

The Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training
Foreign Affairs Oral History Project

DR. GERALD BRITAN

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Initial interview Date: February 2, 2022
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This oral history transcription was made possible through support provided by U.S. Agency for International Development, under terms of Fixed Amount Award No. 7200AA21FA00043. The opinions expressed herein are those of the interviewee and do not necessarily reflect the views of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the Association for Diplomatic Studies and Training.

INTERVIEW

Q: Today is February 2nd, 2022, and this is the first interview with Gerry Britan. Gerry, let's start at the beginning. I know you were born and grew up in Chicago. Can you tell me a little bit about your childhood?

Childhood in Chicago

BRITAN: Sure, I spent my first 12 years growing up on the Southwest side of Chicago. My dad, Norm Britan, was also a Chicagoan and went to college at the U of C. My mom, Greta Mahler (Britan), was a refugee from Austria who met my dad at the beginning of World War II. They got married, had my sister in 1944 and had me in 1949. After the war, my dad worked as a chemist for a while at Sherwin Williams, but he hated that and went back to school to become an anthropologist. My mom and dad met in Washington DC in the early 1940s, where she was his lab instructor for a graduate chemistry class at George Washington University. My mom emigrated to the States on her own at nineteen as a refugee from Austria. After working as a governess for a few months, she won a scholarship to Mt. Holyoke. After college, she went to graduate school in Washington, where she met my dad, who was also a graduate student.

Norm ended up enlisting in the army for World War II and served as an officer in Italy for most of the war, although he was briefly in the Philippines at the very end. My parents got married in 1943. By the time I was born in 1949, my dad was back in graduate school studying anthropology under the G.I. bill. I had a pretty normal, middle-class upbringing on Chicago's southwest side in a neighborhood called Longwood Manor...a kind of working class annex to the posher Beverly Hills. neighborhood. When I was about twelve, we moved to South Shore on the southeast side of Chicago, which is where I

spent my adolescence.

Q: Clearly you had some international roots! Did your parents encourage you to think about a career in international work?

BRITAN: My mom wanted me to become a doctor like her uncle, my great uncle, who lived in New York. By the mid-1950s, my dad was teaching college in Chicago, first at South Eastern Community College and then at Northeastern Illinois State University, where he eventually served as the chair of Anthropology and where he stayed most of his career.

When I was five, my dad did his doctoral fieldwork in anthropology on a little island in Maine, Penobscot Island, near Old Town, studying social change and acculturation among the Penobscot Indians. So, after a couple summers thinking I was an Indian, I guess I had at least a good start to a cross-cultural career, but my parents never actually traveled much internationally when I was a kid.

Q: Did your parents speak any language other than English?

BRITAN: Well, my Mom was a native German speaker and my parents always spoke German when they didn't want my sister or me to understand what they were saying. I finally took German in college, but never really spoke it very well; my French has always been better. My dad wasn't a native speaker, but he'd studied German in college, so my parents spoke German when they didn't want us kids to understand.

Q: So, it seems to me just from what you said and from what I saw on your resume, that you started initially following in your dad's footsteps? Sociology, anthropology—

University of Chicago and Columbia University

BRITAN: Well, you know, when I was a kid I thought I was going to be a scientist. I was very good at that kind of stuff. When I was in sixth grade, I won first place in the Chicago Science Fair and when I was a sophomore in High School, I won a Chicago citywide math contest (competing against juniors and seniors). I also won a scholarship to an NSF summer science research program at the University of Washington before my junior year. So, I thought I was going to be a molecular biologist when I entered the University of Chicago in 1966. I placed out of three years of biology and two years of calculus at U of C, but never took another science course again. My first semester, I took a senior level course in international relations called "The Balance of Power" with Hans Morganthau and the next semester I took a futuristics course, "America in the 21st century," with Daniel Bell, and I was hooked. I just loved social science and philosophy and decided I'd had enough with science!

That spring I was supposed to go to the Bahamas with some friends, but the trip fell through at the last minute and I decided to go to New York. One of my good friends at U of C suggested I look up her cousin at New York University, and I did. We fell madly in

love and eventually got married. That was my first wife, Ronnie, who died, far too young, from breast cancer in 2000. Anyway, Ronnie and I ended traveling back and forth between Chicago and New York during the winter and spring of 1967. Soon I applied to transfer to Columbia University and got in. And, I ended up spending the rest of college and graduate school at Columbia.

Q: Right. At that point, you were very certain that social science was the direction you wanted to go.

BRITAN: That's right, and my first advisor at Columbia was Immanuel Wallerstein, the well-known sociologist. At that point, I thought sociology would be my major. But, by my junior year I had decided on anthropology. I think that I actually resisted studying anthropology for a long time because my dad was an anthropologist, but once I started taking anthropology courses, I became fascinated.

Q: Being at Columbia right in the middle of all of the anti-war protests, did that affect you at all? Or affect your view of what you wanted to do

BRITAN: Definitely. You know, one of the things that brought me to New York in the winter of 1967 was going to an anti-war march and I was pretty active in the anti-war movement. And, I was part of the Columbia uprising in 1968 and got arrested in the mathematics building along with Mark Rudd and Tom Hayden and a whole bunch of others. And there were anti-war protests at Columbia again in 1970. This certainly colored my education!

It also influenced my thoughts about graduate school, because at that point the draft was coming up. I managed to avoid the draft with deferments of various sorts, but when I applied to graduate school in 1970, that wasn't yet certain, so I also applied to several Canadian universities, just in case. But everything worked out in the end. I went to graduate school in anthropology at Columbia and married Ronnie in 1970, who was then also a graduate student in anthropology at NYU.

BRITAN: Two more anthropologists in the family. Definitely a love match.

Q: Just a question on the protests, I'm wondering, did it color your view about working for the government?

BRITAN: Sure. But this was also in the day when anthropologists were being castigated for working for the CIA (Central Intelligence Agency) and helping with the Vietnam war. That was a big issue within the American Anthropological Association in the 1970s. And I always knew that I wanted to be an applied anthropologist, which was not particularly popular in that period. I was studying social and economic change and I thought I was going to work in development in some form. In the end, though, I did my doctoral fieldwork among Irish-Catholic fishermen/farmers/wage laborers in Newfoundland, so I guess I became a Europeanist, more or less.

By then I had become very interested in working on the fringes of developed economies--the coast of Norway, islands like Newfoundland, Appalachia, places like that. But I also was very interested in Africa and Asia, and post-colonialism. But most anthropologists in those days had very mixed feelings about working for the government. It wasn't like the beginning of the Vietnam era when people went to work for the State Department thinking they were doing good and, you know, bringing freedom to the people of Vietnam. By the time I finished graduate school in 1974, there was much more suspicion about working for the government.

So, I thought I'd probably work domestically on social and economic change, political change and so on. As I said, my doctoral research was studying how a small Newfoundland fishing village dealt with the aftermath of confederation with Canada and the decline of the cod fishery. There had always been substantial seasonal labor wage labor migration from my little community and I examined how the economic opportunities on the little island had changed and how people had dealt with the new opportunities they faced. And, interesting enough, one of the things that really fascinated me was how all the various social and economic development programs that affected my community actually worked in practice and how they affected people very differently than planners expected.

I'd read about most of these programs while doing background research in Ottawa and in St. John's, but when I arrived in my little Newfoundland "outport" and began studying how people were actually coping, I discovered that these programs and their impacts often looked very different from what was intended. The opportunities people faced, and the way these programs were sometimes "gamed," were also very different. So, I became very interested in studying how bureaucracies and social action programs actually work. And, although my doctoral dissertation was on economic decision making, I also spent a lot of time examining these development programs and wrote several articles and papers on bureaucracy and organizational behavior.

Q: Right, I saw that you have a number of publications on bureaucracy and anthropology and most of them were written before you ever got into the AID (Agency for International Development) bureaucracy.

BRITAN: That's right, although I wrote a little bit about AID as a bureaucracy too, but much less. It's a little harder once you're already part of it.

As I was finishing graduate school, I also started looking for a job. In academia that typically involves networking through your advisors. My first advisor at Columbia was Pete Vayda, one of the founders of ecological anthropology. But he ended up moving to Rutgers before I finished so I eventually completed my doctoral dissertation under Conrad Arensburg. Arensburg was a famous Europeanist (author of "The Irish Countryman"), one of the founders of the Society for Applied Anthropology, and co-author (with Karl Polanyi and George Dalton) of "Trade Markets in the Early Empires," which was the seminal text for the "New Institutional Economics" (for which James Buchanan and others eventually won the Nobel Prize).

So, I was interested in looking at how economies work, particularly non-western economies, and how people cope with opportunities and decision-making in different economic and social contexts. My dissertation was a pretty academic look at how people make economic decisions in a non-market setting, but I was also studying things that had very practical implications for how people address social and economic opportunities in times of social and economic upheaval. When I started looking for employment, though, most of the jobs were in academia, and I ended up taking a job at a University.

Q: And you were able to go straight from your doctorate into teaching.

Academic career at Northwestern

Britain: Yes, that's right, I was lucky. Francis Hsu, a famous Chinese-American anthropologist, was the chair of anthropology at Northwestern University, and George Dalton, another of the founders of institutional economics, was on leave, and both were close friends of my advisor, Conrad Arensberg. So, I was asked to fill George Dalton's position while he was on leave and ended up teaching at Northwestern for another 8 years. Although my last couple of years at Northwestern I was actually on leave and working for the government. Meanwhile, my wife Ronnie finished her masters in anthropology at New York University in a program designed to prepare community college teachers. But (ironically, like international development programs), by the time she'd finished, the job market for community college teachers had pretty much dried up. Ronnie, however, had always been lucky. She had an internship at SUNY Farmingdale (then a 2-year college) through her NYU program. And while Farmingdale didn't need anthropology instructors, it did need someone to teach reading to adult illiterates. And, somehow Ronnie transformed this experience into a stellar career in adult basic education. So, we went off to Northwestern, and while I started teaching, she co-founded an adult literacy program in Evanston which continues to this day. She also ended up continuing her graduate studies at Northwestern and finishing her Ph.D. jointly in anthropology and education in 1978.

Meanwhile, I taught Economic Anthropology and Anthropological Theory and Applied Anthropology and even Urban Anthropology, and futuristics. And, I started writing more about bureaucracies and how they worked. One of the new fields just developing in the mid-1970's was evaluation research, which was closely related to my interest in bureaucracies and how they work. And, two of the leaders of this new field, Don Campbell and Tom Cook, happened to be at Northwestern. They were running a post-doctoral seminar on evaluation research, and I started sitting in.

Campbell and Cook were the founders of experimental evaluation in the 1970's. Indeed, to this day one of the major evaluation awards is still called the Don Campbell award and the Campbell Institute is named after him. Campbell was a brilliant guy, who wrote a fascinating paper in the late sixties about "the qualitative basis for quantitative knowing," demonstrating that all quantification is ultimately based on qualitative distinctions.

And I was writing papers on the need for understanding programs in their social, cultural and political context—about the value of contextual evaluation as opposed to experimental evaluation. In the end, I think we all learned a lot from each other. I certainly gained an amazing perspective on the evaluation field and a strong grounding in experimental methods.

Contract evaluation and public policy research

My position at Northwestern was extended and renewed (I eventually served as Associate Chair of Anthropology and founded Northwestern University's Program in Ethnography and Public Policy). But I also started doing a lot of contract evaluation research for various social action, education and community development programs. After about a year or two of this, some evaluation colleagues on a National Academy of Sciences panel who had become aware of my work and asked my advice on how to evaluate an experiment in bureaucratic reform at the Department of Commerce. The program was called the Experimental Technology Incentives Program (ETIP) and its purpose was to help other government agencies develop and implement experimental policy changes aimed at stimulating technological innovation. Indeed, one could say that ETIP's purpose was to convince other agencies to conduct public policy experiments (which it turned out was no easy task.) and then to figure out what did and didn't work.

After a few back and forth consultations, the National Academy Panel asked me to conduct a major evaluation of ETIP from 1976 to 1978 (while continuing to teach at Northwestern). Eventually I wrote a book about the program, "Experimenting with Public Policy" and a series of technical monographs and articles. And, I really enjoyed the work; putting together a team of fieldworkers examining how various government agencies conducted their policy experiments, and indeed on how these agencies actually worked.

Q: Right. Which government agencies were included in that study?

BRITAN: Oh, all sorts, it's been nearly 50 years... The program was based at the National Bureau of Standards in the Department of Commerce, but they worked with the Food and Drug Administration, the International Trade Administration, the Patent Office, the USDA, the Department Labor, all sorts of different Agencies. They developed several experiments with regulatory reform, various kinds of technology incentives, all sorts of interesting stuff. And the underlying question was whether bureaucracies were really willing and able to experiment with their policies. And for the most part, it turned out they weren't. So, Agencies often gamed the program in various ways.

ETIP had some really big success, but also lots of experiments where participants tried to avoid doing much of anything. So, it was interesting. It was a lot of work, but also great fun. And, I got to work closely with the ETIP Review Panel at the National Academy of Sciences. The Panel included people like Amitai Etzionni, the famous sociologist and Jordan Baruch, the Assistant Secretary of Commerce for Science and Technology and one of the real inventors of the internet), etc., etc. So, there were all these brilliant people

on the panel, who kept me on my toes. It was not quite evaluation research, but I certainly examined how organizations adapted and changed over time. So, I got more and more interested in organizational behavior and bureaucracy while I was at Northwestern, particularly from the perspective of evaluation research. Eventually, I ended up with a joint appointment in Management, and ended up teaching courses on organizational behavior and organizational culture at the School of Management. Like I said, I was having a grand time.

Joining Evaluation Office at USDA

Sometime in 1979, I was at an evaluation meeting and this guy (who turned out to be a senior advisor to the Secretary of Agriculture) came up to me after I presented a paper and said, “Hey, we’re creating a new evaluation office at the USDA’s Science and Education Administration. Are you interested in helping?” And I sort of scratched my head and said, “Let me think about it.”

I was interested, but my wife had a great job in Chicago and I very much liked what I was doing at Northwestern. John Brazzel, the guy who would be running the new Evaluation office was energetic and brilliant and seemed like he would be great to work with. (John eventually ended up as a very successful executive coach, and we met again years later when we both worked for Vice President’s National Performance Review). Anyway, John wanted to hire me as the Office’s senior evaluation methodologist and I was really tempted.

But I returned to Northwestern thinking I’d probably turn the job down. A few days later I was on the top floor of the John Hancock Building having cocktails with the ETIP Advisory Panel Chair on the top floor of the John Hancock Building (not my usual haunt) and I asked him what he thought. “Why wouldn’t you take it,” he said. “Sounds like a wonderful opportunity. At least find out more. What have you got to lose?”

