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SUSAN FINE

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INTERVIEW

Q: Today is November 23, 2022, and this is interview number one with Susan Fine.

Susan, thank you very much for participating in the program. We look forward to hearing from you. Can we please start with you talking a little bit about when and where you were born, a little bit about your family background.

Childhood, Family, Education, and Early Background

FINE: Okay. Well, thank you. It's good to be here talking with you. And so, I was born in New York City. I grew up in my early years in Westchester County, which is a little bit north of New York City. My father was a corporate lawyer. He first worked in Manhattan and then later on worked for American Can Company in Greenwich, Connecticut. And my mother, before she had me, was a writer for Time Incorporated in New York City. And she had been an art history major in college and she first did some work with art galleries in New York and then she joined Time Inc. for a few years before I was born. Of course, in those days, it was typical that when you had a child then the mother stopped working. When I got to be a teenager, my mother actually went back to work and had a successful career as a writer and editor, first for Time *Life* and then for *Readers Digest*.

My father had a career as a lawyer. He had been in the military—he was in the Korean War and he worked in army intelligence, and he actually wanted to serve the government. He applied for a job with the Central Intelligence Agency but they took so long to get back to him that he took a job as a lawyer instead. But he had a lifelong admiration for public service, particularly military service because that's what he was familiar with, but when I did go into public service, he was always very proud of that.

Q: Were you an only child?

FINE: No. I was the first-born, and then four years later my sister, Alice, was born. And then, when I was in fourth grade we moved from southern Westchester to northern Westchester County, so almost out on the Connecticut border about fifty miles north of the city in a beautiful area. The town was called South Salem. It was quite rural at the time. There was still a working farm in the town. But there was also a train service into Manhattan, so my parents at various times would get on the train in the morning and commute into midtown Manhattan and then come out in the evening. It was a wonderful place to grow up. It was, as I said, very rural, with a lot of open space. I went to Lewisboro Elementary School and John Jay Middle School and High School. Not a huge school. I had some really wonderful teachers over the years. Interestingly, another USAID (United States Agency for International Development) person who lived in the same town and was only a year ahead of me in school was Cheryl Anderson.

Cheryl lived two houses away from the elementary school and her mother was the Girl Scout Troop leader. So, I got to know Cheryl and her sister, who was a year younger than me, growing up. We weren't close friends in high school, but then it was interesting we then reconnected when both of us joined USAID. She joined a few years before I did.

Q: It's a real compliment to your high school that you both did so well in your international development careers.

FINE: It's a funny connection, right? (Laughs)

Anyway, let's see. What can I say about growing up—I mean, it was a wonderful place to grow up. It was a safe place, lots of open space. I spent lots of time outdoors. I was very interested in nature and conservation. I remember the first Earth Day in 1972. I rode my bicycle to school instead of taking the bus and was very into it. Also very interested in native, well, what would have been called Indian culture back then. My family did a lot of hiking. We would go to the Adirondacks in upstate New York in the summertime and when we were younger, we would stay by a lake and do day hikes and then as we got older, we would do camping trips, like weeklong sort of backpacking trips.

And I was, let's see, I played the flute. And in junior high I got into gymnastics, competitive gymnastics. I was never terribly good, but I enjoyed it.

Q: You said your father honored and respected public service, which I'm sure had an influence on your ultimate career choices. Did you have any exposure to global issues or do any travel outside of the country as a young person?

FINE: Surprisingly, not really until my first international travel was with the Experiment in International Living and it was actually at the end of, after my senior year in high school. And I did a six-week program in Switzerland. I had studied German in high school, so we did a program in the German-speaking part of Switzerland. It also involved

hiking in the Swiss Alps, which was wonderful. But that was actually the first time I was in—that I had gotten a passport. My parents did not travel a lot. I mean, my father did a little bit of travel for business, but not a lot. So, I didn't really have a very international orientation. I do remember we did have a subscription to *National Geographic*, and I remember pouring over those *National Geographic* articles and being very interested in them. But there was nothing in my upbringing that would have predicted my career path.

When I went to college, I did go to the Soviet Union, but that was later.

Q: We'll talk about that a bit later. So, when you were looking for colleges, did you look all over the country or did you focus on the Northeast?

FINE: I did focus on the Northeast. I guess, not very adventurous. I mainly focused on New England. I spent a lot of time growing up in New England. My mother was an only child, so no relatives on that side, and my father had one brother. And so, one set of cousins and they lived in Massachusetts. So, we spent a lot of time in Massachusetts with them. So, I guess I felt comfortable with the New England environment and I also liked skiing and winter sports, skiing, skating. So, I did focus on schools in Massachusetts, Maine, upstate New York.

Q: Did you know what you wanted to study when you got out of high school? Were you open to anything or did you have a focus in mind?

FINE: I was fairly open. I didn't have a specific major in mind. What I was interested in, or thought I was interested in, was environmental issues. You know, back in those days there wasn't even such a thing as an environmental studies major, I don't think. There might have been a few very early ones, but they weren't common, so I wouldn't have known to look for them, I don't think. I ended up applying early decision to Colby College in Waterville, Maine. I went up there on a college visit with one of my good friends from high school and her mother. And one of the things that I really liked about Colby was that they owned a bog. (Both laugh) I know. I told you, though, that I was interested in conservation issues. I'd actually done a camp when I was in high school in New York State that had a bog and so, I'd studied bogs and bog ecology and I thought it was interesting, the carnivorous plants and also the fact that you have very similar environmental conditions in a bog as on the top of a mountain. And so, that was one of the things that just intrigued me. So, the fact that Colby owned the bog was one of the deciding factors.

Q: Deciding factor. Okay. (Laughs)

FINE: It was a nice size for me. I liked the fact that you would have the opportunity to get to know your professors, and that actually did turn out to be influential in my choices going forward.

Q: Okay. Right. I'm still intrigued by the bogs. When I think of bogs, I think of cranberries.

FINE: It is a certain type of bog, the cranberry bogs.

But there are other kinds of bogs, typically where you have a kind of a bowl of rock and the water flows in and it doesn't flow out. So, the difference between a bog and a swamp is a swamp, water flows through and a bog, it sits. It can flow in but then it doesn't flow out. So, there's no movement and so over time it fills in and it has certain acidic properties because of the fact that you don't have water flowing through. It's a unique ecology.

Q: Okay. Thank you. (Both laugh)

Q: Very good. So, you go to Colby and play in the bogs (laughs), but you do ultimately choose a major, and it sounds like some of the professors might have had some influence on that decision?

FINE: Well, what happened was I took a freshman economics course and I had taken an economics class in high school, very rudimentary, and I thought it was kind of interesting. So, I signed up for a first-year microeconomics course. And what just grabbed me was how economics explained things like pollution and the whole concept of common property resources and why you would have land degradation in public spaces because there's no ownership so there's no incentive for anybody to protect the land. The incentive is just to get as much out of it as possible. And there were a number of things where economic theory sort of explains human behavior and explains the whole concept of externalities. It just clicked with me. I remember thinking, wow, this makes sense to me and I thought, well, this is what I want to do. And fortuitously, at the time there was at Colby one of the foremost environmental economists in the country, Tom Tietenberg. He was doing research—this is in the late seventies, early eighties—he was doing research on marketable pollution permits, which was really groundbreaking at the time. Still haven't managed to implement them. He taught a course in environmental economics, which I think I took. I ended up working for him as a research assistant, helping him create a textbook and—he wrote it, obviously, but I did research tasks, supporting him in writing a textbook. So, that really resonated with me.

So, the economics department at Colby was quite strong and there were actually several professors who had done research on international development issues. I took a couple of courses from them as well because they had a good reputation. And so, I learned the different economic theories around development like Walt Rostow, stages of growth.

I do remember one of our professors in one of these international development courses, saying, "Hey, you know, if this is something that you're interested in, then you should probably think about finding a way to go to a developing country," which made a lot of sense to me.

Q: Is that what piqued your interest potentially in the Peace Corps, although you probably made that decision later?

FINE: Yeah, I think so, that was part of it. I also had a strong sense of how fortunate I was, the opportunities that I'd had, the upbringing that I had, the opportunity for a good liberal arts education. And I did have this sense that it was important to find a way to contribute to and help people who didn't have the same good fortune that I did. I mean, it was very inchoate, it wasn't like I had a formulated plan as to how that would happen. But I do remember that it was important to me.

Q: Now, you mentioned that as an undergraduate at Colby you made a trip to the former Soviet Union.

FINE: Yes, and it actually ties back to a course I took in high school in Russian studies. And the high school teacher who taught that had spent a lot of time in the Soviet Union, and I remember getting the impression that maybe the Soviet Union and the economic system that it had wasn't all that it was—it wasn't as powerful as everybody talked about. So, I remember having this skepticism about are they really that bad, are they really that dangerous? And so, in college, I took a Russian literature course. And then, Colby had a January Plan where you have a month between the first semester and the second semester where you do something different, and it can be independent research, it can be courses on campus and then there are some travel opportunities. And so, in my junior year there was an opportunity to go to the Soviet Union. I should have thought that January is probably the worst time of the year to go to that part of the world because it's so cold, but anyway. But Maine is also really cold.

And so, there were fifteen or twenty of us who went with a professor to the Soviet Union and it was fascinating. We went to, of course, Moscow first and then we went to Kyiv, which was still part of the Soviet Union. We went to Tallinn, now the capital of Estonia, but at that time part of the Soviet Union. And we went to Leningrad, as it was called back then. Of course, we had the minders, the people who were with us. But I remember, in Moscow, we went to GUM, the famous supermarket. And I think they took us to some factory. And then, we saw cultural presentations. We went to a ballet and the Tretyakov Gallery, which I thought was incredible. I was amazed at the art that was there. But I remember, looking at what was on the shelves in the stores and looking at the technology in the factory and thinking, I don't know if these people could really support some kind of major war effort. Not that I was any kind of expert, but it just didn't look that robust to me. And then, when we were in Kyiv, we visited a lot of the churches, the old orthodox churches and being just blown away by the beauty of them and also really struck by the fact that the only people who were in there were really old ladies.

And then, Tallinn was very interesting because people were more open there —they were much more willing to be critical of the Soviet Union and they would come up to us and make comments. Obviously we were foreigners, so people would be walking in the street and somebody would kind of walk along next to us and start talking. And so, it was an interesting experience and I felt that it bore out my suspicion that maybe the Soviet Union wasn't as robust as it was thought to be.

So, that would have been January of 1981. It was still deep in the Soviet Union period.

Q: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely. We hadn't talked about whether you'd studied languages in high school or college. Did you study Russian language?

FINE: No; I did not do Russian. As I said, I studied German in high school, and that was motivated by my father, who had been posted in Austria during the war and he had learned German.

Q: That's right. I had forgotten you had mentioned that.

FINE: I took several years of German in college, but when I got to the point of having to read Goethe in German —that was too much for me. I gave up. Of course, German ended up being a terrible choice for international development work because where in the developing world except maybe Namibia, which was not Namibia at that point, would you use German? So, there were times when I regretted that I had not studied something more useful, like Spanish or French.

Q: So, your major ended up being economics. Did you have a minor in political science or international relations or something along that line?

FINE: No, not at all. That's actually one thing that I regret—Colby did have a good, strong government department and I didn't really take advantage of it and I regret that. I guess I just wasn't thinking, I wasn't thinking about career and how do you translate interests into a career. And so, regrettably, I missed the boat on the government stuff—.

Q: So, as you were in your senior year and thinking about what you were going to do next, what kind of thought processes were you going through? Were you thinking about graduate school or were you thinking about a job? You ended up with Peace Corps, but I'm wondering how you arrived at that decision.

FINE: I knew that I didn't want to go directly into a full-time regular job. There were a lot of financial institutions, businesses that would come to Colby to recruit, but I had no interest in that at all. And I did recognize that this was a time in my life when I had more freedom, I didn't have much student debt, thanks to my parents, so I was fortunate in not needing to get a job right away to pay off student loans. So I didn't have a lot of obligations and thought that was my chance to do something different. As I mentioned, I had professors who had encouraged the idea of going to a developing country, and so Peace Corps appealed to me because it would give me the opportunity to go someplace new and different and see what a developing country was like. It kind of touched that desire to want to give back to—recognizing my own good fortune. And it kind of solved the problem of what to do for the next couple of years. (Laughs) So—

Q: The perfect solution.

FINE: Yeah, I can't say that I went through any rigorous thought process. I don't remember exactly when I filled out the Peace Corps application, but it was probably early in my second semester of senior year. I don't think it took so long back then.

Q: And I assume Peace Corps probably had recruiters that went to Colby?

FINE: Not all the way up in Waterville, Maine, no. (Laughs)

Q: No, they didn't go to Waterville, Maine. So, you had to take the initiative.

FINE: Yeah. So I applied and they asked, where would you want to go, and so I said Africa, that was my first choice. I'm sure they asked things like what skills do you have and I think I said that I could teach. And so, anyway, a few months before I graduated, I got a letter from Peace Corps saying that I had been assigned to Swaziland. And of course, I'd never heard of Swaziland. I remember going to my professor and sayin"Well, where's Swaziland?" He says "Oh, it's a little country in southern Africa." And at that point, South Africa was really deep in apartheid. Actually, there was a disinvestment campaign at Colby and it was something that I had noted. I didn't participate actively in it, but I was aware of it and I was conversant with the issues of apartheid and supportive of the disinvestment but I wasn't one of the people planning the campaign.

So, then I started looking into Swaziland. I learned that it's a tiny country but it has a very interesting culture, very traditional. It still had a king. And I was assigned to be a math teacher, which I thought as long as it's not calculus that I can probably handle it. I was not very good at calculus in college.

Q: Yes, the rare economics major who fought calculus. (Laughs)

FINE: Yeah. It was a requirement. You had to do it, but it was a struggle for me. Algebra and trigonometry, I was fine.

Q: Okay. So, how soon after graduation did you go into Peace Corps training?

Peace Corps and Early Introduction to USAID and Non-Direct Hire Employment

FINE: Pretty quickly. I graduated in May and I was supposed to report for a multi-day, orientation slash interview that Peace Corps did in Harpers Ferry, West Virginia, at the end of August.

Q: So, was this work in Harpers Ferry just for your class?

FINE: No. It's a standard part of the Peace Corps process. I'm sure they've changed the format somewhat over the years, but I believe it was just the people going to Swaziland. Maybe there were others. I can't recall. But it was a situation where they're preparing you for the experience, but at the same time, you're also being evaluated. And they identified some people that they think are not going to make it.

We were a large group. In the end we were somewhere around thirty volunteers and it was one of the largest groups that had gone to Swaziland in a while.

Q: Did you do more training in Swaziland? Because at some point I know that Peace Corps moved their training in-country.

FINE: Yes. This was not the training per se. This was an orientation and also, they give you all your shots and like I said, —they were also observing. We had to do these different exercises and they were observing how people interacted and there were a few people who were told "We don't think this is right for you." And some people also dropped out on their own. It was trying to prepare you for what you were going to go into and it's a significant investment when Peace Corps sends you someplace and they didn't want to send people who were going to turn around and leave a month after they arrived.

So, there were a couple of people who also decided this isn't for me and we ended up, as I said, with a pretty robust group of around thirty. I think it was five days in Harpers Ferry, then I went home with a packing list. And then we left at the end of September to go to Swaziland. So, we arrived in Swaziland and unfortunately, right before we arrived King Sobhuza, who had been the king for sixty years, died. So, we arrived and the country was in mourning and it was strange because all the men had shaved their heads as a sign of respect and mourning. So, I remember, it took me a while to realize that that wasn't the way they looked all the time, once their hair started growing back. (Laughs)

Q: Question. Did you all actually fly into Swaziland or did you go by road from Johannesburg to Swaziland?

FINE: We flew to Johannesburg and then from Johannesburg we flew—by Swazi Air to Matsapha Airport in Swaziland.

Q: Okay. So, you hadn't yet been exposed to South Africa by the time you arrived?

FINE: No. And then, it was three months of training and a lot of it is language training in siSwati. It's a Bantu language that has a totally different language structure than a European language. I'm an average language learner. And I think I have a good ear. Of course, we also did cultural practices. Our group was mostly teachers. I think there were a few people that were doing something else, but we were mostly math and science teachers. And so, we learned about the Swazi education system and curriculum development and classroom management procedures. As part of the training we had several times when we would go out and stay with a Swazi family and also go out and spend time with another volunteer who was a teacher, all of those things that they would do to prepare you for the assignment. I was sent to visit a volunteer who lived in the far southern part of Swaziland in the really hot, dry part of the country. And even though Swaziland is small, about the size of the state of New Jersey, still when you're traveling by either bus or hitchhiking, which was the most common way of traveling for Peace

Corps volunteers, it can take a long time. And I remember thinking, oh my gosh, I have to go all the way out there. And it was really, really, really hot.

Q: Over near Mozambique, that area?

FINE: Yeah, yeah, it was. It was near the Mozambican border in the—what was called the Lowveld. So, getting there was not easy and there were certainly times when I was thinking, why am I doing this? But then, when I got there I remember just loving being in this rural place and interacting with the kids and even the simple kind of life of a Peace Corps volunteer, coping with the things like not having electricity and in some cases not having running water, having to bring your water from a well or something like that. It appealed to me in some way.

Q: A good thing you did all that camping as a kid.

FINE: Yeah, that's true. The camping probably came in handy. (Laughs)

Q: So, did you know when you were going through training where you would ultimately be assigned as a teacher or did that happen at the end?

FINE: That happened towards the end. They didn't tell you where—I'm sure that they were—

Q: Probably evaluating you to see capabilities?

FINE: Evaluating people, trying to figure out who would fit best where. Also because some people were teaching at what were called secondary schools, which were more like middle schools, and then some people were teaching in high schools. I ended up being assigned to Evelyn Baring High School. It was the main high school in the Nhlangano district, which was in the southwest of the country. So, it was the district capital. And Evelyn Baring was considered to be one of the better high schools. They had boarding facilities and some Swazis sent their kids there because it was considered to be a better-quality education than some of the other places. It was interesting because the staff at the time was fairly international. There was another Peace Corps volunteer already there when I arrived. She was an agriculture teacher. And there was a couple who were Canadian volunteers with World University Services or something like that. And there were several Ghanaian teachers and that was fascinating to me. I didn't know anything about West Africa or Ghana. And then, of course there were Swazi teachers. Oh, and there were two British teachers.

Q: Was the head teacher Swazi?

FINE: Yes, the principal was a Swazi. So it was in the district capital and I had mixed feelings about that. On the one hand, there was electricity and running water. On the other hand, it wasn't like the real Peace Corps experience. It wasn't like out in the bush. The good thing was that I had a friend who was assigned to a rural school about twenty

kilometers away and so, we would do exchanges. She liked coming into town to go shopping and take a shower and things like that. And then, I would go out there and spend the night out there with her and get a taste of the rural experience.

Q: That sounds ideal.

FINE: Then, of course, the other thing that happened while I was in Peace Corps was that I met my future husband, Patrick Fine.

Q: Was he in your Peace Corps group or was he in another group?

FINE: He was already there. He had been there for two years when I got there, so he had done the regular two-year Peace Corps thing and had already been approved to extend for another year. He was starting his third year around the time that I arrived. And he lived and worked in a very rural area in the northern part of Swaziland, so pretty much the exact opposite of the country from where I was. And his job was as a community education worker. He ran a rural community education center. They had all kinds of classes that he organized, like in different skills like sewing and cooking. The idea was to help people develop skills so they could do entrepreneurial activities.

Q: Right, so it wasn't working with the children, it was with the parents and the adults?

FINE: With adults, right. And he lived with a very traditional Swazi family. And so, that was really how I got my sort of classic Peace Corps experience, by spending time on the homestead, that's what they're called in Swaziland. People don't live in villages or at that time they didn't; they lived more spread out and everyone has a homestead with farm fields around it in the rural areas. So I spent a lot of time on the homestead, visiting him and getting to know his family and learning about traditional Swazi life there.

Q: Yes; that sounds great.

Question about Peace Corps in Swaziland. Did you all have instructions as to whether you could go into South Africa? Were there any restrictions? Did you spend any time in South Africa?

FINE: Right. That's a good question. We were discouraged from going to South Africa, but not forbidden. And so, I did travel to South Africa and around South Africa. It was a weird experience. And I remember, for example, Patrick and I going to Johannesburg and there was one area of Johannesburg called Hillbrow, which was kind of a seedy part of Johannesburg, but where things were a little bit sort of looser, shall we say—and it was also cheap. We actually went to hear a concert by Juluga, a band formed by Johnny Clegg and Sipho, his Zulu friend and fellow musician. They subsequently became Johnny Clegg and Savuka. But anyway, at that time it was Juluga. I loved their music. We went to this really divey place in Hillbrow to hear them and the place was packed and mixed white, black, and then when we came out there were police cars all around. As far as I know, they didn't actually attack anybody or anything, but it was very uncomfortable.

When I would hitchhike in South Africa sometimes I'd get picked up by these white South Africans who were just so racist. And I remember having these debates with them about apartheid. And I remember this one guy saying to me, "Our blacks are different from your blacks." It was appalling. It was really—I mean, I guess it was eye opening, but it was very uncomfortable. I didn't enjoy being in South Africa for the most part. Of course it was nice to go to the beach in Durban, the beach was lovely. And there was really good South African wine that was very cheap. So, there were a few things about South Africa that were kind of nice to enjoy on a short-term basis, but overall, it was really not comfortable being there. And also, in Nhlangano where I was based there was a casino that was operated by a South African hotel chain. There were several of them around the country. Gambling was illegal in South Africa, but all these white South Africans would come over every weekend and go gambling and drinking and so it was very hypocritical too.

Q: Right. I vaguely recall there was a famous boarding school in Swaziland, Waterford where the children of many activists against apartheid went. Did you have any exposure to that school at all?

FINE: A little bit, not directly, but I did get to know a number of Americans, mostly USAID people, who were living in Swaziland. At that time there was a regional USAID office based in Mbabane in Swaziland, and it was a fairly large mission for the time. And so we got to know some of them, like Neal Cohen, who was an economist with USAID. I think it might have been his first tour with USAID. And his wife, Jan, who was very active in the theater scene in Mbabane. And actually, the USAID mission director at the time, Bob Housman, was a musician and he played violin, I believe, and so he found out that I was a flute player and one of my fellow Peace Corps volunteers was a cellist. Of course, she did not bring her cello, but when Housman found out that she played cello he went and found a cello in Johannesburg. We formed this little musical quartet and we would have rehearsals on the weekend, so I would hitchhike from Nhlangano to Mbabane, which usually would take four hours, something like that. We'd have a rehearsal Saturday afternoon, spend the night, and then Sunday morning I'd hitchhike or take the bus back to Nhlangano. So, we did get to know a few of the Americans who were there, and some of them had children who went to school at Waterford. So, that's how we knew about Waterford. And I think maybe we might have met a few of the teachers through it.

Q: The moral of this story is that Peace Corps volunteers should take their musical instruments with them on assignment?

FINE: Take your instrument with you, right. You're never going to know. I mean, honestly, I was amazed.

I think what's also important about that is that was my first exposure to USAID. I didn't know what USAID was when I went there. I'd never heard of it. And we did get to know some of these folks fairly well, particularly Neal Cohen, the economist. And so, that was

my introduction to USAID and the work that they did. And of course, as Peace Corps volunteers we would have these debates about whether or not it was good or bad, you know, the big, bad, U.S. government donor. We had those conversations.

Q: Right, yes.

FINE: But it was nice having these folks who would take us in—they would invite us for Thanksgiving. They had their consumables shipment, so we would get to eat goodies from the United States that we hadn't seen in a year.

Q: Well, one of the important functions of USAID officers is to help feed Peace Corps volunteers.

FINE: Exactly. (Laughs)

Q: Well, it sounds like a pretty fantastic Peace Corps experience. The work you were doing was meaningful and you got involved with a lot of other things as well.

FINE: Yeah. I loved my students for the most part. I really did enjoy teaching, although one thing that was difficult was discipline because in the Swazi education system corporal punishment was expected and it was the norm. And of course, I did not feel comfortable at all administering corporal punishment.

Q: And you were teaching at the high school level too, right?

FINE: I was teaching, yes, the high school level.

Q: Was it a mixed class, boys and girls or were they separated?

FINE: Yes, mixed.

Some of the boys were bigger than I was. And the head of the math department was this very strict Scottish guy and he had no hesitation using a stick on people. That was absolutely the most difficult part of the experience, really. When students would misbehave, I would try various things. Of course, this was also something we talked a lot about amongst the volunteers and in the training. The instructors would talk about strategies for managing without beating. I remember sometimes when a student misbehaved I would try to discipline them and the other students were going, "Miss, you must beat him. You must beat him, Miss." (Laughs) And that's like, I can't do it. Ugh. That was no fun. I did not like that. But overall, I found the experience gratifying. I actually have been contacted by one of my former students a couple of years ago. He had eventually become an accountant at Baragwanath Hospital in Johannesburg, so he'd gone on to get an accounting degree and then was working at the main hospital in Johannesburg. And on the side he was a lay minister and then, at some point he decided to go entirely into the ministry. So, he's now a minister and I believe the last time that I spoke to him he was in Madagascar. He's affiliated with a group in Atlanta, and so he's

come to the U.S. a couple of times for conferences. And we met in Washington, DC maybe five years ago, and then, he was here last year but the timing didn't work out for me to connect with him. But it's kind of interesting to talk to him and get his perspective on high school and some of those students and how they perceived things.

So, a lot of times you don't ever know what kind of impact you have on people and every once in a while, you get an opportunity to see that maybe you did have an impact on somebody. So, it's nice.

Q: That's good. Another question on Swaziland: you mentioned that when you arrived that the king had died and then his son, presumably, became king. And I believe he's the one who's still king.

FINE: Yes. Well, there was a period of regency, so the Queen Mother was a regent for, I think about a year or so, and then they announced Mswati as the Crown Prince. He wasn't made king while I was there.

Q: Because he was still a teenager?

FINE: Yes, he was going to boarding school in England.

I think he was identified as the Crown Prince while I was still there. And yes, of course, there were all these machinations going on that you heard about— in the royal family. And Swaziland has a very strong history of—or tradition of, what they call muti, like poisonings and disappearances and people being killed for body parts and there's a kind of a disturbing underside of the culture. But there's also a lot of joy and beauty in the culture. I participated in many local ceremonies, community gatherings, dances, and wore traditional Swazi dress. I'm glad that I ended up in a country that had a strong culture. And you know, it's striking that with being surrounded by apartheid South Africa that the Swazis were able to really hold onto that culture and not let it be overrun by South Africa.

And then, of course, in Mozambique there was a war going on at that time, so there was no chance of going there. That was not allowed. (Laughs)

Q: Well, again, it sounds like a very positive Peace Corps experience and not everyone has that.

FINE: Right. I think that's absolutely true. So, in my second year, you have to start thinking about what comes next. One of the things that I had learned from talking with these USAID people is that if you wanted to do international development work that you needed to get a master's degree, a bachelor's degree was not sufficient. And so, again kind of putting off the question of what is my career going to be, well I've done this Peace Corps thing, maybe I can go back to school now. I've had a little bit of experience. Then of course the other consideration was whether or not Patrick and I were actually going to stay together after Peace Corps. I said, "I don't want to actually marry you until

we get back in the United States and make sure that we still like each other in that setting."

I knew that there's a certain uniqueness to being in Peace Corps in a different country, and having a close relationship with a fellow American certainly enriched my Peace Corps experience in many ways, especially because Patrick was a fluent siSwati speaker and really understood Swazi culture, and so he helped me to really learn a lot about Swazi culture. But it's not a normal context, so I did think that it was important that we go back to the U.S. and spend time together there and make sure that it wasn't just some sort of ephemeral thing that was because of the circumstances. I know quite a few relationships that started in Peace Corps and did not last, and I also know some relationships that started in Peace Corps and have lasted.

Q: So, you were looking at graduate school, and I assume Patrick was looking at graduate school as well? You thought maybe you could go to the same place?

FINE: Well, so he finished Peace Corps. After we met, he had extended for a fourth year, which is pretty unusual, and in his fourth year he was assigned to the capital, Mbabane, working in the ministry of education. He still finished six months before the end of my Peace Corps service. He had applied to the master's in international education program at UMass Amherst. There's a very well-known Center for International Education there. He had met some people who were working on education projects in Swaziland financed by USAID who were from UMass, and so he applied and was accepted there. He was to start that program in September of 1984, and I didn't finish my Peace Corps service until December of 1984. And he actually left in July, and very bravely met my parents without me. So he came back, went to Amherst and started graduate school there.

There were a number of us in my group who were thinking that we would go on to graduate school. One of my favorite memories is sitting in the back of a pickup truck, hitchhiking, going either from or to Mbabane with Chris, who lived in the rural area near me. She also wanted to go to graduate school. So, we were in the back of a pickup truck and we had our GRE study books and we're quizzing each other on vocabulary words while driving across these beautiful green hills, bumpy roads. I just remember thinking, this is so amazing. Anyway, we took the GRE in Mbabane. It was amazing that it was offered there. I took the GRE but it was too complicated to start researching schools from there. You didn't have the internet back then.

Q: I was going to say, this was all pre-internet, so it would have been difficult.

FINE: Yeah. And so, I finished my Peace Corps service in December of 1984, and on my way back to the U.S. In those days we traveled with Pan Am. Remember Pan Am?

Q: Mm-hm.

FINE: And there was this flight that stopped at practically all the capitals through Central and West Africa. And so, I decided that on my way back I was going to visit one of my

college friends who was a year behind me in college and had become a Peace Corps volunteer in Senegal. She spoke French so that at least made sense. And so, I thought, well, I'll go visit Jenny in Senegal on my way back to the U.S. And she had been assigned to a school in the Casamance. It was in the town of Bignona, which is in the Casamance in the southern part of Senegal below Gambia. She came to the airport to meet me and I remember —Senegal was so different from southern Africa. It was just much more bustling and exuberant, and the people hassling you all the time. Okay, the men in Swaziland would hassle you, especially when they'd been drinking. But it was just a totally different vibe. And then we traveled down to Ziguinchor, which is the capital of the Casamance, and at the time—the conflict in the Casamance was just starting to bubble. And in fact, she had been delayed from going out to her school because there had been some rebel activities. So, it was interesting—since I subsequently ended up spending time in Senegal with USAID, having that early memory and having been in the Casamance for a brief time, right at the very beginning of the conflict, was meaningful in some way. I think I spent two weeks there and then went on back to the U.S. and then joined Patrick in Amherst where he was already studying. And then, we got married in June of 1985, so it didn't take me too long to decide that, okay, I guess he's okay in the U.S. (Both laugh)

After I returned, I spent the first half of 1985 researching graduate schools and filling out applications and planning my wedding. (Laughs) And for graduate school, what I really wanted was a program that would be rigorous and give me some real quantitative skills, but I didn't want to do a master's in economics because I'd seen enough in the sort of advanced economics courses that I'd done at Colby, including econometrics, that I just felt like it was too theoretical. And particularly, having had that Peace Corps experience and seeing the reality on the ground and realizing when you do an econometric model, you have to make all these assumptions in order to make the model work. And I felt like you're making so many assumptions that it doesn't necessarily have a relationship to reality anymore. I also felt like I didn't want to just be doing research. I felt doing an economics degree would be too insular. At the same time, I also understood that it was important to have quantitative skills and there were, at that point, very few master's in international development, but I remember looking at them and thinking that they were just too squishy. So, I ended up applying to the Kennedy School at Harvard because it seemed like the government programs there had a strong quantitative emphasis and fortunately, I was accepted and we moved to Boston in September of 1985. Patrick had finished his master's by then and he ended up getting a job with Boston Community Schools, so we lived in Boston, and I started the master's in public policy at the Kennedy School.

Q: Is that a two-year program?

FINE: It's a two-year program, right. And one of the things that was really interesting was they have a mid-career program, which I think some USAID people had the opportunity to take, and the mid-career people were just fascinating because they had so much experience.

Q: And they did it for one year, is that correct?

FINE: They did it for one year. Kennedy School uses the case-method. You know, they took it from the law school and the business school, the model teaching by case—a lot of the courses were done by case-method. And when you have these mid-career people and including people from developing countries, more Latin America, I would say at that time than Africa, but I remember there were some really fascinating people from Latin American countries who were students. And their perspective made the cases so much richer. You're learning so much more than just what the professor has to say. So, I was very pleased with the choice but also, I did take hardcore macro and microeconomics and econometrics and statistics.

Q: Were you able to do some international development courses as well?

FINE: Yes, I did. So, I was still kind of on the fence about whether I want to have a career in international development. I also had this interest in natural resource management and environmental conservation. I did a summer internship with the oversight body for the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority. They were going through this whole Boston Harbor cleanup back then. But, I also took some international development courses. I just wasn't sure.

Q: Okay. So, you and Patrick had not yet made the decision to go back overseas and to do international development?

FINE: We talked a lot about it. (Laughs) I'm a planner. I've always been a planner. And so, the planning side of me was like, how is this going to work out —this international development thing? It was just really difficult for me to see what was going to be the trajectory. But, after two years in Boston, we were missing the environment of Africa. And Patrick got a job offer to work on a USAID-funded project in Lesotho, another small country surrounded by South Africa. And this was during my second year. It didn't take a lot of conversation to say, "Okay, let's do it."

We were kind of itchy, I will say, to go back overseas. So, he accepted the job in Lesotho. I still had to finish my degree, so I didn't travel out with him until after I finished. But I did then immediately after graduation go out to Lesotho and then found a job as a lecturer at the National University of Lesotho, in their economics department. One of their professors had left at the last minute and so, I showed up and while I had very little relevant experience, they needed somebody and were impressed by my Harvard degree. So, I ended up teaching econometrics and international trade, which were the two courses that this other professor was supposed to teach. So, the good thing was I really, finally learned econometrics because I had to teach it. And I'm actually glad—I sweated for that. You really have to understand something well to be able to teach it to somebody else.

So, there we were in Lesotho. Again, we interacted a lot with USAID mission personnel and got to know more about USAID, especially since Patrick was on a USAID-funded project.

Q: That's good. So, did you introduce the case study method to the University of Lesotho?

FINE: Hah. I might have tried to do a few. I remember spending time in the library of the National University of Lesotho, trying to find materials and they didn't have a lot. Their collection of economic journals was quite old. So, it was challenging to find material other than the textbook. But it was a good experience, I would say.

Q: And you did that for a year, is that correct?

FINE: A year, yes.

Q: And then, there is another position for a year—was that in Lesotho as well?

