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EMMY B. SIMMONS

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Development Planning Office, USIAD, Washington, DC 1987-
Staffer, Office of Development Programs (AFR/DP)

Nairobi, Kenya 1991-1994
Head of Policy and Program Division, REDSO/ESA

Moscow, Russia; USAID Russia Mission 1995-1997
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Office of Economic Growth and Agricultural Development (DAA/EGAD) 1997-20002

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World Vegetable Center Board
Agree
Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition

INTERVIEW

Q: This is Alex Shakow and I am at ADST with Emmy Simmons for her oral history that we are beginning today. This is the first segment and we will see how many more we will need; with a career as long as yours we could go on forever. But this is the 6th of December and I am delighted that you are prepared to do this. This is part of a program for which AID (United States Agency for International Development) has given a grant to ADST to carry out 50 or so oral histories over the next several years. There are several of us from the USAID Alumni Association doing the interviewing. The grant is essentially for the transcription, the real expense of any oral history.

So, Emmy you have had a wonderful and long career at AID and you had a career before and a career afterwards. But we are going to start at the beginning. So, please tell me about where you were born and when and what your early influences were that you can remember that might have inspired you to come into this field.

SIMMONS: I was born in northern Wisconsin, about 50 miles northwest of Green Bay, in the parsonage of St John Lutheran Church, near a town called Suring, Wisconsin. My maternal grandfather was the minister of the church and both the church and its two-room parochial elementary school were naturally, a core part of my early upbringing. The other part of my background, however, was agricultural. My paternal grandfather was a dairy farmer, with 22 cows, that is, not large-scale and heavily dependent on family labor. We grandchildren were engaged from a young age: cleaning the barn, washing the milk cans, picking potatoes, butchering pigs and chickens, and lots and lots of canning and freezing of the garden produce. In addition, from the time I was about eight years old, an aunt organized me, my older sister, and my three girl cousins in commercial ventures, i.e., growing strawberries and green beans for sale. So, my childhood was very much rooted in this small rural community and very much focused on church and the work of an extended farm family. However, after my freshman year in Suring High School, I left the family and moved to Milwaukee, Wisconsin, to attend the Lutheran High School there. I was excited to get away from the constraints of a small town life.

Q: So, this is something that your parents encouraged?

SIMMONS: My mother, in fact, encouraged me to move away. She herself had gone to a Lutheran High School in Milwaukee back in the early 1930s and it had been an important part of her life. She did not feel that the local high school in Suring was offering me the best options for education, and she managed to arrange for me to attend Milwaukee Lutheran High School. So just before my 15th birthday, I got my first paying job – and a place to live – by working as an *au pair* with a family in Milwaukee. In some ways, I started life afresh.

Q: You were still in high school-

SIMMONS: Yes.

Q: -and were you a boarding student?

SIMMONS: No, I wasn't a boarding student. I was a live-in *au pair*. I worked as a babysitter and housekeeper for a family that I interviewed based on responses to an ad I had placed in the paper. The head of the family was a dentist, they were Jewish, and they had two small children. Coming from a large rural family, I had significant babysitting experience and a strong work ethic. So this job enabled me to attend Milwaukee Lutheran High School for three years – a jump from the high school in Suring with 250 students to one with more than a thousand – and to experience a completely different sort of life. Upon graduation from high school, I immediately enrolled at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee (UW-M). At that time, the various campuses of the University of Wisconsin accepted anybody who had the requisite grades and it was only $110 a semester – a sum I was able to earn at summer jobs. So I was by that time a city girl! My first transformation!

Q: Did you go back to the country in the summer or not?

SIMMONS: I did go back to Suring during the summer vacations from high school. The pull of family was strong. For two summers I worked in a local green bean canning factory – an "industrial" job paying a dollar an hour which was not bad at the time (the 1950s). The downside was that I couldn't eat canned green beans for decades after that. However, in my college years, I again started looking forward to something more exciting and got some urban work experience as well. But I still had no idea how college could lead to a working future. An initial thought about majoring in English faded quickly, so I chose a major which seemed to give one a lot of additional room to explore: international relations. It allowed study of political science, economics, geography, and, for me, theater! So I really didn't know where this major would go, but I did sense that it would lead me further away from the rural areas of northern Wisconsin.