So, I called the folks at the USDA back and asked them how the appointment would actually work. And they said, “Well, the easiest route would be for us to offer you an Interagency Personnel Act Appointment” (a three way contract between me, them, and Northwestern). “We’d pay you a GS-15 salary” (about triple my academic earnings) “plus a per diem” (since I’d be away from my Evanston home), “and you can pretty much define your own agenda. Come for a couple of years and we’ll see how it works.” And so, I did.

Q: So, you were technically on loan from Northwestern?

BRITAN: Yes, I was on an IPA contract working for the USDA and supervising USADA employees, while on leave from Northwestern. As I’m sure you know, USAID has also had lots of IPA employees over the years. I’d never heard of an IPA contract before, but it seemed fine to me.

Q: Right, so you had this offer, you decided, “Give a shot. Maybe two years. Maybe they’ll extend it. Maybe” –

BRITAN: Exactly. And my wife Ronnie got a job at the Department of Education, and we thought that Washington would be a good place for us to pursue dual-careers. As I mentioned, Ronnie had been running a community-based adult education program that she’d co-founded in Evanston, but she’d recently earned her Ph.D. and wanted to move on. And Washington seemed like it would be a better place to pursue two careers, particularly at a time when that could still be difficult for women.

Moving to Washington DC

So, we said, “Why not,” and we ended up moving to Washington late in the summer of 1980. We got an apartment in Crystal City and I began commuting to the USDA. And, I was working with a great group of people at the USDA’s Science and Education Administration.

You know, I’m a city kid. Never in my wildest dreams had I thought I’d be working for the USDA. And, I’d never even heard of the Science and Education Administration. I don’t know how it’s changed since, but in those days USDA/SEA included the Federal Agricultural Research Service, the Agricultural Extension Service, and the State Cooperative Research Services. So, it encompassed almost all the more scientific and intellectual parts of the Department of Agriculture.

Q: Right, you started right at the beginning of the Reagan administration?

BRITAN: Just before. It was summer of 1980, the election took place that fall, and Reagan was inaugurated in January.

Q: So, were there any impacts on your work?

BRITAN: Yes. Enormous ones, eventually. I came in at the end of the Carter administration, during a time when there was still lots of enthusiasm about working for the government. This whole idea of conducting evidence-based evaluations for decision-making was gaining momentum, and our ability to collect and analyze good empirical evidence was growing. At the time, I was one of the founding members of what was then called the Society for Evaluation Research, which eventually merged into the American Evaluation Association. All of this was still just starting and it was really fascinating.

The USDA/SEA’s new Evaluation Office was staffed by a very empowered group of social scientists and economists working on agricultural research and extension issues. A lot of them had come from land-grant Universities, state Extension Services or the Federal Agricultural Research Service, all of which had a long history of empirical research on agricultural programs and policies. So, there was a lot of enthusiasm and energy, and a strong focus on collaboration at the federal, state and local levels, and clear

emphasis on the impact of programs and policies on farmers and consumers. All our evaluation work seemed interesting and important, many of our studies were methodologically challenging and, and some may even have made a significant difference for beneficiaries!

Given my background in organizational behavior, I was asked to lead a large evaluation of something called the National Extension Users' Advisory Board to see what difference it had made in the quality and impact of extension programs. I was looking at issues that were in many ways similar to those I had examined in evaluating ETIP: How can you get bureaucracies to change? How can you get programs to do more sensible things? One of my ETIP findings was that while the program began very idealistically, it quickly became bureaucratized and its policy experiments became primarily a matter of 'selling money' to reluctant partners. Money was not a critical need for most of these agencies, but conducting experiments was very threatening.

Q: Money wasn't enough?

BRITAN: Money wasn't much of an incentive to take extra risks and to do what most bureaucrats saw as extra work. So, there was a kind of perverse organizational dynamics and while ETIP did accomplish a lot, its experiments were far more fraught than you would've thought. ETIP was saying: "we have money to defray the cost of trying new policies, seeing how they work, and then implementing the changes that are most effective." But there are risks for bureaucrats in doing that, big risks. The experiments might, after all, fail. And, even more telling, any policy experiment would likely alienate at least some constituencies. And, discovering that the program could have been doing better wasn't necessarily so wonderful either. So, it was very fraught.

My work evaluating the National Extension User's advisory board was in many ways similar. Extension services are remarkably inbred in the land-grant universities and it was a whole new world for me. I remember one time I was giving a talk at Texas A&M and flew into College Station on a little prop plane and it was like....

Q: It's another world—

BRITAN: Right. A nice Jewish boy from the south side of Chicago galavanting around rural Texas looking at catfish farms. It was all very different. But then, by the summer of 1981, the Reagan administration had really gotten going and life became a whole lot more difficult....

Q: Money was being withheld or new policy directives were pulling you off course?

BRITAN: Both. Maybe a little less so at USDA than at USAID, but things were getting difficult even in Agriculture. And the folks in Science and Education were the least "old boys" in the old boys network. I mean, they were scientists, right, not farmers. And eventually this had a big effect on me as I made decisions about my career and my future. Despite my publication record, my future at Northwestern was tentative. They just didn't

know what to make of an applied anthropologist who'd taken a leave of absence to work outside of academia. And SEA wanted me to stay. So, there I was, a 32 year old anthropologist being offered my first job in government as a GS-15. It was pretty nice.

Short term position as Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at Southern Illinois University

BRITAN: So, I told Northwestern I was planning to leave. Then the Reagan Administration pulled the rug out from under me and imposed a federal hiring freeze!

This was the winter of 1982 and I had to figure out what to do. I was having fun at the USDA and had basically burned my bridges with Northwestern. SEA's Evaluation Office was still doing fine and thought they'd be hiring again soon, but didn't know when. So, I stretched things out as long as I could, but finally, with a newborn, I decided it was time to fish or cut bait and started looking for another job.. I soon was offered a position as Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research at Southern Illinois University, essentially the person in charge of research and projects. Somehow the people at SIU thought that my Washington experience and connections would be a real boon in bringing more research and program funding to the university. To my surprise, they were right.

Q: Right, was SIU part of the land grant system?

BRITAN: The University of Illinois is the land grant institution. Southern Illinois has two campuses, one in Carbondale and Edwardsville, both near St. Louis. In addition to serving as Associate Dean of Graduate Studies and Research I was also appointed as an Associate Professor of Anthropology. And Ronnie, who was working for DoD by then, would be able to transfer to a job in St. Louis. So, we said, "Let's give it a try it."

I was based at the Edwardsville campus and in May of 1982 we moved to Edwardsville, Illinois with our one-year-old son. I had had a fair amount of experience developing and managing research programs and projects at the USDA, at Northwestern, and as a private evaluation consultant. At Northwestern, for example, I had been responsible for running a "human subjects review board" and had developed and obtained funding for a large graduate level training program. I knew large parts of the federal and state research establishment quite well from my work with ETIP and at the USDA. And I had been very successful in obtaining grant and contract funding for my own research. So I settled right into the work.

Settling into life was a bit more challenging. I grew up in Chicago and I thought I was a Midwesterner, but one of the things that Ronnie and I quickly learned is that the small-town southern Midwest is not Chicago. Edwardsville and Carbondale are church and family sorts of places and I was an acculturated lefty from Chicago with a wife from a conservative Jewish background in Brooklyn.. Surprisingly, we actually fit in fairly well, but it was challenging. Ronnie, I think, was more adaptive than me, adjusted well to her new job, and saw her career take off. My work at Southern Illinois went well too,

building in many ways on my previous experience studying bureaucracies and organizational behavior!

This was my first time in a big public university and, I must say, I found the bureaucracy a bit stifling. There were just all these picayune rules and procedures that made it very difficult for people to conduct research and projects and get outside funding. SIUE had a rule, for example, that faculty couldn't use any university facilities for research or consulting projects that weren't run entirely through the University. Indeed, the University wouldn't even let faculty pay for copying, computers, student assistance or lab and office space for work they were doing as a sideline. None of this reflected the law, so much as the really arcane rules and practices of the university.

In my two years at SIU, I more than doubled research and programs funding. And mostly I did it by figuring out how to get the university out of the faculty's way. It may be that I got all the easy picking in these first two years, helping people who were already highly motivated to do research and projects and more than happy to run more of it through the University if it was less of a hassle. So, we made it easier for faculty to buy part of their secretary's and research assistants' time, to hire graduate students from private consulting earnings, to pay for the use of university facilities and equipment (which were otherwise underutilized anyway). None of this was necessarily easy and all of it involved a fair amount of bureaucratic politicking, but the faculty were on my side, and research and projects funding increased rapidly.

Still, Ronnie and I weren't all that happy living in the small town Midwest and in little more than a year we started looking for ways to move on.

Q: Okay, so, just so I understand—all of your academic and professional training was on questions like “Where are the bottlenecks?” and “What’s keeping people from doing the right thing?” and you were able to apply that to this public institution. You also were able to clear some of the roadblocks so that people could get the funding for the research they wanted. But nevertheless, socially, this was not a very compatible place.

BRITAN: Exactly. But even professionally it wasn't that satisfying. Being a research and projects czar wasn't what I really wanted to do with my life. It wasn't terrible. And I liked teaching on the side. But I wasn't getting up in the morning thinking, “Today I'm going to cure river blindness” or “reduce the infant mortality,” I certainly helped some professors do interesting and productive research and projects, and the funding I helped bring in funded a bunch of graduate students, but mostly it was just about getting more resources for the University

So within little more than a year, Ronnie and I had decided we wanted to move on. The question was whether I would stay in academia and look nationwide or move back to government and return to DC, which seemed the best place to pursue a two-person career.

Q: Right, and you had enjoyed your initial time in Washington?

BRITAN: I had certainly enjoyed my time in Washington. But I also enjoyed teaching. And some of my graduate students were becoming big successes, which felt great. One of my students became president of the Society for Applied Anthropology, another served on the board right of the American Anthropology Association, and still another became a named professor at CalTech, and that was good. But academia has also always felt a bit sterile to me, a bit narrow, and a bit unfulfilling. I've always loved applied work the most, dealing with big problems and issues.. Most academics succeed by doing very good work on very narrow subjects and it sometimes seems the narrower the subject, the better.

Q: After an academic gets tenure, is it your experience that frees them up to be broader, or do they stay in their narrow row?

BRITAN: I think that most continue to hoe their pretty narrow row. Not everyone. Some academics semi-retire after tenure and others just do whatever they want. Certainly, some academics pursue brilliant, wide-ranging and broadly influential careers—I have one cousin like that. But I think it's less a matter of tenure and more about native brilliance. Such extraordinary folk are few and far between, and the culture of academia doesn't necessarily encourage them.

Q: Okay, so we're leading up to when you first encounter AID. How did that happen?

Encountering USAID and return to Washington

BRITAN: So, let me try to remember how that happened., Ronnie was always more employable than me. She had civil service tenure, a wonderful career at DoD and was getting promoted regularly, to GS 14 or 15 by then. She was doing interesting work as senior analyst and systems planner at DoD. And she had plenty of opportunities to move back to Washington. My job situation was tougher. I still had opportunities in academic anthropology, in academic administration and in government, but I didn't have civil service status. Jobs were tight in academia and in government the Reagan job freeze was only just thawing.

While I was working at SIU, I did a little consulting for USAID. One of my former economist colleagues at USDA, Leon Hunter, was married to Annette Binnendyck, who was the head of evaluation studies at USAID. And sometime in 1982 or 1983, Annette hired me to write a paper assessing USAID's evaluation system.

At that point USAID still required that every project be evaluated every year. I reviewed a sample of these evaluation products and concluded that this approach was essentially useless, a bureaucratic requirement that people met perfunctorily, taking as little risk as possible." The staff in the evaluation office looked at my paper and were impressed, but when my report was sent to Agency management, it was filed away and ignored. I do think that my work may have had some influence on USAID's subsequent decision to eliminate annual evaluation requirements, but it may also have been a bit too critical and was never directly cited.

Q: Right, and the evaluation system you're referring to was the mandatory project evaluation system?

BRITAN: That's right, where every project got "evaluated" every year. And where there was an annual evaluation report, a midterm evaluation, and an "end of project" evaluation, if I remember correctly. But it was primarily a bureaucratic requirement that had little or no effect on what people did.

Q: Except it may have fed the Beltway Bandit system.

BRITAN: That's right, and used up a lot of resources. There may have been an occasional study that had some positive effect, but it was rare. The system wasn't designed, particularly, to have an effect.

Anyway, many of USAID's evaluation staff were sympathetic to my views and Annette and I got along famously. It got to the fall of 1983, I think, and Ronnie and I decided, "Enough is enough. Let's both look for jobs in Washington and as soon as we get one, we'll move." And, within a month, Ronnie was offered a great job (with, I think, another promotion) at the Defense Information Systems Agency. We visited Washington in December 1983, rented a house in Lake Barcroft (and remained in that community for the next 25 years), and got ready to move early in 1984. But I still didn't have a job.

I did interview with Annette and her boss, Haven North, that December. USAID wasn't doing much regular hiring then, so Haven recommended hiring me through another Intergovernmental Personnel Act appointment. Fortunately, Southern Illinois University agreed.

Q: Another IPA.

BRITAN: Yep, another IPA. It was no big deal for SIU. USAID paid them and they paid me (at the GS-15 level). But they were doing me a favor and got very little directly back in return. SIU certainly could have been more difficult. But my boss, the Graduate School Dean, knew I was unhappy living in the small town Midwest and very much appreciated my work increasing the University's research and projects funding. So, she did me a favor. I don't remember how I handled the politics of it, but I knew I was moving. I think that the IPA was approved in January and Ronnie and I moved in February, but we'd already made a commitment in December.

You never know how these things will work. I have friends who moved to DC without jobs and who were marginally employed for the next ten years, often pursuing difficult careers as consultants. You know, my current wife (Patricia Moser) has been consulting since she retired from ADB and while she's very senior and very much in demand, she still doesn't understand how anybody makes a career out of independent development consulting. She's currently designing a healthcare program in Nepal and she's enjoying the work, but I think she actually works double what she gets paid. That's okay if you're

semi-retired, but if you need to make a living at it, consulting work can be tough. I was glad to avoid that.

So, we moved back to Washington in February 1984, and I began working as a Senior Evaluation Advisor at PPC/CDIE under Haven North and Annette Binnendijk.

Q: So you were able to come in as an IPA.

BRITAN: Yes. The IPA salary is based on a civil service position and while it's not officially civil service, you have essentially the same authority and status as a direct-hire. You can manage other government employees, approve contracts, etc., etc. I was happy to be back in a GS-15 position—the same level at which I left USDA—but, even better, it was a great job.

Q: So, I want to spend some time on this because your name is synonymous with the evolution of thinking about evaluation at AID and you've seen it through some silly periods and also some pretty exciting periods. So, maybe just describe, other than the sort of useless project evaluations, what was the state of thinking about evaluations when you came in?

