

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

**CURT REINTSMA**

*Interviewed by: Carol Peasley  
Initial interview date: November 17, 2022  
Copyright 2024 ADST*

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

**TABLE OF CONTENTS**

**Childhood, Family, Education, and Early Background**

- Montana Farm Kid
- College Debater – Eastern Montana College and University of Texas
- University of Wisconsin Graduate School – Agricultural Economics
- Peace Corps – Mauritius

**Pre-USAID Direct Hire International Development Work**

- Rwanda (1978-82): Director of Government of Rwanda Agricultural Program – strong GOR commitment and significant impact
- Zaire (1982-3): Chief of Party for USAID Contract – dysfunctional government and little impact
- USAID/AFR (1984-87): Food Security Work as a USDA RSSA/PASA – Mali Success Story
- “Midnight Massacre” of RSSA/PASA Staff

**Hired as USAID Foreign Service Officer – May 1987**

- Project Development Officer

**USAID/Lesotho (1989 – 1992), Agricultural Officer**

- Integrated Rural Development Program – Too Much Technical Assistance, Not Enough Capacity Building
- Relationship with South Africa
- The Importance of Context and Local Institutional Effectiveness

**USAID/W, AFR/Sustainable Development, Division Chief (1992 – 1997)**

- Africa Bureau Food Security Initiative: Self-Generated Response to Reduced Agriculture Funding and the Value of Self-Empowerment

- Private Sector Role
- Constituency Group Outreach
- Zimbabwe Campfire Project Controversy

**USAID/W, Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs (1997 – 2000)**

- Lessons Without Borders: Building Connections Between Global and Domestic Programs
- Global Agriculture and the American Midwest: Mutual Benefits
- U.S. University Outreach and Relations
- Future Farmers of America: Sharing Benefits of USAID's Global Work

**USAID/W, AFR/Southern Africa Office (2000)**

- Mozambique Floods: Bold Initiative for Supplemental Appropriation to Address Longer Term as well as Emergency Needs
- Congressional Notification (CN) to Obligation in Three Days

**USAID/W, Global Development Alliance (GDA) Secretariat Deputy (2001 – 2004)**

- Career Staff Driven Initiative
- Institutionalizing an Initiative
- Coffee Corps
- Building a More Efficient Central Procurement Mechanism
- Due Diligence and Managing Reputational Risk

**USAID/W, AFR/Sudan Office Director (2004 – 2005)**

- Darfur and South Sudan's Fight for Self Determination

**USAID/Malawi, Mission Director (2006 – 2011)**

- PEPFAR: Inter-agency Challenges and Need for Integrated Programming – and Award for Best Coordination Between USAID and CDC
- Advocacy for Greater Attention to Family Planning – Use of RAPID Model
- Presidential Malaria Initiative
- Nutrition Programming and Ready to Use Therapeutic Food
- Agriculture Funding and Fertilizer Subsidies
- Donor Coordination and Issues – Per Diem Rates
- Anti-Corruption Work and MCC Compact Development
- Education Programming: “Soft Restriction” and “Flavors of the Month”
- Food Aid Monetization: Value of Integrated Programming and Continuity
- Personnel: Role of FSNs and Managing Junior Staff
- Temporary Detail to Secretary of State's Office in Washington, DC to Create New Food Security Initiative (Feed the Future) – Avoiding PEPFAR Model and Selecting Countries
- Length of Tour: Advantages of Longer Assignments
- Lessons for a New Mission Director

**USAID/W, Policy Bureau, Donor Engagement Office Director (2011 – 2012)**

- BRICS as New Donors

- Busan and Aid Effectiveness
- Other Donor Approaches

### **Retirement from Foreign Service (2012) – And Post Retirement Work with USAID/Food Security Bureau (2013 – 2022)**

- Public-Private Partnership with Starbucks
- Differences from the Global Development Alliance
- Innovative Procurement Actions: Broad Agency Announcement
- Monitoring and Evaluation
- Climate Change and Agriculture – Coffee and Cocoa Examples
- Global vs. Country Approaches
- Historical Look at USAID and Agriculture/Food Security Programming: Lessons
- Public-Private Partnerships: Lessons
- Concluding Thoughts on an International Development Career

## **INTERVIEW**

*Q: Today is November 17, 2022. This is Interview number one for Curt Reintsma and this is Carol Peasley doing the interview.*

*So, first, Curt, we're delighted to have the chance to interview you. Could I ask you to talk a bit about where you were born, your childhood, and your early background.*

### **Childhood, Family, Education, and Early Background**

*(Montana Farm Kid; JFK; College Debater; Peace Corps)*

REINTSMA: Sure. Thanks, Carol. And just to let you know, I really do appreciate the opportunity. So, this is all good.

I was born in rural Montana, the eastern part of the state, not too far from Billings, and grew up on a small farm. I was fully immersed in farm life, in a very dry part of eastern Montana, all the way through high school.

*Q: Was this a working farm and not just living on a farm? Was this what the family did?*

REINTSMA: That's exactly right. Farming was where our income came from. There were a few years in the early 1950s, during the post-World War II boom, when my father worked as a home building contractor, but other than that, the family's limited income came from the working farm. I wouldn't say it was technically a 'subsistence farm' in the sense that we did sell what we grew, some of it at least, but it wasn't too far from that. A small, somewhat struggling farm.

*Q: Was it a wheat farm? I remember driving through Montana once and seeing a lot of wheat. Was that one of the things that you grew?*

REINTSMA: So, I'll give you a little bit of a long answer to that question. In 1902, the federal government passed something called the Reclamation Act, designed to provide water for crops through irrigation projects in the West. What was done in this case was to build a diversion dam across the Yellowstone River in that part of eastern Montana. Then a long canal, which my maternal grandfather helped dig with a team of mules, was used to irrigate a valley alongside the Yellowstone River. It was a fairly flat valley bottom, so the land was graded and lateral canals were built to bring water to each individual farm. This is known as the Huntley Project, where I grew up with an irrigation shovel on my shoulder.

The kids in my high school were divided between the ranchers and the dirt farmers and I was a dirt farmer. So, to answer your question, we grew mostly sugar beets, which are a higher value irrigated crop, versus wheat which can be grown more cheaply on dry, non-irrigated land.

*Q: Ah, okay. Did you do 4-H and that kind of stuff as well, or was that part of the Montana ethic?*

REINTSMA: It was very much part of the rural Montana ethic. However, I personally didn't do too much of that. I don't ever remember making an explicit decision about this, but I think early on I felt like I probably wasn't going to end up on the farm. So I tended more toward an academic track versus a focus on practical hands-on farm skills. I came to somewhat regret that later in life, when I wished I had better developed practical skills. But I did not do FFA (Future Farmers of America) or 4-H or auto mechanics, unlike many of my school colleagues.

That said, I think my farm upbringing taught me some very important life lessons and values. Perhaps it's a bit of a cliché, but I do credit it with developing values like a strong work ethic, persistence in the face of setbacks, helping others in need, and much more.

As rural children in that era, we were also given a 'long leash'. On those rare days free from farm work or school, it was 'head for the hills' (in my case, literally) and just be home for supper. This freedom and lack of dependence on organized activities allowed children to develop self-reliance, self-contentment and problem solving skills.

*Q: Okay. Very good. And so, you went to high school and graduated from high school there. Did you have college in mind all along as you were going through?*

REINTSMA: My father was a child of the Great Depression and had to drop out of school after eighth grade to work on his family's farm. But he was determined that his kids would go to college. And so, we grew up with college always being an expected part of our future. My dad gave us all a cow when we were sub-teens and each year the cow

would have a calf. The calf would be sold when it got older, and the money from that calf went into each child's college fund—not to be touched for any other purpose.

So that was the start of money for college—of course, I worked as well during high school and college, and got some scholarships, to make enough money to get by.

*Q: Fantastic. And how many siblings did you have?*

REINTSMA: An older brother and an older sister, so three of us.

*Q: And you were the baby then.*

REINTSMA: Yes, I was the baby.

*Q: Very good. And I'm assuming that your mother was at home.*

REINTSMA: She was, yes. She did have a high school degree, and after high school went to what was called "business school" at the time. I believe it was basically teaching typing and secretarial skills, one of the few job opportunities for women, along with teaching and nursing.

*Q: Right. Yes, I remember those days well.*

REINTSMA: However, she loved outdoor work, and in later years, started her own greenhouse/gardening business. She was also a strong and constant reader, and stimulated our interest in outdoor adventure and environmental issues, by reading us books like Thor Heyerdahl's Kon-Tiki, and Rachel's Carson's Silent Spring.

*Q: So, when you decided to go off to college you went, you went to—*

REINTSMA: First to Eastern Montana College in Billings. It's now called Montana State at Billings, but it was previously what at one time was called a "normal school", basically teacher training college, before expanding into a broader State-funded liberal arts type school.

*Q: And were you commuting from home or were you living on campus?*

REINTSMA: I lived in Billings in apartments, and worked part-time. I got a scholarship for speech and debate, and was on the College's traveling debate team. I also had some success with individual sports like judo and gymnastics, but debate became my main extracurricular activity.

*Q: So, your high school had a debate team?*

REINTSMA: The last year I was at high school one of the teachers started a debate team and I took to it like a duck to water and that became kind of my big focus in college. And

I have to say, we had a—little old Eastern Montana College had a hotshot debate team. We won tournaments all over the northwest against much bigger schools, and even won a big tournament in New York City.

*Q: Wow. Very interesting that a schoolteacher in rural Montana was focusing on a debate team. That must have been quite an innovative teacher.*

REINTSMA: Yeah, yeah. I think that's very much true. And you know, one of the interesting points that my wife makes is that women who today might be national leaders or senior executives of a big corporation, in those days were teachers. Because teaching was one of the very few avenues available to them, and so you had some really, really excellent public school teachers who took a strong interest in developing the students.

*Q: Right. And so, this was a woman teacher who encouraged the debate team?*

REINTSMA: Yes, she started it during my senior year in high school, and then they had a strong speech and debate program at Eastern Montana College that I quickly became part of.

*Q: Right. Now I know why you're such an articulate spokesperson.*

REINTSMA: I don't know about that. But interestingly the way the National College Debate Board (or Intercollegiate Debate Society or whatever it's called) works, they choose a national debate topic for each year, then all the teams from all the schools nationwide debate that topic. You have to be prepared to debate both the positive side and the negative side of the issue--you have to do the research and develop the case for each side, then switch from one side to the other during tournaments. So interestingly, one of those national topics when I was in college was the pros and cons of American foreign aid.

*Q: You're kidding.*

REINTSMA: By pure coincidence, yeah. So, I learned quite a lot about foreign aid very early, before I had any intention that I would ever go that direction as a career.

*Q: That's fascinating. And you learned all the pluses and the minuses by having to study and debate so that must have come in handy once you joined AID (United States Agency for International Development).*

REINTSMA: I guess so, although at USAID, it seems we spend most of our time trying to implement programs, rather than having deep discussions about the pros and cons of the big picture of what we're engaged in.

*Q: That leads to the question of what led you into a career in international development. Some of your experience in college would have been part of it, but what other factors?*

REINTSMA: I was giving this some thought last night. As Americans, we always like to make ‘three points’, right, so I’m going to give you three factors that probably influenced my career direction. One was, in fact, the speech and debate experience. With the exception of that one national topic on foreign aid, it wasn’t necessarily about international affairs, but it certainly did give me a broader world view than one would necessarily expect to get growing up on a farm in Montana. And it stimulated an interest in public policy in general. So, speech and debate was definitely a part of the equation.

Going back earlier, though, I would say that another major factor was my grandfather, who lived in our household part of the time when I was growing up. He was quite an educated and well-read man, for a farmer in Montana. He had a college degree in agriculture and took a real interest in world affairs. And even when I was small he always had news magazines lying around the house. I was a reader, we didn’t even have a TV when I was young, so I’d pick up the news magazines and read about world affairs, national affairs and so forth. So I think my grandfather’s influence definitely broadened my horizons and that was quite important in shaping my future directions.

A third factor was JFK, President John F. Kennedy. I was thirteen or fourteen, a very impressionable age, when he gave his famous speech, “Ask not what your country can do for you, but what you can do for your country”. Then he announced the Peace Corps and somehow that made a big impression on me. I was no doubt somewhat naïve, in retrospect, but I really was inspired, and that left a real imprint on me which no doubt eventually played out in determining a career direction.

Perhaps an additional influencing event occurred when I was in college. An uncle, the only family member with the money for international travel, invited me on a family trip to Mexico. This was my first international experience—it was very positive, and I really loved having adventures in a different culture, which no doubt also influenced my eventual career choice.

*Q: Could I go back for a second? You mentioned your grandfather and that made me wonder if your family has long roots in Montana? I’m not sure what the ethnic background of the name Reintsma is, but it sounds like it might be Scandinavian, and whether there were immigrants who came to the U.S. Were there immigrant roots that might have contributed to your career choice?*

REINTSMA: Yes and no. There were certainly immigrant roots, but I’m not sure they directly played a role in my career choice. My paternal great grandfather immigrated from what’s now called Ostfriesland in Germany. The name Reintsma is Frisian, a population group based in northern Holland, and stretching across into northwest Germany. He was from a family of German farmers, and immigrated to America in 1852. He settled first in a German farming community in Illinois. His son, my paternal grandfather, moved on to farm in Iowa and Minnesota, where my father was born. The lure of additional land and most likely sketchy promotions by the railroads brought them to Montana in 1916, when my father was fourteen.

On my maternal side, as mentioned earlier, my grandfather (born 1880), was one of the original homesteaders in that part of Montana. They developed the farmland in the irrigated valley where I grew up. Remember, this was still early days in the European settlement of the West—my grandfather knew and apparently had a mutually respectful relationship with one of the famous Indian chiefs of the area, and we frequently found arrowheads, beads, and other artifacts.

*Q: Right. So, you are a true Westerner.*

REINTSMA: I guess so, yeah.

*Q: Okay. So, let's go back to Eastern Montana, and if I looked at your CV properly, it appears that you didn't remain there. You ended up going to the University of Texas in Austin. How did that happen?*

REINTSMA: Well, originally, as often happens in the lives of young men, it was in part because a girlfriend moved to that part of the world.

*Q: Okay.*

REINTSMA: More broadly, though, I was just ready for a change and Billings, Montana, was feeling a little confining or small or something, so I did three years at Eastern Montana college, and transferred to the University of Texas-Austin.

*Q: Did you continue with debate at the University of Texas?*

REINTSMA: You know, I did start there with the debate team, and initially it went fine, but it didn't stick. It wasn't really a conflict with the coach, but I just felt like he was not aware or wasn't recognizing my potential, and I was probably also in a different mental space, so I didn't continue with it after the first few months.

*Q: Okay. I was just wondering if it was an NCAA (National Collegiate Athletic Association) scandal of being recruited away from Eastern Montana? (laughs)*

REINTSMA: Actually, we had a much better debate team at Eastern Montana College than UT-Austin had, as a matter of fact.

*Q: Okay, good. We want that for the record*

*And you graduated from the University of Texas. What was your major?*

REINTSMA: Political science with an international focus. But there were some twists and turns along the way.



I completed one school year at Texas. Some of my credits from Montana didn't transfer, so I ended the year a few credit hours short of graduation. I went back to Texas the following Fall to wrap up and graduate, but lost my motivation before I completed the term. To this day, I'm not sure exactly why, but this was right at the height of the Vietnam protests, the very peak of all that national turmoil. Anyway, I ended up dropping out of school a few credits short of graduation. Then there was the major drama for young men in the form of the national draft lottery. I drew a low number meaning that I would certainly be drafted and most likely end up in Vietnam. At that point, I had gone through the process to obtain Conscientious Objector status, but of the type that serves in a non-combatant capacity (versus not serving in the military at all). So the likelihood was I would end up as a medic in Vietnam. At the same time, I was always interested in Peace Corps, so I applied, and it became a race as to which organization was going to move fastest, the Army or the Peace Corps. Looking back, this was one of those points where the road of life divides into two very different directions. Peace Corps acted fast and won the race. I firmly believe I would have had a very different life if I had ended up going down the other road.

*Q: So, Peace Corps won. You go off to Peace Corps in 1970?*

REINTSMA: Yes, spring of 1970.

*Q: Right. And where did you go and what were you doing as a Peace Corps volunteer?*

REINTSMA: After a training program in the Virgin Islands, I went to Mauritius. Mauritius, for those who may not know it, is an island nation off Madagascar in the Indian Ocean. This was just two years after Mauritius became an independent country, so ours was the first Peace Corps program in the country. We were literally met at the airport by the prime minister. I'm afraid he and the government had been given highly inflated views as to what Peace Corps could accomplish for the country. I ended up spending a year and a half in Mauritius, the main island, and then two and a half years on a tiny four by nine-mile island called Rodrigues, which is a dependency of Mauritius way out in the middle of the Indian Ocean --most people have never heard of it.

*Q: Right. How big was your Peace Corps class? You were Peace Corps One for Mauritius?*

REINTSMA: Yes, Peace Corps One in Mauritius. Between twenty and twenty-five Peace Corps Volunteers (PCVs).

*Q: And what were you doing specifically? Was your entire Peace Corps class doing the same?*

REINTSMA: No, very different tracks for the different PCVs. Some were nurses, some were in agriculture, some assigned to other ministries. I was assigned to the Ministry of Cooperatives to develop farm cooperatives. On the main island of Mauritius, I was working under an FAO-funded (Food and Agriculture Organization) project, and was

assigned to a village as a field worker to work with a co-operative, focused on onion storage and marketing, which was an important crop in that part of the Island.

*Q: Had you had experience with cooperatives from the farm in Montana? Were you experienced with that line of work?*

REINTSMA: Not really. I was aware of cooperatives and my father may have belonged to one, but I didn't really understand much about them.

*Q: Okay. So, part of the training, I assume, involved a bit on what you'd be doing specifically, cooperatives.*

REINTSMA: You would have hoped, but that was not the case. Training was a bit of a washout, actually, in part literally because we were encouraged to develop a garden during the training program and it wasn't well located and the first big rainstorm washed the whole garden down the hillside. This was in the Virgin Islands. The part of training that was well done, however, was the language training. Peace Corps flew in Mauritians for language training, and it was very well done. We gained a lot of fluency in a relatively short period of time.

*Q: Okay.*

REINTSMA: So the technical training was pretty much all on the job learning.

*Q: And, what language did you use for Peace Corps?*

REINTSMA: Mauritian Creole, which is a French-based Creole. And I don't know how much to get into detail, but it's actually, it's not a patois. It actually is a separate language. But similar to the Creole in Haiti and Martinique and parts of the Caribbean.

*Q: Right. Because Mauritius had been a French colony?*

REINTSMA: The settlement of Mauritius is a long and interesting story, but here's a very quick summary: uninhabited island, first discovered by Arabs, then the Portuguese as the first Europeans. The Dutch controlled it for a while, but the French stayed and set up sugarcane plantations. They brought in African slaves to work the plantations. When slavery was abolished, they brought in indentured laborers from India, who were both Urdu or Hindi speakers, (Muslim and Hindu). Then during the Napoleonic wars, the British took it over from the French, but didn't change the common language. So, even though the official language is now English, the most common language was French-based Creole. Many people also speak various languages from the Indian subcontinent, including what I believe is a Hindi-based patois. It's a complicated ethnic and linguistic mix, but the Mauritians do a great job of making it all work. Interestingly, one of the author Patrick O'Brian's series on the Napoleonic wars is called the *Mauritius Command*.

*Q: Okay. And you spent more time on Rodrigues island? Working on cooperatives?*

REINTSMA: Yes; fishing cooperatives. I spent two and one half years on that tiny island, and absolutely loved it.

*Q: Are there things you learned during that Peace Corps experience that affected how you looked at development going forward with your career later? I'm just curious whether there were experiences that generated "ah ha" moments later in your career.*

REINTSMA: OK, I'll give that one a little bit more thought, but—well, first of all, let me say that Peace Corps was absolutely the right thing at the right time for me. It not only set the direction for the rest of my career, but also turned me from an unfocused 'kid' into quite a focused person with a strong sense of knowing what I wanted to do with my life. So it was absolutely a defining, highly positive experience overall.

To your question, I guess there were certainly specific lessons. Things like "foreign experts" (as they were called in those days), often didn't really know what they were doing (this applied both to my FAO boss and to me). I remember a quote I love from Lee Kwan Yew, the early Prime Minister of Singapore. He said: "A foreign expert is someone who comes to find out, and leaves before he is found out".

There were probably others lessons, like: the complications of trying to develop co-operatives (they often only work when truly bottom-up and left alone by the government); insights in life and collective decision making processes at the village level; maybe some things about how host government ministries and bureaucracies work; that sort of thing.

I think more broadly, though, the Peace Corps experience was a strong affirmation of the ideals and my feelings about the fundamental nature of people, who really are the same the world over. They all want a better life for their children, you know, they all want the same basics, such as rising above absolute poverty. We could go on about people's aspirations, but the key point is that it was, for me at least, an affirmation of my beliefs that people everywhere are the same at a fundamental level, and need to be treated with dignity and respect.

*Q: Right. So, it was a very positive experience.*

REINTSMA: Yeah, and I have to say that also people were generally very welcoming, although in my first village there was an undercurrent of suspicion that I was somehow a CIA agent. Many Peace Corps volunteers deal with that, I think. I enjoyed asking them what it was they thought they had in the village that was so important it was worth my time being there to spy on.

*Q: Right. Now, I'm looking at your CV and it indicates you stayed on Rodrigues after Peace Corps, so you were a Peace Corps volunteer for three years?*

REINTSMA: Three years, yes. I did the regular Peace Corps term of two years, then extended for a third year. And then, toward the end of the third year the government of Mauritius said we'd love you to stay and keep doing what you're doing, and we'll pay you if you want to do that. So the government of Mauritius actually paid for me to stay on. So I did that for a fourth year, at which point I figured I'd better get back to the U.S., clean up my undergraduate record, and get going on a career path.

*Q: I would suspect that it's rather rare for the government to ask a Peace Corps volunteer to stay on and then pay them.*

REINTSMA: I suppose so. I can't really say how rare it is, but I did take it as affirmation that they appreciated my work. But also, I think the government of Mauritius was somewhat unusual in being pretty serious-minded, having their act together and they probably also had more resources than the average government in say Africa.

*Q: Well, it has been a great success story. Did you ever go back to Mauritius after your Peace Corps period?*

REINTSMA: I have not. My son, my granddaughter and I may be making a trip there at some point, but I have not.

*Q: Okay. I believe it became a model for development policies and economic growth for a number of years.*

REINTSMA: Yes, and also, in terms of handling ethnic tensions. I would definitely agree that Mauritius has been something of a model in many ways. Including the fact that lots of different ethnic groups mixed very well there.

*Q: Yes. I think that doesn't get highlighted often enough.*

*So, you stayed on, but then you returned to Austin, I believe, after Peace Corps. You were highly motivated now and so you thought finishing up those couple of extra hours to get your degree was a priority?*

REINTSMA: That's right. I cleaned up my undergraduate record. I met my (now-former) spouse on Rodrigues Island where she was doing volunteer work for a British aid group. She joined me in Texas and entered a masters degree program at UT-Austin, while I took an extra year of coursework to make the switch to a development track in agriculture and economics. So I finished my BA from Austin, did some extra work, and then transferred to the University of Wisconsin-Madison to start a master's degree program in agricultural economics.

*Q: The University of Wisconsin Ag-Economics program was one of the largest agricultural-economics programs in the country, probably, and one of the most significant ones?*

REINTSMA: I think so, yes. It was also highly oriented toward international development work. The Land Tenure Center at the University of Wisconsin was well known, and it worked closely with the Agricultural Economics Department where I was located. Yes, a very strong international ag. economics program.

*Q: Were you involved at all with the Land Tenure Center because it was a premiere institution that USAID worked with for many years?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I was. I had a type of research assistantship there. I think it was actually USAID that made the grant for that work at the Land Tenure Center, focused on international development.

*Q: Did you have to do a thesis? I'm just wondering if you had a research paper and what the subject might have been.*

REINTSMA: I did not do the formal thesis option. However, I did do a pretty extensive research paper. It was a big-picture econometric analysis of what factors lead a country to development or not—why some succeed while others fail. So, I was fairly deeply into international development and foreign assistance issues at that point in graduate school.

*Q: Do you recall any of your conclusions and would you agree with them today?*

REINTSMA: (Laughs) To be honest with you, I would have to go back and try to dig that paper out. I do remember that there was a very strong correlation between a country's level of economic development, and infrastructure (specifically electrification/availability of electric power). Hard to say which was the cause and which was the effect, however—correlation does not mean causality.

*Q: Okay, I was just curious.*

REINTSMA: I think that's another good area to give some thought to. I think there probably were some conclusions that I already felt at that point and probably still agree with today. But I'll give some thought as to how to articulate exactly what they were.

*Q: Okay. We just want to make sure that the econometrics came up with the right answers. (laughs)*

*Okay, so you finish up at Wisconsin and you're then looking for a position in international development, and how did you go about doing that and where did you end up going?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I decided I should pay a visit to Washington since that seemed to be where a lot of the employment decisions happened. I had been offered a job with a cooperative serving African American farmers in Louisiana, which happened via personal connections followed by an interview. But I decided to look at other possibilities as well and came through Washington. I talked to various international development

contractors, and passed out my resumé. A couple of months later I got a call. One of the contractors had become aware that USDA (United States Department of Agriculture) was looking for somebody to replace the director of a USAID project in Rwanda. I was interviewed and then hired. The person I replaced was Don Brown, by the way, if you remember Don Brown. So, it was off to Rwanda.

### **Pre-USAID Direct Hire International Development Work**

***(Rwanda, Zaire, USAID/Washington—Functional, Dysfunctional, and ???)***

*Q: So, director of the project. You were internal within the AID mission then, is that correct? Or were you external?*

REINTSMA: I was external in the sense that I worked in and directed a Rwandan government office. The project was developing a national food storage and marketing system for the government of Rwanda. I was AID-funded (initially via a USDA employment mechanism, later as a personal services contractor), but I actually worked in the project office which was structured as a component of the Rwandan government. I was part of the American expatriate community in Rwanda, of course, and had some Embassy privileges such as use of the diplomatic pouch. And I reported in many ways to the USAID Representative (USAID didn't have a Director-rank person in Rwanda when I first arrived there.) But I was actually running a Rwanda government office and so also reported to a Rwanda government official.

*Q: Okay. So, it was like being chief of party. You were in charge of the project, but sitting in a government office.*

REINTSMA: Yeah, the difference being it was a directly-staffed USAID / USDA project, not implemented by an institutional contractor. And it was also a Rwandan government parastatal office. So I wasn't really an 'advisor', but rather the Director of the national food storage and marketing program. We operated warehouses around the Country, and bought, stored and sold food crops. It was a big jump in responsibility.

*Q: Yes. You said it was a parastatal, but part of the ministry of agriculture or part of another ministry? How did it work being an expatriate running a government program?*

REINTSMA: Gee, that's a big topic, but overall it worked well. I'm trying to decide how much detail to go into here and how to explain the relationship in a way that will make sense to others. Essentially, I reported to an influential ex-military guy in the Government of Rwanda. USAID first started this storage and marketing program as a stand-alone USAID project. Then the Rwanda government endorsed and incorporated this project into a larger parastatal that he was in charge of. He ran that larger parastatal and I reported to him, but in effect our USAID-funded project that I directed was the only real operational activity underneath the larger parastatal. And it was a stand-alone parastatal expected to be self-funding, not a part of the ministry of agriculture.

At any rate, I got along very well with the Rwandan colonel in charge of the parastatal. Both he and the USAID Representative (my two reporting channels) gave me and the staff a lot of autonomy to run the project effectively and to make good business decisions, but they also provided support and cover when it was needed.

*Q: Right; I ask in part because it's a very different initial experience sitting in a government structure while implementing a USAID project. You must have learned a lot about how host countries operate. It's very different from sitting within an AID mission, and probably a great way to start one's career.*

REINTSMA: Yeah. I hadn't actually thought of it in those terms, but I think you're absolutely right. I agree.

*Q: Do you recall how large the USAID program was in Rwanda during that period? Was it a small program?*

REINTSMA: It started small but grew rapidly. When I first came in 1978 and certainly when my predecessor, Don Brown (who later became a senior AID official) first came a couple of years earlier, this was the only AID project in Rwanda. I think it probably originally started out of REDSO, the regional economic development office for East Africa, based in Nairobi. And then, I believe a year or so after it started John (Pat) Patterson came to Rwanda as the USAID Representative. He was the only USAID person in Rwanda when I arrived. But he later acquired a program officer (Terry Barker), and the program started expanding from there, adding new USAID staff, contractors and programs. Those were the Carter years, when the U.S. aid program was expanding into the smaller countries in Africa.

*Q: I don't know the history of Rwanda well enough to know the factors that ultimately led to the genocide but believe that many Tutsis were pushed out of the country into Uganda at some point. Had that happened before or while you were there?*

REINTSMA: Well, again, it's a long history with lots of twists and turns and multiple waves of migration. I'll try to break down what I understand into a few minutes. But first of all, note that I left Rwanda in 1982, and the genocide was April of 1994, so I left twelve years before the genocide.

Again, let me caveat this by saying my information and understanding is no doubt limited and I'm not an historian. But my very basic understanding is that pre-colonialism, the Rwandans had a kind of loosely ethnically-based serf and overlord system where the minority Tutsis were more pastoralist and often owned large numbers of cattle and the majority Hutus were more subsistence farmers and sometimes worked under the Tutsis. I understand it was even possible to move from being a Hutu to a Tutsi if you obtained enough status, i.e., that there was room for upward mobility in a fairly fluid system. When the Belgian colonialists arrived, they exploited the ethnic divisions and turned the groups against each other, as colonialists did elsewhere to facilitate maintaining their own power and control. I understand they facilitated education for the Tutsis but not the

Hutus, and established a more rigid social hierarchy that favored Tutsis. Then I understand that as independence approached (1959) and the Belgians saw they were going to have to give up control and leave, they “switched sides” and handed power to the majority Hutus, who had little or no preparation. The Hutus were at that point feeling very disadvantaged because the Tutsis had been given all the advantages of education and wealth. There was a fairly brutal “shaking out” over the next several years, and a percentage of the Tutsi population fled to Uganda, while the Hutus remained in control of the government.

*Q: Okay. So, that had happened well before you were there?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I believe that had happened in the early and mid 1960s, and I arrived in 1978. When I arrived there was a pretty stable government that had come to power via a coup against the first Hutu government/President. But it was quite a stable and reasonably effective, serious-minded government that you could work with to get things done. At that time, Hutu-Tutsi ethnic divisions seemed a relatively minimal factor in the national development landscape. There was what might be called a kind of affirmative action program, for example any organization was not supposed to employ more Tutsis than their percentage of the population-- an attempt to level the playing field to give Hutus some advantages that they didn't previously have. But generally speaking, there was not that much ethnic tension. As an American expatriate, I traveled and ate and stayed throughout the country with the project staff who were both Hutu and Tutsis. We all traveled together, ate together. Again, there wasn't a lot of overt ethnic tension at that time, although there may have been more under the surface that I wasn't fully aware of as an expatriate. But I worked very closely with the Rwandan staff on a daily basis, and I didn't sense much tension.

*Q: And the staff you worked with was mixed?*

REINTSMA: Yes, Hutu, Tutsi, and a few expatriates.

*Q: Okay. But there were conscious efforts to have an equitable balance between the groups.*

REINTSMA: Yes.

With reference to the 1994 genocide, people have asked me, did I see it coming? The answer is no, I did not see it coming. I don't think anybody did at that point in time. We saw an attempt to redress past ethnic power imbalances, and a relatively effective government to work with. It's not relevant for this interview, but there is another whole story about how things started going south in the mid-eighties, which led up to the Tutsi invasion from Uganda in 1990 (which a lot of people today don't know about), which then eventually led to the shooting down of the President's plane and the genocide in 1994.



