greg Gottlieb who Bill Garvelink brought in as his deputy in the new Food Security Bureau, started joking with me about coming back to the new bureau. Greg Gottlieb who at this time was the deputy in this sort of nascent Food Security Bureau, every time I'd see him—I was going down there every day to say you know, "I think I've got so and so who's ready to come to the bureau." Or "When you recruit for this position make sure you get this kind of person—" I mean they sought advice from people and they saw that even though they were taking all my staff that I was trying to make it work and trying to help them make the new bureau functional. So, I would talk to Greg or Bill Garvelink a few times a week, so Greg every time I'd see him, he'd say, "Okay, Dave, are you going to come? When are you going to start working for us? When you retire just give us the word!" So that's what I ended up doing when I retired. I ended up working as a PASA for them and that stretched out to eight years and it was a lot of fun.

*Q: Okay, David, you retired, you had a wonderful departure ceremony. You've sent me the information about what you said there which is very positive about so many people you worked with.*



ATWOOD: Well that actually was my retirement after retirement. That was in 2019, after the Bureau for Food Security. I'm going to put those "farewell addresses" into this as the last chapter!

*Q: So, you retired and came back. How much later, a month or two later, to work for the Bureau as a contractor or PASA?*

ATWOOD: Well yeah, as these things go, I was told, "You're retiring September 30. We'll have you back working in the Bureau of Food Security October 1<sup>st</sup> but nobody had done the paperwork so it took about six weeks or something, yeah.

*Q: And what was your job there?*

ATWOOD: I mentioned this guy Jeff Hill who I used to supervise and who really had been the driving force behind USAID and agriculture for a long time. When Jeff finally moved to the Bureau of Food Security, they were struggling to find where to put him. Jeff was incredibly talented, but hadn't taken kindly to the new bureau taking his ag staff and, more importantly, saw a lack of care there in how they were taking on the Africa bureau programs and partners that were now moving to the new bureau. But when they decided that the new Bureau needed a unit focused on policy, that was the perfect place to put Jeff, and he started recruiting some of his old bosses with a lot of policy experience, Ron Greenberg and me, among the staff of this new unit.

But let me back up and say how this policy unit started in the new Food Security Bureau. It became a really important part of the bureau, for our credibility in the interagency food security FtF initiative, but also it was where I spent my final eight happy years working more or less full time. I had mentioned the country plans that we in Africa Bureau asked missions to prepare early in FtF. This idea then got taken on wholesale by the Bureau of Food Security. They went out to all the new food security initiative missions and embassies and asked for country plans based on those country's own priorities. Then those country plans got reviewed by an interagency group of like 60 people, but the two key people who co chaired the meetings were Paul Weisenfeld, who at that time had replaced Bill Garvelink as head of food security in AID, and a senior State Department guy who I can't remember, career state, who was the head of the little State Department food security coordination office that had now shifted out of Secretary Clinton's office to become a more normalized regular part of the State Department.

Paul and his State Department counterpart were cochairing the interagency reviews of these country plans. Each day they'd review one or two of them with 60 people in the room, and at one point they each turned to the other one and they said, "You know, none of this is going to work if these countries don't have a good policy environment in place in their food and agriculture system." So that led to a much bigger emphasis on policy and so Paul—This was right at the time that Jeff Hill as the last holdout from Africa Bureau is moving into the Bureau for Food Security, and they hadn't figured out what to do with Jeff. They assigned Jeff the job of creating a new policy unit in the Bureau of Food Security to help missions and embassies work with governments to put into place

more conducive food and agriculture policies. I was hired into that unit to work with Jeff and a handful of other people in creating this new kind of function that hadn't originally been envisaged when all the FtF planning had been done in the Secretary's Office.

Initially for the first two or three years, my work on the policy team did resemble a think tank job because I get to spend a fair amount of time looking at what the bureau is doing and saying because they're so focused on metrics and specific things in country plans, "Are you thinking about this? Do we need to have somebody who pays attention to global developments in agriculture, not just the countries we're working in? Do we need to be thinking about governance in agriculture?" At one point I listed about 10 different issues that nobody was working on and got people to start thinking that if we are the U.S. government food security initiative, the global food security initiative in poor countries around the world, these are issues we need to be dealing with. Eventually all those issues got covered as the bureau expanded.

I spent a lot of time surveying the literature on whether small-holder farmers can actually be productive farmers and solve the food problem in their country. There was a lot written on that. This was a very big academic controversy, and the bureau was paying no attention to it at all. I did stuff like that, that was both fun and interesting and got things on the agenda of the management of the Food Security Bureau. I was still spending a lot of time just coordinating with State Department and looking at these country plans and seeing how they're being implemented.

So maybe we could stop there and then there was a second phase of my work in the bureau, much more with missions that I can talk to when we come back.

*Q: Well, thank you, David.*

ATWOOD: One other thing John. I did this TDY in Bangladesh in 2013, so it was two years into my work in the bureau. There were three parts to that TDY. I went to Bangladesh just to see what the food security programs looked like there. I went on to Cambodia to attend a regional Asian food security conference that we were sponsoring and then I went to the first ever global food security conference in Holland. There had been all sorts of agriculture and nutrition conferences. This was the first ever global food security conference. It was just outside of Amsterdam. It was during one of the government shut downs. But we weren't sure there was going to be a shut-down when I departed for this extended TDY, and nobody was supposed to attend conferences during a shut-down but I wasn't a U.S. government employee. I was a University of Maryland employee on loan to USDA. So, I got to be the one sort-of U.S. government representative at this global food security conference in Amsterdam and I delivered a paper on why we can't forget about small holder farmers in food security and agriculture.

But what I wanted to talk about very briefly was the part of my TDY in Bangladesh. I think I talked about being in Bangladesh at a really exciting time when we were assigned there in the 90s. The Green Revolution had finally come to Bangladesh, where poor people's nutrition was improving and you could see this month by month as HKI, Helen

Keller International, was doing these nutrition surveys: production increased, grain prices came down, families had more money to buy more diverse diets, very exciting time, 1992–1996 when I was there. I left in 1996 and only went back this one time, in 2013, so 17 years later.

I had been told that the food security initiative in Bangladesh had chosen to focus on the poorest parts of the country. So, we go down to southern Bangladesh, one of the poorest parts of Bangladesh, and we're there with an old friend of mine, a guy who worked with CIMMYT, the international Maize and Wheat Research Institute, in Bangladesh for many years. So, I'm down there with this group of people but including my friend, Craig Meisner, who probably knew Bangladesh better than any other American at the time. And I'm just amazed by what I see. We go through this little secondary village and there's a baby taxi dealership. It's not just that there are baby taxis, these motorized three wheelers you see in Asia, but that had barely existed in smaller secondary cities 20 years earlier, but there's a dealership for them now! I look out on the fields as we're driving by, fields that in the 90s would have been entirely rice, necessary for life, but not a high value crop. Now on this trip back, yes, there's some rice here but also a crazy patchwork of many other crops as well, higher value crops, papaya, fishponds. We visited a fishpond and there's this whole—When I was in Bangladesh the concern was that there wouldn't be enough protein in 10 years because the rivers were fished out. All of a sudden there's this huge aquaculture industry that has doubled the amount of fish protein available to people in Bangladesh and that's where their protein comes from, mainly fish. So, I just see this remarkable transformation and I turn to Craig Meisner, and I say, "Craig, the mission people told us they were putting these programs in the poorest part of Bangladesh, what's going on here, were they misleading us, this doesn't look poor to me?" He says, "This IS the poorest part of Bangladesh! You should see what's going on up north!" So that was a real privilege for me to see what had happened in Bangladesh from the time I'd been there 17 years earlier to 2013. It was really just amazing!

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*Q: Good morning. This is John Pielemeier on the 1<sup>st</sup> of August 2022, third interview with David Atwood. We have a number of items to go over, and David's ready to go, so David let's just go ahead and start with the policy issues you wanted to discuss.*

ATWOOD: Well John, you had asked me to talk a little bit about Secretary of State Hillary Clinton's Quadrennial Development and Diplomacy Review, the QDDR modeled on the Quadrennial Defense Review. That Defense Department review had been taking place for a number of years and was mandated by law for Defense. I thought I might talk very briefly about my involvement as one of literally hundreds of AID people who got involved in the QDDR. And also, a couple of similar reviews that took place in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau around the same time or a little earlier. I'll start talking about that and then move into my final job in the Bureau of Food Security after I retired from the FS.

Anybody who's worked for AID more than a few years has been involved in many strategy reviews and many reorganizations. That's part of our job to just always be thinking about how we can do our work better. And it's also just part of the way bureaucracies operate. But there were three strategic reviews that a number of AID people—mid-level, senior, junior—were involved in, and I was one of those people. I thought I'd talk about all three of them. I alluded to a couple of them earlier when discussing the Europe and Eurasian Bureau.

One was the mandate by the State Department coordinator for all assistance to the E&E region—military, economic, development—to come up with criteria by which countries would graduate. I did talk about that graduation exercise led by Carlos Pasquale earlier. That was a pretty important exercise and, in a way, unprecedented as an interagency exercise to be clear about how we're going to graduate countries; what they need to achieve for us to feel like they've made irreversible progress.

*Q: That was because there was pressure, these were countries that were different from the Africas of the world. These were more developed countries in Eastern Europe, and we didn't need to keep them all in the AID program nearly as long. That was the idea?*

ATWOOD: Yes, exactly. I arrived in the Europe and Eurasia Bureau in 2003, so this was already long after Congress and the early Clinton administration, and even the George W. Bush and George H. W. Bush thought that there would be taxpayers paying for foreign aid in the former communist countries. In the 1990s people thought it would be in and out: the thinking was these are educated people, good institutions; just get rid of communism and markets will flourish. There was already a great deal of impatience about continued funding and some recognition that the countries that were still getting aid were those that really had much greater challenges than the Czech Republics, Polands, that really had made the transition somewhat quickly and graduated.

The other State Department-AID specific thing that I was involved in was the Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice and AID Administrator Randall Tobias foreign aid reorganization that basically moved budget and policy decisions to the State Department, but did try to come up with a clear sort of categorized way to think about how we deliver foreign aid, in what circumstances, through what mechanisms. As I discussed earlier, my staff and I got very involved in that because that was the kind of exercise that could make all sorts of wrong turns, make big mistakes by making assumptions based on sort of lack of knowledge about how AID actually works on the ground. So, we invested several months of time—probably for some people a third or half of their time—in trying to make that as good as it could be, given that it was almost a merger of AID and State at policy and budget level.