FINE: Right; so while we were in Lesotho Patrick decided to apply to the IDI (International Development Intern) program at USAID. And—or, oh no. It was actually before we went to Lesotho. He had already interviewed for USAID, just randomly, they called him the same day that he accepted the Lesotho job, and said, "Okay, you know, we think we want to hire you, but it's going to take time." And he said, "Well, I just accepted this job in Lesotho." And they said, "Well, it's going to take a while, so you should just go to Lesotho."

So, he was called to USAID to start his IDI service towards the end of the time that we were in Lesotho. Again, I had to stay to finish my teaching commitment.

Q: This was good practice for later.

FINE: So, this is a theme over our careers. We almost never arrive and depart places at the same time. So, I stayed for a few months to finish the semester, and he had meanwhile gone back to Washington to become an IDI. And then, I joined him. And he was in Washington for a year, roughly, and while he was there, I got a position as a researcher and writer at the Worldwatch Institute. So, scratching that environmental and natural resource itch. I knew someone at the Worldwatch Institute, so that gave me a little bit of entree. And actually, it was a very good experience. I focused a lot on global warming, chlorofluorocarbons. At the time, CFCs were a big issue. They were negotiating the Montreal Protocol. And it was good for my writing and it was also really good because what I learned from that experience was that I wanted to do things and not write about other people doing things. My job at Worldwatch was to talk to people who were doing interesting stuff, innovative things around climate and whatnot, and then write articles about it. And I found it very frustrating to be just writing about the cool things that other people were doing. I'd always thought I would love to have a job in a think tank and then I realized no, I don't want to work in a think tank. I want to be the doer, not the researcher. So, I've used that. I've told young people who are seeking career advice, it's just as important to figure out what you don't want to do as to figure out what you do want to do.

Q: Right. That was an important lesson to have learned. I'm assuming that Patrick spent the year as an IDI in Washington and then he got assigned to, lo and behold—

FINE: Swaziland.

Q: —Swaziland. (Both laugh)

FINE: Yeah. I know. It was—we weren't expecting—actually, he was first told he would be assigned to Pakistan. And I was not thrilled about that because I wasn't sure about living in a Muslim country where they don't treat women very well.

And so, we were preparing to go to Pakistan. And then, someone had to leave suddenly from the Swaziland mission, the education officer. Patrick joined as an education officer, so they had a gap there and he was known in the education office for having worked in Swaziland so his assignment was switched. And so, we were going back to Swaziland, which was wonderful, as far as I was concerned. We actually arrived in Swaziland together. (Laughs)

And so, the first thing I was concerned about was what I was going to do. I went into the mission and talked to the deputy director, Harry Johnson. And I remember him saying, "Well,

you know

, you have good credentials, but what can you actually do?" (Laughs) So, I was happy to be able to say, "Well, I can do statistical analysis and I can write," and so, I felt that my decision to make sure that I had quantitative skills was validated there.

They ended up offering me a job in the program office. It was a regional mission, so it was covering not just Swaziland but there were programs in Mozambique, Lesotho, I think there was even a little bit going on in Angola. And then, of course, there was the NGO (Non-Governmental Organization) program in South Africa, which I didn't have anything to do with, but it was being managed out of Swaziland by the Regional Legal Advisor, Don Keene. Anyway, the head of the program office was Alan Reed and his deputy was Joan Johnson. And then, later on Jim Bednar came as the deputy. So, I learned my program skills from several illustrious program officers.

And you know, we did a strategy. I can't remember what the acronym was, but I wrote a lot of it. And we designed projects. Oh, you know who else was in the mission at that time? Alonzo Fulgham was also a PSC (Personal Services Contractor). His wife, Celeste, who later became a contracting officer with USAID, was the associate Peace Corps director for administration, so she was with Peace Corps in Swaziland. Alonzo came as a spouse and he got a job managing the small enterprise projects that the Swaziland mission had. So, Alonzo and I were there as PSCs, that's where we first met, and yeah, it was a good group, we had a really good group then.

Q: Valerie Dickson-Horton went in as mission director at some point. Was that while you were there or was that later?

FINE: I think it was later; Roger Carlson was the mission director. And it was a good way to learn the nuts and bolts, like reading the ADS (Automated Directives System). It wasn't called the ADS back then. We had the handbooks, Handbook Three for projects.

I feel like I was very fortunate to be in a place where there were people who really understood the nuts and bolts of USAID and I feel like I got a good grounding in that. And it wasn't through any kind of formal training. It was really just learning by doing.

Q: Right. Could you see much of the interagency aspect of USAID in that very first assignment within the Swaziland mission?

FINE: Not really at my level, no.

Q: Was AID supporting Peace Corps programs in Swaziland at that point?

FINE: Oh, the SPA (Small Project Assistance Program) grants. They might have, but I wasn't really involved in that.

Q: Just one other question. I'm wondering if HIV/AIDS had become an important issue during this period. I know that it became a very serious problem in Swaziland in later years, but wonder if you all had begun thinking about it during the 1980's.

FINE: I don't recall us having HIV programming at that time. This would have been 1989 to 1992. What I do recall and has really stuck with me was there was a very successful family planning program in Swaziland that was supported by USAID. And there was a Swazi organization that we were supporting for a number of years and USAID was able to give them an endowment and they had a partnership with Pathfinder International as their international partner. And they got this endowment; they were very successful. And you know, one of the things that I find frustrating is that the idea of creating endowments for local organizations that are doing important things like reproductive health ceased to be a tool that we could use not long after that happened.

Q: Right.

FINE: So, we had a very strong family planning program and of course, Swaziland had one of the highest fertility rates in Africa at the time. Family planning was definitely important. I don't think we had an HIV program.

Q: I was just curious because it was my early time in Malawi and we were starting up a program so I was just curious about Swaziland.

FINE: There might have been one and I just wasn't aware of it. I'm sure that the Swazis would have been very uncomfortable with an HIV program given their very traditional culture.

Q: Okay. At that point in time there were increased delegations of authority to the field, but I think there were also still some programs that had to go back to Washington for approval. Were you ever involved in that Washington project review process? If so, what were your thoughts about the process?

FINE: I think it was still the time when you had to send the Project Identification Document or PID into Washington for review and approval.

Q: And then they might delegate authority to the mission for approval.

FINE: And then, they would give you the authority to approve the project in the field, in the mission.

Q: Were you involved at all with any of that?

FINE: Well, yeah, I was. I don't think that I went back to Washington for a project review because I was a PSC. But I was familiar with the process. Speaking of authority, I remember when the mission got a fax machine and people started using the fax machine to communicate with people in USAID Washington by sending faxes. And the mission director, who was Roger Carlson at the time, got wind of it and said, "This is not acceptable. All faxes must be cleared by the front office." And I just remember thinking, that doesn't seem very realistic. He was trying to get control over the communication

flow and I think that that edict about clearing faxes with the front office lasted maybe a few months and then it just became impossible.

Q: Yes. Interesting. As communication channels increased over time it was hard for a lot of AID mission directors to adapt.

FINE: Right.

Q: And email, obviously, was even more of a challenge when that first started.

FINE: Right. I remember thinking he's not going to be able to keep the lid on that. (Laughs)

Q: You mentioned you were a local hire PSC and I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about things that experience? Did you feel like a second-class citizen or did you feel equal to the direct hire staff? Any lessons learned that you later applied when you were responsible for hiring PSCs?

FINE: Right. A couple things. First of all, I remember having to negotiate my salary with the contracts officer, who was a very intimidating guy. And I didn't have much of a salary history because I'd been a Peace Corps volunteer and I'd worked at a non-profit organization, the Worldwatch Institute, so my salary was pretty low. And I really didn't know how to negotiate a salary and I tried, but he basically said, "Well, you know, this is all I can give you because that's all I can justify on the basis of your salary." What I subsequently realized was how that started me at the very low end of the pay scale and I know I'm not the only person that this happened to. This happened to many people. And that follows you through your entire career. And so, I wish that I would have understood how critical that first negotiation was because that then ended up influencing the level at which I was brought into the agency when I did become an IDI, and then it just stays with you throughout your entire career. I'm glad that the agency in recent years finally has recognized that and has changed the procedures so that salary history is not the only factor that is considered. But that was a change that was too long in coming. So, that was one thing, you know, I felt like I kind of got screwed.

On the other hand, I did feel that people in the mission treated me pretty respectfully. I think because I produced and—

Q: The best way to earn respect is to produce.

FINE: Exactly. So, that was maybe another lesson, right, that you show what you can do and people will respect you, they'll listen to you.

And then, I think the third thing was, there were several of us local—U.S. PSCs in the mission. And I mentioned Alonzo. There were a couple of other ones, as well, who were spouses, and the other ones were all women. And I talked a lot with them about their experiences over time at different posts and they had interesting jobs in Swaziland for the

positions they had there, but then they told me that in other places, they couldn't get a job or their job was something that was not really in their career as they saw it. And so, that actually was influential in my deciding that I would apply to become a direct hire with USAID. As I mentioned, I'm a planner, so I wanted to be able to see what my path was and it was pretty clear that as a spouse it would be hard to have a clear path, a career path. And so, ultimately, I decided, this probably makes sense. So, I decided to apply to the IDI program and I'm sure Roger Carlson and Alan Reed both wrote recommendations for me and so, I was accepted and told to report to duty in Washington in August of 1992.

Q: Okay. And where was Patrick in terms of his assignment since you two specialized in not traveling at the same time?

FINE: Oh, I forgot a really important thing. While I was in Swaziland in 1990 our first son was born.

Q: And was he born in Swaziland?

FINE: He was born in Swaziland. He was born at home; we had a home birth with an American midwife who was working on a USAID-funded primary healthcare project that worked with Swazi midwives. But she also liked to keep up her skills and there were several of us women in the American community who all became pregnant around the same time and so she offered to do classes with us, birth preparation classes. Swaziland didn't have anything like that. So, she did and during the course of that time, I came to realize, wow, this woman is just an exceptional professional. She really knows her work. I mean, she was teaching Swazi midwives. You know, when you meet somebody who just really knows their field you just sense it.

At the time they wanted to send us to the hospital in Johannesburg, still apartheid, and it meant going several weeks ahead and hanging out in Johannesburg in a clinic where I didn't know anybody and the whole idea of going and giving birth in Johannesburg, apartheid South Africa, was really, really unappealing to me. And so, over time Patrick and I decided well, let's give birth here in Swaziland and with Mary as the midwife. And there was a wonderful old British doctor who had a partnership with her and so, he was the backup —and there was a good clinic in Mbabane, private clinic, should there be any complications, so he was on-call and the clinic was there and but I had a very normal pregnancy, no red flags. And so, Joshua was born in our house in Mbabane.

And then, Patrick's Swazi mother, who we still visited regularly after we returned to Swaziland, came a couple weeks after Joshua was born. She came to Mbabane for the first time, and she is a very, very rural, traditional woman. And she came because she wanted to see her—

Q: Her grandchild.

FINE: Yes. And stayed with us. It was very cool.

Q: Oh, wonderful. Was it a hassle with the medical unit at the embassy to be able to do this or did they trust your judgement on it?

FINE: They didn't love it, but we didn't get hassled this time. The next time, in Uganda, it was a different story.

Q: Yes; I interviewed Holly Wise, so I look forward to getting to that.

FINE: Okay. Yes. Anyway, I don't remember them giving us a really hard time about it. I think because the doctor was so well-known and trusted in the community. He was the doctor that everybody in the American community used. There was a clinic there, which was pretty good, so it wasn't a big issue.

Anyway, so then we had a small child and, to get to your question about Patrick, he had been assigned to Uganda because his tour in Swaziland was ending. He had been assigned to Uganda and then I was to go to Washington. And so, the plan was that he would take Josh with him to Uganda because Josh was an infant, and you know, childcare in Washington is difficult and there's plenty of childcare in Uganda, nannies and whatnot. I was going to do my IDI and language as fast as possible and then hopefully be assigned to Uganda so that I could join them. And just before we left Swaziland we were told that there had been an upsurge in bad malaria cases in Uganda. There was sort of an epidemic of cerebral malaria in the American community, which of course, is really terrible, and I think a couple of people had even died. And so, the medical unit, without notice, said that you had to be able to take the more effective malaria medicine at the time. What was it called? There was the old stuff that we took when we were Peace Corps volunteers, which wasn't very effective, and then, there was a more effective malaria medicine but you had to be thirty pounds in order to take it. Well, Josh didn't weigh thirty pounds because he was only a year and a half old. So, all of a sudden, he couldn't get medical clearance to go to Uganda with Patrick. So, we had to change plans and I had to bring Josh back with me to Washington while I was in IDI. So, you know, in addition to everything else, I had to find a place to live, childcare (laughs), oh my gosh. But it worked out and yes, so, I'm trying to think. Patrick must have come back to Washington with us but then gone out to Uganda. I don't quite remember the sequence but anyway. But he was assigned to Uganda and was in Uganda while I was doing my IDI training in Washington.

<u>USAID Employment – International Development Intern (IDI) — 1992</u>

Q: Did you come in with an IDI class? Was there a group of you?

FINE: Yes. Yes, there was a group of us.

Q: And so, you did some training in Washington.

FINE: Yeah. Debbie Griesser was in my IDI class, also, John Winthrop who became an EXO and then a mission director.

Q: But it was a class and you went through formal training and then worked in AID/Washington?

FINE: We did the formal training and then I was assigned to the Africa bureau and Patricia Rader was my IDI supervisor.

Q: And that was in the program office then at the AFR bureau?

FINE: Yes, I was in the program office. Marge Bonner was the head of the program office, so another great person to learn from. And I don't remember exactly when I knew for sure that I was going to be assigned to Uganda, but they must have decided that which is why they put me in the Africa bureau.

And so, I knew pretty much from the beginning that I would be going to Uganda.

Q: And you were hired as a—

FINE: A project development officer. It seemed to fit my skills and interests.

Q: Did you also have to do language training in Washington?

FINE: I did. I had to do language. And so, because I was going to Uganda I asked to do Swahili, thinking that I'm going to East Africa. Swahili will be useful. And I also thought that because I had learned at least some siSwati and some other Bantu languages, there's some similarities between Swahili. Basically, my objective was to get to Uganda as quickly as possible.

(Laughs) And so, I think I only spent like six weeks in the Africa bureau, not very long, and then, I went into Swahili training and it was with a private provider because they didn't have a Swahili class at FSI (Foreign Service Institute) or they didn't have one that was starting in the right time frame. Unfortunately, when I got out to Uganda, I discovered that Swahili was a terrible choice for Uganda because Ugandans hated Swahili. They associated it with the Tanzanians who had invaded them. And it was only used by the military and the police. (Peasley laughs). I quickly abandoned my attempts at working on Swahili.

Q: (Laughs) How long did you study it in order to get the grade so that you could go to post? I'm just curious.

FINE: I believe it was, let's see, August 1992 I joined and I traveled out to Uganda in February 1993. So, I studied for about four months.

Q: Okay. So, it was a very compressed IDI period in Washington.

FINE: Yes, but that's because I wanted it to be.

And it wasn't just that I wanted it, but the bureau was supportive of that. I mean, they understood or I don't know if it was bureau or HR at the time, but they obviously knew that my husband was already there. The supportive environment helped me get out there. And I think the fact that I had served as a PSC and had been doing the kind of things that project development officers do already, I didn't have such a steep learning curve either.

Q: Yeah. One last question and then we'll close it up for today. Joshua couldn't travel until he was thirty pounds, so does this mean you were feeding him a lot during this time in Washington, trying to fatten him up?

FINE: Yes, it absolutely was, we gotta get his weight over thirty pounds by the time we have to go to Uganda. (Laughs) I mean, that's a little bit of a joke, but he obviously was a growing boy and so, when it was time to go out he was two and four months and he made it over thirty pounds.

Q: Okay. (laughs).

FINE: But you know, that experience, though, —here I'm thinking how things that happen to you early in your career link to later on. I mean, I think it's important that I had that experience and having to deal with a young child and finding childcare because later on, when I served in Washington, multiple times, I had many colleagues and subordinates who were struggling with childcare. And my own experience made it much more relatable and I knew what they were dealing with and the stress that they felt. I was very fortunate that most of the time that my children were the age where they needed childcare, we were overseas and had excellent childcare.

Q: And this was all still when AID was in the State Department building and I don't believe there was any childcare, actually, at State at that point. I mean, the Reagan Building ended up having some childcare, but I think the State Department at that time didn't have anything, right?

FINE: There might have been some. I don't know whether they had child care across the street. But you know, it was the sort of thing you would have had to apply for months in advance. All of my stuff came up last minute so it wasn't something that I planned for. And I think just my being there for such a short time, it wouldn't have been practical anyway.

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Q: Today is December 5, 2022, and this is Carol Peasley, and this is interview number two with Susan Fine.

So, Susan, thank you again. And I believe when we left off you had—were completing your IDI training in Washington and had been assigned to USAID Uganda, where your

husband, the other half of the tandem couple, was already at work, I believe. So, if you could—we could start with talking about your, you know, completing your IDI training and heading off to Uganda and what position you went into.

USAID/Uganda, Project Development Officer (IDI) – 1993 – 1997

FINE: So, yeah, fortunately, I think I said this towards the end of the conversation we had last time that the Africa bureau and the human resources office, particularly the legendary Cecilia Pittis were very supportive in ensuring that I was assigned to Uganda, where my husband, Patrick, was the deputy in the general development office, and we also had our son, Joshua, who by the time I went out to Uganda was about two and a half and fortunately, over the weight limit so that he could take the malaria medicine that was required to be in Uganda.

Q: Lovely.

FINE: And so, I was a project development officer as an IDI, and I was assigned to the program office. Norm Olson was the program officer and Cheryl Anderson (who I had known in high school) was the deputy program officer. When I got there, the mission director was Keith Sherper, and then he was there for maybe a year and a half and then he left and I think he retired out of Uganda. And then, Don Clark arrived as the new mission director.

Q: And this was 1993, wasn't it?

FINE: I actually arrived in Uganda in February 1993. And I do remember my first office was in a closet because the mission didn't have a lot of space. They were in some big old house, not co-located with the embassy. And they didn't have a place for me initially, so yeah, they had taken a closet that had filing cabinets in it and made it into my office, so that was okay, I was fine with that. (Laughs)

It was a very interesting time in Uganda. It was a few years after the end of the civil war and there were a lot of educated Ugandans who were returning to the country. You know, they had fled during the war. And Museveni had been the president for, I don't know, a few years, and there was still this sense that he was part of a group of new reform-minded, more progressive leaders on the African continent, and so yeah, there was optimism about Uganda, and the Ugandans who were coming back were all very passionate about restoring, bringing Uganda back, getting it back on a positive economic growth path. It was the pearl of Africa and they wanted to bring that back.

And so, we had just amazing counterparts in government and also some of the leaders of some of the non-profit organizations that we worked with, like the head of the AIDS organization, I think it was called TASO, The AIDS Support Organization, and of course, on the negative side, this was also the peak of the HIV epidemic in Uganda. And on the positive side, at least the government was supportive of the HIV programming. There was controversy about it because the Catholic Church in particular is quite strong in

Uganda and they were not so supportive, but part of what USAID did was to try and work with the religious leaders on HIV. We had a pretty substantial HIV-AIDS program in Uganda. So, it was probably one of the early ones in sub-Saharan Africa.

Q: That's right. And I think in the early days it was seen to be one of the most successful in terms of prevention. And there was, I think, a heavy focus on testing that TASO—

FINE: There was, that's right. Voluntary testing and counseling and support groups for people who were diagnosed as positive. Of course, this was before there was treatment available. There were also a lot of AIDS orphans and that was another area that USAID was involved in, was supporting groups that supported AIDS orphans. So, it was a really an exciting time to be in Uganda because of this, you know, the quality of the counterparts that we worked with and the interest on the part of the government in making significant reforms.

They started universal primary education at that time, significantly supported by USAID and other donors. They also were very open or somewhat open, I would say, to the private sector. They wanted private sector development. They invited a lot of the Asian entrepreneurs who had had their property taken during the war period and the Amin era. There was a whole process for restoring those properties. It was pretty complicated. I think that USAID did have some role in supporting that process. And I think it was near the end of that process when I arrived, so it had been going on for a number of years. So the government was encouraging private sector investment. I remember one of the project designs that I worked on as the PDO (Project Development Officer)—was a high-value agriculture export program, kind of modeled on some of the high-value ag exports that were being developed in Kenya.

In the mission, Robin Phillips was the economist and he had been in Kenya before coming to Uganda, and so he was aware of the programming that Kenya had been doing around—things like cut flowers and high-value agriculture like snow peas and broccoli and things like that, and so, the government was quite keen on that. And that was one of my early experiences in project design, organizing the design team and having a few consultants —I do believe one of them was—came from Kenya and had done work on the Kenyan projects. And of course, the anthropologists and Robin was the economist, and so for me it was a great experience because it was doing the design and going out and talking with farmers and talking with the government officials about the policy issues.

We were the design team. Yes, we did bring in a few people short-term contract as part of the design team, but most of the design was done by USAID staff, which, later on, as you know, the agency started struggling with staffing issues, and we started to see that less and less. So, I feel fortunate that I was there at that time and had the opportunity to do the design work directly because you can't really learn it any other way. You can't learn it in a textbook or in a course in the same way that you do when you're actually on the ground and participating in the design team.

Q: Right. I know that the mission in Uganda did a lot of combined non-project and project assistance programming. Was this one of those, or was this solely project assistance? You mentioned policy components, so I'm wondering if there was non-project assistance attached to it or was the policy dialogue more generic?

FINE: Yeah. To my recollection, we did not have an NPA (non-project assistance) component to the agriculture program. There was non-project assistance, combined project and non-project assistance for the education program, which was called SUPER—Support Ugandan Primary Education Reform—and that was a massive program, and it had a big NPA component as well as a technical assistance and training piece. And there was another non-project assistance related to environmental and natural resource management.

Another area that the mission was actively involved in was protected area management. Uganda had gorillas and chimpanzees and the wildlife had been pretty decimated by the war, and there was a lot of poaching. And so, one of the things that USAID was supporting was to reestablish the parks as protected areas. I think there was also a creation of a couple of new parks, including Bwindi Impenetrable Forest, which is where the gorillas were. And I think that the government gazetting those parks was one of the milestones that they got, a non-project assistance payment for. I also remember they had to produce the NEAP, the National Environmental Action Plan. So, we had that NPA, and then we also had projects associated with the protected areas supporting mainly, I think, NGOs that were working to train rangers and develop tourism activities, and work with the communities on the borders of the parks. And that work was kind of cutting edge. I mean, I haven't gone in and looked to see where else that work might have been done at that time, but you know, that was the period when Diane Fossey was in Rwanda and so, I'm not sure who came up with that model, but it's obviously something that USAID has done and continues to do in a lot of place. I believe that the Ugandan program was one of the early ones.

Q: Right. There were a number of those types of programs in Africa, particularly in trying to involve the communities so that they would be benefitting from the parks and the tourism.

Regarding project design work, you earlier mentioned how impressive the counterparts were. Could you talk about how you worked with counterparts in doing project design? USAID sometimes gets criticized for doing the designs themselves; it would be good to hear you talk about the collaborative process.

FINE: Right. You know, the process that was designated at the time laid out in Handbook Three, the old Handbook Three for project design was very explicit that there was an expectation that there would be significant host country participation in the process. And at all the stages. So, as part of the design team to the extent possible, having a representative or representatives from the relevant ministry on the design team. If that wasn't possible, then at least we would try to hire some local consultants to be part of the design team, and then when we would get the concept developed, that would be shared

with the government. And of course, then when it got to the procurement stage, back then we had the P-I-O-Ts, the Project Implementation Orders for Technical Assistance, and there was a block on the face sheet where the representative of the government had to sign off on the scope of work for the contract or the grant or whatever. And then, of course, they also participated in the technical evaluation process.

So, to me it was just a given that you had people from the host country participating in various ways in the development and then the implementation of the programs. And you know, when that fell away to some extent later on, as USAID evolved, it always bothered me, and particularly when I worked with people who had come into the agency more recently and hadn't had that experience, they just didn't necessarily recognize that that was a problem. (Both laugh) Yeah. So, I think, in general we had very good participation and engagement of the host country counterparts. I mean, not to say that there weren't disagreements but by and large I felt like the process that we used was a sound process that really did engage the government and/or other—represented local population and resulted in fairly well thought out projects.

Q: I assume during the period you were there, 1993-1997, that there was growth in the program because when you arrived in the fairly early days following the civil war. I assume there was also a great growth in staffing, including of Foreign Service Nationals (FSNs). Any observations about the growth process?

FINE: I think there was growth, both in the budget and in the staff because for one thing, you know, there were space issues. (Laughs)

Q: Right. Did you ever get out of the closet? (Both laugh)

FINE: I did get out of the closet eventually, but I think somebody else might have moved in after me. And so, yeah, the mission was hiring staff because when we got there, the program was building up. And so, there was hiring going on to manage those activities. I can't swear to the fact that the budget was also growing, but it was a pretty robust budget. Of course, at that time we still had the Development Fund for Africa, so we didn't have earmarks and directives in the way that we subsequently did. And I do remember a couple of years after I got there, Cheryl Anderson left and a new program officer came in who had come from LAC, and she was amazed that we didn't have all these earmarks and directives. And because I had had no experience of it, I just really didn't get why that mattered. She was just so excited about this—"You don't know how lucky you are to have the Development Fund for Africa." Well, I didn't know how lucky I was until we lost it.

Q: Right.

FINE: I think after Don Clark arrived we did do a new country strategy and we were working in health and a big health portfolio, not just HIV-AIDS, but primary healthcare, education, education reform, agriculture, natural resource management, and I think there was—I'm trying to think—there was some kind of democracy programming, I don't even

know if it was called that back then. It was more like civil society strengthening or something like that. And so, yeah, it was, you know, it was a pretty substantial portfolio.

Q: You arrived in February 1993, so you were there when Rwanda exploded in 1994. Were you involved in any of the relief work at the border?

FINE: Yeah. So, I did not go down to the Kagera River to help pull bodies out of the river. But other people in the mission did, including my husband, Patrick. Before that, just a brief anecdote. So, Debbie Grieser was in my IDI class, and we were close IDI buddies. And she was assigned to Rwanda. And she had come and spent Christmas with us in Uganda and traveled around the country a little with us, and I was supposed to go and visit her in Rwanda for Easter. So, that was April of 1994. And I remember very distinctly - of course, all of us listened to BBC Radio because that was the main news source - I remember turning the radio on at breakfast, and they reported on the shooting down of the plane bringing the Rwandan president, and I immediately got up and called Debbie on the landline, because that's what we had back then. I called her house and the phone rang and rang and rang. She didn't answer. It turned out that she had been at somebody else's house for dinner the night before when they got the alert that something had happened and they were told to shelter in place, so she stayed the night with her friends and then was subsequently evacuated to Nairobi. So, she was never able to get back to her house. She literally left Rwanda with what she had with her at dinner. Anyway, so yeah, that made it very real to me. And of course, there were all the awful consequences.

Q: Right. And you know, ultimately it changed the dynamics throughout the region politically as well.

FINE: Yes. Right.

The other thing that I recall is that subsequently, for the next year or even maybe more, there would occasionally be an FSN from the Rwanda mission who would make his or her way into Uganda and come to the USAID office in Uganda. And then, when they did that, then they were able to claim, a certain amount of backpay and—I think the agency had made arrangements to give them a fairly generous separation package and so, that was a function that the Uganda mission had, helping these employees who were able to make their way to the mission.

Q: Yes. Looking at the FSN population in Uganda, was it a mix of different ethnic groups? I know that missions are now beginning to look a bit more at the demographic composition of their own staffs.

FINE: Right.

Q: And I'm just wondering if it was a representative group in Uganda —or perhaps it was never an issue and no one noticed one way or the other.

FINE: I don't recall having conversations about it. I believe that the ethnic composition was pretty much dominated by the Buganda, who were the best educated group. And they would have had an advantage in applying for USAID positions by virtue of being better educated and also that was the predominant ethnic group in the Kampala area. So, yeah, at that time I don't think that we focused on it that much.

I do remember, there were issues around how to deal with employees who were HIV positive. And unfortunately, we had a number of employees who died of AIDS, and that was really difficult.

Q: Difficult for everyone.

You spoke about the project design process and how much you learned from it. During this time, Washington began the reengineering process to change the way in which all of these programming processes were done. Was the Uganda mission involved at all in that process?.

FINE: So, we weren't one of the reengineering labs. Senegal was, so when I got to Senegal (both laugh). But, I do remember having these discussions about reengineering and some presentations, maybe it might have been somebody who came out from Washington and made a presentation to the mission about some of the reengineering concepts. Because I remember us having staff meetings where we discussed some of these reengineering principles and what I specifically do remember is that there were a lot of questions about how things were going to work once you took away the handbooks. Because you know, there was a lot of criticism of the handbooks and they said that the process was too labor intensive, too bureaucratic, which is what precipitated reengineering.

Q: Took too long.

FINE: It took too long to design stuff. On the other hand, I will say that the virtue of the handbooks was it was very clear what the process was, and you didn't even have to go to training, you could read the thing and that's how I learned, from the handbooks. And so, I remember that we talked about, okay, if we are not following those processes now, then what's replacing it? And we came up with this motto in the mission, which was, Ambiguity is Your Friend. Because what we decided was if it's not clear what we're supposed to do, then we'll just do what makes sense. And you know, Don Clark was the mission director. He's very much of a flexible guy, you know, not—

Q: Free spirit.

FINE: Not a stickler for process just by nature, and so, yeah, I even remember, we printed up a sign and we put it around in the mission along with some of the other reengineering slogans. And basically, what we meant by that was do good development, be responsible, but if it's unclear what the process is, just do what makes sense.
And don't sweat it.

So, I feel like that concept of Ambiguity is Your Friend really has stayed with me throughout my career and there have been other times, subsequently when oh, yeah, things were ambiguous, it was not clear, and so, I would say, Ambiguity is Your Friend, use it to your advantage.

If it doesn't say you can't do it then you probably can —

Q: Yeah, no, I think that's actually a very good phrase. I'd not heard that one before. (Both laugh)

FINE: Yeah. Ambiguity is Your Friend.

The other thing that I remember, which was happening around the same time, was the mission was designated as a testing center for the New Management System, the NMS.

We did have an internet connection. We had this huge satellite up on top of the office building. You know, it was early days in the internet era. And I remember our IT person, a Ugandan, very talented guy, saying that what they want to do takes bandwidth that we just don't have. But Washington insisted that we had to be an NMS test site, so there was a desktop set up that had the NMS program on it, and I don't remember what kind of data, like, I don't know if it was financial data or—

Q: I think it was financial contractual data.

FINE: Right.

Q: You had to try to consolidate it all into one system.

FINE: Right. Yeah. And so, literally someone would go in and just type a couple of characters and then the dial would start spinning around and around and around. And so, they would type something and go away for like, an hour, and then come back. And then, maybe after an hour it would have gone through and then they would type a few more characters. I mean, it was ludicrous. It was just so unworkable. As a relatively new officer I found that really perplexing. Why would AID try to implement this thing that was so manifestly unworkable, at least in an African country with limited internet capacity? So, it didn't give me a positive impression of USAID headquarters.

And then, the other thing that happened during that time, as you well know, was the RIF (Reduction in Force). I don't think anybody at the Uganda mission was RIFed, but certainly we knew some people elsewhere who were. One of the job categories that was significantly affected was the education sector and so, since Patrick was an education officer, he knew quite a few people who lost their jobs.

So I was an IDI. My class started in August 1992. I believe there was one more IDI class after me in maybe late 1992 or early 1993. And then, I do not believe that there were any

new Foreign Service officers who came into the agency for at least another two years and maybe longer.

And you know, I noticed it more as I got older, but for a period of time I was one of the newest Foreign Service officers in the mission, and yet there were no other new Foreign Service officers coming in after me. So, for an extended period of time I was still the, you know—

Q: New kid on the block.

FINE: The new kid, right. And you know, I think it didn't take me long to recognize that this was also going to create real problems for the agency down the road in terms of not having a pipeline of people coming in and learning skills and moving up in an organized fashion. So, I was the tail end of a cohort of people and then there was a gap. And then, I guess the NEP program was started.

Q: We had a number of those who were hired at mid-level, I believe too.

FINE: Yeah, right. But that didn't really get started until maybe 1997, somewhere in there. Thinking about the agency and some of the things that happened in the mid-nineties, that was a really bad period at the agency level, because we were, I think, very negatively affected by all the investment that went into the NMS, you know, the RIF, the loss of confidence in the agency. And as I continued through my career, particularly later on when I was in Washington, I really saw the impact of those things and how decisions made literally decades before have reverberated throughout the agency's history.

Q: Yes. It's an important point.

Uganda, because it was seen as a very successful development program by Washington and Museveni was one of what they referred to as the African renaissance leaders, there were many VIP visitors, including, First Lady Hillary Clinton on her first trip to Africa in 1996 or 1997 and later the President. How was it for the mission to manage these high-level visits?

FINE: Right. I think, yeah, it was a new phenomenon to have these presidential or first lady level visits in Africa. It certainly hadn't happened in a long time, if ever. I remember Don Clark coming into a staff meeting and saying, "Does anybody know the meaning of the acronym FLOTUS (First Lady of the United States)?" And none of us did.

So, of course, then he told us that it was the First Lady of the United States and that we were going to get a visit from FLOTUS. That was a really interesting and valuable experience because subsequently I had presidential and first lady level visits in South Africa and in Senegal. I didn't know it at the time, but learning how to manage and work on those kinds of visits is actually an important skill. When Hillary Clinton came to Uganda, she focused a lot on education. We learned about advance teams and I don't

recall being involved in writing briefing papers. But I do remember these advance teams and how picky they were about things and wanting to change the photo background and, you know, the kinds of concerns that advance teams have. I guess as a young person I probably thought they were a bit arrogant (laughs).

I remember probably the highlight of her visit, at least from USAID's perspective was she went to this primary school and it wasn't too far off the main road and the kids practiced, God knows how many instructional hours they spent practicing the song that they sang for the first lady, but she loved it and it was a smashing success. And so, because that trip was very impactful for her, Bill Clinton came back to Uganda. By the time he came, I was in South Africa, so I wasn't there for the POTUS (President of the United States) visit, but—

Q: But you saw him in South Africa.

FINE: But that was my introduction to high-level visits and it served me well when I went on to South Africa where we had both FLOTUS and POTUS.

Q: Yes. Since I was a strap hanger on that trip, I know how impressed she was by the work that you all were doing in Uganda.

FINE: Oh, you were on that?

Q: Yes, I have a picture of myself at that school when she signed a project agreement amendment to add money to the program. She and Don signed along with Ugandan officials.

FINE: Nice.

Q: And she gave a very good speech at Makerere University as well on that trip.

FINE: Right. That was probably managed by the embassy public affairs section, yeah.