*Q: Right; it is a very complex history. But, you were there in a period of relative calm when it was possible to do lots of work. By the mid-to late 1980's, the USAID Rwanda program was seen as very successful and making a real difference.*

REINTSMA: I don't know what the perception in Washington was, but that was certainly the feeling that I had there; that it was a country where you could get something done and our USAID programs were making a difference.

*Q: So, you were there for four years?*

REINTSMA: Four years, yes.

*Q: And it was all on the same project, the same activity, working within the government. Did you decide that four years was enough and that it was time to move on? In looking to leave, were you looking for a new contractual position or did someone approach you to move to another country?*

REINTSMA: My wife and I just decided that four years was the right time frame. There was no particular push factor, but four years seemed like the appropriate time frame, and my wife at the time wanted to further her education to the next level, so we just decided four years was the right time frame and left without having something else to go onto at that point in time.

*Q: Okay. But you did ultimately end up as chief of party for an ag policy project in Zaire with USAID?*

REINTSMA: That's correct. So, my wife and I traveled around the world for several weeks in early 1982, then went to my home base in Montana for the rest of that Summer. I put my CV out with various consulting firms and was picked up by Pragma Corporation, to be chief of party for an agricultural policy and statistics and project in Kinshasa, Zaire.

*Q: Right. Was that an institution building project to build ag policy capacity within the ministry?*

REINTSMA: Yes, exactly. It was all about building capacity and setting policy. Our team worked with Ministry of Agriculture employees, some of whom had been graduate students in the U.S. We worked to develop a national ag reporting system, publish reports, and develop statistical analysis. In many ways, it was about trying to develop the basis for good agriculture policy, and build local capacity.

*Q: Right. In this case, you were in an advisory capacity with the government as opposed to being actually in the government?*

REINTSMA: Correct. Still physically sitting in a Ministry of Agriculture office in this case, but as Chief of Party of an advisory team, as opposed to being in an operational mode.

*Q: How was the adjustment to that, from being in a more operational position to being in an advisory position? Was that a hard adjustment to make?*

REINTSMA: Yes, it was a hard adjustment. But the much harder adjustment was moving from a functional country to a dysfunctional country.

*Q: (Laughs) Right. I was wondering how you were going to word that. Yeah, so the government in Zaire was not quite as efficient or committed as the government in Rwanda?*

REINTSMA: So, let me cut to the chase on this one. After some time in country, I sort of literally woke up one morning and realized that the Ministry of Agriculture in Kinshasa (the capitol) was totally and completely irrelevant to agriculture in the rest of the country. It was essentially a collection of buildings and staff in Kinshasa with no connection to what was really happening in agriculture in the rest of the country. That might be an exaggeration, but if it is, it's only a very slight exaggeration. There was no functioning agricultural policy in the country, no support to legitimate farmers, Zairian staff salaries in Kinshasa often did not cover the cost of bus fare to and from work, corruption was rampant (not with USAID's money, however), and nothing good was going to come out of the project so far as I could see.

*Q: Right. So, that was probably not very motivating to go to work each day.*

REINTSMA: It was really a dysfunctional government in many, many ways. Perhaps the only real motivator was providing support, mostly morale support, I guess, to the Zairian employees. Just doing what we could to provide some support, and work with them and develop their skills as much as possible in that environment.

*Q: Right, because the project probably included a fairly large participant training component for graduate study in agriculture economics?*

REINTSMA: Yeah. I think the participant training program was funded through a different USAID project, but we received those folks back in the Ministry when they were finished with their U.S. training.

*Q: And so, at least that part was encouraging.*

*Were there discussions with the AID mission about the difficulty of the environment?*

REINTSMA: I did have a lot of those discussions, often at a personal or informal level, but also sometimes verbally with USAID in the more formal contractor reporting role, including with the person within the USAID mission who was the project manager. The

COTR (Contractor Officer's Technical Representative) or whatever the person's title was in the terminology at the time.

Anyway, we did to some degree have those kinds of discussions. I don't want to sound critical because I think everybody was doing their best within a very imperfect situation, but we were all locked into a system to implement the projects, to meet the contract requirements, produce the reports, and that was going to happen whether or not it all had any real impact.

That sounds harsh, but you have to look at the larger picture of the U.S.-Zaire relationship. It was driven by Cold War politics and the concern to keep a large country in Africa 'in our camp' in the context of the on-going Cold War with communist countries. Not an environment that was conducive to having serious development impact from our programs (and very different from the situation in some other countries such as neighboring Rwanda, where our programs did have positive impact).

*Q: Right. And I think in later years they began to move away from that kind of governmental work to working only with nongovernmental actors.*

REINTSMA: I think that's exactly right. And you'll remember this as well, but where we put the bulk of our aid money in Africa changed dramatically from those early years of U.S. aid to Africa. Early on, most of the funding went to five big countries, Somalia, Liberia, Zaire, and I don't remember the other two. But the USG was essentially determining where to put our efforts based on Cold War big-picture politics. To the credit of the U.S. policy makers, that changed dramatically over time as more money started to flow to countries where it could be better utilized.

*Q: Okay, so you were there for a year, if I'm reading your CV correctly. Is that—?*

REINTSMA: I think it was about a year and four months, something like that.

*Q: Right. Did the project end or did you leave?*

REINTSMA: No, the project continued. As I noted above, when I "woke up" and came to the conclusion that the project simply wasn't going to be having much or any impact, I decided this was not where I should be spending my time and my life. So I gave my employer several months' notice that I wouldn't be staying on, to provide them enough time to recruit somebody else. I just decided not to stay.

*Q: Right. So, you then moved to Washington and joined the Africa bureau in Washington through an arrangement that the Africa bureau had with the Department of Agriculture.*

REINTSMA: That's correct, but first I joined my wife (and kids) in England, where she was studying for another graduate degree. We lived there several months before the job in Washington came up.

*Q: Were you exploring that option from Zaire or did you return and then start talking to people?*

REINTSMA: I put my name out as ‘looking’, but the job in Washington didn’t come up until after I had been in England for several months.

*Q: Okay; that was in the Africa Bureau’s TR (Technical Resources) Office; and I believe that office during that period was led by one of the Sherpers—*

REINTSMA: Keith Sherper.

*Q: And were you primarily working on regional projects or were you doing mission support or were you doing analytics? What kind of work were you doing from that platform?*

REINTSMA: All three.

Some of it was analytic work on proposed new mission projects. In those years, USAID/Washington had a very heavy hand in weighing in before new mission projects could be approved. I think not too long before I arrived, Washington approval was required at three different points in the project development and approval process, before a project could be implemented in the field. At the time I arrived there were still two levels or phases of Washington approval during the project development process. So part of our job in the technical office was to review those proposed mission programs, do analysis, and point out strengths and weaknesses. And not all projects won approval, to the unhappiness of the field missions.

Then I also did some mission support work, traveling to field missions, as well as project evaluations. But my main and most interesting job happened when I became the USAID manager of the Michigan State Food Security in Africa project, which at that time was just moving from its first to its second phase. I believe it went on to have four or five phases over the years.

*Q: And what was it doing, that project on food security? Was it doing analytic work or was it—?*

REINTSMA: Analysis and advisory work to national governments, capacity building and a lot of participant training. A big part of it was bringing students back to MSU for graduate degrees, then setting up capacity building activities and providing campus-based support to agricultural policy units, in various countries.

*Q: Okay. So, it was mostly on the policy side, not the crop research side.*

REINTSMA: Yes, heavily on the policy. This was the agricultural economics group at Michigan State, which specialized in ag policy work, not scientific, agronomic research.

*Q: Okay. So, in some ways quite similar to the work you were doing in Zaire, but hopefully with a mechanism that would be working with countries that wanted to actually do something.*

REINTSMA: Yes, absolutely. One of my first activities was to travel to five African countries with a Michigan State team in 1985, to essentially sell USAID missions on helping to set up ag policy units and capacity in the ministries of agriculture.

*Q: And do you recall any of the specific programs that evolved out of that that you might have been involved with?*

REINTSMA: Absolutely. We went to Senegal first and I don't think anything very concrete and lasting came out of that one. But the next country was Mali and that trip became the basis of a twenty or thirty-year history of Michigan State working in Mali, in a multi-phased policy and capacity building program that had major impact. This all stemmed from that trip that I was on, the first one in the new phase of the MSU project. The Michigan State team basically sold the idea to Roger Simmons, who was then program officer at the Mali mission. And I always remember that after a couple of days of negotiation, Roger sort of grudgingly said, "Well, okay, I'll find you \$50,000 to try out the program." Emmy Simmons was also there in the mission at the time, serving I think as ag. economist and perhaps other roles as well, but most likely she assessed the MSU opportunity and weighed in as well. Anyway, over time, that \$50,000 start grew into a program that probably amounted to tens of millions of dollars over the course of a twenty or thirty-year program.

*Q: And that was the seed, then, for the work that Emmy and others did on food security, including the use of food aid to improve the policy environment within Mali. Was that all part of the same sort of effort?*

REINTSMA: We would have to talk to Emmy to better understand how she worked in relation to the MSU project, and any complementarity with the food aid component of the Mission's program. I don't know which pot of money Roger used to fund the MSU activity, but I doubt it was Title II (food aid funds). But to your larger point, yes, this was a key seed activity to start to improve the policy environment in Mali.

The program laid the foundation for working extensively over successive Malian governments on ag policy and food security issues, some of which had really big-time impacts on the country.

*Q: And Mali moved towards being a food secure country, is that correct?*

REINTSMA: Yes, for quite a while, it did. Unfortunately more recent coups and other events have moved the country backwards. Nonetheless, I would guess that some of that work is still paying dividends to this day, particularly the training of some of the excellent Malian graduate students who went to Michigan State, then came back and became real leaders, both nationally and internationally, in food security work in Africa.

After Mali, we went to Rwanda. Following that trip, MSU also started a program in Rwanda, which also had very positive influences over time, even including work to rebuild the economy after the 1994 genocide. We also went to Zimbabwe, where some MSU staff (particularly Carl Eicker), had previous experience. I believe there was a strong program in Zimbabwe for some years, but of course it was overtaken by national political events in later years. So Senegal, Mali, Zimbabwe, Rwanda, and I can't remember what the fifth country was. But in at least three of those five countries that we visited on that major initial trip, the foundation was laid for long-term, very positive development work. I was happy to have played a very small role in helping to get that work started.

*Q: Yes. And in most cases, the USAID missions were willing to buy into an instrument that could help them achieve the objectives they wanted on the agriculture policy front?*

REINTSMA: Yes. I would say that they were willing to throw the dice and give it a try with a fairly small amount of money initially. And then, when Michigan State was able to deliver over time, they saw the value of it and the programs continued and expanded.

*Q: Yes; it was a very good model. In many ways that kind of mechanism replicated what was done by the Office of Population for many, many years with instruments that field missions could use to jump start programs.*

REINTSMA: Yes. I think it worked in part because that University had made its own long-term commitment to development work in Africa and elsewhere. Marrying the participant training at the graduate level with social science and policy research and developing local institutional capacity – it was a formula that had staying power. It really worked over the years.

*Q: Yes. Were there other particularly notable things you were doing during those three years? I know that the legislation for the Development Fund for Africa was being discussed at this time – were you involved at all on the analytic side?*

REINTSMA: I don't recall having any role in that. My work was more regional project implementation and mission support.

*Q: Okay. Other things that you want to mention or should we move to the big news when you become a direct hire USAID employee? Or maybe before doing that, do you have any observations of what it is like working within AID, not as a direct hire employee, but through the mechanism with the Department of Agriculture? Did you sense that you were not a direct hire or did AID treat everyone pretty much the same?*

REINTSMA: I would say more the latter than the former. I didn't feel any particular disadvantage, or that being hired through the USDA mechanism diminished the degree to which I was listened to or not. It felt that how you were seen and treated was largely

merit-based. For example, if you had good comments on a proposed project then people paid attention to what you said. Or if you could deliver for a mission, they didn't really care what mechanism you were hired under. I think we were pretty fully integrated in the office, regardless of the hiring mechanism.

*Q: So, just another creative move by USAID on the staffing front.*

REINTSMA: Yeah. However, see the next point. But first, I wanted to note that I had some great partners to work with in that office. For example, Gloria Steele and I were the two PASAs that were kept on after the midnight massacre.

*Q: Oh—what was the midnight massacre?*

REINTSMA: Basically, a legal ruling came down saying that the way AID was getting staff through USDA-affiliated universities was not kosher. I don't remember whether the ruling came down from the USAID side or the USDA side, but at any rate the older retiree staff who were hired under that "university to USDA to USAID" mechanism all had to leave. Gloria and I became USDA Schedule B staff, not university employees, so we could stay on.

This resulted in a big drop in the size of the staff in the Ag. technical division.

*Q: Right. But, I think that AID continued to use the RASA agreements, but then people were Department of Agriculture employees then.*

REINTSMA: Yes, at that point, you had to be a Department of Agriculture employee rather than university employee routed through USDA.

However, there must have been a later re-interpretation, because university-based employees routed through USDA were again used more recently.

*Q: (Laughs) Okay. Well, all things are cyclical.*

*So, when you converted to direct hire, how did that come about? And you converted as a project development officer and I'm wondering if there is a story to that. Was that the only backstop being recruited? Why not an ag economist?*

### **Hired as Foreign Service Officer -- 1987**

#### ***(In for the Long Haul)***

REINTSMA: I don't know if it was the only backstop being recruited at the time, but it was the one being recruited for that seemed to best fit my qualifications. So I interviewed and was hired. As a footnote, though, this was the third time I applied to become a Direct Hire. I had applied coming out of graduate school and didn't get called for an interview. Then, there was another window for applications/interviews later on when I left Rwanda.

I interviewed at that point and was told that I was qualified and ‘on the list’ to be hired, but that they didn’t have any openings at the time. I believe that was the status for a few years. Finally in 1987 a window opened for project development officers. Third time’s the charm.

*Q: Yes, right. And you remained in the Africa bureau but went to work in the Office of Project Development.*

REINTSMA: Correct. Under a very dynamic Office Director.

*Q: Right, I’m sure. And so, you moved from contributing to program reviews as a technical officer to coordinating the entire review process, pulling together those issue papers that looked more broadly beyond just the agricultural sector. So, did you find that interesting?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I did. I joined the Foreign Service in May 1987, and my recollection is that at the time new hires were supposed to spend about one year in Washington “in training” before going out on their first field assignment. In my case, and I’m getting a bit into personal issues here, it was also becoming clear that my wife at the time was reluctant to go back overseas, and there were also some children’s learning disability issues popping up. So I ended up staying in Washington for closer to two years. At any rate, I enjoyed the Project Development work and the people I was working with and learning new, broader skills. In addition to managing Washington review processes, I also provide mission support and some travel to the field. As you know, when you’re in Washington expecting to go overseas, a lot of energy is spent on figuring out where you are going to end up overseas. This was particularly the case in my situation, because I decided to ‘switch backstops’ (areas of specialization) and go overseas as an agricultural officer, not a PD officer. So there was a lot of back and forth about getting the first assignment.

*Q: Right. Did you come in under the IDI (International Development Intern) program. Was there a mid-level equivalent? Did you come in with a class or as an individual? Did you have any kind of training? —*

REINTSMA: I came in as a mid-level career transfer, or whatever it was called, from USDA. So I was able to come on at the grade level of FS-02.

And yes, I did join a New Entry class, but my recollection is it only involved a couple of weeks of training, unlike the more extensive training under the IDI program.

*Q: Was it a mix of mid-level and younger folks or was it mostly mid-level?*

REINTSMA: I don’t remember for sure, but I think it was more of a mixture. I’m pretty sure I was not the only mid-level person in the group, but there were IDIs as well.



*Q: Okay. This period was the height of the Development Fund for Africa and some of its most innovative programming during the 1987 – 1990 period. Were you involved with reviewing any of those very large policy-based non-project/project proposals while in AFR/PD?*

REINTSMA: We were exposed to it, and I remember the discussions and debate about non-project assistance, and that a lot of folks were skeptical as to whether or not it could be effective and really change host government policies, and even how to measure the effectiveness. I do also remember reviewing some of those programs, but I don't remember it well enough to draw particular lessons from the experience.

*Q: Okay. Why don't we go on and talk about your first assignment and then maybe call it quits for today. But let's talk about how you were assigned to Lesotho.*

### **USAID/Lesotho, Agriculture Officer (1989 – 1992)**

#### ***(Horses, Sheep, Too Much Technical Assistance; and Nelson Mandela)***

REINTSMA: Yes, Lesotho. A small/medium sized mission in a small but interesting country, and with a substantial ag program. I was the ag officer. There was only one ag officer position. I had a small but strong staff of FSNs (Foreign Service Nationals), three or four, if I remember right. There was a mission director, program officer who also functioned as a de facto deputy, ag officer, controller, and project development and health officers. So, six or seven direct hires. The mission was housed in a building within the embassy compound.

*Q: What was the agricultural program? I actually visited there once and went up in the mountains, and I believe I was visiting an agricultural program. I remember having to ride on a horse, and I believe the University of Wyoming had something to do with this program.*

REINTSMA: Yes. And not 'just a horse', but a Basotho pony, I'm sure. Those horses are known for a special gait called 'tripling', which I understand is similar to the horses from Iceland. In Lesotho, they ride them over very dicey, steep mountain trails. Those ponies are really surefooted and highly prized.

*Q: I know. And I could hardly walk after I got off the horse.*

REINTSMA: Yeah. I believe Lesotho is the only country in the world besides Canada that has a Royal Mounted Police Force. So, horses are a big deal there.

At any rate, the flagship ag. project was called LAPIS. I don't remember exactly what the acronym stands for, but it was a mega integrated rural development project. And very likely you may have visited the livestock (mainly sheep) component of the project, which had a big range management activity based in the mountains. Lesotho's main export, other than labor, is merino wool. There were a couple of other ag projects, much smaller,

but LAPIS was the major flagship project. Really a multi-component mega project. Those were the days when we weren't very good about local capacity building, and we had something like twenty-eight or thirty long-term American TA on the project in Lesotho, a tiny little country.

They were doing everything from capacity building at the Lesotho Ag College to promoting irrigated farming to this large range management program in the mountains on the eastern side of the country. And various other components as well, including marketing and policy.

*Q: Were some of those people in OPEX or governmental positions, or were they advisory?*

REINTSMA: My recollection is they were all advisory, all under one project and all project employees.

*Q: Wow.*

REINTSMA: The exception to the advisory role may have been at the Lesotho Ag College, where I think a few may have been actual teachers -- I'm not sure on that.

*Q: So, was it a consortium? It must have been a very large contract.*

REINTSMA: One big contract given to a very small company based in Arizona, American Ag International. And I believe that Lesotho project was basically that entire business of that company.

*Q: Had the program been designed before you got there?*

REINTSMA: It had, yes. I want to choose my words carefully here. The design was led by a very experienced, well-meaning individual, and I wasn't there when it was designed, so I want to be careful about what I say with the benefit of hindsight. But I think the design team may have gotten a little carried away with the design process itself. I think the process may have to some degree overtaken some of the realities on the ground. Again, I wasn't there at the time, but my sense is that it became; "well, we need a T.A. specialist to cover this issue; and then, what about that issue; and then, oh yes, we'll also need one of those; and it just kind of got out of hand. I used to, a little bit disparagingly, call it the "thirty, thirty, thirty project", as in \$30 million, with thirty long-term advisors (TA) working with thirty farmers in Lesotho. That's an unfair exaggeration, but it did have a big structure and expatriate presence in a very small country, which didn't leave a lot of room for developing local capacity, in my view. That said, Lesotho government capacity was very weak, so it was no doubt had to find competent counterparts to work with the expats.

*Q: Right. So, were there ever any efforts made during the project to revise or refocus it, perhaps narrow it down? I'm just curious whether you were able to do any adaptation.*

REINTSMA: Yes. That adaptation did happen in the transition from that first mega-project to the follow-on project. The follow-on ended up being focused on the integrated range management program, which was considered one of the most successful components. It tried to apply the lessons learned from the first phase and was much more limited in scope.

*Q: So, there were lessons learned from the first project?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I think that's right, especially about the overly dominant presence of expat T.A., and there were technical lessons about range management techniques as well.

*Q: (Laughs) Well, that's good.*

*What was it like being in Lesotho, an unusual little country in the middle of South Africa? Did that create any special challenges to you all? And then, another question about being a small mission that relied to some extent on regional services: any observations about how regional platforms work in supplying services to small missions?*

REINTSMA: Well, for the second question on regional services, I actually saw more of that when I was in Rwanda, coming out of REDSO East Africa, than I did in Lesotho. In Lesotho, we had our own controller. We did depend on the regional RLA, who I think was based in South Africa, but I don't remember much in the way of regional services in the ag sector in Lesotho. There may have been more of that in the Health sector, and also Food for Peace.

*Q: Yes, right. So, you were pretty self-contained, then.*

REINTSMA: We were pretty self-contained and honestly, the main focus of the ag office, at least, was really just implementing that one mega project. I may have gotten some regional help with the design of the follow-on project, I don't remember how much of that I did myself and how much depended on help from regional or Washington-based services.

*Q: Okay. I was just curious.*

REINTSMA: Sorry, what was the first part of the question?

*Q: Well, the first part was just what it's like working in a country that's embedded in another country? And, did you spend a lot of time in South Africa on a personal basis?*

REINTSMA: We did spend personal time in South Africa. Maseru, the capital of Lesotho, was right on the border with South Africa, and most expatriates went to South Africa for shopping and often for vacations or recreation.

Regarding working there, Lesotho being a small country entirely surrounded by South Africa, it was a fairly unique situation. I think there was always a question in most expatriates mind's as to whether Lesotho was, sorry to say it bluntly, was really a 'viable country' or not. Both the economy and the politics were extremely dependent on what happened across the border. A very high percentage of Basotho were employed in South Africa, especially in the mines; supplies, raw materials, markets and market access all came through South Africa, and the country was also very affected by the politics of South Africa, which were very exciting at the time.

This was during the time when Nelson Mandela was released from prison, and South Africa was transitioning to majority rule. So, a lot was going on in the region overall. In some ways, it's fair to say that our aid program in Lesotho existed in large part because of apartheid; because of the perceived need to show USG support to 'majority-rule' countries in Southern Africa in the face of apartheid. The USAID mission was closed not many years later, after the end of apartheid.

In terms of my work in the ag. sector, it was more complicated due to this geography. For example, with the exception of Merino sheep's wool that was exported internationally (but still through South Africa, of course), Lesotho's ag markets and marketing logistics depended on South Africa. And agricultural inputs like seed and fertilizer all came from South Africa. Interesting, though, Lesotho did benefit somewhat from sanctions on South African products for a certain time period.

So to your question, yes, working there felt that you were in this little island in the middle of a much larger country and situation, and that broader forces affected everything you did, including some aspects of USAID programing.

*Q: Right. Did you have much involvement with the embassy at all? Was there much interagency collaboration at all or were you isolated from that with the ag program?*

REINTSMA: I would say quite isolated from it and even though we were geographically within the embassy compound, I did not have much contact with the embassy. There were also not a lot of other USG agencies at post.

*Q: Was Peace Corps in Lesotho?*

REINTSMA: They were, yes. Quite a large program.

*Q: Was there any AID-Peace Corps collaboration?*

REINTSMA: There was, yes. I don't remember the exact name of the broader USAID-Peace Corps collaboration program, (was it Small Project Assistance or something like that?), but yes, we did have that program in Lesotho, and it was within my portfolio. So, I did work with the local Peace Corps director. That would be the exception to what I said earlier about lack of interagency work.

*Q: Just one other question: Since USAID was grappling with the early stages of HIV/AIDS during this period, were you ever involved in broader discussions with the mission about it? While not part of your portfolio, I wonder if it came up as a concern within the mission.*

REINTSMA: Yes, it was a concern, but I was not directly involved. As I recall, PEPFAR (United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief) didn't exist at that time—it didn't start until the early 2000s under George W. Bush, right? So, I don't think there was significant funding for HIV-AIDS in Lesotho at the time. But I don't remember much about the health portfolio, so I'm afraid I can't really shed much light on the question.

*Q: Okay. And you weren't seeing it within the staff of the mission as well? Because there were some missions in Southern Africa where it was quite noticeable.*

REINTSMA: No, not at that time, to the best of my recollection. It was a small mission, small staff, and perhaps relatively early yet in terms of the full impact of the HIV-AIDS crisis in Africa. Or maybe I'm just not remembering it well since it was not fully on my radar screen in the ag office, even though I was quite concerned about the broader Africa-wide implications of HIV-AIDS earlier when I was still in Washington.

*Q: Okay. Anything else on Lesotho that you'd like to mention about the program or living there?*

REINTSMA: Well, again, it was interesting going from Rwanda, where I had a very operational job within a functional government, to Zaire, where the government was largely dysfunctional or irrelevant to serious development, or even had a negative impact on development. And it really was irrelevant, in terms of any kind of support to people's lives. I'm not joking.

Then to go to Lesotho, which was a kind of strange or unique middle case. At any rate, for me the big picture lesson seems pretty obvious--that foreign aid is by and large only as effective as the context within which it operates. You can push a wet noodle upstream and with enough money and effort, possibly make a little bit of headway. I'm probably mixing my metaphors here. But you might make a little bit of headway and you can do a few good things, but if those bits of progress are going to really last and have staying power, then they need to happen within the context of either an effective local government or solid local institutions, or both. Organizations, including government entities, are going to take advantage of the resources that foreign aid brings and really build something with them. And in Lesotho, there was, again, this question about how long is this going to last and are our development efforts really going to be viable over the long term. Not as clear a situation as Zaire (now Democratic Republic of Congo), where the answer was very clear, but in Lesotho it was more of a constant question in the back of your mind.

*Q: Right, right. Do you have thoughts on how to assess that context and how to measure? I mean, a case like Zaire is pretty easy, but most cases are not so clear. Any thoughts on how to measure that commitment of host country institutions.*

REINTSMA: Hmm, I think MCC (the U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation) has done a lot of work on that question. In the end, though, there is probably a lot of subjectivity in trying to answer that.

*Q: Yeah. Well, we can come back to that question.*

REINTSMA: Yes, it's a good one.

*Q: In many ways it's true of all assignments.*

REINTSMA: Yes. And then, another question you're always asking yourself is, even if what I'm doing is not very effective in a direct, immediate, not 'showing results in the next five-years' sort of sense, am I still planting seeds that will grow in the future. Is working with and sending people off for participant training, for example, going to have a long term payoff that can't be seen in the shorter term?

Well, anyway, I've got two or three things to think about for our next session.

(End of Session)

*Q: This is Carol Peasley and this is interview number two with Curt Reintsma, and it is December 28, 2022.*

*And Curt, when we finished up last time, you were departing USAID-Lesotho, and you were heading back to Washington to work in the Africa bureau, the Office of Sustainable Development. And I believe you became the division chief for the ag environment, private sector division. So, would you like to tell us a little bit about the position and the office in which you were working? And we can go over some specifics.*

**USAID/W, AFR/Sustainable Development Office, Division Chief (1992 – 1997)**

***(Building Initiatives; Honing Management Skills; Reaching Out; Stimulating Portfolio)***

REINTSMA: Okay. Sure. Good morning. My recollection is that I joined the Office of Sustainable Development as the deputy head of the Ag, Environment and Private Sector Division, then I became the Division Chief roughly a year later. It was a very interesting and fairly high visibility job, both internally and as liaison to a lot of outside constituency groups, such as large Washington-based NGOs, heads of the agricultural research institutes worldwide, and university international program directors. Internally within the Africa bureau, the Division: managed some large and important regional programs, such as: FEWS (Famine Early Warning System) and CARPE (Central African Regional Program for the Environment); did analysis; and provided backup support for missions, covering a wide range of sectors. It involved managing and bringing together those three sectors in the portfolio of the technical office of the Africa bureau. I managed both Direct

Hire (FS and GS) staff, as well as a large number of PASA staff from USDA, I think somewhere around 30 overall.

*Q: Okay. I know that the Development Fund for Africa still existed and that the Africa bureau was doing a lot of policy-based programming. Were you involved with that at the mission level and supporting any of that policy-based work? Do you recall?*

REINTSMA: My memory is a little hazy on that, frankly. Certainly, policy-based programming was there as a part of the broader agenda. I suspect that more of that was handled at the office director level by Jerry Wolgin, and perhaps by Larry Saiers who was the DAA (Deputy Assistant Administrator) at the time.

Also, possibly our Private Sector group worked with the mission economists, but I'm not recalling this very well. I think my own focus was more on the operational side.

*Q: That's fine. I know that one of the big tasks that you were involved with was a food security initiative that President Clinton had.*

REINTSMA: Yeah. That's an interesting story and one of the accomplishments from my career that I'm most proud of. Maybe I'll start at the end of the story and then go back to the beginning. You played an important role in the story, of course, in fact several roles in your leadership capacity in the Africa Bureau. So, to jump to the end of story, President Clinton traveled to Uganda, and one of the programs he announced during his speech there was this initiative, the Africa Food Security Initiative, or AFSI. You were with him at the event, and you took some snapshots of him making the announcement and gave them to me. So, somewhere in my boxes of paraphernalia here at home, I have those pictures that you sent me of President Clinton announcing the initiative.

So, to go back to the beginning of the story, let me start by noting something that I think was a little unusual in our work, and that is starting a major initiative internally within the Agency, as opposed to having it brought down to us from above, either by the administration or the Congress. The story begins with interest on the Hill by Senator Lugar (and perhaps others) in African food security issues. I believe this was in part because the funds for agriculture within the agency had diminished dramatically, and his constituencies were probably making him aware of that. I actually did a paper on that topic for Administrator Brian Atwood a few years later, which quantified the extent to which the funds for agriculture had diminished within the agency. Just to give some rough numbers to illustrate the point, funding for agriculture went from something in the range of \$1.2 to \$1.4 billion (depending on how you count) in the early 1980s, to around \$200 million by the time we started that initiative, refresh my memory here, 199--?

*Q: That will be 1996, 1997, something like that.*

REINTSMA: Yeah, perhaps a little earlier, 1995 probably when we first started working on it. Anyway, it had dropped from over \$1.2 billion down to \$200 million worldwide for agriculture programming within the agency. There were a lot of reasons for that drop. It

was a dramatic decline, and I remember the ag sector counsel (heads of the ag offices for each of the Agency's regional Bureaus and the central technical Bureau) used to sit around and moan about how there weren't any resources any longer. And being a little younger and perhaps more reckless, I guess, my reaction was "Well, what are we going to do about it"?

At any rate, Len Rogers, who was DAA in the Food for Peace Bureau, was called up to the Hill to testify before Richard Lugar's committee, which I believe was Senate Foreign Relations, on this topic.

As division chief for ag in the Africa bureau, I had worked very closely with his staff, especially Nisha Desai (who later came back into the agency as a political appointee), on preparing his testimony. So, I went up to the Hill with him when he testified, and Nisha and I were there to back him up as staff support when needed. I had been thinking about this, and in the taxi back to the office after the testimony, I said something like, "Len, given this interest on the Hill and given the dramatic decrease in resources for agriculture, do you think the time might be right to propose some kind of an effort or initiative to build back funding and focus on agriculture and food security in Africa?" We chatted a bit about it in the taxi, and when Len got back to his desk he sent an email to you, copying me and Jerry Wolgin and maybe some others, and (laughs) and essentially said "What about this? Should we refocus attention on this?" Of course, I was highly enthusiastic and quite excited, and I remember replying to the email, to you and the others, saying, "Yes, yes and yes!!!". (Laughs). So that's how it got started.