PEACE CORPS

For three years, my college experience was wonderful. I loved economics. I joined the theater group, I had lots of friends, and earned enough income from a weekend job in a greengrocer to pay for the apartment I shared with my older sister, who was also attending UW-M. Then John F. Kennedy got elected and started the Peace Corps. This seemed like a great opportunity to put my international relations training to work, so during my junior year I took the Civil Service exam that Peace Corps was using to screen applicants at that time. I scored well and went in for an interview. They said you look like good Peace Corps material to us! I didn't know what skills I had, since I had not yet finished college, but my assignment was in a "teaching English as a second language" program in the Philippines.

In November of 1962, I took my first airplane flight and met the rest of the Peace Corps recruits for this program in San Francisco. After medical tests and a few days of fun in San Francisco, we went on to training in Hilo, Hawaii. Our group, the Philippines IX group, was great; it included some really fantastic people. The East West Center located in Honolulu ran the program. While training was largely focused on learning Filipino languages (Ilocano in my case) as well as how to teach English as a second language, we also had extensive physical training and some preparation in science and math education.

We lived in an abandoned hospital in Hilo, just above Rainbow Falls, so it was an out-of-the ordinary kind of experience in every way, living with a group of people 24/7 and studying something completely new. At the time, 1962, Peace Corps was itself just finding its way. There was no tested handbook for training us to live overseas so basically, the program placed a huge, huge importance on physical training. In addition to doing the normal sports, we climbed Mauna Kea and Mauna Loa – major challenges for someone from northern Wisconsin. The night before the final selection of who would get to go to the Philippines, we undertook our last big hike, from a midpoint on Mauna Loa heading down over a lava field toward the beach. Unfortunately, we started too late and it got dark before we had completed the hike over the incredibly jagged and pitted lava field. The last straggler didn't come in until almost midnight, but amazingly, no one was injured. When members of our group get together – as we did for the 50th anniversary of Peace Corps, this story is told and retold. It was an important bonding experience – a story of survival - even though the next morning 20 of our group of 80 or so were "deselected" and did not go to the Philippines.

Q: So, as you look back on that in terms of your ultimate career was the Peace Corps a very important experience?

SIMMONS: Peace Corps was a transformative experience in so many ways – living with people from very different backgrounds, being a teacher, seeing daily life from the perspective of the rural Filipinos in our villages, getting to know about the politics of an unfamiliar country, and learning the lessons of WW II – as where I lived in the Mountain Province had been an active battleground. I was assigned with another volunteer to a village cluster about 15 km outside of Baguio, the big summer capital of the Philippines and the site of Camp Hay, a U.S. military R&R location. After all that training in Hawaii, my roommate and I were concerned that we were not suffering enough by being so close to Baguio's movies, great restaurants and markets, but we began our teaching assignments in three elementary schools in neighboring villages and took advantage of our physical training in Hilo as we hiked up and down the mountain roads between the schools each day.

The population in the area was largely focused on farming and gold mining. Some of the students in one school spent their nights illegally mining gold for their parents in the mines; then they'd come to school in the day and fall asleep. While I had certainly not grown up with any wealth, the farm families in our Peace Corps villages were, to me, truly living in poverty. Most of the children got the prescribed new clothes for the graduation ceremonies at the end of the year and that was what they wore for the next school year. One family asked my roommate to be the godmother of their newborn child. They invited us for a Sunday dinner. To make it special, they put salt on the rice. They didn't have anything else. There was no meat or anything, just salt. I never realized that simply adding salt to rice could be a luxury. That was pretty stunning.

Q: Did you live with a family?

SIMMONS: No, for about a year we lived in a school building, the home economics "lab", with some fellow teachers. It was a very public place with little privacy. We then found a house in a nearby village for our second year in search of a more "normal" life. We continued to work and be friends with our initial housemates, who were fellow teachers and not from the area, but also got to know a little more about village life. In fact, when I had completed work on a USAID evaluation in 1980 in the Bicol area of the Philippines, I flew back to Baguio for a quick visit. I took a taxi out to our village, and found that our house had given way to the development of a second-home community for wealthy Filipinos from Manila. I did visit one of our schools and found a number of our fellow teachers still at it! I also got in touch with one of the teachers we had become close to in our first residence. She was from the town in which President Marcos grew up, and through her we had had an opportunity to meet Ferdinand and Imelda Marcos as they were just starting to climb the political ladder and to get a taste of the political atmosphere in the Philippines at that time.