Q: Which reminds me, did you have much involvement with the embassy or have any early observations about State-AID relationships and interagency collaboration, either through the VIP visits or just through your work more generally?

FINE: Yes. So, when I arrived in Uganda the ambassador was Johnnie Carson. And I mean, he is just one of those people that when you meet him and you listen to him, you know that he is someone with gravitas and insight, and he was very supportive of the USAID program. As a junior officer, I didn't interact with him directly. Maybe I was in a meeting once or twice with him, accompanying the mission director or something, but you know, he's just such a wonderful human being. So, I think he was a great example of what a U.S. ambassador should be and so, I feel fortunate that my first experience of an ambassador was Johnny Carson. He then went on to become—I think he went from Uganda to Kenya to be the ambassador in Kenya. Or maybe he went back to Washington.

So, that was great. And then, the subsequent ambassador and I'm blanking on his name right now, he was very skeptical of Museveni. And you know, there was—as we've talked about, the kind of prevailing sense among the international community was that Museveni was a reformer and somebody that we wanted to support. And this ambassador was like, no, he's not. So, I thought that he was just being very negative. (Laughs) But he was proved right, you know. I remember him saying, no, he's not democratic, he's not really a reformer, and we shouldn't be so lenient with him. I mean, maybe that's not how he put it, but that was the sense that he—

Q: He was raising a lot of questions, right.

FINE: Yeah, yeah. And I mean, I wasn't obviously in any position to judge, but I guess I'm kind of the person—I like to be an optimist, I want to be an optimist, and so give our partners the benefit of the doubt, and so, yeah. I didn't like hearing that.

As I recall, another area where we interacted with the embassy significantly was support for the Ugandan Investment Agency. Uganda at that time, because they were encouraging private investment, had started a Ugandan Investment Agency. I think a lot of African countries were doing that in that time period. And USAID provided support to the Investment Authority and that was an area that the embassy had a lot of interest in and put a substantial amount of pressure on USAID to be supportive of.

Q: Yes; I recall during Hillary Clinton's visit that Museveni emphasized the importance of trade, not aid, in a speech. He was emphasizing the importance of private sector development, not that he was downplaying aid, but saying he wanted to move towards more of a trade relationship.

FINE: Right.

Q: You had started earlier to speak about the new strategy the mission was doing after Don's arrival. Any more you want to say about that?

FINE: Hmm. That was a long time ago. (Laughs)

I can't honestly recall what we did to gather input for the strategy. I would hope that we did some kind of citizen engagement, but I think it was reengineering that introduced this notion of going out and surveying the population and things like that. So, I think that the strategy was maybe prior to that.

So, I don't know that we did anything particularly innovative.

Q: Right. You had a good program in place and you were probably just updating it and refining it, would be my guess..

FINE: I do remember that we had to go back to Washington for the review and that I had the opportunity to do that. And I remember in particular getting very positive feedback from John Breslar, who was in Africa DP at the time. I think he was the head of the strategic planning section or something like that. So, that made me feel happy.

Q: So, they liked your strategy, so there were no issues really with Washington?

FINE: I'm sure there were issues. There are always issues, right? (Laughs)

Q: Yes, right. But, nothing significant?

FINE: Right.

Q: Right. Okay.

On the personal front, I think during this time in Uganda did you have a second child?

FINE: Ah, yes. So, our second son, Zachary, was born while we were in Uganda, in December of 1994. At the time, you know, the medical services in Uganda were pretty poor by modern American standards. Most people in the American community, if they had any significant medical issue, would either go to Nairobi or be evacuated to, like, London or maybe South Africa. So when we found out that we were going to have another child, of course, the question of where we were going to have this child was pertinent, and you know, we had had a positive experience having a home birth in Swaziland with our first child, but Uganda was a bit of a different story because it didn't have good medical infrastructure. Interestingly, the mission was starting a new primary healthcare project that had a component that involved training midwives. And the firm or the NGO, I guess it was, that won the project included a team that included the same midwife who had delivered our son in Swaziland.

Q: (Laughs) Coincidence.

FINE: So, when I found out that she was on the team that had won this project, I wrote to her and said, "Well, you know, I'm really excited that you're coming to Uganda and I have another job for you." (Both laugh) In the end she decided not to come out as part of the project team for various personal reasons, but she told me that if she wanted me to come to help with the birth that she would be willing to do that, which was huge. And so, we had a conversation with the embassy medical staff. In addition to the embassy nurse, there was a pediatrician who consulted with the embassy. His name was Larry Maram. He worked for CDC (Centers for Disease Control) on a pediatric AIDS project. His wife, Elizabeth Maram, worked at USAID managing the HIV-AIDS programs. And Larry was just a very decent person, very thorough about his work. And so, when we initially talked to him about giving birth in Uganda, he expressed a lot of concerns and said, you know, if there was anything wrong that it would be very difficult to have the medical support for an evacuation and he basically discouraged us from doing it.

So, we thought about it for a while and discussed it and looked into alternatives. The thing was, being in Uganda, actually, they would have evacuated me to the United States, which would have meant that I would have to leave Uganda several months ahead of time because you can't travel towards the end of your pregnancy. And then there was the question of where I would go and what I would do during that time. And so, that was not a very appealing option for our family. Eventually, we looked into the medical situation in Kampala and there was a Catholic hospital that had reasonable medical facilities. I mean, not high-level, but they had some medical capacity, like, if I had to have a C-section or something like that. I had a normal pregnancy, no red flags, so, we finally decided, okay, our midwife is going to come. And we talked Larry into—we kind of brought him around. We felt like with them and with the Catholic hospital, it was probably an acceptable risk.

But we had to then tell the regional medical officer, who was in Nairobi, who came over and, because he was aware of this plan, and he basically told us that we were being completely irresponsible and that he hoped that we had $40,000 in our bank account because if anything went wrong he was not going to approve a medivac. And there's a nasty cable in my personnel file about this whole situation. So, that was really tough and I guess, you know, thinking back on it, it wasn't really the most supportive way for the Foreign Service to support families. I don't know if things have improved, but I felt like the decisions of the embassy medical, State Department medical office were based purely on avoiding risk and not really taking into account the needs and concerns, priorities of the families. So, it was pretty awful (laughs) going through that.

Q: Well, creating extra anxiety for you.

FINE: Yeah. Accused of, you know, being irresponsible. I mean, women in Uganda gave birth all the time. And yes, things went wrong, but the level of care that I had access to was significantly higher than what they—. Anyway, in the end, Mary came, she spent Christmas with us because the due date was December 24, but, he wasn't born until December 30, and I remember her telling me as it was getting towards the end of the year, she's like, "You know what, I'm getting on a plane on January 2, and so, you better have this baby because I'm not staying any longer." In the end it all went well. Holly Wise was there as the midwife assistant and as I recall, there was an announcement about the birth on the weekly radio call, which happened to be that morning. So, everybody in the American community knew that Zach had been born. And yeah, it worked out.

Q: And that Mom was well.

FINE: Yes. So, anyway, it was an interesting experience.

Q: Well, let's hope that it's all a little bit more family-friendly now than it was in those days.

FINE: Yeah. I think it was also the time when delivery in the United States had become very hospitalized and that was kind of—that had become for sure the standard. I think

nowadays, from talking to younger women who are having babies now, they look at a variety of options. So, yeah, we were definitely kind of going against the flow at the time. But it felt right and it all worked out.

But I should say, it was a very interesting time to live in Uganda because when we got there, there was still a lot of crime and gunshots every single night in our neighborhood and there were break-ins. There were carjackings, an American was killed in a carjacking. It wasn't a peaceful, serene period. There were tons of guns in the country from the war. So, on one level it was a wonderful place to be as a young family and there were other young families there. But it wasn't safe. We had security bars all over everything, guards, roving patrols. It was a bit of a—it was a little bit of a wild west when we first got there. You know, downtown Kampala had not yet been renovated. I remember, there was this joke about how you could tell a drunk driver? And it was that they were driving straight down the main road in the middle of Kampala because there was a huge pothole in it. So, you know, it was a bit of a dicey time.

On the other hand, because there wasn't much in terms of commercial recreation opportunities, like movie theaters and there were hardly any restaurants when we first got there, you know, we had to come up with our own recreation a lot. And one of the favorite things that we did was go camping. And again, the parks hadn't yet been—the infrastructure of the parks hadn't been renovated yet, so you had to take everything with you, water, food, fuel. And that led to some really, really interesting experiences, pitching our tent and having hippos grazing around the tent and pulling up grass and being worried that the hippos were going to step on the tent. One time we drove up to Kidepo, which is way up on the border with Kenya where the Karamojong live. We had everything with us and we found a lodge there, and it had some staff, so we thought, oh, this is great. We'll stay at the lodge instead of pitching our tents. And so, we did and then we went to dinner and they handed us these menus and we said, "Oh, we'll have the chicken," and they were like, "Oh, sorry, we don't have any chicken." And then we said, "Okay, we'll have the fish." "Oh, we don't have any fish." And so we said, "Well, what do you have?" And they said, "Well, we have some eggs." And we said, "Well, you know, we have food. Would you like to cook the food for us?" And they were so happy. They were delighted. And so, we just turned over the coolers to the people in this lodge and we were there for a couple of days, and we just gave them the cooler and said, "All right. You guys figure it out." (Both laugh)

Q: Oh, that's wonderful.

FINE: So, it was a really interesting time, yeah, because you kind of experienced Uganda in an almost natural state, I could say. A lot of the investment in parks and whatnot came back. .

Q: Did the lack of security and the guns and the issues in Kampala inhibit your ability to go out and visit projects? It sounds like it didn't if you were off going on camping trips. So, you were still able to travel around the country and see projects and do all that?

FINE: Yeah, we were. And I don't actually remember having issues with the RSO (Regional Security Officer). I don't even know that we had to get approval except for northern Uganda. So, northern Uganda was, at that time there was still fighting going on. You had the Joseph Kony Lord's Resistance Army up there. And there were still, I think, a few other residual—what was her name? Alice Lakwena? She was associated with Kony. There were some other rebel groups. We had a project in northern Uganda. And you had to fly there – I believe it was Arua.

They were doing a little bit of work there, yeah. And it was actually at that time where, and I think this was Don Clark who really started the conversation about what can we do in northern Uganda? How can we, you know, help to bring that part of the country to integrate with the rest of the country. Because there really was a sense that there was Uganda, and then there was northern Uganda. And because of the insecurity, there was not a lot of donor activity going on in northern Uganda. I do remember Patrick going with a group of other donors, and the government organized a trip to northern Uganda and they literally rode in tanks to go around to a few places. So, the government was also conscious of wanting to bring development to that area as a way to kind of cool down the conflict. And we recognized that that was necessary, but at the time that I was there, it was still, the conditions were not right for doing anything on a significant scale. I think we did have some kind of agriculture activity going on up there. There was a research station. I think it was an ag research station and we had something happening with them and maybe with some small farmers, but maybe it was a PL-480 program.

Q: But it wasn't a major thrust in the program.

FINE: No. We did not have a major program there at that time.

Q: Because some years later northern Uganda became an important part of the program.

That does remind me, however, another thing that was being driven by Washington was the Greater Horn of Africa Initiative. Do you recall that at all from the mission perspective because I believe that it included Uganda and went down to the Great Lakes. Much was focused on the relief to development continuum. Do you recall that at all in Uganda and did that sort of encourage people to begin to look towards the north?

FINE: I do. I do recall the G-H-A-I. And definitely remember the acronym. I do remember that, and you know, there was discussion, even at that time, about reviving regional cooperation, particularly with Kenya. I mean, Uganda's relationship with Tanzania was still pretty rocky after the Tanzanians had invaded them, so—but I think the discussion around regional integration and how that would benefit Uganda by giving them a larger market, for example, was something that we talked about and certainly that Ugandans talked about. But like I said, there were political complications because of Tanzania and the situation in Rwanda.

Q: So, it wasn't a major part of what you all were doing.

FINE: I don't know that it drove the program in any substantial way.

Q: Okay. It's just when you mentioned the north it made me think of GHAI.

FINE: Yeah, I think, the more immediate issue was, what do you do about Joseph Kony and the LRA.

Q: Yes; well part of GHAI was conflict prevention or conflict resolution as well, at least it evolved that way over time.

As you all were beginning to think about where to go after your two tours in Uganda, how did you, as a tandem couple go about the process? Was it challenging or did you both just bid and hope you'd end up in the same place? Or was there some actual thought given to it and did Washington help with that thinking?

FINE: That's a good question. Well, we were conscious of needing to find a place that would have career enhancing positions for both of us. Obviously, Patrick had joined USAID earlier than I had and he had become the head of the General Development Office in Uganda while we were there, so he had succeeded Holly Wise as the head of the office after Holly went back to Washington. And so, he was kind of the lead, shall I say. I was still first tour, so I think the way that worked was really him looking at where there were opportunities for him and then we would see whether there was also something that worked for me. And basically what happened was that Aaron Williams was the mission director in South Africa and South Africa had just recently become a majority government, Mandela was the president. The AID program was expanding rapidly. It was a very high-profile program. And Aaron was recruiting the best people that he could find. And he needed an education person to manage the South Africa program with the universities that were in the former homelands, because that was a fairly substantial program.

And so, I think he went to the education office in Washington and asked, "Who are the good education officers?" and they said "You should talk to Patrick Fine." So, what happened was Aaron or somebody from the South Africa mission reached out to Patrick and said, "Hey, would you be interested in coming to South Africa?" and he said, "Well, I might be interested in coming to South Africa, but would there be a job for my wife, who is a program officer?" And so, that's pretty much how it happened. And you know, the good thing was South Africa was a growing mission at the time and soI don't think it was difficult for them to take on another person in the program office. John Wooten was the head of the program office when I first arrived and Karen Freeman was the deputy and Jim Harmon was the PDO, and so I came in as a fourth program/PDO officer.
So, honestly, there probably was stress waiting to see if the arrangement was going to be approved —and again, I think we had a lot of support from Cecelia Pittis, and I think the Africa bureau in general. But it was South Africa and that was a period when pretty much South Africa and Aaron Williams got—

Q: What they wanted.

FINE: —what they wanted. (Both laugh) And yeah, I mean, the mission was growing, as I said, and so, we had to do a formal bidding process but it was pretty well cooked in advance.

Q: Well, that's an important lesson that you got.

FINE: So, yeah. I was lucky. (Laughs). Of course, it didn't hurt that by that time people in Africa DP knew who I was. Like I said, Jon Breslar had given me really positive feedback and Paul Knepp, you know, the famous Paul Knepp, I'd gotten to know him through budget work and so I had good relationships with people in the Africa bureau program office. I was known to them, so I'm sure that when South Africa said "Well is she a good program officer?" I think that helped. So, when I talk to people about the whole tandem business and when I, as a manager, am looking at possibly recruiting tandems, if both members of the tandem are strong officers it makes it a lot easier. Where it gets complicated is where you have an imbalance and maybe you have one member of the tandem who is really strong and another member who's not as strong, then that makes it difficult for missions. I don't want to be—

Q: You were, you guys were—

FINE: —immodest, but you know, I had a good reputation. I was still a relatively new officer but I was known within the Africa bureau and so, I'm sure that that helped.

Q: I think any mission would have seen it as a win-win.

Is there anything else on Uganda before we leave?

FINE: For Uganda I just feel that I was very fortunate to be there at that time and to—I think it was a great place to really learn the craft of development, you know, in the way that USAID does it. And I think that was true because of the quality of the relationships that we had with counterparts, because of the leadership that we had in the AID mission itself, and the fact that Uganda was in this period where things were there was a little more possibility for creativity, openness to try things and experiment, and it was also just a really great time from a family perspective. Like I said, there were a lot of other young families there, not just American but others in the international community, and we had some really good Ugandan friends.

When Zach was born one of our Ugandan friends—well, first of all, the Ugandan mission staff gave him a Ugandan name, Musisi, which means thunder because there was a storm around the time that he was born. And then, one of our Ugandan friends did a naming ceremony for him, a traditional Buganda naming ceremony, so his actual full name is Zachary Kasolo Musisi Fine. So, he has two Ugandan names. And it was nice to feel like we were connected with the country and the people and you know, —we weren't in a highly secure embassy walled off space. So, I feel very fortunate and I feel like it

unwittingly prepared me very well. It was a really good first tour, to help me be a good development officer.

Q: Right. No, it sounds like it was almost "the" perfect place to start your career: a place where you could see a good development program; a government and country doing the right things; and great relationships across the board with the Ugandan people.. So, what more could one ask for?

You did mention that there were a lot of donors there. Is there anything on the donor coordination front that you would like to mention? Was the coordination led by the government or the donors themselves?

FINE: Yeah. I think at the time it was still donor-led. The World Bank had a significant presence there. The government had an AID coordination unit and I remember that the building where the ministry of finance and economic planning was housed was maybe six or seven stories high, at the time, one of the tallest buildings in Kampala. And of course, the minister's office was on the top floor, so when we would go for meetings, we would have to go to the top floor. And I refused to take the elevator because—you know, the power went out all the time and I never wanted to be stuck in the elevator. So, I would climb the six flights of stairs because I did not want to be stuck.

Q: So, it helped you remain very fit as well, so.

FINE: Yeah, yeah. I think that we had generally good relations with the government. I think most of the donor coordination was more on the sectoral level, like the education reform had to be well coordinated. The World Bank was very involved in that. I think on the policy front I'm sure that, at the mission director level, Keith Sherper, Don Clark were talking with their counterparts on some of the big policy reform issues, particularly related to opening up the private sector. I personally was not involved in those, but I'm confident that they were happening. The World Bank in particular was quite involved in those.

Q: Thank you. USAID/Uganda was a well-staffed mission and therefore probably did not have to rely upon the regional office in Nairobi for very much, but to the extent you did have to get any support from the regional office, I'm wondering how it worked or more importantly, did it give you insights for later in your career when you were involved with regional programming or regional platforms.

FINE: Yeah. Oh, good question. Yes, well, so there was still REDSO (Regional Economic Development Service Office) and at that time they had their annual scheduling conference where you would try to plan out what kind of assistance your mission needed from the various offices that were part of the regional mission in Nairobi. Definitely we had legal and contracting—did we have our own contracts officer in Uganda? I don't know why I can't remember that, whether we had our own or whether we used Nairobi. And then when we had designs planned, we definitely had someone that we worked with a lot, Ruth Buckley, who was the anthropologist, social, soundness person in the mission

there. Also, an environment officer in Nairobi. I think the Food for Peace team I remember. Who else? Anthony Vance was the lawyer.

And I learned a lot from Anthony. He would come maybe once a quarter and spend a week there and work on various things, including often, the grant agreements and all that of course, the program officer was responsible for. And what I learned from him was you actually have to read them thoroughly because people make mistakes and the grant agreements are legal and binding documents. And I do remember once it was late on a Friday afternoon. Anthony had a flight to catch in Entebbe, and he was supposed to leave for the airport. And he hadn't finished reading through some grant agreement amendment, I think. And I was saying, "Anthony, you need to go. You're going to miss your flight." He's like, "Nope." And he sits there with his calculator and he's checking the numbers in the budget. And I said, "Don't worry about that. You're going to miss your flight." "No, no, I've got to do it." And he checks it. Of course, he finds a mistake and it wasn't a big one, but you know, he found some misprint or something like that, some additional error. I think he actually did make the flight, but that was a really good lesson for me as a young officer, particularly in program, that you just—you have to check things. And I know that over the years that is a lesson that has annoyed many people who worked for me, when I was the mission director and it was an important document. I read the whole thing and I would check the numbers. And you know what? Sometimes I found mistakes. But it really irritated some of my staff.

Q: I bet they then learned to check before they gave it to you.

FINE: (Laughs) But you know, ultimately, when you're the responsible person then you have to take that responsibility seriously. And I think that it reflects on your organization, your office or your mission, if you do work that's not accurate, not good quality, and so, that was a really good lesson that Anthony taught me.

Q: Yes; that's good. I agree with that absolutely. (Laughs)

FINE: So yeah, I think that there was good value, for the most part, from the support that we got from the regional mission. Of course, there was tension between the regional projects and the bilateral projects. I think that I as a young officer learned a lot from the interaction with the various people who came from REDSO, not just the lawyer but, as I said, other experts, the social anthropologist and—

Q: Did they sometimes bring ideas that other missions were doing?

FINE: Yeah.

Q: Was it ever helpful—

FINE: Yeah, definitely.

I think that there was a function of regional support in terms of knowledge, management—or knowledge sharing. And also bringing everybody in the region together, those scheduling conferences were a lot more than just planning the TDY (Temporary Duty) schedule. They were substantive. I remember—well, you might have been there when Cynthia Rozell came out and made a presentation about non-project assistance.

And there were other substantive sessions on various topics, and of course, that was also how we learned a lot about what was going on in Washington with reengineering and things like that. It was a very valuable opportunity. It was like a program officer conference, but back in those days, I don't think there were program officer conferences, at least not on a worldwide level, or if there were I was too junior to go to them. But it was a really important vehicle for bringing people from missions in East and Southern Africa together and learning from each other, learning from what different missions were doing.

People like Paul Knepp, the Africa DP people, would talk about the budget outlook and trends. Towards the end of my career when I was in PPL (Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning) and there hadn't been any sort of program oriented, program officer oriented gatherings for quite some time, I was remembering that experience of those scheduling conferences and how useful they were when I was pushing for us to restart those kind of gatherings, either on a regional basis or a worldwide basis.

I think it's very valuable.

Q: Yes.

Just one other just final thought because you came in as an IDI as project development officer, you went to Uganda, which was a combined program/project development office. So, from the very outset I worked both as—doing project design and program work. And then, when you went to South Africa, I think it was similar. How did you evolve into doing both roles? Was it something that you consciously thought about or it just happened?

FINE: When I applied, I definitely chose the PDO backstop because that's what interested me, more than program. And so, that was a clear choice. Obviously, once you get into it, you do what needs to be done. In Uganda and in South Africa there was a clear distinction between—there were the PDOs and there were the program officers. And the program officers dealt with the budget and the PDOs dealt with design and implementation issues, the strategy everybody does, right, all hands on deck. And so, I certainly got involved in some of the program-related stuff, but at least for those two missions, there were distinctions.

And they were understood by people. In South Africa I started as a PDO, and then when Karen Freeman became the head of the program office I moved into her job as the program officer. So, then I really became a program officer.

Q: Okay. I was just curious because you were talking a lot about budget and strategy, not the usual language of Project Development Officers.

FINE: You can't ignore the budget, right? No matter what.

Q: Indeed.

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Q: Good morning. This is December 14, 2022, and this is interview number three with Susan Fine and this is Carol Peasley.

So, Susan, when we last—when we last spoke, you were leaving Uganda, on your way to South Africa where you were assigned. If you could tell us a little bit about the job you went into and a little bit about the program there.

USAID/South Africa, Program and Project Development Officer – 1997 – 2000

FINE: Okay, great. Yeah, so this was 1997 and it was just a few years after the majority government in South Africa came in and the USAID mission there was scaling up. The USAID program in South Africa was very much in the spotlight in Washington, DC. And so, the mission director at the time when I arrived was Aaron Williams and his deputy was Henry Reynolds. And so, Patrick and I went there, of course, as a tandem, and Patrick was the head of the education office, which was a substantial program. I was in the program office and initially I was there as a project development officer and then, after a year, I would move into a program officer job, still in the same office.

At the time, there was a lot of money coming into the South Africa program and we didn't have yet bilateral agreements, so most of the activities, at least when I initially got there, were directly implemented with implementing partners and it was one of the big things that we had to focus on was moving the money because the pipeline was large and a lot of the organizations that were implementing programs did not have a lot of experience working with USAID. Of course, there were some of the big international partners, but we also had local partners, particularly in the democracy and governance arena, but also in other sectors. And so, one thing I learned really quickly was that we really had to focus on how to make sure that these—the implementation was moving forward. And we had these quarterly reviews where everybody would sit around the table, the program office, the controller, contracts office, legal, and of course, the technical office and try to figure out what were the bottlenecks and what could we do to accelerate the implementation of the various programs.

And then, there was also a huge backlog of grants from the apartheid, pre-majority rule era that had to be closed out, so that was another big task.

Q: Those were all with, I think, most of those at that point were done with local organizations.

FINE: Yes, they were with local NGOs.

Q: And I know that there was a strategic issue of—that the mission had to grapple with for several years, and that was the degree to maintain relationships and programs with local civil society groups while also shifting to do more directly with the government. Were those debates still going on when you got there?

FINE: Yes, yes, definitely. I mean, for one thing, some of the local NGOs had been led by people who then moved into the government when it became a majority government. So, some of the local organizations just kind of fell apart, quite frankly, or they lost their strong leader and then struggled. And then, of course, the government itself had very high expectations for what they expected from USAID. They very much wanted a partnership relationship. They felt very strongly about determining the direction of the program.

It took a while to build a strong working relationship with the government because it was complicated. They had mixed feelings about the U.S. They basically felt we had not sufficiently supported the end of apartheid and they were very much, like I said, wanting to have a relationship of equality, but I think they didn't necessarily trust us, which is understandable under the circumstances. For the program office, our principle counterpart was the ministry of finance and planning, and the guy who was the head of the aid coordination unit there was a very smart, intelligent character, also very prickly, and we would have these annual reviews, and they did this with all the donors, and we would have to go up to the state house on the hill in Pretoria, very imposing building, and we would go up there and we would do a whole presentation of the portfolio and then they would basically grill us.

And they would ask tough questions. And you know, it was good in a way. I think it kept us on our toes. Over time, at least over the time that I was there, the three years, we did begin to build a relationship of trust. I would give a lot of credit to Karen Freeman, who was the head of the program office, for really cultivating a strong relationship with this head of aid coordination. But yeah, it was challenging. And I think in the technical areas it was not easy for the various technical offices to build good working relationships with their counterparts, just because it was very complicated and human relationships in South Africa, the way I experienced it, had a lot of baggage, everybody had baggage. And so, yeah, it was a very interesting dynamic, very, very different from what I had experienced in Uganda. But you know, I think that was valuable.

Q: One other aspect of partnership between the U.S. government and the government of South Africa was the Binational Commission, the Gore-Mbeki Commission.

FINE: Right.

Q: And I suspect that that took a considerable amount of your time as well, managing expectations on the part of the South Africans and the other U.S. agencies vis-à-vis the commission. If you could talk a bit about how all that worked.

FINE: Yeah. So, it was not just a question of managing the expectations of the South Africans, it was also the question of managing the expectations of the other U.S. agencies because the Binational Commission was set up and it was intended to have relationships like between the Department of Labor in South Africa and the Department of Labor in the U.S. and our EPA (Environmental Protection Agency) and their environmental agency. And all that was great, but of course, our U.S. domestic agencies didn't have any funding for it because they don't get funding for international programs. So, USAID was the piggybank and there was a lot of negotiation around how much money USAID was going to put into various agreements that would support the activities that were developed between the counterpart agencies.

And I learned about this firsthand because I was asked to be the manager for an interagency agreement with the Department of Labor and an interagency agreement with the Department of Treasury. Those two, I guess, because they didn't clearly fall within one of the traditional sectors the program office had to take them on. That was actually a very valuable experience in terms of understanding what an interagency relationship is, how to work with other parts of the U.S. government, and you know, there were a lot of challenges around getting information on, the funding, expenditures. You can imagine just sort of the nitty gritty management of the things as well as—I mean, we didn't really get too much involved in the implementation of the activities, but we did we were responsible, basically, for the financial controls and for reporting—

Q: What was Treasury doing? Was it the IRS (Internal Revenue Service) on tax issues?

FINE: Not—I don't think it was—they had several advisers. I think it was through the Office of Technical Assistance. They had somebody, I'm trying to remember. I think they had somebody at the Central Bank and they had somebody in the ministry of finance, but I don't remember exactly what their role was. And then, labor, I don't really remember all what they were doing. And I obviously didn't have to deal with the heavy duty politics. That was the mission director and others higher up who had to deal with the really tough negotiations, but yeah, it was a prominent feature of what we were doing in South Africa was managing these relationships, both with the South African government and with the U.S. interagency.

In terms of management, I also gained valuable experience because I was asked to manage the two microenterprise activities that were working with disadvantaged small entrepreneurs. One was outside of Durban and one was down near Cape Elizabeth. It was as great opportunity for me as a relatively young officer to experience direct project management and you know, I always value that as a program officer because I think one of the challenges that program officers have is they're always asking their technical counterparts for information and what I learned was what it feels like to be the technical office and to be the manager of a project and so, I was able, as I progressed in my program career, to be, I think, sensitive to the realities of my technical counterparts. So, that was a really useful experience.

Q; Yes, that's probably something that all program officers should have an opportunity to experience at some point.

I see in your CV that you had designed a program to strengthen black majority voice in economic policy. How did you go about doing that? Was that a program focused on think tanks or was it—?

FINE: Mm-hm. Yeah. So, Rick Harbor was the economist in the mission when I arrived and —in keeping with this notion that we wanted to have a relationship of equals with the South African government and help the majority government to be able to manage its own affairs and formulate policy and whatnot—he proposed that we should support several think tank-type entities in South Africa in terms of their ability to do economic policy analysis to be input, if you will, to policy for the government. So, we designed a capacity building project with several different entities. One was at an institute at the University of Witwatersrand. I believe there was one in Cape Town, but I don't remember the name of it. And there may be—I'm pretty sure there was at least one other entity. So, there were several entities that had slightly different kinds of capabilities and perspectives, but the notion was that we would essentially help them to be better able to do the economic analysis and then present it, be an advocate or a resource to the South African government on economic policy.

Q: Okay, that's good.

FINE: I don't know how long they carried on the program, but I do think the government really appreciated it and it was maybe a little bit different from a traditional USAID program. And then, I would just highlight another important area of USAID work that I learned a lot from while there, and that was the use of development credit authority. I had not encountered development credit authority before getting to South Africa, and the mission was very fortunate to have a guy named Joel Kolker, who had come up through the RHUDO (Regional Housing and Urban Development Office). Also Carleene Dei, she was the head of the urban programs office in the mission, and Joel and Carleene were incredibly creative in how they used the development credit authority to support, in particular, the shortage of housing for the majority population.

As I'm sure you know, there were all these huge shantytowns with just terrible housing conditions, no water or sewer, people living in shacks. There was really strong pressure on the government to address some of those massive inequities, in housing, in education, in health. And so, through the development credit authority program they developed what I thought were creative programs, using the banks, the traditional banks in South Africa, like Standard Chartered and other well-established banks to leverage their resources to support various housing projects. Like, there was a sites and services program outside of Durban that I recall visiting. And it just opened my eyes to the value of development credit, which I had not encountered until now, and how it really has an amazing potential for leveraging private sector resources.

So, I've always been grateful that I was there at the time and saw people really using development credit authority in a productive way, and that always stuck with me.

Q: Yeah, yeah. No, that's important.

A question about relationships with the embassy and interagency relationships in general, I think that it was a mission that worked very closely with the embassy over time. Any observations on that?

FINE: Yes, of course, we had to work very closely with the embassy. Obviously, it was the mission leadership that engaged mostly with the ambassador, who was Jim Joseph when I first arrived. At the program office level we worked with the public affairs office on various things. We would have high-level visits, I mean Vice President Gore would come to chair the Binational Commission. We had Hillary Clinton, the first lady, come I think the first year that I was there. That was '97. And then, President Bill Clinton came in 1998.

FINE: So, of course, you have the countdown meetings and all of that, which was also a good learning experience for me as a relatively new officer, how all that works. At that time, USAID was not co-located with the embassy. We were in a separate building in downtown Pretoria in a shopping center, of all things. I think they were starting to explore, well, not co-locating, because there was a new embassy, a relatively new embassy, in Pretoria and you know, people didn't like it terribly because it was fortress-like, so I think it was one of the early, more secure ones that had been built.

Q: So, relations were good and—

FINE: I'm sure that there were tensions, but a lot of that was sort of above my level. (Laughs) So, I didn't experience a lot of that. I will say, it was an incredible team that was in South Africa at that time. Pretty much everybody who was in that mission went on to become senior leaders at USAID if they weren't already. I feel I was very fortunate to be there and to have just a really high caliber of colleagues who I was able to learn from. I mean, Ken Yamashita, who was the head of the health office, and Carleene Dei and Margo Ellis and Beth Hogan and Steve Brent, the head of the democracy office. But then, I also really learned a lot from the contracts office. We had Jerry Khrystal who was an amazing contracts officer who really taught me what a good contracts officer does, how they work to find a solution within the confines of the regulations. And the lawyers. We had Paul Weisenfeld and then Karl Fickenscher. Again, people who understood that the role was not just to say, "This is the law," or "This is the rule and you have to follow it," but to figure out how to work within those rules to find constructive, creative solutions so that implementation can go forward. And there were a lot of issues in that program, so you know, it was not an easy program to implement for a whole variety of reasons, capacity reasons, for trust reasons.

Q: It was an all-star group.

FINE: It was an all-star team and I really—I learned so much from all of them.

Q: Just one final word that with the all-star team there, you also had, I think, a very strong cadre of FSNs as well. Any thoughts about the use of FSNs in South Africa?

FINE: Yeah, well, so, there were some FSNs who had been on the program since before the end of apartheid and most of them were in the democracy governance section and they were really remarkable. In the program office we had some strong people in program functions, budget, monitoring and evaluation. But I'm glad you reminded me of that because I think South Africa had the agency's first DOC (Development, Outreach and Communications) officer. She was a USPSC (U.S. Personal Services Contractor) named Reverie Zerba. And because South Africa was so much in the limelight, that was the reason why the mission was either told or given permission, I'm not sure which, I suspect maybe Aaron Williams advocated for it. There had been, you know, that kind of longstanding reluctance on the part of the agency to do outreach and communication because it could be perceived as lobbying on behalf of the agency, but I think Aaron really recognized the need for this function, in part to help with that relationship, with the government and with the population of South Africa to help people understand, what is USAID, why is it here, as well as to help with all the the visits and that kind of thing. So, I'm pretty sure that that DOC position was the first in sub-Saharan Africa, maybe not the first around the world, but—so that was also really helpful for me to understand what that function could be.

And, that was around the time when I think (Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs) started encouraging missions to create this position and fill it and so, I was very fortunate to have the opportunity to see how that functioned and appreciate the role that an outreach and communications person could play.

Q: That's great. Thanks.

So, you were in South Africa for three years, is that correct?

FINE: Right, right. From 1997, yes, to 2000. And so, normally we would have stayed another year, however Patrick was selected to become the deputy mission director in Senegal. And of course, when this possibility came up, one of the obvious questions was well, is there a job for me in Senegal. And it so happened that they were going to have a vacancy as the head of their program office. So, that was fortuitous because it was a nice step up for both of us.

Q: A win-win, yeah.