USAID's Office of Evaluation in the 1980s: Impact Evaluations

BRITAN: The state of USAID evaluation at that time was actually very positive and very progressive. USAID was gearing up new evaluation approaches to replace the fairly useless evaluation system that existed previously. I'm trying to remember the time sequence...New Direction was earlier, but this was sort of a follow on.

When I joined the evaluation office, it was part of the Center for Development Information and Evaluation (PPC/CDIE) which was founded by Haven North a year or two earlier. Haven wasn't particularly well-trained in evaluation per se, but he was intellectually brilliant and bureaucratically smart. He was very aware of how the agency worked and very committed to strengthening evidence-based decision making.

He created CDIE with the intention of reforming evaluation and (what later came to be called) knowledge management, and began a program of "impact evaluations". Nowadays what we call "impact evaluations" generally refers to evaluations that have an experimental design. But for Haven an "impact evaluation" denoted something more basic. For Haven, an impact evaluation was a study that looked not at how a program or project spent money or how it was implemented, but at what difference it made for beneficiaries. As North emphasized, it really doesn't matter whether a program or project is on time, runs well, or spends money efficiently if it doesn't have an "impact" in improving the lives of beneficiaries.

And Haven's epiphany was that getting together a group of experienced development professionals to carefully examine projects or program "impacts" often yielded very useful findings. In North's view, "impact evaluations" needed to be based on rigorous

empirical evidence, rather than gut judgments or intuition. North may not have had a deep understanding of evaluation methods, but he sincerely believed that experienced development professionals, given sufficient time and professional help collecting and analyzing empirical data, could come up with some brilliant insights.

And he was right! It may sound simple, but that's the origin at USAID (with the addition of more rigorous methodologies and designs over time) of what we call impact evaluation today. Haven created this new office, PPC/CDIE, after serving as Deputy Assistant Administrator (I think) for Africa. Serving as CDIE Director would be his final job at USAID, which gave him a great deal of independence and believability.

Q: It's interesting, because Doug Bennet, the Administrator before you got there, was also very interested in program evaluation, and again thought getting career people involved in evaluation was essential.

BRITAN: Yes, there was definitely a nexus. I think that Haven may have been appointed by Bennet, who'd left before I arrived. I can't remember, but I think he was in the Carter...

Q: Yes he was Administrator under Carter.

BRITAN: He'd left a year or two before I came, maybe three. Peter McPherson was administrator when I arrived and he was pretty thoughtful and progressive and empirically-oriented too. I don't know whether Haven was the instigator or a reactor, but he was clearly in tune with all of that. And he hired Annette Binnendijk to head the Studies Division, which conducted impact evaluations and he created another division, then called the Systems Division, to look at more routine performance measurement and evaluation activities. I think I was formally hired in the Systems Division, but CDIE used me as an in-house methodologist working across the entire range of evaluation activities. Annette herself was an economist by training and her brother, Hans, worked for the State Department.

First large evaluation for USAID: IFAD

BRITAN: I don't remember who was Chief in the Performance Division then, perhaps Ed de la Rosa. But I spent the next three or four years as a kind of methodological trouble-shooter, designing and helping to implement the most difficult and problematic evaluations and studies. And that was fun. I think that I got involved in my first big evaluation study in the spring of 1984, a special "program review" of IFAD (the International Fund for Agricultural Development), a multilateral agency based in Rome. That study fit in well with my background in bureaucracy and organization. USAID was asked (by the WH, I think) to conduct a program review of IFAD as input to upcoming USG decisions for the next IFAD funding cycle. Haven North and his Deputy, Paula Goddard, led the study, but pulled me in as a methodologist to help design and implement it.

So, I think I came to USAID in February and by May I was designing and implementing a major review of a multilateral donor. In June, I think, Haven, Paula and I made our first trip to meet with IFAD staff in Rome. I was having a great time. I had just started working for USAID and was playing a key role in a fascinating evaluation study. I mean, I had just started working for USAID and my first TDYs that summer were trips to Rome and around the world!

I learned a lot traveling with such experienced development professionals as Haven and Paula. Then in September, I led one of the first teams conducting field studies of IFAD projects. (The design of the review encompassed 5 or 6 teams examining about 15 or 20 IFAD projects around the world.) Most of IFAD's projects were jointly funded with the World Bank, ADB, AfDB, or other multilateral donors, so I learned a lot about them too. So, I led the first team to Asia, accompanied by another very experienced USAID FSO, Mike Zak, who really knew the ropes.

Q: And he knew everyone too.

BRITAN: That's for sure! He was married to a Filipina and our first stop was Manila. It was my first real international trip for USAID and Mike knew everyone in the Philippines, and then in Thailand, and then Indonesia. And we ended by stopping in Rome to interview IFAD staff. So it was not only my first trip to Asia, but also my first trip around the world. It was hard work. And the field trips to isolated projects in Northeast Thailand and central Sumatra were challenging. But I had never been so excited!

The work itself was really interesting too. I had designed the study, so I knew what we were trying to do and Mike knew how projects really worked on the ground, so we were able to keep each other honest. And again, we were looking at issues that were similar to what I'd looked at during my doctoral fieldwork in Newfoundland and in evaluating ETIP. IFAD was created to develop agricultural programs for the poorest of the poor, to alleviate rural poverty. Yet ETIP had little capability to design and implement programs on its own. So, essentially, ETIP had to "sell" its programs and ask for help from other international actors, like the World Bank or the ADB, or the IDB. IFAD developed projects jointly with these institutions (or more typically funded add-ons to existing projects) while the other multilaterals prepared detailed project designs and managed implementation.

So, the real question was: what difference did IFAD make? Was IFAD accomplishing anything that these other institutions like the World Bank wouldn't have accomplished on their own? These partners, after all, were much bigger than IFAD and didn't really need IFAD's money. So, what was going on?

It was pretty fascinating. And somewhat to my surprise, we eventually concluded that IFAD was indeed adding value. Based on all of our analysis and case studies (Paula and I wrote the final report) we concluded it wasn't so much that IFAD was doing a whole array of entirely new things, but it was sharpening the focus of the other multilaterals

more directly on alleviating poverty. So, while IFAD wasn't doing something entirely new, many of the activities being funded wouldn't have been implemented in IFAD's absence.

So, I think that our study played a role, albeit a minor one given all the bureaucratic wheeling and dealing, in the USG's decision to continue IFAD funding. You may remember that IFAD was created as an offspring of OPEC petro-dollars, a way of "laundering" excess OPEC profits and redirecting them to more socially beneficial ends. And, I think that people looked at IFAD a little askance, but that our study helped the USG see IFAD more clearly. And the question our study answered was important: Was IFAD really doing anything good or just supporting programs that would have been funded anyway?

Participating in the IFAD study was also a real eye opener for me. It was not only my first time seeing the developing world first hand, but also my first time seeing how development programs and development bureaucracies work. I still remember my first flight to the Philippines. Mike had flown ahead to visit his relatives in Manila, so I was alone. I was bumped up to first class on the flight from Washington to Chicago (that actually happened in those days) and chatted with the young woman next to me who was a World Bank economist. We had a great talk about poverty and development and when we got to Chicago and both changed for the plane to Tokyo, she stayed in first class, while I moved to the back of the bus. And I just felt like, "My god, here we are working on poverty and the World Bank flies first class" But after I was reunited with Mike in Manila, his connections got us upgraded for most of the rest of the trip. And I didn't complain!

Q: Your assessment concluded that IFAD was able to move the needle by improving in the way the bank looked at projects?

BRITAN: Yes.

Q: At that point, the bank didn't have a very robust evaluation system of its own, did it?

BRITAN: At that point, I'm not sure. But the World Bank soon began building its evaluation capabilities. I think the evaluation system was strengthened a bit later, in the 1990's under James Wolfensohn. In the mid-80's I think USAID may have still had the edge.

There have been many good evaluation people who came into the Bank with whom I worked very closely. But that was a bit down the road. It was in the late eighties, I think, when the WB really started strengthening evaluation. And by the 1990s, the World Bank had probably the best evaluation system of any development Agency. They did a really good job building it up. Vinod Thomas was one of the leaders (both as Director General for Evaluation at the WB and later as Director General of Evaluation at the ADB) and Karen Heider.

But to finish up, I do think that IFAD did make a difference. Not the one that was advertised—they weren't coming up with a whole new approach to agricultural and rural development—but they were helping to focus projects more on poverty. The World Bank, for example, was working on many irrigation projects, including the one I looked at in northeast Thailand. And, IFAD added a big new element to that project focusing on farmer's organizations and farmer's groups and on organizing poor farmers to play a larger role in managing irrigation systems. Maybe the World Bank would have done this eventually, but not at that time, and not without IFAD's input. There were lots of examples like that.

Q: Right, so that was your first big evaluation?

BRITAN: Yes, for me at USAID that is. I had done a bit of design work for USAID previously and some other stuff, but this was my first big USAID evaluation. After that I designed and implemented maybe half a dozen relatively big USAID evaluations. But, over time I became more of a troubleshooter rescuing evaluations and studies that had design or implementation problems. But IFAD was my first big USAID evaluation and it took about a year to complete from the summer of 1984 to the summer of 1985. We had half a dozen teams doing 15 to 20 case studies around the world. It didn't particularly follow the impact evaluation model, but we did gather good empirical data available and relied on experienced field staff to conduct interviews, analyze data and make expert judgments.

Q: Interesting, interesting. So, we were talking earlier about how to convince bureaucracies, and you did talk about how the evaluation system when you first encountered it, wasn't really designed to tell you very much. How did you go about selling evaluation within the agency? Or did you not feel you had to do that?

BRITAN: Well, at that point, that wasn't my job yet. But CDIE certainly had to sell evaluations to the Agency. Haven was very good at that, and John Erikson followed him, and then Janet Ballantyne—all of them were very good at "selling" evaluation. While Annette Binnendijk was brilliant, "selling" evaluation probably wasn't her strong point. Annette was very good at producing useful evaluations and studies, but she was less talented at bureaucratic politics. Haven North, on the other hand, was very good at bureaucratic politics, as was Janet Ballantyne, and even John Eriksson.

But, you know, they were appealing to people's angels, and that made the "selling" easier. I mean, most people don't go into development because they want to make a fortune or because they love working for the bureaucracy (the "blessed job," I think the Nigerians call it). In those days most staff worked for USAID because they wanted to make a difference for poor people. It may have been different in the 1970s, but by the time I got to USAID most of the Vietnam Veterans had left. By the eighties, USAID seemed to be filled mostly with Peace Corps veterans and the like who wanted to make a mark on the world.

So, it wasn't that hard convincing most USAID staff about the value of evaluation. Most USAID staff really wanted to do their work better. Occasionally, you'd come across careerists and bureaucratic gamesmen, and you'd have to convince them that it was in their self-interest to embrace evaluation and performance management. Even when we were implementing the National Performance Review in the mid 1990s, with strong support from Clinton and Gore, there were still plenty of reluctant staff. But, so long as evaluation wasn't directly threatening them, you could get most people to endorse it.

I do think there's always been a strain of idealism in the development business, perhaps more so in USAID than elsewhere. Most people in the development business really do care about what they're doing. So, it's not that hard to convince them that better information about what works and what doesn't work is a good thing. Certainly, many development professionals believe in the value of gut judgments and management instincts, and, you know, there's some truth to that. But even with good instincts and good judgment, good empirical data never hurts. So, while USAID may have needed a bit of a culture shift about the value of good data and rigorous analysis, I do think evaluation was a much easier sell in international development than in most other fields.

Q: AID's relationship with the Hill has always been a bit fraught. It seems to be doing better now, but I know that there was always a worry that if we identify problems, they're going to be thrown right back in our face. I don't know whether that actually was your experience, or whether you had to deal with "yeah, we'd like to know how to do this better, but we have to be very careful."

BRITAN: I don't think I ever had the problem with outsiders taking a negative finding from an evaluation study and throwing it back in the face of USAID managers. I certainly did have to deal with people's fear of that, though... I mean, that's just part of the bureaucratic mentality, right? You always want to control the narrative and worry about being out of control. Good bureaucrats do that very well, and it's very uncomfortable for them to have somebody do a study without knowing the findings in advance.

And so there certainly was some fear of evaluation. But, for the most part, staff accepted the idea that it was better to be the bearer of bad news ourselves than to have other people bring it to us. If there were problems and we called them, we were in a better position to shape the narrative and act than if others called the problems to our attention. So, while there's historically been a real fear of evaluation, I think people recognized it was better to do evaluation ourselves and do it well!

I also think that clarifying the distinction between evaluation and auditing helped. I think that many bureaucrats in the sixties and seventies saw evaluation as auditing, as finding fault. And there was a strong element of truth to this in USAID's old evaluation system. Evaluation did sometimes almost feel like an IRS tax audit: "They're going to go all over all stuff and find out where we haven't followed the rules, where we've done something wrong, and they're going to get us. That was a problem.

From evaluation as audit to evaluation as learning

So, this whole movement from evaluation as audit to evaluation as learning, was I think an important part of what was happening at USAID. That said, there was certainly fear of the unknown and fear of being out of control. You, Ann, were a much more senior bureaucrat than I was. I always saw myself as a social scientist first, but you worked much more closely with career bureaucrats and politicians who didn't have much of a social science background. I've always been surprised when I've worked with really senior bureaucrats to see how many fear that they've been promoted beyond their capabilities, that they've somehow risen beyond their level of competence. And, even if they don't really believe that, there's still this fear that "maybe I don't have what it takes." So many bureaucrats seem to have at least some insecurity about evaluation, particularly people who don't come from strong technical backgrounds.

Q: Yeah, interesting. I think over the eighties a lot of evaluations shifted from project evaluation to program evaluation. Can you talk about how that evolution happened and what difference it made in terms of the programming?

BRITAN: Well, sometimes the distinction from project to program to policy evaluation can be a bit vague. And it's different from the issue of ensuring that "facts" are empirically well grounded and that "findings" are based on rigorous analysis. I think that the crux was the shift from a focus on nitty-gritty inputs and outputs to a focus on higher level outcomes and results that affect people and institutions. And this, I think, was also closely related to the shift from evaluation as audit to evaluation as learning. It reflects the realization (and I think CDIE played an important role in promulgating this) that we can implement a set of project-level activities perfectly and that can still be a total waste of time. The issue isn't how efficiently or effectively planned activities are implemented, but whether implementing them makes any difference.

And so, where Haven North was going with the impact evaluations and that whole thing, was to answer the "so what?" question. And, while some people at USAID came from a very input-oriented, project implementation background, most didn't. Most USAID staff were far more concerned about "so what?" questions than about whether the trains ran on time.