The QDDR that you asked me about was one I didn't mention before because it really didn't go anywhere, but it was important, nonetheless. Secretary of State Clinton early in the Obama administration, on the heels of this Secretary of State Rice and administrator Tobias "foreign aid reform," on the heels of that maybe less than two years later, Secretary of State Clinton mandated something called a Quadrennial Diplomacy and

Defense Review. (To my knowledge, this was the first and last of them, so they never became quadrennial.) Her intent was to elevate diplomacy and development as a co-equal level with defense as a tool of national security. That general instinct that Secretary Clinton had I think was something that was supported by pretty much everybody in the State Department and AID and certainly by several secretaries of defense under George W. Bush and then under President Obama; those Defense Secretaries, who spoke out very publicly that Congress and the American people need to understand that the diplomacy function of the State Department, the development function of USAID and other agencies, are an equally important tool; sometimes more important than military means to accomplish our national security goals.

The instinct behind the QDDR was good. The process was a pretty—How shall I say?—a frustrating process because the rules of the game were you'd take off your hat; you're not here to represent AID or Africa or State Economic Bureau, you're here to represent diplomacy and development and we're all going to work together. But of course, people were always very conscious of turf and of losing power, of losing influence over budgets and programs and stuff. This was a very detailed process which floundered along for a long time including why were we even doing this? What were the topline approaches to this? It involved multiple meetings by pretty senior people and then a lot of staff, by sector, by region. It did produce a Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. (QDDR). But Congress wasn't interested in this and it didn't really go anywhere. It didn't really have much influence but it was in an attempt to carry out the desire to elevate diplomacy and development and it took a lot of people's time.

At one point, you know, all of us in AID, in multiple meetings, were called—We weren't called on, but we felt compelled to point out ways in which sometimes some of our colleagues in the State Department weren't understanding the function of development. The fundamental—I guess a lot of these disagreements came down to State Department being focused on the input: assistance, the tool, the input, the money buys you influence, the money buys you allies. For just about everybody in AID—especially since the 1990s reorganization under Brian Atwood, but certainly decades before that—we think in terms of development outcomes and the money, the “assistance,” as just an input to get somewhere which is development and improving people's lives.

So, in many different ways and at many different times, everybody from AID involved in that process had to one way or another at very high level or very micro level make that point that look we're not just talking about money to be a short-term tool of foreign policy; we're talking about transforming these countries, these institutions, these people's lives, and the money buys us projects, advisors, policy changes, institutional capacities that can lead to such transformation. That is, development as a key tool in national security because if we fail in development, then these countries are going to face more conflict, war, and be drawn into the orbit of countries that are hostile to us. So that was an ongoing discussion that I don't even remember the times I made that point, but I made that point multiple times as did many other people in these AID meetings.

*Q: I do remember being part of that process at the margins, as a consultant and hearing you make that point, the difference between what diplomacy can achieve and how*

*development's trying to achieve (it) with an audience of State Department people that I felt was just very effective.*

ATWOOD: When you mentioned that to me before, I couldn't even remember the specific meeting, but I just remember the dread that I had going to those meetings. Not because I was particularly scared, but that it was just so painful for everybody, going through that process.

John, maybe that's a good segue into the Bureau for Food Security, because one thing that we got right I think with State Department finally when things got going, was sort of marking these boundaries between and synergies between diplomacy, the State Department's role, and development, which was AID's role, so shall I move into that now?

*Q: Yes*

ATWOOD: I'm going to be speaking a little bit from notes and not looking as much as I should at the camera. Well, there are four different things I did in the Bureau of Food Security but let me carry that Diplomacy and Development conversation a little further.

I started talking about the early days of the Bureau of Food Security a couple of weeks ago. I talked about the State Department-led process where we had five people from AID who were very influential in finally shaping the FtF initiative in reasonably good ways towards more sustainable outcomes, building on USAID experience and things like that. There was still a lot of back and forth between the Secretary of State's office and AID over who had final decision making, how programs were going to run, what they looked like, what countries to choose, but things were on a pretty good track.

Bill Garvelink (William J. Garvelink) was a very senior AID manager. Bill had been ambassador to Zaire, is that right? That was a really big country to have an AID ambassador. So, Ambassador Garvelink came in from the field, sort of the capstone of his AID career—After you're a mission director if you're very lucky and do very well you might become an ambassador—he was asked to be the first AA of the new Bureau of Food Security and really to build it up, hire staff and everything. That's when he took all my staff in Africa Bureau!

But as the bureau kind of got its legs and got organized and as the State Department devolved these functions from Cheryl Mills and the Secretary of State's office down to a senior coordinator in the State Department with a small staff, that first State Department coordinator, Pat Haslach, knew Bill very well and they worked well together. She had come in from being ambassador to Ethiopia. Anyway, there was one crucial meeting on some issue and at the end of that meeting Ambassador Haslach and Bill were talking about the meeting afterwards and Pat said something along the lines of, "Bill, I realize that you now have so many staff who know what they're doing, and we have this little coordination office of a handful of people. We need to take advantage of AID skills and staff and capabilities and stop competing on this." So that was a really important thing for

her to say to him. Out of that came a pretty good demarcation of responsibilities where we were seen as taking the lead on development. For AID to be taking the lead on anything in Feed the Future (FtF) was a major step forward, because for example it wasn't that way in the E&E Bureau where there was a State Department coordinator. In theory AID had the lead on nothing. All decisions, everything, were taken by the State coordinator in E&E and AID was considered just an "implementer."

So, it was a big deal for this senior person to say to Bill Garvelink, "You know, you guys have the staff, the knowledge, the experience, the capability; we need to really build on that and defer to you on development issues." So, the demarcation between diplomacy and development in FtF actually worked pretty well, especially once the new policy function got built into FtF.

Jeff Hill's policy team that I was a part of spent a lot of time working with State and other agencies to jointly hammer out a policy agenda for Feed the Future but more importantly a process by which embassies, AID missions, and other agencies at posts, sometimes the Ag attaché, sometimes Department of Commerce, sometimes other U.S. agencies, would come to an agreement on their key policy dialogue priorities around food security in their country and in that country-based approach the diplomacy function was owned by the State Department and the ambassador.

As an example, if we believe that we need to have a dialogue with a host government on their policy of imposing tariffs on grain imports, which is going to raise prices and hurt people's nutrition, as well as the broader regional economy in Africa, the lead on that policy dialogue issue is really the ambassador and probably the Embassy econ office. They may, and often do, get the AID mission involved and are happy to and there's a good relation, and in practice it may be the AID mission director who's taking that on, but in theory on paper, that's the diplomacy function and that's the embassy.

But when it comes to for example building up the capacity of a local think tank to do studies on tariffs, on wheat imports, or designing the project that is going to increase the country's productivity in producing grain so that they can compete with imports, things like that, that was clearly seen as an AID function.

Now for people a generation before us, John, like the old timers from the '70s, this would be ridiculous. "Why are we even talking about this?" Of course, this is what AID knows about, but as you know, since at least the '90s when Senator Jesse Helms tried to merge AID with State and certainly since the 2000s with all these mergers and talk of who's in charge of what, this FtF change was a major explicit recognition by the State Department that USAID has the lead on the substantive functions within FtF in terms of development.

One of the last things that the outgoing Obama National Security Council did on food security was clarify something that had been ambiguous during the entire Obama administration, which was who was really the coordinator of all of FtF? Was that the State Department or AID? The demarcation for much of the Obama administration was State Department had the coordinator for diplomacy in FtF, the AID administrator was

the coordinator for development in FtF and that was delegated to Bill Garvelink. In the very last days of the Obama administration the NSC—I think Gayle Smith did this, she was administrator by then. Anyway, they put out this policy that AID is the coordinator of FtF. We were sure that would get reversed by the incoming administration whether it was a Democratic or a Republican one, and certainly by Trump, but they were busy with other things and never reversed it.

That's how we had a pretty good demarcation between diplomacy and development in FtF; diplomacy being policy and development being pretty much everything else.

*Q: Thank you. That's helpful.*

ATWOOD: There were four different things I was involved in in FtF. I thought I would talk about them a little bit and then answer your questions. This may take a while, this might be 20 minutes or half an hour and if you want me to speed up or move onto something else, just let me know.

There are four things I got involved in with FtF in the Bureau of Food Security. One is—and I mentioned this just at the end last time, this was like working in a think tank for me, and I'll elaborate on that in a minute—in terms of being able to do some free-standing analysis and think about things that nobody else had time to think about and what the relevance was for the program and the bureau.

Second—maybe I talked a lot about this already—I was part of this policy team introducing a process and standards for food security policy dialogue for both embassies and AID missions.

Third, I was part of the informal group constantly battling—and this was mainly within AID, within the bureau, not with the State Department—constantly battling to not lose focus on building capacity, building systems, building markets to transform agriculture instead of FtF being the model – often used in the health sector—where we identify our beneficiaries and give them what they need, e.g., vaccinations, oral rehydration, etc. to improve their health. That continues to be a battle.

And finally, I spent a lot of time, especially the last four years from 2014 to 2018, really helping missions in their second-generation policy projects and policy capacity building activities.

I'll talk about each of them a little bit. And in talking about those I'll get at some of the top line questions you asked me last week.

So, in terms of the think-tank nature of the job, I came into the bureau hoping to be able to do some useful analysis. I've always valued this, both because I like doing it and am good at it and because I believe it's really important. I have valued paying attention to the evidence, and in agriculture the evidence isn't always straight forward. It's not like we have vaccination rates and number of child deaths. We do have good information on



nutrition in a lot of countries. But paying attention to the evidence means figuring out what can stand in for evidence when you don't really have clear measures for things, and then what are the implications of that for programs.

I had the luxury of coming into the Bureau of Food Security at a time when people were just scurrying around to carry out the administrator's orders, get things going in 15 countries and start up programs, and I wasn't responsible for any of that. Jeff Hill, who I had previously supervised and who was now my supervisor, wanted me to spend time on some of these questions, as did Beth Dunford who eventually became head of the bureau.

So just as an example of some of these questions: If we're trying to alleviate hunger and poverty, should we be focused on ag production or should we be focused on income and nutritional status of poor people? Can small holders deliver the production gains needed in ways that pull them out of poverty and create other income linkages for other poor people who aren't farmers?