<u>USAID/Senegal, Program Officer – 2000 - 2004</u>

FINE: We were going to make a move where we both had a career-enhancing position and that doesn't always work out that way. So, we were very excited about that. But, one thing was that neither of us were French speakers.

In Senegal the working language is French. So, the normal thing is you go back to Washington and you would go to FSI for six months and do French training. We thought that would be really disruptive, both for our family and also the mission was very anxious to not have a big staffing gap for either of the positions, and so Don Clark, who was the mission director in Senegal at that time said, "Well, I think we can organize French language training here because there are lots of language training resources here in-country." So, they hired two French language instructors and we went directly from South Africa to Senegal and we spent the first three months that we were there having daily language instruction in our house. It was a big house, so it had a lot of extra rooms, so we set up two rooms as classrooms and every two weeks the instructors would switch and so, that's how I did my language training. I've always thought it was so much better than making someone move back to Washington, in part because it's not as disruptive. I mean, our kids were able to start school at the international school in Dakar. And then, more importantly, you're in the French-speaking environment, so it completely reinforces what you're doing in the classroom because you have to function, you have to be able to get out and go to the grocery store and find your way around and interact with people. And so, it was such a better language learning experience than the traditional method. And I've always thought it's unfortunate that the agency didn't do something like that more often. I don't know what it took to get that approved, but it's, yeah, it was a much better way to learn French.

Q: And Don respected the fact that you were in language training and you weren't being asked to do office responsibilities at the same time?

FINE: No, I didn't go to the office the first three months. I mean, I went and met people but my job was to do language training.

Patrick went in—he started sooner than I did. So they weren't quite as generous with him. (Laughs) But yeah. And then when I went in, I started working, of course, and I did continue taking French language for a while. But you have to start working in the language and being forced to use it really helps. And of course, you know, the staff, the Senegalese staff were so helpful and very professional and supportive of the learning process. And I had to learn some very specialized vocabulary for meetings with the ministry of finance.

So, that was a positive experience and it's too bad they couldn't do that more often.

Q: Yes, it's a very good model and one that probably should be used more frequently.

Before we get onto the substance of the program, I'm just wondering if there were any special complexities with Patrick being the deputy mission director and you being the program officer. I'm just wondering if you could talk about that a little bit because I think many people have to face that issue.

FINE: Right. And this was the first situation where he was clearly my superior. Under normal circumstances, the program office might report to the deputy director. Of course, that wasn't the case here. I reported directly to the mission director, to Don Clark, and then subsequently Olivier Carduner who became director part way through our time there. The program office functions as a support office for mission management so I think it works a little better than if I would have been the head of a technical office reporting to the mission director. But because of budget issues and strategy and the things that mission leadership are focused on, you work very closely with the mission director on those things in any case. Also outreach and communication. So, it didn't feel awkward for me to be reporting to the mission director. Patrick and I were always very conscious of trying to demonstrate that there was a difference between our professional roles and our personal relationship. And I'm probably not the best judge of how successful we were at that, but I feel like we did a pretty good job because for one thing, it was never brought up to us or at least to me that there was a problem. I will say that from time to time Patrick would complain that I was harder on him than anybody else. That was maybe more when he was a technical officer. But maybe that's a good thing too, right? (Both laugh)

Hold your spouse to a higher standard.

It's better being harder on him than being easier.

Q: Yes, absolutely. Absolutely.

FINE: We were conscious of needing to demonstrate the distinction between our professional roles and our personal relationship, not only in the office but also in our home life, not to get too focused on work when we should be focusing on our family and our friends and things like that. So, I think we developed a very healthy habit where, on the way home from work, we would do a download of what happened in each other's day and sometimes if we would have been in the same meeting like, can you believe that, dah-dah-dah-dah-dah-dah. And you know, sort of vent about things. And then, when we got home it was done.

And we didn't talk about work until the next morning.

Q: That's an important lesson that people need to follow. It sounds as if it was very well managed.

And to go on to the substance, you were the head of the program office. Was there a country strategy in place or were you in the process of developing a new strategy? Where were you in terms of that?

FINE: There was a strategy when I got there, but then during my second year, we did develop a new one.

Oh, by the way, I will say, 9/11 happened just maybe six weeks or so after we had arrived in Dakar. The USAID office was still downtown, right by the port, and I remember, you know, hearing about some terrible thing that was happening—that had happened in the United States, some plane crash. And going down—the public affairs office of the embassy was in the same building that USAID was in, but the rest of the embassy was across town. But I went down to the public affairs office, they had a TV with feed from the U.S., and I remember watching what we all watched, the planes flying into the World Trade Center and, yeah, like everybody who experienced that, it was a memory that I will never forget. And of course, because we were in a Muslim majority country, we pretty quickly started thinking about the ramifications. And so, that wasn't the only impetus for developing a new strategy, but it was certainly an important part of the context as we started developing a new strategy. And there was a sense that Senegal was an important African partner for the United States and—oh, the other thing that had happened just as we arrived is that they had had a peaceful transfer of leadership. Abdoulaye Wade was elected right around the time that we arrived and so, it was seen as a country that was progressing as a democracy. So, from a foreign policy standpoint, Senegal was kind of on the rise as a partner for the United States.

The other thing that was going on around that time were negotiations to try and bring the conflict in the Casamance region to an end. They did not conclude during that time. However, there was a reduction in the number of attacks. There were some groups that were interested in engaging in peacebuilding activities. Wade's government was at least publicly trying to resolve the conflict in the Casamance and one of the things that we did was design a peacebuilding program in the Casamance. No donors had been working in the Casamance for about ten years because of the insecurity and USAID was the first organization to start funding activities there. We funded, as I recall, two local organizations that were doing community-level peacebuilding, confidence building activities, and so, those were some of the things that were going on and provided the context for the USAID program at that time.

Q: Something you gave me mentioned the strategy was looking at a more integrated approach to the role of local governance across sectors.
Could you talk a little bit about what that meant?

FINE: Mm-hm, yeah. Absolutely. So, one of the things that the mission did, and I think Don may have started this, was what he called synergy meetings where we'd bring together the chiefs of party for all the different projects to talk a little bit about what they were doing. I think each time one of them would give a presentation about some aspect of their project. The technical offices would also participate in these meetings as well as the implementing partners. And what started happening is people started seeing how there were connections between the private enterprise program and the education program, or the health program and the local government program because the local government is responsible for providing some kinds of support to health clinics and to schools.

And so, the whole staff and our implementing partners started seeing how there were these connections between what they were doing and, obviously because of the way we

received the funding and the way we tend to program, we often do it on this sectoral basis, but it creates these sometimes artificial distinctions, and so it was really valuable to see how there were connections and in a number of instances the different implementing partners would then get together and say, "Oh, I can—." I remember one example was the education program, they had a program with a girls' school where they were doing some kind of technical skills, not just reading and writing and math but technical skills, so that the girls could develop jobs. But they weren't teaching them any business skills. And so, there was a small business activity and it was working in the same region, and so they said, "Well, hey. We'll go to the school and we'll offer these girls some training in entrepreneurship skills." So, you know, it was a very simple example, but there were things like that.

And so, during that process one of the important things that we saw was how critical local government was. And Senegal was going through a decentralization process at this time. They had put in a decentralization policy, but they were really just in the beginning stages of operationalizing that policy and trying to devolve more responsibility to local government and a little bit of funding, a very tiny amount of funding. But there was a realization that the local government can actually have a very positive impact on support for girls' education, helping to ensure that the local clinic functions well, on addressing some community issues like natural resource management and things like that.

So, we designed a local government program to support local government and it was explicitly designed not only to develop capacity of local governments and encourage transparency and citizen engagement, but also to have linkages to the other sectors. I don't know at that time whether we actually succeeded. I don't think we actually put funding from other sectors into the program, but there was at least a connection in the implementation phase. And I became an evangelist, I think, for synergy and for constantly striving to recognize the connections between our programs and subsequently —the next time when I was back in Senegal as the mission director we actually succeeded in designing a local government program that had funding from other sectors, but that was down the road.

Q: (Laughs) Okay. What's interesting is that I've now done several interviews and more and more missions are increasingly looking at local governance and decentralization as priorities. It's interesting. It's gaining momentum.

FINE: Yeah, right. And I think it's an area where you can have a lot of impact without a lot of money.

Q: When we spoke about re-engineering in Uganda, you mentioned that Senegal had been a re-engineering lab in the 1990s. I'm wondering if the creation of strategic objective teams made it more difficult to pull together those synergies because you had these well-established sectoral teams. And I'm just wondering if those teams made any difference one way or the other as you pulled people together?

FINE: Yeah. I don't know that it made a huge difference because the strategic objectives were still mainly organized sort of on a sectoral basis. I would say where I really saw the impact of reengineering in Senegal was the empowerment of the local staff. Senegal had just amazing local staff. Many of them had been there for a long time and the reengineering process had really given them a much stronger voice in the mission and I saw them building lasting relationships with local government, with government partners, you know, really having a strong voice in strategic planning decisions. We had some tremendous economists, including Ousmane Sane who sadly passed away in the last year, and a really strong deputy program officer, Massar Beye, who I learned a tremendous amount from. And you know, in the technical areas there were also a lot of really fantastic Senegalese staff. So, I think that was an important impact of reengineering, giving them a strong voice.

Q: And that has continued.

For the conflict resolution work in the Casamance region, did you all do that as a mission or was OTI, the Office of Transition Initiatives, involved? To what degree was Washington involved?

FINE: We had a special objective for the Casamance and so it was the mission that was in the lead, but I do recall that we had someone from OTI come out. I know that we tried to get OTI funding and I honestly don't recall whether we actually were successful in that or not. There was—I kind of remember there was maybe a little bit of friction between the OTI people who wanted to do something in one way and the team that was managing the Casamance program who, again, we had a very strong FSN who was from the Casamance and in fact, he was based in the Casamance. He had an office there and we had—oh, my gosh, we had to go through all this rigmarole with the regional security officer to set up this office in the Casamance. But it made no sense to be managing a program in the Casamance from Dakar.

And we did go through quite a drill to get approval from the RSO to have this office and it had lots of special locks on it and security cameras and all sorts of things. So, he was well-protected.

And so, he was very instrumental to the program because he had good relationships with the governor of the region and also with some of the community groups.

Q: Very good.

FINE: So, I think the mission's approach was we have these strong local partners. They understand the context and we want to support them to do the confidence building, the peacebuilding stuff and I think—I don't remember exactly what the friction was over, but I think maybe OTI had a slightly different model that they wanted to do, and so maybe that's why they didn't give us money.

Q: It sounds like you had a very good model, a locally-based model. Isn't that what everyone's talking about now?

FINE: That's right, yeah.

Q: Another big thing that was going on in Senegal during this period involved the Millennium Challenge Corporation. I believe they were looking at Senegal.

FINE: Yes.

Q: Could you talk a bit about the MCC in Senegal? I don't recall whether they were trying to develop a compact or whether they were a threshold country, but if you could walk us through how all this worked in Senegal. I know that Washington was very interested in the dialogue that you all were having in the field.

FINE: Yeah, that's right. So, in keeping with this Washington view that Senegal was an emerging, important African partner, there was interest on the part of the new MCC in developing a compact with Senegal. And you know, their scorecard was relatively good compared to a number of other sub-Saharan African countries. It wasn't fantastic, they had their issues, of course, But it was definitely being looked at as a candidate for an early MCC compact. By then Olivier Cardune was the mission director and I think there was an MCC mission that came out to talk to the Senegalese, and they came to USAID and we were trying to be very supportive and we wanted Senegal to get a compact. It would complement the work that USAID was trying to do. And so, I remember this meeting the team from MCC and we're making suggestions about how we could support them, and they really were not open to it. They really were not interested in a partnership with USAID. And I got the very distinct impression that they thought they didn't need us. They had a better model, we were old, stodgy USAID, we didn't have anything to offer them, which was kind of disappointing. Anyway, Olivier said, "You know, if there's going to be an MCC compact, what's going to be important is to understand what the government of Senegal's capacity to implement that compact is. Because with the MCC model, you can look at a country's policies and see how they're doing on the various indicators, but it doesn't tell you very much about their implementation capacity. And so, Olivier, I think very astutely, recognized that the Senegalese are very good at talking a good game and I mean, they're amazing at talking a good game, but the follow through is not always quite as stellar.

So, Olivier decided that we should do a study to better understand what some of the blockages were in Senegal, the government's capability to implement donor funds. And he asked this Senegalese economist, Ousmane Sane, to lead that effort, lead the study. I think we might have gotten some consultants to help out as well. And we gathered data from a number of other donors, with the government. We obviously did it in cooperation with the government. They supported it because they thought that it would be helpful to them to understand where they were going to need to maybe build their capacity to implement this hoped-for compact. And what was very interesting about what came out in the study was—and this was not at all the intention of it—but when we did the study,

what we saw was that there was a very strong correlation between donor disbursement rates and whether or not they had decision-making authority, the donor, in the field or in headquarters.

And you know, because even if the government was implementing, let's say a World Bank program or an EU program, the government would have to get various approvals in order to move ahead with disbursing funds and things like that. And what the study documented is that the approval times were much, much longer for donors who didn't have a strong local presence. And USAID actually had the by far the best disbursement rate, you know, burn rate, of any major donor. And so, A, that was fascinating because what it showed was the value of having a local presence and I think that there was this ongoing conversation in Washington about how we could be more efficient and how to save money and could we downsize our overseas presence. I mean, there were discussions about consolidation in regional hubs and all that stuff.

And so, from a USAID policy standpoint this was really useful information. PPC (Bureau of Policy and Program Coordination) was delighted with this because it kind of gave them data that showed the value of having a field presence. And then, on the Senegalese side, it really upped our standing with the government of Senegal because they were like, oh, wow, you guys are amazing. You're spending the money and some of these other donors are taking years, for the—they pledged the money and then it doesn't come. And so, yeah, so it definitely gave us more credibility with the Senegalese government.

Q: Do you think it affected MCC thinking about how it would organize itself for the field?

FINE: That's a good question. I don't know. I know we gave them a study, In addition to talking about disbursement rates it also looked at the various systems, like the government's procurement system and other things that would be important to implementation capacity, and I know that we gave it to them, but what they did with it I have no idea. In the end, Senegal was not the first country to get an MCC compact in sub-Saharan Africa. In fact, it took them a number of years before they did finally get a compact. So, I just thought that it was unfortunate that in those early days of MCC that they were not open to more collaboration with USAID. Fortunately, when I went back to Senegal as the mission director, a number of years later, and by that time the MCC compact was in place and was in implementation and there was a much more collaborative relationship.

Q: Just out of curiosity since you had worked in South Africa, at that point Steve Brent was back in Washington in PPC and was the main USAID liaison with MCC. Did you have any dealings—were you dealing at all with Steve and PPC?

FINE: The leadership did, yeah.

And I know that when Olivier proposed this study, of course, he asked, "Did Washington support doing this?" because there was a recognition that this was a developing

relationship between—we were trying to develop a relationship between—with MCC and, yeah. So, I know he asked permission.

Q: On Senegal, are there other noteworthy things you want to mention, Susan?

FINE: Well, let's see. I mentioned that when I first arrived in Dakar the USAID office was located downtown right by the port. The embassy was also downtown. And of course, after—there were already concerns about the security of the USAID office because it was right on the street and there was actually a gas station right next to it, so it had an underground gas tank.

And then, 9/11 happened and so the security concerns became even greater and the sense of urgency about finding a new location for the USAID office grew. There was a lot of pressure. And so, eventually they were able to identify a site out of the downtown area. Downtown Dakar was very crowded and there was almost no vacant land. But they were able to identify a site out—an area called Ngor. You know, Dakar is on a peninsula and the downtown is at the tip of it and then, if you go back up the peninsula towards the airport, Ngor is up that way. And there was an old hotel that had had a fire and was kind of burned out and had never been rehabilitated, and so USAID ended up buying that hotel and rehabbing it to turn it into a very nice USAID office. And so, that process was going on while we were there and then, we moved from the downtown location to the Ngor office a little over a year after I arrived, maybe—I think it was December of 2001. I remember the move happened over the Christmas/New Year break because there were a lot of people who were on vacation so that was a good time to do all the IT—we had an amazing IT person, a local IT team. They were fantastic. You can imagine how complicated that is to take everything down, move it, set it back up again. But it was a lovely office right by the ocean. The mission director and the deputy had beautiful ocean views. And I think the ambassador actually was jealous because the embassy at that time was not a very big embassy, it was very crowded and cramped and it was downtown also. And after 9/11, they had shut off a number of the streets around it and that was an irritant for the Dakar government and the local population as well, that there were these streets that were blocked that they could no longer go through. Traffic was a terrible problem in Dakar. The one disadvantage of moving out to Ngor was when we would have meetings at the embassy, which were quite frequent, or with the ministries, for that matter, we would have to go downtown and you would have to budget forty-five minutes or an hour—it wasn't really distant-wise that long, but the traffic was just horrendous. And so, the embassy, as part of the whole State Department program to build new embassy compounds, also started looking for land. And eventually, after I left, the embassy found a location even a little bit further out, but in the same area, and built a new embassy compound, which USAID moved into.

And then, the UN actually took over the Ngor location. But that happened after I left.

But I think one advantage of having a separate office location is in terms of accessibility. As USAID has had to move into embassies it has made it more difficult for us to interact with partners, at least when the partners come to us. We can, of course, still go to them,

however, one advantage of having our separate compounds was our ability to invite counterparts to come and have them come in without excessive security procedures, you know, it makes a difference.

Q: One other quick question about Senegal: Was it a good place for kids and families generally? Schools okay?

FINE: Oh, yeah, right. I had a family while we were there. When we got there, Zach was starting kindergarten and Josh was in fourth grade. So, they went to the International School of Dakar, which was a nice little school. It was pretty international, you know, typical international school. And I think they had a very positive experience. They learned French much more quickly than I did. Their accents are better than mine. And my older son started developing a circle of friends that were international, including some Senegalese who went to the International School. And then, when he got to middle school, he really branched out. He eventually had a girlfriend who was Belgian-Senegalese, who went to the French School, so his social circle really expanded. And my younger son really got into soccer, football as they call it there, played all the time on the sandy street outside of our house with the local kids, barefoot. And when we subsequently came back to the U.S. and he started playing soccer in the U.S., all his coaches said he had the most amazing foot skills. And I'm convinced that it's because he started playing soccer barefoot (Both laugh) on the street. And we—it was a really good family post.

I think for them when they think of their life overseas, what they really remember most is the time in Senegal. We were there for a little bit over four years. And my older son still maintains a friendship with a few of the boys, now men, who he went to school with there. He still stays in touch with them. And so, it was a very formative time. I will say, since we're in World Cup season right now, an important, exciting event that happened while we were there was in 2002 Senegal beat France in the 2002 World Cup and it was the most thrilling thing, I mean—the noise around Dakar was deafening. And then, there was this jubilant parade in the street and people were slitting roosters. They symbolically—anyway. It was an exciting time.

So, we learned about the importance of soccer on the African continent.

Q: Absolutely. And I assume this means you'll be cheering for Morocco this afternoon.

FINE: I will be cheering for Morocco, absolutely, yeah, right.

We also did some really interesting family overland trips. Probably the most exciting one was we traveled with another family from Senegal over to Mali and all the way up to—we didn't get to Timbuktu, but we got to Mopti and Bandiagara. And in those days the highways, particularly between—in eastern Senegal over into Mali were non-existent. It was pretty much tracks. So, it was quite the adventure. And we went to Djenné, which is, you know, the oldest or the largest, supposedly the largest mosque built of mud, in the world, and it's very, very old. So, it was an incredible experience to go to some of these

places, which are no longer accessible because of what's happened in Mali. And so I feel like we were very fortunate to be able to visit some of those places and see the richness of the civilizations. We also traveled to Mauritania. We did a lot of driving in a big Mitsubishi four by four around the country.

Q: Very fortunate you were there during a time when you could do that.
So, you were there for four years and then you began to think about onward assignments and what happened next?

FINE: Yes, right. So, Patrick was the deputy, and he was interested in moving into a mission director position. And there was an opening in Ethiopia, the mission director job, and so, then we started talking with the Africa bureau about what would be the options for me. And at the time the AA for Africa, I believe it was Connie Newman, and she had a very strong position on tandems—she was very, very concerned about conflict of interest and whatnot. And she basically said she did not think that it would work for Patrick to be the mission director and for me to have any other position in the mission, even if we worked out some kind of separate reporting relationship. Actually the public affairs officer, who we had known in South Africa, was by that time in Ethiopia and we talked to him, and he said, "Oh, well, you know, we can make a job for you in the embassy. You know, we'll figure something out." I was very appreciative that he was willing to do that, but it didn't really sound like it was very satisfactory. And it wasn't at all clear what the process would be for that. And I would have had to be seconded somehow to the State Department and it seemed pretty complicated. And so, even though we were quite interested in going to Ethiopia, the head of the Africa bureau said no.

And so, I guess it must have been early 2004 when these conversations were happening, late 2003 or late 2004, I'm not sure exactly when. So, then what happened was the agency was looking for somebody to go out and be the next mission director in Afghanistan, and someone told Andrew Natsios, who was the administrator at that time, "Oh, you should talk to Patrick Fine." Oh, no, wait. It wasn't Andrew. First he talked to Gordon West in the Asia and Near East bureau. You know, we weren't very well known outside of Africa because we'd only worked in sub-Saharan Africa. But someone told them to talk to him and so, he went back to Washington, had interviews with the Asia bureau, and then went and met Andrew. And so, then it was like, "Okay, you're going to Afghanistan." (Laughs) So, then, at that point, we had a decision to make about whether I was going to—I could extend for another year in Senegal. Olivier would have been happy to have me stay on, and—or bid on another post, maybe a post in Asia so that we would be closer to Afghanistan, or go to Washington. Those were essentially the three options. And we had, as you can imagine, a lot of conversations about the pros and cons of each of them. Ultimately, what we decided was this was the time for us to move to the U.S., for our children to experience living in the United States. I always wanted my children to be comfortable in the U.S., even if they chose not to ultimately live in the United States. It also just seemed really complicated if I was to go to an Asian post, well then, what would Patrick do after his year in Afghanistan. So, we decided to move back to Washington.

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And there was a job in the Asia and Near East bureau's program office. It was the team lead for strategic planning. Cheryl Anderson had been the previous team leader. So, I talked to her and said" Do you think I can do this job?" And she said, "Oh, of course you can do this job." (Laughs) Larry Brady was the head of the program office at that time and so, that's what I bid on. And it was good, also I recognized that it was good to get to know a different region, and it was probably time, maybe even past time, to get exposure to the work that the agency was doing in other places. And of course, at that time ANE was huge, covering everything from the Philippines to Morocco and including Afghanistan and Iraq, so it was a big chunk of real estate.

Q: Right. You spent a year as team leader in that position. Was there anything noteworthy you want to mention during that first year in the ANE Bureau, or do you want to focus on the broader three year experience?

FINE: Yeah, so I got there and, let's see, about a year after I had been there Larry Brady announced that he was going to retire. His position, the head of the program office, was an SLG (Senior Leadership Group) position. And so, I bid on it, even though I wasn't actually eligible because I was an FS-2. I think they were less strict about the whole SLG procedure than they are now. (Laughs) And on the first round they didn't select anybody, including me. And then, there was something where they had to decide that the position was open to FS-2 bidders. And so, they readvertised that position so that people who were FS-2, including me, could bid on it, so I bid on it and was selected. What I will say about the first year was it was a hard year because my kids and me were adjusting to life in the United States and in the DC area in particular. We had bought a house in Reston, Virginia. It was a pretty long commute at that time because the Metro didn't go all the way out there. And I was basically a single parent, you know. Both my kids had a difficult adjustment to the U.S. context. Even though they'd gone to international schools it's just different and I think, particularly for my younger son it was really hard that people didn't understand or value the experiences that he had. And my older son went through—I think this is very typical for kids who come back from overseas. In a year he completely changed his friends circle. Like, the friends that he made when he first got back, a year later they were completely different because it's something about reading the culture and it takes people a while to sort of understand the nuances of kid culture and things like that. So, you know, we were trying to figure out life in the U.S. and—

Q: Did AID give you any time to help the family get settled or were you expected to work immediately?

FINE: No. None.

Q: And that's something that the Agency should perhaps look at?

FINE: Yeah. I mean, I'm sure—I think we got a couple of days to move into the house.

The one thing that really saved me was we brought our Senegalese housekeeper with us and she stayed with us for the first couple of years. I never would have been able to manage without her. So, she was there when, especially when my younger son came home from school in the afternoon. She got meals, she helped with cleaning. You know , there's a special visa category that Foreign Service families can take advantage of to bring someone from a country where they've been serving. So, that was a lifesaver.

But it was a difficult year. We were all going through these adjustments and of course, Dad was in Afghanistan, so he wasn't really there to be supportive. And he was going through an incredibly intense time, leading the Afghanistan mission 2004-2005. There was still a sense of hope in Afghanistan, but as you can imagine, a lot of challenges, including building up a constructive relationship with a very difficult ambassador. We didn't talk every day, but we talked multiple times a week. And he came back a number of times, and would have—he'd be scheduled from like 7:00 to 7:00 during the day, but then, would spend some time with the family. And of course, I was also learning to work in USAID Washington and learning all sorts of new stuff and understanding the relationship between the geographic bureau and PPC and other things. So, it was a hard year.

Many, many other people did the same thing, it's not unique, I understand that. Pretty much everybody now went through this. But those were early days, so this was kind of the beginning of having officers go out to places like Afghanistan and then Iraq, so I know my experience was not unique. But the one thing that was maybe a little different was, oh, I'm sure other people had this too, there were a lot of transitions happening at the same time.

Q: Absolutely.

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Q: Okay. Today is January 4, 2023, and this is interview number four with Susan Fine.

When we ended up last time you had become the director of the Office of Strategic Planning and Operations, SPO, in the Asia Near East bureau. And this was 2005. If you could tell us what that office did and then maybe we could start with a couple of the major events that began during that period, certainly one being the tsunami in Indonesia and another being the Pakistan earthquake.

FINE: All right, yes, thank you. So, the—SPO was the Strategic Planning and Operations office and it was responsible for budgeting, strategic planning, monitoring and evaluation, performance reporting, and also donor coordination across the Asia and Near East region, which at that time spanned from the Philippines all the way through Asia and into the Middle East, Egypt and Morocco, and the West Bank, Gaza. So—and Iraq.

Now, there was a separate Iraq office that handled most of their—of those functions for Iraq because it was so enormous. However, at that time the SPO office also handled all of

those functions for Afghanistan, which was another huge program, working, obviously, very closely with the Afghanistan desk, but so, we were supporting, of course, the leadership of the Asia Near East bureau in making, you know, important budget decisions and strategic decisions and reporting on result, and also supporting missions across that entire region in their ability to, you know, do their country strategic and do their monitoring and evaluation efforts.

And we were also starting up a—we also had a small outreach teaming working, of course, with Legislative and Public Affairs, but as you can imagine, because of the prominence of that portfolio and that region, LPA was really not able to provide, you know, all of that (indiscernible) support that was needed. There were a lot of, of course, you know, congressional testimonies and news enquiries constantly about what was happening in that party of the world and what USAID was doing. So, we also supported those efforts.

So, it was a substantial office. And one of the things that made it—well, there were a number of things that made it complex. One of them was that we had three different geographic bureaus at the State Department that we had to work with. So, there was the East Asia and Pacific bureau, which covered East Asia, there was the South and Central Asia bureau, which covered Afghanistan, and then there was the Middle East and North Africa, which covered that region. So, you know, we were negotiating, particularly on budget issues we were negotiation with three different bureaus of the State Department, and then not long after I took that job, Randall Tobias was named the administrator and at the same time the new director of the Office of Foreign Assistance, known as F, and that office, you know, took a lot of the budget functions that had previously belonged to USAID—well, the administrator, Tobias, was dual-hatted, and so, I guess, in some sense he still had the budget functions, but what it meant for us was that we had yet another office with which we had to negotiate on budget issues, in addition to the three geographic bureaus at the State Department. So, yeah, it was not a simple situation.

Q: And I suspect that you also were dealing with different kinds of resources, that a substantial part of the budget would have been ESF (Economic Support Fund)? And you had development assistance (DA) funds. There were also special appropriations for Afghanistan and Iraq.

FINE: There was, I'm trying to remember when—initially, you know, the funding for Afghanistan and for Iraq was ESF. At a certain point, there was a different category of funding—I'm trying to remember what it was called. It was something like OCO.

Q: It was supplemental money.

FINE: Right, right. And I honestly don't recall exactly when those funds came in. I think when I was still in SPO, I don't think that those funds had started being appropriated yet. I think we were still just using ESF.

Q: Right. But there were different negotiations with the State Department vis-à-vis ESF than for DA?

FINE: Yes, correct. And in that region, because of the profile of the programs, I would say the majority of the budget was ESF. I mean, there were some substantial DA, Development Assistance, countries, like Indonesia, Cambodia, but then, you know, then we had, yeah, obviously the very high-profile countries, Afghanistan, Iraq, Egypt. They were ESF countries. And you know, there was a lot, obviously a lot of political interest in that part of the world, not only the countries where we were (laughs) you know, in conflict, but then, there were also some interesting situations like there was an earmark for Burma, which the Asia bureau had to implement through several non-profit organizations and there were particular individuals on the Hill who were very—paid very close attention to that. They had special interests in Burma.

Then, another very kind of unique facet of that job was the transfer to Israel, which at the time was still—there was still an ESF transfer to Israel, non-defense funding. That actually phased out while, I think, around the end of my time there, but for the first two years that I was there, we had to do this transfer to Israel and it was, I'm trying to remember the amount, but it was like, one billion and change or something like that. And it was—there were—you had to do it within like, thirty days of the start of the fiscal year. I mean, it was—and it was—and the steps that were required to do it were complex and you know, you had to work with Treasury and I mean, obviously the State Department and the Israeli embassy, and it was, like, I mean, literally every single day in the thirty-day, I think it was a thirty-day clock. And like, you had to do certain things every single day in order to have it done within the time limit. So, I mean, fortunately, there were people in the office on the budget side who had been doing this for a while, so they knew the steps and they knew the players in the interagency who were involved, but it was still sort of a unique (laughs) operation. And then, as I said, I think the appropriation—the non-defense appropriation for Israel actually ended somewhere around 2007 or 2008. But—and then, of course, we had the program, the funded program for the West Bank and Gaza, which at that time was pretty substantial. So, yeah, it was a region with a lot going on. And then, we had, as you stated upfront, then we had some unexpected natural disasters that further elevated the, you know, the attention, the pressure, so yeah, stop there.

Q: Okay. That's all very interesting. There were two rather huge emergencies that arose during the time that you were the director of the SPO office in the Asia Near East bureau. Could you tell us about them? I believe the tsunami was first, so maybe we could start with it.

FINE: Yeah. I remember that tsunami very clearly because I was on vacation. I think I was with—I think we were at a ski resort with my family. And I remember having had a discussion, I think, with the Asia bureau leadership about, you know, leave plans and coverage and all of this stuff, and there was this sort of sense that oh, well, you know, it's really quiet the week between Christmas and New Year's, so it'll be okay to be away. Well, that tsunami happened on December 26, and I will never again assume that nothing

will happen between Christmas and New Year's. (Both laugh) Because you know, of course, it was a horrible tragedy and a huge, I mean, it was shocking.

I think, you know, the other thing that I remember, though, was how relatively quickly the U.S. government announced a response and you know, a very, very substan—of course, we had started the humanitarian operation right away, and you know, I was not involved in that. Of course, the DCHA bureau (Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance) was leading that response. But they also very quickly announced a very, very substantial package of reconstruction—humanitarian, combined humanitarian and reconstruction assistance. And I was actually surprised at how substantial that package was, and I think that it, you know, reflected in part the desire of the Bush Administration at that time to demonstrate goodwill towards the Muslim world, as well as, you know, compassion and whatnot. But given what was going on in Afghanistan and Iraq, I think there was, you know, there was clearly an element of, you know, showing that, you know, we want to be a force for good in the Muslim world. So, I was impressed by that.

And fairly quickly the administrator, I think it was still Andrew Natsios, decided to establish a task force and used a model that I'm not sure had been used previously in the agency, where there was—it was sort of a joint Asia bureau/DCHA bureau task force, and there were two people sort of—one person from each bureau designated as the lead, and I believe that it was Greg Gottlieb for DCHA and Debbie Kennedy-Iraheta for the Asia bureau. She was the head of the East Asia and Pacific office at the time. And the notion was that—initially the DCHA person would kind of lead the task force, that the early part of the response was primarily humanitarian. And then, at a certain point, the Asia bureau person would take over the leadership when the response became more focused on reconstruction. And so, you know, I was not directly involved in that, but of course, I supported the work of the task force, particularly from a budget standpoint.

But I think that it was—I mean, it worked fairly well as a model, and then, I know that, you know, the agency continued to use that approach on a number of subsequent natural disasters, the next one, the next big one, unfortunately, being the Pakistan earthquake, which happened a year later, in 2005, so the tsunami was December 26, 2004, and then there was this terrible earthquake in northern Pakistan in 2005. Again, the agency or the U.S. government announced a fairly substantial package of assistance and the same model was used for, you know, on the humanitarian side and then leading on the reconstruction side. And I did, for the Pakistan earthquake effort, I think I was more involved in that, and I actually did have the opportunity to travel out to Pakistan, to work with the mission on their reconstruction planning, and to visit the earthquake region by helicopter. It was my first time to ever go in a helicopter. And it was really striking to see how remote the region was that was affected by the earthquake and how—I was really struck by—we visited, I remember we visited a school that was being reconstructed, and then in the same valley, there was—there were some series of dams that had been affected by the earthquake that were being rebuilt so that people would have, you know, irrigation for agriculture. And I was really struck by how women were—and women were just almost, you know, non-existent. Like, it was a very conservative part of Pakistan and

you know, the only people that I spoke to were men, other than maybe the, you know, the head mistress of the school or something like and some teachers. But you know, the women in the community, we were, you know, we weren't able to talk with them at all. So, it was, yeah, it was striking.

I also, at that time we were developing a program in the so-called FATA (Federally Administered Tribal Areas) of Pakistan. It's the, well, it's on the border region with Afghanistan and its Federally Affiliated Tribal Areas. Anyway, you know, so there's a lot of these ethnic groups that don't necessarily feel a part of Pakistan. There's a lot of animosity. They feel like, you know, they haven't been—they've been left behind. So, one of the things that the U.S. government was doing at that time was trying to start working with the FATA authority to help them be able to deliver some development results, you know, give them more legitimacy in the eyes of the community. So, when I went out to Pakistan, in addition to visiting the earthquake site, I actually also went—at the time, you could still go up to Peshawar. And we had somebody there trying to work with the FATA authorities. It subsequently became too dangerous to have somebody there, but I mean, it was good to see USAID, like, trying to, you know, to make that work, to really try to work at the sub-national level. I don't know how—ultimately how effective that was, that program. Of course, I do believe that there were some massive corruption issues with some of—with one of our implementing partners up there. Not surprising, because it's just a very, very corrupt environment. So, I'm not excusing it either, but anyway, it was, I think, the agency deserves credit for, you know, trying to make it work, even if it was not terribly successful.