So, I think the shift was very much from a focus on inputs and outputs to a focus on outcomes and results. And I thought it was very healthy. At that point, the idea of "managing for results" started being bandied around—that it's not so much about "managing inputs" or "managing outputs," but rather "managing for results". And results were defined as differences in the lives and well-being of people, or sometimes, differences in the productivity of an economy or the extent of political freedom. And, I think that the latter part of the 1980s was a very propitious time for USAID to begin focusing more clearly on results.

Q: The network of organizations, contractors and so forth that you would have to rely on, did it shift with the shift in AID's focused on evaluation?

BRITAN: Yes, I think it probably did. I don't know who did USAID evaluations prior to

the mid-eighties. But in the mid-eighties, a bunch of new evaluation-oriented firms appeared and a number of older firms increased their capacity to do evaluation work. Some were small firms like Management Systems International, and the Academy for Educational Development and Social Impact, and many eventually became large firms. And some existing firms like Booz Allen and Rand and Checchi and Mathematica moved quickly into this new evaluation field. And that's when we began competing the first IQCs (Indefinite Quantity Contracts) to support monitoring and evaluation activities.

Most evaluations were much smaller in those days. This was well before the development community (re)discovered experimental evaluation in the late nineties.

Q: I was interested in the technical support contractors and how they shifted in response to AID's policy shift or did it go the other way? Were you getting pressure from the development community outside AID to take a different approach to evaluation?

BRITAN: I think that outside contractors have always been very responsive to USAID. They're in business to make money and when they saw that USAID was interested in conducting impact evaluations and doing rigorous analytical work, they made sure that they were capable of filling that need. And, at various times there were also quite a number of very capable in-house contractor staff working right alongside direct hire professionals, including in CDIE.

Haven North had a remarkable vision in the early 1980s of combining (in current terms) knowledge management, evaluation and performance analysis in the USAID's Center for Development and Evaluation (PPC/CDIE). Haven strongly believed you not only needed to conduct evaluations and analyze performance data to create new information, but that you also had to make sure this information (and related knowledge) was easily available to planners in useful forms. So, Haven created an organization called the Development Information Service (DIS), which remains central to USAID planning and reporting to this day. I had the privilege of helping to build and manage this Development Information System as Chief of CDIE's Evaluation Systems Division (1993-96) and as CDIE Director (1996-2002). Interestingly enough, I got involved in DIS again in 2016 while working as a consultant for DEVTECH, the company that is currently running what is now called the Development Information Solution (but still DIS). And, I was pleased to see that the DIS was still going strong!

The whole creation of this very useful development information database was supported by contractors. Robert Baker, another brilliant guy who always worked on site (for decades as a contractor, but eventually as a direct-hire), played a key role. Annette Binnendijk, of course, was also crucial. So, in addition to CDIE's Evaluation Systems Division (which coordinated USAID's decentralized evaluations) and the Evaluation Studies Division (which conducted impact evaluations), there was a third Development Information Division that ran the USAID Library, maintained the Development information database, and conducted analyses for USAID staff. Over time, the DIS has moved online, become mostly automated and self-directed, and expanded to include new GIS and performance monitoring systems. And, it has become even more central to agency operations.

On the evaluation side, contractors got the message about “managing for results” pretty quickly. They wanted to get contracts, after all. I worked a lot with Larry Cooley, who was the founder and President of Management Systems International (now emeritus). He and I collaborated on at least a dozen TDYs (field trips) providing training and technical assistance to help Missions strengthen their monitoring and evaluation systems. And, there were a bunch of contractors who built their business on evaluation, evaluation systems strengthening and knowledge management and learning.

Older and bigger contractors migrated to this space too. But there was less interest, at least initially, from major project implementation contractors who embraced evaluation work more slowly because they perceived it as potentially in conflict with their much larger implementation work. This reluctance helped many of the newer younger firms get started. Much more recently many of these younger firms (including MSI) have themselves been acquired by larger development actors.

Q:—Bigger firms?

BRITAN: Yes.

Q: Yeah, it's interesting, I'd love to hear your thoughts on the changing business of development, but, just wrapping up the 80s—because that represented a major shift in the way AID was approaching evaluation and it coincided with some strong leadership in the evaluation field. I do want to get to the 90s.

BRITAN: So, I'm trying to remember when Haven North retired. I think he left in the late 80s.

Q: I think he did.

BRITAN: And John Erickson replaced him. John was an economist who had been mission director in Thailand. He started at USAID in the civil service before moving to the Foreign Service, a very thoughtful guy. Since he retired from USAID, he's been an evaluation consultant for the World Bank for at least ten or fifteen years. So, he's continued with evaluation work. I think that CDIE had very good leadership in the 1980's and 1990's from Haven North, John Erikson and Janet Ballantyne. I think that things continued going well for a while after I became CDIE Director in 1996, but by the early 2000's the political environment for evaluation and performance management deteriorated and didn't improve for another 5 or 6 years.

I will say, it was great being at USAID from the mid-eighties through the nineties. We built a new evaluation system, conducted a whole series of impact evaluations, and instituted a new approach to performance management. I'm not sure how much difference CDIE's early impact evaluations (from the 1980s and early 1990s) actually made, because USAID had not yet instituted a broader performance oriented programming system. But, most of these impact evaluations were very thoughtful studies that people found illuminating.

And then from the mid to late 1990s, USAID built a new performance-oriented programming system. In the early 2000s, this system almost fell apart, as USAID lost much of its programming and budget independence during the second Bush administration. And, finally, from 2007 to 2011 much of USAID's performance management and evaluation system was rebuilt. And, in 2011, I "retired" from my direct-hire position and helped implement this new performance management system as a USAID PSC (Personal Services Contractor) in the Philippines.

It was good being at USAID through that whole cycle. After finishing as Director of CDIE late in 2002, I became Director of the Management Bureau's Office of Policy, Performance and Administration (M/MPPA), assessing performance on USAID's management side. As Director of MPPA, I also worked with STATE on a number of joint initiatives, staffing the joint USAID-State Strategic Plan and serving as Executive Secretary of the State/USAID Joint Management Council (Co-chaired by USAID Deputy Administrator, Fred Schiek and UnderSecretary for Management (and later USAID Administrator) Henrietta Holsman Fore).

CDIE was finally dissolved around 2003 or 2004 with the creation of the F Bureau in State and the Center's few remaining staff were moved to a new Evaluation Office there. But by 2007, it had become clear that USAID could not remain completely disengaged from monitoring and evaluation.. So, from my new vantage point in M, I was asked to represent USAID at the OECD/DACs Evaluation Experts' and to help prepare USAID's (then required) annual performance report to Congress.

Finally, in 2009 the new Obama administration brought in Ruth Levine as a DAA to rebuild USAID's evaluation function. So I spent my last two years as a USAID direct-hire helping Ruth develop USAID's new Evaluation Policy and rebuild USAID's evaluation function.... But, I'm getting way ahead of myself.

Q: Right. Can you talk a little bit about the whole focus on management information systems? I don't know whether Larry Byrne was a big part of your work.

BRITAN: I tried to avoid Larry Byrne. I haven't thought about him in quite a while, but I do remember him.. When did he join USAID, around 1991 or 1992?

Q: He came in '93 with the Clinton administration and he probably left in '97

BRITAN: That's right. So, we're still finishing the Reagan administration and the Bush senior administration that came after. In 1984, I joined USAID as an IPA. After two years, my IPA was running out, and USAID said, "What do you want to do? We still have a hiring freeze, but we'd be happy to extend your IPA." So, I went back to SIU, and they said, "One more year."

And so, we extended my IPA for another year, and after another year USAID still had a hiring freeze. My wife had a great career going at DoD, while I was again looking for a job in a tough hiring environment. I believe I may have actually worked for a few weeks as a USAID consultant, I don't remember, because there were very few regular jobs.

Finally CDIE came up with a part-time GS-13 position as a way to get around the freeze. I believe it was Haven North who came to me and said, “I know you’re a GS-15, but this is all we have. Why don’t you apply? I’m sure we can make it work out in the long term” And so I did. And, in February of 1987 I became a regular part-time, GS-13 USAID employee.

Under the rules, CDIE could pay me for up to 39 hours a week as a part-time employee, so I was working nearly full-time. And, I continued to do pretty much the same work, so it was hard to tell the difference (other than to my ego). And within twelve months I was promoted to GS 14 and made full-time. And then promoted again to GS-15 in 1990. So, it wasn’t that bad. And I was doing what I loved!

In 1990, I applied for and was accepted into the Office of Personnel Management’s Executive Potential Program, which groomed candidates for the Senior Executive Service. Even though the program was geared to more traditional government agencies, a couple of people from USAID participated each year. And the training proved to be wonderful.

The EPP was a one-year program that encompassed a series of four or five multi-day training events in various places around the country (including the Federal Executive Institute in Charlottesville) as well as a series of mentorships and internships. This was 1990, and my major internship was with the GAO (then the General Accounting Office). I was working closely with a guy named John Kamensky (who later became the Deputy of Vice President Gore’s National Performance Review). Anyway, John and I were working on drafting what eventually became “The National Performance and Results Act of 1993”—the foundation for performance management in the USG. I wrote a rather influential paper while at GSA on “Measuring Performance in Public Agencies” that was widely cited. The paper argued that government programs could be modeled as hierarchical systems of cause and effect based on logic models that could be verified through performance measurement. And with that, my work shifted from a focus on evaluation per se to a focus on evaluation as part of performance management and learning.

So, I came back to USAID from my training and internships under the EPP having had time to do a lot of thinking about how to measure performance, how performance measurement related to evaluation and knowledge management, and what all that meant for USAID. And I came away with the realization that monitoring and evaluation very much needed to be part of a results-oriented management system (a programming system in USAID’s terms) or it would never be institutionalized. It was a bit of an epiphany, but it was still an enormous task to turn this epiphany into anything like reality. You know, in many ways doing good evaluation was the easy part, but while USAID’s impact evaluations had many interesting findings, their impact on USAID programming was often hard to discern.

Sometimes, you’d have important insights from an evaluation, for example, on the importance of farmers’ advisory groups on irrigation projects or the need for community

engagement in local development initiatives. And people would say, well that was interesting, we'll have to keep it in mind when we do something like this in the future. And you might even develop a policy, as CDIE did, saying "before you design a new project you must look at previous evaluations of similar projects." But there was no management structure for ensuring this, and it was very hit or miss. And, while some thoughtful staff really tried to utilize evaluation lessons, these lessons were rarely in a form that was easy to access or apply. Indeed, there was no systematic way to make sure you were aware of what you should be aware of--you just didn't know what you didn't know—because performance information just wasn't a systematic part of programming.

This was the starting point in the early 1990s for thinking more systematically about how to encompass performance information as part of USAID's programming and management. Eventually USAID became a government-wide leader in performance management. That was partly because people working in development really cared about results. And it was partly because of the work of people like Haven North, and John Erikson, and Janet Ballantyne, and others, including you. But, it was also because performance management was what was happening in the government more generally at this time, both domestically and abroad. I may have played a significant role, but I was very much helped by being in the right place, with the right people, at the right time.

National Performance Review

When I was working at the GAO in 1991, this performance management stuff was just being created and I don't think that many people at USAID were aware of it. I brought a lot of that performance management knowledge back to USAID, but there were others like Carlos Pasquale (who went on to bigger and better things at State), and Emmy Simmons, and Maureen Norton, and Cindy Clapp-Wincek, who were also committed to performance measurement and evaluation.

Q: Pamela Johnson?

BRITAN: Yes, and people like Pamela Johnson and a core of other technical people at the global bureau, particularly in health, which had always been very data and results focused.

Q: So, you've told me something I didn't know. I assumed that the National Performance Review activity started with Al Gore as vice-president, but in fact, what you're saying is, they were already ruminating on this at the GAO and on the hill.

BRITAN: The GAO started getting involved in 1990 and 1991, with John Kamensky taking the lead. He was responding to a Congressional staffer, John Mercer, who, I believe, had instituted a form of performance management while serving as Mayor of Sunnyvale, California. Anyway, Mercer, by then Republican Counsel to the Government Affairs Committee, pitched his performance management ideas to Senator William Roth, who became a strong advocate. Mercer asked the GAO's Government Affairs Division for help and when I was detailed to GAO in 1991, they had begun developing a basic

performance management approach for the federal government, building on ideas pioneered at the local level in the U.S. and Great Britain. By 1992, Kamensky and Mercer had drafted the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA), which engendered bipartisan support before becoming law in 1993.

As Senator, Al Gore also became a strong advocate for GPRA and performance management. Indeed, I doubt GPRA would have passed if Clinton and Gore hadn't been elected President and Vice President in 1992. And GPRA was also one of the major motive forces for the creation of the National Performance Review (NPR), which Gore led as Vice President. So, yes, I think Al Gore deserves most of the credit for moving us from performance management as a smart idea to performance management as something that had a substantial impact on government. And, Gore was certainly a true believer.

Q: Yeah, he was.

BRITAN: It wouldn't have happened without Gore. And Pam Johnson (from the Global Bureau) got involved around this point too. I'm not entirely sure how she got involved. Pam was already very much engaged in analyzing performance data for Global Health and, I think, had contacts on Gore's staff. She worked on the National Performance Review with me and continued working on performance management issues with the NPR and Gore well after I left. Indeed, I don't think she ever returned to USAID.

I was brought into the NPR through John Kamensky, who became Deputy Director and through my former colleagues and friends from USDA, John Brazzel and Leon Hunter, who had become core members of the NPR team. I was assigned to the cross-cutting Performance Measurement and Budget Team, heading up the performance measurement component. And, I also served on the team examining performance issues in the Office of the President (and particularly at Office of Management and Budget).

But, again, that's getting a little ahead. In 1991 I split my time between working at USAID and my EPP training and internships. I think I did a couple of other, shorter internships, but the big one was at GAO. When I came back to USAID, there was a vacancy for the head of what was already called CDIE's Performance Measurement Division, and I applied. I think that Nina Vreeland and I were the two main candidates. Ultimately, I was selected, made head of the Division, and promoted to a GS-15. That was in the fall of 1991, I think.

Q: Did they have to hold your position while you went to GAO?

I'd never really left my position in CDIE, but as part of the year-long EPP program, USAID made me available for about 4-6 months of training, internships and other assignments. I think my assignment for three or four months at the GAO was by far the longest. And, yes, USAID held my job. But I was actually doing both jobs...working half-time on EPP assignments and full time at CDIE. It was challenging, but also one of the best training programs I've encountered. In addition to my EPP training and GAO internship, I spent several days shadowing senior USAID executives, attended training sessions at the Federal Executive Institute, completed a one month internship in Urban

Development at the Global Bureau, etc., etc. Lots of good stuff, and I really appreciated the opportunity, but I also worked really hard.

But, it was fun and exciting, and, after the 1992 election, it looked like there might actually be an administration in power that would be more sympathetic to this performance management. I mean, Bush Senior wasn't that bad, but Clinton-Gore promised a big change for the better. So, while the early 1990s at USAID were interesting, things became far more exciting in 1993.