So maybe my first six or nine months, I spent a lot of time just surveying the literature, talking to people, and writing a pretty in-depth paper on this question of whether we should focus on small farmers as a key source of productivity and income growth in agriculture; this was something a lot of people have done a lot of on the ground real research on. Mine was just a literature review, but pulling things together in a programmatically useful way to start thinking of those questions. And this is a continued debate whether there should be a focus on small holders or not if you want to use agriculture to reduce poverty. But this was very fun and rewarding for me and it provoked a lot of discussion within the bureau and even at this first global food security conference in Holland that I presented at, which I mentioned last time.

And then there were a bunch of other really important food security questions that Administrator Shah and the bureau were not able to think about because they were so focused on getting these programs started, which we had to do. We had to get the money out there, we had to get programs on the ground quickly. But with all the scurrying around we were missing some important issues. Questions like, Is there any relevance of or concern about governance? Or producer co-ops? Or the role that governments have in dialogue with their own people over policy issues? Are there governance things we should be paying attention to? Are there global supply issues like the ones we see right now with Russia shutting down the world wheat market? Are there global supply issues we should be concerned about? Nobody was thinking about that. Are there fiscal burdens that some of our policy dialogue might impose on governments that we should be aware of? Just a bunch of questions like that were important. For us to think about that, I had the luxury of drawing the people's attention to, and that was really rewarding for me, having not been able to do that for probably the previous decade or more in my career where I was a manager. You don't have time to do that stuff. You can encourage other people to do it, which I did during those years, but being able to do some of it myself again, I really enjoyed, and I think it helped the bureau in a lot of ways.

The second of these four roles were part of this policy team that once we got past this discussion of State is diplomacy and leads the policy dialogue with the country, AID is development, we then worked pretty closely with the State team, and with Washington-based representatives of a few other government agencies, to come up with a process to develop a set of policy dialogue priorities for each country, and a set of standards about how to do that. Some of those standards involved country ownership, dialogue with local NGOs, farmer groups, involvement of key stakeholders within the government. That really generated a lot of pretty good energy between embassies and AID missions on important policy issues that they could kind of grab onto and have dialogue with the government. Almost always building on USAID's strong on the ground presence, knowledge of key policy actors in the government, and usually programs that could inform such a policy dialogue.

You asked me one of the topline questions, John, about the role of regional organizations in policy dialogue. So let me address that now, largely from the point of view of FtF.

There have been other regions where there have been important regional institutions. There's been some interesting stuff over the past twenty years in Central America, not so much in South Asia where India dominates everything, but in Africa is where I saw really the most exciting and influential role of regional organizations doing what they at very high political level had chosen to do, but often with AID as a helpful facilitator. Sometimes AID providing funding for advisors, but more often providing advice on how to do what those organizations wanted to do but weren't sure how to go about it. Probably the most important aspect of this is the African Union where I think I talked a little bit about this last time. But several really visionary African presidents in the early 2000s formed the Common African Agricultural Development Program (CAADP). I'll use the acronym right now while I'm talking, since I've said it once. CAADP was basically a set of goals and standards and ways to achieve those goals in agriculture to revitalize agriculture in Africa where not only had donor funding fallen precipitously in the 1990s but where African governments themselves were fatigued with low performing agriculture. In the earlier post-independence years these countries had wanted to get beyond agriculture. They wanted to industrialize fast. They saw that their agriculture sectors in many cases were stagnating. And CAADP was an attempt to reverse that fatigue, get people excited, and really help member states in CAADP invest their own resources in agriculture and thereby leverage donor support and revitalize the agriculture sectors.

I can't emphasize enough how Jeff Hill was really instrumental in this. He established very strong relationships with the early CAADP implementation unit in the African Union headquarters in Addis Ababa. They trusted him. He provided resources to them, and more important than resources he provided a lot of information to them through the International Food Policy Research Institute. He was able to set up this whole network where each country had a focal point where they're collecting all of the relevant data on agricultural growth rates, nutrition, and things like that. They could help countries make decisions as to where to put their own money and where to direct donor funds and help the AU monitor country performance and continent-wide trends.

In addition, at a certain point, our DAA in Africa Bureau was also a very important party of this, Franklin Moore. Jeff and Franklin also got other donors to support CAADP; to realize this was not just rhetoric, this was a real thing, African countries' own contributions from their own resources for agriculture were increasing. I talk about that because it's relevant to this second role I had in the Bureau of Food Security which was part of this small policy team to help embassies and missions figure out how to have a policy dialogue with host countries.

Part of this policy dialogue and more broadly the part of our FtF programs in countries had to respond to country priorities. When countries come up with priorities by the seat of their pants with no evidence, it's hard for USAID to actually want to support those. But when countries come up with priorities in a fairly rigorous peer-reviewed process, which happened under CAADP, partly with Jeff helping provide the resources and ways of doing things to CAADP, then that makes it much easier and more desirable for AID missions and embassies to say, "Yeah, we want to support this part of your priorities because we know you've established them with some dialogue with the private sector, with farmer groups, involving NGOs, looking at what hasn't worked in the past. We know you have goals which are quantifiable and measurable." So that's what CAADP provided on a continental level with a very high political mandate. It provided standards by which countries could establish their ag, food, and nutrition priorities. And so, a lot of our policy work ended up being to help AID missions and embassies see where they could build on those CAADP-led priorities and use them in their own policy dialogue to move agriculture forward.

One other example—again related to Feed the Future where regional institutions can be pretty important in policy dialogue—is the regional economic communities in Africa, Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS) in West Africa, the East African community, and the Southern African Development Community (SADC).

They were also part of the CAADP mandate and played a major role in convening member states regionally to figure out how to most effectively implement CAADP but they also were working on specific policy issues. I think ECOWAS has been probably the most successful and influential both on regional agricultural trade and on seed standards. ECOWAS over a period of years got countries to significantly reduce their tariffs that made cross-border trade a lot easier. And West Africa is only going to advance if they figure out how to trade with each other and the rest of the world in a less costly way. So, they've made a lot of progress. There are still issues of border crossings, corruption, the high cost of crossing borders, but they've made a lot of progress.

On seed standards, again agriculture can only be productive if you have seeds of productive varieties suited for the particular conditions, market conditions, soil, taste and cooking qualities, and weather conditions, in a particular place. It was very hard to bring seeds across borders in West Africa. So, ECOWAS got this going, again with a lot of USAID support from the regional USAID office in West Africa based in Ghana for most of the past 15 years. ECOWAS established a set of processes by which the 15 West

African countries could eventually trade across borders almost seamlessly in seed, which has been pretty important. And without ECOWAS driving that it wouldn't have happened. These are very complicated standards for seed trade, much more complicated than for a commodity like wheat, or even for contraceptives. They're very intricate, complicated standards. It's not just one thing, it's a bunch of things depending on the crop, etc. and without ECOWAS putting in place a process for that, it just wouldn't have happened. Again, there was a lot of AID support for that, but it was a regional institution driving it so those are a couple examples of where regional institutions were important.

This issue of support for regional programs is another issue that I spent a lot of my career involved in, because regional programs are orphans politically; by contrast, when you're arguing for country funding levels in AID there's always a constituency. Every country has a constituency to argue for their funding level. Within the U.S. government it's first of all the U.S. ambassador to the country and the mission director. Second, it's the ambassador back here in Washington, the ambassador from Kenya or whoever who gets involved in talking to the Hill sometimes. Much of the early 2000s the group of African ambassadors was one influential group pushing for renewed U.S. global leadership in agriculture, and was part of the coalition that led to the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa, the IEHA and later for what led to FtF. Often there are country diaspora groups and so on, but for regional programs there's no constituency, there's no ambassador, the regional mission director's there with no support and there's hardly anybody in Washington that particularly cares. So, there's always pressure to reduce funding for regional programs. So, some of us in AID Washington and in the regional AID programs in Africa spent a lot of time in the '90s and especially the 2000s arguing for the importance of regional programs as key ways to implement policy change in Africa and key ways to implement FtF's policy agenda.

Anyway, let me go on to the third area that I got involved in with Feed the Future. I spent a lot of time fighting battles in AID. I was part of the informal core group involving the policy team, involving some people working in nutrition, some people working on market development, market systems. Part of this core group was engaged in this constant battle within FtF, which has been a larger battle in AID beyond agriculture. Why we can't simply see what we do as helping these 5,000 farmers improve their crop for the next three years. We need to be more ambitious and try to change larger systems, markets, institutions to have an enduring impact beyond the life of a four-year project. With most of our projects being three- or five-year projects, within that project you can choose to focus only on direct beneficiaries and get the metrics and everything for that time, or you can focus on that in ways to build more sustainable systems and leave lasting outcomes.

I have a lot of respect for my health colleagues in AID. They've been able to accomplish a tremendous amount in the last 30 years in terms of the child-survival revolution, making sure people don't die of AIDS, vaccinating people. There are two major differences between agriculture and health in my mind. One is that it's a lot harder to make a difference in the ag sector even when you have the money you need, and two, because it is relatively easy to document and even see the impact on health outcomes of inputs like vaccination, even surveillance and vaccination, oral rehydration therapy,

anti-retrovirals, health constituencies and certainly Congress that doles out the money can see the short-term accomplishments and the need for continued funding. Members of Congress whether they're conservative or liberal, when they see foreign aid they want it to help people. So, when you talk about how many kids' lives you've saved or how many people with HIV/AIDS have not died because of your interventions, the money keeps flowing. Agriculture's never going to have that situation. We're not going to have unending sources of funding. So, we have to keep always figuring out how we can spend our money in ways that create sustainable systems. I know this is an issue on the health side too and there are similar battles about whether we should be investing more in health systems. We shouldn't be investing only in these narrowly defined disease pockets and so on, and that's an ongoing issue in health at least for the past 15 years or so.

But in agriculture it really makes a difference because we'll never have the same amount of money and there's no guarantee we'll have that amount of money five years from now. So how do you spend the money now in ways that do help people now but that create a more sustainable outcome. And the ways to do that are to make sure that on the ag side that you are investing where possible in private sector-led approaches where the market is going to provide the incentives to keep buying the new seeds, keep selling their crop, keep being more productive, if we help them figure it out. And then there are a lot of institution capacity-building issues as well. If we can build the institutions of ag research so that the scientists in Mali or Ghana or Kenya can keep producing the new crop varieties that's a self-sustaining thing. If we can keep producing the next set of policy analysis experts to inform the government so that we don't have to do it with an AID project, that's pretty important.