*Q: I'm hoping we said yes. (Laughs)*

REINTSMA: I think initially it was a sort of qualified yes. I think you wanted to know more about what it would actually look like. So, we just started putting it together, making the case, defining what it would look like (essentially it was just a plus-up of funding, at least initially), deciding on a funding level to ask for, etc. I remember the first time I talked to you about it face to face, you said something like, kind of reluctantly, "Well, I suppose we can have one of our own initiatives, since we keep getting them imposed on us from outside." I started filling in the pieces, preparing presentations and so forth, then you agreed we could present it to USAID Administrator Brian Atwood. I remember the three of us sat in his office and went through the slides I had prepared. And at the end of the presentation, Brian basically said: "Okay, give it a try, but on the condition that you're not taking resources from some other parts of the agency". So, with his tentative thumbs up, I also started making presentations to the various constituency groups and there was a lot of enthusiasm. That would be groups like Bread for the World and other NGOs, the ag research and university communities, and others.

I'm probably forgetting a lot and I'm making a long story much shorter, but essentially we continued to build support for it both within the Agency and with the constituency groups that supported international agriculture and USAID. So, we then took it to the point where a funding request was put into internal budget proposals, the administration's



budget proposals, and finally it went to the Hill as part of the administration's government-wide official budget request.

*Q: Do you recall whether the primary focus was on production and ag research, or was it more crosscutting? Did it begin the ideas of partnerships with the private sector? Are there some interesting aspects of this strategic approach that would be worth highlighting?*

REINTSMA: It was generally seen as a financial plus up across the board, at least at that point in the development of the Initiative. So far as I recall, we did not propose to change the balance of funding between sub-sectors, i.e. to change the way funding was allocated between production versus research versus agricultural marketing, or other subsectors. We were focused on restoring some of the lost funding for agriculture and food security, and it would be mostly left up to the missions to define the sub-sector focus of their programs.

On the private sector part of your question, while there was an active set of private sector activities in the Division I managed, I don't think we were really thinking in terms of direct programmatic partnerships at that point in time. That mostly came later with the development of the Global Development Alliance, I believe.

At any rate, I led the Initiative up to the point that it was approved, or at least put into the Administration's budget to Congress. Then I left that office to go to Legislative and Public Affairs in 1997 and David Atwood followed me as Division Chief. I believe David then really led the charge in terms of better shaping and defining the specifics of the new Initiative.

In terms of lessons learned from the approach, for me the biggest lesson was a personal one, which I suppose you might also call a management lesson or a lesson in finding ways to be effective in big bureaucracies. So, the big lesson I took from the experience was one of 'self empowerment'; that even in big bureaucracies, it's possible to jump in and take charge, provide leadership and advance a bold idea to make it a reality. I was lucky, I suppose, that I also had good people above me in the chain of command who were supportive and gave me the latitude to move forward. (in this case, especially Jerry Wolgin and yourself.) Sometimes, you can have a lot more influence than you might think you can have.

So yes, self-empowerment and 'think big' were the major lessons for me.

*Q: That's a very important lesson. I think that USAID offers incredible opportunities for people who are innovative and entrepreneurial and pushing ideas. You don't have to sit and wait for the political bosses to come up with the initiatives and ideas.*

REINTSMA: Yes, for sure. In some ways, the bureaucracy is so 'wishy-washy' that if you exert some real leadership, you can get a lot further than you might think you can.

*Q: Yes, absolutely. I'm assuming that the initiative included food aid as well, correct?*

REINTSMA: No, it did not. It was focused on the Development Assistance side of the equation.

*Q: Okay.*

REINTSMA: The bottom line for the Initiative itself is that it had modest success. I was shooting for a billion dollars, a budget increase of \$100 million per year over ten years. That was my personal aspirational goal. Well, we didn't get that, but we did get a modest increase in funding, and most importantly we reversed a nearly two decade long sharp decline in funding for agriculture. I don't remember the specific numbers, but I think we got an increase of maybe 20 or 30 %, or something in that order of magnitude, probably in the low hundreds of millions spread over a few years. But we stopped that downward plunge of the curve and got it to turn back up a bit and started to get people to pay attention to the importance of funding to combat hunger and malnutrition in Africa. I think this effort and later initiatives probably also became a factor in helping create the conditions, the constituency, and the internal focus and staff that later helped put together what's now the larger, multi-Agency Feed the Future Initiative.

*Q: Yes, and you also importantly influenced the central AID leadership that had minimized the importance of agriculture. You turned around their attitudes as well.*

REINTSMA: Yes, I hope that was the case, at least to some extent. At the same time, I don't think it was a case of people consciously thinking or saying that agriculture is not important. It's just that the attention shifted elsewhere. For example, the fall of the Iron Curtain (collapse of the Soviet Union and its 'empire'), led to a big shift in the resources going to that part of the world, and the health sector was increasingly absorbing funding as more attention was paid to those issues. So funding for agriculture and food security was just being squeezed out by other priorities. It wasn't as if there was a deliberate strategy to deemphasize it.

*Q: Right, right.*

*Now, you had mentioned earlier that during the time you were in this office within the Africa Bureau, the private sector role in agriculture began to be emphasized more. Can you talk a little bit about what you all began to do?*

REINTSMA: Yeah. Help me out with some of the specifics here, about how this emphasis on the private sector developed. I wasn't directly involved in the early years of it, and I'm hazy on the timing. At any rate, at some previous point, (was it the Reagan Administration?), the agency actually had a private sector bureau.

*Q: Yes; it was started during the Reagan Administration and Peter McPherson.*

REINTSMA: Okay, yes. So, during the time period we're talking about that bureau wasn't fully disbanded, but it started to be deemphasized in terms of its visibility and position in the bureaucracy.

*Q: Right. And some of this was funding constraints as well because there became more and more earmarks and economic growth and agriculture money began to become more scarce.*

REINTSMA: Yes. So, at any rate, the remnants of what had been an agency-wide bureau ended up coming to my shop in the Africa bureau, the shop that I was heading at the time. And Warren Weinstein was leading that group, or he may have been the only person left in it at that time, I'm not sure. And of course, Warren later met a tragic ending.

*Q: Yes, right.*

REINTSMA: Anyway, Warren was heading that unit, and he was the intellectual and operational driving force behind it.

*Q: So, this was broad private sector development, it wasn't private sector only related to agriculture?*

REINTSMA: It was, yes.

*Q: Within the office, okay.*

REINTSMA: Just as the environment was integrated into agriculture, but separate. So, there really were three parts to the office, agriculture, environment and private sector.

*Q: Okay, right. It was really three sectors you were heading up. Okay.*

REINTSMA: Yes. But for me, at least, and probably for much of the agency, it was early on in starting to understand the role of the private sector generally, and the role the private sector can and should play in promoting development and providing a longer-term, more sustainable approach to development.

*Q: I know that later there began to be very active involvement with some of the cocoa producers and with Cargill and others. Did any of that start here or did that start later?*

REINTSMA: That's a good question and I don't know the actual timeframe for when that started. I believe Jeff Hill and probably others would know when it started, but I don't recall it being during my tenure in that AFR Bureau job. However, when I went to LPA (Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs) in 1997, we were doing outreach to private companies. I remember traveling to Cargill's headquarters, for example, to discuss adding micro-nutrient fortification to food processing facilities in Africa. I also developed outreach events in Iowa and Chicago that involved private sector groups like the

American Farm Bureau, so there was a relationship developing during the latter part of the 1990s. My sense, though, is that it was early and nascent and largely exploratory. I don't know what the earlier Private Sector Bureau was doing in terms of outreach to individual private companies, as opposed to promoting market-based policy issues.

*Q: No, that's fine. We will talk about it more later because you went on to other jobs in which this was an important part of your work.*

REINTSMA: Yes, for sure. It became a major focus for me later, then again for my last ten years before the second retirement in 2022.

*Q: You had mentioned on the Africa Food Security Initiative that outreach to constituency-based groups was another important part of the work that you were doing. Was this a broad spectrum of groups or was it the Africa-centric groups and agriculture-centric groups? I'm just curious if you can say a little bit more about that.*

REINTSMA: Yes. It was mainly groups focused on both agriculture and environment, including the overlap between the two, but definitely both sectors. Most of the groups had a world-wide perspective, but certainly also a strong focus on Africa. For example, World Resources Institute was a big one on the environment side. On the ag side, U.S. universities, especially the international programs departments of the Land Grant universities, were an important group, as well as the heads of the CGIAR institutions (International Ag. Research Institutes). Then there were also non-profit advocacy groups like Bread for the World, and other more operational NGOs that worked with USAID in the field, such as CARE and Catholic Relief Services. Those were the kinds of groups that we were working with.

*Q: Since environment was in your portfolio as well and there was a lot of controversy during this period about community-based natural resources management and the Campfire model in Zimbabwe.*

REINTSMA: Yes.

*Q: Were you involved at all with that?*

REINTSMA: I was.

*Q: Because it did involve constituency groups, some supporting and others vehemently complaining about the Campfire model. The Congress also became involved. If you were involved, if you could talk a little bit about that.*

REINTSMA: Sure. I wasn't involved at the level of going to the Hill myself to testify or answer questions, not that level of involvement, but I was quite aware of the issues and involved at a lower level. My recollection is Tony Pryor (who's still at USAID so far as I know), and John Goudet who was the head of that unit, and the Zimbabwe Mission were leading the effort for the Bureau, to hone our response to the issue.

At any rate, the basic issue came down to whether the priority focus should be on individual animal rights versus a focus on broader community-based wildlife protection.

The essence of the issue was whether culling individual elephants by hunting should be allowed, in order to raise revenue for wildlife management and protection. My understanding was that the Campfire Project, for which USAID was providing partial funding, was a widely respected, acclaimed project in Zimbabwe and beyond. It was working with local community groups to build support for wildlife and environmental protection. One of the ways that they did that was to have some revenue flow back into the community from the National Parks or protected zones, and one of the ways the revenue was created was to allow hunting of older bull elephants that probably needed to be culled anyway. In some situations, they can be detrimental to the environment due to overpopulation in small land areas, and to the overall cause of wildlife protection by decreasing community support when they destroy crops, for example. So, one small part of the model was to allow wealthy hunters to shoot a bull elephant for a large fee. Then a portion of that fee went back to the local community as a way to show them tangible benefits of preserving wildlife. So, the idea was that generating revenue for the local population would decrease poaching, improve management of the protected areas, and build support in the local community to protect the wildlife overall. When the Humane Society heard about this, they got very upset, asking how U.S. government taxpayer money could possibly support shooting elephants. Of course, it wasn't that simplistic. Believe me, I love elephants. I have spent time in the bush tracking elephants on foot, and I think elephants are amazing and wonderful creatures. But at the same time, there is a broader issue here, and I think a lot of observers believed the program was having a very positive impact in building overall support for wildlife and environmental protection in Zimbabwe. Anyway, the bottom line was the Humane Society and probably aligned groups were able to get Congress to pull the funding for the program. So, USAID had to stop it.

*Q: Right. Yes, and I do remember being visited by the Humane Society.*

REINTSMA: So, just a heads up for when we come to the Malawi part of this discussion, my single best day as mission director in Malawi was participating in moving elephants, as part of an elephant translocation project.

*Q: Okay, good, so you made up for your sins with the Campfire Program (laughs).*

*Well, again, you had mentioned to me earlier that this involvement with constituency groups during your time in a technical position in AID helped you better understand the importance of those relationships more generally for USAID.*

REINTSMA: Yes, and it became a factor in why I decided to move to LPA and work on those broader agency-wide outreach issues for a couple of years. I think there are a couple broad lessons there. It's awfully easy in USAID for staff to become very internally focused. I think that has a couple of detrimental impacts. One is that by being overly

internally focused, you're often missing the forest for the trees; missing the big picture of why you're doing what you're doing; the larger context. That's not anybody's fault, it's just the pressures people are under on a day-to-day basis, but you certainly can miss the bigger issues with that overly internal focus. And secondly, it becomes demoralizing and discouraging over time, when you become overwhelmed with the bureaucracy and feel like you're not making any headway. It's encouraging and refreshing, I think, to get out and to spend time with the constituency groups, talking with them, listening to them, hearing what kinds of issues they're concerned about, but also what they're excited about and sometimes seeing the more idealistic goals that led us to this kind of work in the first place. So yeah, I found that a very uplifting part of the job.

*Q: Mm-hm. Is there anything else further you want to say about the time in the Office of Sustainable Development in the Africa bureau, or should we move onto your time in LPA?*

REINTSMA: I think just to summarize, I felt like it was a time and place when I was allowed to expand my own horizons, to develop and blossom. Is that too flowery? No pun intended. I had a very interesting portfolio of activities/sectors, and a direct boss who gave his staff a lot of leeway to develop professionally. He was in many ways the ideal boss. He supported you when you needed support, but also gave you a lot of freedom to run with the things that you thought were important. And to a large extent that approach went on up to the front office of the Africa bureau. I really appreciated that ability to take things and run with them.

#### **AID/W, Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs, (1997 – 2000)**

##### **(Outreach, Outreach, Outreach—Building Our Support Base)**

*Q: Good. So, you really took quite a significant detour to go to the Office of—the Bureau of Legislative and Public Affairs, LPA. I suspect you may have been one of the first technical Foreign Service Officers to move into that Bureau.*

REINTSMA: Yes, that is probably the case. That said, I think the leadership in LPA did recognize that it was important to have some career Foreign Service people. Although they did have some career Civil Service staff, most of the top level staff were political appointees. And again, I think the leadership in LPA at the time valued having a few technical career staff.

It was a very interesting and a very positive time for me. Part of the equation in making the decision to 'take a detour' was at a personal level. Due to some family issues I knew I was going to be staying in Washington for some time, and so I decided rather than following a kind of narrow, linear path and trying to move up stepwise in a traditional track, I would just find interesting things to do. And so, partly because of the earlier work with constituency groups, I got quite interested in the question of how we build a constituency in the U.S. for foreign assistance. That's what drove my decision to move to LPA.

*Q: So, the Bureau had two parts: public affairs and legislation. Which side were you on, or were you doing both things?*

REINTSMA: I was very heavily on the public affairs side. I think I was the de facto deputy of the public affairs division of LPA, although I don't remember what my official job title was. But it was a small group in LPA, so I also had a lot of contact with the staff on the legislative side; people like Betty Cook. And I did spend a little time in meetings on the Hill. But my basic job was to work at building the constituency base for foreign aid on the public outreach side.

*Q: Okay. I know that one of the important initiatives that was done at that time was the Lessons Without Borders initiative. Was that part of your responsibility?*

REINTSMA: Absolutely. That was a lot of my responsibility, yes.

*Q: Could you talk about that a bit and some of the specific examples of that program?*

REINTSMA: Yes, absolutely. Again, I was very heavily involved in that. The basic concept of Lessons Without Borders was that there were specific lessons and areas of technical expertise that USAID funded and honed in working overseas, and that those lessons and expertise could be applied back to the U.S. Expertise in issues like addressing poverty and hunger, building better health care, etc. And the implicit assumption was that in making the linkages between our overseas aid programs and addressing similar needs domestically, we would build connections between U.S.-based development practitioners and overseas development practitioners, and open people's eyes to the interrelationship between the two and thus build support for foreign assistance. That was the underlying concept of Lessons Without Borders.

*Q: Can you tell us some of those lessons that were learned?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I can give a couple of examples.

*Q: Okay.*

REINTSMA: So, to cite one example that happened just before I joined LPA, inner-city Baltimore at the time had very low child immunization rates. USAID was able to bring in technical experts from our Health Bureau to provide advice and do a program working with the city authorities in Baltimore, based on lessons learned through our child immunization work overseas. They advised city of Baltimore authorities on ways to get child immunization rates up, and I believe the program had some success.

Community policing was another idea that I remember was being worked on—applying lessons from a program that USAID sponsored in the Caribbean, to U.S. cities. So those were a couple of examples—there were certainly others.

With regard to my own role, I conceptualized and led two major events when I was there in LPA. One was called Global Agriculture and the American Midwest, and we did it in Ames, Iowa, in collaboration with Iowa State University. We had strong participation from groups like the U.S. Farm Bureau, which is a relatively conservative farmer group, universities, and various other ag and farm groups. We put on a pretty big three-day event, with lots of speakers, panel sessions, and more. USDA heard about it and got in on the act. It was quite a big event and I think got a lot of good press for USAID in the American heartland. Interestingly, it was the very, very beginning of internet video calls and live streaming, and we actually tried to live stream a connection between a young farmers group in Uganda to the auditorium in Ames, Iowa. Iowa at the time (this was probably 1998) was one of the first states to aggressively wire the state with internet access, and we brought in the USAID folks who were leading on IT connectivity (I think Lane Smith was leading that effort for the Africa Bureau). This brought a new, cutting edge element to the event.

*Q: Oh, really?*

REINTSMA: Yes, it added an innovative IT aspect. Anyway, it was quite a big event with pretty high-level participation. I think we may have had a couple of members of Congress participating, but I'm not sure about that specific detail.

One of the lessons or perspectives that we honed at that event, and that USAID still draws upon today, is that U.S. agriculture and U.S. farmer's incomes are very dependent on agricultural exports. And in order to export U.S.-grown crops, you have to have markets overseas where people have the money to buy those crops. This is especially the case for feed grains. As USAID helps to develop economies overseas, and as people become better off, they can afford better diets and they buy more U.S. agricultural exports, in particular animal feeds as they shift to higher protein diets. So, USAID's work in promoting economic development is actually expanding markets for U.S. farmers overseas. South Korea's an example of this that's often cited. Their purchase of U.S. agricultural exports expanded dramatically as their economy developed. So that perspective was one big theme of the Iowa event.

Another theme is that investments in ag research have universal pay-offs. There are many cases when research work done on sorghum or wheat or other crops internationally (and partially funded by USAID) paid big benefits to U.S. farmers when the results of the research investments came back home. Those were a couple of the big themes that were developed and publicized at the event.

Then I did another big event in Knoxville, Tennessee. In this case, the theme was focused on rural enterprise and service provision for rural development. We brought together rural development practitioners from overseas who were often funded by USAID, to interact with practitioners in Appalachia. They were often working on similar kinds of projects. There were three days of interesting exchanges. For example, we would set up a panel where you might have one person working on rural development in Zimbabwe and



another working on it in eastern Kentucky. And they would be exchanging methodologies, approaches, and lessons learned.

Those were two big events that I pulled off during the time I was there.

I also did a lot of outreach to the U.S. university community, which was feeling pretty neglected by USAID at the time. We organized a kind of ‘listening and learning tour’ to visit U.S. universities. We set up and traveled to three or four big regional meetings around the U.S., where regional groupings of universities came together to meet with us. We also met with university presidents, vice presidents, provosts and international program directors—folks at that level. The discussions centered around what USAID could do to rebuild better relationships with and support for U.S. universities that were or wanted to be working overseas.

*Q: Did that include work with BIFAD (Board for International Food and Agricultural Development)? Were they connected with LPA? I wonder who within USAID in fact was the main interlocutor with BIFAD*

REINTSMA: I’m not sure which office or Bureau within USAID was managing BIFAD at the time—possibly the Higher Ed group that I worked with from my LPA perch, or it could have been the central bureau agriculture office. At any rate, BIFAD is one of just two official advisory bodies to USAID. There are only two that are mandated by legislation. At least, that has been the case, I don’t know if that’s changed in more recent years. I believe the original focus of the membership of BIFAD was the land grant universities, established by Act of Congress in 1962 and 1890.

So BIFAD at the time consisted of senior officials from land grant universities advising USAID. More recently it’s been expanded to include private sector representatives and others as well.

*Q: Okay. And then there’s the Association of Land Grant Universities, public universities that Peter McPherson was the head of for a number of years. I assume you probably had a fair amount of contact with them as well.*

REINTSMA: We did, yes. As well as the broader association for U.S. universities. (I’ve forgotten the acronym for that broader group, based in Dupont Circle.) Anyway, we worked closely with that group as well. I believe they were the ones who helped set up the listening tour that we did around the U.S., because it was broader than just the land grant schools.

*Q: Do you have thoughts more generally about the partnerships that USAID has had with universities historically over time and the ebbs and flows of USAID work with universities?*

REINTSMA: Yes, and my thoughts are a bit mixed. It’s one of those situations where I can really see both sides of the equation. First, it’s an important relationship in a number

of ways. Practically speaking, universities are a constituency group that's important to USAID. As well as a potential source of support with Congress, they bring university-based research to a lot of the development issues that USAID is focused on, in sectors such as health, agriculture, economic development, and others. They are also, of course a primary training grounds both for Americans interested in international work, and for students from developing countries who will be the future leaders of their countries.

On the other hand, on the ag side at least, some would argue that over the years from maybe the late 1960s through the 1980s, some of the international and ag schools at the universities developed a sense of entitlement. To some degree, they may have felt like they were entitled to USAID funding regardless of the effectiveness of the results that they produced. And some of that 'entitlement' was legislated, in the form of congressional earmarks or mandates for state universities. Coupled with this, there's a long running criticism or concern that a lot of university-based research doesn't actually end up getting applied in the field. That it may provide more benefits to the university structure and systems of churning out graduate students, than it has actual development impacts on the ground.

So I think it's a nuanced, case-by-case situation. I don't think it's all one or the other. I do think that tremendous work has been done by universities like Michigan State in really taking a long-term development perspective. Did we talk about this last time, MSU's work in Mali and elsewhere and the long term impact of that work? They and others provided long-term policy-based assistance to many African governments. So, I think it's a mixed picture.

*Q: One of the other things that universities have been heavily involved with is participant training, including large programs that supported graduate school training. I'm wondering whether those were ever discussed during the time you were talking with university constituency groups.*

REINTSMA: I don't remember the extent to which that question was discussed on that specific university listening tour, but most likely it was indeed a topic of discussion. To speak to the overall question of participant training, I think it's a huge issue. Many times I've walked into the office of a minister of state or other senior African government official, for example the minister of health or the minister of agriculture or whatever. And they would talk about how they went to a U.S. university, say Iowa State or MSU or Washington or Arizona State for their graduate training. They clearly relished the time they spent in the U.S., and the specific training they got. So I think that if you take a broad foreign policy lens, and you think in terms of winning hearts and minds and building support for democratic ideals and values—the big picture foreign policy accomplishments that the U.S. tries to pull off in part through USAID—I think participant training was a huge factor in terms of winning friends for our ideals.

At the country level, I also think that it smoothed the way for better implementation of programs because there was more of a meeting of the minds about how to proceed, when

you're dealing with local officials that have U.S. based training. So I just think that we really lost a lot when we stopped most of the funding for that kind of participant training. The criticism of participant training at the time was that it was very expensive. I.e., can you justify the cost of sending somebody to the U.S. for two years to get a master's degree or maybe five years to get a PhD, vis-à-vis training people locally which is much cheaper? So, if you look at it in that narrow sense of direct cost comparison of international versus local training, yes, it's subject to criticism. But I think if you pull the lens back and look at the broader benefits, we've lost a lot by stopping most of that funding. And it was never very expensive overall, in the sense of being a big part of USAID's overall budget. And now many students from developing countries go to China or other places for their training—a huge loss for U.S. foreign policy.

*Q: I agree that it's important and has a lot of intangible benefits as well.*

*Since I distracted you to other matters, did you get an opportunity to say what you wanted to about the process side of Lessons Without Borders?*

REINTSMA: I think just the exposure that we gained within the U.S., as to the importance of foreign assistance, was a major accomplishment. Maybe you could argue that it's not that big a deal to put on a half dozen regional events around the U.S. But I think it was a big deal. We would normally get at least the local member of congress and sometimes other members of Congress or key staffers to come to these events. And we got local press and leaders of big national groups like the American Farm Bureau. So just to have those decision makers present and exposed to the ideas, plus three or four hundred participants, was important. For many of the people who came to those events, it was probably the first time they were exposed to what USAID does overseas and how that's relevant to their work and lives in the U.S. I think that exposure was very eye opening for a lot of people.

*Q: Were there other parts of the public affairs work that you did that you thought were particularly useful? You've talked about outreach to constituency groups and then Lessons Without Borders; are there other things that you would like to highlight?*

REINTSMA: One of the other activities that I was proud of was the production of a film targeted to the Future Farmers of America. This was a joint project between myself and Bruce White, a former Peace Corps Volunteer who worked at the FFA headquarters. The film showed how wheat farmers in the U.S. benefited from seeds developed in part with USAID funds, and which were stored in an international facility in Ethiopia. It was filmed in both Eastern Washington state and in Ethiopia. It was shown at the national FFA convention before 50,000 students. Then we developed a study guide to go along with it, and sent it to every FFA chapter in America. FFA has over 9,000 chapters in all 50 states, with over 900,000 student members. The film was also picked up by Maryland Public Television, so it got a lot of coverage, again highlighting the message about how international development work overseas comes back to help Americans.

Another outreach activity in LPA at the time was the development of an enhanced Speaker's Bureau. USAID staff, especially mission directors and other senior staff, were strongly encouraged to speak before local groups whenever they were in the U.S. This was not an activity I was leading, but it's another example of the very active outreach activities that were promoted in LPA during that era.

So back to my own story, I spend 90 percent of my time on the work with the agriculture groups, work with the university groups and then the specific events under the Lessons Without Borders program. Those activities were my main focus.

But I think what's important in terms of a broader lesson here is how it was a conscious, strategic effort on the part of LPA leadership to get outside of Washington, get outside of the bureaucracy, listen to constituents, and really work with existing constituencies and develop new constituencies. I don't follow LPA activities any longer, but I think it's probably rare in the history of the agency to have that kind of energetic, strategic, mindful approach to exposing the public to the benefits of USAID's work.

*Q: Yes, I was going to ask because you've, in subsequent years, had a lot of involvement with some high-profile issues, and I was going to ask whether you'd seen this level of attention to constituency groups. It sounds like you've not.*

REINTSMA: I don't think so. I think the norm in USAID is to do some of that, but it tends to be episodic, you know, situation or context specific, or at a lower level. As opposed to a consistent and deliberate strategy.

*Q: Okay. It sounds like a fascinating time and work that everyone needs to be exposed to in their careers. I'm sure it was very helpful for you later when you became a mission director to understand the importance of public outreach.*

REINTSMA: Yes, absolutely. And before we leave this section on LPA, I want to give a shout out to political appointee Jill Buckley, who was the AA (Assistant Administrator) for LPA at the time. Jill was behind a lot of this and she also gave me and others a lot of latitude to develop these ideas. She really pitched in and was very supportive as the ideas came to fruition, as mentioned above. She was practical, hard-working, strategic, and I think very effective. And remember, this was the time period when Senator Jesse Helms was trying to eliminate USAID. He came very close to doing so (two other Agencies he targeted were in fact eliminated), and I believe Jill Buckley and Brian Atwood worked effectively to prevent that from happening.

*Q: Good. So, you did that for three years. What did you do after you left LPA?*

REINTSMA: I think it may have been closer to two years, and then I had a couple of shorter stints and I may have forgotten what I put on my CV, but—

*Q: Oh, what you have is going to the Europe and Eurasia bureau.*

REINTSMA: That's right, I did two fairly short stints. I did a stint that lasted only months in the Europe and Eurasia bureau. And then, I did a year or so on the Southern Africa desk.

Yes, so I did a few months in the E and E bureau as division chief of the project development group. And it was just a bad fit. The job just didn't work well for me. There was no specific disaster during my tenure or anything like that, but it just didn't hold my interest. I was supervising a small group of folks who were providing mission support in general project development type work. The mission support was, how do I say, focused on compliance-based assistance, helping missions understand and follow the rules, that sort of thing. Frankly, it just didn't interest me, and the small group I was supervising didn't really need my help, nor did I have much to offer.

*Q: Yeah, probably not too exciting.*

REINTSMA: It just wasn't my thing. I don't remember exactly how long I did that for, but after some months, the Director of the Southern Africa office recruited me to come back to the Africa Bureau.

**AID/W, AFR/Office of Southern African Affairs (2000)**

***(Mozambique Floods: Bold USG Response, Lessons for the Future)***

*Q: So, this was the office of Southern African Affairs, the desk for Southern Africa?*

REINTSMA: Yes. I was the head of the desk for the Southeast Cone, covering South Africa, Mozambique, maybe Botswana, Swaziland and Lesotho. I supervised a small team. The work was more fast paced and more interesting.

But the big event that happened during my tenure was a massive flood in Mozambique and neighboring countries. It was front page news in the Washington Post and elsewhere.

*Q: Ah, right. And there was some very innovative work done on that, as I recall. Some I suspect took a lot of time to get approvals for.*

REINTSMA: Well, speaking of timing to get approvals, I'm going to tell a story here because I think it's another example of when you seize the reins and really charge forward in the bureaucracy, you can get some amazing things done. In late 1999 and the Spring of 2000, there was massive flooding in Mozambique due to unprecedented rainfall and the Indian Ocean cyclones that periodically come across Madagascar and hit southeast Africa.

Basically, the watersheds upstream in Zimbabwe, Malawi and elsewhere lead downstream to large deltas in Mozambique. The watersheds were inundated with weeks of hard rain, and so a massive amount of water came roaring down and flooded tens of thousands of square miles. Somewhere around 1,000 people died, and there was little or

no warning before the floods hit. This became a major story in the U.S. and international press, with dramatic photos of people clinging to trees, and massive widespread flooding. USAID was called upon to respond. Cynthia Rozell was the mission director in Mozambique and I ended up leading the charge back in Washington. Susan Rice was the Assistant Secretary of State for Africa, and Vivian Derrick was AA for USAID's Africa Bureau. With strong backing and leadership from Susan Rice, we decided to launch a bid to get a large supplemental funding request through Congress. I think Susan rightfully saw this as an opportunity to not only respond to the Mozambique floods, but also to raise the visibility of the kind of work that we did. I called Cynthia after a meeting with Susan Rice and let her know of the plan to request a large funding supplemental. The mission worked quickly and proposed a forward looking, innovative program; not just in emergency relief and recovery, but also setting up flood monitoring systems, early warning systems, and really trying to address the long term, broader problem of recurrent flooding that was so damaging and life threatening. This was in addition to the more immediate OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance) response, of course.

So, we put together this multi-country proposal, to work upstream in Zimbabwe, Southern Malawi, as well as in Mozambique, to provide the funding to set up early warning systems, in addition to emergency recovery activities. I don't remember the exact amount requested, but it was over \$100 million. It was a supplemental funding request from the administration to Congress. In the meantime, Cynthia and I and the Mozambique desk officer worked together to put together daily situation reports. Because of the time zone differences, the desk officer and I would come into the office very early and have a daily call with Cynthia, around 6 or 7:00 a.m., which was well into the work day in Mozambique. I would quickly write up the daily update and send it up the chain. We were getting daily updates out much quicker than the State Department, because they still relied on formal cables for their updates. So we were able to build a lot of momentum for support for the supplemental. And we got it through Congress; a large amount, something well North of \$100 million. The money was used in part for early warning systems, which I understand saved a lot of lives during flooding in subsequent years.

But here's another small part of the story that I'm quite proud of, in addition to my overall role. I do think this has probably never been done before or after in the history of the agency. I got people in all the USG agencies involved in the budget process lined up, all the ducks in a row, so that when the final CN (Congressional Notification) cleared the Hill on a Wednesday, we got the money moved through OMB (Office of Management and Budget) and other parts of the chain to USAID, then through USAID to AFR, all on Thursday. Then out to Mozambique overnight, where Cynthia was able to formally obligate the funds on Friday.

*Q: That has to be a record.*

REINTSMA: Yes, we literally got done in 2-3 days, a process that normally takes months or sometimes even years to accomplish.

*Q: Wow. That's very impressive, very impressive.*

*I vaguely recall that, and I don't know if it was part of the supplemental or if it was part of earlier relief, humanitarian relief efforts, but there was something about early use of cash transfers to victims of the floods. Do you recall that at all? It's something that's done quite frequently now as part of emergency relief, but I think that was one of the early USAID examples, and I was curious whether you had any involvement with that or any controversies.*

REINTSMA: I don't recall.

*Q: Okay. And it may have been part of the relief work, not part of the supplemental.*

REINTSMA: It could have been, I don't know. But Cynthia was certainly a forward-thinking Mission Director, and I wouldn't be at all surprised if she was trying out innovative programming like that.