Q: But the fact that you were near Baguio didn't mean that you were free of the poverty.

SIMMONS: No, we were especially aware of the hardships that the parents of our students faced. They grew rice and sweet potatoes, largely for family consumption, and pineapples as a cash crop. People really worked hard growing these beautiful pineapples. But they all came ripe at the same time and prices dropped. So all that work for very little return. There were no storage or processing options available. Farmers just packed the pineapples in the jeeps (that provided transport) and took them to town for sale on the spot market. For me, it was seeing a farm life with which I was familiar from a different side. The resulting poverty that our pupils experienced was much deeper than I had ever known. I also found that farming small acreage in a very mountainous community really couldn't allow you to get ahead.

GRAD SCHOOL

Q. So where did you go when you finished your Peace Corps tour?

SIMMONS: I was enormously lucky. I still had a year to go at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, but I now knew a little more about what international relations were all about. Somewhere during my second year in Baguio, Peace Corps announced that a rural sociologist from Cornell University, Milton Barnett, was interviewing people for possible Ford Foundation scholarships to grad school. I went to Manila for the interview and was offered a full scholarship to Cornell, starting in the fall of 1965. I was able to get credit for my Peace Corps experience at the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee and to complete my degree there with only one semester on campus. I started work toward my Masters in agricultural economics (minor in international nutrition) in Ithaca, New York, in September, 1965. I now know how extremely fortunate I was to emerge from university in 1967 with no debt and a terrific education complemented by work experience and global travel.

Q: During the time you were teaching English did you actually engage in any agriculture or were you just able to see it?

SIMMONS: I was able to see it. It wasn't my job. My job was working with teachers to improve instruction in English. I helped to develop new teaching techniques and got the chance to test them continuously with the kids. My roommate and I were invited to rice harvests occasionally; I never did the backbreaking work of planting, though.

One of the other formative experiences with Peace Corps that actually carried through to my USAID life related to food aid. One of our schools was chosen as a food aid recipient, in recognition of the deep poverty that many children experienced. I had never seen U.S. food aid programs before. The first commodity provided was bulgur wheat; that required cooking and was a product that no one was familiar with. The school also had no funds to hire anyone to cook it so the two best teachers at the school, one of whom ran a restaurant as a side job in Baguio, had to effectively give up their classes in order to prepare the bulgur wheat. They tested it out with the students; the kids hated it but they would eat it if the porridge had plenty of dry milk and sugar. But the school did not have money for these extra ingredients, so all the teachers, including us PCVs, had to pitch in. This naturally caused some resentment. Ultimately, it was discovered that wheat flour was available as a food aid program commodity. A deal was made to send the flour to a bakery, which took its cut, and then sent the bread rolls (pan de sal) back to the school for the children. The rolls were popular and the teachers got back to teaching. The nutritional impact, however, was doubtful.

Q: But you stayed the full two years in the Philippines?

SIMMONS: Yes. I travelled back to the States in November-December 1964 via Thailand, India, Israel, and Europe, and arrived in my hometown in time for Christmas. Returning to the University of Wisconsin-Milwaukee, I finished the requirements for my B.A. in International Relations in June 1965 and went off to Cornell University, Ithaca, New York, in September. I spent two years in a Master's degree program, majoring in agricultural economics with a minor in international nutrition. I had the opportunity to do field work in Mauritius for my master's thesis in the summer of 1966 and ultimately won an award for the Outstanding Master's Thesis of 1968 from the American Association of Agricultural Economics.

Q: What was the subject of your award-winning Master's thesis?

SIMMONS: It was a study comparing different statistical methods for analyzing a national food economy. I used the case of Mauritius as that country imported more than 95 percent of its food; the trade data could be used to construct a food balance sheet, following the format established by the U.N. Food and Agricultural Organization (FAO) to describe national food availability. However, my major professor at Cornell, Thomas Poleman, thought it would be possible to do a reanalysis of a national household expenditure survey that had been done by an ILO (International Labor Organization) consultant two years before and to gain more insight into Mauritians' food consumption and nutrition at a more disaggregated level. In theory, the ILO consultant had stored a complete set of punch cards containing the household survey data in Mauritius and it was agreed that I would have access to them, the original survey questionnaires, and some of the people who had worked on the survey. This would enable me to re-process the information and translate expenditures into food consumption/nutrition at the household level, allow me to understand consumption patterns of people in different areas and with different income levels and, finally, to compare these results with the national average information in the food balance sheet. However, when I got to Mauritius, I found that the cockroaches or ants had gotten to the computer punch cards before I did. So the fairly rapid computer-based analysis – that I intended to complete over my summer break between academic years at Cornell -- was out of the question.