Here, too, Jeff Hill and his team, first in my AFR/SD office, and then in the Bureau for Food Security, were working with missions to lay a very solid foundation for longer term African success in food security and agriculture. Building that capacity needed for any of this work to be sustained. In addition to the work supporting the African Union and the regional economic communities, he and his team developed easy contract and grant vehicles to help missions first of all train a new cadre of younger leaders in agriculture, leaders who were really needed – in government, in research, in the private sector, in local NGOs – if all this new money, from host governments, from USAID and other donors, was to be used well. And then started creating a whole organizational development and leadership industry in Africa, building on existing institutions and a few highly skilled individuals but extending them across Africa as a network to help each country develop, monitor, revise and implement the agricultural development plans they were putting together. I spent a lot of time in these discussions and battles about long-term sustainability and capacity.

*Q: You were comparing it to the health side. Often it was described as “disease specific” interventions or whether it's more general health systems strengthening. I suppose in agriculture it would be “crop specific” or “input specific interventions” rather than broader interventions.*

ATWOOD: Yeah, I think you can do crop-specific, like the way FtF was organized, missions had to tell us what crops they were going to focus on, and they couldn't focus on 20, they could focus on two or three or four. But even within the crop specific approach, you can focus on very short-term measurable impacts alone that likely won't be sustained, or you can get the short term benefits while at the same time laying the foundation for longer term change; if you don't provide missions and contractors with some guidance, especially contractors will want to maximize your impact this year and next year so they get the metrics and are judged successful, even if it means them intervening in ways that aren't sustainable. So, one of the key challenges in agriculture is yes, it's not that difficult to increase production for one or two years, but the more successful you are, the more you create supply problems, declines in prices when there's a glut of production, and then farmers go back to what they were doing before.

So, the way contractors and NGOs sometimes solve that problem is, we'll get our truck in there and we'll buy the stuff and then we'll sell it in the city. And that is not a sustainable outcome, because who's going to be the buyer and seller when the project ends? So, under FtF what we were trying to do, and this happened earlier under the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa, it happened over the years in missions that were smart about it, before FtF. But what we tried to do in FtF was develop market-based approaches where we looked carefully at who were the millers or rice processors or wholesalers. What are their constraints? What's preventing them from getting their truck out to this village and buying the new additional sorghum or rice or corn crop? And sometimes it was bank financing, sometimes it was warehousing, sometimes it was knowledge. But often those are bottlenecks that are easy to address if you're trying to do that. When I mentioned earlier that the Brian Atwood reengineering focus on results, slowly over a decade or more got modified into a focus on short term metrics, that was some of the challenge we were fighting: to not have only short-term metrics, but to be focused on longer term outcomes and the institutional and market mechanisms required for a short-term project to contribute to those outcomes in a sustainable way.

So, a lot of these kinds of battles were how do we make sure that we're getting missions, and not even so much missions but their contractors, focused on sustainable market-based outcomes and looking upstream and downstream at where the bottlenecks were. This was a little hard sometimes because initially we were told—and again this was part of the initial parameters of FtF—you have to focus on the limited geographic zone in the country. So, then what if the rice processor or wholesaler isn't in that zone? We're helping farmers in that zone. Can some of our money go outside the zone to the rice processor who is going to go into the zone and buy, so these became some of the issues we got involved in?

I guess the last thing I'll mention here is—and there were a number of very successful projects that took this approach and had lasting impact. I would say one of the most important—I can't remember the name of the project, but it was the Senegal value chain project—working on rice and some other commodities where for the first time ever they were able to make rice produced in the Senegal river valley several hundred miles from Dakar competitive with cheap imported rice from Asia. That had never happened before.

And the reason they were able to do so was because they worked up and down the value chain with millers, bankers, wholesalers, people producing packaging that was as attractive as the rice coming from Asia. And so that was a sustainable long-term impact of that project, which had direct beneficiaries, but also had a sustainable long-term way for benefits to continue to accrue to those beneficiaries.

The last thing I did was help missions with project design - especially in the last four years in the bureau when there was a new generation of policy projects that missions wanted to design. Projects that focused a lot more on building capacity, policy analysis and advisory units either within government or as NGOs or think tanks. And often missions knew they didn't have the time or the staff to do the design, so our team spent a lot of time doing TDYs to the field, sometimes alone, sometimes two or three of us together, helping missions figure out how do we build on what we've got, take it farther, and continue to invest in sustainable policy capacity and policy analysis with local institutions. That was actually a lot of fun because it took me way back to my very beginning in AID but in a more constructive way. My first three years in AID, '81 to '84, I was doing cost benefit analysis of AID projects, often reviewing projects that were poorly planned and pointing out their flaws, or sometimes going out to the field to redesign them. But now in BFS I was starting from the beginning and doing design work and helping design strong policy projects for the missions. It was a nice thing to end on in FtF and my AID career, doing that.

One other thing I was involved in was pretty important and really cut across all four of those roles I had in FtF: I was also a project manager. I was involved in the planning, design, implementation, and evaluation of a key policy project for the bureau, and then also developed the follow-on activity, and was even there for the beginning of that new activity. To people on the outside of AID, being involved in the full range of a project's life cycle might not seem unusual. But this is the only time in my AID career that I was involved in a project from beginning to end to follow-on. I might take a year or two to get the go ahead for a project, then another year or two to develop it, another year or more to find an implementer through a competitive process, then five years of actual work, final evaluation, and then start over again if there's a follow-on. So, we are talking six, seven, eight years. And I'm someone who spent five years in one post and four years in another, but I still hadn't had that experience of a single project from beginning to end, because five years isn't usually enough for the full project cycle. I'd been involved in the beginnings, middle and ends of a lot of projects, but it was only in the Food Security Bureau, because I spent eight years there, where I was able to see the whole thing through in a single project, through its full life cycle. This was the Food Security Policy project that was implemented by Michigan State University, the International Food Policy Research Institute and the University of Pretoria, a project to both extend the state of knowledge of policies conducive to food security, build capacity of local institutions in developing that research and analysis capacity, and then bring the results to host country policy-makers as well as to donors. That also was a very rewarding part of my time at FtF, working with great, committed colleagues at Michigan State and with a number of partner institutions especially African ones and seeing some major new policy-relevant findings and influence on policies in a number of countries.

*Q: David, what were the linkages on those policy efforts? How much linkage was there to the international research networks and to some of our research projects we had in Africa with local countries' research institutions.*

ATWOOD: Well in terms of scientific research, in terms of agronomy, soil science, plant breeding, stuff like that, there were a lot of linkages between the local ag research institutes that we supported and the international ag research centers, the maize and wheat center, the international rice research center and so on. We had big regional offices in eastern and southern Africa, and their regional programs supported networks of African research scientists. There has been a continued tension in those relationships partly because donors who are in a hurry, including USAID, have often gone straight to the international ag centers and said, "We want you to implement maize development and production in Kenya," instead of working to strengthen the local research systems. So that has always been a tension. The local ag research centers owned by the countries, managed by the countries, which in many countries in Africa have a pretty strong scientific cadre, they and the international centers have had working relationships for decades. But who benefits in terms of capacity building and sustainability is partly a function of where you put the money, and we the donors, including AID, have tended to push that balance way more towards the international centers than we should have in my opinion, because that is not a sustainable outcome.

In terms of policy though, all these international centers have some economists. Some of them getting involved in policy, but for the most part, the big international center in policy is the International Food Policy Research Institute, and they have worked with Michigan State under FtF in the project that I designed and managed and now there's a follow up project to both do some of the policy analysis, establish the relationships with government decision makers but also strengthen the capacity of local think tanks and policy units. One of the things I feel really good about in the earlier project, and then the new one, was USAID's role in helping to launch, and then support as an implementing partner, an African-run network of national level policy analysis think tanks across a number of African countries, that has now achieved some impact and influence with African food and ag policymakers. So, there are some pretty strong linkages between country research, whether in policy or in the wider areas of crop and soil science, but continued tension as to who should be in the lead, where donors should put their money, and what the division of labor is.

That's not a thorough answer to your question, but that's the best I can do. There's an ongoing tension between doing stuff faster and sometimes a little better through an international institution versus taking more time doing it slower but leaving stronger capacity in place and working with researchers or scientists who are part of the national system.

*Q: Let me ask you one more question on Feed the Future. As someone who's been outside of it but very interested in it, I know there was an ongoing debate country by country on how much money AID would spend on farmers who were focused on exports and*



*bringing foreign currency into the country and farmers who were basically moving out of poverty and just being able to produce enough for the local market. Was there a final decision on that? Is that still an open question country by country?*

ATWOOD: When I left the bureau—and I think this remains the case—there wasn't firm guidance on that. Some countries have selected various horticultural crops that are for export. Some have focused on local food staple production, but some of those local food staples were exported. For example, cowpeas in the Sahelian belt in West Africa, a lot of cowpeas spill into the coastal countries and actually provide farmers an important income source from those exports even though cowpeas are also an important local source of nutrition. Cowpeas are black-eyed peas by the way, a highly nutritious staple for the local people as well.

One of the first time this issue arose early in FtF was Ghana where the mission had a fairly robust program supporting horticultural exports, sometimes to the coastal cities but often outside of Ghana and was told it had to shut that program down very abruptly and start focusing on the poorer part of Ghana in the north, which meant a focus on grain staples. But that was less a cash crop vs. food crop discussion than a geographic focus discussion. The outcome, however, was a very abrupt end to what had been a pretty successful agricultural export program most of whose beneficiaries were relatively small farmers, albeit in a more favored part of the country from a climate and soil point of view.

In most other FtF countries there hasn't been that much tension around that issue. I'll also say that some things that we knew about in some countries have turned out to be more generally true that make this distinction between cash vs. food crops a bit hazier. For a number of years, we knew that in Sahelian countries, if farmers have a more productive variety of their basic food staple crop, they'll keep on producing that food staple, but because they can get the same production level with less land and labor, this allows them to shift that extra land and labor to a higher valued cash crop whether it's cowpeas or horticulture or something else.

In the middle years of FtF we discovered that was also true in Kenya, so it's very important. Kenya is such a commercialized country and has so much potential. But we discovered that a farmer in a given land area, if he gets a more productive maize variety, he'll grow a little less land to maize – the basic food staple crop—and put some more of that into a cash crop and the reason for that is the markets in most African countries are still so volatile and so unreliable, farmers want to be able to rely on their own production for some of their food. I mean, every farmer in Africa, rich or poor, even very poor, is buying some food from the market. Nevertheless, they're also trying to produce some to protect themselves from market volatility. So, if you give them a way to produce the same amount of maize on half the land area, they'll take the other half and grow green beans, tomatoes, whatever is appropriate there, and earn some more cash. Maybe to say all of this in a much simpler way: The cash crop-food crop argument isn't always an apt argument in cases where increasing the productivity of food crops frees up land and labor

for higher value cash crops, something we found was the case in the Sahel, in East Africa, and in parts of Central America, at least.