I guess I've already said it, but the other lesson that I learned from Susan Rice directly was to be bold. I think the mission was initially thinking of proposing a funding request somewhere in the twenty million dollar range. I distinctly remember a late meeting in Susan Rice's office at State, and she was very dismissive of what she considered a timid approach, saying to go for a much larger funding request. So we did. And I feel like Cynthia and I made a good team in acting on 'being bold', once we got that steer from Susan Rice.

*Q: Okay. Be bold. I think that's important. It enabled you to do things that you wouldn't have been able to do otherwise, such as the early warning systems.*

REINTSMA: yes, it gave us the ability to really address the broader, recurring loss of life and livelihoods from the flooding problem, which happens every few years in that part of the world; as opposed to just emergency relief which is important but wouldn't address the longer term issue.

*Q: Right. So, you did that for a year; and meanwhile, there was an election, so there was a transition. I mention that because you then moved on to help create the Global Development Alliance that emerged as a key activity during the transition to the George W. Bush Administration and Andrew Natsios as the new USAID Administrator?*

#### **AID/W, Global Development Alliance Secretariat, Deputy (2001 – 2004)**

##### ***(Driving Institutional Change: From Vision to Reality)***

REINTSMA: Yes, that's right. There was an internal transition team or task force, consisting of several USAID folks, which was formed between the out-going and in-coming Administrations. The purpose was to make recommendations about USAID and foreign assistance to the new Administration when it took over in January 2001. The

task force took a broad view of their mandate, a “start from the beginning, blank slate” approach to rethinking USAID’s role and approach. I was not on that group, but at some point, I was asked to weigh in on their initial recommendations.

Some of their big picture ideas (such as really elevating USAID to an equal level with State Dept and DOD) were paired back, but one of the ideas that was retained was to start working mindfully with the private sector in development programs and activities. This really resonated with me, based on my previous work with constituency groups, and I probably said so in my comments on their new proposals. At any rate, I was asked to join a new, private sector focused initiative that came out of the task force recommendations.

Keep in mind that it was a Republican administration coming in, so a lot of people in USAID assumed that the idea to start seriously working with the private sector came from Republican political appointees. But in fact the people driving the initiative were actually career staff. So, I started working with Holly Wise, who was on the initial task force, and we brought the concept to life. It was named the Global Development Alliance (GDA) initiative, and we staffed it as a new unit in the Agency which came to be called the GDA office or Secretariat. Holly became the Director, and I served as her operational deputy, although I’m not sure what my actual official title was. There were some political appointees as well, who had worked on the Bush campaign, but most of them didn’t stay very long.

We refined the concept and the approach and presented it to Andrew Natsios soon after he was confirmed as the new USAID Administrator. After some initial hesitation and back and forth, he endorsed it, so we were off to the races. Essentially, the task was to institutionalize the concept and approach of working mindfully and deeply with private companies—to institutionalize this approach throughout USAID. It became a significant part of the Administration Natsios’ tenure at USAID.

As an aside, note that at the time, the term Global Development Alliance (GDA) referred to the whole initiative and the office that brought it to fruition—in later years, the use of the term changed and it came to refer to the main procurement mechanism used to partner with private companies (as in ‘let’s partner with that private company by using a GDA’).

*Q: And I think it’s important to note that this was career staff putting ideas forward during the time of the transition and having them then be picked up by the new political leadership. This goes back to your point of being bold and coming up with ideas.*

REINTSMA: Absolutely. As noted, it was a Republican administration and Republicans were generally seen as more oriented to private sector solutions. So as the idea started to get some attention in USAID, a lot of people made the incorrect assumption that this was just the new administration “selling us out” to private companies. This created some resistance, and there was resistance for other reasons as well. But you’re absolutely right, this was initiated by the career staff and presented to the new political leadership.



*Q: Right. Can you talk a bit about how you all institutionalized this and put it together and even some examples of some of the early efforts?*

REINTSMA: Sure. First, let me note that I found this all quite exciting because it was a startup, and startups are fun, a lot of work, but fun. So, we became an official USAID Office, reporting directly to the Administrator. We were housed in that little suite off the administrator's office on the sixth floor (the same suite that you later occupied as Counselor to the agency). Holly had the foresight, I think, to recognize that optics matter, and if we were seen as being directly attached to the administrator's office, then the initiative would have more weight. I believe on the organization chart we were more or less at the same level as the General Counsel or other offices that reported directly to the Administrator.

At the very beginning, my recollection is that the Office started with just Holly and me and maybe an admin assistant. We soon acquired a couple of political staff and one or two career staff, and then we took in some Agency new hires on rotations. Sometime during the first year, I believe, Dan Runde joined our staff as a political appointee, and Dan later became the Director after Holly and I left. The staff always remained very small, I think probably six to ten was the average staff size over the next three years. Then after some debate, the office got a little seed money to incentivize actual partnerships. I think it was \$10 million annually for an incentive fund. Most importantly, though, we just started brainstorming and thinking through the ways to institutionalize what was a fairly radical new approach, a new concept for most people in USAID.

One key was of course to refine and articulate the rationale for working with the private sector—to clearly articulate why we thought it was important and would make our development work more lasting and sustainable over time. To make the case for why USAID should adopt this new approach.

Another key was to provide incentives. Either some extra funding, or clear personnel-based incentives for staff to get involved, or both. For example, I met with HR and we eventually got work on partnerships inserted as part of the foreign service promotion precepts.

Another important approach was to find (or create) champions in various offices around the Agency. People who understood and believed in the rationale or were convinced of it after we talked with them. There were some parts of the agency, like the old Urban Programs office, for example, that had been working with the private sector for a long time and fully understood the concept of public-private partnerships. And a few other parts of the agency had some (but limited) experience working with the private sector, such as agricultural marketing and economic growth. Those groups got the concept or at least were generally willing to explore it. However, there were other parts of the agency that were very resistant to the concept.

*Q: Which parts were most resistant?*

REINTSMA: In general, I would say that many people in Global Health were very resistant initially. And just to be clear, I think that's no longer the case today—most of the staff there now understand there are many instances where working with the private sector is advantageous to improving public health and especially health service delivery.

But at that time, the thinking of many was more like “We’re here to work directly with poor people. Private companies, with their profit motive, are the bad guys”. And in some cases, they were. You’ll remember the famous Nestles case, which was often cited as an example of why the private sector are the bad guys. At a certain point in time, Nestles was promoting their infant formula to new mothers in the developing world, as opposed to breastfeeding. I understand this was quite harmful from a health perspective, especially since the water available to mix formula was often contaminated.

And the nutrition group was very resistant to working with private companies, who were seen as damaging nutrition outcomes by promoting processed foods. And, of course, there’s some truth in that, but there are other instances where private companies have enhanced nutrition, for example through micro-nutrient fortification.

And there were certainly other parts of the Agency, as well as specific individuals, who tended to see companies as working against the interests of the poor. Again, that can be the case in some situations, and the reverse is true in other situations. And there were other sectors, such as Education, where I think the staff just didn’t see the ‘fit’ or the relevance of trying to work with private companies.

But we did find people in the agency who supported the idea. So using a combination of identifying those champions, having some push from the top with the support of the Administrator, setting up staff incentives, and a little bit of seed funding to start some ‘model’ partnerships, we got it moving. By the way, when we asked for the seed funding, we deliberately put a sunset clause on that funding, i.e. that the pot of central money would disappear after a few years. There was quite a bit of discussion around the thinking behind that, i.e. having centralized funding to drive the initiative, vs pushing for a decentralized approach throughout the Agency. In the end, I think we got it about right. We strongly took the position that the initiative needed to be decentralized throughout the agency, built from the ground up and not just be the responsibility of one office in Washington. But at the same time, it was important to provide early seed funding and incentives, to kick off and support that decentralized approach.

One aspect of the decentralized approach, that came up a couple years into the initiative, was to fund regional alliance builders in the field. We made a push to fund a few field-based people who’s full time job was to build, and support building, public-private partnerships at the mission and regional level. I was the primary advocate for that, if I’m remembering correctly, and we did get several of those people placed in the Agency’s regional offices in East Africa, Asia, the Caribbean, and probably elsewhere.

To some degree, Holly as Director focused more on external (public facing) aspects of the effort, as well as ‘managing up’ to raise our visibility with Agency leadership and sometimes corporate leadership. As an early example, she and Dan Runde met with Chevron Texaco executives regarding joint work in Angola. My focus was a little more on internal institutionalization of the new initiative. So, another thing I did was to ‘make the rounds’; to talk to the heads of various units throughout USAID/Washington. I made the case for PPAs (public private alliances) as a new and better way to bring about development outcomes; listened to their views; brainstormed with them about ways to bring private sector approaches into their work; things like that. We also discussed ways to make it a significant part of somebody’s job in each major unit, to have someone really focused on exploring the concept of public-private partnerships and how to advance that approach in their unit. As mentioned before, there were also discussions with HR about ways to better incentivize staff. For many people in USAID, this was really the first time they were exposed to the concept of working directly with the private sector, or even the concept of co-equal partnerships with external partners. Remember USAID’s normal business model focused on grants and contracts (and to a large extent still does), which implies a whole different kind of relationship with outside organizations.

*Q: It’s interesting how you defined it as institutionalization of an approach to doing development work. I wonder how often that is done with initiatives. It’s interesting how bureaucratically savvy you and Holly were.*

REINTSMA: Thanks. Maybe it could sound a little ‘calculating’ to put it this way, but I do think it is important to think about things like this in a step-by-step, strategic, clear-eyed way. You have just a very small group working on a new initiative, trying to change the way a whole agency thinks, and to change the approach and processes everyone is used to. So the only way for a small office, and most likely a temporary one, to get legs for a large new initiative like this is to be very strategic.

*Q: I believe that you also invested in training for staff as well, and teams went out and worked with the missions.*

REINTSMA: Yes. I did some of that early field-based socialization work myself. I visited a number of missions to discuss the concepts, and to try to get missions to think in terms of partnering with the private sector. For example, I remember making a presentation to a big internal USAID conference in Nairobi, very early on in the GDA initiative. I don’t know if it was a mission directors’ conference or maybe program officers’ conference. But it was possibly the first time the GDA was presented to the field. I spoke about the concept and rationale, the drivers for it, what’s behind it, how we can make it work, concrete examples, etc.

With regard specifically to your question on training, yes, there was a training course for USAID staff developed, but I don’t think I was directly involved in that. And as already mentioned, we had a number of USAID new hires rotate through the GDA Office. That was quite an effective approach in terms of really providing deep exposure to the new approach and developing champions, I think, even though you couldn’t reach all that

many people directly that way. But yes, training and ‘socialization’ are definitely part of the roadmap to institutionalize a new initiative.

*Q: There was also seed money that enabled people to submit proposals and then you would fund them?*

REINTSMA: Yes, that’s right. Some activities we generated ourselves and others came in the form of proposals from others. My recollection is that our funding came with a time limit and/or a cost share, but yes, the idea was that missions and others were encouraged to submit proposals and help us come up with ideas to use the seed funds.

*Q: Did you get an overwhelming number of proposals and then have to make hard decisions, or were there only a reasonable number so that most things could be funded?*

REINTSMA: My memory is not too good on that point, but I think it was a reasonable number at first, which is probably what you’d expect. At the beginning when it was new, many missions probably didn’t really want to devote the time and resources to thinking through proposals, and they didn’t have established channels to work with private companies. I think this was especially the case since; a. the amount of funding was quite small, and b. mission and agency staff were unclear if the new initiative would have staying power or would soon disappear. Several took a ‘wait and see if it gets legs before we act’ approach.

The GDA Secretariat staff would also meet with outside groups. I got some activities funded from my own meetings with particular constituency groups or outside groups. The rule was there had to be a fifty/fifty match, i.e. that the private sector had to put up at least half the money.

*Q: So, those were central mechanisms.*

REINTSMA: Yes, early on several of them were central mechanisms that were broader than any one mission. But I think as it became publicized and it became known that it had clear support from the Administrator, we started receiving more proposals from across the agency.

*Q: Can you give us examples of a couple of those early ones that you helped put together?*

REINTSMA: Coffee Corps was one I got started. The story for that one begins when I was at an annual meeting of TechnoServe, an NGO with a history of working with private companies. On the margins of those meetings, I ended up at a breakfast meeting with a woman who was head of what was called the Coffee Quality Institute, and a guy who was one of the original founders of Starbucks (he left Starbucks and went on to become one of the founders of Peet’s Coffee). At any rate, we had a discussion about how technical and executive talent from the coffee industry could help coffee farmers and small local businesses and cooperatives in developing countries. The timing was fortuitous--we had

just created the GDA incentive fund, and the coffee industry was interested in helping small farmers, in part due to the need to preserve the long-term supply of high-quality coffee from places like Central America and East Africa. The companies have a lot of expertise that the Coffee Quality Institute could tap into, so the idea was to find a way to connect that pro bono expertise with cooperatives and farmers and small local suppliers—groups that badly needed help in areas like coffee growing and processing, in order to preserve high quality and get premium prices. So, the idea of Coffee Corps was born. I think USAID ended up putting up about a half million dollars, and the coffee industry did the same. I don't know the extent to which Coffee Corps is still operating today, but I know it had a good run of at least ten or twenty years, and it continued long after we stopped funding it. Many relationships between companies and development programs and coffee farmers were born from the activity. It paid dividends for many years. It even played a role in the recovery of the coffee industry in Rwanda after the genocide there; Green Mountain coffee was one of the companies that invested there after their initial exposure through Coffee Corps.

*Q: It probably also helped to promote the whole concept of “boutique beans” that we see marketed now, you know, these are beans from X place.*

REINTSMA: Yes. In the industry, it's called the Third Wave. The First Wave is what we called 'the cans'. Remember when you bought your coffee from a can in the supermarket; brands like Maxwell House or Folgers?

*Q: Right.*

REINTSMA: Then the Second Wave was the Starbucks and the Peet's, specialty coffee shops, but still large chains. And then, the Third Wave is what you're talking about, all the little boutique coffee shops that pop up in neighborhoods. And as you allude to, more coffee is marketed by its place of origin, like wine.

*Q: Yes, very interesting.*

*What others besides the coffee? Did this start some of the work with Mars and the cocoa people as well?*

REINTSMA: I think we may have, but I'm not sure if that work got GDA funding or not.

*Q: Okay. I know that Jeff Hill was heavily involved with all that from the Africa bureau over time.*

REINTSMA: Yes, he was. I don't know whether he got funding from that GDA pot of money or not, but I think that might have been a little later on when Jeff started that work. That work with Mars continues today, by the way. But yeah, there were a number of activities like that one. There was another alliance called the Food Resources Bank, which was not what you would think from the name, but rather getting farmers to set aside acreage and grow crops which were then sold to fund agricultural programs in

Africa. That was another one that I helped get started, with fifty-fifty funding from the private sector and USAID. Another early one was working with CocaCola in Ethiopia to fund HIV/AIDS orphans to set up small businesses. There were others which I'm either not remembering just now, or I was not directly involved in bringing them to fruition.

*Q: Were there any specific issues or problems that arose that might be worth recording, things that didn't go the way you'd hoped they'd go and issues you had to overcome?*

REINTSMA: Well, one of the issues that we did make some progress on, but that still remains a big issue today, is what I call the bandwidth problem. This refers to the fact that establishing public-private partnerships is usually very time consuming; they take a lot of staff time, which is always in short supply. So, a partial solution to that issue was to figure out a central mechanism designed to make it quicker and easier to set up those partnerships. The GDA Secretariat worked extensively with the Office of Procurement to create a faster, easier mechanism to partner with the private sector.

Over time, this central mechanism came to be commonly referred to as a GDA, so many people today in the agency who know the acronym GDA think it means the mechanism. I didn't personally have very much of a hand in setting this up because it was just starting as I was leaving that office, but it turned out to have staying power. In one form or another, it has endured now for sixteen, eighteen or maybe closer to twenty years, and is still a primary way to actually fund partnerships from a procurement perspective. I guess that clearly shows that the mechanism brings value added, or it wouldn't have survived so long. A very partial solution to the bandwidth problem, and sometimes I'm not clear how much faster and easier it actually is, but it seems to really help missions to have this central mechanism so they don't have to create their own stand-alone one.

*Q: Yes. You had mentioned earlier the Office of Urban Affairs and Housing because they had done so much collaborative work with the private sector. Was the Development Credit Authority seen as a companion piece of the GDA?*

REINTSMA: Yes, in the end it was. But that was a very interesting discussion and process. You may know more of the origin of DCA than I do, but you'll remember John Wasielewski, who I believe was the founding director of the DCA and the early driving force behind it. John and I had a discussion about that soon after the GDA Secretariat was set up. I believe the DCA had only been established shortly before the GDA was, maybe a year or so before.

So when the GDA popped up, John was worried that it might render the DCA obsolete or usurp it, absorb it, or whatever. I very well remember the conversation with John where I tried to allay his concerns and told him that at least as far as I was concerned, DCA deals automatically qualified as a public-private alliance under the GDA definition, since they were a 50 percent credit guarantee and thus required at least a 50 percent participation from banks or the public-private sector. Later on, I helped put together some very innovative partnerships that combined a GDA structure for technical assistance with a

DCA credit guarantee. So, yes, the two initiatives were complementary, and we ended up working hand in hand as opposed to competitively.

*Q: Okay, good.*

REINTSMA: In my view, a DCA is one approach to implementing a public-private partnership on the finance side. That's why I view the relationship between the two initiatives as complementary. Both are major additions to the Agency's tool box.

*Q: And used very creatively by some AID missions. Did you find some AID missions that were particularly enthusiastic about the GDA?*

REINTSMA: Yes, absolutely. Leadership, leadership, leadership. Missions that had an innovative, open-minded director or office director --those were usually the missions that endorsed the concept and ran with it. Also, to some extent the country context and type of government made a difference to the degree to which the GDA approach was a good fit. Speaking of that, I remember you tried to do something with it in Russia, where you were Director at the time, but—

*Q: Yes; it just led to the private sector partner being arrested two weeks later, but (laughs).*

REINTSMA: (Laughs) Yeah, well, not funny in the real world, I shouldn't laugh. But absolutely, individual mission directors, individual office directors in the field as well as particular office directors in Washington made a huge difference. It's not purely a matter of individuals, however, because some sectors are more of a natural fit for working with the private sector than others are. For whatever reason, the Kenya mission picked it up early and continues to this day to be a champion for public-private approaches-- maybe in part because entrepreneurship is an important part of Kenya's ethos and development approach.

*Q: Were there any regional differences as well, just out of curiosity, whether some regions might have been more entrepreneurial than others geographically?*

REINTSMA: I may be wrong, but my recollection and experience is that it was more of a natural in Asia, which you might expect since entrepreneurship and business approaches are big in Asia. It worked pretty well in some African countries, I think, and not in others. It probably met with more resistance in Latin America, where I think there may be more of a tradition of private companies and large landowners being seen as highly exploitative of poor people and even violently defending highly unequal social systems. But all this is just my off the cuff thinking, no doubt somewhat shallow. I haven't seen any analysis of the extent of uptake by region.

*Q: I know that one of the other commercial sectors that was involved early on was the oil and gas industry, including Chevron and ExxonMobil. Were you involved with any of those discussions with those companies as well?*

REINTSMA: I was not personally involved with that industry or those companies. But one of our very first larger deals was with Chevron /Texaco in Angola. This was part of a very interesting set of discussions about who (companies or industries) we as USAID should do business with. It was a sort of “who are the good guys and who are the bad guys in the private sector” discussion. Who should USAID work with and what is the risk to USAID, including the reputational risk. And so, lots and lots of discussion around that, with lots of points of view. In the end, we took an approach which I still believe is probably correct.

First, we decided that two sectors were flat out off limits. Those sectors were tobacco and firearms. Tobacco was off limits in part because the agency was legally prohibited from working with tobacco companies, and firearms were off the table for obvious reasons.

Beyond that, we decided that decisions would be made case-by-case, with priority given to the specific activity being proposed, vs some people’s view of the ‘reputation’ of a particular company. So, you might have company, say an oil company, that may have a less than stellar reputation in one area of the world, say in this case the Niger Delta in Nigeria, but if they were proposing a really good, effective development activity somewhere else, we would not rule out working with them on that specific activity. But we recognized that there were some reputational risks to the agency in that approach, so it was still a case-by-case situation. We developed a set of guideposts or a decision tree analysis to determine who we would work with in a particular situation.

*Q: So, you had guidelines for the due diligence?*

REINTSMA: Yeah, due diligence was a big part of it; developing a process and guidelines for the consistent conduct of due diligence.

*Q: To what degree did you have to discuss with the political levels of USAID the policies on company eligibility and sectors? Also was there an interagency element to this at all? Did you all have to work with the State Department at all on any of these criteria or decisions?*

REINTSMA: Holly as Director was handling a lot more on that than I was, regarding specific cases. So there may have been some political level discussions regarding specific companies that I was not part of. As noted earlier, I was more responsible for the internal institutionalization of the initiative, under our division of labor, although I certainly did fully participate in the overall internal discussions on how to handle this topic. But I don’t remember being aware of any consultations with State Department on the topic. Holly and Dan Runde were handling the Chevron-Texaco case, and I’m guessing they probably met with Andrew Natsios on it. In general, though, my recollection is that we mostly made our own decisions on the due diligence policy and processes.

*Q: Okay.*



REINTSMA: One aspect of this is how was it done at the mission or country level. In thinking about it, I would guess that the mission director and the ambassador probably had those discussions, in cases where it may have been controversial to work with a particular company in their country.

*Q: Are there other things to talk about with the three years in the GDA secretariat? You certainly built something that continues, was sustainable?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I think it has proved to be so, at least at the macro, big picture level. Some years ago, but long after the GDA was established and they had left USAID, Holly and Dan put out a report that was a sort of retrospective on USAID's approach and progress in working with the private sector. They expressed some disappointment that it didn't go as far and fast as it could have. And I share a bit of that disappointment. But there has been tremendous progress overall, in terms of institutionalizing a new approach to development work. Whereas many staff in USAID were hesitant, and even dismissive or outright opposed to working with private companies when we started that work in 2001, I think it's fair to say that most staff today see the value of it and want to at least try to work in that direction.

So I would say we didn't take it from zero to a hundred, but we took it from zero to maybe sixty-five or something like that. And other development Agencies worldwide followed our lead and also started working with private companies, rather than seeing them as the enemy. Even State Department set up a partnerships office to engage with private companies, following our lead. When I left the GDA Secretariat in 2004, I didn't do much of that kind of work in a direct sense for seven or eight years, including my time overseas. But when I came back to Washington in 2011, it was really impressive to see the huge amount of progress, the extent to which the approach was widely accepted throughout the agency, and seen as a way to enhance the sustainability of our development work.

So yes, it's an idea that has stood the test of time, and has to a significant extent become institutionalized.

*Q: Yes, it's something that you and Holly and Dan and the others should be very proud of. You built something from scratch that changed the way USAID worked. Not everyone can say that.*

REINTSMA: I guess so. It was fun, you know. There's still some back and forth on the degree of institutionalization, but yes, I think that's basically true. Thank you.

#### **AID/Washington, AFR Bureau, Sudan Office, Director (2004 – 2005)**

##### ***(Death of a Leader; Birth of a Nation)***

*Q: Right. You left that job in 2004 and became the director of a new Sudan office in the Africa bureau. Can you tell us about what was happening that caused that office to be*

*created and how you got tapped to go into it? Maybe start with telling us what was happening in Sudan.*

REINTSMA: Right. Sudan at the time was front page news. Two major events were happening there at the same time. In Darfur in Western Sudan, there was a huge humanitarian crisis that got a lot of press coverage. The brutality of the government in Khartoum and their proxy militias in Darfur in putting down minorities and separatist groups, had created large refugee camps. There was widespread famine and enormous humanitarian needs. At the same time, South Sudan was fighting for independence (or at least self-determination) from the Khartoum government in the North. And within the South, there were tribal-based conflicts that the North was exacerbating in an attempt to weaken the push for independence. So, lots of factions fighting each other, and lots of press coverage.

All that press coverage got the attention of the Administration, of course. In addition, it turned out that a lot of U.S.-based religious and humanitarian groups had links to Sudan through missionary work there. There was also a religious element to the conflicts, since much of the South was Christian and those who held power in the North were Muslim. Those Sudan conflicts became a big area of focus for the first Bush Administration at the time, in part due to strong ties with U.S. religious groups. Administrator Andrew Natsios also had strong ties himself to that community and to humanitarian work given his previous position at USAID as head of OFDA (Office of Foreign Disaster Assistance). I don't know to what extent Andrew was assigned the role by the White House, and to what extent he just took it on, but work on Sudan became a major effort for USAID. So he and Kate Almquist, who was initially his special assistant and later became DAA/AFR, created a new Office of Sudan Affairs in the Africa Bureau. And I was tapped to be the first director of the office.

*Q: Right. And Roger Winter was the assistant administrator for the humanitarian bureau, whatever its name was at that—or maybe the head of OFDA (Office of U.S. Foreign Assistance). The Administrator, Andrew Natsios, was also involved in the negotiations with Sudan.*

REINTSMA: He was, yes. He had personal ties there. Brian d'Silva, who I had previously worked closely with in AFR, also had extensive personal ties and was actually a college roommate with John Garang, the head of the South Sudan movement for self-determination or independence. So, Brian and Roger Winter were, I think, working behind the scenes to provide support, bring factions together, and probably help move negotiations forward. I would have to go back and look at the history to remember which major event happened in which order, but at some point the South declared itself independent from the North and there was both a lot of fighting and a lot of negotiations between factions and between South and North.

*Q: And then there was an agreement to conduct a referendum a couple of years later.*

REINTSMA: Yeah. We could Google the various dates. But anyway, a massive and complicated humanitarian crisis precipitated by the war as the South fought for independence.

*Q: So, this Office of Sudan, then, was looking at Darfur, was looking at the civil war in Southern Sudan, and we also still had the remnants of an office in Khartoum. Is that correct?*

REINTSMA: Mostly yes, but the Darfur work was left mostly to OFDA, whereas my focus was mostly on the South. And USAID had a mission or at least a significant presence in Khartoum. I believe it was a mission when I visited there a couple times.

*Q: Oh, it was a mission? Okay.*

REINTSMA: I think so, yes. We had a significant presence in Khartoum and we had a satellite office in Juba.

*Q: But we were running it out of Nairobi at that point still, or it had gone to Juba?*

REINTSMA: It was a very muddy and changing picture. At the time I started, the USAID South Sudan group was still based in Nairobi, and the South Sudanese leadership and ‘shadow government’ was still based in Rumbek, an isolated hamlet in the center of the South. They had not yet moved to Juba for security reasons. However, I and others did visit Juba where USAID maintained a compound and a couple buildings and at least a couple of local staff were there. I’m not sure if technically they reported to Khartoum or to Nairobi. Over the next months/years, some USAID staff moved from Nairobi to Juba, and the ‘government’ relocated there and it eventually became the capital of the new nation of South Sudan. At any rate, at the time I made a couple of trips to Sudan as the Office Director, in spite of the war going on we still accessed Juba through Khartoum, via charter plane. We also flew to Darfur from Khartoum.

*Q: Okay. And I should look this up myself because I interviewed Allan Reed. Was he the first mission director who went into Juba?*

REINTSMA: He was.

*Q: And in Khartoum?*

REINTSMA: Kate Farnsworth was there on the ground working out of Khartoum with responsibilities for Darfur. She didn’t have mission director rank, but she had high visibility and interfaced directly with State as well as USAID. And then, Allan was responsible for South Sudan, first living in Nairobi and then was eventually transferred to Juba. I’m a little hazy on exactly who was where, when, and when a Director was assigned to Khartoum.

*Q: Right, right.*

REINTSMA: It might have been mostly Kate Farnsworth working out of Khartoum, but there were local staff and some others, including John Granville who was assassinated in a terrorist attack in Khartoum.

*Q: Yes; it was a very complex situation and you had to keep track of an awful lot of different things that were going on led by a lot of different people as well.*

REINTSMA: Yeah, very complex. Kate Almquist was DAA of the Africa Bureau, but a large chunk of what she did was Sudan related. It was a chaotic, complex, taxing year. The Sudan Office at USAID consisted of me, a part time admin assistant, and after a few months, one other person who fortunately was extremely competent. We were trying to keep up with eighteen or twenty people in the Sudan office in State Department, and every single day of that year felt like drinking from a firehose—lots of demands from the Administrator's Office, a constant barrage of classified cables to clear from State Dept., and a constant flow of “we need it immediately” requirements. I also traveled with State Department folks to Sudan.

*Q: And you went multiple times to Juba?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I think twice to Juba, twice to Khartoum, and once to Darfur and Nairobi. One of those trips was with Carlos Pasqual, who had just been named the founding director of the new Office of Crisis and Stabilization at State Department—I may not have the name of the office exactly right. Anyway, the Sudan crisis was exactly the kind of place that office was created for, and Carlos was trying to get it off the ground and the visit to Sudan/South Sudan fit his objectives nicely. We met with the well-known leaders of the South, such as Riek Machar and Salva Kiir, who is now the President.

*Q: And Sudan, I believe, was his first AID assignment.*

REINTSMA: Yes. That's right, it was—Carlos was a junior officer there for USAID at the start of his career. Anyway, I traveled with him and a small team. Then in July, the big event happened. John Garang, the charismatic, inspirational independence leader, was killed in a plane crash. That was a huge event—you might say he was the George Washington of South Sudan.

*Q: We talked earlier about constituency groups and Sudan had probably more than its share of constituency groups, and I'm wondering how much time you had to spend on that as well. Weren't George Clooney and other actors involved? Did you have to spend a lot of time on constituency stuff as well?*

REINTSMA: No, I didn't personally spend much time on that, and unfortunately I never got to meet George Clooney. I think Kate and Andrew Natsios probably did most of those meetings with the constituency groups. My focus was more internal, helping get the office in Juba set up, interfacing with State at a working level and advising Kate, that sort of thing.

*Q: Okay. Is there anything else on Sudan that you want to mention?*

REINTSMA: Well, again, what lessons can we draw from these kinds of experiences? In this case, it felt very chaotic and complex—as I said, drinking from a firehose every day and rarely or never coming up for air. I’ll have to think a bit about what broader lessons we can kind of draw from that.

*Q: Okay. I’m going to suggest we stop for now.*

(End of Session)

*Q: Today is January 11, 2023, and this is interview number three with Curt Reintsma. And this is Carol Peasley.*

*So, again, thanks, Curt. When we finished up last time you were the director of the new Sudan office in the Africa bureau in Washington, and as you were getting ready to go--you were looking at overseas options. And I know you chose a very good one and I’m wondering if you could talk a little bit about how that happened.*

### **USAID/Malawi, Mission Director, (2006 – 2011)**

#### ***(Steady the Ship; Build the Program)***

REINTSMA: Well, first of all, in my personal life I was at a time where I was able to go back overseas again. I had been stretching out my time in Washington much longer than most people in the Foreign Service did, due to a complex family situation. And so, after a long time in Washington I was then able to go back overseas. And at the same time, I became aware that the bureau was in need of a new director in Malawi, and I expressed interest in the job and was accepted. So, that’s essentially how it came about. And probably a year serving as the Sudan office director was about as much as I could take. (Both laugh)

*Q: Right. So, you went out to Malawi as the mission director in 2006?*

REINTSMA: Very early 2006. I think I arrived there in January probably.

*Q: Okay. And at that point what was the focus of the program?*

REINTSMA: The program had a significant health component, that was the largest component. It was not a PEPFAR focus country, but it nonetheless had significant PEPFAR resources, which were split between USAID and the CDC (Centers for Disease Control). Then we had an education program, an agriculture and environment program that was initially quite small, and a fairly large democracy governance program. The latter was because USAID was implementing what’s called a threshold program for MCC (Millennium Challenge Corporation). It was focused on anti-corruption activities and was

‘pre-compact’. A compact in MCC terminology is when a country meets all the threshold criteria and signs up for a very large amount of new funding with MCC. And finally, the fifth component was food aid, Title II (or monetized) food aid.

*Q: Okay. Looking at Malawi itself, the president then was—was it Bingu?*

REINTSMA: Bingu wa Mutharika, yes.