Q: How did you deal with that?

SIMMONS: I still had access to the original 1,800 questionnaires. But because I only had two months in Mauritius, I had to figure out a way of capturing this survey information in a way that I could carry it back to Cornell for re-computerization. I hired five young women, developed a system for summarizing the data from the questionnaires, and fit the results into a box to take back to Cornell. There I had to hire more people to punch new cards for computer analysis and undertake the analysis for the thesis. Since I had no computer programming experience then (back in 1966), this was a challenge.

Q: Do you still keep in touch with Mauritius?

SIMMONS: I went back to Mauritius as the lead representative for USAID at an AGOA (African Growth and Opportunity Act) ministerial meeting that was held in 2003. USAID hosted a side event on food security and African agriculture. It attracted substantial interest in the potential for AGOA to lead to greater African agricultural exports to the United States. USDA was not, however, prepared to provide staff to support the export certification process so it ended with some frustration for our African colleagues as well as my USAID team.

For me, being back in Mauritius after nearly 40 years was eye-opening. In 1966, the government of Mauritius was exploring the promotion of emigration of Mauritians to Central America because the dominant sugar sector in Mauritius was not generating sufficient employment and income for the population. However, during my Mauritian summer, the first labor-intensive industry was launched: assembling watches for a Swiss company. Enough watch parts to support employment for years could be sent in one airplane. By 2003, Mauritius had developed an important tourist sector as well as a textile industry sophisticated enough to do clothing design as well as manufacturing. AGOA offered incentives to expand their exports to the United States.

Q: And, at Cornell, you got a Masters, an MS in ag economics?

SIMMONS: Yes, I was one of two women in the graduate agricultural economics program at the time. The other 98 or so were male. Today, Cornell University no longer grants degrees in agricultural economics. It was replaced by "applied economics and management" as a field some years ago and more than half of the graduate students today are female.

Q: So, are they teaching the same thing? They just feel if you use the word agriculture demeans it? Why, what's going on here?

SIMMONS: The Charles H. Dyson School of Applied Economics and Management became a named school at Cornell in 2010, replacing the Department of Agricultural Economics. The Dyson School is, I understand, still very much focused on agricultural economics and agribusiness as a part of the College of Agriculture and Life Sciences. The Cornell University approach continues to make it possible for students in one college to study in other colleges and departments of the university, so my understanding is that students continue to be able to link interests in nutrition (as I did), agriculture, and development economics. More recently, the Dyson School has been brought under the SC Johnson Business School, so I would expect that the emphasis on agribusiness is strong.

This kind of departmental reorganization and reorientation has affected many of the universities that, back in the 1960s and 1970s, were actively developing programs in food and agricultural economics. In 1996, for example, Stanford University closed the renowned Food Research Institute that had been established there in 1921. UC-Davis continues to have a Department of Agricultural and Resource Economics and Michigan State, a Department of Agricultural, Food and Resource Economics. But the momentum of international agricultural research built in the 1970s with the founding of the

Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research (CGIAR) and the Green Revolution in Asia and Latin America in the 1970s and 1980s definitely slowed by the beginning of the 1990s. USAID hired its last career agricultural specialist (known as Backstop 10) in 1991 or 1992 and did not begin to bring on new career staff in this area until 2004. So incentives to study international agricultural development – and agricultural economics – with the idea of making a career in this field were much diminished throughout the 1990s.

OUT INTO THE REAL WORLD: PITTSBURGH, NIGERIA, AND LIBERIA

I left Cornell University after completing my Master's degree in 1967. I got married, raising the ire of Dr. Poleman, my major professor, as he expected me to stay on for my PhD. I moved to Pittsburgh, Pennsylvania while my husband, Roger Simmons, completed his M.S. degree in public administration in the Graduate School for International and Public Administration at the University of Pittsburgh.