But, yes, that was a contentious issue at the beginning of FtF in Ghana. There were difficult issues in the beginning of FtF where we had these arguments over what crop mix people would grow, but it's fairly diverse, the approach that missions were taking on this, at least by the time I left in 2018.

*Q: Let me add one more question. Right now, we're facing a food crisis because of the Russian invasion of Ukraine and its inability to export, and it's roiled the agriculture food markets all over the world and the AID's Administrator recently announced that Feed the Future is moving into a number of new countries. If you look back on your experience, what successes should they be looking at? What kinds of things have we accomplished in other countries that they might be able to accomplish in these new countries that Feed the Future is moving into now?*

ATWOOD: Well, I think we have had success in building policy. First of all, many of those new countries are countries that had been part of FtF in the beginning, that is they had been part of FtF, certainly the southern African countries. I think there were one or two others also that have been brought back in so we had 19 or 20 countries in the beginning of FtF. That was cut back to 18. Then at the beginning of the Trump administration, it was decided we needed to focus more so we eliminated more countries and got it down to 12 or 13. So I think some of those "new countries" announced are countries that did have FtF programs before.

I guess I'd point out three general kinds of successes in Feed the Future. One is I think we have had a lot of success when missions have been able to figure out how to increase the productivity and incomes of a defined set of beneficiaries in a particular geographic zone, but do that in a way that created sustainable markets, milling capacity, finance, all those things, rather than the contractor-NGO doing that stuff themselves. So, this is kind of the value-chain approach. Now it's called the market-systems approach. A number of missions have left a pretty successful set of deeper, more robust markets and institutions in place that didn't exist before and that are going to continue regardless of whether there's an AID project, or maybe a much smaller AID project in the future in that space.

I think we've had some pretty successful projects dealing with policy and analytical capacity in a number of countries, with host country folks doing the analysis, bringing the results to policy-makers, helping even formulate more effective agriculture and food policies. You know, nutrition is a really difficult thing to work on, and we've had some pretty successful nutrition projects actually in some countries. And I don't know as much about them, but they took some innovative approaches, combining both food-based approaches and approaches to health, changing the ways in which parents took care of their very young children, care approaches, and also the Bureau of Food Security now resilience in food security, now includes the water group, and so clean water is a key part of better nutritional outcomes as well.

*Q: And part of that is reduction of stunting and there are indicators such as that.*

ATWOOD: Yeah.

*Q: Thank you.*

ATWOOD: So maybe I can just move on to some of those other questions you asked me. Is that okay?

*Q: Yes, please!*

ATWOOD: Okay. So, you asked me to give some examples of where mission policy dialogue resulted in major policy change and also where USAID Washington leadership has led to policy changes. So let me give a few examples of mission policy dialogue.

I think I spent a fair amount of time earlier talking about policy dialogue in Mali, which led to opening up grain markets, getting a lot of rice millers involved and really leading to thirty years of tripling agricultural production there. I won't talk more about that, just to reiterate that it was all the food aid donors together committing to the government that if they took this risky approach and it didn't work out the way we thought it would, they'd still have food aid as a guarantee that they wouldn't have people rioting in the streets. So, Mali was basically dialogue around grain markets, rice milling, but also significant investments in ag research to increase the productivity in ag.

Bangladesh was a lot more complicated. I talked earlier about the grain market reform there, which was similar to Mali and using food aid, again with the other donors, as a guarantee that the government of Bangladesh would have that to fall back on if their own food production didn't increase. You have to remember that both Mali and Bangladesh about the same time had devastating famines. Mali, the Sahelian famine of the mid '70s; Bangladesh, the war with Pakistan in which many people starved to death in the wake of that and where FTF food aid was withheld because the Nixon administration supported Pakistan and didn't want to support India and Bangladesh. So, decision makers in Mali and Bangladesh, it's kind of like Soviet and Russian decision makers who always have World War II in the background when they make any decision because so many Russians died in World War II.

In Mali and Bangladesh, the decision makers—at least back then in the '80s and '90s—were always looking backward to the number of people who died in the 1970s famines, and they didn't want to do anything that would even look like those conditions were returning. So, they were very risk averse. Having the food aid as a guarantee to rely on as they made these fairly courageous and wide-ranging policy decisions was important. In Bangladesh, the dialogue was much more complex though.

You had not only liberalizing and opening up of food grain markets, but especially—and here it was mainly the World Bank—dialogue about opening up the market for irrigation

wells, called tubewells. Bangladesh has a fairly high water table. It has an abundance of water you can draw out of the ground, but it had these regulations that required people to purchase only a certain kind of pretty expensive tubewell technology. India and China both had very cheap tubewells they wanted to sell to Bangladesh, but the regulations didn't permit that. So, the World Bank, while we and the food aid donors were engaged in dialogue around food grain market liberalization, the World Bank led this dialogue on opening of the tubewell market so that you could bring in any tubewell you wanted from anywhere. So once that succeeded, all of a sudden you had all these cheap tubewells coming in from China and Pakistan really allowing in some cases double cropping, in some cases triple cropping, especially of rice. Then you had both investment and policy dialogue around rural electrification as well, with USAID a significant donor. The tubewells could run on diesel, but as you had electricity access in more and more of rural Bangladesh, that significantly lowered the cost of running the tubewells.

At the same time USAID had a fertilizer privatization dialogue going on. The Bangladesh government had tried to manage the fertilizer market, basically being the monopoly fertilizer supplier everywhere. With all the corruption, dysfunction, late delivery, fertilizer left out in the rain, that you can imagine from a government-run commercial enterprise. So, opening up fertilizer distribution and import to the private sector really made a difference in not just fertilizer availability, but the quality and timeliness with which farmers got their fertilizer.

Finally, when you look at food security from the national level, macro level, all those complicated investments and policy changes are just on the supply side, increasing the production of food, the quantities available, through irrigation with tubewells, fertilizer, opening up the food grain markets, and at the same time the more productive crop varieties. But you also have the demand side, consumption. Consumption is how much food people eat multiplied by the number of people. So that "number of people" is an important part of food security, as well; therefore, family planning was an important part of this. And beginning way back in the 1960s there were technocrats and village development people who were starting, almost as soon as contraceptives became available globally, there were people in Bangladesh, mainly Bangladesh—they were actually West Pakistani development experts at the Comilla Development Institute in East Pakistan (which later became independent Bangladesh—who started asking local people, "If there were a way that you could have fewer kids would you do that?" And pretty much everybody said, "Oh no, no, that would be against the will of Allah." So, then these early researchers added a follow-up question, something like: "If your local religious leader said it was okay to have fewer kids, what would you think then." Large numbers of women said—again, this is early/mid 1960s, not long after contraceptives were available anywhere—"Yes, if they say it's okay then that would be fine with us." Following this, there was a period of time when the World Bank and AID family planning programs started talking with the governments and started talking to local imams and village leaders, religious leaders, and village leaders about family planning. You know, "If there were a way to reduce women's burdens by them having fewer children, would that be a good thing?" And the local leaders, including religious authorities, said "yes."

Eventually, because of that local dialogue with local authorities and local religious leaders and government people, family planning became much more accepted in Bangladesh. So, from the '70s through the early 2000s, you had remarkable gains in family planning and by around 2008 to 2010 I think that's when Bangladesh got to the level of replacement fertility, that is, the level of fertility where the population level is sustained but not increasing. Good for women's health, good for families, but also reducing what would otherwise have been growing demand for basic foodstuffs. So, people now, especially in the ag sector where we focus so much on supply, don't recognize that family planning dialogue was a key part of food security's success in Bangladesh, but it really was.

*Q: Good point.*

ATWOOD: So, all those things together, multiple donors, but especially USAID involved in these dialogues, helped Bangladesh get on a track where they have avoided famine and have become a much more productive agricultural economy than they were even in the early '90s, and now with a significantly better record than India has in major reductions in poverty and malnutrition.

*Q: Do you have any other examples, David? That was excellent.*

ATWOOD: Yeah, a couple of other examples. I know that genetically engineered crops can be controversial, including in Bangladesh. Eggplant is both an important vegetable for local consumption and an important cash crop there. Eggplant insect infestation got to the point when I was there—and this was the mid '90s—where people were having to apply insecticide eight or ten times during the season, and it's probably gotten worse since then. So, there was a dialogue—really led more by AID Washington and a very good university contractor—with the Bangladesh ag research institutions, which wanted to figure out if they could do genetically engineered eggplant that would require a lot less insecticide. There were two things going on, dialogue around whether the sort of genetic stock for that would be permitted in Bangladesh because neighboring India has a very strong anti-genetic engineering policy, or it did at the time. And then support to do that actual scientific work. So that eventually did lead—and it was a very respectful dialogue, and the way AID has supported dialogue on genetically engineered crops is more in the larger context of bio-safety: We will help increase your capacity in bio-safety regulation in agriculture if you want to use that capacity to look into genetically engineered crops; we'll be happy to help you do that. It's not a hard sell, you know, this is the wave of the future, you have to at least be equipped and have the capacity to make your own policies in this area, even if your policies end up limiting GMOs. You know and we know that you need to improve your capacity on bio-safety whatever the regime is, whether you're pro- or anti-genetic engineering.

There was a similar approach around genetically-engineered potatoes in Egypt, which is an important cash crop and a local-consumption food in Egypt. So, in both places it was that kind of dialogue which did lead to the government accepting genetically engineered crops, or at least for eggplant and potato in those countries, which were important food

and cash crops, while at the same time significantly increasing their capacity to understand, regulate and monitor genetically engineered crops and imports.

I can give two other examples.

In Ethiopia in the early 2000s, there was another serious crop shortage and danger of famine and Administrator Andrew Natsios at the time said—that was when I was sometimes going to Natsios’s senior staff meetings, when I was acting DAA in the E&E Bureau—something along the following lines in response to yet another developing famine there: “This is the last time this is going to happen in Ethiopia. We’re going to figure out why it is that we always have to provide hundreds of millions of dollars’ worth of food aid to respond to yet another emergency, and yet can only give them five or ten million dollars to actually solve the problems of agricultural productivity over the long term so this doesn’t happen again.”