*Q: Was he president the whole time you were there? I think he died in office, but I believe that might have been after you had left.*

REINTSMA: Yes, he was President the whole time. He died shortly after I left.

*Q: Was it a relatively calm period politically, or were there a lot of ups and downs and a lot of people changing parties and dropping in and dropping out? And were there any major corruption scandals during that period you were there, out of curiosity?*

REINTSMA: I would say more on the stable side than on the unstable side. It was a government that was not considered particularly strong or visionary, certainly not visionary, but also relatively stable during that period. There were always corruption scandals, but some of the bigger ones blew up later on after I left. While the general feeling was that it was not a particularly effective government, there were some fairly strong individual ministers and senior officials that we could work with. There were also concerns about the drift and the direction of the government, but it was basically democratic with fairly free elections at that time.

*Q: Okay. So, it was a reasonably calm period. Just ask you one other question then we'll go into some more details about what you were doing. At various times the Southern Africa regional program has been very active -- were any regional programs being implemented in Malawi at that time? I suspect most ended once South Africa became a majority-led government but am curious whether you had an active regional program at that time.*

REINTSMA: There might have been some remnants of small regional activities, but nothing significant that I remember on the ‘development’ side. However, the food aid monetization program did have regional components--the sales of the food were regional, not just in Malawi, and it was managed out of South Africa.

*Q: Okay. I was just curious. Although Malawi wasn't a PEPFAR focus country, I suspect that the PEPFAR money continually increased during the period you were there. And if so, I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about how PEPFAR worked from a mission perspective. I know it has its own bureaucratic requirements. It was probably a dominant resource that you had to fit into an overall country strategy, a challenge that many missions in Africa faced during the PEPFAR era.*

REINTSMA: Yes, and this is a somewhat sensitive topic, even today. Essentially, PEPFAR was set up in the George W. Bush administration as a vertical, centrally managed, single sector program focused on the huge HIV/AIDs problem. It was ‘whole of government’, meaning many different USG agencies had a piece of it, but it was managed from an office in State Department with both USAID and CDC playing a major role. I think it’s not too impolite to say a rivalry developed between USAID and CDC, with substantial differences regarding how PEPFAR should be implemented, and also just ‘turf’ battles. In some countries that rivalry was very sharp. I believe it damaged the effectiveness of the program and I think some of that still continues to this day. In Malawi, however, we were largely able to minimize the rivalry and work fairly effectively together.

Nonetheless, we did have some separate views regarding the initiative and how to focus it. My view as the USAID mission director was that it was important to have integrated programming to maximize impact. And if true integration was not possible, then at least have enough understanding of how one sector impacted other sectors that you could have cross-sector coordination. Let me give a couple of examples.

If an aid agency is working on HIV-AIDS and providing antiretrovirals (ARVs), which were extremely important in Malawi, well you can’t give ARVs to people who are severely malnourished. The drug just doesn’t work without a reasonably well-nourished body. And so, nutrition, which was the purview of the USAID programs, becomes very important to the effective use of ARVs. And in order to have nutrition, you can’t ignore agriculture. So, you really have to look at an integrated package of agriculture and nutrition and the provision of ARVs. Of course, CDC could not take this integration approach because their mandate is only public health. This is just one concrete example of why integrated holistic programming is important--there are many others.

By the way, ARVs saved tens of thousands of lives in Malawi. People who were there before me used to talk about how they could visually see the difference on the streets of Lilongwe, comparing pre-PEPFAR and post-PEPFAR when ARVs were being provided. People just looked a lot less sick, there were fewer funerals, and there was much more vitality than before.

*Q: Were you able to use that kind of argument to get more resources for agriculture from Washington? Did Washington recognize the important synergy between the two?*

REINTSMA: The short answer is no. Everything was stove-piped and while it was certainly worth making that argument for integrated programming, and the argument may even have been understood intellectually, it didn’t really make much difference because the initiatives were locked into their way of doing things. PEPFAR was not going to fund agricultural programs, and there wasn’t initially much other money for agriculture. I suppose from the point of view of PEPFAR leadership, they were implementing this single sector, vertical program, and they needed to remain focused tightly on HIV-AIDS. In order to maintain congressional support, I think the feeling was that the program had to really show a major quantifiable impact, especially regarding treatment for HIV-AIDS.

This brings up another aspect of the difference between USAID and CDC's approach. USAID focused more on the prevention side of HIV/AIDS work (which is much harder to measure the impact of), whereas CDC focused more on the treatment side. This contributed to the tension between a strict focus on producing quantifiable impact for reporting to Congress, vis-à-vis the longer-term need for integrated programs which would have longer, deeper impact, particularly on the prevention side. So, there were real differences in how to approach the issue, in addition to simple interagency rivalries. This is just a sampling of some of the factors that set up a lot of tension between AID and CDC.

*Q: Yes, globally, although you said that in Malawi things were relatively smooth.*

REINTSMA: Yes.

*Q: I know that in the early days of PEPFAR there was a lot of debate about the relative merits of ABC: Abstinence, Behavior Change and Condoms. Did you all get caught up in that at all? It became political in many places with religious groups intervening. Did any of that occur in Malawi?*

REINTSMA: It was running in the background, I would say, and it did come up. But I don't think it had significant impact on determining actual programming. I think it was, at least from what I saw in Malawi, a little bit of a tempest in a teapot. I think there was more heat and rhetoric about it than there was actual impact on programming. That's my bottom-line recollection and perception.

But I did want to talk a little bit more about how we were able to prevent those interagency tensions from having significant negative impacts in Malawi.

Of course at the end of the day a lot of it comes down to personalities, but here are some other reasons why we made it work in Malawi. The CDC Director and I spoke regularly, socialized and even became personal friends. There was, I think, a sort of informal agreement between us that we didn't want those tensions to get out of hand and really negatively affect the programming in Malawi. We also had pretty good, collaborative leadership from the DCM at the embassy on this topic. And finally, the PEPFAR coordinator was an unusually competent and nice person who maintained good relationships all around. The external evidence that we managed the issue fairly well came in the form of Malawi getting a PEPFAR award as the country that had the best collaboration between USAID and CDC.

*Q: Fantastic.*

REINTSMA: Yes, it was good to get that external recognition, establishing that we were able to work well together. Being careful to set the tone and to demonstrate from the top down that we were able to work together was also important in getting the staff to work



well together. The point I'm trying to make is that those kinds of tensions can be managed, with the right attention to the issue, a conscientious effort, and the right personalities.

*Q: Right, that's important to know. And I believe CDC was co-located in the same building. Is that correct?*

REINTSMA: Yes, we were both in the same building.

*Q: Was it like that when you arrived or did that happen during the time you were there?*

REINTSMA: It was like that when I arrived. So co-location probably helped a bit as well. And it also helped that the new CDC director and I arrived at about the same time, which helped us to build a personal relationship. We also both stayed for much of the same time period that I was there, the five or six years. I understand the USAID/CDC relationship didn't go so well, however, after we both left.

*Q: Right. I think that's probably a very important factor; both being there for that long a period of time I'm sure helped immensely.*

*You were doing other health programming as well during that period.*

REINTSMA: Yes, quite a lot of it. Malaria, maternal and child health, some nutrition, basic healthcare, working with hospitals on things like prevention of hospital-based infections. The things that were probably the standard range of health care programs in countries like Malawi.

One program which I felt was extremely important in Malawi, and for which we didn't have the resources we needed, was family planning. Malawi had a very high birth rate—in some ways rapid population growth was overwhelming almost all other progress. I often cited the statistic that during the time period from independence in 1964 to the year 2040—76 years or the lifespan of a single elderly person, the population of Malawi is going to increase 12 fold. That means 12 times the number of schools; 12 times the need for jobs and health care; skyrocketing need for food production, with increased lack of available land for farming; etc.

In some ways, it was worse because in Malawi, you already had high demand for family planning services; but just not nearly enough resources to meet that demand. So, it wasn't like you had to go out and convince people to have smaller families, or convince women to practice child spacing. They understood that, they wanted to do that, but they simply didn't have access to birth control. So that was one area where I did personally get involved in the mission's health programming. We had an analytical team come in from Washington that specialized in population demographic trends, and they ran models on Malawi's population growth. I believe it was called the RAPID model; maybe it still is.

So, we had that group come in and they did the analysis, which I think is done in a lot of USAID countries. What was maybe a little different in this case, is that as Mission Director I got personally involved in putting a lot of emphasis in the dissemination of their results. For example, we got together a group of the heads of all the aid agencies in Malawi, we set up an event at the U.S. Ambassador's residence, and had the RAPID group do a presentation of their results. We also had the group go around and do a kind of 'show and tell' presentation to various senior officials in the government of Malawi. So I think we were really able to demonstrate the importance of this issue for the future of Malawi. Part of my rationale was that if we couldn't get the funds needed from USAID, maybe we could convince other donors to get involved, and at least demonstrate the importance of the issue to the Malawi government.

*Q: Just out of curiosity, did you deal with the press at all on that issue?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I believe so, although I don't remember all the specifics. I think we may have done some kind of a workshop or a seminar for the press, for reporters. I do believe there were local press articles as a result of that work.

*Q: That is probably one of the benefits of democratic change in Malawi, a more active press.*

REINTSMA: Yes, for sure. And just to further set the context regarding the family planning issue, Malawi is a highly agricultural country, mainly subsistence farming, with relatively little employment opportunity outside of agriculture. And it already has an extremely high population density. So, it's a situation where there are very few non-farm jobs or economic opportunities. The farm size is getting smaller and smaller and smaller, while the soil is being depleted. So, population growth and family planning was really important-- you can't just keep dividing the farms up into smaller and smaller plots and depending on subsistence farming to a rapidly growing population. The combination of high population growth and lack of jobs and economic opportunity is a recipe for huge instability, as we've seen in other countries.

*Q: Right. And I know one of the other critical health issues in Malawi was, and probably still is, was malaria. And I believe President Bush started a presidential initiative on malaria as well when he was president.*

REINTSMA: Yes.

*Q: Was Malawi a focus country on that as well?*

REINTSMA: Absolutely, yes, we were. Contrary to how PEPFAR was administered (with responsibility spread across multiple USG agencies and headquarters in a stand-alone office in State Dept.), PMI or the Presidential Malaria Initiative, was managed by USAID. Malawi was a focus country, one of the main countries, and we had a very good relationship with the Washington leadership of PMI, Admiral Tim Ziemer in particular, who headed it. I think we made a lot of good progress in the malaria program.

*Q: What kind of work were you doing? I know that there's a long history of CDC research in Malawi on malaria, but were you doing bed nets and those kinds of programs as well?*

REINTSMA: Yes. Bed nets, indoor residual spraying and yes, the range of prevention programs. And we did work well with the CDC advisor on Malaria.

*Q: And did you begin to see differences there as well?*

REINTSMA: I think we made good progress on Malaria prevention, but I can't give you any numbers on that. I think there was a solid impact, but I won't be able to cite any statistics.

*Q: No problem.*

*You've talked about Malawi being an agricultural country, and USAID was doing work in that sector as well. You've also talked about nutrition. Was that nutrition work part of agriculture or part of health? I am curious how you were thinking about those issues given the scarce resources you probably had to devote to both agriculture and nutrition.*

REINTSMA: Yeah. The way we dealt with that issue administratively was to create a nutrition position, filled by a person who spanned both offices, both the Health and the Agriculture Offices. The nutrition specialist in the mission reported in both directions. Again, I can't cite statistics this many years later, but I believe we were making progress on nutrition.

We were also a leader in Africa on the local production and use of therapeutic foods for severely malnourished kids. We had a public-private alliance for the production of RUTF (Ready-to Use Therapeutic Food) in Malawi, and the product was even exported to Ethiopia and elsewhere. These are truly miracle foods, by the way—they can bring a child back from the brink of death from malnutrition in a matter of a few weeks. A really important resource in situations of severe child wasting, which is not uncommon in parts of Africa.

*Q: Right. And I suspect that some of the thinking on that you ultimately drew upon in later assignments working on global food security issues, but we'll come back to that later.*

*Are there things that you'd like to talk about on the agriculture side, the kinds of programs? I suspect by then you were no longer doing anything with Burley tobacco.*

REINTSMA: That's correct, although there's an interesting postscript on that. I don't know if you've followed the agricultural development activities currently going on in Malawi with tobacco settlement money. They have quite a large agricultural program, helping farmers diversify away from tobacco, using money that came from the U.S. lawsuits against the big tobacco companies.

*Q: Oh, I didn't know that.*

REINTSMA: Yeah. Philip Morris is actually funding a lot of agricultural diversification work in Malawi now.

*Q: Oh, fantastic. That's really good news.*

REINTSMA: Yes, quite interesting. But back to the USAID agricultural program, we did have to stay away from tobacco. And I know there was a big spat about that before I arrived.

A couple of highlights regarding agriculture in Malawi while I was there. The big debate that brought international attention to Malawi at the time was the fertilizer subsidy. Malawi was known in Africa as one of the leading countries that heavily subsidized the provision of fertilizer to farmers. The rationale was simple: the soils were depleted, farmers badly needed fertilizer, they couldn't afford it, and so the government would subsidize it and widely distribute it. In reality, the merits (or not) of this approach are complex, with some high profile and perhaps opinionated people taking positions on both sides. It became quite the debate, even in the U.S.

So, to back up a bit, when I first got to Malawi there was very little funding for agriculture--this was before the Feed the Future initiative started, with its emphasis on refunding agriculture. Lack of funds for agriculture was not unique to Malawi, as mentioned earlier, because there wasn't much money for agriculture anywhere at the time. But in the Malawi case, some influential folks in USAID/Washington pushed to eliminate even the little funding we had, because of their unhappiness over the government's fertilizer subsidy policy. They felt that if the government was going to go down this path, this misguided path of subsidizing fertilizer, then we're not going to provide USAID funds any longer. I pushed back pretty hard against that argument.

Then on the other side, some well-known people were championing the fertilizer subsidy, and praising the Malawi government for 'standing up to the donors.' There was even a film crew that came to Malawi to make a film pushing that storyline. And I also pushed back against that simplistic approach. Anyway, this interview is not the time or place to go into all the arguments and counter arguments, but I pushed back and was able to keep some funding for agriculture flowing; and on the other side of the issue, may have also moderated the content of the film, I believe, to make it more balanced. I had some success on this, perhaps in part because I came from an agricultural background within the Agency myself, and knew all the players well. At any rate, I was able to keep the door open until significant resources started to flow later under the Feed the Future initiative.

*Q: This issue of the fertilizer subsidy, as I recall, has also been an issue among other donors and was often a focus of consultative meetings with the World Bank. Some donors supporting the subsidy, other donors not, and having it become a policy football. Was that the case then? And I'm wondering if you could talk a bit about how the donors themselves argued about this issue.*

REINTSMA: Yes, we did see those differences among the donors in Malawi, with the Europeans more in favor of it and USAID probably more opposed. But like the CDC issue, I tried to maintain strong relationships with the other donors, collaborative relationships. It was important not to let that one disagreement dominate the relationship with other donors. We did distribute a Michigan State study that showed a lot of the downsides of the subsidy, and I think it's fair to say that the Europeans probably saw some merit on both sides of the argument. But they tend to take a somewhat less market-oriented view in general, and they were more inclined to say that if it's host country government policy, we will be supportive absent a strong and clear reason not to. Whereas USAID in general tends to be a little more vocal regarding host government policies—we tend to say: “hey, the analytics here show that there's a lot of problems with this policy, we think you should look at revising it”.

That's kind of a quick summary to your question, but overall USAID and the other donors were pretty ‘like-minded’ on most topics, so we certainly didn't have any shouting matches over it. And other than the Irish, the others mostly did not have significant programs in the ag sector in Malawi anyway.

*Q: Where was the World Bank on the issue? Because they've gone back and forth historically as well.*

REINTSMA: The World Bank and USAID were pretty much in lockstep, I think. As mentioned, Michigan State University came in and did a study on this—I believe it was on agricultural fertilizer subsidies in general, with Malawi as one of the main case studies. The study pointed out a lot of problems with the government's subsidy, and my recollection is that the World Bank agreed.

*Q: Right, there was a change of administration then and the Obama Administration made Food Security a centerpiece, perhaps even with the G7?*

REINTSMA: Right. There was a food crisis worldwide, prices spiked and there were lots more hungry people in Africa. That prompted attention to shift back to the issue of agriculture and food security. Let's see, that was 2007.

*Q: Two thousand and seven, 2008 with the financial crisis then became a food crisis globally.*

REINTSMA: Right. And then, when the Obama Administration took over in 2008/09, I think I'm getting my dates right here, then the secretary of state, Hillary Clinton at the time, made this a priority and it became a major thrust. And I've got more about my role in that when we get to it. But basically, you know, as I said, we kept the lights on, kept some small activities for ag in Malawi going until there was some significant funding.

*Q: Okay. I was just going to ask, since we talked a little bit about other donors, I don't know if some of the European donors were still doing sector programs and budget*

*support programs in Malawi, and if they were, and I suspect that USAID was not providing any non-project assistance. If so, how did we coordinate with those other donors? In some countries, USAID was still involved with sector working groups even though it was not providing budget support. I'm just wondering how it worked in Malawi.*

REINTSMA: Yes. As you're saying, it was to some degree a point of disagreement, whether to do project-based assistance, or sector-wide budget support. I think DFID in particular was big on budget support at the time. We did have monthly meetings of the donor heads, and some of those issues were discussed. I think USAID took a little flack for not doing budget support, but I don't remember it being a significant issue. Overall, we tried to coordinate and present a united front as much as possible to the government on some of the sticky issues. There were also sector level donor working groups-- ag and health were the two that I remember. I'm a little unclear on the extent to which that issue was debated at the sector level, but I think there was enough dialogue and coordination that, with the exception of the UN, we were usually presenting a united front to the government on most issues.

*Q: But the exception of the UN?*

REINTSMA: As you know, the UN, because it's a member-based organization, tends to operate much more fully in line with the national governments and their policies. The fertilizer subsidy was one issue.

Another interesting issue that became a big sticking point in Malawi between the UN and the bilateral donors was paying per diems and stipends to government officials to attend training programs. This issue kind of got out of control in Malawi. With lots of donors and relatively few key mid-level government officials, it got to the point where, when we tried to sponsor some in-country training program, they essentially would say: "we're not going to come to your training program unless you pay us a per diem or daily stipend as high as the UN pays us". This was extra income for underpaid government officials, so you could sort of understand their perspective, but essentially they were demanding to be paid (beyond their regular salary) for training that was designed to increase their skills and make them more effective in doing their jobs. And, of course, that runs counter to the fundamental philosophy of cost-effective foreign assistance to build local capacity. So, the donors tried to set a uniform policy on per diem rates so the Malawian officials couldn't play us off against each other. And the UN was not playing nicely with the other donors, in spite of endless meetings on the topic. The UN seemed to think they had to go along with whatever the government of Malawi officials wanted, and it became a big issue for the other donors, including USAID.

*Q: How did it end?*

REINTSMA: I recall we met repeatedly with the UNDP representative, who is the head of the UN in country. I think we got him to generally agree, but then the individual UN agencies ignored him and did it the other way anyway. So, I don't think it ever got fully resolved.

*Q: So, did it mean that we reduced the number of training programs we were doing? Or did we just end up paying more?*

REINTSMA: Well, we weren't going to give in on it. It may have had an impact on the number of programs, although I can't remember explicitly canceling any that were already planned. I think we just tried to find the best work-arounds we could, and proceed even if the attendance was not optimal. I remember this being an issue in other countries as well.

*Q: That's an interesting example of the donor coordination issues.*

*Within the embassy itself, Malawi is not a large embassy, but a number of agencies are there. Can you talk a bit about interagency relationships generally? You probably worked for several ambassadors. I worked for two during the five years I was in Malawi, so I suspect you might have worked for at least two and possibly three as well.*

REINTSMA: Yes, two ambassadors. And then, just before I was leaving, a new DCM (Deputy Chief of Mission) arrived, who was also Charge for a while. I was actually Charge myself (acting ambassador) sometimes, once for a month or more. Anyway, I think I kind of made it my mission to maintain good relationships with the embassy, and we probably were pretty fortunate in that for the most part we had good staff at the Embassy to work with. This was helped in the sense that Malawi was what I call a sweet spot country. What I mean by that is that on the one hand we were able to get significant resources for development work, especially over the time period I was there. We actually quadrupled the size of the program from about \$40 million to \$160 million while I was there. But on the other hand, we weren't an Ethiopia or Kenya where we were getting constant political attention, congressional delegations, that sort of thing. You know, the issue of 'too much love from Washington'. We got some love and were able to get the resources for an appropriate program for the size of the country, but we weren't constantly being second guessed and micromanaged, and having to manage CODELS. That's why I call it a sweet spot country.

*Q: Absolutely. You had the perfect world there, more resources and less attention.*

REINTSMA: Yeah. (Laughs). I'm not quite sure why I said all that in response to your question, but there weren't a lot of other agencies in town. It was largely USAID and CDC and the Embassy, the three of us. And of course Peace Corps. There was some other agency representation, but minor.

*Q: Right. You said you had a significant democracy and governance (DG) program. Perhaps you could talk a little bit about that, and the degree to which the embassy itself was interested in that program or whether there were any political issues that had to be discussed on the interagency basis.*

REINTSMA: Yes, this was a big topic, for sure. So, to recap, the focus of that DG program was anti corruption, and the USAID mission was implementing the MCC

Threshold program in that sectoral space. The approach was multi-faceted, working with several Malawi government institutions and NGOs, as well as strengthening the free press. So the topic was a major area of interest for both USAID and the embassy. And coordination with the Embassy was pretty tight. As USAID director, I was invited to the weekly pol-econ meetings at the embassy. I don't know if that's standard in other country teams, but from the beginning USAID had a full voice as an active participant in these weekly meetings to discuss evolving political and economic events as they unfolded. The USAID person heading the MCC effort, and I also had a lot of ad hoc meetings with Embassy staff, as well as my personal regular weekly meetings with the Ambassador and DCM. We also accompanied embassy staff to meetings with government officials on relevant issues and helped prepare and clear cables to Washington. In terms of USG interagency, we had someone who worked for Treasury working on MCC—he was working on setting up better accounting and monitoring systems, including issues like money laundering. So, we were quite well integrated into the embassy dialogue with the country on issues relevant to that program, and beyond. It was a big program, \$20 million, if I'm remembering correctly.

*Q: The threshold program was an anti corruption program because that was one of the indicators that didn't get Malawi over the bar for a compact?*

REINTSMA: Exactly, yes. Under the MCC process, in order to win a compact a host government had to meet a series of indicators or criteria, which were set up with third-party monitoring and scoring (groups like Transparency International were used for the corruption indicators that we were focused on in Malawi). Winning a compact meant a pretty large check for the country, usually in the range of \$200 to \$500 million, which was a lot for the budget of a country like Malawi (one of the world's poorest), so this was a big issue for the country and for the USG team.

*Q: But Malawi did have an anti corruption commission, I believe. Was the program working with them?*

REINTSMA: Yeah. My memory's not too clear on that, but I think we did work with that commission at one point. I believe the head of it was fired sometime around that era.

*Q: The head of it gets frequently fired, I think.*

REINTSMA: Yes, I'm sure. I don't think that group was making much headway—they were probably trying but weren't able to be very effective. We tended to work much more directly with the line ministries, agencies, and offices of the government. And there was a component working with the Malawi press on anti corruption issues and investigative reporting; another with the police; another with the Treasury; a small grant activity for NGOs; and I'm sure others I'm not remembering.

*Q: I know that a major corruption scandal broke out a couple of years after you left. Did the emergence of that corruption come out of the institutions that we had been working with or do you know? I'm just curious.*



REINTSMA: I don't have an answer for you on that. If there was a linkage, I would suspect it's probably an indirect one in the sense that the training we did for the Malawian press may have played a role in uncovering and exposing that corruption scandal. Very likely they played a big role, but I don't know that for a fact.

*Q: Right.*

REINTSMA: I'll have to try to refresh my memory about some of the other components of the program. I think there was also a significant part that was working with NGOs in the anticorruption field, especially regarding public communication.

*Q: How much coordination was there with the MCC while USAID was implementing the program? Did they show interest in what was happening with the threshold programs, or did they just wait to see if the threshold programs resulted in a change in the indicators so they could then discuss compacts? I'm just curious about the degree of collaboration or interest there might have been with the MCC.*

REINTSMA: We had regular coordination and communications--the USAID staff heading the program in Malawi maintained regular contact with MCC staff monitoring the program from Washington. It was a pretty tight relationship, I think. We had periodic field visits from both staff level and senior level MCC folks. There was an active MCC 'desk officer' in Washington for the Malawi program, i.e., a country officer from MCC that we coordinated with very regularly. We were very aware that it was MCC's money that we'd been entrusted to use in implementing the program. And of course we all thought it was an important issue and program to work on. And we wanted Malawi to win a Compact, so we maintained good coordination with MCC HQ in Washington.

*Q: So, they did remain involved.*

REINTSMA: Yes. Not at the 'every day' level, but overall fairly close monitoring from Washington and good communications with USAID and Embassy staff.

*Q: And did the program ultimately lead to a Malawi compact?*

REINTSMA: It did. We were quite proud when Malawi did in fact win a Compact.

*Q: And did that happen during your tenure, the Malawi compact?*

REINTSMA: Yes. It was approved while I was there. The USAID person leading the threshold program and I were quite involved in the process. Because we at USAID were perceived as having done a good job with the threshold program, we were invited into the lengthy dialogue and discussions about putting the compact into place. We worked closely with the Embassy and multiple visiting MCC teams, and we were all quite proud when the Compact was awarded. So, USAID had an active role in the preparations for the Compact itself, beyond just implementing the Threshold program.

*Q: Can you talk about what that—what the compact program ultimately focused on and how AID helped to develop it or refine it?*

REINTSMA: So, it ultimately focused on the electricity sector. While a threshold program is fairly directive in terms of identifying shortcoming that need to be addressed to meet the criteria, the compact is supposed to be very much the priority and lead of the host government. So that was what the government wanted to spend the money on—electric power generation and especially electricity transmission. USAID obviously didn't have any of our own programs in the electricity sector, so our role was not a technical one for the most part. Our role was more facilitatory, working with the Embassy to help make the case that Malawi should qualify, introductions to the right government officials, consulting with the design teams on non-technical matters, probably helping shepherd the technical teams, that sort of thing. I participated in numerous meetings at the embassy with visiting MCC officials or phone calls with MCC officials in Washington, when we were able to argue the case that Malawi did, in fact, deserve to get a compact. And again later when specific compact negotiations were underway.

*Q: Did it require any kind of policy adjustments on the part of Malawians and the electricity sector to move forward with the compact?*

REINTSMA: Yes, it did. I can't cite specific examples, but there was a lot of discussion around that; decentralization issues, policies regarding fee collections from electricity uses, and other things. Oh, and there was one technical piece that USAID did get directly involved with. That issue was about siltation from soil run-off. The electricity turbines to generate power from dams don't work if siltation piles up behind the dams. So, USAID was involved in a tree planting and agroforestry-type program upstream from the dam, to prevent siltation. We may have gotten funding from MCC for that, I don't remember for sure.

*Q: Did the fact MCC was doing this electrification program prompt people in Washington to begin to think about the Power Africa program? I'm just curious whether this influenced that initiative.*

REINTSMA: I don't know the answer to that. It's an interesting question, but I don't know the answer. Power Africa came along a number of years after I left Malawi.

*Q: Okay. Are there other parts of the AID program that you'd like to talk about?*

REINTSMA: Yes, there are a couple things from which I think we can draw some lessons. First, with regard to the education program in Malawi, it was important and I personally went to bat to keep it alive. It was scheduled to be closed out when I arrived in Malawi. And by the way, education did link to the MCC threshold as well, in terms of anti-corruption messages in schools.

But the first ‘lesson’ I want to discuss regarding the education program has to do with the problems around shorter-term, highly projectized assistance, compounded by lack of funds and ‘flavor of the month’ trends in sector-specific funding. We had relatively little education money, and it had to be programmed in line with the latest trends or thinking in Washington. So, we would create a program around a specific set of issues in education in Malawi and pick a couple districts to work in with the limited funds. For example, one I remember we funded was trying to develop parent-teacher associations and increase parent involvement in education, on the theory that the quality of education would go up if parents were more involved and holding the schools accountable. So, we would do that for a couple of years and then that particular pot of education funding ran out and we would have to stop funding those activities, and we were told to do something else in education. There were lots of ‘soft’ restrictions—support for only primary versus secondary or tertiary education, for example. The point is that these shorter-term programs that start something and only stick with it for two or three years, then focus on another issue in a different part of the country, were simply not very effective. I felt like we weren’t having the impact we should have in that sector.

So, we had started to address that and other concerns in the design of a new education program, when the bulk of money for education was taken away, to help fund a ‘Grand Challenge’ in the education sector in Washington. That continues to irk me to this day. Just when I felt we were poised to adapt our programming and really do some good work, the funding was pulled back to Washington. Maybe there’s a lesson in that somewhere.

*Q: Yeah. So, you weren’t able to figure out a different way of working, even with projectized assistance, in the education sector because you lost the funding. That would be very irksome.*

REINTSMA: Yes, my recollection is we were in the process of designing what we thought would be a more sustainable program. It was especially irksome because the funding was pulled back for a ‘Grand Challenge’, a kind of theoretical approach to go out and solicit a bunch of ‘new, innovative ideas’ in the education sector. The concept is not necessarily a bad one, but I suspect there’s very little evidence about if and how those ideas ever got implemented at the field level. Good in theory in an academic sense; not so good in practice, I suspect.

There is one other point I was going to make on our education program, and this one is more positive. The lesson, or anecdote in this case, is about using limited resources innovatively to promote indirect change. One of our education activities involved the purchase and distribution of a large number of textbooks. Up until that time, textbooks for Malawi had been mostly purchased in South Africa, where they had the capacity to more easily print large numbers of books. I pushed pretty hard to buy the books from businesses in Malawi, to localize that large purchase even if it meant stretching the capacity of local print businesses. As a result of that ‘seed money’, I think we had some significant impact on building printing capacity within Malawi, which I believe probably had positive longer term impacts for the local economy. And all it took was to think outside the box and do something a little differently.

*Q: Yes; that's an important benefit. Sometimes with small amounts of money you can have a very significant long-term impact.*

REINTSMA: I'd like to switch to the last component of our Malawi program, which was monetization of food aid, or Title II. I just want to make a plug here for integrated programming at the 'people' level (versus at the policy level).

Let me illustrate the point with an anecdote. When as mission director I would go out on field trips to review USAID projects, I would meet with the local groups or leaders, and there would be speeches, songs, dancing, etc. Anyway, there was a very typical pattern that emerged after doing this a number of times. Keep in mind that Malawians, even at the rural village level, are quite adept at 'playing the aid game' because they have been recipients of foreign aid for many years. So, the way this would usually go is you would go out to a project site, and the whole village or set of villages and the local officials would come together to greet you. When it came to the speeches, they would usually say something like: "we are so grateful for your assistance; it's meant so much to us; thank you, we really appreciate it. Oh, and by the way, here's the list of all the things you should do for us next". (Both laugh)

It got to the point where I was just waiting for that part of the speech because I knew it was coming. So, contrast that as the usual experience, with a field trip I made to the site of a Title II monetization program. First, to set the context, the project site was in a very dry area of Southern Malawi. The whole surrounding terrain was brown—it was probably the dry season. But we drove over a hilltop and suddenly, there was this beautiful green valley in the midst of all the dry area. So, it immediately got my attention, right? Then when we meet with the local folks, and most of local leaders were women in this case, they talked about how they used the Title II money to build their own irrigation system (which is why the valley was so green), how they set up village savings and loan programs, how they integrated health messaging to address HIV/AIDS and malaria, et cetera. Then at the end of the speech, to my surprise, they essentially said: "well, we used your resources to help build all this, thank you, along with our own effort and ingenuity; it's been successful; the project can leave now; we'll take it from here". And it was such a shock to hear Malawians say that.