But good things were also happening at USAID and at PPC/CDIE in the early 1990s. John Erickson was a great caretaker for PPC/CDIE, but when Janet Ballantyne became Director, CDIE became much more dynamic. Janet was a fantastic manager and a very good economist, who didn't take fools gladly and who had little tolerance for BS. She firmly believed in the value of good empirical data and the importance of good management. Above all, Janet wanted CDIE to be practical and useful. Janet became a good friend and valued mentor and, ultimately, it was her decision (along with then AA/PPC, Kelly Kammerer) to hire me as CDIE Director in 1996.

CDIE also benefited over the years from outstanding deputies, including Paula Godard (under Haven North), Wendy Stickel (under John Erikson), Scott Smith, and Marci Bernbaum....the education person who left USAID in a downsizing shortly after her husband Eric died. But the high points for me in the early 1990s were the EPP and the National Performance Review. Pam Johnson and I both worked on the NPR, but I don't think there was anyone else from USAID involved.

And the work at the NPR was very good. So good, in fact, that Pam ended up staying for at least a couple of more years. When I came back to USAID in 1994, I was asked to co-direct (with David McCloud) something called the Results Oriented Re-Engineering Task Force. So, in 1994 and 1995 we gathered together a team of about a dozen people researching how USAID worked and we came up with a report entitled "Making a Difference for Development" about reengineering USAID's programming and management systems. And that I think this was a very useful process and product that has colored USAID's subsequent shift to performance based management.

At the same time, I continued in my new role as head of PPC/CDIE's Performance Measurement Division. One of the new requirements under the Government Performance and Results Act of 1993 was that each core government Agency, I think there were 23 or 24 of them including USAID, had to prepare an Annual Performance Report and submit it to Congress for review. Not surprising given my experience at the NPR, my Division was asked to prepare USAID's annual performance reports with the first due I think in 1995.

I don't know if you remember, but based on an independent ranking by the Mercatus Center at George Mason University, the Government Affairs Committee named USAID's first annual performance report the best in government! That was just quite a shocker for everybody, for the Senate Committee, for other Agencies, for USAID, and even for me. I don't think that ever happened again (though we were ranked third or fourth for several years), and it clearly reflected the fact that I knew what was wanted and gave it to them..

But we also had a bit of a head start: we had at least some good performance data, and we were very good at analyzing that data and communicating it in an understandable format.

I think that USAID's being named "best in government" for performance reporting really helped get "managing for results" accepted at the Agency. USAID senior management looked at all the good press and realized that this was something we could do well and that would be helpful rather than harmful. And you know, it would have been fine coming in second or third (being on top can be a little dangerous), but being named the best turned out to be a really good thing. So, I think that the mid 1990's were a turning point for AID in terms of developing a programming and management system that was more thoughtful, more empirically oriented, and more committed to managing for results.

The old programming and management system had been thoughtful, but in a very folksy, heuristic sort of way. And heuristics can only go so far. It's hard to effectively manage a multi-billion-dollar government agency based on purely heuristic judgments about what works and what doesn't. So, this "managing for results" provided a basis for reorienting and restructuring and "reengineering" USAID. One of the risks, of course, was that "managing for results" would become bureaucratized itself. And, indeed that has happened to some extent. But one of the interesting outcomes of USAID's struggles over the past twenty years is how successfully the Agency has been at continually reforming and reinventing itself. I've been on the fringes for the past five years, so I'm not sure about right now. But I have been doing a lot of MEL and consulting and fear that perhaps things are getting a little too cut and dried, a bit too bureaucratized, again.

Q: Right, just counting for the sake of counting.

BRITAN: That's right. You can always find things to count if you want to find things to count. In my article on "Experimental and Contextual Evaluation" written back in 1981, I gave the apocryphal example of the old Soviet Union factory that learned it would be evaluated based on how the number of widgets it produced, so it became very good at producing widgets and everyone at the factory got raises and promotions. But, the widgets were just thrown away as quickly as they were produced because nobody wanted them

Q: Okay. With the National Performance Review, you clearly knew that there was a lot of reluctance in AID and people who thought this was something you did only because that's what the vice-president wanted and what the administrator wanted, but didn't see any value to that. Did you have to do any persuading?

BRITAN: Brian Atwood was the administrator. And I don't think we had much selling to do with Brian. But we did do a lot of "selling" one or two levels down. A lot of people thought this was just the latest flavor of the month. But the fact that Brian supported "managing for results" helped. And the fact that USAID was pretty good at it helped too. If our first performance report had ranked last, then people might have said, "we told you so." But USAID ranked first, and we got all kinds of kudos from Capitol Hill and from the White House, and that resonated well with the rank and file.

You know I think that the nature of USAID's staff had changed quite a bit by this point. Lots of people from the private sector joined USAID during the Reagan and Bush administrations and the Agency continued undergoing substantial personnel changes into the 1990s. Most of this new staff still cared deeply about what USAID was doing—about “making a difference for development,” but they were also much more attuned to private sector management. And a lot of foreign service officers were sympathetic too, people like Emmy Simmons and Dirk Dijkerman and Carlos Pasquale and Kelly Kammerer and Janet Ballantyne and Roberta Mahoney and Dave McCloud, who later became movers and shakers in the Agency.

The people who were probably the least engaged were those who saw development assistance as primarily transactional and who were all about “making deals.” And there were certainly plenty of people who just doubted the value of anything the government might do--cynics, I guess you'd call them.

But I don't think we met all that much resistance. The politicians supported performance management because it was administration policy. And, a lot of prominent and up and coming foreign service officers just thought it was the right thing to do. Ultimately, I think, it's hard to disagree with the proposition development planning and decision making should be informed by good information about past performance.

Q: Let's talk about the reinventing government initiative.

BRITAN: I was involved in “reinventing government's” almost from its beginning, believed strongly in its principles, and found the whole business of bureaucratic reform fascinating. So, it's not surprising that I thought that Al Gore's National Performance Review was the best thing since sliced bread. And, I was happy when he made John Kamensky the NPR deputy, because I had an in. I don't know precisely how Pam Johnson got involved in the National Performance Review. But I came on board because I called John and said, “I really want to be part of this.”

And I still believe in it. You know, when Al Gore distributed his little cards that said, “don't ask, do” and stuff like that, I really felt great pride in being part of an effort to make government work better. The NPR certainly didn't fully succeed, but I do think it did much more good than harm and produced a number of useful government reforms.

To get way ahead, I officially retired from AID in 2011, when my wife became Health Director at the ADB and we moved to Manila. I was on one of my last TDY's for USAID piloting new versions of the Agency's evaluation course in Bangkok. Great final TDY, right? And, after two weeks in Bangkok reviewing and implementing the new evaluation curriculum, I flew to Manila to help Tricia (who had already started at the ADB) find housing. And who was the new Mission Director but Gloria Steele, a good friend and strong performance management advocate.

I had great plans. This was July and I knew I was retiring in a month or two and moving to Manila. The Director General of Evaluation at the World Bank and at the ADB were

both good friends and I anticipated lots of consulting opportunities. And, I was thinking: This is great. Tricia has a fabulous job and she will be doing lots of representational travel throughout Asia on which I can accompany her. And, I have great contacts here, so I can also do as much evaluation consulting as I'd like for the ADB, the World Bank, and others. What fun.

So, Gloria takes us out to dinner in Manila and I'm spouting on and on about my plans for semi-retirement. And Gloria looks at me and says, "No, you're not, you're working for me." And you know, that's what I did. I spent the next four years as Gloria's Senior Evaluation and Performance Management Advisor, writing Country Development Strategies and Performance Management Plans (for the Philippines, Mongolia and the Pacific), designing and implementing program and project evaluations, mentoring technical staff, conducting performance measurement and evaluation training, etc., etc. Turnabout is fair play, I guess and I was doing all the things that I had promulgated on the field as Director of CDIE and after. It was fantastic! And, I still had time for dozens of trips around Asia.

It was the first time in quite a while that I was doing that kind of hands on evaluation, performance measurement and knowledge management work. And it was my first time working long-term in a mission. All in all, it was a great way to leave AID, spending four years in the Philippines and working with Gloria. Gloria was a very demanding boss (of herself as well as others), but also very supportive; simply a fantastic person to work for with a laser focus on "making a difference." So, this was a great way for me to leave USAID. But we'll get to that eventually.

The mid-2000s, on the other hand, were probably my low point in USAID; 2008 to 2011 were a redemption, rebuilding performance management and evaluation (and USAID itself); then 2011 to 2015 were a personal renaissance—rediscovering performance measurement, evaluation and knowledge management in the field. I gained a much better understanding of what it meant to be a foreign service officer that I never really had as a Washington-based GS employee. And though she worked ridiculously hard, I think Gloria had a fabulous time too. In fact, if anyone wants a second career after the SES, I'd recommend becoming a mission director for a couple years!

Q: I think everyone should have that experience, knowing what it's like being overseas and in the fishbowl.

BRITAN: Yeah, and you know, what Gloria's doing now--similar to what you did, I guess—becoming COO at CARE. Which is a whole different world again.

Q: Absolutely, I told her she can come and cry on my shoulder anytime.

Q: I think when we stopped, you were talking about the national performance review. And the positive experience it was for you and actually for the agency because it came off very

well. And I just wonder if there's anything more you want to say about that. And whether you're ready to move on to your directorship of CDIE?

BRITAN: I saw the national performance review as a great opportunity and actively lobbied to join through my connections with John Kamensky. John was the deputy director of the NPR. And, my former USDA colleagues John Brazzel (who'd been my USDA boss) and Leon Hunter (Annette Binnendijk's husband) were also working at the NPR. I think the total staff was between 100 and 200 people. The NPR was organized in functional and organizationally focused teams and many people were on multiple teams. I was asked (along with my former USDA colleagues) to join the Performance Based Budgeting team and also to join a second team focused on the Office of the President, including, in particular, OMB.

Q: Right.

BRITAN: Looking at the Office of the President was interesting. I hadn't realized how many bureaucratic entities fell under White House umbrella and many of them were quite political. Ultimately, we focused primarily on OMB, probably the most visible part of the President's Office. At the time, I didn't know much about how OMB worked and learned a lot from interviewing OMB staff. It was fascinating, but much of the work was colored by politics. This was, after all, the time of Travelgate, if you remember Travelgate?

Q: I do remember Travelgate.

BRITAN: Arkansas friends of the Clintons had been hired to run the White House travel office and the old staff had been let go. And there were questions of fairness and self-dealing. And when our NPR team started looking at the travel office, we were quickly told to focus instead on OMB.

Q: Why would Travelgate have come on your agenda in the first place?

BRITAN: Well, the Travel Office was part of the Office of the President. And, we thought (naively) that we should look at how all the parts of this Office worked with an eye to making them work better. But it would have been hard to look at the Travel Office in the middle of Travelgate without having politics emerge. And such a minor Office didn't really have any broader implications for bureaucratic reform. Reforming OMB, on the other hand, while still enormously political, would have much broader implications. So, we focused there.

That was probably a wise decision. While it was interesting to see Travelgate from the inside, the panic that ensued and the damage control that emerged, and all that kind of stuff had little to do with bureaucratic reform. And though it seemed like a major scandal at the time, it was short lived.

Q: Right. I knew you must have dealt with Vice President Gore, as he got into the reinventing government program as well, because in my mind, they sort of flowed together, but maybe that's incorrect.

Working with Vice President Gore

BRITAN: Sure, so we were officially Gore's staff. We had offices at the Old Executive Office Building and also in another building kitty-corner to the White House on 17th Street, I think. And, as I said, there were probably 100 to 200 of us working for the National Performance Review at its height. So, there were a fair number of people and Gore only had a few meetings with all of us. We also met with Gore periodically in smaller groups that were working on particular topics. My work on the OMB team and on the Performance Budgeting Team was the subject of several such meetings. And I was always very impressed with Al Gore, and even more with his wife, Tipper, who was very sweet. The Vice President had just moved into the new Vice President's house on...

Q: Massachusetts Avenue.

BRITAN: Right, at the Naval Observatory. And so, Gore had us all over for a Thanksgiving party and for cocktails a couple of times. That was fun. And I still remember one time when we were meeting off-site at the Interior Department, I think. The Vice President asked me to xerox something for everyone and I went out looking for a copying machine. And someone looked at me askance and said, "Who are you?" And I replied, "I'm Gerald Britan and I'm here with the Vice President." And, immediately, she couldn't have been more helpful. So, yes, the Vice President's authority was quite amazing, very different from saying I worked for USAID. Overseas USAID staff may have a bit of clout, but domestically we're near the bottom of the totem pole.

Q: Right. Well, you certainly were able to get your phone calls answered. I think!

BRITAN: That's right. I remember one day Pam Johnson and I were working out of the same office and she was making a series of phone calls that all started with "Hi, this is Pam Johnson from Vice President Gore's office," and the level of cooperation was phenomenal. So, that was fun. And it was interesting. Lots of USAID people get detailed to work at the WH for various reasons, NSC staff and things like that, but I was never that excited about working for the WH. But it was fun working at NPR. Pam probably handled the power (and the politics and the pressure) better than I did and ended up staying on to work for OMB and for the Vice President for at least a couple of years.

But I certainly enjoyed the work. I learned a lot about federal budgeting, which I hadn't known much about, and broadened my understanding of performance measurement and evaluation across a wide range of government agencies. So that was great.

I came back to USAID after the NPR Reports were published--in the spring or summer of 1994, I think. And when I returned I was asked to head up CDIE's Systems Division (later the Performance Division) which focused on performance measurement and

analysis and supporting field-level monitoring and evaluation. At that time, CDIE also included a Studies Division, which conducted Agency-wide Impact Evaluations and a Development Information Division, which managed USAID's library and its electronic development information systems.

It was also about that time that I was asked to co-lead USAID's internal "Results-Oriented Reengineering Task Force with David McCloud. The Task Force included about a dozen foreign service and civil service staff and was charged with developing a more efficient and effective results-oriented programming system for USAID. And, we issued a report, "Making a Difference for Development" with recommendations about what such a results-oriented programming system should look like. And many of these recommendations—on results frameworks and theories of change, learning versus accountability, performance monitoring and utilization focused-evaluations, knowledge management and country strategic planning, etc., etc.—were subsequently reflected in the redesigned USAID programming system that emerged in the mid 1990s and after.

Q: I know you met resistance, you also had some good collaborators, but there was some resistance, and I'm just wondering, where and why do you think it was slow going?