I worked with the Regional Development Planning Institute for about a year analyzing a survey of urban poverty and then did a stint in the operations research department of the H.J. Heinz company. The operations research job gave me an opportunity to learn computer programming skills (mostly Fortran, with some Basic). In 1969, I moved to Nigeria. My husband, Roger, had been offered a job with the University of Pittsburgh on a USAID contract at Ahmadu Bello University (ABU) in Zaria, Nigeria. He taught public administration in ABU's Institute of Administration.

The Ford Foundation, the Rockefeller Foundation, and USAID were all supporting agricultural development around the world at the time. I was able, in late 1969, to join a research team funded by Rockefeller, the Rural Economy Research Unit (RERU), headquartered at ABU's Institute for Agricultural Research and led by an agricultural economist from Kansas State University, David W. Norman. Before I arrived, the RERU team consisted entirely of men and the focus of research efforts was male farmers, their production, and their relationships to the market. The breakthrough findings were that intercropping, i.e., growing several crops simultaneously in the same field, was both productive and efficient, an idea that has now returned to saliency under the guise of sustainability. However, it turned out that labor for weeding posed a critical constraint to overall productivity increases, not a finding that the Green Revolution crop breeders were too thrilled about.

Further, the majority of the population in northern Nigeria were (are) Muslim and practiced purdah, which seriously constrains the ability of women to leave the confines of their housing compounds. Given the male focus of the RERU research plan, no thought had been given to household dynamics, food consumption, or women's involvement in the rural economy. I persuaded the team, with some difficulty, that I could add value to their efforts. As a woman, I would be the only member of the team with access to the interior workings of families and, based on my graduate work, I did know something about surveys, food consumption, and nutrition.

In the end, I worked with a sample of 120 households and dozens of individual women in three villages around Zaria from late 1969 to mid-1973, exploring questions of family nutrition, women's microenterprises, and, more generally, women's roles in the rural economy. From this RERU work emerged the analytical concept of "farming systems," that is, the understanding of how different crops, livestock, and off-farm activities contribute to the overall outcome of agricultural productivity and household welfare. My work showed that women's roles (largely invisible to the outside observer) were important to rural household dynamics, food supplies, and prosperity.

My other contribution to the team was developing computer programs suited to the ABU computing system. A colleague did the multiple regression program, but I used Fortran to develop programs for doing cross-tabulations and basic statistics using the 2k ICL computer. At Heinz, we felt analytically constrained by having access to an RCA Spectra computer with 180k memory, so having access to only 2k posed some real constraints to data handling.

My four plus years with RERU and other colleagues at Ahmadu Bello University were, in the end, fantastic. I wrote some papers for publication, completing some after our next move, to Monrovia, Liberia in 1973. In 1979, David Norman, Henry Hays, and I published a book with Westview Press on "Farming Systems in the Nigerian Savanna." It is now available as a "replica" book on Amazon.

Q: Tell me more about your research on women, didn't they participate in agriculture?

SIMMONS: Women in most of northern Nigeria did not work in the fields, but they processed agricultural commodities and sold them for cash, which they controlled as individuals. The idea of a "household income" was completely absent. However, Fulani women in one village close to Zaria were entitled to market the milk of the cattle herds owned by male family members. These women were the rural group I found to benefit most from their microenterprise. After processing the milk (souring it) within the confines of the house/compound, they carried it to market (on their heads, in calabashes) about three miles away in Zaria. Often, the women also produced a millet-based product which, when combined with the milk, was a popular lunchtime street food – *fura da nono* -- in the city. Hausa women, by contrast, rarely left their housing compounds, but managed active microenterprises (what I called "occupations") by using their children, especially young girls, as their runners and marketing agents. Women would buy ingredients for the snack foods generally eaten at lunchtime or raw commodities that could be further processed into edible foods such as dried baobab leaves, fermented locust bean cakes, and groundnut oil and presscake (known as *kulikuli*). The young girls were expected to work for their mothers until they were in their early teens, when they would be married off and confined to purdah. There were no educational facilities in any of the three villages and only a few boys had been sent to relatives in cities to attend school.

I had worked hard for my family's enterprises when I was young but at least I also had the opportunity to go to school! The women respondents in the RERU study villages, though, had no such aspirations for their daughters. A good marriage with someone wealthy enough to underwrite a trip to Mecca at some point in the future was the top choice.