So, my lesson from this, other than just empowering local people, is that food aid was the only pot of money we had for truly integrated program, programming that wasn't 'vertically determined' or limited to a single sector (i.e., only for malaria, or HIV/AIDS or primary education), or even for only a limited set of activities within those sectors. Food aid is inefficient at the macro level, because transporting and importing food into Africa, selling it and then using the proceeds is a highly inefficient way to fund projects, because so much of the proceeds are used for shipping, processing and administrative costs. Nonetheless, it was the only flavor of money that we could use for truly integrated programming, to fund a variety of different programs in one geographic area in response to the local need. You could use one set of activities to reinforce others; you could add and build up additional components or drop a component when that need was met. In

sum, you ended up with a kind of local ecosystem of needed support systems, with local people in the lead. I suppose this takes us back to the days of integrated rural development projects, which had their own set of issues, but in my view, there's not nearly enough of that flexible, integrated across sectors approach.

*Q: Just a follow up question on how this worked. Was the food coming in at a national level and monetized and then doled out to different organizations, or was the food going to local organizations or NGOs and then monetized in the local area and those resources then used in that local area?*

REINTSMA: It was actually monetized regionally, so it didn't have to be sold only in Malawi. But yes, it was sold after arriving in East or Southern Africa, sold regionally wherever the needs were the greatest, and then the money from the sales were used to fund the NGO-led project. It was Catholic Relief Services (CRS) in this case.

*Q: Okay, so the resources then went to an NGO and supported the community level work that they were doing in-country.*

REINTSMA: Right. So, CRS came in, set up this program using those monetized resources, and worked with the local community to create this integrated program.

*Q: That's valuable to note. It also illustrates again the advantage of staying in a country as long as you did. You learned how to deal with the local communities on your field trips. In the first year or two, you might have had one reaction; by year five you had a different reaction. Knowing your audience is important.*

REINTSMA: Yes, that's true. And continuity of programming is also important. By continuity of programming, I don't mean doing the same thing over and over again. I mean being in a local area long enough that you really understand the needs, can build a base of support, and then tweak and refine the program, add this component as needed or take away that component if it was no longer needed or didn't work. That kind of integrated approach coupled with continuity of presence that allowed for long-term impact, sort of the opposite of what I was talking about regarding the early years of the education program.

*Q: Was the program working all over the country, or was there any sort of geographic concentration?*

REINTSMA: Most of USAID programming was in Central and South.

*Q: Central and South, okay. Did you go up north very often? Just curious.*

REINTSMA: Not too much. I never actually got as far as the Tanzania border, but I did go fairly far to the North a time or two. For those unfamiliar with Malawi, it is a long, narrow country along the border of the huge lake; the country is something like 500 miles long.

*Q: Yes, probably. I think they say it's the size of Pennsylvania and 20 percent lake. So, I assume the security situation was such that there were no inhibitions on your ability to travel and monitor the program.*

REINTSMA: That's correct. We all traveled widely, both for our jobs as well as personal travel on the weekend. Security concerns were minimal.

*Q: I know that's a rarity in today's world.*

REINTSMA: Yes. And I guess that's another aspect of the 'sweet spot', in the sense that Malawi was a country where there was a clear, strong need for development assistance. But with enough stability and security that the assistance could by and large be used effectively—no sense of constant crisis, at least with regard to overall stability.

*Q: You could talk maybe a bit about the AID mission itself. I think you probably had a large group of Foreign Service National employees, Malawian employees, many of whom had been there for many years. I'm just curious if you have any thoughts about the roles of the FSNs and any changes you might have seen during the period you were there.*

REINTSMA: Well, first of all, fortunately for me (but not for the local staff earlier), I was lucky in the timing of my arrival. There had been a downsizing of the FSN staff just before I arrived, along with other management turmoil. So, when I arrived, I was able to enter a rebuilding phase, rebuilding and expanding the program, which meant that we were eventually able to expand the local staff somewhat as well. It's always a lot easier to run an operation during a building up phase than during a downsizing phase, of course. I suppose I also give myself a little credit, in addition to the good luck. Having spent all those years in Washington, I knew people and how to work the hallways at USAID to help keep the resources flowing and expanding. That wasn't all my doing, of course, but I think I did help keep Malawi on the map when new initiatives and funding came along.

*Q: Right. If you quadrupled the program, there was definitely a need for more staff.*

REINTSMA: Well, as noted, increasing the program size also had a lot to do with overall funding levels for USAID and foreign assistance overall, but we were also able to take advantage of new initiatives started in Washington by showing we could produce results.

But to return to the core of your question, yes, there were a number of concerns that the FSN staff had. We were able to hire, and even rehire a few of the people who had been let go before I arrived, and to slowly, thoughtfully expand the staff. So, generally speaking, I felt it was a period of positive relationships with most of the FSN staff. Nonetheless, some of them felt like their salaries and benefits weren't adequate, and they sometimes became quite vocal about that. We had lots of meetings on the topic. The salary scale was set by the USG overall, so there wasn't a whole lot that we had the power to change regarding salary and benefits. But we certainly listened and tweaked things a little bit where we could to improve their benefits. There was also quite a bit of anxiety when I

had to fire a senior FSN employee for corruption but wasn't allowed (by the Inspector General investigator) to explain to the staff the details of exactly what he did to get fired.

Overall, I think the most important thing we could do was probably empowerment—making those FSN staff who were stars feel empowered and recognized. For example, in the health office we made an FSN the deputy director of the office, supervising American staff. In other cases, we supported them in other ways to feel empowered and listened to.

*Q: Well, that's important because I think AID is now talking about making FSNs deputy office directors. You had done this early on.*

REINTSMA: Yes, although I will say it's not without issues and certain tensions. I think a couple of the more junior American staff wondered why they had a Malawian supervisor, for example. But in the case of the FSN health officer, everyone recognized her extreme competence, so that helped. So yes, we made it work.

*Q: Did you have a lot of younger American staff that might have been first-term employees?*

REINTSMA: We did, especially toward the end of my time there.

*Q: Did that then require a lot of training and mentoring in order to help people have a good start to their careers?*

REINTSMA: Yes. I think we probably did an OK job in that regard, but in retrospect I probably wasn't always as conscious or mindful of the issue as I could have been. It's probably better not to get too specific here, but in one case in particular I think I could have done a better job. We were in a situation where a junior officer lobbied hard to become office director, in an office with a lot of responsibility and pressure. I agreed, and she became the Office Director, but it probably put more pressure on her than she was ready for. In retrospect, I wish I'd provided more mindful support.

Overall, though, I feel like I did pair more junior people with more senior people and gave them the opportunity to take on more responsibility and stretch themselves. I think in a couple cases, the new staff needed to be pushed a little bit, and I felt like I did that—hopefully not too much. In other cases, that approach of giving folks a lot of responsibility worked quite spectacularly. For example, one person who came as a first-tour officer, who I gave a lot of responsibility to, did exceptionally well. He earned a glowing employee evaluation that I took a lot of time to write, and he was ranked #1 worldwide for promotion as a result. He ended up becoming a deputy mission director in a very large mission only a couple tours later. He was able to rise very quickly in the agency, based in part, I think, on that positive experience. In another example, I facilitated a first tour junior officer doing a rotation at the Embassy in a very responsible position, and she also rose quickly in the Agency following her positive first tour.

Another side of this, of course, is paying a lot of attention to staff recruitment. Really checking out people carefully before they are given the job, then empowering them with as much responsibility as possible. Then also making sure the rewards are there, meaning paying a lot of attention to writing strong employee evaluations when they were merited. As you know, that's very important in the Foreign Service system.

*Q: Okay. Last question: you were in Malawi for nearly six years. The first couple of years was the George W. Bush administration and you went from Randall Tobias to Henrietta Fore as the administrators, and then the election of 2008 and the Obama Administration and eventually Raj Shah coming in as Administrator. Did you feel the change in administration, or did you just keep doing what you were doing? It would be interesting to see the transition from the field perspective.*

REINTSMA: OK. I'm trying to process that question a little bit. I think big picture there was some change of emphasis, but not that much impact at the country level. Of course, USAID was without an administrator for the first year of the Obama administration, which I can go on and talk about a little bit because I actually was back in Washington for part of that time.

*Q: Please do. That was an important period.*

REINTSMA: Yes. But first, going back to your question, our largest program after MCC was PEPFAR, and that program didn't really change. The Mexico City policy (this prohibits funding to any organization that in any way supports abortion, even with their own funds) went away, which may have increased the range of groups we could fund, but I don't remember it resulting in any direct changes. The big impact by far was getting substantial funding for agriculture and food security during the Obama years. But for the rest of the programming I didn't see, or at least don't remember, any major changes on the ground.

Does that answer your question?

*Q: Yes. You did earlier mention the education challenge fund. Was there more focus on centrally driven approaches in the latter years?*

REINTSMA: Yes, that's a good point. I think that's probably correct. USAID under the Bush Administration was possibly less 'activist' or directive in determining where funding went, since other than PEPFAR we may not have had as much centrally determined programming as was the case when Raj was Administrator. At a bigger picture level, however, setting up PEPFAR and MCC under the second Bush Administration was a big change and challenge to USAID's previous position as the key USG development agency.

*Q: Okay. You said that you were back in Washington. Is there anything you want to say about that time?*



REINTSMA: Yes. I think I may have referenced this last time we spoke. Because I was known in Washington for previous work in agriculture and food security, including helping create AFSI (the Africa Food Security Initiative we talked about earlier), I was asked to come back to Washington and work in the Secretary of State's office to help set up what became Feed the Future, a big new food security initiative.

*Q: Yes; please tell us about that. I assume a lot of actors were involved.*

REINTSMA: Following the 2007/2008 food crisis, Secretary Clinton wanted to make the topic of food security a cornerstone of her new tenure at State. She had basically assigned the task of creating this new initiative to Cheryl Mills, her counselor to the State Department. Cheryl also held another title as well, I don't remember what it was, but she was working as one of the Secretary's top advisors, the inner circle. She was putting together a small staff, and she was looking for a couple others to help set this up. Someone put my name forward to Cheryl Mills, and she contacted me directly, out of the blue, to ask if I was interested in coming back to DC to work on it from the Secretary's office. So, we had a phone call, and we both agreed to try it for three months and to see how it worked out. So, I was quite abruptly pulled out of Malawi and seconded to work with this small group that Cheryl was setting up in the Secretary's office, in order to create this new food security initiative.

*Q: And where did the people come from in the group?*

REINTSMA: So, we had a very small group; Cheryl herself, one mid-level State Department Foreign Service officer, and two political appointees, one of whom was a budget specialist working only part time on this topic. I brought in an admin person, and over time I think one or two others were detailed to work on it part time.

*Q: Were you the only person with an agricultural background?*

REINTSMA: Yes, with regard to the small full-time staff working out of the Secretary's office. However, there were regular interagency meetings a couple times a week, which included people from USAID, Franklin Moore and Jeff Hill in particular. Jeff is of course an ag specialist. Raj Shah also attended some of the meetings as the representative from the Department of Agriculture. At that point Raj had recently been appointed an undersecretary at USDA. So I had that relationship with Raj before he became USAID Administrator. One of the first big events that happened soon after I got to DC was for Cheryl and the team to go out to Rwanda to discuss the new initiative with African leaders and others. While we were in Rwanda, Raj was nominated to be AID administrator, so when I came back to DC he had shifted from being the USDA's representative in our working group to now being the nominee for AID administrator. So I worked with him a little bit on his new appointment, advising (at his request) on key issues he should first focus on, and related topics.

*Q: When you went to Rwanda were you just talking to the Rwandans or were there other African countries represented?*

REINTSMA: It was a large regional conference based in Rwanda, with international representation. I think we were piggybacking on top of that conference to introduce what became Feed the Future and get reactions on how it should operate.

*Q: And did they help to define the priority approaches that you would take in the initiative?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I'm a little hazy on the specifics now, and there were meetings that I wasn't in, but yes, that was the purpose. Gayle Smith, then at NSC, also joined us on the trip. As an interesting aside, she knew Paul Kagame (President of Rwanda) quite well, and we went to his house one evening for a late meeting.

*Q: Okay. So, how did you put this together?*

REINTSMA: Well, putting the initiative together involved everything from defining the technical substance; to preparing the Administration's budget request and making preliminary country funding allocations; to determining the interagency structure and how it would operate; to making presentations to the NSC and members of Congress; and more. My own role touched on all those aspects, but I was by no means the dominant player on the team. Cheryl had a small but dynamic team that I was one part of. My recollection is my value added was probably in providing a field perspective, some agriculture technical perspective (although Jeff Hill did more of that), and some experience in dealing with the Hill and constituencies in making the case for funding for agriculture issues. Preparing briefing materials for Cheryl and the Secretary was also part of it. So, my role was essentially adding perspective from my USAID and field experience, and in a couple cases trying to influence decisions in a direction I thought was important.

*Q: What were some of the key issues that you all were debating?*

REINTSMA: Well, the biggest issue where I felt like I did have some significant influence was on how to set it up, what structure to use in operationalizing it. I believe Cheryl was leaning toward a structure based on the PEPFAR model, which would involve creating a new office in State Dept. to manage it, and then having the different agencies essentially compete for the funding. In my mind, that's a formula for unproductive interagency turf battles like we see in PEPFAR.

Since Feed the Future was clearly to be "whole of government" with lots of different government agencies involved in it, the question was do we set it up with a separate office in State to manage it, or do we embed it in an existing agency and let them coordinate it. I argued strongly for what I call the PMI model, with overall management based within USAID. And I was able to arrange to have Admiral Tim Ziemer (then head of PMI) meet with Cheryl, to explain how PMI works. I was not in that meeting, but my viewpoint won out in the end, and Feed the Future came to USAID. I don't know this, it's speculation, but since Raj was nominated to be USAID Administrator around that time,

he may have also pushed for that approach. Again, I felt that if you put the overall coordination and management in USAID, you have much better opportunity for integrated programming, because AID does all these other things, like nutrition and girls' education, that are needed to make agricultural work succeed in the broader, longer-term sense (as I discussed earlier). And of course it reduces the interagency turf battles to have one Agency in charge, bringing in the others for technical expertise when needed.

*Q: And that is ultimately what was decided?*

REINTSMA: Yes, that's correct, and that's how it happened, at least from what I could see. So, I think if I had any really major influence over the shape of the initiative during those three months, it was probably helping to push the management structure in that direction.

*Q: Did that then prompt the creation of the new bureau for food security and that bureau then played the coordinating function? Is that the way it worked?*

REINTSMA: Yes, that's correct. I returned to Malawi after 3 months (late Feb or early March 2010), and sometime later Raj (probably in coordination with Cheryl) created the new bureau; the Bureau for Food Security or BFS. And at some point while I was still there, the initiative started to be formally called Feed the Future (FtF). So basically, BFS was charged with implementing FtF.

To your earlier question on what issues were being debated, another interesting issue was determining which countries would be included in FtF, and how much weight would be given to 'political' factors, versus 'development' factors. Countries which were important to the USG politically, versus those where there was the most development need and potential for most effective use of the funds.

I'm pleased to say that the 'development focus' mostly won out—most countries were chosen based on development criteria, versus overtly political criteria. Then there was the question of the actual allocation of funds among the countries selected. I played some role on that question, and I actually ended up downgrading the amount of funds that were initially slated to go to Malawi. I felt like a massive increase of new funding was not the right way to go in Malawi, given some of the concerns about the Malawi government policies and their implementation capacity.

*Q: And was it a global initiative or only an Africa initiative?*

REINTSMA: Global. And it still is today. Initially I think there were sixteen or eighteen focus countries, Malawi being one. Something like twelve countries in Africa and maybe four or six in Asia and Central America.

*Q: And so, that helped to expand resources for agriculture and food security in Malawi. Was food aid part of the Feed the Future initiative? Was it part of it?*

REINTSMA: Yes to the first question. It was a significant, but not massive, increase in funding for agriculture work in Malawi. No, FtF did not directly include food aid, but did promote tighter collaboration with the food aid side.

*Q: And did the NSC play a significant role in the development of this initiative as well?*

REINTSMA: Early on, yes. Chris Sheppard-Pratt was our main contact at NSC. He was on detail from USAID to NSC at the time and we worked quite closely with him, especially on coordination with the Hill. We went together to the Hill, for example, to brief members and staff. And also on defining the program, i.e., which countries to include, resource allocation, all those issues. Gayle Smith was involved as well, mostly I think with Cheryl and the Secretary, and probably with the African leaders she knew.

*Q: Were there any serious issues with the Hill that had to be negotiated and did the Hill provide any pressure on country selections? I'm wondering if there were issues with them.*

REINTSMA: Not a lot of serious issues that I remember. We did a fair bit of 'selling' the initiative to key people on the Hill, but we didn't meet a whole lot of resistance. I do remember one meeting with the congressman from Montana (my home state). He was skeptical of the argument that supporting agriculture overseas comes back to help U.S. farmers, but my recollection is we were pretty persuasive on that topic. At one point, I remember some pressure to include a couple of countries that may not have 'qualified' on purely development criteria, but I don't know whether that pressure came from inside the administration or from the Hill. In the end, though, the right decisions mostly won the day, and you can still see that in the countries selected and maintained over the years.

*Q: Okay. In dealing with the Hill, was it primarily with authorizers or appropriators, just out of curiosity?*

REINTSMA: That's a good question. But I don't remember the answer, sorry.

*Q: Okay. Anything else on the three months that you were working on this initiative that continues to have an impact?*

REINTSMA: I don't know if it's appropriate to say this in this interview, but I guess I will anyway. At a personal level, I was quite uncomfortable with that time working in the Secretary's Office at State. It just didn't fit my style very well, I guess, to function in that very high pressure, immediate decision-making kind of mode. Very big decisions were being made on the spur of the moment, and that didn't set well with me. In one case, the initial decision of how to allocate a billion dollars between countries was literally made overnight (as in between 9 pm and 8 am the next day), based on what seemed to me to be very little information. I guess to some degree the initiative probably had to operate in that mode, and maybe part of it reflected senior leaders at State who were new and didn't know how to use the bureaucracy to get deeper information quickly. And in retrospect, part of my discomfort probably stemmed from my personal decision-making style. I'm

the type who usually wants more information, data, and time for contemplation before big decisions are made.

So, I was asked if I wanted to stay on when the 3 months were up, but I didn't. I was happy to get back to my life in Malawi and to a job where I felt more comfortable.

Going back to a previous question, one other area where I may have had some influence was in better communications around the initiative with career staff, both at USAID and at State. Regarding USAID, for example, I would sometimes go over to the RRB (Ronald Reagan Building where USAID was based) and meet with people to bring them up to speed. At State Dept, even the assistant secretaries were in the dark on what was happening with the initiative. I know this because I happened to find myself in the elevator one day with Johnny Carson, the highly regarded Assistant Secretary of State for Africa. When I introduced myself and told him what I was doing with Cheryl, he immediately took me to his office to set up a personal briefing. When I briefed him a couple days later, it became clear he was almost completely left out of the loop. So, I suggested to Cheryl that she set up further briefings for the relevant assistant secretaries and their senior staff members, and she did

*Q: Right. Do you think that AID could have led development of this initiative itself?*

REINTSMA: No, I don't. We absolutely needed the gravitas of the Secretary of State's office to make it happen, in my view. And also to make it interagency and to make sure that the other agencies felt they have a piece of it so they'd be supportive of it. I also don't think the White House/NSC would have supported it, if it wasn't interagency/whole of government. USAID simply didn't have the 'weight' to do all that on its own.

*Q: Right. Were you in any meetings with Secretary Clinton on the initiative?*

REINTSMA: No. The anecdote here is that even though I was directly attached to her office, and I worked literally just down the hall from her suite and sometimes within the suite, I never saw her personally during the three months I was there. The closest I came was when they gave me a farewell party in her conference room, but I never actually saw her.

But I did work very closely with Cheryl Mills, and Cheryl was of course one of her two or three closest advisors.

*Q: And Cheryl Mills during this same period was also honchoing the Haiti relief efforts as well.*

REINTSMA: She was, yes. That happened in January, 2010, several weeks after I arrived in DC from Malawi.

*Q: Did you get dragged into any of that?*

REINTSMA: No, I was deliberately not dragged into it—my focus remained on the food security initiative. But it did become nearly all-consuming for Cheryl during the last month or so that I was there.

*Q: A very interesting experience, but you did return to Malawi? As a conquering hero since Malawi did become a focus country?*

REINTSMA: Well, sort of, maybe, but not really. I don't want to give the impression that I went to Washington as the Malawi mission director and then, guess what, suddenly Malawi gets a lot more resources. In the overnight country allocation of funding that I talked about earlier, Cheryl and her budget person actually slated Malawi for a lot more money than I thought was appropriate. So I actually argued successfully for quite a bit less than that, although of course it was still a significant increase for Malawi, as it was for all the countries involved.

*Q: Right, but did folks in Malawi know that?*

REINTSMA: Yes.

*Q: Oh, they did. Okay.*

REINTSMA: Well, I felt like I had to tell the ambassador when I got back. (Both laugh)

*Q: But he was supportive, right? Or she, I'm not sure who it was.*

REINTSMA: Well, there's another story about the way I ended up presenting that bit of information to him. But I won't go into that now.

*Q: But you did get some additional resources?*

REINTSMA: Yes, definitely. I don't remember the magnitude exactly, but it was probably something like a jump from \$two or three million, to \$15 or 18 million. That was probably the order of the magnitude we're talking about.

*Q: Okay. You had mentioned earlier that you were acting ambassador for a while. When was that? Was that before this period or was it after this period?*

REINTSMA: Initially before. I first served as acting Ambassador for brief periods, a few days from time to time, when both the ambassador and the DCM were out of the country. But near the end of my tour, the ambassador at the time was also leaving at the end of his tour. There was actually a DCM in country at the time, but she was very new to the country. So the ambassador asked me (or directed me) to be the Chargé for a month or so, after he left.

*Q: And how was that experience?*

REINTSMA: It was fine, but I thought the ambassador made a mistake by appointing me Charge, over the new DCM. I was concerned it would undermine her credibility with the Malawi government. I think I handled it pretty well, though. I worked closely with that DCM, and essentially informally said to her: “This is temporary, and you are soon going to be the Chargé, so whenever possible let’s just act as if that’s already the case”. I think she appreciated that and it worked out fine, at least so far as I know.

One other point. Perhaps this is not a fair statement, but I will say that during that month when I was acting as ambassador, I was struck by how much more work there is to do in the USAID program, and as a USAID director, than there is to do at the embassy. This is probably especially the case in these smaller countries like Malawi. Anyway, I think it’s interesting that some ambassadors are supportive of the USAID program and really empower the director, whereas others, perhaps not having enough to do elsewhere, sometimes micromanage and get overly involved in USAID’s business. Not always helpful, to say the least. I was fortunate to have served under more ambassadors who went the first way rather than the second way, but it was a little bit of an eye opener to see that there actually wasn’t a whole lot for ambassadors to do in those smaller countries.

During my time in Rwanda, I experienced an ambassador who tended to follow the second approach. I honestly think he didn’t have much to do except get involved in the details of the USAID program, and it created a lot of tension with the USAID representative at the time.

*Q: Right, right.*

*Are there other things you want to talk about on the Malawi posting? Before that, I wonder whether your earlier assignments with the GDA, the Global Development Alliance office and then the Legislative and Public Affairs office influenced you at all as a mission director. Did they change any of your approaches or bring lessons to your work?*

REINTSMA: I guess there may be a couple points. First, I think probably the big lesson would be, again, the importance of keeping an external focus versus strictly an internal focus. I think this is an overall problem in USAID. We’re a big bureaucracy and we have our systems and our processes, and it’s easy to become too focused on the internal. I think a successful AID director needs to both manage internally (or at least set the tone for other mission staff who supervise and manage offices), but also have that external focus. Overseas, of course, this means paying attention to the constituencies (often visitors), the project implementers, the local government officials, other donors, and the other USG agencies.

The other lesson has to do with empowering and incentivizing staff. That’s a big one, with regard to managing any organization, and it’s no different for a USAID mission.

Maybe a third point is to try to remember to stop and assess the big picture. Things like: “are we really getting results here, and if not, why not?”. Avoid those rabbit holes and internal diversions that can take up a lot of time and energy but aren’t really all that important in the end.

\*\*\*

*Q: This is Carol Peasley and it is February 8, 2023, and this is interview number four with Curt Reintsma.*

*Curt, in our last session we spoke a lot about your nearly six years in Malawi, which is a long time for a mission director to stay in a country. I’m wondering if you could talk a bit about the advantages and any disadvantages of staying six years in a country. One of the concerns State Department talks about is “clientitis.” Did you have to grapple with that potential issue?*

REINTSMA: From my perspective, the benefits of staying longer definitely outweighed any downsides. And maybe we can talk about “clientitis” a little further on in the discussion. But in terms of staying longer, first I think there are a lot of advantages of going a little slower at the beginning, and taking the time to develop an in-depth understanding of the situation before you start making major changes. Now, that doesn’t fit all situations. Obviously, there are some situations where quick, immediate action is needed and there are advantages of acting quickly and getting difficult decisions or actions out of the way upfront.

But I would argue in most cases it’s better to really get your feet on the ground before you start making big changes. That applies both internally to the USAID mission and USG country team, as well as externally. Externally, get to really know the country, travel and get outside the capital city, find opportunities to meet with local people in addition to the capital city elites, and ask lots of questions when you travel ‘up-country’. That’s pretty important, I think. I didn’t always do as much of that in Malawi as I would have liked. But I did do a fair bit over time, and you know that ‘former Peace Corps volunteer’ is always a part of you to some degree. So getting out and really meeting people in the villages and having independent channels of information and understanding people’s circumstances and how they think, that’s really important. Get those firsthand experiences in the rural areas and other parts of the country. All of that takes time and being there longer gives you time to absorb all of that context, so you can factor it into your decisions back in the office.

Another advantage of staying longer, which I suppose is obvious, is the importance of building relationships. There’s a lot of fluidity in donor relationships in developing countries. Expatriates in donor agencies come and go, local government officials come and go, senior people change jobs frequently, so to the extent that you can build some personal relationships even as people change jobs, you will be a lot more effective. And you’ll be in a better position to resolve difficult issues when they come up.



*Q: When I was in Malawi many years earlier, my main government counterpart was probably the secretary of the treasury. Would that have been the case when you were mission director? Who were your main interlocutors?*

REINTSMA: Well, in terms of the most senior government officials, there were two lasting ones that I most remember. The two key interlocutors at the senior embassy level, which also extended to some degree to me as the mission director, were the minister of finance himself, Minister Gondwe, and then in the presidency we had very close relationships with the President's chief-of-staff, although I'm not sure that is the right title.

*Q: Right. In my day that would have probably been the secretary to the president and cabinet.*

REINTSMA: Yes, I think that may indeed have been his title. Below that, there was a woman within the ministry of finance who headed the foreign assistance unit who was our main cross-sectoral interlocutor. At the technical sector level, I dealt with individual ministers like the minister of health and minister of agriculture, and the permanent secretaries (the senior career person in the ministry in the old British system). I also spent some time with the Vice President who was in office for part of the time I was there, although I wouldn't say we had a close relationship.

*Q: Was Gondwe the minister of finance during most of the time you were there?*

REINTSMA: Absolutely.

*Q: Right. And he was with the IMF (International Monetary Fund) during my day.*

REINTSMA: He was.

*Q: And so, he obviously knew his way around the issues.*

REINTSMA: He knew his way around the issues, he knew his way around Malawian politics, and probably most important, he knew his way around donor politics. He was an astute operator. (Both laugh)

Those were some of the key counterparts. There were other counterparts more at the level of the USAID office directors, but who I also had a lot of contact with; people like the national director of parks and wildlife or the principal secretary of ministries like education or health or agriculture. Finally, I would say the ministers of health and ag were probably two very key counterparts, who unfortunately changed jobs fairly often. I specifically remember "cutting a deal" on a difficult issue with the minister of health, only to find that she couldn't keep her end of the deal because she was soon replaced.

*Q: That's good. Did you ever have to confront the "clientitis" issue, that you were too close to the country, you didn't understand the real perspective that was coming from Washington or elsewhere?*

REINTSMA: I could see why that might be the case in some situations, but I honestly don't think it was the situation here. I had spent so many years in Washington, and stayed in fairly close touch with folks there, so I really don't think it was a problem in my case. Of course, an independent observer might have a different view, but I don't think so.

In terms of our relationship with the Malawian government (by 'our', I mean the USG country team led by the embassy), it was largely a healthy and respectful relationship. That said, there were certainly specific issues of contention, and we could be quite critical of specific government decisions or particular officials. Overall, I think it was more of a "hold their feet to the fire and make sure they do what they committed to" kind of relationship, as opposed to a "clientitis" attitude.

For example, we had some pretty sharp disagreements on policy issues; we were pretty critical of some of the actions or inactions on the part of the Malawian government. In the agriculture sector, as mentioned, the fertilizer subsidy became an international policy dispute. In the health sector, big failures or inaction by the government led to stockouts of critical drugs. Related to that, there was a very big issue about corruption and/or incompetence in the Central Medical Stores; it was an issue that risked affecting the distribution of malaria drugs we were financing. In another case, there was a major disagreement about gay rights.

I think there was always a set of issues where we didn't agree with the Malawian government and felt the need to push them on. I don't think we ever got to the point where we were just blindly supportive or lost perspective in terms of reporting to Washington. I would argue that one clear example of this was when I was in Secretary Clinton's office on detail, and argued against a higher level of funding for Malawi than I felt was justified. Did I talk about that in the last interview?

*Q: Yes.*

REINTSMA: So, I feel that I and the other USG leaders at post were not really infected by "clientitis" to any significant degree, but of course others may view it differently. Interestingly, this situation might have been helped by the fact that Malawi was not a highly political country in terms of U.S. foreign aid politics. Perhaps that made it easier to be more honest in discussing the Malawi situation with Washington.

*Q: Right. When you went to Malawi you were a first-time mission director. I believe that you went into a mission that had gone through some management challenges before you arrived. Could you talk a bit about how you dealt with that as a manager and whether over time your management style began to change as you had more experience as a mission director.*

REINTSMA: Well, let me start with a little bit of a personal gripe here, which I'll try to turn into a broader lesson. In spite of this being my first Foreign Service post as a senior officer, I was denied the opportunity to go to "mission director school" before going out to post. When I say mission director school, of course, that doesn't formally exist, but there are some training programs for senior managers that are helpful, and one was being offered at the time I was getting ready to go out. (I think the agency probably offers more and better training for directors today). At any rate, perhaps because the Malawi Director slot had been open for a while due to the management challenges you allude to, there was a rush to get a new mission director out there, and so my request to attend a management course was denied by the head of the Africa Bureau at the time. So, by way of preparation, I talked to a couple of former directors and tried to draw out what lessons I could before going out, and that was about all I was able to do. I didn't feel very well prepared.

I'm sorry, I'm just going to ramble a little bit here.

*Q: No, that's fine.*

REINTSMA: At any rate, as it played out, I think I got lucky in that the mission had just been through some hard times; management issues, a cutback in local staff, some funding cuts, some pressure to get Malawi out of some sectors like education. (There was also a move later on to drop the food aid program, which I successfully resisted.) Anyway, all those 'negatives' allowed me to arrive at a point in time when there was an opportunity for rebuilding. As noted earlier, it's always nicer to lead an organization when you're in a rebuilding phase rather than a downsizing phase. A steady hand on the tiller, I think, was the phrase I used when I first got there, and I think that turned out to be the right diagnosis for what the mission needed—that was my North Star for the first couple of years. Then I think I mentioned this last time, but having spent so much time in Washington, I had a lot of strong relationships with sectoral leaders back there, and that helped make the case when there were threats to funding that I felt were not justified.