BRITAN: I don't think there was as much resistance as people sometimes think. I mean, there was some resistance that was well founded, based on the realities of doing development on the ground, and some that was a bit silly. Silly may not be the right word, but some resistance was poorly founded. I mean one of the most sensible concerns that people had was that all of this "managing for results" was just going to get bureaucratized and become another burden on the field; that it was just going to be a waste of time that added little value. And, the Task Force was very concerned about this too. But USAID has for the most part successfully addressed such challenges with continuing programming reforms: the new Evaluation Policy in 2009, the growing emphasis on Knowledge Management, the strengthening of Country Strategic Plans, the creation of Mission Performance Management Plans, the development of more substantive Portfolio Reviews, and the fielding of more effective Evaluation and Learning support contracts (IDIQs) to name a few.

But even when I went to work in the Philippines in 2011, people were telling me: "Now you see what it's really like and how difficult the programming reforms have made it for us." And there's some truth to that. But I also think that "managing for results" helped us become a much more effective Agency.

So, in my role as head of the Performance Division and later as CDIE Director, I went around the agency and briefed people on what the programming reforms encompassed. And, I was surprisingly well received. This was, after all, about making more of a "difference for development", for our beneficiaries and for their countries.. It was very different from when I worked at USDA. Certainly, most USDA staff wanted better extension programs and better agricultural science, but most were also just bureaucrats doing their jobs. Most USAID staff really care about what they are doing, and really want

to do it better. When I was at the NPR, I always thought I had a much more receptive audience at USAID than at other Agencies. And that's one of the main reasons I was happy to come back.

Of course, there were some old timers at USAID who remembered past monitoring and evaluation efforts, and said, "this is just another exercise that's going to have us examining every program and every project every year. It's going to become an enormous burden, just another set of bureaucratic rules." And by the mid-2000s, under the regime of the new F-Bureau, this did in fact seem to be happening. So, the programming reforms at the end of that decade, the new Evaluation Policy and, most importantly, the renewed emphasis on knowledge management and adaptive learning were extremely helpful. But such "results-oriented management" nearly died at USAID in the mid-2000s before eventually being reinvented in a much more learning-focused way.

The emergence of what USAID now calls "developmental evaluation," recognizing that you can't figure out everything about a program or project in advance, has also been very helpful. I mean, one of the weaknesses of a "managing for results" approach is that it can become overly rigid. If you think you already know everything you need to know and you know what you need to do, then it's just a matter of getting the plan right and tracking progress. But, the real world is much messier than that and development is really a messy business. Even in fields like health (as opposed to political development), where we're pretty sure we know what we are doing, it's very much a learning process. Our knowledge about what works and what doesn't is formative: we learn by doing and by adapting.

After finishing the work of the Reengineering Task Force, David McCloud and I and others spent the next six months making presentations about the new programming approach around the agency. And the Administrator (Brian Atwood) and other senior managers were very supportive. But it was really people in the Bureaus and people in the field who took the ball and ran..

Results-based management has certainly evolved over time. But I do think USAID was more receptive than most government agencies to the idea that good management should be more about results and less about process or about checking the boxes. And, as I mentioned, USAID's first annual performance report (in 1995 or 1996) was very well received, named the best in government by the Mercatus Foundation. That helped. That gave us some political cover. Top Agency management may have been a little surprised, but were also pleased

Q: Did your work get confused at all with Larry Byrne's management information System Improvement?

BRITAN: Definitely at times. And eventually when things got very difficult at USAID in the mid-2000s, I went over to the other side (I wouldn't say the dark side) to work on management reform.

I think that Byrne and his people wanted to create a system in which all the management data that people needed—on budgeting, on procurement, on expenditures, and even on performance—was entered once into a database that could be accessed and analyzed by anyone anywhere in the Agency. Not necessarily a bad idea, but not a practical one in the late 1990s. And Byrne and his people also seemed to view this MIS as a singular, closed, centrally managed system for top down control, rather than the kind of decentralized, empowering, multi-nodal systems that have evolved with the emergence of social networks and the internet. Indeed, much of what Byrne envisioned is finally emerging (in a rather different form) in Mission information systems, the modern development information system, the Agency's new budgeting and programming systems, and other forms of knowledge sharing.

Byrne was around for quite a while as head of Management, and he was a difficult person to work with. But he was an AA and I was a Division Chief and then Office Director, so we didn't have much interaction. And, he had some sympathy for what I was doing. I was trying to create a development information system where people could easily enter and access the performance information and evaluation data they needed. I mean, historically, people wrote an evaluation and nobody ever looked at it again. So, we were trying to create a system where evaluation lessons could be more easily accessed.

In the 1980s and 1990s CDIE's Development Information Division had as many as a hundred to two-hundred contractors (mostly graduate students) researching development data on request. So, if an FSO was designing an integrated rural development in Nepal, he or she could ask DI to synthesize evaluation findings and lessons learned from IRD projects around the world. And within a few days or weeks the DI contractor would deliver a synthesis and summary. This was a very labor intensive process, but the labor was relatively cheap in those days and it worked. I thought it was great, and so did our customers. And, it wasn't inconsistent with what Byrne wanted to do on the management side. But Byrne saw his management information system as a means of controlling staff, rather than empowering them

When I used to teach organizational behavior years ago, I'd emphasize that the point of decentralization in business wasn't so much to empower lower level managers as to create an organizational structure where these managers would make the same decisions that senior managers would make if they were in their place. In a sense, that's what Byrne wanted. He wanted to create a management system that he could control in which lower level staff would have very little discretion. And for some things, like making widgets, that works. But USAID is in a much messier business, and Byrne's efforts to develop an MIS created all sorts of problems for the Agency on all sorts of levels. But they weren't my problems. I was just trying to provide USAID managers with performance information that would help them manage their programs more adaptively.

Around this time, there was also some turnover at CDIE. I'm not sure I remember it all correctly. Haven North and John Erickson had come and gone. Janet Ballantyne served as CDIE Director for a while and then left for the field. Her Deputy, Scott Smith, replaced her. Then Janet came back and took over again in the mid-90s, I think. Janet was very

supportive of results-based management, but she was also a bit cynical about it. She was both experienced in the field and well-aware of the politics of development. So, in many ways she kept us honest, in terms of realizing the limits of what we could do and recognizing that “managing for results” wasn’t going to be a panacea. I always found Janet a pleasure to work for, but she was demanding. But she was also appreciative and supportive, and willing to tell you honestly when things were going wrong. I may have been lucky, but nearly all my USAID bosses have been great! And I thought Janet brought out my best.

Director, CDIE

Q: There are some important management lessons embedded in your statement! So, you basically became the head of CDIE

BRITAN: So somewhere in there, Janet was leaving again. I don't remember if Janet suggested I go after the job, because it was a little awkward for her because her friend Marcy Bernbaum was also a candidate. But Janet certainly supported my applying. I believe Kelly Kammerer was AA/PPC at the time and he encouraged me too. But the CDIE Director had always been a very senior foreign service officer, usually that person's last assignment. The CDIE Director was also a “senior management list position” which meant that the person selected as Director had to be explicitly approved by top management. So, Kelly and Janet proposed me for the job to Atwood and Byrne.

Q: Oh, AD appointment?

BRITAN: Not an AD appointment, but I think at the time there were about 100 or so positions that had to be specifically approved by top management, that were called the “senior management group” or something like that, and CDIE Director was one of those positions. And the CDIE Director was also designated as a foreign service position that had always been filled by a very senior foreign service officer, usually in their last tour. So, PPC had to get an “exception” to have me appointed and it went up to the highest level—the Administrator and the AA/Management—for approval. Byrne eventually recommended that Atwood approve my appointment, but indicated that he couldn't promote me immediately to the Senior Executive Service because of the limited number of SES slots allocated to USAID. Kelly Kammerer assured me that PPC would get me an SES appointment within a year or two, but he left PPC well before then and the promotion never happened. But I had already assured him, honestly I think, that I was much more interested in the job than in the promotion. And, so, I became CDIE Director in 1996 and remained Director for more than six years, the longest tenure of anyone. And I really enjoyed the work.

Now, it's probably a good idea not to keep the same person as CDIE Director—the Agency's senior knowledge management and evaluation position—too long. And making the CDIE Director a senior FSO's last assignment is probably a good idea too. So, when Haven North left CDIE after four or five years as CDIE's founding Director, he retired; as did John Erikson after three or four years. And while Janet Ballantyne didn't retire

after her second stint as CDIE Director (a total of about three years), I think she intended to. Instead she was coaxed into staying at USAID, eventually becoming Counselor, Deputy Administrator and Acting Administrator. So, my leaving after 6+ years as CDIE Director was probably a good thing. But I wouldn't say I left under the most comfortable circumstances. I left because by 2002 it had become clear to me that the new Administration (and the new Administrator) were no longer committed to “managing for results.” But that’s jumping ahead; we’ll get there.

Q: Please describe what was happening in CDIE at that time: it was a respected organization, it had made the switch so that evaluation was seen as a learning opportunity, as well as an opportunity to rethink programs.

BRITAN: Right, we were trying to support the agency by implementing “managing for results” in the field. So we focused less on conducting evaluation studies. We still had a Studies division that conducted centrally funded impact evaluations, but over time, that function, and the “impact evaluations” that Haven North had started, became progressively underfunded. Fewer “impact evaluations” were being conducted and those that were being done were less extensive and less rigorous. And, these evaluations were increasingly being implemented by contractors, rather than by the direct-hire staff who had always found them such an incredible learning experience.

This was also the time—the late 1990’s—when the value of more rigorous experimental evaluation designs was just emerging, when Banerjee and Duflo and Kremer were beginning the seminal work that led to their 2019 Nobel Prize for an “experimental approach for alleviating poverty.” But USAID’s “impact evaluations” were becoming less rigorous, more descriptive case studies, that relied on good informant interviews and solid empirically data, but that lacked the kinds of sophisticated design that could unambiguously test development hypotheses. So, while USAID’s central evaluations continued in the late 1990s, they weren’t particularly dynamic or cutting edge.

So, CDIE’s main emphasis under my leadership in the late 1990s was on supporting the new results-oriented programming system that AID was building. This included developing much more “results-oriented” strategic plans; strengthening performance measurement to better monitor program inputs, outputs and outcomes; and initiating more field based evaluation studies. Our emphasis, throughout, was on producing empirical data and analysis that could better inform Mission, project and activity decision-making. Our objective was to make sure that decisions about which activities, strategies and objectives to pursue were as fully informed by good performance monitoring and evaluation data as possible.

So CDIE started conducting performance measurement, evaluation and “managing for results” workshops at field missions all around the world, in close cooperation with regional and technical bureaus. We probably conducted twenty or more workshops each year, developed the first evaluation courses, and established a set of evaluation IQCs (now IDIQs) to provide Missions and Technical Offices with easier access to monitoring and evaluation services. The establishment of the IQCs/IDIQs was an important

innovation because one of USAID's greatest problems historically has been the cumbersomeness of its contracting system. So, in a sense, CDIE was becoming more directly engaged in addressing the management issues involved in strengthening monitoring and evaluation, which played to my personal interest in how bureaucracies work. I mean, if you have to fund each evaluation through a separate contract, either the evaluations are going to be very small so it can be awarded without competition or you would have to hold a formal competition, which takes forever. And if you want to conduct a hundred or more field based evaluations each year, you face an enormously labor intensive process. But using pre-competed firms that were part of an IQC or IDIQ made that process much simpler—and that was a god-send.

Q: Yeah, I know that the field appreciated the convenience.

BRITAN: Right. So CDIE implemented the first evaluation of IQC's in 1996 or 1997. And utilizing a simpler mechanism like the IQCs certainly reflected my experience with the National Performance Review and the recommendations of the Results Oriented Reengineering Task Force. It also reflected the fact that there were many others in the agency who had also gotten excited about performance measurement, evaluation and “managing for results.” It reflected the fact that there was a supportive USAID Administrator and a supportive administration. And, it reflected the fact that USAID was finally getting positive recognition for its performance measurement and evaluation work and our Annual Performance Report., So, it was certainly the right time to build a results-oriented programming, monitoring, evaluation and learning system. Most of the parts were in place by the late 90s. But there were also other things happening to performance management and evaluation both within and beyond USAID

CDIE's founding Director, Haven North, was also the founder and the first Chair of the OECD/DAC's Evaluation Experts Group in the mid-1980s. By the mid 90s, not just USAID, but nearly the entire development community was exploring results-based management. DFID, the British development agency, called it “getting value for money. The World Bank's, James Wolfensohn focused on “knowledge management and learning.” The ADB and IADB emphasized “performance management.” Soon nearly everyone was getting interested in “managing for results” and the DAC Evaluation Experts Group, which met in Paris a couple of times a year, had become one of the most important forums for sharing and learning.

And USAID was viewed as a leader. We were asked to make presentations on our results-based management approach for the OECD/DAC, the World Bank, the ADB, Canadian CIDA and DiFID, among others, to support the international effort. And we conducted performance management and evaluation workshops all over the world. Everyone encouraged and supported each other. CDIE, for example, was an important participant in the major “Knowledge Management Conference” that James Wolfensohn organized at the World Bank, in 1998 or 1999.

And while all that was happening in the late 1990s, I was also dealing with some difficult personal issues. My wife was diagnosed with breast cancer in 1998 and died in 2000. And, I had two teenage sons to bring up. So that distracted me a quite a bit

And then in 2000 we had another election. George Bush Junior won and, I think, Andrew Natsios became USAID Administrator. That was a bit worrisome at first, because Natsios was a very political character and it wasn't at all clear how interested he was in performance management, evaluation and empirically informed decision-making. But, he turned out to be quite supportive, at least initially.

Natsios turned out to be really committed to development generally. He did place more focus on Eastern Europe and on engaging the private sector in development, but he valued empirical data and was pretty easy to work with. And, I don't think he initially got in the way of our programming reform efforts. But within a year or two he had brought in some ambitious political appointees to head PPC who had different agendas. So, by 2002 my new PPC political bosses were starting to tell me that CDIE's job was to marshal data to support Administration policy positions, rather than to learn what worked and what didn't and (in the evaluation vernacular) "speak truth to power." And that made me very uncomfortable.

Q: So "go find the data to support our policies"?

BRITAN: Exactly. And, that is not an unreasonable task for a politically oriented policy shop. But it's not "managing for results," it's not analyzing empirical data as a basis for decision-making, and it's not an appropriate task for the central evaluation office. Maybe agencies do need policy shops that marshal data to support policy positions, but that wasn't what CDIE was supposed to be about. And it got quite blatant by the middle of 2002.

Q: Do you remember an example?

BRITAN: It started to color all our work and I didn't stay on very much longer, but let me try to remember. There was one study where we were examining how a small business development program affected economic growth in Africa, and we collected data and did our analysis and concluded that they didn't have much effect. Then PPC management directly assigned a different staff member to reanalyze the data to support a different set of conclusions. That person did a good job, and the analysis wasn't entirely unreasonable. You could find data to support both positions. But that wasn't what was going on. Data was only marshaled to support the front office's position. I wouldn't say that was unethical, but it wasn't evaluation and it added a political coloring to much of our work. And, it certainly wasn't what I wanted to do. So, I spent most of my time working with field missions, developing performance measurement and evaluation training, running workshops, trouble-shooting the Evaluation IQCs, making presentations at home and abroad, and helping other Agencies, like the Canadian development agency...