When I heard Andrew Natsios say this I thought, “That’s a good sentiment, but is it going to work out?” Well, it did! Andrew Natsios sent a high-powered team to Bangladesh: Jeff Hill, Susan Bradley from food aid, Tom Hopgood from the Agency ag office, and some other people. They really drilled down and looked into this and figured out a way in which donor food aid could be used in more productive ways to build a more productive base for agriculture while still meeting the targeted needs of people who really needed food on a short-term basis and also provided a rationale for greater ag productivity investments.

The food aid part of this became something called the PSNP Program, the productive safety net program, which has been in existence for almost 20 years or so. It has really helped address in a sustainable way some of the food needs and some of the more vulnerable areas while laying a basis for more productive agriculture there.

The Ethiopian government is a government that often doesn’t follow the donor lead; they make their own decisions. They know what they want to do, and they do it and if the donor happens to have a good idea, they might follow it but they’re not going to do something just because USAID said it was a good idea. But in this case, the Ethiopian government saw a real value in this new approach and they adopted it.

One other example is related regional institutions—This again comes from West Africa, from the Sahel. West Africa is complicated. You have ECOWAS, which is the regional economic community, but since the Sahel famine of the 1970s, you have an organization called the Permanent Interstate Committee for Drought Control in the Sahel, CILSS is its French acronym. It’s supported by a very strong group of donors, which over many decades has established a pretty trusting relationship with CILSS.

*Q: And started with AID assistance.*

ATWOOD: Oh, CILSS was started with AID assistance? Great! You know David Shear [former Mission director in Senegal and also key leader in the USAID Sahel

Development Program in the 1970s] just died; I saw his obituary and I believe he was probably involved in that, I think.

*Q: He was directly involved, absolutely.*

ATWOOD: He was somebody who believed that regional approaches can really make a difference in country policy change. That turned out not to work so well for the Mauritania-Senegal-Mali Senegal River regional organization [the Senegal River Basin Development Organization (OMVS in French), a regional cooperative management body of the Senegal River which currently includes Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, and Senegal].

But it certainly did work out for CILSS because CILSS started a series of exploratory seminars and discussions, but eventually policy convocations on a number of policy areas in the Sahel. Initially grain market reform but also land tenure, forestry, other things. It really became a clearing house with the support of the donors, this Club of the Sahel, which David Schaer was probably involved in starting also. It really became a source of countries sharing their experience, spurring each other on. So, if Niger was more advanced in changing their forestry code to recognize that farmers had rights over the trees on their field, then Mali did the same a few years later, seeing that it worked in Niger and the reason they saw that is partly because of the CILSS policy convocations. So, a lot of this was peer-country to peer-country learning, but in addition the donor role in this, through the Club of the Sahel, was to finance both evidence in each of the priority areas, and also financing evaluations of individual country experiences in making these policy changes.

So CILSS was really important in helping these countries come out of the drought experience. Not just looking backwards but looking forwards as to how they can organize their ag and rural sectors and policies to be more effective and productive.

My takeaways from these examples, like the earlier ones on policy change, are: follow the lead of reformers in the host government who want to change things but maybe don't know how. Maybe they know how but they need resources. Maybe they know how, but they need more person-power. So, follow their lead and see where we can help them. Trust is a really big deal. I mean CILSS was so successful because slowly host governments and donors trusted each other more, they understood each other's constraints and incentives, and they really did want to work together. And understanding the constraints that policy makers are under is always really important for success. They have their own bureaucracies; their own politicians they're dealing with, and they can make changes but within those constraints. So how can we help them?

*Q: Very good, thank you.*

ATWOOD: You also asked about policy dialogue where Washington was involved: I talked earlier about coming back to Washington from Bangladesh when ag funding and ag staffing had fallen so low and being part of this group of people inside and outside of USAID that created this constituency to restore ag funding and ag staffing. That

eventually led to the Initiative to End Hunger in Africa under the George W. Bush administration and building towards the Feed the Future initiative under President Obama, and also AID Washington helping the African Union put in place standards and approaches for food and ag investment in the African Union's CAADP, the Common African Agricultural Development Program.

One other thing that I was involved in, again with a bunch of other people, is another example of Washington-related policy change. I mentioned this earlier in the context of research on individual land titles that the World Bank, and my project in the old S&T Bureau with the Land Tenure Center, were involved in during the 1980s. But I can retell this story here just in terms of influencing USAID policy itself. At that time, John Bolton was the head of the AID Policy Bureau. He wanted to rescind the old AID policy determination on land tenure and land reform and put in place a new policy determination that basically said we want to create land markets everywhere we work so that people can buy and sell land. We want to give small holder farmers the same kind of formal, legal title to their land that Americans have. This aligned with similar thinking by some people on the operations side at the World Bank.

But as I said earlier, research we had funded with the Land Tenure Center called that whole idea into question, in terms of being something that would neither help small farmers nor increase farm productivity, under the conditions at the time. Also, internally the World Bank, which had its own research arm under the leadership of a man called Hans Binswanger, was coming to some similar research conclusions. Basically, at that time in the 1980s, much of rural Africa, and even major parts of rural Asia, were still places where small farmers still had a lot of security over their land rights, and in that time, creating a land market, it was kind of like banking. In many of the countries we worked in in the '80s, who has access to the banks? It's nice to say we want everybody to have banking access back then before mobile phones and mobile money and all these wonderful things that have happened in Kenya and elsewhere, but the fact was who had access to a bank back then? Only people with influence, who had the wherewithal to get to a branch bank in a town, and so a lot of people were kept out of the banking sector simply by the high transaction cost.

Similarly with land titling. If you create a land market where every hectare of land has a title attached to it, who are the ones going to end up with those land titles? Only people who have the wherewithal, the money, the time, the influence, to get to the land title office, to bring the people out to survey their land. We saw this later in the former Soviet Union. The idea was to break up—and in Ukraine even a few years ago—break up the big farms, let ordinary people buy some farmland and become farmers. That's not what happened to the former communist land. The people who got the land were the influential people because that's how it worked. It was very expensive to do land surveys, there was a lot of corruption even in surveying, and who could access those services?

So there became this big dialogue within the World Bank and AID about this, and eventually those of us who had access to this research, people like Joan Atherton in the policy bureau, Pat Fleuret in Africa Bureau, myself and a bunch of other people were



able to change the planned USAID land tenure policy, so it was much more nuanced and wasn't just about creating land markets, much more attentive to specific situations.

So, we were able to stave off hundreds of millions of dollars going into land title programs that would have probably hurt poor people and wasted a lot of money.

I just want to add that now the situation is very different; small holder farmers around the world are facing tenure insecurity in a lot of places. The traditional authorities that protected their land tenure have often been compromised or bought out, or the market forces are too great to withstand. The cost of registering land has come down to almost nothing. It's very cheap to survey and register a parcel of land now, and AID and MCC have both been pretty heavily involved in land title programs that now do make sense in a way that they wouldn't have made sense back in the '80s.

*Q: Very interesting.*

ATWOOD: Let's see. I guess you asked me about other USAID-fostered ag successes. I think I answered that.

*Q: Maybe we should move on to some management issues USAID is always interested in looking at. You were a senior manager and worked with programs both in the field and in Washington. Did you have any role models as a USAID manager and what would you say about your management style?*

ATWOOD: Yeah, I had a lot of role models. I was blessed to work with a lot of great people. Jerry Wolgin, who I worked for and with several times and then I eventually went into his AFR/SD director job (and then eventually hired him back!) He was both a great role model for me and an important mentor in my career, and spiritual mentor as well.

A lot of deputy mission directors have been both role models and mentors to me. Frank Young in Bangladesh, Don Clark and Wilbur Thomas in Mali. Emmy Simmons and Roger Simmons are people I really admire a lot in just how they worked and what they did and the attention they paid to younger people who they had confidence in. Carol Peasley, who was AA of Africa Bureau. Kent Hill was AA of E&E Bureau. John Bressler, who I worked pretty closely with both in Mali and in Washington. I guess these are the people you admire, the people you model yourself on.

When you talk about people you admire, you're also in fact talking about the management style you are emulating. These people, and many others I learned from, were always willing to learn; they were very good listeners. They had clear ideas about what they wanted to do, but they also listened to staff. They listened to contractors and other partners They listened to people on the outside, other donors, researchers, think tanks. They were very apolitical in their decisions, thoughtful about what might and what might not work, what the risks might be. They were ambitious in their program and policy goals. It seems like an anomaly, but as you know, John, it's easy for people planning projects not to be ambitious, and they were really ambitious in using projects to

get to something higher and longer term. But they were also very politically savvy about the constraints that AID, the embassy, the FTF government, and the host country faced.

*Q: When you say ambitious, do you mean risk taking as well?*

ATWOOD: There's all this rhetoric about USAID needing to take risks. I don't think about it that way. I mean every AID project is a risk. You don't know what's going to happen; it's not a science. That's not exactly what I mean. What I mean is fitting in the program and the specific outputs and even outcomes to some larger vision of where they thought that either that subset of the ag research sector in Mali or the food sector in Bangladesh, where that should be going relative to where the country should be going. They always had a higher-level set of goals they were working towards that the project or program would fit into. I don't know if they would articulate it that way, but that's what I saw.

I always felt kind of empowered and listened to and I felt like other people, regardless of age or status, that they treated them that way also. Don Clark and Wilbur Thomas in particular—this is early in my Foreign Service career, my first post overseas—they were both good managers, but they were also mentors, not just to me, I mean they saw their job as being available to a lot of the staff for advice, next assignment, career, how they could do better in their current office environment.

Then a lot of my specific bosses I just really liked working for: Don Brown, Eric Chetwynd, Tracy Atwood, John Swanson, Gloria Steele was a coworker and then rose pretty high in AID and was DAA/E&E when I was there, Franklin Moore, Earl Gast, Sharon Cromer was AA in Africa Bureau, Jeff Hill, Chris Shepherd-Pratt. So, there were a lot of people. I just feel like I was very lucky in the people I worked with and worked for over most of my 38 years.

You had a question on training, so I'll get to management style because training is part of that. I didn't get a lot of training in AID partly because I avoided some training. Believe it or not, I got away with never taking the project implementation course, which did leave some gaps. For example, it was only when I got to Bangladesh when I learned about letters of credit, and we had a very creative contractor who created what they called "inland letters of credit" to free up local bank financing in order to get the fertilizer privatization going. I didn't initially understand that, and I would have had I taken that course.