*Q: Right. It's interesting that you mentioned going slowly on the management front -- a steady hand on the tiller as you said -- which is very similar to taking time to understand the country before you start trying to make changes. That probably is an important lesson, as many people move too quickly to make changes.*

REINTSMA: Yes, I do think that's a best practice for management overall, or at least it is for my personal style in most situations. And then of course it's important to avoid micromanagement. If at all possible, start by recruiting good office directors and deputy office directors and sector leaders, set a positive tone and point them in what you feel is the right direction, but then empower your staff. And give younger staff an opportunity to grow via stretch assignments and other approaches. I think that approach paid off very well for me, for the most part. Looking back on it, there may have been a few instances where I went a little too far in terms of hands off; there may have been a couple of times where the sector leaders in the mission needed a little more oversight and support,

perhaps. But generally, it's important to keep the focus on what's important at the director level. I would summarize that as three things.

One is paying a lot of attention to staff issues; recruitment, retention and incentives. I think my approach on that probably did evolve over time, as I increasingly realized how important that was. I did make some staff changes that needed to be made shortly after I got there—you have to have solid people if you are going to empower them, of course. In a couple of cases, the changes were suggested to me by others—I didn't come up with them myself. But I guess I'll give myself some credit for keeping an open door policy and being open to those kinds of discussions, and I quickly saw the merit of the ideas proposed, and acted on them.

The other two things to keep your eye on to be a successful mission director would be managing interagency relationships, first and foremost with the embassy, of course, but also with the other agencies. And managing the relationships with the government. That can be quite difficult at times and you have to make some tough calls sometimes. I think those are the big three for me.

*Q: Thanks very much, Curt.*

*Is there anything more on Malawi that you'd like to talk about before we move on?*

REINTSMA: Well, I guess this gets into broader issues of foreign aid overall, but I felt that as Foreign Service assignments go, I got lucky being assigned to Malawi. What I mean by that is I see Malawi as a part of a fairly narrow subset of countries that are, I'm going to say "in the middle" and therefore ripe for development assistance. Let me explain what I mean by that. On the one hand, countries like Malawi are not failed states; they're not Somalia, or Yemen or Libya, or even DRC at various points in its history. So not failed states. They're also not highly politicized in terms of U.S. foreign policy like, say, Egypt, nor do they have the visibility of countries like Ethiopia or Kenya or South Africa. And they're not about to 'graduate' to middle income, which would reduce the rationale for development assistance. So, they're countries where there's an opportunity to invest in a serious development program. They also have reasonably functioning governments which have the potential to use foreign aid resources relatively effectively. And I think that all adds up to a fairly small subset of countries these days. I could probably list only twenty or so that I think fall into that category, so I consider myself lucky to have been director in a country where those factors were mostly in place.

*Q: It's interesting you mention that. In the early days of the Development Fund for Africa in the late 1980s and 1990s the country allocation funding decisions were based on program and country performance, as well as need. Was the country itself doing the right things in order to develop, and were the AID funds themselves being used effectively and having impact? Malawi did well in those calculations because while it was very resource poor, there was always the possibility of accomplishing something.*

REINTSMA: Yes, exactly. And I think to a large degree Feed the Future used a similar set of criteria.

*Q: These kinds of criteria often put Malawi in a better position to draw on funds from centrally driven initiatives. to be able to get resources, which is why you grew the program so significantly.*

REINTSMA: Yes; it definitely gave us the opportunity to go after those resources.

*Q: Any further thoughts on Malawi right now?*

REINTSMA: No, I think that covers most of it. I did talk last time about the importance of integrated programming, using the Food for Peace Title II example.

*Q: But that's sort of increasingly difficult to do with the earmarks and directives and initiatives.*

REINTSMA: It is, yes. I'm sure that if you looked over time from the seventies and eighties to now, it's steadily become harder and harder to do, and it's across all administrations, I think.

*Q: Okay. When we come back at the end I want to ask you some questions about global initiatives.*

*So, when you were getting ready to leave Malawi what were you thinking of doing?*

REINTSMA: I was getting close to the mandatory retirement age—age sixty-five in the Foreign Service.

*Q: So, you knew then that your next assignment would be for just a year or eighteen months?*

REINTSMA: That's right, so that was known upfront. I just took a light look around at the listings and thought it might be useful or interesting to be outside the Africa bureau since I'd been there for a while. And I knew that PPL was rebuilding and I knew the good reputation of the assistant administrator there so I reached out to see what the interest might be.

*Q: Who was the assistant administrator?*

REINTSMA: Susan Reichle.

At one point, I was briefly asked by the AA for Africa whether I was interested in a DAA (Deputy Assistant Administrator) slot. I thought about it for about 30 seconds and knew that was not what I wanted at that point of my career. I had seen the DAA jobs up close and felt they were not for me, especially for that last assignment before retirement.

Basically, rightly or not, I saw them as “pressure cooker” jobs where you had, what’s the old phrase, all the responsibility and none of the authority, or something like that.

*Q: All the dirty work goes to the DAAs.*

REINTSMA: Exactly. So, I decided that an office director job in PPL might work well.

### **AID/W, Policy Bureau, Donor Engagement Office Director (2011 – 2012)**

#### ***(A Different Perspective)***

*Q: And so, you became the director of the Donor Engagement Office within the Policy bureau. What did that entail?*

REINTSMA: It was certainly a very interesting job, with a set of responsibilities that most of the Agency is largely unaware of. I worked very, very closely with the Administrator and Deputy Administrator. A lot of what the Administrator does is going to international conferences, meeting with his or her donor counterparts, et cetera. The office largely managed all of that, in addition to international donor-wide processes and assessments, such as the peer reviews of aid effectiveness, and big conferences like the UN General Assembly meetings and the Busan conference following the Paris Declaration, et cetera. A lot of the daily job was preparing briefing papers for USAID’s top leadership, and advising on how to handle specific issues that came up in the donor world. In addition, USAID still had a network of staff assigned to other donor countries, to improve coordination. We had people assigned to Rome, to the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), to China and Japan, and Brazil may have also come under our Office—I’m not sure about that one. So, all those folks technically reported to me as the director of donor engagement, and our small Washington staff supported them as much as possible.

One of the more interesting issues was dealing with the ‘emerging donor’ countries such as the BRIC countries. We tried to be helpful to their relatively new experiences with becoming donors. It was interesting from both an academic as well as a practical sense. In some countries like India and Brazil, we still had a USAID assistance program in that country while at the same time we were trying to help them to become donors.

*Q: Can you maybe talk about one of those? I’m not sure who the BRICs were that you were working with at that point in time. Was Korea one of them or Brazil?*

REINTSMA: Yes, South Korea was a big one. We didn’t have a representative assigned there, but we worked quite a lot with KOICA (Korean International Cooperation Agency) and had a relationship with their person in Washington. There was also work in India, Brazil, China, South Africa and even Russia, some of that work was lightly coordinated from our office. For example, I developed a regular, two-way reporting tool for our representatives in those countries.

*Q: Okay. Did they come with questions about how AID managed X, Y or Z?*

REINTSMA: Yes, Korea especially was very interested in learning from the USAID model, as was Japan: JICA (Japan International Cooperation Agency). Korea gave the U.S a lot of credit for their own economic development success story, and they proactively sought to learn from us. For example, we set up a headquarters level staff exchange with Korea (or possibly Japan, my memory is hazy on which one it was). One of the most interesting interactions was with China, where we had a person assigned. At one point, I met with a visiting Chinese delegation, and we talked about, among other things, the ethics of foreign aid and those kinds of questions. I remember that meeting quite well.

*Q: Any specifics you want to share with us?*

REINTSMA: Well, I have a strong visual memory of addressing this room of silent but attentive Chinese officials who were very hard to read. At one point, I used the phrase “doing well by doing good”. I was trying to make the point that an effective foreign aid program helps people and countries on the receiving end, and also comes back to help us at home in the donor country. Even though they were extremely attentive, I wasn’t getting many questions or much of a response. But then one of the younger guys spoke up, and he essentially said that at a certain point in your national development, just doing well is good enough—forget about doing good. (Laughs) So much for the ‘ethics’ of foreign aid. It stuck with me over the years, since it seemed to illustrate the difference in the two philosophies regarding being an aid donor.

*Q: Was Raj Shah the administrator during this period?*

REINTSMA: Yes, Raj was the administrator. I worked very closely with him on a number of topics, including his attendance at international conferences. For example, as mentioned, Busan was during that time. There were a series of those big international meetings on Foreign Aid Effectiveness that evolved out of the Paris Declaration. Busan was definitely on my watch. That was a big part of my job for quite some time.

*Q: Brian Atwood was the head of the Development Assistance Committee in Paris at the OECD during this period. Did you have any interactions with Brian at all? In his oral history, he talks a bit about the Busan process.*

REINTSMA: Yes, I did work with Brian, but not a lot of direct contact.

Well, that piques my interests because I didn’t know he had written about it—I’ll go in and read it now if it’s online. I was in some meetings with Brian, which was interesting in multiple ways—I had worked fairly closely with him on Lessons Without Borders back in the LPA days.

*Q: Did Raj go to Busan for the meeting?*

REINTSMA: I'm pretty sure he did. I can't say for sure since it was some eleven years ago now, and it's possible the Deputy Administrator (DA) went instead, but I'm thinking it was Raj. At any rate, we spent a lot of hours with him and DA Don Steinberg on those kinds of preparations.

*Q: I know that the NGO community was also very heavily involved; Interaction, for example, on the policies on—for Busan. Did Interaction come to you to talk about any of these things as well, to try to influence U.S. policy?*

REINTSMA: No, I don't remember talking with Interaction about that—they may have met with Raj or someone, but I don't remember that. There was another group (it may have been Oxfam) that we did meet with more than once. My recollection is they were a significant NGO on the advocacy side.

*Q: Okay. Another question related to the DAC, which does peer reviews of member aid programs. Would the review of the U.S. have been done during the period that you were in that office? Did you have involvement with any of the peer reviews?*

REINTSMA: I'm trying to recall the timing. I'm very much aware of those peer reviews, aware of the one done on the U.S., and trying to remember the exact timing. I think it was done in the time period shortly before I got there, but I'd have to look up exact dates. I do remember reading it, and my personal reaction was that it was pretty fair; I had a generally positive reaction to it, even though it had some criticism of the U.S. I was not directly involved in the peer review process myself, but I believe Steve Pierce, who reported to me, was leading it at the staff level for USAID. Steve also at one point either spelled off or replaced Dirk Dijkerman at the DAC, and they were both very involved in it. So, I think Steve was leading on it for USAID/Washington, and I was probably just provided whatever support he may have needed, if any.

*Q: Okay. Between your engagement with the donors from your position in the Policy bureau, and then your own field experience with them, I'm wondering if you have any thoughts about how other donors worked? Things you wish USAID could do? Or negatives that you're glad USAID didn't have to worry about? I'm just curious if you had any big picture reactions to other donors.*

REINTSMA: Yes, there are some points to make on this topic. I have a couple quick reactions now, and I'm going to make a note to give this a little more thought for a later session. But first of all, it was perversely gratifying to find out that some of the other donors had even worse bureaucracies than we did. (Both laugh)

*Q: Good. That's always nice to know.*

REINTSMA: I would cite the UN and the EU as being in that category. So, that was one clear impression.



Going back to my experience as mission director in Malawi, let me say first that in general, we had a collaborative, positive relationship with the group we called the like-minded donors. This group was for the most part the European bi-laterals, although the UN and the EU also came to our monthly meetings. There were some differences in approach, however, in that USAID tended to be both more market-oriented, and more willing to express disagreement with host countries policies. Our tendency was to do a study or piece of analysis on an issue, and then present it to the government and push for policy changes if needed. Whereas the Europeans tended to be more inclined to just say, “well, that’s government policy and it’s not our role to second guess the government on policy issues”. The Brits were an exception to that, however. Their Malawi director and his staff were quite vocal in criticizing the government on policy issues, especially in the health sector if I remember correctly. Anyway, that’s another difference in approach and style between USAID, the British, and the Europeans.

Between the Western donors and the Chinese, however, there was a big difference in approach. Basically, the Chinese were not willing to attend donor meetings, nor to reveal data on their aid programs. They clearly did not want to be seen as part of the ‘donor club’, nor did they want any examination of the details of their aid. That said, they were nonetheless very well received by the Malawi government—this might have been specific to the case in point, but there was great (and public) affection between the Malawi President and the Chinese Ambassador.

Another difference, comparing USAID with Europeans, was that the Europeans generally had broader public support for their foreign assistance program and budgets than we had in the U.S., at least during that time period. I don’t know if that’s still the case now, I’m guessing it is. So they didn’t have to cater as much to political whims, and they gave a substantially higher percentage of their GDP to foreign assistance than the U.S. did. I think their in-country programs probably also had more flexibility and discretion on the ground with regard to how their funds were spent—I think they were less affected by the ‘vertical programming’ (earmarks and directives) that we mentioned earlier.

*Q: So, was the year or so in PPL a good experience?*

REINTSMA: It was a mixed experience. I had very supportive supervisors and enjoyed that. Really excellent supervisors. The type of work was probably fairly typical of a high-profile small office working closely with the Administrator’s office; lots of short turnaround briefing papers, lots of push to determine “our (USAID’s) position” on this or that topic, lots of preparation work for high profile events and international conferences, etc. And lots of face time with the Administrator and Deputy Administrator. Overall, it was a busy time just keeping up with the daily requirement. But to be honest, the year was also colored by a difficult personnel situation, which I found very taxing. That situation ended up taking a huge amount of my time, and had negative consequences for the whole office. That made it a difficult year.

*Q: Right. Is there anything more you want to say about that position? I know that you then retired but came back into USAID in other capacities. Anything more about the donor engagement experience and then your retirement as a direct hire employee?*

REINTSMA: I think we've pretty well covered the donor engagement issues and the job itself. I guess my summary takeaway is that it's an important but undervalued function in USAID. I think there's a lot of room for more effective foreign aid if donors collaborate better. Certainly, in Malawi there were cases where the host government was able to play one donor off against other donors. So, lots of room for better donor coordination, and more effective aid programs as a result.

*Q: Actually, let me ask you one more question about donor engagement because an important part of it, from a field perspective, takes place at the World Bank's consultative group meetings. In the Policy bureau, were you engaged at all in the process of consultative group meetings, either helping to formulate U.S. positions or in discussions with the bank about how the meetings were held. Any engagement on those issues?*

REINTSMA: So, you're not talking about the big Spring and Fall annual meetings at the Bank in Washington?

*Q: Not those meetings, but the country level consultative group meetings.*

REINTSMA: Ok, so you're talking about the country level. No, we were not really engaged at the country level in PPL, I'm guessing that was mostly left to the regional bureaus. We did get involved in the logistics and mechanics of the World Bank meetings in Washington, though.

*Q: Would the U.S. have tried to get the World Bank or the IMF to engage on certain issues and add certain issues to the agenda for the spring meetings?*

REINTSMA: If that was happening, I was not aware of it. Our role was more reactive and logistical or operational, for example, things like finding a USAID speaker to represent us on a particular panel, that kind of thing.

*Q: Okay. That's fine. So, you retired.*

**Retirement from Foreign Service – 2012 – and Post Retirement work with USAID Food Security Bureau (2013 – 2022)**

***(Coffee, Anyone? Another Round of Private Sector Engagement)***

REINTSMA: Yes, I retired from Foreign Service in Fall of 2012. I had a great three-month retirement and then went back to work.

*Q: (Laughs) What did you come into initially?*

REINTSMA: I worked for ten years after retirement; actually I exaggerate a bit, it was only nine and a half years. I went to USAID's Bureau for Food Security (BFS, now called RFS) and stayed there for the whole nine and a half years. I worked specifically on private sector engagement in the ag and food security sector.

*Q: And this was the bureau that was set up during the Raj Shah administration?*

REINTSMA: Right, the bureau charged with implementing the Feed the Future initiative.

*Q: That you had been involved with when you had the secondment to Secretary Clinton's office.*

REINTSMA: That's correct. In making the decision about what I was interested in doing after retirement, I went through a mental process. First, I knew I wanted to keep working, but at age 65, I felt I was a little too old to start a second career in something entirely new, so staying around the USAID family seemed to make sense.

Then I thought about my background and experience, including the master's degree in agricultural economics, my background in ag and ag policy issues, and the work experience in the agriculture sector in Lesotho and USAID/Washington, and before that in Rwanda and Zaire as a USAID contractor. Then, there was my strong interest in external engagement and working with the private sector. So, in the end, it seemed like a no-brainer to bring together my experience in ag and my interest in private sector engagement, and work in that space. So that's what I did.

*Q: Right. The first assistant to the administrator for the new bureau was, I believe, Paul Weisenfeld. He helped set up the Bureau for Food Security (BFS) so it was operational by the time you began?*

REINTSMA: Up and operational, yes, but still working out the kinks. BFS was set up in 2010-11, so when I came in at the very beginning of 2013, it had only been operational for a year or two.

*Q: Okay. And so, you went into an office that already existed and was focused on public-private partnerships (PPPs)? Can you tell us what you all were doing in that office?*

REINTSMA: The office, MPI (Markets and Partnerships Innovations, I think it was called) was essentially managing external relationships, largely but not exclusively focused on private companies and engaging the private sector. The aspects I was working on were built on the old GDA model, the Global Development Alliance. The concept was to find the intersection between development work and development objectives and the long-term, enlightened business interests of companies. It was about building relationships with those companies that were interested in investing in development-related activities in the countries where FtF worked, both because it was the right thing to do and because they thought it was in their long term interest.

So to cite one example to illustrate the point, I was the USAID relationship manager for Starbucks for probably eight of those nine and a half years. Starbucks really needs a steady, reliable supply of high-quality Arabica coffee and is also interested in helping small scale coffee farmers become sustainable. They (and a number of other coffee companies) want to have long-term relationships with specific coffee cooperatives and farmers, both because it helps them supply-wise and because they feel it's the right thing to do. And so, in a country like Colombia or Peru or Rwanda, USAID's development interests were to promote stability and economic growth, in part by supporting coffee farmers. Coffee is an important crop in those countries. In the Colombia case, the mission was especially interested in conflict or post-conflict areas of the country. So, to cite the Colombia PPP example, we teamed up with Starbucks and we each put a half million dollars on the table and developed a joint project to support coffee farmers. That's a classic example of how these ideas and partnerships worked.

*Q: And did you have your own pot of money that you were able to use or were you talking to missions to provide funding?*

REINTSMA: Both. We did have a modest pot of money for multi-country activities which went well beyond the span of any one mission and where there was a broader set of relationships and lessons that could be drawn from the activity. We would not go into any one particular country and do something with central funds that would replace or supplement what the mission was doing at the country level. But we did initiate a lot of regional or multi-country activities, especially if there were broader issues at play.

*Q: Okay. So, but in the Colombia example, that would have been the mission providing the funding.*

REINTSMA: That one was mission money, yes.

*Q: So, would you be the one to encourage the mission to come into partnership with Starbucks?*

REINTSMA: Yes, through our relationships with the companies, we were often the ones to make introductions, facilitate contact, or scout out which USAID missions might be interested so that companies like Starbucks weren't wasting their time going to countries where our missions didn't work in the coffee sector. Generally speaking, playing an intermediary role of bringing the two sides together for the country level activities, while also starting and managing headquarters-level centrally-funded activities.

*Q: Do you recall which countries were involved, that you helped to broker partnerships with, Colombia being one?*

REINTSMA: Sure. That specific example of the Colombia activity actually began before I arrived in BFS, but I was in touch with the mission about it. I helped communicate with Starbucks corporate HQ in Seattle on some issues that arose, and later engaged the

mission to see if they wanted to expand it or start a new phase. In Peru, I made the introductions which brought the two sides together for a new program. Earlier, we set up partnerships in Guatemala, Honduras and the El Salvador regional program, to address the devastating effects of coffee leaf rust, a fungus that was wreaking havoc on coffee crops and incomes in Central America in 2013/14/15. We used a combination of BFS, LAC and mission funds to work with several coffee companies and NGOs, and those activities got a lot of positive press for working with the private sector to proactively address a crisis. In Uganda and other countries, we developed an innovative farmer finance activity that was a combination of a DCA and a GDA, which is now managed by the new Development Finance Corporation. We developed a regional partnership in Rwanda, Burundi and Eastern DRC to address another coffee disease in Africa. In the cocoa sector, we worked in West Africa with the World Cocoa Foundation and their member companies, specifically to address the impacts of climate change on cocoa farmers. Our office also worked with companies like John Deere on mechanization, Pepsi-Co on chickpea production, and Walmart on training women farmers in multiple countries, including Rwanda. So those are some examples.

*Q: Were Ethiopia and Kenya involved, just out of curiosity?*

REINTSMA: The Kenya mission was not working on coffee at that time, but we did have some work in Ethiopia, in part through World Coffee Research, an industry group that we partnered with multiple times.

*Q: I think I've seen bags of coffee at Starbucks from Kenya and Ethiopia.*

REINTSMA: Yes, they buy and market coffee from several African countries. South Sudan was another interesting case. We actually helped facilitate a very interesting, and somewhat surprising partnership with Nespresso in South Sudan. George Clooney was doing clever ads for Nespresso, and he took an interest in South Sudan, and helped push the company to do a partnership with the mission that was managed by Technoserve. Mexico was another country where we had some activities and we were helping facilitate contacts between the mission and private companies. There's a lot of coffee grown in the southern states of Mexico.

*Q: You said the models were based on the Global Development Alliance. Since you were involved with the startup of the GDA, has the approach evolved at all? Were there any significant differences to how AID was looking at public-private partnerships or companies were looking at them than in the beginnings of the GDA?*

REINTSMA: Yes, I think one big evolution in the field of public - private sector relationships was to expand the concept beyond individual partnerships. Over time, the Agency started to see it as being less about specific, individual co-funded activities, like the Colombia example where each side puts up 50 percent to create one particular partnership. It became more about broader, longer-term engagement that might result in multiple specific activities, and even working with groupings of industries on broader activities. The terminology even changed, so today we talk more about private sector

engagement (PSE) and less about specific private sector partnerships (PPPs) or alliances (PPAs). So, with broader engagement, PSE might involve, say working with companies on a range of policy issues or activities where there's a perception that both sides benefit, meaning there's both a development benefit and a benefit from providing much needed investment in a particular country. That's a significant evolution in the approach.

*Q: So, the USAID involvement might, in fact, be just policy dialogue, not money?*

REINTSMA: It could be in some cases, or in other cases, activities that had mutual benefit without new and additional funding. An example would be connecting a group of farmers in Nigeria (that USAID was supporting via an existing project) to a private grain processor who would pay them better. Neither side was putting up new money, but there were large potential benefits. In one 'reverse' example of broader mutual benefits, Starbucks testified before a Senate committee about how important their partnership with USAID was. That sort of thing is worth a lot to USAID, in my view.

Another evolution in the approach over the years was just to make working with the private sector a more extensive part of the job for a much broader swath of USAID staff. This enhanced approach was 'codified' in the new private sector policy that was issued under Administrator Mark Green in 2108 or 2019.

Another big issue that I was always quite involved in was the effort to address the inhibiting factors or impediments that make it so difficult for USAID staff to make these partnerships actually happen. Various factors having to do with USAID's bureaucracy and lengthy approval and procurement processes can make it very difficult to put a partnership into place. So, a lot of attention over the years went into trying to make it easier and more efficient for AID staff to work with the private sector, and vice versa. You can imagine both sides working hard to develop a relationship and then to define a mutually beneficial project, finally getting the outlines in place, and then you have to tell the private company: "this is great, I know you're busy and time is money, thanks for all your hard work on this, but I'm sorry, but it'll now take USAID eighteen months or two years for us to put the program into place, because we have to follow all these procurement rules and our contracts office is backed up". That doesn't go over too well, to say the least. So even though my job was in the Bureau for Food Security, I had a significant engagement at the agency-wide level trying to help resolve those issues. For example, I proposed and helped execute a significant field survey to identify and prioritize the key issues field staff were facing when they tried to engage and partner with the private sector.

*Q: So, you spent a lot of time at the Office of Procurement?*

REINTSMA: Well, we certainly spent a lot of time talking *about* the Office of Procurement. But yes, I did some of that directly, and in other cases I was developing the evidence and passing the info along to those who were having those discussions (since I was technically a contractor at that time).

*Q: But I think you all developed some new instruments, is that correct, to be able to deal with some of these issues?*

REINTSMA: Yes, to some degree. First, the GDA mechanism that was developed early on continued to be refined and improved. Then there was the BAA; do you know about the BAA?

*Q: I think I've heard of it, but you'll have to spell it out.*

REINTSMA: Well, the acronym stands for Broad Agency Announcement, and it is a procurement mechanism that already existed, but wasn't being used by USAID. One of the more innovative and forward-leaning procurement officers came up with the idea of using it as an expedited process to work in partnership with a select group of companies or NGOs. One of my colleagues and I were among the first in the agency to use it for PSE and partnerships with private companies. It was an interesting process, testing new waters so to speak.

*Q: Right. So, I assume a lot of the work was dealing with company supply chain issues. I know at one point USAID agriculture strategies focused on marketing, so this was a very logical extension of USAID's work.*

REINTSMA: Yes. That's a big part of it. Working with companies engaged in global supply chains; coffee and cocoa are two commodities with global supply chains that immediately stand out. A big part of our role was helping producers find better markets and give them more bargaining power. Spices and nuts were other commodities that we got somewhat involved in, working with companies like McCormack in places like Madagascar.

So, yes, working with companies in the global supply chain was important, but not only that. Developing new markets is also part of it. So, if you're an African or an Asian seed company and you're trying to develop new markets and you have a better seed variety, it's absolutely in USAID's interest to get that better seed variety in front of farmers, and it's in the company's interest, of course, to develop those markets. So, that was also a big one, working with seed companies like Pioneer and others.

*Q: Did the bureau develop some monitoring and benchmarks to assess the impact of these programs over time? Were you able to see what was happening with coffee farmers in these countries? I'm just curious the degree to which it was being done by the center and/or field missions.*

REINTSMA: It's a little bit of all the above. Feed the Future, because it is a global initiative, has its own evaluation system and indicators to monitor impact, and a small group of folks dedicated to M&E. So those of us working on PSE in BFS worked somewhat with that M&E group to develop and track indicators related to PSE and public-private partnerships. There was, therefore, some monitoring and reporting on the impact of PPPs at the central, or BFS level. At the mission level, their PSE and

partnership activities were of course evaluated and monitored as part of normal project evaluations, if and when those occurred.

That said, I do feel the agency has underinvested in monitoring the effectiveness of public-private partnerships. And it's a tricky thing to do because a lot of the impact is likely to be hard to quantify, and it may take a long time for the benefits to be known. It's also about relationships and approaches for long-term, sustainable impact, hard things to measure the value of, especially in USAID's normal project cycle. Also, attribution becomes a big problem; how to disentangle the impact of our funding versus what the company or the sector is doing as a whole. But those complications aside, it's an area where USAID hasn't invested as we should have, in my view.

*Q: Were there other donors doing these kinds of public-private partnerships as well?*

REINTSMA: I'm glad you asked. This is truly an area where USAID led the world, we really did. USAID was first off the starting line when we set up the GDA Secretariat, and before long, we had a lot of imitators, both other donors and other USG agencies. What's the expression? Imitation is the highest form of flattery or something like that. So, yes, some other donors also started moving in that direction. The Germans did some interesting work on this and a couple of the other Europeans did. But USAID really was the leader, and I'm guessing still is.

*Q: I recall that the Bureau for Food Security early on spoke a lot about monitoring the impact of its work on women and women farmers. Do you recall any of those discussions?*

REINTSMA: For sure, absolutely. And interestingly, the companies that I worked with were also very interested in this topic. Any time we did a program, be it a PPP or other, we worked with the USAID office that was focused on gender and women's issues, and made sure the approach and indicators were approved by that office. Again, the companies were usually forward leaning on this—I think I already mentioned Walmart's work to train a large number of women farmers, for example. It was their own program, and they came to us for advice on where and how to implement it.

As an aside, there's a great video that Starbucks produced in Rwanda, showing the positive impact on Rwandan women from support to the coffee sector. It's about women who formed coffee cooperatives after the genocide in Rwanda, and the key role those cooperatives played, both economically and emotionally, in helping them build back their lives after the genocide. These were women whose family members were killed in the genocide, and coffee growing and marketing through cooperatives became a way for them to reestablish an economic base of survival and regain self-respect.

*Q: Was all USAID agriculture activity then included in this new Food Security bureau?*

REINTSMA: I would say probably 90 percent of it was. Most of the funding for agriculture came through the Food Security bureau and then was allocated out to the



missions or retained for centrally funded activities like staffing and the research programs at universities and international research centers. The exceptions were mostly Colombia and Peru, I think, with their separate pots of funding under what's called alternative development funding. Is that the right name for that program?

*Q: Yes, right.*

REINTSMA: Thanks, so Alternative Development funds in the LAC (Latin American and Caribbean) Bureau had some money for agriculture. And there were probably a few other bits and pieces around the Agency. I think RDMA (the Regional Development Mission for Asia) out of Thailand maybe had a few activities that touched the agriculture sector, for which the funding didn't come through BFS. But other than those cases and some Food for Peace activities, all or almost all funding for agriculture was passed through the Food Security bureau.

*Q: Okay. And the—and just for those who might be reading this that might not automatically understand the relationship of cash crops like coffee to food security, do you want to say a word about why that's part of food security?*

REINTSMA: Sure. The short answer is an easy one. People need money as well as home-produced food. There have been some interesting studies done in rural Africa, and in many cases people actually buy more food than they produce, even in many rural areas of Africa. This doesn't always fit our image, but the fact of the matter is people's lives in today's world are based on a cash or money economy. Although in modern economies today I suppose we could say some of that involves 'cashless' payments, but that's a different issue.

*Q: Yes, right.*

REINTSMA: Anyway, even rural people desperately need funds. They need funds for school fees, shelter, medicine, transportation, tools, clothes and these days for cell phone fees. They also need to buy supplemental food beyond what they could possibly produce at home (think salt, for example). And much more. At the household level, people need money just as much or more than they need self-produced food. And further up the chain, business, which depends on a money economy, is the driver of economic growth and jobs. And by the way, when I say business, I don't necessarily mean big multinationals, but even the small trading activities around agriculture that provide employment. A lot of rural households are dependent on daily wage labor, for example, which is almost always present in the agricultural sector. So, marketing those cash crops is what provides the income to drive development as well as people's basic needs at the local level.

*Q: Okay. Thank you.*

*I know that the Bureau for Food Security and AID generally were also working on the issues of climate change. Could you talk a bit about how you saw that from where you were sitting.*

REINTSMA: Yes, for sure. So, I was involved in some early work on that way back in the 1990s when I was division chief for ag, private sector, and environment in the Africa Bureau. During my more recent work in the Bureau for Food Security I got quite interested in the topic of how climate change is (and will be) affecting agriculture and farmers in developing countries, and also how we could work with the private sector to address that issue. So, a colleague and I developed one of the first BAAs in the agency around this topic. BAAs have to have a research topic, which can be very broadly defined, and so the research topic in this case was something like: “how can USAID and private companies work together to mitigate the impact of climate change on smallholder farmers around the world”. That was essentially the topic we took on. Following the BAA procedure and working closely with OAA (office of procurement), we issued a solicitation on that topic. We then went through the BAA process of winnowing down the concept papers received (I think there were 126 of them). We got them down to twelve or thirteen, then again following the BAA procedure, we held a two or three-day co-creation workshop with that smaller group of organizations to define the specific activities that we would jointly move forward with. Co-creation is at the heart of the BAA process. We ended up with four activities to fund, each involving a small consortium of two or more of the groups selected under the BAA process.

*Q: And the four activities were?*

REINTSMA: One was in the coffee sector, one was in the cocoa sector, one was a learning lab to bring together the experiences from the other activities, and the fourth one was in the finance sector. The finance one had very little funding and focused on a couple of countries in East Africa. That one did a few good things but had some serious issues and didn’t really advance the ball very far. The others got quite a long ways, and maybe the best way to illustrate their progress is to give a couple of specific examples.