Q: CIDA.

BRITAN: Yeah, like Canadian CIDA, set up their own performance management systems. I was still having fun, but by then I'd been directing CDIE for more than six years and I was starting to think it was time for a change. By late summer of 2002, I knew it was time, and PPC management thought so too. I just wasn't willing to do what they wanted and it was time to find something else. So, I left PPC/CDIE to head a new Office of Management Policy, Performance and Administration (M/MPPA) that was tasked with assessing performance on the business side of the Agency.

PPC selected a senior foreign service officer, whose name I forget, with no experience in performance management or evaluation, as the new CDIE Director. The new Director stayed in the position for about a year or two as a caretaker, managing a shrinking staff and declining evaluation budget as CDIE dwindled away. I'm not sure when CDIE was officially dissolved, but remnants remained (and continued producing USAID's GPRA-required, but now poorly rated, Annual Performance Report) until PPC itself was eliminated in the 2006 reorganization (under Administrator Randall Tobias) that created the F Bureau.

But by then I had long ago left CDIE to organize the M Bureau's new Office of Management Policy, Performance and Administration. Essentially, M/MPPA was being asked to do for the business side of the Agency what had previously been done on the program side. That is, to systematically collect and analyze empirical data on performance and results for USAID's business processes and systems (acquisitions, human resources, information technology, etc.) as a basis for policy, program and budget decision-making. In the second Bush administration, there was much more support for this kind of performance management on the business side of the Agency. And, people did care about whether our contracting system was efficient and effective, whether our budgeting was accurate and honest, whether we were getting the tools and materials that we needed, and whether we were hiring the right people. So, I moved to the Management Bureau, which also turned out to be a fascinating experience, particularly because I became involved in ongoing efforts to shift or merge many of USAID's management functions with the Department of State.

Q: Was that when the budget function went over to State, or was that later?

BRITAN: That happened a little later. So, one aspect of my new MPPA job was relatively straightforward: coming up with useful metrics for assessing management performance. But while it wasn't hard to measure the direct outcomes of ongoing management activities, it was much harder to assess their quality. And there were lots of questions about measurement accuracy. I'm not sure we ever solved that problem.

But, at the same time, other more politically charged things started happening with regard to integrating management at USAID and State. There was an effort from State (with substantial WH support) to move the budget function to State that Nastios was resisting. (I remember attending one meeting at State as Acting AA/M in which Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice talked about "HER" USAID budget.) And there was a much broader

effort to have USAID and State work more closely together. This eventually culminated in the creation of the F-Bureau and the transfer of most of USAID's budget function to State in (I think) early 2006 under Randall Tobias. But efforts to more closely integrate USAID and State began much earlier. One of the motive forces, I think, were the Embassy bombing of 1998 & 1999, which resulted in decisions to strengthen embassy security, rebuild Embassies and to co-locate Embassy and USAID staff.

I'm sure you remember how back in the 1980s and 1990s, USAID Mission were usually separate from Embassies, often in centrally located rental space. After the 1998 and 1999 bombings, new secure embassies were constructed (the fortresses you see today) and USAID and other Agency staff worked onsite at the Embassy. And there's not much reason to have to separate office management, support services, car pools, housing pools, etc. with everyone co-located. But USAID staff valued (and often benefited) from their separateness and independence, so the process of co-integration, co-location, joint planning and, eventually, joint management progressed slowly throughout the mid- 2000s

One of the more sensitive management consolidation issues was the question of housing. USAID had its own separate system from State for owning and allocating housing overseas. More to the point, State employees felt that USAID staff generally got better housing and resented that. That may well have been true. But, in any case, it's hard to justify the need for two entirely separate housing systems when State and USAID offices were themselves co-located. So, there was lots of pressure to amalgamate the housing systems and create a single housing pool for both State and USAID staff. And, particularly as co-location moved forward, there were similar arguments about amalgamating other systems, such as car pools, information technology, support staff, local procurements, etc.

Anyway, shortly after I moved to the Management Bureau, Fred Schieck, (who had been heading IADB's Evaluation function since retiring as a Mission Director) returned to USAID as Deputy Administrator. And he was asked to co-chair something called the STATE/USAID Joint Management Council with the Under-Secretary of State for Management (and later USAID Administrator), Henrietta Holsman Fore. And they asked me to serve as the Joint Management Council's Executive Secretary.

Q: Ah, okay.

BRITAN: "Executive Secretary" is a position where you have no power and work like a dog, but you do have lots of influence, and are fully aware of everything that's happening since you pulling everything together, doing the background papers, managing the agenda, and so on. The Joint Management Council met every month or two for the next few years to tackle all of these consolidation issues. And it was exceedingly interesting. There were lots of decisions to be made, lots of strategizing with top management, and lots of access to the Deputy administrator. I may be wrong, but I thought we made some good compromises about what we could give up (amalgamating the housing systems) and what we couldn't. And at that point we kept the USAID and STATE budgets separate. Eventually Henrietta Holsman Fore became USAID Administrator (after Tobias), but

even as Under Secretary she tried to be objective—and seemed more supportive of USAID than Randall Tobias. So, I wasn't too surprised what an excellent administrator she later proved to be, under very challenging circumstances)

Serving as Executive Secretary for the Joint Management Council was fascinating. USAID and STATE also began development of a joint strategic plan at that point. As a product of the Management Council, focused very much on management issues, but I believe included substantive goals as well. Again, all of this was very interesting to me. I'd never worked closely with State before and it seemed like we were making substantial progress.

Then somewhere along the line, Randall Tobias became USAID Administrator and most of the compromises we'd reached on joint management issues fell apart. I don't know the history of the F Bureau in great detail or depth—I don't even remember precisely when it was created. But in 2005 or 2006, when Tobias began serving concurrently as USAID Administrator and the State Department's Director of Foreign Assistance (at the Deputy Secretary level), things changed rapidly. But it would be better for you to talk about all this with people like Dirk Dijkerman or Wade Warren, who filled leadership positions at F and have much more intimate knowledge of what was happening (and how they fended off the worst). Wade eventually served as USAID Acting Administrator while Dirk served as USAID's Counselor and OECD/DAC representative. I think they're both retired now and have probably both completed their own oral histories. But from my perspective, the work of the Joint Management Council was essentially over; there simply wasn't any "jointness" left.

It was a very difficult time for USAID. I stopped focusing much on the big management issues for a couple of years, because that was all being dealt with by F, and instead focused on measuring and analyzing USAID's more mundane management services. Tobias did create a small evaluation office at F and the few remaining staff from CDIE moved there, but they really didn't do much.

But, USAID still had to fulfill some residual performance measurement and evaluation requirements under GPRA and from other federal rules and regulations. We still needed to prepare a Congressionally-mandated Annual Performance Report, we still needed to represent USAID at the OECD/DAC and at domestic interagency evaluation forums, and so on. But there was nobody to do the work. PPC and CDIE were gone and the F Bureau was uninterested (and likely incapable). So, as Director of Management Policy, Performance and Administration I took over these tasks. My job was simply to make sure we didn't get into trouble by failing to do things that we were required by law or Executive fiat. So, M/MPPA began preparing USAID's annual performance report (indeed, I think M/MPPA may have taken over this responsibility even earlier with CDIE's decline in 2004 and 2005). When the F Bureau was formed, PPC's remnants, including the few remaining CDIE staff, moved to State, where they focused on managing the budget process and analyzing policy. They did not, to my knowledge, do much in the way of evaluation or play any significant role in performance management or annual reporting. So, it kind of made sense for M/MPPA to take over.

By this point, I wasn't a very happy camper. Indeed, I don't think there were very many happy campers at USAID then. But in the international development community more broadly, evaluation—particularly rigorous experimental evaluation—was having a renaissance. The World Bank, the ADB, the AfDB, several bilateral donors, the new OECD/DAC Evaluation Network (which replaced the Evaluation Experts Group), the new IFI Evaluation Network, and other institutions were all strengthening their evaluation functions and staffing. Even the State Department was creating new Bureau-level evaluation units (including one headed by Cindy Clapp-Wincek). And the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), Bush's new development assistance organization, prided itself on its commitment to rigorous experimental evaluation.

After about a year or so, F realized that it needed to preserve at least some minimal evaluation function, and hired Peter Davis, who had been President of Development Associates, to head a small evaluation unit. Peter (who is recently deceased) was a good man, very committed to development and to USAID, but with little background in evaluation or social science research. Meanwhile, as Director of M/MPPA, USAID's last remaining vestige of evaluation, I worked closely with Peter to reestablish and rebuild USAID's evaluation capabilities. I also worked closely with the MCC's Evaluation Head (whose name I forget) and the three of us began working together with the OECD/DAC Evaluation Network, the World Bank's Evaluation Training Institute, etc., etc. And, Peter and I began jointly preparing USAID's Annual Performance Report. So, while many other substantial changes were occurring at USAID and major battles were being fought about who should make what decisions about programming and budgeting and staff, I mostly ignored all that. My focus in 2007 and 2008 was on making sure that USAID fulfilled all of its performance management and evaluation requirements and retained as much of its existing decades results-oriented management capacity as possible.

Q: Right. Did you have any allies? In the political sphere, anyone who was trying to help you?

BRITAN: Certainly. Dirk Dijkerman and I are and were good friends. He was my boss for quite a while when he was DAA/PPC, and he was very supportive. Wade Warren was also very supportive of monitoring, evaluation and learning—both at the Africa Bureau, as Dirk's deputy at F, and later as USAID Administrator. Dirk himself is a brilliant guy, a great manager and an outstanding economist/social scientist. And his serving as Deputy (or Chief of Staff?) at F, was really helpful to USAID. Dirk later became USAID's representative to the OECD/DAC, succeeding Kelly Kammerer. So, when Dirk was based in Paris from 2009, he was the person I would meet and work with on Evaluation Network issues. Dirk was very driven, very supportive of "managing for results," and very helpful. The handful of former PPC who moved to F were also our allies. Dirk certainly tried to make sure that the Evaluation function was supported and maintained. That said, Dirk and Wade had many other fish to fry trying to assure USAID's future.

There were people in the Management Bureau who were supportive too. The head of the Contracts Office and the head of IT were both very interested in performance based

management. But they weren't so much development people and tended to focus more narrowly on business process improvement. I believe that M/MPPA also took over management of USAID's Evaluation IQCs during this time. As I said, our objective was to sustain as much of USAID's performance management capability as we could. So, we re-competed the Evaluation IQCs, which had been withering.

Sometime late in 2008, I think, my little MPPA Office was reorganized into a much larger Office of Management Policy, Budget and Performance (M/MBPB), which took over the Agency's (now returned) Budget function. I believe this happened around the time of the election, when Henrietta Holsman Fore was still Administrator. Angelique Crumbly (later AA/M), who came from a budget and contracting background, was asked to head the new Office, while I ran a new Performance Measurement and Evaluation Division under MPBP. And then in the spring of 2009, the Obama Administration brought in Ruth Levine, a very strong impact evaluation advocate at the Center for Global Development (and organizer of the widely renowned Bellagio Evaluation Conference in 2008) as DAA in USAID's new Policy Bureau, charged with revitalizing evaluation.

So, performance management and evaluation, which had probably hit a low point at USAID under Tobias in 2006 and 2007, rebounded rapidly. The Obama administration reformed the Policy Bureau and under Ruth Levine's leadership, performance measurement and evaluation were rapidly strengthened. Although I hadn't previously known Ruth very well, we worked closely together. Soon plans for the new Policy Bureau were being finalized, including a new Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research (P/LER). By early 2009, as Senior Evaluation Advisor, I was hiring new Evaluation staff and serving on a new Evaluation Policy Task Force, which released its new Evaluation Policy by the fall. By 2010, the new Policy Bureau was officially established and my little M Bureau performance measurement and evaluation staff was rolled into the new Office of Learning, Evaluation and Research under the directorship of one of my former CDIE colleagues, Cindy Clapp-Wincek

By 2010 the field of development evaluation had also evolved dramatically. "Impact evaluations, implementing experimental evaluation designs, were all in vogue. Bannerjee, Duflo and Kremer were promulgating the experimental evaluation studies that eventually won them the Nobel Prize in economics. I had been teaching graduate courses in evaluation at Johns Hopkins School of International Studies (SAIS) for several years and was well aware of all the current development evaluation trends. And Ruth Levine and Cindy Clapp-Wincek were among the movers and shakers. So, USAID was very quickly back at the cutting edge!

And working at USAID was fun again. Both Cindy and Ruth were firmly committed to rebuilding USAID's evaluation function with a more rigorous emphasis. The Evaluation Task Force rewrote the evaluation policies with a focus on Learning, Evaluation and Research. And, by 2010 and early 2011, I had completed a new set of "Management, Evaluation and Learning" support contracts, the MEL IDIQs. While these MEL IDIQs were direct descendants of the evaluation IQCS that had been in place since the 1990s, they also reflected a growing recognition that the field Missions needed to mobilize far

more substantial resources to effectively support monitoring, evaluation and learning. So, the IQCs which had had a total ceiling of \$15-20 million in the late 1990s grew into IDIQs with a total ceiling of more than \$500 million in 2020.

Q: Wow.

BRITAN: And that enabled field staff in Missions all over the world to obligate \$10 million or \$15 million or even \$20 million in five year contracts to support performance measurement, evaluation and learning activities in their country. And the new Evaluation Policy spawned broader performance management guidance encompassing CDCSs, PMPs, Annual Portfolio Reviews, and a broad array of performance measurement, evaluation and learning activities. So, when I finally left USAID (at least as a direct-hire) in 2011, I again felt good about the role I had played in institutionalizing performance management and evaluation throughout the Agency.

Q: Those large contracts were for evaluations that weren't at the project level, or even at the program level, is that correct?

BRITAN: One could use those contracts to do an individual evaluation or even a very small study, and people sometimes obligated \$50,000 or \$100,000 or \$200,000 to do an evaluation of a specific project or activity in, say, Ethiopia. Or sometimes a technical office, perhaps in the Global Bureau, would fund a single large program evaluation costing several million dollars, for example to assess child survival or agricultural development across a range of countries. But the bulk of the funding went to large \$10 million to \$20 million (or more) contracts providing multi-year monitoring, evaluation and learning support for all of the LER activities in a particular field Mission. I'm working right now, for example, on a proposal from one of the bigger MEL consulting firms to support multiple performance measurement and learning activities in a medium sized LAC Mission over five years. And, I was previously involved in drafting the winning proposal for MEL services in Nigeria totaling nearly \$50 million. That level of support for MEL activities was new. And these MEL services went far beyond anything that Mission staff could conceivably do themselves or accomplish through individual evaluation contracts focused on specific activities.