Q: Right. Pakistan has probably been one of the most difficult places that AID has had major programs in over many, many years.

Just before leaving discussion of the tsunami, President Bush appointed his father and former President Clinton to honcho relief efforts and to do private fundraising. Did you have any contact with them?

FINE: No, I did not myself. I imagine that the leadership of the task force may have interacted with them and/or their staff, but I did not.

Q: Okay, I was just curious.

Also, on the tsunami, did the large supplemental appropriation also include early warning systems for the future?

FINE: Yes, absolutely. I don't know if monetarily it was a big part of it, but there definitely was funding for a regional tsunami early warning system. There was also funding for—it wasn't just Indonesia. Of course, Indonesia was the massive part of it because that was the country that was the most heavily impacted. However, there was also some funding for Sri Lanka, for India, and even, I believe, there was a small amount of funding for, Djibouti maybe, an African country that had some coastal impact.

Q: Right, it impacted Thailand as well, and did we provide assistance there?
FINE: Yes, yes. Even though we did not have an AID program in Thailand, there was funding for Thailand. Of course, for Indonesia the big project was the rebuilding of the road, the main road in Banda Aceh, and again, that was, you know, a major reconstruction project that had all kinds of issues with it that we were under a lot of scrutiny for many years, even beyond my time in the bureau. But the early warning system was—I'm trying to remember. I think they worked with—it was an Asian regional institution, and I'm not 100 percent sure which one it was, but yes. And I know that there have been, in subsequent tsunamis there have been, you know, the warning system has activated and you know, I don't know how well it's been maintained, but yeah, that was important as part of the response.

Q: Well, that was a pretty active two years (laughs).

FINE: Yes. And it was definitely, you know, coming from the Africa bureau and the field, you know, to a job like that in Washington, I had a massive learning curve, you know. It was really drinking from a firehose, both in terms of, you know, working in Washington, but also, you know, learning about the interagency and how to, you know, working across bureaus and yeah, it was a very intensive job, and I had long days. Also, you know, for the first year, well, that was before I became the head of SPO, but yeah, it was pretty time consuming and also, you know, just with living in the—you know, the adjustment to, as I talked before, adjustment to living in the U.S. and commuting and all of those things, I would say it was an exhausting time. But you know, I enjoyed what I was learning.

I really felt like I was learning a lot and I was very fortunate to have Jim Kunder as the AA for the Asia Near East bureau. I learned so much from him and he was such a pro at working in the interagency and working with the Hill, and he was very, very supportive of our office and all that we were doing. And so, I did feel, yeah, quite fortunate to have somebody like him as the leader to learn from.

Q; Right. And he had a unique background on both development and humanitarian as well. So, you did that job for two years and then got tempted away to a new position in 2007. How did that come about?

AID/Washington, Senior Director, Office of the Administrator, 2007 – 2010

FINE: Yeah. So, you know, as we touched on briefly earlier, during, I think it was 2006, when Tobias, Administrator Tobias came in and the Policy and Planning Coordination bureau, PPC, was abolished, and many of the staff were moved to the Office of Foreign Assistance in the F bureau at the State Department. And I remember Administrator Tobias saying that USAID didn't do policy. And I think when he said that what he meant was we shouldn't be involved in foreign policy. I don't believe that he ever understood or appreciated that there's another level of policy, which I would call development policy, which is about how we do development. You know, the different implementation approaches and things like local localization, things like what we do, what we collect performance information on, how we work with other donors on various issues.

So, when Tobias said you can't talk about policy, and I don't believe that he realized when he got rid of PPC, that there were all these other functions that were not related to the budget that PPC did, and a lot of those functions were about development policy, including, how we negotiated issues at the DAC, the Development Assistance Committee of the OECD (Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development) which was handled by the Donor Coordination Office until we didn't have one anymore.

And it also related to, I would say, how we coordinated within USAID. I mean, PPC at least, to the extent that I was exposed to it before it was abolished, played an important role in coordination across the agency, particularly on issues that were going to be discussed in the interagency because a lot of times, one bureau, the technical bureau would see something one way and the geographic bureau would see something another way. And so, there was a need for us to negotiate those issues internally before going either to the Hill or to the NSC (National Security Council) and discussing them with others. And that was an important role that PPC played, and when PPC was abolished, we no longer had anybody to do that, and it was very chaotic. And you know, I really felt that it was like USAID had been given a lobotomy, it was like we didn't have a brain anymore, like a coordinating function within the agency to negotiate different things within the organization and then, as well, like, I said, some of the issues with other donors, it was also really difficult.

So, I think that after a time, I assume that there were some bureau leaders who were able to articulate some of that to him because he had established this Office of the Chief Operating Officer, COO, and had brought in Alonzo Fulgham to be the chief operating officer of the agency after Alonzo finished his stint of mission director in Afghanistan. And so, around 2007, I think with Alonzo's encouragement, and others, probably, agreed that we could—that the COO office could have a small unit that could do coordination. We were not allowed to use the word "policy," so it was established as the Program Analysis and Coordination Unit, PACU. Horrible acronym. It sounds like a little animal. Anyway, But there it was and the idea was that it would be a unit that could take on at least some of these sort of coordination functions that were not being done. And so, Alonzo approached me and asked if I would be willing to come and be the head of that unit. And you know, where I was at the time in the Asia and Near East bureau and really feeling the impact of not having that function, to be able to negotiate issues within the agency even, I saw the need for it and so, I agreed to do that, to take on that function.

And then, my first job was to hire a bunch of other people to join me in that, and I was able to hire just an amazing slate of people who all subsequently became agency leaders in their own right, people like Melissa Brown, Michael Metzler, Trent Thompson, Rebecca Black, Jed Meline, I mean, not all at the same time, but yeah, we had some fantastic people who came in and—oh, Kerri DiZoglio was another one. Anyway, just super people.

Q: Yes, that's important to record.

There was a change in Administrator around this time. Was creation of this unit within the COO a Randall Tobias decision or a Henrietta Fore decision? I'm wondering, who was the administrator when you first went in?

FINE: It was Tobias.

So, Tobias agreed to it and when I started, Tobias was there and we were—then we were in the administrator's office, so yes, he was the boss. And he did agree to it. But then, he didn't last that long, after I came in and then he was replaced by Henrietta Fore, and she obviously had a very different view of USAID, a much more positive view of USAID. And she used that dual-hatted role to give USAID back some—not autonomy, but some voice, and some agency, I will say. And she understood, for one thing, she understood the idea of development policy and she got that there was something beyond foreign policy and she understood that the agency needed to have this coordination ability. And so, she was very, very supportive of the unit and in fact, leaned even more heavily on it. I mean, we worked very, very closely with the executive secretariat on managing all the paperwork that came in. A lot of the coordination, actually, ended up happening as briefing papers and action memos came up to the administrator's office. ES (Executive Secretariat) would review them for format and make sure that they had all the clearances they were supposed to have. But our job was to look at them substantively and say, "Is there an issue here that hasn't been addressed?" And so, we had this kind of substantive role which was one way of doing the coordination that needed to be done. And so, when Henrietta came along, I worked very closely with her, I mean, like on a daily basis.

Q: Can you give any examples of when a decision memo went to her, and you all said that there's another point of view that needs to be brought into this. I'm just curious if you can provide an example.

FINE: All right. I'll try and think of one. I can't—one doesn't come to mind off the top of my head.
But there were many, so I will—I'll try and come up with one because—

Q: Yes; it's important that there was someone checking to make sure that all points of views are heard before a decision gets made.

FINE: Right. Well, we also tried to get people together and work things out so that they didn't have to go to the administrator for a decision, right? Because that was also (indiscernible) trying to facilitate reaching agreement on things so that they didn't have to come to a head at the top of the agency.

So, it was very interesting because it was a lot of informal work. You know, I would go and, if it was somebody from EGAT (Economic Growth, Agriculture and Trade) or, you know, or maybe get together two people from different parts of the agency, and say, we need to figure out how to move forward on this particular topic. Also, Administrator Fore was very big on partnerships and—partnerships of the private sector for sure, but also partnerships with other development actors, other donors. So, she recognized the value of

various donor forums like the DAC and the G-20 and things like that, and really sought to take advantage of them.

And then, another thing that we did with a lot of support from Jim Kunder, who at that time had been made the acting deputy administrator, and unfortunately, he had people on the Hill who were not willing to confirm him, but—so he was serving as an acting DA, and he was very concerned about the budget and about USAID's ability to provide input into the budget process, even though the decision making was being made at F now. Of course, Administrator Fore was dual-hatted, but Jim felt that it was critical that we have the ability to do our own analysis and to provide at least recommendations on significant budget issues, which we did not have. We literally did not have—there was a period where F would not share the budget data with the agency. And so, Jim really lobbied very heavily to give us access to at least the parts of the budget that USAID would be responsible for so that we could do some analysis on it and make some recommendations.

Q: Because the budget submissions went directly from the missions to the F Bureau?

FINE: I think the budget submissions went directly—technically they went directly to F. They went to F and then, right, the regional bureaus would be copied or informed. But there was no—this was really concerning. There was no whole of agency budget picture.

Q: Right.

FINE: And you know, there were a lot of people in the F bureau who didn't want us to have that because they perceived that if USAID could see the big picture, then it would be able to more effectively lobby for how it wanted the budget to go and there were people in F who didn't want USAID to have that ability.

Q: Although there were people at F, there were senior USAID people at F, right?

FINE: That's true. There were some very, very experienced budget people at F, including Pat Sommers, and since they're no longer there, I can say that they, for the most part, were helpful to the extent that they felt that they could be. And—but you know, it just—honestly, I do not think that it served our country well to have this opaqueness in the budget process.

Q: Okay, that's important. I ask some of this because I've also interviewed Dirk Dijkerman, who was the COO of F during that period. (Laughs)

FINE: He was, yes, right, that's right.

Q: Anyway, Dirk has different views, so this is why oral histories are important.

FINE: Mm-hm, right. I'm sure that he thought that he was finding the right balance.

Q: (Laughs) Right. So, all that's very interesting. There was also an election in 2008, correct? So, you were there in the front office when the transition was taking place as well. Could you talk a bit about that because you all played a critically important role.

FINE: Yeah. Yeah, so 2008, President Obama was elected and the administration took a very long time to identify a candidate for USAID administrator. I mean, again, above my pay grade why that happened.

Q: It was about a year, for the record.

FINE: Yes, it was almost a year. And during that year Alonzo Fulgham was the acting administrator, having been the COO for the last couple of years so he was well positioned to run the agency. But, yeah, we were his support office (laughs) for that period. And it was difficult because after a few months many of the counterparts of the State Department, the political appointees, were being filled in. And yet, we at USAID, both the administrator's office and then also in the regional bureaus and the pillar bureaus, it was all career people, great career people, super experienced but there was this thing where if you're not a Senate-confirmed appointee in the interagency you don't carry the same weight. And so, USAID was at a disadvantage, particularly in the interagency, because we had this very long leadership gap. I mean, I think that Alonzo and the bureau, acting bureau heads did a terrific job under the circumstances, but then finally Raj Shah was named as the designee around—in late 2008, and one of the interesting things was we had decided, we meaning the front office, I think, had decided that even though there was not, at the time, an agency administrator that we would have a mission director conference. Because it was, of course, a big, significant transition from the Bush Administration to the Obama Administration and there hadn't been a mission director conference in several years, you know, with the F situation.

There had been a lot of tumult in the agency and so, the sense was, we really need to bring the field leadership together to talk about this. Hopefully, we'll have an administrator by then, but if not, we're going to go ahead and do it anyway. And so, as it happened, the mission director conference was scheduled in late, mid-November, late November, I can't remember exactly what the timeframe was, but towards the end of the year. And then, Raj Shah was nominated, maybe just a few weeks before the mission director conference happened. So, this was not supposed—this was technically not allowed, but he came to the conference for one of the social events.

So, he did come and was able to meet the field leadership, the mission directors and have a conversation with them and of course, they met him as well. There was, of course, just incredible thought leadership coming from the field on a whole variety of issues, including things like localization and, I'm trying to remember what else was in there, procurement reform, a lot of things. And so, these things were being discussed and proposed at the mission director conference and I think Susan Reichle was one of the most prominent leaders of some of the ideas that were coming out. And so, Raj was exposed to those and then, so it ended up being, I think very positive in the sense that when he then developed his USAID forward agenda, it was significantly informed by

what he had heard at the mission director conference and subsequently. So, when he came in, there were already some—the beginnings of an agenda for him. Of course, then the Haiti earthquake happened right after he arrived.

Q: Within days, right?

FINE: Yes. Right. Which was a distraction, yeah. And then, maybe the other thing to highlight at that time was—around that time or, I guess, after Raj came onboard but not too long afterwards—Secretary Clinton, who was secretary of state, launched the first Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review. And so, that was obviously an important effort that we recognized we, as an agency and being in the front office, I was still in the front office (laughs), needing to have really good people participating robustly in that exercise because there were a lot of important issues that were being kind of litigated through the QDDR, including the future of F, including the responsibilities between State and AID relating to conflict and stabilization.

You may recall the State Department had this S-CRS, the bureau for Conflict Reconstruction and Stabilization, and there had been a lot of friction between USAID and CRS about who's responsible for what, who manages which funds. Another area of friction was in the humanitarian space, particularly between DCHA and the PRM bureau (Bureau of Population, Refugees and Migration) over responsibilities for certain aspects of humanitarian response. So, these issues were all being litigated through the QDDR, and so—

Q: Was the COO's office the linchpin, the centerpiece for USAID?

FINE: Yes.

Q: So, did you all then help identify who would be on the various teams?

FINE: Yes. And so, yes, that was one of the things that we sort of coordinated for the agency, was making sure that we had good people participating in the process. And one of those people was Chris Milligan, who was, I believe, worked primarily on the conflict and stabilization piece, but then after the—not long after the Haiti earthquake, I think maybe a few months in, it was decided that they needed Chris in Haiti, I think the team out there, Carlene Dei needed help or relief. And so, at that point then I was asked to go over and work on the QDDR —

Q: Seconded to take Chris's place?

FINE: Taking Chris's place as the senior person. We had several other people there, but I was kind of the lead for USAID.

So, then—and that was in, I believe, maybe late 2008. I'm not sure of the date, actually when I went over there. But I think I spent about nine, eight or nine months working on the QDDR. And one of the wonderful things about that was having the opportunity to

work with Anne-Marie Slaughter, who was the head of the policy planning office in the State Department, and she was the lead, she was in charge of the process for the secretary. And so, it was really—I learned a lot from her in that process.

Q: As I recall, Raj Shah's USAID Forward agenda was also being looked at as part of the QDDR. I think AID was working to create a budget office and was working to recreate a new policy bureau, even before that was all ultimately, finally endorsed as part of the QDDR. Is that correct?

FINE: Ah. I mean, yes, I think it is correct. So, when Raj came in, he had a lot of sessions with different groups of people around the agency, in the beginning just to listen and understand. Of course, he had his ideas of what he wanted to focus on, but he did go around and listen to people. And he definitely heard a lot about the loss of budget authority, about the difficulty with coordination, the so-called development policy issues. And so, it didn't take much for him to be convinced that there was a need to reestablish some kind of policy function within the agency. And so, he did set about creating what became PPL, the Policy, Planning and Learning bureau. I think that got started maybe 2008, 2009. I'm not sure exactly when it was formally established, but by then I was working on the QDDR, so I was not involved in the setting up of PPL. But I knew it was happening. And given my experience I was very happy about it.

But yeah, I mean, I think that the QDDR was a vehicle for endorsing that. That was one of the less controversial aspects of the QDDR. There were other pieces that were quite controversial and really never got resolved.

Q: Right. And one of those involved global health and PEPFAR (United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief).

FINE: Right.

Q: Were you involved at all in the discussions about that? Again, as I understand, the QDDR tried to finesse it and said that it would relook at it in a year. Were you involved at all in that, the specifics of that?

FINE: Not the specifics, no. I mean, honestly the QDDR was a massive exercise and it tried to take on all the issues out there, both at the State Department itself as well as in the relationship between State and AID, and it was—I had the sense of it being just really—really cumbersome and just too much, right. It was—I think it could have been more successful and more effective if there had been a decision to reduce the number of pain points that the QDDR tried to address. I think the fact that it was so—it had such breadth that it just was not possible to negotiate over such a large number of issues. I think it was maybe overly ambitious.

Q: Right. I know that there was also a lot of debate about the post-conflict work and where it should be located

FINE: I would say there was more than debate. It was nasty fighting.

Q: (Laughs) Okay.

FINE: Really. I mean, it was not—it was not always—the people who were working on the—on that issue, yeah, it was—we had a separate office where all the QDDR staff were working, and it was not always a congenial work environment. There was some serious rancor amongst some of the folks. People had very strongly held views.

Q: So, what happened then after this? Once the QDDR was issued, did people then accept the results and move on or did the rancor continue?

FINE: Well, so first of all, I think the QDDR was largely finished in—around—gosh, I'd have to go back and look at the dates. But I remember we had largely finished it and were writing it up. And then, it started going through the interagency clearance process. And you know, it just wasn't moving. And in particular we weren't getting clearance from the White House. And at the same time, Gayle Smith, who was the senior director for Democracy and Development at the NSC, had been leading a separate process to develop a new Presidential Policy Determination (PPD) on development policy.

And that addressed some of the same issues as the QDDR, but not all. I mean, it was a policy document whereas QDDR was a bit more focused on kind of—it had policy elements to it, but it also was more about roles and responsibilities and how we implement the policy. So, Gayle did not see eye-to-eye with the State Department, you know, about some of these issues. And so, that process was going along and I did participate in some NSC meetings on the PPD, representing the agency on some of those issues.

What I understand is that part of the reason that the QDDR was not being cleared by the NSC was because Gayle Smith didn't agree with some of the things that were in the QDDR because they were in contradiction to the PPD that she was developing. So, I think that this is reflective of a—there was a broader dynamic that many people more knowledgeable than I have written about on the conflict between Secretary Clinton's State Department and Obama's White House. So, I think the QDDR was a victim of that to some extent, but like I said, I also feel that it just tried to take on too much and it probably would have been more successful if it had gone for a more targeted number of things. But you know, as you point out, it did provide the sort of seal of approval for USAID to reestablish not only PPL, but also a budget function in the administrator's office.)Of course, F still had the overall budget authority, but at least now with the budget office having been established at USAID, we had that ability to see it across the agency and do some analytical work and for the administrator to provide meaningful input to F on budget questions.

Q: Okay, that's all very interesting.

One other question. I don't know if this would have happened when you had gone over to the QDDR office or if it was when you were still in the COO's office, but early on Raj Shah did a speech in which he talked about what we now refer to as localization. I can't remember the term that he used initially, but they set the target of 30 percent for obligations to local organizations. Was that when you were in the COO's office? I'm wondering if there's any story behind that speech.

FINE: (Laughs) Yes, I was in the COO's office. I don't recall being part of conversations about what that target would be. I do recall the next year, so after USAID Forward had been put out there, we had, I think it was not a mission—I'm trying to remember. I don't think it was an actual, official mission director conference, but there were some meetings when groups of mission directors would come in maybe on a regional basis and there was a lot of discussion and debate about that target, and what were the obstacles to being able to achieve that target, was it even meaningful. I mean, obviously it was controversial and yeah, there was—I do remember some very heated discussions amongst field leaders with the administrator about that target and whether it was a good thing or not a good thing.

Q: Right. Just one other related question to that because all these discussions about working directly with local organizations put aside government-to-government work. I believe there were lots of discussions in that period about "G to G" work. Also, the financial management people developed something called the P, and I know that there was a lot of discussion about—during that period about government-to-government work and the controller's office developing a Public Financial Management Risk Assessment Framework (PFMRAF. Were you involved at all in those discussions about the requirements that missions would have to do in order to work directly with a host country government?

FINE: No, I was not involved in that.

Q: (Laughs) Okay.

FINE: (Both laugh) For better or for worse.

You know, it's interesting to reflect back on that and think of the evolution of the conversation that we've had as an agency around working with local partners, including local government. And I don't recall at that time the concept of risk and risk management being discussed so directly and—but then subsequently, the agency did start talking more about risk and we developed the first risk appetite statement. And now, very recently I understand that the risk appetite statement has been updated to reflect greater appetite for risk working with local organizations because of the potential payoff. And so, when we finally really brought that idea of weighing the benefit and the risk and acknowledging the risk that missions and the agency ultimately were taking on in working with local organizations and recognizing that if we want our missions to do that, we have to be prepared to defend them when things don't work out because I think what a lot of mission directors felt and maybe still feel is that they don't get sufficient support when a grant with a local organization doesn't work out, when there's issues of accounting for funds,

outright corruption, all those things. So, I do think that the agency has come quite a ways in addressing that issue up front. We weren't quite there with USAID Forward and that 30 percent target.

Q: Okay. No, I was just curious because the issues of localization have been with AID forever, but they've been a special focus over the last 15 to 20 years. And so, this was an important beginning and we're going to come back to it later when we talk about some of your later positions.

FINE: Yeah. I think that that effort on developing the guidance for the PFMRAF really was led by the CFO's office, the Office of the Chief Financial Officer.

It was, yes, I covered a very interesting period. Obviously, one of the other things that Henrietta Fore did, incredibly important for the agency, was she recognized that we really needed to revitalize, resuscitate hiring, not only Foreign Service, but starting with the Foreign Service. And so, she went to the Hill and made the case for the Development Leadership Initiative, the DLI, and got the funding for it. And so, that was an extremely important effort that she initiated..

You know, I also remember her very early on recognizing the issue of food insecurity and how it was related to political instability. And the—I remember when she was preparing for the G-20 in L'Aquila, Italy, which was where the—that was the genesis of Feed the Future. Feed the Future was Raj's initiative, but actually, Henrietta Fore laid the groundwork for that. I mean, I have a very clear memory of her one morning coming into the office and she had multiple clippings of incidents around the world where, you know, there was—that was, I guess, 2008, right, when we had the global financial crisis and there were food riots and things like that happening different places, and she's like, "This is important. Look at this." "We have to think about this and recognize the link between food security and political instability and conflict." And so—

Q: So, the seed of making that part of the G-20 agenda was planted by Henrietta then?

FINE: Well, I don't know if she was the only one, but definitely that was an issue that she really championed, and it kind of got rolling at that G-20 in L'Aquila.

And then, Raj built on it, of course, with the Feed the Future initiative, so.

Q: Several initiatives began during the Raj Shah regime. Was the COO's office involved in any of them or were they on a separate track?

FINE: Well, no, Raj, didn't come in until 2009.

Q: Oh, that's right.

FINE: And by then, I was, so I, yeah, I was there for, you know, part of that year and then, you know, I'll have to go back and check exactly, but at a certain point then I

transitioned to working on the QDDR, and so then I wasn't really—I was kind of out of the loop in many ways.

Q: Okay. And we determined that you didn't write the speech on the 30 percent target.

FINE: No, I did not. (Both laugh) I can't take credit or blame.

Q: Okay, so 2010 comes along and you change positions. How did this come about?

USAID/Sudan Deputy Mission Director (Juba), 2010 - 2011

FINE: Well, right. Well, at that point I had been in Washington for six years, which is the maximum. And, more importantly, I really felt like I needed to get back to the field. You know, I'd learned a tremendous amount in the time that I was in Washington. I'd been in a geographic bureau, I'd been in the administrator's office, I'd worked on the QDDR. Like had probably more exposure to the interagency than I ever wanted. But I really was missing the development work. I really felt the need to get back overseas. However, that was complicated. On a personal level, by this time Patrick had left the agency and joined a non-profit organization, one of USAID's major implementing partners. And then, actually, after the Obama Administration came in, he became a political appointee at the Millennial Challenge Corporation, which was still a fairly new entity, and he was the COO, so the number two at MCC. And my older son had started college and my younger son was in high school. And so, it was pretty clear that I probably wasn't going to be going overseas with my family. And so, I felt like it's time for me to go and work in one of the so-called CPCs (Critical Priority Countries), and at that point the options were Afghanistan, Iraq, South Sudan—was there—Pakistan—no, Pakistan, I don't know if Pakistan was a CPC at that point or not, I can't recall. Anyway, I don't honestly remember my decision-making process very well, but I thought, when I was in the Near East bureau I had a lot to do with Afghanistan, I had a lot to do with Iraq. Patrick was the mission director in Afghanistan. So, I don't know if I really want to get involved in those. And besides, at that point so much of what we were doing in those places was, working with the military on the PRTs (Provincial Reconstruction Teams) and I just felt like that probably was not my strong suit. I didn't have any experience, really, in that arena.

And on the other hand I knew Africa, knew sub-Saharan Africa. I'd worked in Uganda and knew something of East Africa. And so, South Sudan, or Sudan at the time, really seemed to be the right fit for me. There was an SLG position as the—formally the deputy director, one of two deputy directors for Sudan because Sudan was still one country at that time. But there were two deputies, one who was based in Khartoum and one who was based in Juba, where the USAID program was focused on helping the government of Southern Sudan figure out how to function and prepare for potential independence should the referendum turn out that that's the way things were going to go.

Q: And the mission director was in Khartoum, is that correct?

FINE: The mission director was based in Khartoum. It was Bill Hammink, the mission director at that time. And—but of course, he was responsible for both the program in Khartoum and the program in Juba. The Juba program was much, much larger, you know.

Multiple sectors. Most of what we were doing in Khartoum was some humanitarian assistance and some democracy governance stuff, and a lot of it was the support of the commission that was working on the referendum.

Q: Right. And then, supporting the humanitarian work in Darfur—correct?

FINE: It was in Darfur.

Q: So, going out as the deputy meant you were the on the ground responsible person.

FINE: Yeah. So, it was a unique position because you were deputy and you had the mission director there, but operationally you were the person in charge on the ground in Juba. And Bill spent a lot of time in Juba, but he wasn't there all the time. And so, yeah, it was kind of a funny—it was like, a bit more than a traditional deputy, it was actually ideal, I thought, because you had a lot of mission director-like responsibilities, but then you had Bill, who was an incredible mission director and mentor who I could learn from and did learn a tremendous amount from and could say, "Okay, we have this issue. Bill, how do we—how should we go about dealing with it?" And so, it was, yeah, it was a terrific position. I didn't even know when I agreed to do it how cool it was. (Both laugh)

Q: It's an interesting model and could theoretically be used in other places, even for multiple countries. Right?

FINE: Yes, so Peter Malnak was the deputy in Juba before me and I was able to go out, remarkably, one of the few times that USAID has actually facilitated, in my experience, facilitated some kind of transition. I was actually able to go out to Juba before Peter left and participate in their portfolio review. The mission was still—there was still some support coming from the regional office in Nairobi, as well as, you know, of course people based in Khartoum, like the program office was in Khartoum, but we had an FSN program person in Juba. And there was a contracts officer in Khartoum. The controller was in Khartoum, but there was a deputy controller in Juba. It was complicated. It was a complicated set-up. And then, yeah, I think the legal—we had a—there a lawyer in Khartoum because there were so many issues in Sudan, but there was some technical support that we got from Nairobi. And in Juba, everybody was on a U.S. government compound that was owned by USAID and also the embassy, not the embassy, sorry, it was the consulate.

The consulate and the USAID office shared office space a block away from the residential compound, also owned by USAID. When I arrived, we were working with the State Department to plan an expansion of both the office compound and the residential compound because the State Department was anticipating and we were anticipating that we could need to have a separate embassy in South Sudan. The State Department

presence was expanding even before independence. There was a big cohort of people, a team that came from S-CRS. Remember, we were talking about that. And this was one of their attempts to be more operational. I think one of the criticisms of S-CRS had been that they didn't get out in the field and so, there was actually sort of a rotating cast of characters who came from S-CRS and were fanned out across Southern Sudan, trying to gather information about what was happening and what people were saying and just trying to keep the pulse of the situation in the months leading up to the referendum.

And that was an interesting situation because of course, USAID also had experience, conflict resolution people and programming going on and so working out the relationship between our people and these new S-CRS teams was something that we had to manage so that they wouldn't go out and upset trusting relationships that USAID had built over many years with local authorities and things like that. Anyway, sorry, I'm digressing.

But so, yeah, that was the situation. One of the interesting things was that it made USAID an ICASS (International Cooperative Administrative Support Services) provider. We were one of two USAID ICASS providers in the world. So, I learned a lot about ICASS, not that I wanted to, but fortunately we had a controller who knew a lot more about it than I did, but still, I had to learn about it because we were the service provider and it was an interesting situation.

Q: Now, USAID was supporting the referendum process in which the people of Southern Sudan would vote on whether they wanted to become separate. Can you talk about that process?

FINE: Well, Southern Sudanese voted. And that meant not only the people who resided in the borders of Southern Sudan, it also meant people in Khartoum who were documented Southern Sudanese. It also meant Southern Sudanese in the diaspora, and so there were voting centers in, I'm trying to remember, a number of countries, I think ten countries. I'm not sure of the exact number, but the United States was one of them and there were several other countries that were identified as having significant populations of Southern Sudanese and so, they were all able to vote in the referendum.

So, I arrived in July of 2010, having gone out for this sort of orientation visit. I think it was in, like, May maybe, of—which was incredibly helpful because you know, just because it was a situation where you have one, you know, a person's there for a year or so and then, you know, then somebody else comes in. So, having that ability to sort of meet with Peter and have him explain where some of the issues were and also meet the staff and get a sense of what the operating environment was going to be like was really incredibly valuable. And that was—when I arrived officially in July, that was six months ahead of the referendum, which was scheduled for the beginning of January 2011. There was a date, January 5, January 6, something like that. And so, there was a lot of—there was—a significant part of what USAID was doing was supporting the actual implementation of the referendum, along with a number of other donors. UNDP (United Nations Development Program) was an important actor, the Norwegians, the UK, the UN, of course, so there were, yeah, it was a very intense situation.

And there was obviously a lot riding on it and you know, in the United States the Obama Administration had made this a priority, that they wanted to, you know, support this referendum and see it go well. There was a special envoy for Sudan and South Sudan or Southern Sudan. Scott Gration, who was a former admiral, an interesting personality. So, yeah. And then, of course, —in Juba, in Southern Sudan, we had a whole development program—we had an education program, we had a health program, we had an agriculture program, we had a—well, the democracy program was primarily focused on the elections, but there was also some stuff working with the Justice Department. We were providing support to the nascent Central Bank of Southern Sudan, which would presumably become the Central Bank if the country became independent. We were supporting the ministry of public administration, trying to kind of set up their whole Civil Service. I mean, it was really incredible the scope of what USAID was involved in there.

Q: Do you remember the size of the program at that point?

FINE: You mean the budget? It was substantial, over $100 million I think, not including humanitarian assistance.

Q: Okay, that's fine. We can add it later.
On the referendum in the South, was there a consensus on how it should be done among the multiple donors and the Southern Sudanese? Did the Government of Sudan itself also have a role?

FINE: Right. So, there was a law that had been passed that laid out the entire process and all the steps in considerable detail. The challenge that we faced was that there was a lot of intransigence from the Sudan—Khartoum members of the electoral commission that was responsible for the referendum. And so, there were these milestones that needed to be met according to the law and the, you know, the electoral commission was dragging its feet when I got there. They were dragging their feet on achieving these milestones. And you know, of course, many people believed, probably correctly, that it was an attempt by the Khartoum government to stall or sabotage the holding of the referendum. And I remember fairly early on after my arrival the—General Gration came and we—the donors gathered to make a presentation to him on sort of where we were on the whole referendum process and you know, the—we had—IFES (International Foundation for Electoral Systems) was the lead U.S. partner. We also had NDI (National Democratic Institute) and IRI (International Republican Institute). They were doing civic education and the stuff that they typically do.

But IFES was the lead for the U.S. in the mechanics of the process. And the chief of party, who was a terrific guy, he laid out in great precise detail the steps that had to happen, where we were, what the blockages were, and what it showed was that we were behind and there was a real significant risk that the referendum could be derailed. But the issues were not technical issues, primarily. There were some technical issues, of course, but the main issue was this political resistance to moving forward on the part of the

commission, which you know, was Gration's job, right? He was the political guy, so he should have been dealing with those things. And he got furious, he was just enraged.

Q: Enraged with you or enraged with the Sudanese? (Laughs)

FINE: No, with the implementers. You know, he started yelling at Jerome, the chief of party , like it was Jerome's fault that this stuff was happening. And I tried to point out to him that this was not the responsibility of the implementing partners, that this was beyond their control. I don't think that he necessarily appreciated that, but I felt it was important to defend our implementing partners. And then, that evening there was this session where Bill Hammink, Bill was there, fortunately, for this visit, and so Bill and I were summoned to the residence of the consul general where Gration was staying and it was such a bizarre thing. I think Bill talked about it in his oral history as well, but basically, we were called on the carpet by Gration. Barrie Walkley, the CG, sat there and didn't say anything, and Gration just let loose and ranted at us and said that if we couldn't fix this, then he was going to have to take over the management of the referendum himself.

And I mean, yeah, I think Bill and I talked about this subsequently and it was—definitely we had the feeling of being kids that were called on the carpet. But it was scary too, you know. He was—he had a lot of power and authority and like I said, he was quite a character and he thought a lot of himself and his own abilities and the idea that he might actually try to take over the management of the referendum, of our programs, it was not far fetched, —I mean, I could see him doing that. So, Bill and I just kind of sat there, and took the incoming. And then we said, we'll handle it, and I think we gave him some specifics about next steps that we were to do and then immediately went from there to summon the head of the democracy office and said okay, we've got to work on this.

Q: Given his position, shouldn't he have gone to the electoral commission and talked to them, right? Was that what you would have expected?

FINE: Yeah, that was his job. We as USAID were not in the position to address these political issues. As the special envoy, that was his job. Anyway, It was a very memorable, in an unpleasant way, encounter. However, I will say that the good news is, because of the sheer commitment and technical expertise of our implementing partners, we were able to, in some sense, catch up and move ahead on—and ultimately the referendum took place as scheduled.

Q: There were actors in Washington who were obviously very committed to this Sudan cause as well. Did you all ever back channel to them to try to help with any of these issues?

FINE: Yeah. I mean, not me specifically, but I know that Bill talked with Andrew Natsios, of course, who had a long history with Sudan and also Kate Almquist, who had been a DAA for Africa during the previous administration focused on Sudan.