So, for the cocoa sector, and I’ll be brief here, we worked through the World Cocoa Foundation to reach the major cocoa companies working in West Africa and to a lesser extent in Latin America. They designed a forward-looking program to assess how climate change would impact cocoa farmers, and what could be done about that. USAID only put up I think about a million and a half dollars, not much at all for such a huge issue. But that funding and the co-creation process stimulated the whole cocoa industry’s interest in the topic, and they later followed through with a much larger, longer-term set of activities to address climate change impacts in their sector. Those activities are still continuing, so far as I know.

In the coffee sector, there were a number of interesting activities in several countries. I will cite one example to illustrate the kind of work we were doing. One of the organizations we funded under the BAA was CIAT (International Center for Tropical Agriculture) in Peru. Their experts did what is called gradient mapping. Using a variety of data sources, CIAT was able to fit the data into geo-mapping exercises which allowed them to assess the potential impact of climate change on specific gradients based on altitude, temperature and so forth. So you could actually take a region of a specific

country like Uganda or Liberia or Guatemala, look at where farmers were growing coffee or cocoa, and determine that a particular agro-ecological band at a particular altitude will be just fine and they can continue to grow coffee there for the next twenty years; whereas in another band farmers will need to make some major adaptations to cultivation practices if they're going to keep growing the crop; and then in a third band, farmers need to get out of coffee entirely due to climate change, and find a substitute crop. And keep in mind that once you plant a coffee tree it produces for twenty to forty years. So, farmers need to be very forward looking before they select the variety of coffee tree to plant (or whether they even want to make that investment at all). Companies and NGOs on the ground working with farmers can say something like: "Hey, if you're now growing Arabica coffee at 1,200 meters and it's going to be five degrees hotter twenty years from now, you need to find another crop. Do not invest in planting new coffee trees."

*Q: Well, that's very interesting work.*

REINTSMA: Yes, and that kind of work is potentially very interesting to companies because they're making investments in those farmers, processors and suppliers in that region.

Anyway, back to your question, that was one example of work we did to address climate change, in collaboration with NGOs and the private sector. With regard to broader Agency and RFS climate activities, I feel like there was a real missed opportunity when the agency recently developed its climate change strategy. The people leading that and those who became the loudest voices in the process did not at all understand the concept of shared value partnerships, and pretty much ignored the opportunity to work with the private sector, or worse, appeared hostile to it.

*Q: I finally remembered the question I was going to ask you earlier when you mentioned cashless. Was the Bureau for Food Security doing anything with the private sector on digital finance, mobile banking and mobile transfers?*

REINTSMA: We were, yes. RFS (the renamed BFS) had a small group working on that, looking at exactly that issue. Digital finance is a big issue. Obviously, it's also very relevant for the private sector and private sector approaches, including more efficient ways to pay farmers in rural areas who don't have access to traditional banks. The bureau was working with select missions, I believe on best practices, case studies, that sort of thing, and also involving some private companies.

*Q: To step back, you've had the unique opportunity to work on the important global Feed the Future initiative. Could you talk a bit about the interface between globally driven initiatives and implementation in the field and how you approached that as part of the bureau? Just any thoughts you might have on that because I think it's an increasingly difficult dilemma that the agency is facing.*

REINTSMA: Yes, I agree with you, it is a dilemma. And I certainly don't have any magic bullets to offer. So maybe just to frame my own perspective on the issue a little bit.

First, missions rightfully have a strong, almost exclusive focus on their country level programs, and their responsibility for the successful implementation of those programs. So of course part of the role of those in Washington is to help make sure funding and other kinds of support is available for mission-level, single country programs.

At the Washington level, however, you've got another set of realities to deal with. First, not everything can be done at the single country level. If you're talking about developing new seed varieties, for example, you need to have a multi country or regional or global focus for that kind of research. Yes, you need to pilot test those seed varieties at the country level, but they have to be developed with a much broader focus. This is one simple example, but there are dozens of types of activities that cannot be done effectively by any one mission in a single country. I would argue that in many cases the same logic applies to private sector activities. A set of activities with a particular company may need a regional focus or needs to work beyond the borders of any one particular country. Then there are other requirements at the central level for multi-country or global initiatives; such as cross country evaluation functions, for example, to draw and apply lessons across countries; or reporting to congress across the whole initiative to secure continued funding; broad policy issues; et cetera.

So, you have this tension between missions that see the world framed around their individual country and their programs within that country, versus the Washington need for a broader focus in some cases. Then, on top of those fundamental differences of perspective, there are overlays of bureaucracy and people needing to find a role for themselves. What's that old expression? Something like the first imperative of any bureaucracy is to perpetuate itself, or something like that. And so, once you hire people at the central level then there is a tendency to create more functions, which in turn need more people, and so forth. So you have this interesting mix of two different realities, two different perspectives, both of which have a lot of legitimacy and there's always a tension between them.

I think USAID quite rightfully has a history of trying to prioritize mission level activities and trying to see that the bulk of the funding gets down to the mission level. But it's a constant back and forth. Some people in the agency have argued (and I'd like your views on this) that one of the reasons that the Global Health bureau has been able to often be out in front of the rest of the agency, is that they have a strong centrally driven approach to programming. At any rate, there were and are different points of view on this in RFS. Certainly, there is an emphasis on trying to find the right balance and making sure that missions are being supported and engaged in the process. I don't have any particular unique wisdom to offer here, but I wouldn't say that the right balance has necessarily been found. I think that BFS and FtF may have become a little top heavy in recent years.

*Q: When there is a desire to have global impact, does the central bureau in making allocation decisions focus on having maximum impact?*

REINTSMA: Well, what can I say? That is certainly a factor, but I wouldn't go so far as to say it's always driven by that. Making allocation decisions is a mix of factors. As

mentioned earlier, I feel like Feed the Future more or less got the mix right, at least with respect to allocation among countries. By that I mean most of the resources reserved for the country level went to countries where it's possible to have substantial impact.

*Q: I asked the question because of the issues often faced with family planning funds. They would be critically needed to support development in small countries like Malawi, but the central bureau had a big country strategy in which they wanted to achieve maximum impact by investing greater funds in larger countries like Nigeria, Indonesia, and Bangladesh. That sort of tradeoff is interesting, and I wonder if the Bureau of Food Security had related debates.*

REINTSMA: Well, all due credit, I think, to the people who were originally involved in developing the food security initiative who I believe got the balance about right. (As you know, my role in that was short term and temporary.) From the beginning, and certainly while I was involved, the early focus was on a set of countries where you could have a good impact, and also some reasonable geographic distribution among the lower income countries. So the countries picked were largely in Africa, two or three countries in Central America and two or three countries in Asia. I suppose you could say Ethiopia is a big country, but mostly the focus was on the smaller and medium countries where additional funds could potentially make a big impact. So no, I'm not aware of much time spent on such debates. But it's an interesting intellectual question: One question is would that fifteen or twenty million dollars really make much difference in India, whereas it could have made a huge difference in Malawi.

*Q: Curt, a management-related question. You were working through a variety of different contractual and inter-agency agreements. How was it working with AID under those various instruments? Did you feel it any different than working as a career officer? Was it different?*

REINTSMA: For me personally, the difference was not that much. Of course, as a career officer you have a more direct responsibility; there is the issue of 'inherently governmental' functions that contractors cannot do by law. So, contractors do not normally make budget decisions or officially represent USAID. But other than that, I usually felt listened to; I felt that my expertise and experience were valued, and I was "a full member of the team", even when a contractor.

I'm not sure if this speaks directly to your question, but there *was* one big issue in making the transition from career officer (and former mission director), to coming back as a contractor after retirement. That issue has to do with the mental adjustment you have to make; to check your ego at the door would be a blunt way to say it. You're now a contractor, reporting to someone two or three levels below where you previously sat in the supervisory chain as a mission director. So, it's important to enter the new scene clearly recognizing that you're no longer calling the shots. You may see some decisions being made which make you privately shake your head and say, "Wow, I sure wouldn't have done it that way when I was director", but that's not your role anymore. So, there is a certain amount of reinvention that needs to go on. I think if you can successfully do that

and reinvent yourself so that you're providing value added based on your expertise, experience, and individual abilities (versus a former job title), then the mechanism itself doesn't really matter that much. I'm giving a sort of personal example here, but it can probably be generalized to the broader question you asked about the role of a contractor versus a career employee. Again, the goal is to be valued for your knowledge, your expertise and experience, your ability to work effectively with other people, et cetera. As opposed to the title of your position or former position. While there are some differences regarding what you can and can't do in a legal sense, that doesn't matter very much in the big picture.

*Q: Right. But you're being looked at not to provide, quote, "leadership," but to provide expertise and perspective? Or can you play a leadership role but in a more circumscribed way?*

REINTSMA: Yes, that's part of it. There's also the question of what leadership means. One of the things I learned very early on at the Federal Executive Institute, FEI, is that leadership is episodic. They would say leadership comes more from rising up to lead in a particular situation, as opposed to the job title you hold. I think this happens quite often in today's workplace, where someone becomes, say, the team leader for a particular discrete task, even though they may be further down in the hierarchy on a day-to-day or job title basis. So, to give an example from my return to USAID after retirement, I feel like I was pretty successful in establishing myself as the agency-wide leader for public-private partnerships in the coffee sector. This was the case even though the word 'leadership' was not in my job description as a contractor. Another example might be leadership in terms of mentoring junior people who were new to working in USAID, even though they might be career staff and I was a contractor. I also did some of that, when I felt sure it was welcome and wanted.

*Q: Okay, that sounds much better than your initial description.*

REINTSMA: Okay. So, to your question, the bottom line for me is I don't think that the mechanism you're brought on under, at the end of the day, makes all that much difference. And this is particularly the case in terms of how you're seen from outside the agency; they don't really care whether you're a director of this or director of that, they just want to know whether you can deliver.

*Q: Okay. Well, why don't we wind up for now and then we'll have one more session.*

\*\*\*

*Q: This is—it is February 15, 2023, and this is interview number five with Curt Reintsma. Curt, when we finished up last time we were talking about when you came back on contractual basis with USAID, working with the Bureau for Food Security. I'm wondering if you'd just like to talk a little bit about your thoughts about USAID's efforts on the food security front. It is an issue that you dealt with throughout your career. I suspect you have a lot of thoughts about how USAID has gone about dealing with it.*

REINTSMA: Sure. Thanks, Carol. Yes, I have some thoughts, maybe not very well organized thoughts, however. Clearly, it's a large and fairly complicated topic, which I'm sure is the case for most sectors USAID works in.

As background, the support for USAID to work in the agriculture sector has waxed and waned over the years. In the early days of USAID, the 1960s and 1970s, it was a very significant, important component of USAID's work. In the eighties and nineties, it dropped off enormously. I think we talked about this earlier, but I actually did an analysis once for Administrator Brian Atwood on this topic. I pieced together all the sources I could find about funding levels, and what was defined as support for agriculture. The funding levels went from something like \$1.5 billion in the beginning of the Peter McPherson years, which would have been, remind me...

*Q: The early eighties, yeah.*

REINTSMA: Yes. The funding levels then dropped all the way down to around \$200 million by the mid-late 1990s, and that's in nominal terms, not even in inflation adjusted terms. This happened for a variety of reasons. Then with AFSI, the End Hunger efforts, and then the Feed the Future initiative, ag and food security regained some prominence and attention, and eventually got back up around the billion-dollar level. But again, those are not inflation adjusted numbers, so clearly a waxing and waning within an overall downward trend in support for agriculture, both as a percentage of USAID's overall budget, and in absolute numbers.

*Q: Let me interrupt for one second. Did the focus also change? Was there more focus on production at one point, including ag research, and then sometimes marketing, or was it always a mix of both? Or did that change at all over time?*

REINTSMA: I think it would be better to describe the change of attention to sub sectors within agriculture as also a waxing and waning rather than a constant unidirectional shift from one sub sector or another.

For example, I think that support for the marketing side has gone up and down, and there have been other shifts over time (e.g., integrated rural development; cash crops vs food crops). That said, and while funding levels also fluctuated somewhat, there has been a clear and consistent constituency for research from universities and other research institutions. Perhaps to some degree the same is true for the production side, and those constituencies have made their voices known within USAID and on the Hill. There's no natural constituency group for the marketing or post-harvest side, nor is there for integrated approaches. I think that when funding levels for ag research went down, that probably had more to do with decreased overall funding for agriculture, whereas support for marketing has probably fluctuated even more, in spite of what was happening to overall funding levels. But I was going to talk about that later on.

*Q: Good; that's important. Thanks. Sorry for interrupting.*

REINTSMA: Apart from the funding levels question, I think the first broad point I would like to make is not going to surprise anybody, and that's the imbalance between food aid and support for developing local agriculture. I have not looked up numbers on that question recently, but it's often been wildly out of balance, meaning that the U.S. governments spends much more to ship U.S.-produced food to developing countries than we spend on helping develop local capacity to produce their own food. Giving someone a fish, so to speak, as opposed to teaching them how to fish for their own long term self-sufficiency. The case often cited is Ethiopia and the Horn of Africa. During the 1960s to the 1990s we spent hundreds of millions of dollars on shipping food aid for famine relief, while we were spending at most tens of millions for long term ag development. Don't quote me on these numbers, but I think during one of the famines there, it was something like half a billion dollars spent on food aid, versus something like \$20 million for long-term agricultural development. Those numbers may be wrong but the order of magnitude shows how out of balance it became.

There were multiple reasons. One is that it's just easier to generate support for responding to an emergency, particularly one that's widely reported in the press, versus the harder, more complex and longer-term effort to support local agriculture. Another part of that reason is the U.S. farm surplus. Farmer groups and U.S. shipping interests come together to support exporting surplus U.S. food. Whereas there isn't that strong of a natural constituency for long-term ag development. And remember, although it has its merits, shipping food is a very expensive, inefficient, and short-term way to help people.

Another point is that within our agricultural sector work, the importance of an integrated approach hasn't gotten the consistent attention over the years that it should have. Taking an integrated approach refers to both within ag, and between ag and other kinds of interventions to support economic growth and nutrition. We need to recognize the holistic nature of agriculture as one component of household (or community or national) economic activity. Small scale, subsistence agriculture in Africa or Central America or Asia is often a residual profession that people do because they can't do anything else, not a lifestyle choice as it has sometimes become in the U.S. I grew up on a small farm; I know personally that it is hard work. It's a high risk and often low reward way to make a living. I used to sometimes joke that the best thing we could do for farmers in some situations would be to buy them a taxicab so they could leave the farm and become a cab driver in a city. Farming is not necessarily where people want to be, but where they are often forced to be. This also partially explains why so many African farmers are women; it's because they lack opportunities to go elsewhere. This also calls into question USAID's sometimes heavy focus on smallholder farmers and the most disadvantaged, because it may be a losing proposition to try to help them 'stay on the farm' in a non-viable situation.

*Q: Right. And in many cases part of their family is in fact working in an urban area somewhere.*



REINTSMA: Yes, exactly. That was the point about my flippant remark about getting them a loan to buy a taxicab; but that might actually work out better than trying to support them staying on the farm when that's sometimes just not viable. So, again, the importance of looking at farming in the context of a broader, integrated household effort and overall economic growth opportunities. Another aspect of this was mentioned earlier. Small farmers produce food, but they also need to buy other food and they have many other requirements. To look at this in the context of the U.S. or other developed economies, you can hardly find a farmer today who drinks milk from their own farm. Most U.S. farmers produce wheat and corn and soybeans for the market, and they buy their groceries at the store. There is this almost romantic ideal of self-sufficient small farms and happy farmers producing all their own food. It's mostly a myth, really. Broader market forces are at work that shape the realities. Such as the need for specialization and land consolidation for more efficient production, in order to compete with efficient producers like say Brazil. This is in contrast to what's happening in much of Africa, where land for farming is often being carved up into smaller and smaller plots due to population increase and lack of off-farm employment.

So, the point is that to the extent that our aid programs ignore these larger market trends, I would say they may often be doomed to fail in the longer term. Many African countries already import products like chicken and fish because other far away producers are so much more efficient. They can produce and ship long distances, and the food is still cheaper than locals can produce.

All of those factors argue for a realistic and more integrated approach to providing assistance than just looking at African smallholder farmers in isolation. I would argue that a lot of our agricultural support does not recognize that; there is a need to see support for agriculture in terms of market realities and as one part of an overall focus on economic growth opportunities.

So, this discussion also leads to looking at the production focus versus marketing focus that was mentioned earlier. Over the years, there have been several big efforts that focused heavily on production. The promoters of that approach set up pilot schemes and essentially said: "See, we can show you that farmers in Third World countries can produce more food—you donors just need to do it like this...". Well, yes, if you give away all the things farmers need; the seeds, the fertilizer, the water, et cetera, indeed they will respond and they will produce a lot of food in that year or two of the pilot project. But then guess what: the bottom drops out of the market and they can't sell it or they have to sell at extremely low prices because of underdeveloped marketing systems. Then of course the farmers turn around and say, "Wait a minute. You told us to produce all this food, now who's buying it". So that heavily production-focused approach simply wasn't sustainable over time. We saw that with the Jimmy Carter - Sasakwa 2000 approach in the 1990s, and more recently with the Jeffrey Sachs millennium villages approach. These approaches focused on production and trying to prove the point that you could get production up and did not take a holistic approach that took marketing into effect. Getting production up is relatively easy. Making the 'post farm' parts of the system work efficiently is much harder, much more complicated.

So, I would argue for a balanced approach in setting priorities between production and marketing, which is not always reflected in our spending priorities, which in turn are determined in part by constituency groups and their earmarks.

And of course I need to mention climate change, as we discuss important factors in how USAID addresses agriculture. It should go without saying that factoring in a forward-looking approach to climate change is critically important in our efforts to help farmers in Africa and elsewhere. We can't fight old battles, because climate change requires a very different perspective. This brings up approaches like CIAT's impact gradient maps discussed earlier, and new research where we're trying to look ahead and determine which crop varieties will work in the future.

*Q: And that's climate change, but it also involves water, right? Is it both rising temperature and lack of water?*

REINTSMA: It's both for sure, yes. Going back to coffee as an example, Arabica coffee needs to be produced at 1,500 meters or above. So as the climate warms, you know—

*Q: That will get higher then.*

REINTSMA: Yes, coffee farmers need to plant at higher altitudes to combat warmer temperatures, which then has doubly negative environmental impacts. Farmers push production up the mountainsides, which are the last bastions of forests and wildlife, and trees are cut to plant crops, which causes more CO<sub>2</sub> and exacerbates climate change, and it becomes a vicious cycle.

Anyway, without going into a lot of detail, agriculture was always a tough way to make a living, and it's going to be even more so in the era of climate change. Research has a strong role here, for example the work that's being done on drought resistant seed varieties. This speaks to your question about water availability and more drought, or too much water in other situations. Then there is also the question of plant diseases, which flourish under certain conditions. So, as climate changes you tend to get more disease spreading to plants.

*Q: Can I interrupt with another question? You were talking about research, so I wonder if you had to deal much with the debates on genetic modification (GMOs)? Is that something that also one has to deal with in working on food security issues?*

REINTSMA: Well, yes, we certainly deal with the political ramifications of it. If that's what you meant by 'deal with'.

*Q: Right, although more generally, is it good, is it bad and how do you convince people that it's not bad if they think it's bad, assuming that we're right that it's not bad?*

REINTSMA: This is outside my field of expertise, so I better not say much or I'll probably say something stupid. So, I'll just give you my quick impressions. I think there probably are some aspects of GMOs that need to be further studied; genetic drift and cross-pollination is probably one aspect. But by and large I do personally feel like it's an issue where the science has not been carefully listened to. People have been genetically modifying plants and animals for hundreds if not thousands of years. Just look at all the breeds of dogs we have as our pets. They're all the same species, they all started at the same place, and we genetically modified them. Where's the outcry about that? So, it's not that this hasn't been going on for a long time. It's just that we now have the tools to do it much, much faster and much more directly. That makes people nervous and perhaps for good reason in some cases. But I tend toward the view that the scare about GMOs is not fully justified by the science. I think that is also the view of most professionals in USAID who have studied the topic.

*Q: Okay. Thank you.*

REINTSMA: But I don't have any good answers for you on the question of how to deal with that, in terms of convincing the public, other than just trying to keep putting the facts out there.

*Q: Okay. Well, that's probably always the best answer, just put the facts out there.*

*So, other thoughts on food security?*

REINTSMA: Well, just maybe back to the topic of agricultural research for a minute. The question I'm putting on the table here is how to make sure that research is demand driven, so that the results will be effectively used. There is no question that research is critically needed. Just look at the Green Revolution in Asia. In the 1950s and 1960s, it was commonplace to hear the Malthusian predictions that massive numbers of people in Asia were going to starve to death. Well, those famines never happened, and the main reason for that is there were dramatic improvements in agricultural technology through research. When I say technology, I'm talking about new seed varieties, crop cultivation practices, that sort of thing.

But while research is unquestionably critically important, it's only effective if the research results reach the farmers. This is not a new issue, but my understanding is there's quite a bit of evidence now, including some done by some people in the Bureau for Food Security, that the large majority of the research innovations that we fund never get to the farmers. Only a very small percentage of that work gets applied in the field.

*Q: And why is that? Is that because of weak marketing of the new technology and weak extension services? Or are they just not practical for small farmers?*

REINTSMA: I think the answer is probably "all of the above", and more. But my personal view is that a big part of the problem is that we don't have enough forces at work to ensure that research is really demand driven, right up front when the research

topics are defined and funded. This may be getting better over the years, but there is often a tendency for research to be driven by the interests of the individual researcher and where they think they can get grant funding. I'm probably not saying this very articulately, but I think too much focus is on proving the viability of the research question, as opposed to thinking in the design stage about the adoption and marketability of the results. Some researchers argue that aspect is not their job, but in the 'real world', it's critically important to think up front about how the research will be adopted. And to ensure that the research question itself is really demand driven. There is a tendency to say that adoption of research results is someone else's job later on; almost an after-thought.

For me, this is one more reason to work closely with the private sector, because if they have a stake in it, they will ensure that the investments in research focus on where there is real need and a practical path for adoption of the results. World Coffee Research is one example of a private sector-driven research organization; the fact that the private sector sets the research agenda setting makes sure it focuses on demand driven research topics. Start with what the need is and how the research will be applied in a direct and realistic way to address that need, then define or refine the exact topic that will get funding. Make it demand driven from the beginning.

And of course, to your question, you also need extension systems (either public or private), and the other pieces of the puzzle. In most cases, public sector ag extension never really got off the ground in Africa, and farmers don't even look to the government for help, which brings us back to the importance of working with private sector. The larger companies working on agriculture in Africa often have their own extension systems, at least regarding export or cash crops.

*Q: Could I ask a question about land grant universities in the U.S. and the heavy use of them decades ago by USAID in agriculture programs. They all included large participant training programs with many people receiving masters' and doctoral degrees in the U.S. Did you see a difference in the local counterparts over time during your career? If you were to compare the ministry of agriculture research and extension people from the beginning of your career in Rwanda versus in Malawi some years later, were they somewhat similar or in fact, had those institutions become stronger or weaker themselves? Is there any sort of lesson here? Again, and I go back to it because there's been lots of discussion about how participant training became less important to USAID. In the 1970's and 1980's and even into the 1990's, those returned participants were working in those institutions, and I'm wondering if the institutions were stronger or weaker then? How do they compare to today's institutions? I hope the question makes some sense.*

REINTSMA: My response is impressionistic rather than based on any research or deep thought on the topic. I guess my feeling is that many of those host country institutions have probably got weaker, compared to what we had a few decades ago. At least I think that is the case regarding technical skills; I'm less clear regarding overall sophistication of the operations of the institutions. I'm guessing it varies by country and probably even individual ministry. But I do think in many cases those people who were sent off to the

U.S. university land grant and other schools became effective in the 1980s and 1990s, as they applied their skills and became more senior in the local institutions. I'm thinking of a small number of well trained, highly dedicated individuals who I knew personally. They were very effective in making a difference, despite having to operate within an extremely low resource and often dysfunctional set of local institutions. It may be that today there are fewer technical skills available in those ministries, while at the same time the institutions have gotten more sophisticated in overall operations and in dealing with donors.

*Q: Okay. That's a good point. Thank you.*

REINTSMA: Returning to the previous question for a moment, I just want to emphasize again that involving the private sector really is critically important. And when I say private sector, I'm talking about both the local and international private sector. Among other factors, the private sector is where you've got the depth of resources to hire high quality technical expertise. In my view, this is a case where the commercial, for-profit motive is usually a good thing, because it keeps you from going down all kinds of rabbit holes that never pay off on the investment. You can't really afford to let that happen if you're a private company. So, I do think USAID is often missing the mark when it fails to work closely with the private sector to achieve development outcomes. And certainly, that's the way U.S. agriculture has developed. Universities and private companies work pretty closely together to make sure research is relevant and commercialized to reach the farmer.

*Q: Okay. Those are all important points. Thank you.*

*Maybe I can ask just one more question related to food security, is nutritional status one of the long-term measures of success in food security initiatives?*

REINTSMA: Yes, for sure. But like with other success indicators, how do you set parameters around a manageable 'target group' where you can concentrate enough resources to make a difference, in the face of all the other factors that inhibit progress. It's usually not possible to have an impact on something like nutritional status at the level of the entire country, so the Feed the Future approach is to choose geographically limited zones of influence to monitor population-level changes, to see if we can at least show impact in that zone. That was the initial approach, and it's still used to some degree. Over time, the approach has not been applied as strictly as it initially was, since it is now more recognized that some interventions, like policy changes, do have to happen at the national level, and that in other cases, what you do in one area may affect outcomes in other areas.

Anyway, it's not easy, but Feed the Future does have a large number of success indicators that have been developed, including impact on nutrition. Some of those are intermediary level indicators of success and some try to get to a higher or more direct measurement of success like nutritional impact.

*Q: Right. But again, that variety of indicators of success again argue for a more integrated approach.*

REINTSMA: Yes.

*Q: You've talked about the importance of public-private partnerships as well. Are there any final thoughts on how AID has gone about doing that historically? Any recommendations?*

REINTSMA: Yeah. I didn't organize my thoughts on this section as much as I would have liked to have, and I may add some things later in the editing, if that's okay. But just a couple quick things off the top of my head.

First of all, I think I mentioned before that we have underinvested in measuring the impact of our public-private partnerships. Measuring impact includes attempts to directly measure how a PPP has impacted the lives of the beneficiaries in a public-private partnership. But it also includes measuring broader but less specific impacts, such as changes in the cost and effectiveness of delivering agricultural inputs like seeds and fertilizers or reducing marketing costs to farmers. System-wide changes. It should also include influencing changes in business practices of private companies. I think I mentioned earlier our work with the cocoa sector and how a very small amount of money from USAID stimulated the whole industry to get interested in climate change, and how it is affecting cocoa farmers. So, it should include measuring both direct impacts as well as these longer-term, systemic changes. We haven't really invested in seriously studying those kinds of impact of our public-private partnership work.

Another broad point I'd like to make regarding PPPs is the lack of understanding of the concept of shared value partnerships. This continues to be a problem within USAID, and even higher up in the USG (State Dept and White House). There is a tendency to see the private sector as simply a go-to resource for money or resources, a way to respond to a particular crisis or issue of the day with a sort of "pass the hat for contributions" mentality. That can be appropriate in some situations, but it's a very limited, short-term approach. A true shared value partnership results from defining the intersection in the circles of a Venn diagram, where international development interests intersect with business interests, and then both parties act together for the benefit of people in USAID's client countries. Those types of partnerships have staying power, and generally continue long after USAID's funding runs out.

*Q: I think your example on the cocoa sector is a great one.*

REINTSMA: Yes, thanks, and I don't want to oversell that or claim credit beyond what is due, but our intervention was a well-timed event that certainly helped to stimulate a significant change of direction.

*Q: Okay. That's great, thank you.*

REINTSMA: Maybe just to return to a final point about PPPs. And that is the issue of why is it so hard for USAID staff to actually make these specific partnerships happen. As we discussed, setting up PPPs on a timely basis can run counter to a lot of USAID's onerous and time consuming systems and procedures. I continue to believe that we could find easier ways to make it happen. For example, look at the expedited processes that have been used to give grants to PIOs (Public International Organizations). Why couldn't we do something similar for private companies?

Anyway, those are a few broad issues regarding public private partnerships.

*Q: Finally, just to step back, any additional thoughts just on your career? Would you recommend a career in international development or a career with USAID to young people today? Any final thoughts on a career with USAID. Also, the experience of working in different employment categories as well?*

REINTSMA: I think some of those things we've already touched on. First, let me be clear that it's been a great career for me; extremely positive overall. I feel grateful that I was able to have the kind of career that I believe has really helped me develop as a person. The experience of working overseas has been completely eye opening and brings me back to some of those very basic values which we hope we learned as a child or pre-teen. Things like: people the world over really have much more in common than they differ. They have the same basic needs and aspirations, they all want a better life for their children, et cetera. There's a lot to be learned from this kind of career.

With regard to advising young people today, I tell them not to put all their eggs in one basket such as USAID or MCC. If they're interested in development work, I would counsel a broader approach, working across institutions to understand the role of the private sector, understand the role of the NGOs, understand the role of government agencies. Get that broader perspective, have a specific skill, but develop the institutional expertise to apply, or at least understand, a more holistic approach. Consider working for USAID for a limited time but broaden out and move around.

One of the broader lessons I think I've learned over my career goes back to that old adage: "it doesn't matter if you're doing things right, if you're not doing the right thing". One aspect of this refers to the tension between the dual purposes of foreign aid, which have been there from the beginning. One purpose is to support U.S. foreign policy, and the other is to promote international development and be an agent for improving people's lives. And we as individuals only have a limited amount of time and energy to make a difference in the world. So, applying these points back to working in a place like Zaire, where the USG was there primarily for U.S. foreign policy reasons, it was not a good use of my limited time and the U.S. taxpayer's money to be involved in implementing U.S. development assistance there. Work where you're doing the right thing; spend your time and effort where you can make a difference, and don't get sidetracked or "seduced" by other incentives. And remember that development work is not a "no harm" proposition. Good intentions are not enough—there can be both positive and negative impacts from our work. It's not always easy to know the final impact of course, but it is always

important to be thinking in those terms and keeping those kinds of equations in the foreground.

A couple other quick final points on career lessons and effectiveness of foreign assistance. Again, foreign aid is really only effective if the host country uses it well. That doesn't always have to be the government in the host country, although that is very important, but you can sometimes work with effective non-profits even in difficult environments. To give an example I used before, I think there's a vast difference between how effectively a country like Rwanda or some parts of Asia use aid today, versus how Zaire used aid in the 1980s.

Other key points are the importance of long-term prevention versus short-term crisis response. Examples were the response to the Mozambique floods, as well as the importance of long-term preventative measures to prevent recurring famine in the Horn of Africa

The bottom line is foreign aid really works best when you have the right combination of factors. An effective government, and an integrated, holistic, long-term approach, with flexibility to adapt and change as you learn. I think the ideal development project probably lasts fifteen or twenty years, and the types of project activities may look quite different at the end of the project than at the beginning. Have a consistent, well thought out overall direction and hopefully consistent local leadership but keep learning and adapting and you can really make a difference.

*Q: Those are all good points, so thank you very much, Curt. It's been a pleasure to have the chance to walk through your career with you. If there are any final thoughts you have, otherwise I'm going to turn the recording off.*

REINTSMA: Well, let me just emphasize again that USAID as an institution has been very, very good *for* me and good *to* me. On the personnel side, many people in USAID were willing to be flexible and make special accommodations when needed, which allowed me to have a full career that I wouldn't have had in an agency that applied a stricter, by the book approach. That's another thing I really appreciated about USAID. And of course at the end of the day, it mostly all comes down to the people you work with, the Americans and other expat co-workers, but also the local people. I was very fortunate to work with so many highly dedicated and skilled people, and people who just really cared.

*Q: A good point. Thank you again.*

*End of interview*