At an earlier point in time, there was a real issue about whether we could legitimately fund evaluation studies using program funds (that Congress appropriated to support development activities) rather than using much more limited operating expense funds that Congress appropriated for managing those development activities. But somewhere in the early 2000s the distinction disappeared and USAID began using program funds to support performance measurement and evaluation work that directly supported management decisions about program implementation and improvement. And, over the same time, the technology for collecting and using performance information in management decision-making also improved dramatically. Geographic information systems were invented. Computers became far more powerful. Social media emerged as vehicles for gathering and sharing performance data. Smart phones and other hand-held devices enabled remote data entry and proactive data sharing. Indeed, the kinds of

“management and performance information systems” that were barely imaginable a decade ago were now quite realizable.

There's no way much of this could have been accomplished by direct hire USAID staff working alone, even in the days when there were a lot more of them. When I was working in the Philippines from 2011-2015, we didn't yet have a central evaluation support contract, but we did establish a set of local performance measurement and evaluation contracts that fulfilled the same purpose. But now I'm getting ahead of myself again.

Moving to the Philippines to work for USAID

Meanwhile, my personal circumstances also evolved. As I mentioned earlier, I was widowed in 2000. I met my new wife, Patricia Moser, in 2002. Patricia is a health economist and former USAID FSO who served as a health officer in Thailand, Jamaica, Washington, and the Philippines. She left USAID in 1994 to work as a health officer with the ADB in Manila. When I met Patricia in 2002 she was the Deputy in the ADB's Washington Office, and was planning to return to Asia shortly. We fell madly in love and she extended her stay in DC for as long as she could. Eventually, Patricia took a leave of absence from the ADB to run an NGO, and then finally resigned and began working for the MCC in 2006 or 2007. In 2007, we got married.

But by this point in my narrative it's 2010 or 2011, and Tricia and I are working happily at USAID and the MCC. But my job at USAID was also nearly done. I mean, I'd been CDIE Director and Senior Evaluation advisor, and god knows what else, and now I was mostly just running the Evaluation IDIQs, which isn't too exciting. So, Tricia was off on a TDY in Indonesia and got a call asking if she was interested in being the Health Director at the ADB. We discussed it, and she applied and was offered the job. I was ready to retire from USAID and moved on and Tricia was both excited about the job and about the prospect of returning to Asia, where she'd lived for nearly 20 years. We decided to try it.

So, we moved to Manila. I think I mentioned that when I visited Manila to find housing in the summer of 2011, Gloria Steele recruited me to be her Senior Performance Management and Evaluation advisor at USAID Philippines. And that's what I did for the next four years as a USPSC. It gave me a chance to see USAID from the other side, from the perspective of the field, which was a really great way to finish my USAID career. I wasn't quite over the hill yet and Gloria was a very dynamic leader who really wanted to strengthen USAID's Philippines' program. We developed a new CDCS (Country Development Cooperation Strategy), a new PMP (Performance Management Plan), a joint country strategy with the Embassy, and a bevy of new projects and programs. And, if working in the Philippines wasn't enough, Gloria was also responsible for programs in Mongolia and the South Pacific at various points in her tenure.

In the early 2010s, the Philippines faced challenging development issues and difficult political problems, including the threat of terrorism in Mindanao. But while work was

sometimes hard, the USAID/Philippines proved to be a wonderful place to work, and I fit in well nearly from the start. Soon after I arrived, I was asked to draft a new CDCS for the Mission. The Mission had actually hired somebody else to draft the CDCS about six months earlier, but they had failed miserably. So, my first assignment was to rescue the Mission from a near-disaster (not so different from my early trouble-shooting for CDIE). And six months later, when we sent our CDCS for the ambassador's approval, he said it was the best USAID document he'd ever read! So Gloria was pleased, I was pleased, the whole mission was pleased, and I'd gained a lot of kudos. That was helpful, because many Mission staff had had their doubts about what an older, Washington-based, civil service lackey like me had to offer, particularly someone who had promulgated all those terrible performance measurement and evaluation requirements that they now had to fulfill.

But my success with the CDCS, and with the Performance Management Plan that followed, and with the first few evaluations we implemented gained me real credibility and everything worked out well. Mostly on their own, but with some help and encouragement from, Mission staff designed and implemented a series of useful evaluations, pulled together an effective performance measurement system, and mobilized for far more results-oriented management. And while I worked hard, I was still able to accompany my wife on representational travel (and a few fantastic vacations) throughout Asia. I remember one trip, for example when we went to an enormous HIV/AIDs conference in Thailand and joined a big party helping sex workers distribute condoms in Soi Cowboy (the red light district). It was certainly different. But it was also exciting.

Q: So here's a question for you -- having created a lot of the policies and the mechanisms to support the policies when you were in Washington. You said, "so I was then on the other side of the table." Is there anything that looks really different from the other side of the table -- that is, being in the field -- that you might have wished were done differently?

BRITAN: There are at least a few things. I don't think I recognized initially how important it was to have the management side of the Agency on board, particularly contracting officers in the field. And it took a while to get support from the contracting officers, until they understood what was going on and what they needed to do. And contracting officers have enormous power in Missions to make things happen or not. So, there were potential bottlenecks like that that I wasn't particularly aware of in Washington. And, I didn't realize how badly understaffed USAID was, how overburdened FSOs were, and to what extent Foreign Service Nationals run the Missions and its programs. From the perspective of the Philippines, it quickly became clear that while FSOs may deal with policy, strategy and host-country counterparts, FSNs handle nearly all of the details of program management and implementation. And, it would have been very useful if we had established the capability to field broad MEL support contracts earlier.

Mission FSOs may have been overburdened, but (in the Philippines at least) FSNs were also extremely well qualified, so it was easy to delegate much of the technical work and

analysis to them FSOs certainly stayed engaged in implementation, but they spent more time dealing with host-country counterparts, communications and outreach, USAID Washington demands, bureaucratic reporting requirements, and the like. I was also somewhat surprised at how “political” the work of the Mission was in terms dealing with the Embassy, coping with USAID Washington, and responding to local political currents. And very little of that could be delegated to contractors or FSNs. Still, people worked hard to manage their programs for results and I do think that all of our “performance management” efforts have made USAID more effective.

I was also surprised working in the Philippines to see how much the development world has changed. In the 1970s and 1980s and 1990s development became laser-focused on “alleviating poverty” and reaching the “poorest of the poor.” By 2015, bilateral development programs—the Brits, Canadians, the Aussies in particular—seemed much diminished and much more focused on national foreign policy interests. Sometimes it felt like USAID was one of few bilaterals left that was still a development agency. And, it still feels good to be part of that. Since returning from the Philippines in 2015, I’ve moved to the third side of the triangle and begun working for development contractors, providing MEL consulting for a variety of “beltway bandits. And that’s a whole different world again.

Q: Say more of being on the other side of the table from AID, How does that feel?

Thoughts on contracting

BRITAN: I certainly wouldn't have wanted to spend my entire career as a contractor, as some of my friends have. To begin with, working as a development contractor is really tough. And I realized how thoughtless and unaware—even uncaring—I had sometimes been working with MEL contractors over the years. These people work hard, often juggling multiple assignments, with few benefits and little security, just to make a meager living. At its peak, for example, CDIE's Development Information Service probably employed 100 to 150 contract staff. These were typically bright young MAs, who had spent a couple of years working as Peace Corps volunteers or low level development interns in the field, and had come to Washington to find a regular job. So, there were a lot of really smart, dedicated young people, getting paid little, to work tirelessly. A few of these contractors did eventually become Foreign Service Officers or other kinds of direct-hire staff, but most just moved from one contracting job to another. They were just brilliant young people working their butts off. It makes me a little sad to think about it, but I was also very impressed!

My wife has also been doing a lot of development consulting work since leaving the ADB and her subsequent position as Chair of the Global Funds Technical Review Panel. And while she loves development consulting as a part-time sideline, she can't understand either how people make a career out of it. Tricia often works 100 days to get a job done, but only gets paid for fifty. Like I said, most development contractors work really hard.

So, I'm impressed with the contracting side of USAID. USAID has excellent contractors, for the most part. Contractors sometimes do bad work, but I think that's really pretty rare. The biggest problem is that contractors need to make money so they sometimes overcommit and get in over their heads. And then they cut corners figuring out how to meet the requirements of a contract when they don't have the time or capabilities. Contracting also seems to be primarily a young person's game and I don't see how people can stay on working as contractors for ten or twenty or thirty years. I have a lot of admiration for people like Larry Cooley and Keith Brown and Peter Davis and Rolf Sartorius and others who've built very successful contracting businesses from the ground up. I mean, that's a tough job.

Q: Yeah, it is. What I've heard from colleagues when they go into the consulting field, and have to negotiate across the table with AID people, and basically have to hold their tongue. They can't say, "Well, that's a really stupid idea" which you might say if you were inside.

BRITAN: Right. That's one of the problems, particularly given that more evaluations are being contracted now than in the past. I think that direct-hire staff were more hands on thirty years ago, doing much of the evaluation work themselves. But even in those days, there were people who really didn't get it, or didn't have the training to do evaluation. And, there have always been people who don't really understand performance management and evaluation and who ask for things that are silly or impossible to accomplish.. It may even be worse now, since there are fewer direct hire staff managing more programs. When I was at USAID/Philippines, for example, there were perhaps ten technically trained FSOs managing the whole program. And, you're lucky to find anyone in a Mission who really knows something about monitoring or evaluation. So, USAID must rely on contractors, but that usually works out pretty well.

I've always believed that USAID managers need to know enough at least to be able to ask contractors the right questions. They don't need to know everything, but they do need to know something about performance measurement and evaluation and how performance management works. They need to know enough to know when they're getting a straight answer and when they're not, to be able to ask the right questions, and to understand what's actually going on. You can't expect direct-hire staff to know everything about performance measurement and evaluation, but they do need to recognize good data when they see it and to be able to use that data in assessing performance and making decisions.

I do think that a lot of the processes that we put in place—the CDCSs, the PMPs., the DQAs and the like—are very useful. Their primary point is to make people more thoughtful about what they're doing and to help them marshal empirical data to better understand the impact of their decisions. More people do have the background and experience for performance management these days and staff capabilities have certainly improved. The Peace Corps veterans from the 1970s and 1980s became the social scientists of the 1980s and 1990s, and the economists and business school graduates in

the 1990s and 2000s. But since 2015, I've worked mostly on the consulting side and am a bit out of touch with who USAID is hiring now.

Q: Right. So you've enjoyed the work you've done?

BRITAN: Yes, very much so. Even the last few years when I've mostly been writing, revising and reviewing proposals. When I first came back from the Philippines, I was parachuted in to fix a few problematic evaluations of the field, but found that tough going. So after a few assignments like that, I said, no more, that kind of field work is for young people. I do have a friend, just a little younger than me, who's been a Chief of Party overseas for more than 30 years and I can't figure out how she keeps it up. That's really hard.

Q: It is, it is. Well, you basically are synonymous with the evolution of the evaluation function at AID from when it was strictly at the project level, to when we discovered program lending and program impacts to when management information systems became critical. And who knows where we're headed now. But I think what's interesting, and maybe just as sort of a final paragraph, if you would, is how have our counterparts changed over your career? And I mean, both the consulting community and our counterparts in the developing world when it comes to evaluation?

BRITAN: When I first started doing this performance management and evaluation stuff at USAID in the 1980s and 1990s, we had to do most of the work ourselves or with US contractors. There were some parts of the world at that time, particularly in Asia, where you could find counterparts who were well trained and well prepared to do performance management and evaluation on their own. But that was rare. Now, well trained MEL counterparts can be found nearly everywhere—in Latin America, Africa, Asia, the Near East—not only in government, but also in academia and the private sector. There may sometimes be issues of divided loyalties or conflict of interest, but these people are smart and very well trained.

Now, sometimes these people may be juggling two or three jobs and getting “bonuses” or kickbacks on the side, that's a different issue, but the level of technical competence is very high. So, you don't need to hire Americans or Europeans anymore to do a lot of what USAID used to hire them to do. Which is great, though it may make careers for US evaluators more difficult. But as for me, my days as a development evaluator are ending.

We are also now in a very different development world than we were twenty or forty years ago. Maybe we are finally at “the end of history” (as my former SAIS colleagues' Francis Fukuama used to say) or at least at “the end of development” as we knew it. The way we did development forty years ago when you and I were starting our careers, wouldn't make sense today. And I don't think it's just a matter of providing program assistance or budget support or large scale program funding (like the Global Fund or GAVI). Many countries just no longer need the kind of hands on programming and implementation assistance that we provided 30 or 40 or 50 years ago.

Maybe all we need to do now is to provide commodities and funds and let our partners figure out the rest. I don't know how development will evolve, but it will certainly be different from what we have done in the past. And I'm not sure that the development community has come to terms with this yet...with the need to do development very differently.

I do remember one time in 2013 when my wife and I were visiting Singapore. On a whim, we stopped by the Singapore Aquarium and there was a big exhibition about the Belt and Road Initiative, which at that time I'd never heard of. And there was this big, glossy display about how China was going to build highways and bridges and railroads and ports all over the place, with maps showing their extent. And I looked at it and said, "That sounds like development". And it certainly was development, but it also represented a very different approach from USAID's to working with developing countries. And, I remember being really amazed by the Belt and Road initiative at the time, and have become even more amazed as I've watched it unfold in the years that followed. Certainly, the belt and road initiative have been a powerful force, and certainly not entirely for the good. But it is a very different approach to development and it has been massively funded. I don't think the West has entirely come to terms with this yet, though I do think we're starting. So, 2022 is a different world. I don't think I really started feeling I was getting old until the last years of the Trump administration, but seeing the Belt and Road Initiative was the first time I had a glimmer of what a different world we were becoming!

Q: Absolutely. And your comments about the Belt and Road Initiative are right on -- it is development, but different, and it's sort of development plus foreign policy. And cynics would say, but so was our's -- that is development and foreign policy.

BRITAN: Yes. Yes. I do think our development programs may have been less ambitious and less well funded, but also more focused on benefiting the poor. Certainly, there's been lots of reaction to the Belt and Road Initiative by now and the Chinese have certainly gotten some negative feedback. I guess we'll just have to see how it plays out in the long run. But what a "wow" that was in 2013 when I first realized how different development was becoming.

I would say that the high points in my government career were meeting Bill Clinton in the Rose Garden in 1993, when he signed GPRA and then meeting Barack Obama in 2014 when he visited the Philippines. And, I felt like we'd come around full circle. When I left USAID again for the second time in 2015, I again very much felt that I left on a high note. I don't know if I would have wanted to work at USAID during the Trump administration—another difficult time. Perhaps I'll ask Gloria out to lunch one of these days to see what it looked like from the inside. Or, perhaps if I just wait a little while, I can read her oral history!

End of interview