But I felt like, for my little time at the margins, I was able to analyze, read, and write, and if I'd maximized my training, I wouldn't have had that time. I published a few peer-reviewed articles, but I was always reading and trying to figure things out about the country situation. I would have had less time to do that. But the management skills training course that I took midcareer was really important to me. I was already supervising a few people, not many, but it gave me confidence and a lot of tools to work with as a supervisor. It was really an important course for me.

*Q: I also took that course. I took the senior course twice, and I won't tell you why I had to retake it!*

ATWOOD: Well, I had to take the senior course twice, too; I'll tell you about that in a minute. By the way, Graham Fraelick, do you know Graham from Training Resources Group (TRG), that did such a great job providing USAID management skills training for a number of years?

*Q: Yeah, a little bit.*

ATWOOD: Graham Fraelick at the age of 21, never having been a Peace Corps volunteer, ran my Peace Corps training program in Bangui in the Central African Republic, and he did a great job at the age of 21 years old! Anyway, then later on I took the FEI course for mission directors, deputies, and office directors just before coming back into Africa Bureau in 2008.

The FEI management training for new managers was also a very good course and one thing that came out of that was that you got a coach for a year to meet with usually over the phone. I did it, monthly or biweekly, and having that coach for a year when I first took over Africa's technical office, the Sustainable Development Office, was very helpful to me. So that was a follow up from training.

Also, I had done a number of retreats for offices or units that I managed, usually involving TRG, and while that's not a training program, the preparation for those retreats, which involved canvassing the staff, was really important to me. That helped a lot. I feel that I've always tried to be an open manager, open to feedback, but there are also things that staff are going to anonymously tell a facilitator that they're not going to tell their boss. And that was always really helpful.

When we were in the middle of this State-AID reorganization and Secretary Rice's and Tobias's foreign aid reform, Dave Eckerson (head of USAID personnel at the time) asked me if I would be the AID guinea pig to take the State Department's leadership training course for new Senior Foreign Service officers, people promoted into the Senior Foreign Service. He wanted to compare it to the FEI comparable level leadership training course.

*Q: Oh really?*

ATWOOD: So, I did! It was run by a couple of TRG people and some other people but organized by the Foreign Affairs Training Center in Arlington. It was okay; it wasn't a bad course; it wasn't a waste of time. I did learn a lot about the State Department and how they operate. I didn't get as much out of it as I did out of AID courses at FEI or TRG. Probably my biggest memory of that course was the woman who later became ambassador to Ukraine—Maria Yovanovitch, who was so courageous testifying to Congress during the first Trump impeachment—was in that class with me. Anyway, I took both the State and the USAID/FEI senior leadership course.

In terms of management style, I think partly because of my personality, but partly because I've never been comfortable around power, like ministers of agriculture, ambassadors, I tended to have an open participatory kind of respectful management style. I'd trust staff until I had a reason not to. So, I've tried to operate that way. I've also always tried to think of what my boss needs and what his/her boss needs in terms of what their constraints are, what are their expectations, that as much as I might be committed to a certain program or way of doing things, it's got to meet whatever constraints or incentives they're operating under.

I guess this is kind of a strange thing, but one of the things I'm proudest of as a manager is when I was acting DAA for the better part of a year in the E&E Bureau. When you're AA or DAA in a bureau, especially a regional bureau, you're constantly consumed by crises and the staff don't see you as much as you would like. So, I made a commitment to myself that every Friday afternoon around 2:30 or 3 I would just block out two hours to walk around the bureau and talk to people. I'd just walk around and go into offices and cubicles and I'd shake their hands and say, "Hey, Bob, I hope you have a good weekend." Sometimes that's all it was, but invariably I would have four or five really important conversations, either important to that person because they were feeling like nobody cared about what they were doing or important to me because I'd learn stuff that I needed to know that I wouldn't—maybe I'd learn a week or two later or maybe I'd never heard about. I just got so much positive feedback on that, so I just felt really good about doing that.

*Q: Good. Walk around management. Do you have any suggestions on work-life balance for people joining the Foreign Service these days?*

ATWOOD: Yeah, in thinking about this, John, I realize even when I retired in 2019, I was in a different world from the world that younger people and really everyone now live in. So, during my entire career including those eight final years in FtF through 2019, I almost never read work emails on the weekends. I never did unless somebody called me and told me I needed to. I almost never got a work-related text message, so I know things are different now in terms of email and text and constantly being "on." I still stick by this advice, though how to implement it is a little different now in this constantly turned-on world, where everybody's on all the time. I guess my first advice is for people to establish a protocol with their boss and the people who work for them on how to contact you after hours when you really need to get involved in something, whether it's a text, a phone call, whatever it is. And then don't read your email! And unplug from work related stuff in the evenings and weekends. I know that's hard, but it is just so important. (I will add here that I'm a very early morning person, and it was always easy for me to be pretty much the first person in the office, using that time well. If I'd had to get young kids to school, for example, those early mornings in the office wouldn't have worked for me. But you have to find some way to protect key parts of your time.)

It was easier for me but still took discipline even in this world I lived in most of my career before texts and everybody being on all the time. From the very beginning I exercised some discipline on avoiding after hours and weekend work whenever I could.

You can't always do that and certainly not overseas. But my default was to avoid work after hours and on weekends.

When you can't avoid it, I tried to fit it into the least intrusive time for my family. So that might be late at night. For me it tended to be very early morning. Sometimes it might be when your kids are having a nap on the weekend. Whatever you can negotiate with your spouse and fit into your kids' schedule. A lot of people are overseas single or without their family now but it's still harder but still important to have this discipline if you're by yourself to keep some time for you. And I think that's even important to USAID, I mean we're not going to work well if everybody's just on all the time.

One other thing I tried to do is make that after hours' time—on the rare times when I did have to put it in—the residual, to give it as little time as you can. Finishing that tasker doesn't have to be perfect. If you spend two more hours making it perfect, that's two hours you don't have for your family. So, I tried to make sure that my family was the priority and my time on weekends and evenings when I did have to put that time was the residual. I did whatever task it was as fast as I could. Sometimes it wasn't as good as it could have been, but I did what I was asked to do, or what I knew I had to do before Monday or before the next day.

I think this is especially true for people who are there with families, because there's been a lot of talk over the decades of quality time with your family, but quality time often is unplanned time. You can't just decide, "I've got this half-hour slot for my kids and that's going to be my quality time." Maybe they're not interested in quality time with you during that half hour. I chose to make after hours office work the "residual" rather than making my time for my family and myself the residual.

Early in my career I was told—This was when I was in Mali, and I ended up spending five years in Mali—"You might get offered an assignment somewhere else during the time you are in Mali. You should take that even if it means cutting short your time here." And I never did. There were a couple of things that came up, and I turned them down; so, don't take a country assignment that would be good for your career and bad for your family. I never regretted staying in Mali for five years. It was a fantastic family post, a really good time for our family. I probably would have advanced faster in my career if I'd accepted to move onto somewhere else as it came up as a possibility before those five years were up, but I never regretted not doing that. I think it's important, I mean you know there are plenty of exciting things you can do in AID. There are plenty of ways to be creative; there are plenty of ways that you will be recognized for what you're doing. You don't need to take a new country assignment that would be bad for your family.

*Q: Okay, very helpful. Thank you. AID has been hiring a large number of new officers including agriculture officers. I think this has just gotten approval to move up to 2,500 Foreign Service Officers so there'll be more. If young people come up to you and ask you about potentially working for AID or for the private sector or for an NGO or if they have some international interest but they're open to what they might do, what would you tell them about AID vs other opportunities?*

ATWOOD: Well, I don't think there are right or wrong answers to that question and everybody's different. For me I've never regretted spending my 38 years working at AID. There's a lot of room for creativity. There's a lot of room for doing things you've never done before, finding your niche. But I guess especially you can really influence—and even a junior officer can influence—key programs, key policies, spending decisions at country level and at global level in a way that's much harder if you're working for an NGO or a contractor. AID has huge flaws and dysfunctions, and it always will. It can't all be fixed or when they're fixed it just creates more dysfunctions. But despite that, you can have an influence on programs that make people's lives better in a sustainable way around the world. The price you pay working for AID compared to a contractor or an NGO is really getting heavily mired in the bureaucracy that USAID has. The bureaucracy is necessary, there are reasons for it, but it's frustrating. There are crazy inexplicable things that happen; decisions that get made because of the bureaucracy. So that's part of the price you pay for being in a place where you can really have a big influence.

The other disadvantage is while you can have a big influence, have a lot of impact, you're very far from the people that USAID is trying to help. If you put in the effort when you're overseas, you can establish really lasting rich relationships with counterparts in key institutions, but your time in villages with poor people benefiting from USAID will be pretty minimal. So, working for an NGO or a contractor, the people who are implementing programs—sometimes, not always, that can get you much closer to people on the ground and help you actually figure out in real time on the ground how you can make the project work better. But the cost there is that you will have usually less influence over country-level funding, country-level program or policy decisions than you would in USAID. You'll have less job security also; most of the time, not always. And you will face frustration being outside of AID where the bureaucracy and capricious decisions seem even more inexplicable and capricious to you! But I don't think there's a right or wrong answer. It just depends on what the person's looking for.

*Q: Thank you. That's very helpful. Do you have any advice for mid-career ag officers on how to advance their careers or whether they should look outside AID, whether or when they should look outside of AID for other opportunities?*

ATWOOD: Yes, let me address whether or when to look outside AID. I guess I'm not the person to talk to because even after retirement I stayed with AID for another eight years, so I don't really have much to say about that other than what I just said about NGOs and contractors and working for AID.

There is a point in your AID career, though, that your skills become so AID-specific that you're more and more effective in AID but probably less effective on the outside. I know some very senior, outstanding people who I respect a lot who moved outside of AID and were either very frustrated with the new organization they worked with or just weren't very effective because their skills were so AID-specific. So mid-career you're maybe right on the cusp of that, not quite there necessarily, but something to consider.

In terms of within AID how to advance your career, I guess, and this is really advice that I haven't always followed, don't spend a lot of time thinking about promotion. It's a losing game because you will get promoted but you won't get promoted when you want to. That's just the way it is, in every organization. And if you spend too much time focusing on it, it affects your attitude, and it also affects how you do your work and how you think about your work. You shouldn't be designing that project thinking that you're going to get promoted for it. You should design it so that it's going to be the best, most sustainable project you can do. So, focus on doing your job well and on the impact you want to have. You will get promoted, but it's going to take longer than you want, so just get on with the work!