My focus, because I was in the field, you know, my focus was really what was happening on the ground, not so much the interagency stuff back in Washington.

Q: So, the referendum did take place as scheduled and the people of Southern Sudan, the Southern Sudanese people voted overwhelmingly for independence.

FINE: Over 99 percent voted for independence. And it was an incredible thing to witness, you know, the—I mean, Southern Sudan has, like, no infrastructure. When we resume, we should talk a little bit more about other things going on in South Sudan, like the road.

Probably not today, I don't think we have time, but there's almost no infrastructure in Southern Sudan. You know, the travel is extremely difficult. We mostly had to get around by flying because the roads were either non-existent or impassable. Anyway, people walked for hours to polling stations and queued up in big, long lines. We had, of course, an observation effort and so I, along with pretty much everybody else there who was able to observe, went around and did some observation of the polling stations. And I mean, the—it was just very emotional, really, to see these people who had been really oppressed for literally decades, you know, having that opportunity to vote for their independence. It was profound.

It was also a fascinating time because of course, there was a lot of international attention to it. The Carter Center had its own observation effort that we were funding, but I think they had funding from elsewhere as well. And so, many very notable people came for the referendum, including former President Carter and former Secretary General Kofi Annan. They stayed on the U.S. compound and I remember one morning walking into breakfast and sitting at the table next to me was President Carter and Kofi Annan. It was, like, wow, and they were just very genuine, thanked the staff, all the work that we did. I mean, they were just—it was a privilege to have that chance to interact with them and get to see them up close.

Also, you may recall that there was a very well-known movie actor who was involved with Sudan, George Clooney.

And he was supported by a guy named John Prendergast, who had an NGO that was, you know, a real sort of activist organization for the cause of South Sudan. So, Clooney also came for the referendum, as well as John Kerry, who was the secretary of state at that point.

Q: No, he was still a senator probably.

FINE: Right, he was still the senator, that's true. But he had a long affiliation with the cause of Southern Sudan. So, you know, the night before the referendum we had dinner with Jimmy Carter, Kofi Annan, Senator Kerry and George Clooney, and I sat next to George Clooney.

Q: Was he as nice as Kofi Annan and Jimmy Carter?

FINE: It's interesting; he talked a lot about baseball. I guess he's a big baseball fan. And you know, he talked about how when he was younger, he wanted to be a journalist, which I also thought was quite interesting. He was up early on the morning of the referendum speaking on Al Jazeera about the importance of the event.

Q: So, once the results were in and it became clear what was going to happen. I assume the priority of the mission then shifted to implementing that change.

FINE: Right. Yeah, yeah. So, the first half of my time there the focus was on the referendum. Of course, there were other programs happening as well that had their issues. But the big thing was the referendum. And then, yeah, so then it became clear, I think they had the results like that night. Pretty much the results were obvious. And so, there were massive celebrations and whatnot. And so then the next six months of my time there was all about helping them prepare for independence. So, maybe—that might be a good place to stop.

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Q: This is January 27, 2023, and this continues our interview with Susan Fine.

Susan, when we finished up last time, we—you covered the referendum in Southern—for Southern Sudanese independence, but I think you wanted to talk about a few other important elements of the work in South Sudan while you were there.

FINE: Yes, great. Yes, thank you. So, there were other things that USAID was doing in addition to supporting the referendum process. Those included working to strengthen health services. I mean, the health statistics in Southern Sudan were really terrible. A lot of the health services were provided through humanitarian assistance and then there was a kind of development related health program working with the ministry of health. There was an education program. There were virtually no schools with concrete walls except maybe in a few of the towns in Southern Sudan. Most of the kids were learning out under the trees, and the teacher education was very, very weak. You know, virtually no school supplies. So, we'd had an education program. And then, probably one of the most—and then, as I think I mentioned previously, there was a lot of work with different parts of the Southern Sudanese government to strengthen various functions, administrative functions, administration of justice, the budget and other aspects. We even had a program with the presidency to help them strengthen their communication with the population, to help them build a communication function like any executive branch needs.

So, one of the major projects that was very high profile publicly was the construction of a road from the Ugandan border to Juba, and it was the first paved highway in Southern Sudan. It got a lot of attention from the the top government officials and also from the population and unfortunately some of the attention was negative because people were not accustomed to having a good road because most of the roads in Southern Sudan were

terrible and you couldn't go very fast. I was there at the time that sections of the road were starting to be opened, and so buses, for example, would be traveling, ferrying people from Uganda to Juba and back and they would travel at excessive speeds and there were several horrible bus accidents. There was a road safety component to the project, which was incredibly important, but you know, realized how much we take for granted, understanding things like that a car takes time to stop. Because if you are a rural person who's never seen a vehicle on a paved road you don't realize that they can't stop instantaneously. Every time that one of these accidents would happen, we would have to go with the contractor, which was Louis Berger, and with the minister of transport and go out to the community and talk to the community about what had happened and present condolences and talk with the community leaders and with Louis Berger about what additional measures could be taken to reduce the likelihood of these kinds of accidents in the future.

But at the same time, it was also just very symbolic, because this was an important link for the new capital, Juba, to Uganda and the rest of the world that didn't involve going through Khartoum, through Northern Sudan. So, also the government was very keen to have that project finished as soon as possible. And it was fascinating for me. I'd never been involved in overseeing a major infrastructure project before and I learned more than I ever expected to about, like, various grades of gravel and—

Q: Drainage, drainage.

FINE: Drainage and all of these things, yeah. So, it was very—I found it personally quite interesting, but you know, it was also a source of stress because of these issues.

Q: Was it a dollar-funded program?

FINE: Yes; it was dollar-funded.

Q: Was it mostly development assistance funding for Southern Sudan or was a lot of it ESF (Economic Support Funds)?

FINE: I believe we had ESF funding. We wouldn't have had DA (Development Assistance) to fund a road. The program was a mix of ESF, DA and obviously some Global Health funding.

And then, you know, so there was the program and the next six months after the referendum was really focused on helping the country be ready for independence, which happened on July 9, 2011. But that also meant that USAID had some internal things that it had to do because we had been one mission for Sudan with, as I described earlier, an office in Juba and an office in Khartoum.

And so, we also had to prepare for there being two separate missions, a mission for the new South Sudan and the mission in Khartoum. And that was a more fraught process than I guess I anticipated. I worked very closely with Bill Hammink, the mission director, and

Doug Arbuckle, who was the deputy in Khartoum on sort of planning and figuring out, you know, there were staffing issues, there were authority issues. Some of the staff, the support staff who were in Khartoum were still going to be providing some services to South Sudan, but we would be separate missions, so then we had to work out how was that going to happen. There were some staff who were based in Khartoum who were Southern Sudanese who had to decide whether they were going to move to Juba or stay in Khartoum and be part of a different mission now, effectively.

And then, another complicating factor was we had FSNs who worked in Juba, many of whom had worked on the program for quite a number of years and had started when the Southern Sudan program was run out of Nairobi, and so they had families in Nairobi. And another issue that came up was, okay, now it's going to be South Sudan, and so, technically an FSN is someone from the country in which you're working, right? I think most of them had South Sudanese citizenship, although there might have been a few who did not. But then, you know, they were worried about bringing their families back because there was not adequate schooling and it was very insecure, there wasn't really adequate housing. So, for the FSN staff there was a lot of anxiety around the implications of independence for them in terms of their personal life and also in terms of their career with USAID.

As part of this process for planning the two new missions and how we were going to work together, there were a lot of questions about transferring files, where were the project files going to go and a lot of sort of technical issues. And so, we had a workshop retreat in Addis for several days and I remember specifically deciding that we were going to do it in Addis because it was neutral territory. I mean, seriously. Like, there was, oh, well, we could do it in Khartoum, and then the staff in Juba were like, "We don't want to go to Khartoum. We don't feel comfortable in Khartoum." And we didn't really have the capacity to host the Khartoum staff in Juba, so we had to find neutral territory. Anyway, I really left before that whole—so I was succeeded by—I'm trying to think—now I can't remember who it was who came in as the new mission director, but they were really the ones that had to make it work, but we did have to set that planning process in motion.

Also, we had to work with the U.S. embassy because they were planning to staff up for conversion of the consulate to a full embassy mission. They were going to get a DCM so they took over more of USAID's space for the DCM office, which people were not happy about (laughs) among other things. So, yes, that was happening also on the State Department side. And we were planning for expansion of the residential compound because we knew with independence that there was going to be more USAID staff, more embassy staff, and other agencies potentially coming in. So, there was a lot going on.

Q: Did the plan anticipate continued services, such as financial management from Khartoum? Or, did you get a Controller in Juba?

FINE: We had a controller in Khartoum and a deputy controller in Juba. In terms of the staffing, my foresighted predecessors had started putting positions on the bid list. So, we did have a controller. And we had a contracting officer for South Sudan. We did not have

a lawyer, as I recall. The lawyer was still going to continue to be based in Khartoum. We had a program officer coming in. But you know, it wasn't just the U.S. direct hires, we also needed FSNs. Like the controller's office in Khartoum was very well developed and they had—and we didn't really have—we only had maybe one financial analyst in Juba. All the voucher examiners were in Khartoum. So, it took time. You know, it wasn't like something that could just turn on a dime. It took time to build up the capacity of the mission in Juba to be able to take on those functions.

Q: One other question, and I don't believe we talked about it before, but that's the diaspora. I know that some of the grantees and contractors may have brought back the Southern Sudanese diaspora, but I'm just curious whether you all within the AID mission did the same?

FINE: Not when I was there, but we definitely were trying to identify people. For an FSN, I don't recall whether we tried to recruit amongst the diaspora. USAID did bring back some people from the diaspora through the different projects, particularly people who were working in the ministries as technical advisors. But I don't recall that we had anybody, at the time that I was there, that we had anybody actually from the diaspora at USAID.

Q: I was just curious since I knew that some of the programs were using diaspora.

Other things about Southern Sudan? Were you there when the independence celebration took place?

FINE: I was. I was there. And it was very exciting. I mean, how many times does one get to be present at the birth of a nation? Not often. It was a very exciting day. And everybody felt optimistic about the future, probably unrealistically optimistic, but you know, I mean, this was—you look at the history of a country and all that it had gone through. There was, of course, a U.S. delegation that was headed by Susan Rice, who at the time was the national security advisor. She stayed in my house. And yeah, it was kind of thrilling to be part of that.

And especially just to see the joy of the Southern Sudanese—I mean, it was incredible. Obviously, I think, many people, myself included, worried about how things would go, and there was a strong awareness of the many significant fault lines in the society, you know, and the number of the issues, the most important issues in the comprehensive peace agreement, such as revenue sharing for oil and the status of Abyei and several other territories, citizenship issues for Southern Sudanese who were living in the north had not been resolved. And they were supposed to be resolved before independence happened. Those were diplomatic issues that were being negotiated at a much higher level than me. I don't know what the calculus was on the part of the international community as well as the Southern Sudanese and the Northern Sudanese about not resolving all of those things.

I guess I think in retrospect it was a mistake of the international community to allow—well, I don't know if the international community could have stopped them from

declaring independence. But we obviously supported it and maybe we should have applied more pressure to get the two parties to reach some agreement on these very, very difficult issues. But you know, I did not anticipate how quickly things would fall apart in South Sudan and yeah, it was really heartbreaking for me, particularly to see the leadership, the government of South Sudan, within a very short period of time starting to inflict on its own population things that had been inflicted previously by the government in Khartoum. Those people had already suffered so much and then to have their own leadership attacking them and waging war and engaging in massive corruption, plundering their resources, just really, really hard.

Q: Do you think in retrospect that we could have done some programmatic work differently? Or would that probably not have been sufficient anyway to have averted what's happened?

FINE: I don't know that there's anything we could have done programmatically that would have, you know, because I think the reason for the problems was at a much more fundamental level. We were doing peacebuilding programs, community level peacebuilding, conflict resolution, and I think there were some really nice examples of how that was working, supporting community leaders who were trying to resolve local level conflicts, not these big high-level conflicts between the North and the South, but there was a lot of community conflict as well. And intertribal conflict. And there were some really nice examples of how that was working. The only thing I think maybe we could have done is more of that, if we'd had resources, you know, finding local leaders who were interested in that and supporting them in those efforts to resolve local level conflicts. It wouldn't have avoided the larger issues, but maybe it would have made people not suffer quite so much at the community level.

Q: Right. Perhaps the lower levels could have put pressure on the top. That's a very interesting point, that sometimes in, quote, "nation building," we only work at the top and maybe we need to spend more time at the lower levels to build up.

AID/Washington, Office of East African Affairs, Director, 2011 - 2013

You left on a high note shortly after the great independence celebration and then you became director of the Office of East African Affairs back in Washington in the Africa Bureau. So, you could keep an eye on Sudan and South Sudan, although you also

FINE: Right. Well, actually, there was a separate office of Sudan and South Sudan in the Africa bureau, so I wasn't directly involved. But of course, I paid attention to what was going on and I'd worked very closely with them, so sometimes they'd come and say, "Well, can you explain why this is going on?" And things like that.

But yeah, so I went back to the U.S. My family was still living in Virginia and let's see, so I think—and I only got a few weeks off because that's what happens when you go back to Washington. And then, there I was in August, in the Africa bureau, and my first

week back in the office my first staff meeting was when that earthquake happened in Washington, DC.

And I thought it was a terrorist attack, but anyway. So, that was, you know, an interesting way to start my time in Washington. But then, unfortunately, two weeks after I started on the job famine was declared officially in Somalia, and Somalia was also part of my portfolio. Of course, I had been in Sudan and adjacent to Ethiopia and Kenya and was well aware of the severe drought that was occurring at that time in the Horn of Africa. And that was really the pressing issue when I came into the East Africa office, was the drought situation. So, that was my main focus for the first part of, well, for the rest of that year and into the following year. You know, the immediate response, which of course, was led by DCHA, but there were a lot of interagency—intra-agency and interagency discussions around the response and that's really when the whole conversation around resilience kind of ramped up. I was representing the Africa bureau on a working group led by Nancy Lindborg, who was the AA of DCHA at the time, to really put together, with missions, obviously, Kenya, Ethiopia, and East Africa, put together a resilience program, recognizing that we really have to—we can't just have this situation where there's a humanitarian response and then, a few years later there's another drought and the communities fall back maybe even further than where they were before. And the Ethiopia mission in particular had been doing a fair amount of work on food security and safety nets and so, and Greg Collins was in, I think, I can't remember whether he was in Kenya or East Africa, but he'd been doing a lot of really interesting stuff on—. So, there was—a lot of the input came from the missions, but there was also kind of a headquarters level group that was working together to put together this Horn of Africa resilience strategy.

Q: Was there an interagency aspect to this as well and if so, was Gayle Smith involved at all? I ask because she had been involved twenty years earlier in Brian Atwood's Greater Horn of Africa initiative. I'm just curious whether she brought any of that old experience into this—these discussions.

FINE: You know, I think we briefed—she was still at the NSC at that time, and so we briefed the NSC. I don't remember if we briefed Gayle directly. Somebody, probably the DCHA and Africa bureau leadership did brief her directly about what we were doing. You know, interesting, I actually went back and read some of the stuff that had been written during the Greater Horn of Africa initiative, GHAI, in the 90s and it was fascinating to see how a lot of the recommendations that were made at that time were still relevant. The one piece that was not in GHAI was the whole conflict resolution piece. So, yes, that was a big focus as well as mobilizing international support for the response in the Horn of Africa, primarily humanitarian, but also to support resilience, so you know, getting some of the European donors and the World Bank and others kind of onboard with supporting the response.

Q: Can I ask a question about Somalia? How were we supporting the work there? There weren't any people resident in Somalia, were there?

FINE: No, not at that time. No. The Somalia program was being run out of the East Africa regional mission, in Nairobi, which at that time was still separate from the Kenya mission. The East Africa mission ran several non-presence country programs, Somalia, Burundi, maybe Djibouti, there might have been one other one. Somalia was definitely too insecure to have somebody on the ground. However, it's interesting that you brought it up. There was—the international community had kind of an operating base, if you will, at the Mogadishu airport and so, it was a secure kind of international compound, the UN agencies were there and various bilaterals would mostly fly people in and they'd stay for a week and then they'd come out. So, the people from the East Africa mission, some of them would go up, they'd fly to Mogadishu, be there for a few days, meet with—you know, the implementing partners would come into the compound, so they didn't—they weren't able to go out. So we did have a Somalia program, and interestingly, although there was this terrible famine happening in Somalia, also there were some interesting political developments. The Somalis were kind of getting their act together and had elected, through some sort of—it wasn't really a formal parliament, but they had some—what did they call it? I don't remember the name, but they had some sort of interim parliamentary-like structure and they elected an interim president, and there was a lot of enthusiasm on the part of the U.S. government to support this guy and to help Somalia get its act together. And so we were supporting the constitution writing process. We had some technical assistance that was being provided for that. We did have people going in and out and meeting with implementing partners, mostly in democracy governance. I mean, we didn't really have traditional development programming there at that time. However, there was a lot of concern about monitoring and evaluation, but monitoring in particular because you couldn't go out, right?

The mission had a third party monitoring contract and there was a lot of interest on Capitol Hill in what we were trying to do in Somalia and so, and of course, we would inevitably get the question, "Well, how do you know that, how do you know these projects are actually happening because you can't go out and see them?" And so, we would explain how we used third party monitoring, which I think was still—this was 2011, 2011-2012, so obviously the agency had learned from experiences in Afghanistan and Iraq, but the third party monitoring kind of concepts, I think, were still starting to filter out to other parts of the agency.

And then, the U.S. started getting pressure and we, USAID, started getting pressure from the State Department to assign a person to Mogadishu and I actually went, while I was in that position as the director, I did a trip out to Nairobi and then, I actually went to Mogadishu for a day, in part to just see what it looked like and to better understand the security situation. Also, I was representing the U.S. at a donor meeting that was happening at the Mogadishu airport. But anyway, that was another agenda, the agency was coming under pressure to assign someone permanently. I think that didn't happen right away. I think what we started doing was having someone go in, like for two weeks and then go out, and then somebody else would go for two weeks and then go out.

Q: Perhaps we'll come back around to it again later when you were in PPL, the whole issue of how AID works in conflict zones.

FINE: Yeah, in those non-permissive environments, right, yes. And that was a very non-permissive environment. I mean, there were active Al-Shabaab attacks and things like that.

Q: You had quite a few of those in your area that you were covering there, including the DRC (Democratic Republic of the Congo). Interesting challenges.

FINE: Yeah, DRC, there was an election while I was there and there was a lot of interagency interest on that and how we were providing support to the electoral process through IFIS and IRI and NDI. I think that would have been maybe 2012. I'm not sure of the date, but around there. And you know, there were some issues because whenever the agencies for the U.S. government are supporting an electoral process, you always have to be careful to ensure that the support that we're providing isn't seen as endorsing a bad process. And so, there were—I don't remember the details, but I do remember there were some tricky calls around whether or not we should provide certain kinds of support to the elections commission because we knew that it was going to be flawed and we didn't want them to be able to say, "Oh, but we got assistance from USAID and other international donors and so, what are you worried about? They supported us. It's their fault." So, there were some tricky issues around that.

Also at the time that I was in this position, the U.S. government had made a real commitment to help Uganda get Joseph Kony, you know, the head of the Lord's Resistance Army. Of course, by this time he was no longer in Uganda and a small band of his supporters were running around an ungoverned area, thought to be sort of Congo and maybe a few of the border areas of other—DRC and Republic of Congo and I think sometimes maybe the border areas of South Sudan. Anyway, so the U.S. was supporting this big campaign to—on the military side to help the Ugandan Defense Force capture Kony. But on the civilian side, we were also developing a plan to help communities who were in the vicinity of where Kony was operating to be better prepared to prevent attacks or at least be warned if there was an attack coming. USAID gave funding to a couple of small non-profit organizations that were working with some of these communities on communication tactics and things like that. And so, yeah, there was a whole interagency working group around the Kony campaign. And there was also—of course, there was some humanitarian assistance when there were inevitable attacks on communities.

Q: Did you ever visit DRC?

FINE: I did. I went to DRC and I thought it was a fascinating country, very, very complex. I was in Kinshasa and then we did a field trip. I don't remember exactly where we went, but we visited some agricultural activities. You get immediately impressed by the vastness of the place and also the lack of infrastructure, you know, how long it took to travel really not very far. And we were doing a lot of health programming out there as well as humanitarian. And the mission had, after a number of years, finally gotten permission from the State Department to post a USAID person in Goma, as I recall.

Q: Oh, that's important, that was a big change.

FINE: Right. So, yeah. And then, they were also, that mission was also responsible for this Central Africa regional environmental program. Which was a whole other ball of wax. It was—it had several interagency partners, EPA and Fish and Wildlife, I think. And it involved, I don't remember, several other countries. And it was—

Q: Was this the CARPE (Central Africa Regional Program for the Environment)program?

FINE: Yes, yeah. CARPE, that's it, yeah. And that was also complicated.

So, yeah. And the mission, the physical facility of the mission in Kinshasa was really terrible. I mean, it wasn't just the mission, it was the embassy as well. And so, they had been looking for a place to site a new U.S. embassy compound. I think eventually they did find one several years after I was there and my understanding is that there is now a new embassy compound in Kinshasa, but it took a very long time. And people were working in really quite difficult conditions in the mission there. So, any time I meet somebody who works or has worked in DRC I have tremendous respect for them because it's just a really complicated place and kind of the enormity of the challenges can be daunting.

Q: You started talking about the famine and the work that was done on famine response; this would have also included the complexity, again we'll use that word, the complexity of relationships between OFDA (Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance) and the missions. Did you see this?

FINE: Of course, yeah, I think in the Horn at that time some of the sort of perennial friction that occurs between OFDA and the USAID mission because of their different lines of authority really came to the fore in the Horn during that response. And what I'm referring to is, of course, the authority for OFDA funding comes directly from Washington, from DCHA to the OFDA field office that is managing the response, whereas the mission director in a particular country or region does not have authority over—doesn't make funding decisions over humanitarian assistance. However, there is an expectation that there's coordination between the humanitarian and the development response, and there's also an expectation that OFDA will keep the mission director informed of what they're doing and vice versa. However, at this time it came to my attention that there were some significant problems in Nairobi over lack of communication and coordination, and this was really—it was causing issues, it was getting back to DCHA, it was coming back to the Africa bureau.

And so, Nancy Lindborg, who was the head of DCHA and Earl Gast, who was the AA for Africa at the time, came to me and they said, "We would like you to work with someone in OFDA," and it was Kasey Channell, and they said, "We want to send a cable to the field that lays out what the expectations are for OFDA, what the expectations are for the mission, and will you guys basically write it, figure it out and write it?" So, Kasey

and I got together and we worked on it. It was a very interesting exercise. I think we—she and I mostly agreed on what we were trying to accomplish, but she was OFDA and I was the Africa bureau, and so you know, the tension was not entirely absent even from our conversations. I think it was actually sent out as a cable and I—and there's also an agency notice, which I still have, dated October 25, 2012. We had to present this proposal to the agency leadership before it was memorialized and so, it was presented to the Administrator's Leadership Council that was presided over by Raj Shah, and all the AAs were part of it. And so, it was a discussion of the role of the mission director and OFDA—oh, and OTI (Office of Transition Initiatives) also.

Because there was also a similar kind of tension where you had OTI, which also received its authority directly from DCHA. So, I know it sounds very bureaucratic, but actually, this is a tension that exists and has existed over—probably throughout USAID's history. And you know, I like to think that we at least did something to advance the understanding and improve the communication in that regard.

Q: Right. Well stated. Which reminds me, was OTI in Southern Sudan at all?

FINE: They were, yes. They were running the conflict resolution, peacebuilding programs.

Q: Right. And you had a good experience with them on the ground?

FINE: Yes.

Yes, those OTI people, I think, a lot of it's personality driven , honestly, and they were very collaborative. So, we—I did not have any issues with OTI. I did have issues with OFDA. There was a long-time OFDA person who had worked in Southern Sudan for years and, I mean, she was wonderful at what she did, but she used to say things like, "OFDA and USAID." And I would say, "OFDA is part of USAID." (Both laugh) So, when this issue was brought to me for—to work on it at an agency-level, I was very familiar with it from the field. (Laughs)

It's something that, like I said, sounds very bureaucratic, but I felt like it was an accomplishment.

Q: Right. And to lay it all out clearly so that everyone knew what to expect I think was—

FINE: Right. And what was really important was that all the regional bureau AAs signed off on it, DCHA signed off on it. Now, how well it's being respected and do people even know that this thing still exists, I have no idea. But anyway.

Q: Yeah. I'm sure it's been codified. (Laughs)

FINE: I'm not but I'm glad you have that confidence. (Laughs)

Q: One other country that I know has always been very controversial within your portfolio is Rwanda. Half the world says they are the greatest development success story, and the other half wrings its hands over concerns about a growing autocracy. So, I'm wondering what was the state of affairs with Rwanda when you were there and how the mission dealt and you all dealt with it.

FINE: Yeah. No, you're absolutely right, that was a dynamic that was very present and I was involved because the development program was fairly successful based on metrics, results. You know, there was a substantial public health program, there was a substantial education program, there was a food security, agriculture/food security program. I'm sure there was some civil society development, but that was kind of difficult in Rwanda, as you can imagine.

You know, USAID had funded the kind of truth and reconciliation type process that Rwanda had after the genocide and there was as little bit of sort of follow-on to that. But it wasn't a major focus of the program. The main reason that I was more directly involved with Rwanda and what was going on there was the mission was trying to develop an agriculture program that would provide funding directly to the government and—I mean, the government counterpart was really strong.

The Feed the Future program we had was producing good results. They had done a pilot of what they wanted to do under, I believe, a grants under contract kind of mechanism and so, they wanted to scale it up and really work directly through the ministry of agriculture in Rwanda. But there were a lot of congressional concerns around democracy, human rights, and in order to get approval to do cash transfers, which is effectively what we were proposing to do, there was a whole list of issues that we had to certify that Rwanda was—was acceptable in these areas, not just financial capacity, but also, you know, respect for human rights and of course, that was where Rwanda did not perform so well.

And so, there was a real debate between—interagency debate, really, about whether or not there was support for USAID to do this. Interestingly, the ambassador in Rwanda at the time was supportive. Peter Malnak was the mission director there at the time, and the ambassador was onboard, but the Africa bureau at the State Department, as I recall, was not onboard. And Treasury was involved. So, yeah, we had some pretty intensive interagency debate around that and ultimately that program was not allowed to go forward because State opposed it.

Q: And I suspect NSC was somewhat supportive of it, at least some people within the NSC.

FINE: Yes, some people.

And we tried. Yeah, we definitely tried. But you know, it was tricky because as an agency we were trying to find vehicles for getting back into doing more cash transfers because there are some obvious benefits of cash transfers in terms of host country ownership and

efficiency and whatnot. And in many ways Rwanda was a great candidate. I mean, we were confident that they would manage the money well. And we were confident that they would produce results. And so, that's why we were in favor of it. But then there's the optic of, well, you're giving money to this government that is repressing civil society and other sorts of rights and issues.

So, I understand. It was unfortunate that we didn't have a chance—that we weren't able to do it because I think it probably would have been a successful program and that could have helped to raise the comfort level of the Congress for the agency to do similar programs in other countries. But it didn't happen.

Q: Thank you very much. That's important.

I assume there were probably also lots of interagency discussions about Uganda as well, for some of the same reasons.

FINE: Yeah. There were the issues about treatment of homosexuals, and that had been, you know, something that was an issue in Uganda for a long time. I'm trying to remember; I believe it was during this time—no, maybe it was after I was there as the East Africa office director. But there was a period where there were some real issues with Ugandan mission staff who had very strong feelings against homosexuality. And there was a case of an individual who refused to process a travel voucher for an LGBT activist. And then, you know, that led to a whole conversation around what is an employee's responsibility versus their own personal feelings about things like homosexuality and other culturally sensitive issues. But I think that that—it did, you know, provoke conversations in other missions in the region where they have similar kinds of homophobic policies. Well, in Uganda it's a crime, so it's more than just a policy.

But I'm pretty sure that that happened after I had gone on to be the mission director in Senegal. But I knew about it because it was something that we were talking about as mission directors.

Q: Well, it sounds like a pretty busy two years in which you dealt with a lot of high-profile issues.

FINE: It was. I mean, it was fascinating. And I really enjoyed getting to know more of, not just the development issues, but the connection between the political, diplomatic side, particularly with respect to Somalia. And yeah, I thoroughly enjoyed my time in the Africa bureau. I had a fantastic team and it was, yeah, it was great.

USAID/Senegal, Mission Director, 2013 - 2015

However, since I'd been doing this resilience work, I was quite interested in this whole concept of resilience and, working on the development humanitarian nexus, as we called it, it made a lot of sense to me. And so then, after the Horn of Africa resilience plan was developed, about a year later, they had been doing a similar thing in the Sahel, because

the Sahel countries also had a very bad drought and I was aware of that. And so, when I learned that the mission director job in Senegal was going to come available and not only was it going to be Senegal, but it was also going to be responsible for the Sahel, the new Sahel resilience program, I thought, that's the job that I want. (Both laugh) So, yeah, I was very excited by that.

The portfolio was the Senegal bilateral program, the Sahel regional program which effectively was being implemented in Niger and Burkina Faso, and there were four non-presence countries that had some level of programming that I was also responsible for, Niger, Burkina Faso, Mauritania and Chad. So, it was perfect because it was Senegal plus, plus all this other new and interesting stuff. And fortunately, the powers that be felt that I was up to the job, so after two years in Washington then I was off to Senegal. I had to brush up on my French because it had been quite some time since I had been speaking French, so I think I finished in the Africa bureau in—around the beginning of September of 2013, and then spent three months at FSI doing French language brush up, and then went out to Dakar shortly before Thanksgiving of 2013.

And I will say, as you've asked me to keep in mind my family situation, at this point my husband was heading up a large non-profit organization that also works in international development. He was not living in the DC area, although he commuted back and forth often. He was based in Durham, North Carolina. And our one son had graduated from college and the other one was starting. And so, I had this conversation with my husband and I said, "All right, I'm going to go to Senegal, I've taken this job. But you know, I don't really want to live by myself for four years, so I really hope that after a year or two, you'll be ready to retire and you can come and live with me." Because he always used to say that he thought it would be so cool to come and just be a spouse. He could go and sit and have tea and talk with people and learn local languages and write and do whatever he wanted. So, I told him this was his opportunity. Unfortunately, he didn't take advantage of that opportunity.

Q: (Laughs)

FINE: That was the calculus: I would go and after a couple of years that he would come along.

Q: Well, that was his loss. And to a great extent also Senegal's loss as well.

But can you tell us about the program in Senegal? I see on your CV that you did do some work to refine the strategy. Was that one of the early things that you did? I see that you reoriented and integrated health, food security, education and governance programs.

FINE: Let me think. When I got there was—did we do a strategic plan? So, there was the resilience program, which was the new Sahel resilience program. Oh, yes, and we did do a kind of update or a new strategy.

Q: I'm sorry. I didn't mean to mislead you. If you want to start talking about the Sahelian resilience program, that would be fine.

FINE: Oh, no, it's okay. I'm just, yeah, trying to remember. I mean, the Senegal program was obviously a very well-established program. It's one of the few programs, certainly in sub-Saharan Africa, that has run sort of continuously without interruption since the beginning, and USAID, I think, started in Senegal shortly after independence, like 1961. And we've never left, which is somewhat remarkable because there are a lot of other countries where we've gone in and gone out, in again for coups or conflict or whatever. But Senegal, we've had this continuous presence for all of this time and I've always felt that that gave the relationship a certain quality that was different from places where we haven't been able to do that. I mean, it's just a very deep, mature relationship with the Senegalese government and with civil society, with the private sector. I mean, we're well-known, we're trusted, we have credibility, and so, you know, it's an incredible opportunity to have that kind of a program.

Obviously, health was huge. But the things that we were doing in Senegal with health were quite sophisticated, helping them to put in place a universal healthcare system. It was not a HIV program, fortunately. There was a PMI, the malaria program was very large. Family planning, reproductive health, infant and child mortality, those standard things. But you know, a lot of it was really helping the ministry of health to kind of decentralize and be better, work more efficiently. And there was a significant decentralization policy that Senegal had been working on for, I don't know, like ten years by the time I got there. It had kind of started when I was first there, and so they'd come some ways in implementing it.
And so, they were really trying to work on moving financing from the ministry of health in Dakar down to regions and districts to really get actual resources out and that was something that USAID was really supporting them on. And as part of that we were giving the government, the ministry of health small amounts of money to manage directly, not—we didn't have authority to do cash transfers yet, but that's what we were aspiring to, and there was also—we were going through this financial management assessment process with the ministry of health with the hope that we would be able to get to a kind of cash transfer program.

Q: And just for the record, that was a process that the AID Washington controller's office asked missions to do?

FINE: Right, Public Financial Management Risk Assessment Framework (PFMRAF). It was basically verifying that they had the systems in place to be able to manage the funding. And that was quite interesting as well because as part of doing the PFMRAF what we discovered was that there were a lot of issues between the Senegalese ministry of finance and the line ministries, so education, health, there were a lot of kind of disconnects and not understanding how budget timelines and processes worked, so there were these sticky points that inhibited the flow of funding to the line ministries and then, of course, that affected their ability to then push the funding further down.

And so, interestingly, the mission had started to get involved in working with the ministry of finance on some of these budget issues, and we had a fantastic Senegalese woman economist who had worked in the ministry of finance and then come to USAID and was providing technical assistance to the ministry of finance. And also helping us to understand what these problems were and how we could work with the government to address them. So, that was a very interesting aspect of the program and it was applicable not just to health, but to education, to agriculture, et cetera.

Q: So, through this you helped to strengthen public financial management.

FINE: Public finance, exactly, yeah. Right.

There was a large Feed the Future program and it was having a lot of success in terms of developing value chains for certain commodities. And we were coordinating—there was, by now there was an MCC compact in Senegal. Remember, I'd been there when they had not been able to get their act together ten years earlier. But there was a compact and so, we were working in coordination with the MCC—in the north they were doing irrigation for rice production and so, one of the value chains was rice. There were other value chains in different parts of the country.

And one that was probably not normal for a Feed the Future program was we were working with the fisheries. Senegal is a coastal country; fisheries are very important both economically and also from a nutrition standpoint. A lot of the protein that the Senegalese get is from fish. And there's a huge issue with overfishing by foreign boats and also not proper management of the resource by communities themselves. So, a lot of what the fisheries piece, which I think they had to get some kind of special dispensation from the Feed the Future powers that be in Washington to have the fisheries component, but it was actually quite interesting. It was sort of a mix of nutrition and also natural resource management, but helping communities to figure out how to organize themselves to manage the resource—the fisheries resource so that they wouldn't overfish and also working with the women who would process the fish so that had better facilities and better, more efficient processes that would enable them to get more value out of the product.