A few other things. While I just recommended never taking a new country assignment that would be bad for your family, I also know that for just about everybody who works in AID there will be times when either you are asked to do something, or there might be an opportunity there that you think would be too much of a challenge or beyond your skills, beyond your experience, and my advice is almost always is, take that opportunity, say yes to that request for a few reasons.

First of all, everything we do in AID is complicated and beyond anybody's current experience or knowledge. If the stuff we did were simple, we'd just write a very tight scope of work and give it to a contractor to do. So, everything we do is complicated and hard to figure out. That's just what we do.

The simple development problems with easy answers were solved long ago. So that means you will contribute even if you think you're not fully equipped to do it. You might create a new approach, but you'll also learn a lot and in ways that can shape the rest of your career. If I hadn't taken on things I felt uncomfortable with or that were very challenging for me—and I'm someone who didn't have a lot of powerful self-image and confidence—but if I hadn't done those things, I wouldn't have completed the first comprehensive food need assessment during the 1984-85 famine in Ethiopia. I wouldn't have gotten the NGOs together in Mali to figure out how to respond to the food crisis and insurgency in northern Mali in 1992. I wouldn't have tried to figure out how to get child survival funding to do ag production projects in Bangladesh. I wouldn't have gotten a bunch of NGOs and religious groups and universities talking to each other about why funding for agriculture is declining in AID. I wouldn't have taken the job in a region and in sectors I knew absolutely nothing about in Europe in health and in education and in democracy.

I'm not an exception. These opportunities are out there. You will be asked to do things you think you're not equipped for and just go for it.

*Q: Well, I think that's very helpful and useful advice.*

ATWOOD: Sorry, I have one other thing important to advance in your career, and also just for your own sanity. I mentioned this a few other times. You really need to always look at things from the point of view of the decision makers who are important in your

work life. Everybody in AID is passionate about what they're doing, what their sector is, their project, whatever it is, but we work in an organization where we have counterparts, bosses, other stakeholders, and we have to understand what drives them and whatever your project or passion is, you've got to make it fit so that they get what they need out of it and then they will help you.

You know counterparts overseas especially are operating—but also counterparts in Washington, in the FTFG., AAs, and DAAs and ambassadors—are all operating under fairly severe political and policy constraints, and often you can help them advance what they're trying to do in ways that advance your project or sector if you're thinking of that. I've worked with so many people in AID who are basically resentful and feel badly treated because they felt like they didn't get what they wanted for their sector or their project, and often it's because they didn't take the time to look at a couple of steps beyond their own area, to the boss or their boss's boss or the counterpart or the minister that the counterpart works for to figure out how to meet their needs while meeting your project's needs simultaneously.

*Q: I think that's a very wise point. And let me just add that some of the new people I've been coaching say they don't understand why a decision is made, I say don't argue with it in the meeting. Ask to meet with the person who made the decision later and say basically you know you have knowledge that I don't have. Can you give me an idea what the factors were that led to this decision? And try to kind of get into their heads a little bit more so that you understand where they're coming from.*

ATWOOD: Yeah, that's great advice, John.

That gets me to my last thing which is information. You know, what information do each of the people you work with need to do their own jobs and achieve their goals, because certainly if you're just staff level there are things you know that the mission director or the ambassador doesn't know and sometimes you need to think about that and figure out how to get them what they need to know.

But also, maybe even more importantly, people who work for you or with you, contractors and NGOs, you almost always know more than they do about the larger picture of the office or the mission or the embassy, what their goals and needs and problems are. Are you keeping them informed? The people who work for you, direct reports, contractors, partners, are you keeping them informed about what they need to know to be more effective in doing their job or to make their work easier?

Finally working for AID, there's just always a lot of noise. Every month or two there is a change in the budget. There are policy changes. There's talk about reorganization. There's talk about we're going to have to cut this project off because of the budget. So, there's a very high level of noise in AID that all of us get exposed to. And I've always felt like one of my jobs has been to keep people informed but also protect them, moderate the noise level, whether they're contractors or employees. So I'm telling them what they need to know to get their work done but not coming back from every senior staff meeting and



saying, “Oh this is terrible! Look at what’s happened now! They’re going to cut our budget.”

Just one example of that. When there’s a new administration, people are always worried about the new political appointees. The Obama administration had a lot of political appointees, not just senior level, a lot of staff level appointees. I got to know a couple of them just a little bit, not a lot, soon after they arrived. People were really worried about these political appointees and their influence and I just said in one staff meeting, “We’re getting these new people. I think they really like AID and like what we’re doing.” I had a little bit of a basis for saying that because I’d met with them, but I didn’t know for sure. But just kind of moderating the panic level so that people can just get on with their jobs.

And just treat everybody with kindness and respect. I just think that’s so important.

While it may be a bit redundant, I feel like the farewell advice I was asked to give in the last Bureau of Food Security all-hands meeting that I attended in 2019 just a couple of days before I truly and completely retired, really summarizes key lessons from my career, so let me run over that here, just as we end:

Gratitude: The most important part of my story is gratitude, especially for the great people I have worked with and for, and for the many opportunities I’ve had.

Feed the Future: I’m proud to have been a part of the many units and initiatives in which I worked over the years, but most particularly, at the end of my career, to have been part of the Bureau for Food Security, part of the impact we have had in so many ways, proud to have worked with so many great people in the Bureau.

Hiring mechanisms: Don’t get discouraged. I couldn’t get a job in 1981. So, my major professor called his friend (the head of AFR/SD) and suggested that he take me on. They actually had an unanticipated hole in their staffing and hired me under the PASA for three months. That was the first of six employment mechanisms I worked under at USAID. It took me several years, and several failed interviews, before I was able to join the Foreign Service – that was tough. I mention this by way of wanting to say: don’t get discouraged by the insanity (and personal uncertainty) of multiple hiring mechanisms. USAID needs your skills and experience and will find a way to get access to them, but it won’t always be pretty, so just focus on doing the best you can without too much attention to the messy hiring mechanisms.

The old USAID: The USAID I joined at that time was the end of an earlier era. We already were doing business through grants and contracts, but the people that Curt Reintsma, Phil Steffan, Gloria Steele, and I worked with in that office, the experienced older guys – and they were all guys – had had their heyday as USAID employees when they had served directly – in Vietnam or in Latin America – as USAID extension agents, land reform advisors, chief of staff or personal counselor to Ministers of Agriculture.

The old focus on inputs to development: I also came into a world focused on foreign aid inputs – projects and money. People were concerned about the results of their projects, but the main focus was in inputs – project design and money. Fifteen to twenty people reviewed every concept note and every PAD and the AA had to review and approve – at both these stages. The test of a successful Mission was how much money they could move. And politics really drove country selection far more than now, where it is one, but only one, factor. Back then, Africa’s biggest aid recipients – and this was economic and development aid, not food or humanitarian – were Liberia, Sudan, Somalia and Zaire, clearly not good bets at the time. Sitting in project review meetings for those countries was painful because we knew those projects, in those environments, could not deliver. Politics needs to be part of country allocations since we are part of the FTF foreign affairs community, but I think we have gotten it much better now, in both FtF and water, where we pay pretty careful attention to need, ability to use the money well to get results, and political priorities when we select countries.

Results, change, evidence: By the time I went overseas in 1987, things were changing. A move in Congress led to greater focus in Africa on results and on countries where we could make a difference. In my first two posts, Mali and Bangladesh, those governments’ fiscal pressures and a new emphasis on evidence created a good environment for policy change. Government realization that they couldn’t manage agricultural prices and volumes created new incentives for investments in productivity and opening up markets to create greater incentives for farmers, processors and others. Combined with ag science providing more productive varieties, the results were in Mali a tripling of agricultural production (almost half of it through yield and productivity gain) and in Bangladesh agricultural led growth increasing supply, reducing prices, and bringing about major reductions in undernutrition and poverty; at the same time, unprecedented women’s access to contraceptives in Bangladesh also contributed to poverty reduction and food security. In both cases, the evidence that USAID and partners provided was an essential part of the policy changes. Evidence remains a key factor shaping strategies and policies, and please don’t underestimate its power even now. But evidence is only valued if its providers are trusted. We worked hard to earn and keep that trust.

Trust: Trust and evidence were equally important when I came back to Washington in 1966 and got involved in the very rewarding effort of talking to constituents and being open about what we know and what we are doing, early in the decade-long attempt to revive funding in food, agriculture and nutrition. Curt Reintsma initiated that process in the late 1990s with the Africa Food Security Initiative. The culminating moment of that effort – ten years later – was the creation of Feed the Future. When FtF started, it was managed out of Secretary of State Clinton’s office, with no clarity on what if any role there would be for USAID. Thanks initially to five people – Jeff Hill, Susan Bradley, Josette Lewis, Franklin Moore, and Curt Reintsma – USAID got a “seat at the table” and clearly demonstrated that we actually had valuable knowledge and experience that State Department could build on; but it took that experience, the trust engendered by these USAID staff, to help shape an FtF that, for example, did focus on nutrition, not just agriculture, and on productivity and markets, not just crash, unsustainable production

support programs. And we have accomplished so much thanks to their early efforts. But trust and evidence both were essential to that.

Don't take USAID programs and budget for granted: A lot of that success in creating FtF did come from continued constituency dialogue with Congress and the Administration. Never assume that we are entitled to, or assured of, the \$1 billion for food, agriculture, nutrition and resilience. It is a direct result of constituency groups that trust and value what we are doing, and their continued dialogue with Congress and the Administration. Don't take it for granted. I know that our colleagues in water can tell you the very same story. Feed the Future comes out of those constituency discussions, and out of that trust. It needs to be continually nurtured.

People: Finally, trust brings me to people.

For those you work with: Kindness and respect, even when they are annoying, off base, or you disagree with them.

For the rural poor: don't treat the farmer and rural people who we are trying to help as objects of our work. They are making their own choices the best they can; they are not our choices. It's patronizing and self-defeating when we say "we need to change the crops people are growing," or "we need to move people out of agriculture," or "we need to get them to eat better." These are pretty basic human decisions that are not ours to make. Our job is to expand opportunities, choices and information people have so they have greater scope to make their own decisions.

Finally, for the people in your life. Don't let the work consume you; it's important, do the best you can in the time available, but don't shortchange those people who are important in your life, or even those who should be in your life but aren't right now. Time is crucial to the people in your life; leave plenty of it for them.

*Q: David, I think those are great points. This has been a great interview. I can't wait for it to be transcribed and then made available to new officers.*

*End of interview*