So, I thought that was a very interesting piece of the portfolio, although the site visits were really smelly because the fish was very pungent, dried fish. Anyway, that was a program that the Senegalese government was quite supportive of because they recognized, you know, how important the fisheries resource is for the country.

And then, of course, we were still working in the Casamance, as I had said when I was earlier in Senegal, and we had started this conflict resolution, peacebuilding program in the Casamance. And you know, things had improved, the situation had improved in the Casamance, security was much better. And some of the Feed the Future activities were in the Casamance. But there were still parts of the Casamance where there was insecurity. So, the peace, the community peacebuilding stuff was—there was still a bit of it, I believe, but not—it wasn't as prominent in the portfolio. So what we did with the strategy

is we said, “Now we need to stop treating the Casamance as some special case. It needs to be integrated into the rest of the portfolio.” And the basis for a lot of the grievances that people in the Casamance had was that they weren’t getting the services from the government that the rest of the country was getting. And so, the way to address that is to improve health service, to support economic development, improve education services, et cetera. And so, that was one of the big objectives of the strategy, was to really integrate the Casamance into the rest of the portfolio.

And what else can I say about Senegal?

Q: Just a quick question. You had mentioned earlier about interest in doing non-project assistance in Senegal. Did you ever get approval?

FINE: Not while I was there. I don’t know subsequently whether they were able to do it or not.

Q: Yes. I vaguely recall hearing that your mission was trying to do some creative work using fixed amount reimbursements as an alternative to cash transfers?

FINE: Exactly, yes. Yeah, we had several FAR (Fixed Amount Reimbursements) agreements. There was one with the University of Dakar or maybe two. And I mean, they were small, and they were all in the health portfolio. But yes, we were doing to kind of pave the way for something more significant.

Maybe the other thing to say about Senegal, a very important thing that happened while I was there and I was involved in, was the Ebola crisis. Now, Ebola, the West Africa Ebola outbreak, of course, had happened in Liberia and Guinea and Sierra Leone, those were the main countries that were affected by the outbreak. However, you know, when the international community, including the U.S., determined that we needed to mount a serious international response to the Ebola outbreak and it was determined that the U.S. would provide support to Liberia and that the UK would support Sierra Leone and I think France was supposed to support Guinea. And that included military support, like airlift, military airlift capacity. So, when that decision was made, of course they contacted the U.S. ambassador in Senegal and said, “We would like to base the U.S. military operation that was going to airlift supplies and equipment and things like that into Liberia,” they wanted to base it in Senegal.

And this was fairly early in the crisis. I think people were still learning exactly what Ebola was and how it was transmitted. There were a lot of misconceptions. Of course, people were panicked. And the first reaction of the Senegalese government was, “Are you kidding me? We’re not going to allow people to fly back and forth between this Ebola-infected country and our country, they’ll bring the Ebola back on the airplane with them,” and things like that. So, but of course, this was a high priority for the U.S. government and we, USAID, had a very, very strong relationship with the minister of health. And the minister of health had tremendous credibility with the president, Macky Sall, and so, I went with the ambassador and with the head of our health office and we

had a meeting with the minister of health and we explained to her what it was that the military wanted to do. And we said, "You just need to tell us, we'll do whatever you want, to ensure that Senegal is protected and doesn't have the negative impacts from this—being part of this response." And I think because of the credibility that USAID—and the strong relationship that USAID had with her, with the ministry of health, she took us very seriously, and she's also a very serious, committed public health professional, so I think she also appreciated that it was important to have this kind of response for Liberia, and she was supportive. And so, there were probably—there were a number of conversations, but basically, we were involved in convincing the Senegalese government to agree to host the staging—they weren't allowed to call it a base.

They had a term, like the staging area or something like that for this—for AFRICOM to operate out of Senegal and fly material into—in and out of Liberia. Of course, we also, along with CDC, were supporting the Senegalese ministry of health in their own Ebola response to be prepared. I think we funded some equipment, so that they could set up isolation tents and we provided PPE (Personal Protective Equipment) and I don't remember all the details, but I know we worked very closely with CDC. CDC had some technical experts that came in and helped them establish a surveillance operation. And in the end, the only Ebola case that came to Uganda came in from a Guinean who crossed the border and had Ebola, and he was detected and it was identified that he had Ebola and he was transferred to the isolation unit in Dakar, and he was treated and he recovered and returned to Guinea. So, it was a real success story for Senegal and it showed the level of development of their public health system.

But we were a partner in that and, like I said, the quality of the relationship that we had made a difference in terms of being able to convince the government that they should host this response.

Q: No, that's important.

One of your strong interests in going to Senegal was the Sahel resilience program. Could you talk about that, including how you were working in Niger and Burkina, and then how that changed over the period you were there?

FINE: Yeah. That was very interesting. So, boy, where to start. Okay. So, operationally we had—there had been a small number of USAID FSNs in both Niger and Burkina Faso for a number of years. You know, those were countries that USAID had pulled out of in the nineties, yes. And then, there were a number of programs—there were Food for Peace programs that were being run in both countries and there were some FSN staff that were helping to manage those based in Burkina and Niger. And then, there had been some regional programs run out of West Africa, out of the West Africa mission in Accra that operated in both Burkina Faso and Niger. There was a family planning project, there was a CVE, a Countering Violent Extremism program. And I think there was some kind of water project. It was a WASH (Water, Sanitation and Hygiene), a WASH project. So, there was a little bit of programming that was taking place in both countries already, so we weren't going in greenfield.

Q: Had—because you mentioned that some of the programs had been managed out of the regional office in Accra. Did those regional responsibilities shift over to Senegal for those programs?

FINE: Yes. Yes.

I don't know exactly when the shift took place, but I think I was the first mission director in Senegal that had responsibility for Burkina Faso and Niger, but only bilateral activities. So, there was also—there was a malaria project in Burkina Faso. But then, there were these regional projects that had components that were being implemented in Niger and Burkina Faso and the mission director for West Africa was responsible for those.

So, it was messy. And to make things further complicated, as part of setting up the resilience program, the decision had been made to establish a new U.S. direct hire position in Niger and in Burkina Faso as, what do we call them? Like, development counselors or something like that. Was that the term? Or like a country representative. But they reported to me. They weren't mission director level, they were sort of—

Q: And they didn't report to the ambassadors? They reported to you?

FINE: Of course—well, yes, they reported to their ambassadors, but they also—I mean, the authority for the programming, the bilateral programming flowed through the mission director in Senegal.
And so, I was, you know, their supervisor in the AID system.

Of course, the ambassadors thought that they reported to them, so. But yes, that was an interesting dynamic. Actually, we were very fortunate. In both cases we had ambassadors who were really good to work with, so I was lucky. It could have definitely been more complicated. It was complicated enough already, right?

So, we had two AID representatives—I think that was it, that was the term, AID representatives—both of whom had arrived within, like, the last year, like about a year before I arrived. So, they'd been there, they'd kind of been getting their feet on the ground. And then, in Burkina, we also had a U.S. direct hire, a new U.S. direct hire position as a health officer because of this malaria program. So, the staff that were there also then took on working on some of these resilience activities. But then, there were also staff in Dakar, so the Dakar mission was staffed up. A second deputy was added for the Sahel, so there were—I had two deputies, one for Senegal and one for the Sahel. And there was a Sahel regional office based in Dakar that had their own program person. They had some technical people; they had an M&E (Monitoring and Evaluation) person. So, yeah, it was a significant shift in the kind of institutional arrangement that had taken place.

I'm not sure if that was very coherent, but basically, there had been staffing up in Dakar, with the Sahel regional office. There had been a lesser amount of staffing up in Burkina

Faso and in Niger, including the addition of U.S. direct hire for the first time in close to twenty years.

Q: Right. Before we go on, talk a little bit about what this resilience programming was. I just have to ask a question since you talked about the Sahel region. Does the Club du Sahel in Paris still exist? And did you have to interact with them as well?

FINE: It does exist, but it exists more as a kind of policy research function as opposed to a donor funding organization function.

Q: Right. But in terms of theory and helping to identify issues, had other donors bought into the whole resilience strategy?

FINE: So, I think the—I'm trying to remember which of the other donors were really engaged. The bilaterals at the time who were operating in those—in Burkina Faso and Niger—I mean, certainly the EU at a policy level was very supportive because, of course, after the U.S., they're the biggest funder of humanitarian response. And so, you know, they were very much onboard with it and—

Q: Was Canada involved? They've traditionally done a fair amount in the Sahel.

FINE: I don't recall them being a big player in this. The other organization that we worked very, very closely with in both countries, particularly in Niger, was the World Food Program. And we were really lucky that, especially in Niger, which was the larger part of the resilience program, the guy who was the country director for WFP at the time just really understood what we were trying to accomplish and saw how the World Food Program could complement some of the things that we were doing. Like, they have the ability to do cash for work, so what happened was in—communities had been identified through a process of looking at historical data on where the recurring humanitarian crises were happening and that was how we then targeted areas to do the resilience programming.

And then, once those had been identified and the implementing partners worked hand in glove with World Food Program to get communities to do sort of reclamation, soil reclamation activities and other activities that were—the technical support came through the USAID resilience program, and then WFP would, because they had this cash for work capability, so then they would be able to pay the community members for doing various kind of land restoration or putting in one of the soil conversation or water conservation techniques. It's called Half Moons. It's a way of preserving moisture in a very dry environment, you know, making the most out of the moisture that you have and the nutrition in the soil and things like that. So, there was a really nice partnership with the World Food Program, particularly in Niger.

But honestly, I would say it was very challenging just to coordinate amongst the USAID partners who were on the ground. I mean, Mercy Corps was working in both countries. I think maybe Save the Children. So, various—we already had various humanitarian and

development partners on the ground. Some of them were officially part of the resilience program and some were doing other things, but it was related. And so, you know, the mantra of resilience is layering, sequencing and integrating. So, just getting our implementing partners to know what each other was doing and to—the whole idea that you're trying to create connections between them and so that each one is bringing in—let's say one partner is doing marketing and another partner is doing soil conservation techniques.

And to get them to work together and, from the community perspective, have it be sort of seamless is actually really, really difficult. And in the early days of the resilience program, it was really hard just for our own implementing partners to work together. And there were a lot of conversations about how it took so much time for them, for their staff, instead of being out doing an activity that they were having to have meetings with other implementing partners and there was a lot of back and forth and discussion about well, is all of this coordination really worth it, and we were trying to have sort of an integrated monitoring and evaluation plan that everybody fit into and that was also tricky. You can imagine, each implementing partner has to report their own results because they have requirements under their grant or their contract to do that, but we also wanted to have a more holistic picture of what was being accomplished that wasn't just broken down into little implementing partner units, and so, to me what was really interesting and challenging about making this resilience approach work on the ground was just how much, yeah, there were a lot of obstacles that are not apparent until you actually try to do it.

Q: Well, because you were trying to feed existing programs into that framework, right?

FINE: Well, there were new programs and there was the new resilience program, which had new implementing partners but then there were some implementing partners who were already there—mainly the Food for Peace partners who were doing very similar stuff. They were doing agriculture, nutrition, you know, similar things, and so, it needed to—and often in the same place or similar areas.

Or they could be humanitarian—they could be doing humanitarian things too. So, one of the ideas of resilience is that you have a stronger connection between the humanitarian and the development work and there was this sort of transition from humanitarian to development, which means that the humanitarian partners or the development partners actually have to talk to each other.

And know what each other's doing so that they're not sending conflicting messages.

Q: Right and you don't want one of them giving out food while the other one's giving out seeds.

FINE: Exactly, yes. Right.

Q: Okay. So this was primarily in Niger and Burkina Faso?

FINE: The resilience program was focused on those two countries, yes.

Q: In those two. Just out of curiosity, was there a bilateral mission in Mali, and were they trying to do similar things?

FINE: They were, yes.
I think they were—I think they were more doing it using their existing portfolio but applying some of the resilience concepts like layering, sequencing and integrating.

Q: But any new resilience funding was going to Niger and Burkina?

FINE: Right. And unfortunately, they were also dealing with a coup at that point. I think the first Mali coup happened while I was there, the first of the recent coups.

So, that kind of sidetracked them. They didn't have a specific resilience program, I don't think, but they had—they were trying to integrate the resilience concepts into what they were already doing.

Q: And this was primarily a response to drought? Or was this also related to increasing terrorism in both countries? Had any of that started by this time? Was some conflict-driven work?

FINE: Well, it's interesting that you raise that. When I was back in Washington and the whole resilience policy was being developed, the first resilience policy, there was quite a bit of debate around whether or not we should just define it as resilience to, like, environmental shocks like drought or could be flooding, right? Natural shocks. Or whether it should also include manmade shocks, primarily conflict. And the decision was, at that time, to focus it on the natural shocks. I believe that the agency has just updated—they just published a draft update of the resilience policy and they now incorporate other kinds of shocks.

FINE: (Laughs) But maybe it was the right place to start, you know?

Q: Right.

FINE: That might have been a big decision. Anyway, at the time, the resilience program was focused on areas that were—had experienced kind of repeated shocks related to drought, effectively. And—but to your question about the CVE situation, so yes, of course, there was a significant rebellion that was happening in Mali and the coup, the first Mali coup took place while I was in Senegal. And there was a little bit of spillover of the CVE—of the extremist groups on the border between Mali and Niger. And of course, on the U.S. military side, the U.S. military was building, because of the whole issue of counterterrorism in North Africa, primarily Libya. The U.S. military was building a drone base in Agadez, Niger. And so, there was a lot of concern, interest on the part of the U.S. government about terrorism, extremism in the region. And at the time, it was primarily in

Mali, it was a little bit leaking over to—there was a little bit of instability in the northern part of Burkina Faso, but really no—I don't remember that there had been any actual terrorist attacks at that time. And—but definitely, at the U.S. government interagency level the Sahel was an area of attention, and that was also part of what drove USAID to decide to put these USAID representatives in Niger and Burkina Faso.

So—and there was an expectation that in addition to resilience, that we would be building up other programming in Niger and in Burkina Faso. Burkina Faso was implementing an MCC compact and so, one of the things that we were looking to do was how do we partner with MCC. They were doing, as I recall, irrigation, agriculture kinds of activities. So, really the—there were several things going on. There was the resilience program, implemented in Niger and Burkina Faso, and we were also charged with starting to build up a bilateral portfolio, particularly with Niger, but also with Burkina Faso.

Q: Was that with the expectation that at some point AID missions would be created?

FINE: In Niger for sure. And so, that was actually one of the things that I had to deal with when I got there, was—I remember my first trip to Niger and I was talking with the AID rep there and the team and they made some reference to the fact that the embassy was planning for a new embassy compound. And I said, "Well, are we involved in that? Because, you know, we need to be planning for a USAID mission. So, right now we only have ten desks." And they're kind of like, oh, we don't know. We haven't been involved in any meetings. So, then I meet the ambassador and the DCM and say, "Well, what's going on with this, what's happening with this new embassy compound planning?" And I'm like, "Well, you know, USAID, we think that we're going to be growing here and we're going to need to have more than ten desks in the planning." And oh, my goodness. So, don't get me off on a tangent about dealing with the OBO (Bureau of Overseas Buildings Operations) again. We had to do some heavy lifting, or rather ask our colleagues in Washington to do some heavy lifting, both the Africa bureau and the Management bureau —because the OBO team had already been there and they'd already programmed USAID for ten desks and that was absolutely not acceptable. We put together a plan, we figured that we could probably get away with forty desks, which is still small for a USAID mission, but under the circumstances we didn't think that we could get more than that. I don't know how many we ended up with, but that was a battle that I fought. I guess it worked out because we do have a USAID mission there now.

It became a mission I think maybe five years ago. I'm not sure exactly when, but I think they're on their second mission director now.

Q: What about Burkina? Is that still just part of a regional?

FINE: I think it's still an AID rep position and I assume it's still, under—reports to Dakar. In fact, I'm sure of that, yeah. And right now, with the coup in Burkina Faso, we wouldn't be planning a mission.

Yeah, so, one of the things that was really interesting to me, going back to Burkina Faso, to Niger, meeting with government counterparts, the impact of not having this long relationship with the country was so clear. You know, I had a real contrast between the longstanding relationship and credibility that we had in Senegal and Burkina Faso and Niger, they hardly knew USAID. I think they sort of knew we were there, but we hadn't had real strong representation. We hadn't had relationships. I mean, the local staff had technical relationships with their technical counterparts in the ministry, but at the leadership levels in the government they didn't know who they were, they didn't understand how we operated.

Q: And none of them had been around when Niger had been a quite large and substantial mission?

FINE: I don't know. I really sensed the—what a difference it makes when we have this kind of sustained engagement. So, I told both of our AID reps "Look, part of your job is you've got to just build this relationship. Get in there and talk to them, get them engaged in our portfolio, find ways to just build trust and credibility." And you know, that's not something that happens overnight. So, it was clear to me that there's a significant cost when the agency goes in and out of a place.

Obviously so much that—there's no alternative, I understand that, but I really saw the impact of it.

Q: That's right.

Related to this lack of experience in building relationships with counterparts, do you think there is any way that people can be trained to be more effective in that? Should it be part of early training, even role playing?

FINE: I think that would be a good idea. You know, if you think about the kind of training that an AID officer, Foreign Service officer typically gets, early in their career, it's technical. Okay, they get supervision training, and teambuilding and things like that, but that's—those are kind of internally focused.

Q: Yes, it's mostly internal, yeah.

FINE: They're not so much focused on how you build a relationship with your counterparts. And yeah, I think most of us, as you say, we learn it by observing more experienced officers, which is great, but maybe we don't always have the luxury of doing that now. The world has changed so much there are probably different ways of building those relationships than in the past. And so, yeah, I think it absolutely—because it's critical. You have to have—those relationships are what makes things happen and—

Q: And I think it's harder to develop the relationships when you're doing less direct government-to-government work as well.

FINE: Yes, right.

Q: Interesting, although very sad to see what's happened in both Niger and Burkina.

FINE: Well, Niger's doing okay so far.

They did have a democratic transition, I think last year, and they continue to be, I think, a good partner of the U.S. government. Not—of course, they have many, many problems. They're still at the bottom of the human development index and—but I think overall, they're trying. And so, yeah, I haven't looked at the budget, but we do have a mission there now, so.

Q: Good. (Laughs) Since I had to help close all those places in the nineties, I still feel a bit guilty…

FINE: They have the highest rate of early child marriage of any country in the world. Terrible.

Q: Anything else on your Senegal experience that comes to mind?

FINE: Well, I mean, it was a really exciting, interesting time. I loved the diversity of things that I was involved in. And I did a lot of, of course, mentoring of younger staff. We had some incredible Senegalese staff and we were, like many other missions, trying to figure out ways to give them more responsibility and prominence and really recognizing they're—that they, you know, when I talk about credibility with the government, often it was—they were the embodiment of that.

You know, they were the trusted people at the ministry of health or the ministry of finance or the ministry of education, and so really, finding ways to support the incredible professional Senegalese staff that we had was something that I worked on. There was actually a sort of uncomfortable issue in the bigger embassy community that arose around treatment of local staff. Fortunately, the ambassador was very open to listening and receptive to—I mean, he was, what I would say on the right side of the issue. But there were others who felt that—there was an incident and it kind of blew up a lot of simmering resentment on the part of mainly State Department local staff about how they were treated by Americans and it resulted in a whole series of conversations embassy-wide. And really, what that showed was a lot of the USAID FSNs were kind of coaching or telling their State Department peers, "Look, you know, it doesn't have to be this way. You can have these different sorts of relationships." And so, interestingly, some of the USAID FSNs kind of emerged as leaders in the broader embassy community on this issue.

Q: Were you co-located with the embassy?

FINE: Yes. By that—at that point, we were all in a new embassy compound.

And so, I was fortunate to have very good relationships with the embassy leadership. For the majority of my time there the ambassador was James Zumwalt, and he had not served in Africa before. He had been the DCM in Japan and most of his career had been in Asia, but he was really interested in and excited to be serving in Africa. And he was—but he didn't try to tell me what to do. I mean, he gave me—he actually was terrific at giving me advice, and he also, when I needed some sort of political muscle on some things, then he came along and provided that. And so, it was really a—it was a wonderful and very constructive relationship.

Q: That sounds fantastic.

FINE: So, as I said when I went there, I was hoping that my husband would join me after a few years.

But then it became apparent that he was not going to be doing that. He wasn't ready to give up what he was doing. That's okay, understandable. And then also, both of my parents were starting to have some sort of significant health issues. And so, I really started questioning whether I should serve for a full four years. And I loved the job. It was really just wonderful—it was, yeah, it was an incredible job. It was, like, my dream job. And so, I really struggled with what to do, but ultimately I did finally come to the decision that I needed to ask to curtail and return to Washington because I thought, my parents might not be here that much longer and how will I feel if they, you know, how will I feel about that if I'd been here all this time. And honestly, Patrick and I did not see each other very much during those two years and you always wonder, like, how much separation can a relationship withstand.

So, I mean, I literally struggled with it for several months. But when I finally came to the decision, I knew it was the right decision, even though it was hard and I was very, very sad to leave the team there and the work, but I knew it was the right decision. And so, I bid on positions in Washington, and in fact, I bid on positions that I thought would not be too demanding, instead of bidding on a DAA job, which would be expected for somebody coming out of a mission director position. It didn't really work out that way, but that's for another session.

Only two years in Senegal, but it was a wonderful two years in Senegal and the Sahel. And that's a part of the world that still is special to me.

Q: Right. But it was a meaningful two years and you made a difference when you were there.

FINE: It was meaningful and I felt that I really had, of course I had challenges and I didn't do everything perfectly, but I felt like I had, by and large, the tools that I needed to do—to manage well.

Q: Okay, why don't we stop for now? Next time, we will start with your new position in Washington.

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AID/Washington, Policy Bureau, Director, Office of Development Cooperation, 2016 – 2017, and Senior Deputy Assistant Administrator for Policy Bureau, 2017 - 2019

Q: Okay. Today is February 23, 2023, and this continues the interview of Susan Fine.

Susan, last time we spoke about your meaningful tour in Senegal and the difficult decision to return to Washington. But you did become director of the Office of Development Cooperation in the Bureau for Policy, Planning and Learning. And I believe this would have been the beginning of 2016, probably.

FINE: Yes, that's correct. In fact, I started in January 2016. And you know, I didn't know a whole lot about the Office of Development Cooperation. I did, of course, you know, I knew in general what it did, that it was focused on, you know, coordinating agency engagement with other development partners, I knew that it, you know, supported our representative at the OECD DAC, as well as several other USAID sort of donor representatives in like, the EU and Japan. And—but you know, I didn't really understand a whole lot about that—the realm of what I would really term development diplomacy. And you know, I think that it is an underappreciated aspect of our development work and I feel really fortunate that I kind of stumbled into this opportunity to learn about that because you know, because, as I think, you know, we all know, there's not enough money to on our own address all the problems that we have, and we often are able to do things, you know, accomplish a lot more if we do it with others. And also, I mean, the fact of the matter is that, you know, the United States is the world's largest provider of overseas development assistance, ODA, and you know, I think we don't leverage that enough, we don't do enough to get the, you know, to really use that to back us up in terms of getting alignment with other development partners kind of around priorities and things like that. So, development approaches, but that's really what the Office of Development and Cooperation is all about. It's kind of like a niche activity. (Laughs)

Q: It probably varies a lot from administration to administration as well, because some AID administrators have gotten more involved in development, diplomacy than others. Who was the AID administrator at this point? And did you know him or her before you went into the position?

FINE: Ah, let's see. This was before the election, so it was Gayle Smith. And obviously, she is somebody who really knows how to work the international system, you know, based on her experience from coming from the National Security Council. She, you know, she actually already knew a lot of her counterparts, and other major donors. So, she was quite, I would say quite, very supportive of it and involved. I mean, not involved in the sense of directing our every move, but she did bring in a DAA into PPL, Barb Hendry, who had a lot of experience working at the UN and working on G-7, G-20, things like that. And so, Barb was really the one who we worked with most closely, and I learned a tremendous amount from her about, particularly about some of the G-7 and

G-20 processes and the whole—there's all these negotiations that go on leading up to these meetings. There's a development working group, which, you know, I didn't even know about before I got to PPL, that is focused on development agenda issues. And then the DAC, the OECD DAC, has its whole calendar of events and negotiations.

So, one thing, one of the things that the DAC does, I think people are aware of this, is every five years each DAC member is subjected to a peer review, a review by its development DAC member peers, and it so happened that the U.S.'s number was up in 2016. And I remember, maybe like my first week in the office as I'm talking to people and trying to figure out what the OECD do and what we have to be focusing on. Somebody said, "Oh, and by the way, the OECD DAC peer review group is coming next month." And I said, "What?" And there hadn't been a whole lot of preparation that had gone on for that, so that was one of the first things that I had to deal with.

The good thing about that peer review was, fortunately because of all the work that had been done under Raj Shah and in the Obama Administration, the agency was looking pretty good in terms of our overall policies. I mean, of course, there are some perennial areas that we would always get criticized for, but we came out very strongly in terms of our work in private sector engagement. We don't come out so strongly in terms of the use of country systems. That won't be a surprise to you. But anyway, I think the peer reviews are a good exercise because in addition to getting kind of feedback and constructive criticism from our fellow donors, it's an opportunity for us also to kind of reflect a little bit on our policies and our practices and you know, what we can do better.

Q: Can I ask a question or two about the review process? Who were the peers that were reviewing us? I assume it was not all DAC members together.

FINE: No, no. No. It's usually two or three other countries, and then, it's coordinated by a staff person from the DAC. And I honestly don't remember who the other countries were who were our peer reviewers at that time. And they also come to headquarters. And it's not just USAID; they're actually reviewing all the parts of the U.S. government that are involved in managing ODA. So, we had to coordinate with Treasury, which has the multilaterals, with the State Department, which also manages funding to multilaterals as well as some bilateral funding.

Q: MCC?

FINE: MCC. You know, there's twenty-two U.S. government agencies that manage U.S. foreign assistance, so I mean, some of them, obviously, there's a few that account for the vast majority of it. We were the focal point across the USG for this exercise. But you know, in retrospect it was actually quite a good introduction for me to understand the work that was being done. I learned a lot about the DAC and what it does and what it doesn't do. And there's a whole line of effort at the DAC that's around negotiation of very detailed, technical negotiations around how you define what counts as ODA. And one of the things that happened in 2016 was, if you recall, there was a big wave of migration into the EU and so a lot of the European members of the DAC were pushing to

have the definition of ODA opened up to allow them to count what they called in-donor costs, meaning if they spent money to house and take care of these migrants coming from developing countries they wanted to be able to count that towards their ODA targets. And so, there was a big debate at the DAC about that. Of course, the U.S. was opposed because we thought well, that's going to divert resources from actual development in developing countries. But you could understand why the Europeans wanted to do that.

So, one of the things that I found when I got into this position was that under Raj Shah, some of the donor representative positions had been downgraded. The DAC representative had always been in the past a senior Foreign Service person, generally somebody who had been a mission director and had a lot of experience and credibility. And I think Raj didn't necessarily appreciate these roles and he saw them as a nice cushy job that they did before they went off to retirement. The fact of the matter is that people did retire after being that, but I'm not sure I would agree that it was a cushy job, but you know, they were there because they had experience and understanding and whatnot. Anyway, they were downgraded. And what I realized was that that was really disadvantaging us in terms of being able to represent U.S. interests in the DAC because we had Foreign Service officers who were FS-1 level officers who had experience but not the same thing as having somebody who's at the level of a minister counselor of even a career minister. And so, one of my accomplishments was I convinced the administrator to agree to reinstate, at least for the DAC position, to reinstate that as a Senior Foreign Service position.

Q: Had Raj Shah also eliminated positions in some places? I'm just wondering how many countries USAID had donor coordination representatives.

FINE: There was one in Brussels at the EU. And there was one in Japan. And that one had also been downgraded. I think the EU one had never been a Senior Foreign Service position. I'm not sure why, but the Japan one had been downgraded. And was there another one?

Q: Was there one in London?

FINE: No. There had been talk of establishing one in London, but that had never actually happened. And I think it wasn't necessary because we worked so well—you know, I asked people, why don't we have somebody in London because it was such a strong partner. But then, that was kind of the reason we didn't need it because we had such good ties, sort of across the board in all sectors it wasn't really necessary whereas I think Japan has always—they have a very different approach and they're influential, they bring a lot of resources, but they work very differently from us, so I think that there's some justification for having a person in Japan.

What we did, though, was we proposed that the position be expanded to include South Korea because South Korea was growing their development budget quite rapidly, and at the same time they told us, "We don't have the capacity to manage it, because our staff isn't growing, or at least not growing as rapidly." And so, I thought, well, here's an

opportunity for us to build a strong partnership with South Korea and maybe we can manage some of their funds for them. So, we were moving in that direction, but then when there was a change in administration, we hadn't gotten it done before the change in administration and then things changed.

So, anyway, it was very interesting. Yeah, it's a whole other world, it's a whole other piece of working in development. The G-20 was another big forum where we were trying to harmonize approaches and policies and I had no idea—before this—that USAID was involved in the G-20.

Q: Didn't the Feed the Future initiative come out of the G-20?

FINE: The G-7 and then the G-20, that's correct.

Q: Did the G-7 or G-20 get involved with global health issues?

FINE: Oh, definitely, yeah. Global health was a strong theme, epidemic preparedness. Kind of ironic, right? (Both laugh) All right , I'm trying to remember what some of the things were that we were focusing on in the G-20 at that point. I remember Germany was the host for that year. I think, you know, 2016, a lot of it was about, because of the migration crisis in Europe and talking about what do we do as the G-20 to support developing countries, essentially to be able to keep their people at home instead of letting them migrate. That was definitely a strong theme. And I believe also, the SDGs, the Sustainable Development Goals, which had been adopted in 2015, and so there was a strong emphasis on how are we following—how are we progressing towards meeting the Sustainable Development Goals, you know, do we have the—it was getting down to more—some practical issues like do we have in place the monitoring structures to be able to track and measure what's happening with the Sustainable Development Goals. There was a lot of discussion around the concept of no one left behind, and particularly certain members of the G-20, like Brazil and South Africa and China. That was a very important issue to them and they were always trying to get more commitment from the, you could say the wealthier members of the G-20 because they saw that as kind of a lever or leverage, to try and push for more resources to help them, even though, you know, they were middle income countries but still, they have their development challenges. The concept of no one left behind operates at different levels. It operates at the international level and it also operates at the national and subnational level and you know, even—every country, including the United States has parts of our country that are suffering and have been left behind.

Q: You mentioned China. Had China begun some of its large assistance programs?

FINE: Yes; the belt and road initiative.

Q: Was there much special about that?

FINE: Right. Oh, and that's where we had another person. We had a person in China, an AID rep in China and that was actually, in the next administration became a significant issue, but we did have somebody in China. In the Obama Administration the relationship with China in the development and humanitarian space was seen as an area where we could work together. There were so many areas of the U.S.-China relationship that were contentious, even then, and so, there was—the administration, the White House was really encouraging this kind of U.S.-China high-level development dialogue, so that was one of the things that we worked on, preparing and it took a lot of effort.

One of the issues that was a focal point of this was trying to get the Chinese government to be more transparent about their humanitarian work and to coordinate with other humanitarian actors when they went when they were helping with a humanitarian response in a developing country. There was finally a development dialogue that happened in Beijing. Gayle Smith went to lead it and I'm not sure that there was a whole lot of progress made, but that was seen as an area where the U.S. and China could have a more positive kind of interaction. And so, the White House really encouraged USAID in that regard.

Q: That's an important point to make because now it's viewed as a more competitive relationship.

FINE: Right, yeah.

Q: One other thing obviously happened during that year that wasn't donor related – that is the election and later transition planning. Were you involved at all in any of that work on the transition?

FINE: Yeah. So, yes. So, the head of PPL, or I guess it would have been the acting head at that time, was Wade Warren, and he—and yeah, he was—PPL was designated by the administrator to lead the transition planning process. And so, it was primarily the policy office that was tasked with supporting that effort but the entire PPL kind of leadership was involved in identifying—I think we had something like eighteen or twenty different papers on different topics that were identified and then tasked out sort of across the agency on all these different subjects where—and the idea was to sort of first, kind of have a concise resumé of the status of whatever the issue might be, you know, humanitarian assistance, Feed the Future, Workforce, all of these things that an incoming administrator needs to know about. And then, PPL was responsible for reviewing the products and editing them and getting them sort of approved. I think there was a leadership team composed of several AAs from different bureaus. They were all career people, so there could be no political appointees involved in putting together the transition book, which I think is interesting, right, that it's all career.

At some point during 2016 I was asked to be an acting DAA (Deputy Assistant Administrator) because there was a political DAA who had left and so, they needed to fill the DAA slot, so I was probably, at this point, mostly participating in that role as opposed to my Office of Development Partners role. But in any case, yeah, it was, I think in

general putting together these transition books is a good exercise for career staff to reflect on the state of the agency and you know, what some of the key issues are that they would like to see resolved. Certainly one of the issues that we addressed in one of the papers was the need to still strengthen, reestablish the agency's policy function, the length between strategy policy and budget because at this point, yes, we had PPL, which covered policy and the program cycle of project design, strategic planning, monitoring, evaluation and learning, which was great, but it was divorced from budget because the budget office was still in the administrator's office. I'm 99 percent sure that there was a paper about that, about that issue and the importance of reconnecting the budget to strategy and policy.

And we would have had one relating to international engagement and especially as an incoming administrator they need to know what are the immediately upcoming high level events that they would be expected to participate in and what the issues they might need to be prepared for, et cetera, et cetera.

Q: Right, that sounds good.

Since you were looking at development, cooperation and what other donors were doing, were there things that other donors were doing that you wished AID were doing? Did you ever get jealous looking at what other donors were doing?

FINE: (Laughs) You know, I would say so. I think—well, obviously one of the things that there was envy around maybe was, you know, the fact that there are other donors who are—have more capability to channel their funding through—either through national governments or through—to local organizations without the kind of heavy duty paperwork and whatnot that the U.S. government does. And so, that's probably one area. And then, quite honestly, another area is that, you know, many other, some other donors, you know, their A budget just is not as much of a political football as ours is. I would say that's particularly true for the Nordic countries. It used to be true for the UK, but interestingly, in the UK at the time, like when we did the peer review, they were always sort of gloating about the fact that they had it in their constitution that they would meet the sort of UN target that countries would give 0.7 percent of their GDP for aid and the UK had been meeting that.

When they had a change of administration subsequently then they no longer were meeting it. I mean, one interesting point about the UK, though, was that for a number of years they were a leader in direct support to the government, being able to do cash transfers. But even by 2016 they had pulled back from that, and they pulled back from it because they had accountability problems and they weren't getting the results that they were expecting. So, yeah, just kind of interesting to see that they had learned some lessons from that experience.

Q: Okay, that's good. Thanks very much.

Are there other things about the work on development cooperation? You were acting DAA for some time, but I assume you weren't given the permanent assignment until after the election and transition. Anything more on your development cooperation position?

FINE: I don't know if there's anything specifically more of Development and Cooperation other than just to say that I became convinced, as a result of that experience, that we need to, as an agency we really need to expose more people to that aspect of the work and give them more opportunities to be part of that and to develop skills and expertise in that area, so.

Q: I know that they've now instituted training programs at FSI for new mission directors and new deputy directors. Does that include anything related to other donors, collaboration?

FINE: I don't know because I'm not involved in that.

Q: Okay.

FINE: Anyway, so yes, at some point, you know, there were transitions, you know, during the course of that year of 2016. Well, eventually Gayle Smith left, I guess when, well, she left when the administration changed. I guess that would have been the beginning of 2017.

And so, Wade Warren, who had been the head of PPL, moved up to be the acting administrator. Actually, before he went there, I think he became an acting deputy administrator while Gayle was still there. So, he moved out of PPL. Patricia Rader, who was the senior DAA, became the acting head of PPL sort of towards the end of 2016 and then stayed on as the head into 2017, but she was scheduled to retire in June 2017, I think. So, yes, and then so, meantime, at some point I was designated to become the senior DAA. So, the good news when we had the transition was that the Trump Administration appointed Mark Green as the administrator fairly early on. I mean, actually they did much better than Obama did with Raj Shah.

But before I start talking about Mark Green, and I do have some things to say about him, one of the things that, you know, every new administration comes in and they have to develop a new national security strategy. And so, that process geared up. I was representing USAID in that process and one of the things that really worked well was I worked very closely with the policy office to get input from across the Agency on different topics.

Q: And this was led by the National Security Council? They're the lead actor in putting it together?

FINE: Yes, right. They were the lead, yes. So, they put out a list and they said, "Okay, we're going to have discussions on all of these different topics." And I mean, they were

everything from nuclear arms to China, of course, Iraq and Afghanistan. But I mean, they weren't just countries, they were subjects.

Q: Was development itself one of the topics?

FINE: No, no. It was not. And you know, economic affairs. There was a substantial list of topics.

Q: And did USAID participate in all the meetings?

FINE: Yes, we did.

Q: Would you still go off to one even on nuclear issues?

FINE: Yes.

And so, they said, "Okay, here's a list." And you know, each session you came prepared for that session with your inputs and your perspective. And of course, we had more to say on promotion of democracy. So, we had more to say in some areas than in others. But what worked really well was that the policy office in PPL would reach out across the agency to, you know, certainly the relevant technical expertise, but also to regional bureaus where that made sense and gather input and synthesize it and then come up with a set of key talking points that we wanted to inject into the process.

Q: Who else was participating in these?

FINE: State Department, Treasury, Commerce, Defense, of course, the CIA.

Q: Would HHS be participating since they have a big global health interest?

FINE: They must have participated. I'm sure they did.

Q: And were there multiple people from different agencies? Would the State Department have multiple there or would there be just one? I'm just curious.

FINE: I think State usually had maybe more than one, like maybe two people or sometimes three. Defense, obviously they had, you know, they had people from the secretary's office and then they had people representing the joint chiefs and you know, they outnumbered everybody, for sure. But anyway, I do think, you know, there was definitely a session on terrorism, extremism, and all kinds of that, that problem set. I believe it was that session where I was making the argument that extremists, they're exploiting grievance, local grievances and that one way to sort of blunt them, to counter them, if you will, is to help governments in places like Mali and other places to be able to address those grievances and take away the fuel that fuels the spread of extremism.

And I got a very, very hostile reaction from some of the—there were some prominent Trump Administration people in the National Security Council and I mean, one guy, he practically jumped across the table at me and he was like, "Why should it be our responsibility to help them" and you know, be challenging whether that was even a valid theory. Anyway, it was a very interesting experience, knowing obviously the kind of politics that we were dealing with, I felt like I had to tread very carefully and try to find ways to make a case that would resonate with the mindset of the Trump Administration.

Q: Were there other issues that automatically put USAID on the defensive? Or maybe nothing quite as severe as that one.

FINE: Yeah, nothing quite as severe as that. I mean, we did have a conversation around, as I recall, around the question of kind of prevention, the notion of prevention, and you know, being proactive and investing before there were problems as opposed to waiting until there were problems, and trying to make the case that in a fragile state, where things seem to be headed in the wrong direction, you know, making investments in like, democratic governance and—as well as economic development would be productive. I think it was met with a lot of skepticism. I remember every time we would have one of those meetings, I would go in there with a lot of anxiety.

Q: Whether you were going to get beaten up.

FINE: Right.

Q: It's interesting, in doing another oral history someone commented to me that in the early days of the QDDR USAID was at a disadvantage because the USAID representatives were all career people and State Department and others were being led by political appointees. It's really the same sort of difficulty in the early days of an interagency debate about national security. AID is always going to be at a bit of a disadvantage given the slowness in identifying AID administrators.

FINE: Yep, that's true. But I think one thing that worked, that was helpful, I mean, hard to know for sure, but we made a conscious effort in our preparation process to try and always bring concrete examples to back up the point that we were making. There was also a lot of discussion—it was maybe a thread in a number of the sessions around the utility of engaging with multilateral organizations. Surprisingly, the Trump Administration had a lot of skepticism about that, and so—and a number of agencies, not just us, were saying, "Well, actually, there are some benefits of engaging with the multilateral institutions." And so, then they would say, "Well, what?" And so, it kind of pushed us to come up with examples of that that were beneficial.

Q: That's good, an important point for folks going to those meetings.

FINE: Yeah, yeah. So, it was such a different environment from the previous administration, which had been very pro-development and, I mean, they didn't want to hear anything about the sustainable development goals. It was an experience.

Q: And this happened all very soon on, so this was probably even before Mark Green had been nominated.

FINE: It was, it was, because Wade Warren was the acting administrator and he went to the final meeting that was chaired by H.R. McMaster, who was the national security advisor. So, Wade went to that and I was back benching, so yeah, so it was very early days. I mean, when the draft came out, this was prior to the final blessing meeting, but the draft came out and there was not one mention of Africa in the entire thing. And there was something else, there was another thing that was, from our perspective, a major omission relating to the role of development. So,we pushed back and we were able to—we talked with the staff and the woman at the NSC who was leading the process, actually I think she was more open to our input than some of the others and so, we were able to at least get a reference to Africa in the national security strategy. It was an interesting experience.

Q: Thank you. That's very interesting. And that's an unclassified document that is issued.

FINE: Yes.

Q: It explains what an administration's policy is going to be going forward.

FINE: Yes, the administration publishes it. It's available, or it was available on the White House website at the time.

Then, I think maybe not long after that process wrapped up Mark Green came onboard and of course, right from the opening day he introduced his vision for the journey to self-reliance. And you know, I think it was very smart on his part because it was important to lay down a marker to show that aid isn't forever, that there's an end point, that countries do progress, you know, and there was this whole discussion around the concept of transition, which made some AID missions very uncomfortable, but the fact of the matter is, it happens, it should happen, it should be something that's celebrated. And the methodology of the journey to self-reliance capitalized on some of the success of the Millenium Challenge Corporation, which of course was started in a Republican administration, and had a lot of support from Republicans on the Hill.

But it wasn't a scorecard. We said that over and over again. Mark brought over Chris Maloney, who had been the brains behind the MCC scorecard and he was the one who developed the metrics for the journey to self-reliance. The basic concept of the journey to self-reliance is not that different from other incarnations of AID policy and practice. But, in my view, his coming out with that and putting it on the table and promoting it literally from day one set a tone that was acceptable to the Trump Administration and the Republicans on Capitol Hill and using that as the frame for everything he did, and then also really embracing the perspective relating to China as a competitor, if you will, and calling out the bad practices of China in the development space, these things that he did showed the White House that he was onboard, that the agency was onboard and

supportive of their message, of their priorities. And I think that Mark Green did the agency a tremendous service by essentially keeping us out of the line of fire.

Oh, the other thing that he did, which I know was very unpopular with a lot of people, was he really supported the idea of giving more funding to faith-based groups. I don't know if you remember, he got very involved in—he paid a visit to Syria and you know, talked up the work that was being done by faith-based groups in Syria and in Iraq. I know there was some controversy about some of those decisions, but my belief is that he did those things primarily because he wanted to protect the agency and he did a pretty darned good job of protecting the agency for the time that he was there because we could—know the perspective of the Trump Administration and essentially—I mean, Trump came out and said that he thought foreign aid was a waste.

So, you know, knowing the attitude, it could easily have been a lot worse for USAID had it not been for Mark Green and the way he managed the relationship with the White House.

Q: Right. That's absolutely clear.

As I recall, the initial Trump Administration budget submissions called for dramatic reductions in foreign assistance. Is that correct? And then, they went to the Congress and the Congress provided additional funding.

FINE: Yes. Right.

Q: That must have been difficult for the field missions – being to submit a budget that was much less than you wanted and that you knew you would probably be getting increased by the Hill? Were you involved at all with how people tried to manage that process?

FINE: Well, I wasn't directly involved in that because I wasn't managing a program at that point. However, I talked to people who were and it was very difficult. You know, I think some people sort of did the equivalent of keeping two sets of books, the one that went into the Congressional budget justification and then, the one that they actually expected to happen. So, yeah, that was—it's very difficult to have such a large gap, either much lower than you are likely to get or much higher than you are likely to get. Either way, it makes it very difficult to plan.

Q: And that would have affected strategic planning as well, right? You were also developing a new planning process. Countries, as part of the journey to self-reliance, were submitting new strategies to lay out that journey?

FINE: Right. So, what happened was, we had a discussion with Mark Green and then Jim Richardson, who had been brought in to lead this transformation process at USAID, and I'm going to say a bit more about that. The journey of self-reliance was also part of the transformation process, so I was told, "You need to talk to Jim about these things."

So, we had to go and we briefed Jim about the program cycle. And he was a—he didn't know anything about it and so, we had to explain we have this process, it's called the program cycle, and you know, strategic plans, then project design, monitoring and all of these, and learning that feeds back in, et cetera, et cetera, because what he wanted to do was start a whole new process, and we're like, "No, that A, would be really difficult, and B, it would be really disruptive. And we have a process that we use and we can integrate the J2SR, Journey to Self-Reliance, throughout this program cycle. And so, it can be—and in that way it will be embedded in the way the agency does business, you know, and in a much more robust way than throwing the whole thing out and starting a new process." It took a couple of conversations with him to convince him of that, but we walked him through, okay, well, this is what it would be like, this is how we would do it.

You know, there was a decision to pause strategic planning until the roadmap, the country roadmaps were done. These were the sort of—at first, we had to agree on the metrics. That took a while. And I was involved in that. There were consultations with outside groups about the metrics. I don't know, you probably were involved in some of those conversations.

Q: I'm sure they were very valuable and helped you.

FINE: They were, they were. Yeah, no, there was some very good input from our partners. And then the metrics had to be agreed on, the country roadmaps had to be produced because the strategy should be based on what the metrics said, right? So, you had to have the metrics before you could do a strategy. And so, that happened and there were a number of different lines of effort to kind of implement the journey to self-reliance.

Q: Did the journey and the strategy coming out of it, did it include resources? Was there planning according to expected resource levels? If so, how did this relate to the decreased budget requests by the Administration, the need to ask for less than you really wanted?

FINE: So, we talked about—when we started—when we were getting ready to restart strategic planning, strategic plans, we had a discussion about how are we going to handle the budget. And we sat down with the budget office and negotiated that the budget office would, in consultation with the regional bureau, provide some kind of parameters for the strategic plans because you know, doing strategic plans in the absence of any kind of resource parameters just doesn't—it doesn't make any sense. So, as I recall, it was, it took a while to sort of hash out exactly what the format—what that was going to look like, how it would be done, but eventually—I was not directly involved in this, but I know eventually they arrived at some kind of methodology that was agreed to by the budget office and the regional bureaus and so, missions did have something to work with when they were doing their strategies.

Q: Okay. It was probably a lower number than they really wanted. Were they given an artificially low number just to fit into the new budget request levels?

FINE: I don't know. I couldn't say for sure. I think there were ranges that were given. I think that there were also some sector directives given.
But I wasn't intimately involved in that, so I really couldn't say.

Q: Okay. But, you did succeed in getting the journey to self-reliance built into the program process, which was a major accomplishment.

FINE: We did, yeah.

Q: The broader transformation process also included reorganization as well as the journey to self-reliance. Is that correct?

FINE: Yes, correct. It was a reorganization, yes. And I was very involved in that. And you know, really from the beginning one of my talking points with anybody who would listen was, we need to bring strategy, policy and budget together and there were many, many, many conversations, discussions, debates around that. But eventually, what was agreed to in the—as part of the reorganization plan, of course, we didn't—we weren't allowed to call it reorganization because that triggers things.

It was a transformation.

Q: Yes.

FINE: Was that there would be a bureau that was going to be called Policy, Resources and Performance, I believe the acronym was PRP. And it was essentially to bring together—it would have all of PPL—there was like one section of the Lab that dealt more with scenario planning and things like that that would come in. There was some, hmm, I don't know about duplication of effort, but like, parallel effort going on between the Lab and PPL. And then, it was envisioned to encompass the budget office. We spent many, many hours developing the vision for this new bureau and the structure and I mean, literally, we had to take org charts and positions and figure out how these positions would be shifted around. I think there were some, we might have made some changes to some of the existing PPL offices as well. I'm not quite sure about that. But anyway, yeah, it was a huge lift.

Q: And then, and you also had to do notifications to the Congress?

FINE: Yes. So, the whole transformation package, essentially, was notified to the Hill and then, I participated in a number of briefings on the Hill with the key committees, both the House and the Senate side, explaining why—particularly related to PRP. And explaining the rationale and why we were proposing to organize it the way we were. And you know, the thing was, pretty much everybody that we spoke, these are, you know, staffers, professional staffers, and many of them knew AID very, very well and were quite

sympathetic, and we got a few difficult questions, but for the most part I think people understood and agreed that it was a—that it made sense. Frankly, there were a lot more questions because these briefings would typically cover the entire or significant parts of the reorg, and honestly, there were a lot more questions about the proposed DDI bureau, Democracy, Development and Innovation, than there were about PRP. It was not controversial.

However, the other part of the reorg, the other bureaus that were created, you know, like Resilience and Food Security, DDI, the Bureau for Humanitarian Affairs, those bureaus went through and PRP was blocked, and I never really understood why. What I was told when I asked was that the PRP reorganization was essentially being held hostage to other things that the Congress wanted relating to the workforce, like having a workforce strategy for the agency. You know, it doesn't make a whole lot of sense to me. I have my ideas about at least what part of the issue may have been. The people in the budget office, which had been located—which was located in the administrator's office, were not happy about being moved out of the administrator's office —they saw it as a demotion.

So, I surmise, I do not have evidence but I surmise that there was lobbying that took place.

Q: Behind the scenes. It wouldn't be the first time people at AID did some informal lobbying.

FINE: No. And who knows what other factors were at play. But it's actually been one of my—I feel like it was one of my big failures, was that I didn't manage to get that accomplished for the agency.

Q: But one of the reasons that I heard was that it was because the head of the new Policy and Resource Bureau would not be a Senate-confirmed assistant administrator position. There were people in the Congress who didn't want to create such a powerful bureau that they didn't have confirmation authority over.

FINE: I agree with that, but that was a choice that was made by Mark Green and Jim Richardson, to allocate the Senate-confirmed positions in other places. We, the career people, made that point. We said, "This is the person that is representing the administration on policy and budget for USAID. It must be a politically-appointed Senate-confirmed position." So, it's not that it couldn't have been, it's that in the bigger reorg that they made the choice to allocate the Senate-confirmed positions elsewhere.

And you know, the rationale was that it was going to report to a DA—because the plan had two deputy administrators, which we do have now, and the idea was, well, it's going to report to a deputy administrator who will be Senate-confirmed and so, that person will be the spokesperson for the agency on policy and budget. That was the rationale that we were given. We career people argued strenuously for the head of the bureau to be one of those Senate-confirmed positions, but we lost.

Q: Okay. Can I ask you a question about another part of the transformation that you alluded to, that is the Development, Democracy and Innovation bureau. I know some people did not want democracy in that bureau; they thought it would be best in the bureau with conflict and stabilization. Was that an issue that you were involved with?

FINE: Well, I worked on a daily basis with Jim Richardson because at a certain point he was named as the assistant to the administrator for PPL.

Which was not a Senate-confirmed position. Because Raj Shah, when he created PPL, didn't have enough Senate-confirmed positions, so the Assistant to the Administrator for PPL is not, to this day, Senate-confirmed.

So Jim was appointed the head of PPL, I was his senior DAA and so we did PPL stuff, but he was also dual-hatted as the head of the transformation. So, yes, we interacted on pretty much a daily basis about a lot of things. There was a senior leader council that was set up to provide guidance to the transformation process, so I was part of that. And so, yeah, there were conversations— the council was involved in discussions about DDI and about whether Democracy should be part of it. I think my concern was more around the scope of the DDI bureau. It just seemed unmanageable. It was set up with something like five or six DAAs. I mean, from a management perspective I really questioned how you could have coherence across a bureau of that scope. One of the rationales for DDI was to strengthen the linkages between the various sectors that were part of DDI, including education and, of course, democracy and economic growth and trade and environment and a bunch of other things. And while I am very much a supporter of linking and finding synergies and whatnot, I guess I also think that—and it also was going to incorporate most of the lab, so to sort of mainstream innovation. But I also think that you just have to look at management practicalities and yeah, to me it didn't. And then, there was a concern about the visibility of the democracy work by subsuming it in this other bureau, was it somehow going to be less visible. I think there's maybe validity to that.

Q: Okay. Mark Green often mentioned that the transformation was career-led, and most of the working groups doing all of this work were career people.

FINE: That is true. The working groups were career people.

Q: And then Jim Richards led the process?

FINE: Yeah, but I mean, obviously, the broad outlines of it, and in fact, a lot of the details, were driven by Jim Richardson and some of the other senior political people. I mean, it's true that they took some ideas that were percolating out there, like bringing together policy and strategy and budget, and I think on the—particularly with respect to—towards the humanitarian operations, I think—and also with respect to the work around food security, resilience, wanting to bring that closer together. So, it's not wrong to say that there were career ideas that were reflected in the transformation. I'm not sure I would go as far as to say it was career-led. (Laughs) Career-informed maybe.

Q: Okay, but still better than some.

FINE: Yeah, that's right, yeah. And you know, another thing about the transformation process, I was thinking about this as I was preparing for our conversation, but it was originally launched by Secretary Tillerson. He didn't last very long at the State Department. But it was launched as a State and USAID exercise.

And there was a very high-level retreat where the State and the AID representatives were supposed to formulate a joint vision for what they together were trying to accomplish in foreign affairs. And I've always suspected that one of the original purposes of the transformation was to fully bring USAID under the thumb of the State Department. And I think, ironically, what it showed was that USAID was, in many ways, stronger in terms of its systems than the State Department. And while the people who are running it may have started out thinking that this was going to be a way to really bring AID more firmly under the control of the State Department, I think that over time they realized well, actually, the State Department has a lot of problems, bigger problems than USAID does and so, maybe we need to actually focus on the State Department's problems. And I'm not sure whatever happened, if much ever happened really with the transformation effort in the State Department, but in some kind of funny way it actually helped USAID.

Oh, there was this survey, now I remember. Tillerson wanted to have this worldwide survey of all State and AID employees to get feedback to inform the transformation. And what came in was, for USAID was an incredibly high level of people saying that they loved the mission of USAID and that that's what motivated them, and there was not such a high number for the State Department. And I think it really made a difference. And it's true, you know. Most USAID people are very motivated by the mission.

So, it kind of played out in a way that I don't think that was expected by those who started it. But there was another example of where Mark Green stood up and really protected the agency. There was this big town hall where Tillerson was unveiling this new vision and mission statement, and the language that they presented, in front of everybody, was not the language that Mark had agreed to and so he had to go—he didn't do it in the open public meeting, but he had to go back to the secretary and push back and say, "No, no, no,".

Q: So, did it get fixed?

FINE: So, I mean, the agency owes a real debt of gratitude to Mark Green.
And, yeah. He had a tough job. (Laughs)

I will say also, of course, we were continuing to participate in various international engagements at the DAC, at the G-20, and I represented in some of them now as the senior DAA, so at a higher level, and in negotiating various documents, policy statements we were directed by the White House to change language around, you know, we couldn't talk about a gender, couldn't talk about—there were, like, these code words that were

considered to be not acceptable, like inclusion, being inclusive, anything that smacked of—

Q: Wokeness.

FINE: —wokeness, you know, references to LGBTQ were totally out. And also, of course, any reference to climate change had to be negotiated out.

Q: I heard at one point there was a controversy about the term universal healthcare.

FINE: That's correct, right, because it's socialist.

Yeah, and honestly, as a development professional, I was literally having to push for language that I knew to be wrong. And it was very unpleasant. And that's actually part of what motivated me, when I eventually decided, okay, I've had enough of this. Time to move on.

Q: Yes; it was hard just being a private American going into other international fora during that time because we were looked at very suspiciously, but to be a government employee (laughs).

FINE: Well, and to be representing, trying to defend policies that are antithetical to development is just really difficult. And even though I think a lot of the people sitting around the table that you're negotiating with, you know, you get to—some of them are the same people year after year after year, and so you get to know them and they get to know you, and on one level you know that they know you're doing—pushing the position that you are because of who's in the White House, but it still just is not a good feeling.

Q: Right. One of the other things I see in your CV refers to a diversity and inclusion committee. Was that for the PPL bureau, or was that a wider agency-wide effort?

FINE: It was for PPL. And it was an initiative of several of our PPL staff who came to the front office and they said, "You know, we think that we need to do some work in promoting diversity and inclusion," not just in terms of staff, but also in terms of receptiveness to different ideas. Of course, our policy calls for inclusion and listening to different voices and perspectives when we're developing strategies and projects and all of those sorts of things. And so, their point was, well, we should probably be doing that as a bureau. And so, I thought it was a very good idea, and so we did establish that diversity and inclusion committee, which I believe—which I was told by HCTM was the first, we were the first bureau to establish one of those. And they did a survey to better understand employees' perspectives on some of these issues. They put together, with input from other staff, they put together an action plan. I don't know that it had any, while I was there, that it had any huge accomplishments, but I think just the fact that we were talking about it and becoming more mindful of it, I think we did do some training, some sort of awareness training, you know, unconscious bias and things like that, which I found very helpful.

Q: I believe the agency a bit later did a diversity and inclusion strategy, which was an agency-wide effort and it was one of the things that got held up after Mark Green left.

FINE: I left while he was still administrator.

Q: Okay. So, I think this was probably then after, but I suspect that the work you did in PPL may have fed into what the agency did. But, it didn't get approved until the change in administration.

FINE: Right. I mean, I didn't think of it as being that radical, but maybe at some level it was.

Q: (Laughs) But PPL was revising agency strategies during this period as well?

FINE: Yes. Yes, definitely. We had a—of course, we produced a policy framework that was based on the journey to self-reliance, and then there was a process whereby, sort of systematically, various sector policies and whatnot were updated, and that process had started when I was there, but it was by no means finished.

Q: Well, it sounds like an incredibly busy time with transformation taking place, both programmatically in the journey to self-reliance and organizationally.

FINE: Yeah, a lot was done. And of course, when there was another change in administration, I wasn't there anymore, but there was a lot of talk about what will happen to the journey to self-reliance because it's associated with a certain administration. I'm sure the terminology has kind of fallen out of favor, but I've been looking at some strategies, country strategies recently, and the roadmap is still there, still being used, you know, the metrics.

And also some of the concepts around particularly thinking about how do we—it's not just a question of money, it's also a question of, as we're negotiating our engagement with a particular country we need to think not only about the financial resources that we bring to bear, but also the influence that we have and the convening power that we have and think about policy changes that need to accompany funding resources. So, for example, in some strategies, they identify policy areas that they intend to work to change along with programs, and I think that that's a step in the right direction because in many countries, not everywhere, some places we don't have very much credibility, but in many countries we have a lot of credibility and particularly in countries where we're bringing a lot of resources to the table, that's important.

There was the new partnership initiative, which continued the conversation around identifying working with new partners, both on the U.S. side, but and—as well as local partners. There was an emphasis on local capacity building, which is still there, more robust in the localization policy. There was a piece of the journey to self-reliance that was probably the least developed, but it was called Redefining the Relationship With the

Country, and we had a whole series of conversations around G-to-G (Government-to-Government funding) and how do we move that process forward, how do we make it less cumbersome and more useful. So, I don't know where those things stand now, but we were working on it.

So, the journey to self-reliance did pick up a lot of things that had been sort of—threads that had been running through the, you know, or lines of effort that had been going on for quite a long time.

Q: And in fact, just to show the consistency in a lot of this, I believe that the presidential determination that related to development in the Obama Administration refers to the end of assistance relationships in countries. Even if you go back in the sixties and look at the origins of the agency, they talked about the end of assistance. So, it's, I mean, it's a concept that has always been there. There's never anything brand new.

FINE: No. Rarely. (Laughs) Right. Yeah.

Q: Anything else to mention about your time as the senior DAA? It was a very busy two years and, as you noted, you were very fortunate to be working for Mark Green who really cared about development and about the agency.

FINE: He did, yeah, exactly. I would just say that I was really fortunate to have this opportunity to work on—in development, in a different kind of way than managing programs. And yeah, it made me feel well-rounded. Also, during those—I mean, they were not easy years, the last couple of years, but I was fortunate to be joined in Washington by a number of very strong women, career women who were in leadership positions in different bureaus, and there was a—we had a lot of solidarity and we supported each other as we went through different stresses and so that was important, to have that group of people who were—it just happened that they were women.

Q: Yes, those networks are important in accomplishing work as well as making life more pleasant.

FINE: Right. I won't call them out, but you know, it was interesting that there were a number of women who I had worked with in various capacities over the years who ended up being DAAs and even acting AAs of bureaus, and so we would support each other and also share information and try to use our various points of entry to influence things in a way that would be beneficial for the agency.

So, I can't exactly recall when I started thinking about retiring. It was a very intense couple of years and it was also very difficult to be working in that administration. And so, I just decided—I don't think I agonized about it too much.

I felt like I had had a very full and satisfying career with the agency and I didn't want to be one of those people that just hangs on and kind of withers on the vine, so we say. You know, go out at the top, I guess that was my philosophy.

And probably there was an element of just being tired too and wanting to do other things while I still had energy to do them.

Q: So, when did you actually retire?

FINE: My official retirement was September 30, 2019, but I left PPL around the beginning of August and went into the FSI retirement course for two months. Oh, and the other good thing about deciding to retire, I didn't have to do another AEF (Annual Evaluation Form).

Q: Oh, yes, that's the best part of all. (Both laugh)

FINE: And I was very honored that just a couple of weeks before my official retirement my promotion to career minister was confirmed. So, that was nice.

Q: Wonderful.

FINE: That was like the cherry on top.

Retirement from USAID – September 2019 – Follow-on Post Retirement Work

Q: And I know that they called you back to do a—to serve as mission director in Uzbekistan for a several months period in 2021.

FINE: Sure. Just briefly. So, well, I retired in the fall of 2019 and I had lots of plans for travel, in particular, but then, of course, a lot of that got derailed by the pandemic, six months after I retired. And I retired to New Hampshire, where I am now, where my husband and I have had a house since the mid-nineties, so it's really been wonderful to be able to live most of the time here and really get to know the community. It's a beautiful place and frankly, when the pandemic came along, I wouldn't have wanted to be anywhere else, just being able to get outside every day and walk and see mountains and the lake and fresh air. It kept me going.

But yes, towards the end of 2020 I was contacted about helping to stand up a new mission in Uzbekistan that had recently gotten congressional approval. So, the agency had decided, in part because of the whole China thing to beef up a presence in—and also because of Afghanistan, beef up presence in Central Asia. We had for a long time a regional mission in Kazakhstan that managed programs and had satellite offices in five Central Asian countries, including Uzbekistan. And the decision had been made, I think Gloria Steele, who was the AA for Asia, had really pushed to upgrade to a mission in Uzbekistan and Tajikistan. And so the agency had finally gotten the approval from Congress, but because of our personnel system, it was going to take effectively a year before a mission director could go out, an assigned mission director. So, in the meantime they wanted to get that process started. And so, I thought that was a very intriguing assignment and of course, by that time I was anxious to have an excuse to go somewhere

different. And I did it in a collaboration with Rebecca Black, with whom I had worked previously.

They wanted somebody to go for six months and neither Rebecca nor I were willing to go for six months, but what we agreed and convinced Gloria of was we would each go for three months and that we knew each other well and we'd work together and we'd make it a smooth transition and so she agreed to that. So, Rebecca went first and did her three months, and then I started in February, and then didn't actually manage to get on the ground in Tashkent until late February, beginning of March because it took a long time to get my diplomatic passport and all the rigamarole that you have to do to come back on board. What I learned was that even though I was only coming for three months, it was like I was being rehired by the agency for a new career. I mean, I had to go through the entire new employee orientation, fill out a bazillion forms, and I remember thinking that for somebody who genuinely is a new person in the agency, they would be so confused by this orientation. And anyway, I eventually got all the paperwork done and got out to Tashkent.

And it was fascinating. I'd never worked in Central Asia. Of course, no country is exactly alike, but Uzbekistan had—went through a lot—after the breakup of the Soviet Union they had even a more repressive government until 2016, and then a new president came in who was a reformer and so—and had opened to the U.S. and the West. And so, that's why the State Department and USAID felt that there was an opening. However, it was still pretty closed and an extremely bureaucratic place. I mean, literally, we had to send a diplomatic note in order to have a meeting with a government official. And our partners had to send diplomatic notes. It was a really difficult environment to work in. A lot of our partners were having difficulty even getting registered to be able to work and you know, so establishing a productive working relationship with the government was a huge challenge. And then, there was the whole internal separation from the Central Asia mission in Almaty.

So, when I got there, there was no program office in Tashkent. There was one person who did program functions, so you had to build the program office. There had been some recruitment. Rebecca had worked on that, so at least we had some positions that were on the bid list, just sort of building up the staff, but we had to also look at FSN hiring. There was also a need to expand the physical space. And the embassy was very supportive because they wanted AID to grow there, but then there were—I had yet more negotiations with the Office of Overseas Buildings. It was a theme in my career with USAID. There was an expansion plan but we had to work with OBO to expedite that process, which you can imagine was, remember all the supply chain things that happened during COVID, well, it affected that as well. And we were starting to lay the groundwork for a—not a country strategy, but a strategic framework. And so, Rebecca had gotten that going and I worked with the team and the bureau to move it a little bit further along so that at least there would be the outlines of it when Mikaela Meredith came in as the first mission director in June 2021.

Q: And what would have been the main sort of objective of a program in Uzbekistan? Was the typical post-Soviet Union strategy focused on economy and democracy?

FINE: So, it was essentially private sector oriented economic growth, particularly in the agriculture sector. They had—their agriculture sector was massively inefficient, or is massively inefficient. And they need to create millions of jobs for a relatively large youth, young population. We were working in the justice sector to strengthen rule of law, access to justice, things like that. And then, we had an education program, which was kind of interesting. Apparently, the president of Uzbekistan really wanted—and the minister of education at the time, really wanted to modernize the education system, and thought that partnering with the U.S. was a way to do that. The program focused on English language instruction. And then on the health side, we were focusing mainly on tuberculosis and—TB and I guess there must have been a small HIV program. I really felt that we ought to be doing something with health system strengthening and tried to make the case to the Global Health bureau that we ought to have a little bit of money that wasn't TB, but I don't think it was successful. So, there was a very large TB population, including a lot of multi drug resistant TB. So, that was the focus of the program.

The government was very interested in having all the donors help them with the issue of the drying up of the Aral Sea and the desertification that happened. The region around the Aral Sea was far and away the poorest region of the country and so, they were trying to figure out what to do there, and I don't think anybody has come up with a good solution yet, but that was one of the things that the government thought was very important. It's kind of a tragic situation.

One of the earliest environmental disasters.

So, anyway, it was a good experience. The staff were great. And after I finished my assignment, I got to travel a little bit in Uzbekistan. Some of the ancient Silk Route cities were just incredible.

That was in 2021. Then last year, 2022, I was in the Kenya mission for July and August as a senior advisor. You know, they had a transition in mission leadership. There was a gap and they wanted some sort of extra help. During that time, there was the Kenya election, which is always a high anxiety event given Kenya's history, as well as a visit by Administrator Power to highlight the new drought in the Horn of Africa. And the Kenya mission is doing a lot of—has been forward leaning on localization, so it was quite interesting to learn about what they were doing.

Q: Did you have to come back again as a direct hire?

FINE: No,actually, it was as a PSC, because I told them, "I'm not doing that direct hire thing again." Because not only is it like you're joining the agency when you start—when you leave, it's like I did my whole retirement process all over again. All the steps. It was nuts. So, I said, I'm not doing that.

And then, I'm a mentor through the USAID Alumni Association. I've mentored several people and I really enjoy that. And then I've done a few things not directly for USAID, but some short consulting assignments that involve keeping up with what's going on at USAID, shall we say.

Q: Right. Sitting on the other side of the table kind of.

FINE: Right, yeah. So, yeah, so it's still home. I still say "us" when I talk about USAID.

Q: Yes, that never goes away, I'm afraid. (Laughs).

Well, we probably should think about wrapping up. Any final thoughts about your quite fantastic career with USAID? Would you recommend this career to young people today?

FINE: I do think it's something that people should consider. I know that the expectations of the current generation are different from mine. There's maybe less patience with the time it takes to advance. And maybe that's not entirely a bad thing. But I've said to many people seeking career advice that you do have the possibility to have a tremendous variety of experiences and to make a difference in a meaningful way. And I guess the idea of working for the same organization for thirty years is kind of out of fashion now, but while it's the same organization, when I think of all the things that I did, they were so—I mean, they were so different. And there even were things that I didn't do that I could have done that would have made AID even more different. Like, I never was a representative to a combatant command. There are many ways that you can make it a—make an AID career a rich and varied experience, even though you're still fundamentally working for the same organization. We need good people in the public service. More than ever, we need good people. And so I feel that I was incredibly fortunate.

Q: That's a very nice summary. Thank you very much, Susan

End of interview