I wondered if simply organizing these home-based enterprises into a network, especially those for the usually-profitable groundnut oil processing, would be competitive with mechanized processing and enable women to earn more predictable, steady incomes. I wrote a paper showing the substantial returns that this approach might generate and actually got it published in the Journal of the Stanford Food Research Institute. Perhaps one of the more important outtakes of this experience with the Rural Economy Research Unit at Ahmadu Bello was being in on the first phase of gender studies. In 1973, I shared my findings with Irene Tinker, a leading voice in the field of women in development (WID), and gradually became a part of this community.

This work on WID, as it came to be known, provided me an opportunity to re-establish relationships with Dr. Poleman at Cornell University. He had been upset that I had not continued for my PhD and did not communicate with me for more than a decade. However, in the 1980s, when I was already working with USAID, he invited me back to Cornell to talk with his students (many of whom were now female) on the topic of women and development. I appreciated the irony.

Q: So when did you leave Nigeria?

In 1973, my husband accepted a position with the Institute of Public Administration of New York to work with the Institute of Public Administration in Liberia. I followed him to Monrovia, thinking that I could usefully use some time to complete publications about my work in Nigeria. That completed, I looked around for an interesting job in Liberia. At the time, USDA was advertising for a technical assistance position in the Ministry of Agriculture. When I was in Washington, I interviewed with USDA and got a positive response. So when I returned to Liberia, I introduced myself to the USAID Mission Director to indicate my interest in the job. He looked at me straight on and said, "Well, we won't hire you for that job because we can get you a lot cheaper here [as a local resident spouse]."

People often ask me whether, at any point in my career, did my being a woman cause anyone to discriminate against me professionally. While I had riled my major professor at Cornell University by leaving before completing a PhD and I had to sell my comparative advantages to the all-male RERU research team in Nigeria, I had never experienced the level of blatant discrimination expressed by the USAID/Liberia Mission Director.

Q: And then what happened?

SIMMONS: So I said, "I will never work for USAID" and walked out. How wrong I was. I started working with USAID in Washington in 1977 and continued until I retired in

2005! However, in Monrovia, I quickly explored other opportunities, including one at the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs. I started working with that Ministry as a Liberian employee in 1974. I had some experience in price analysis, economic statistics, and other analytical skills they were looking for.

Q: And how was that job ?

SIMMONS: Well, at first I was simply compiling price indices with whatever data was available.

Q: Sounds pretty boring.

SIMMONS: It was. But it brought me into consideration of the cost of living index that the international organizations (including the International Monetary Fund) were using to track inflation and to calculate cost of living adjustments to salaries. I discovered, however, that the baseline survey for the index included just 39 male employees of the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs at some time in the past. I concluded that this sample was probably not terribly representative of Liberians as a whole at the time.

So given my experience in grad school and with Ahmadu Bello University in Nigeria, I thought I could contribute something. I went to see the Director for Statistics, Phillip Gadegbeku, and proposed that the Ministry could do better, i.e., with a more representative sample and with some external funding from USAID or the World Bank. He agreed, arranged for some financing, and named me the Deputy Director of the Liberian National Household Expenditure Survey. Unfortunately, I did not insist on being the Director of the survey and that proved to be a serious difficulty. An FAO Adviser over-ruled my proposal to move survey teams from county to county over the course of the year rather than trying to cover the whole country at one time. Further, the vouchers for providing the survey supervisors with gasoline were under the control of the Director. My hopes for a high-quality survey plummeted. It was apparent that the data quality was so poor that, after the first few months of fieldwork and analysis, I had to concede defeat. My husband also came to the end of his contract and I decided that I simply had to leave the survey undone..

One bright spot was that I had involved a fellow Cornell student, who was married to a USAID employee, in the National Household Expenditure Survey. Heather Warrack Goldman was pursuing a PhD in nutrition, so she had a close interest, as I had had in Nigeria, in linking family expenditures on food with their consumption and nutrition. She had independent funding that she used to carry out the Survey work in one region and managed to keep the fieldwork team together to generate a quality research product! She completed her PhD and eventually became a Foreign Service Officer in USAID.

Q: So, you came back from Liberia and the Liberian experience was not nearly as satisfying as the Nigerian one, right?

SIMMONS: In many ways the Liberian experience was profoundly unsatisfying professionally, although one might argue that even negative lessons can be useful. Personally, however, Liberia was wonderful. I found the Liberian sense of humor to be very enjoyable, the food was terrific, and we had really good friends doing anthropological research in Bong County, other doing linguistics with the Bassa, and others with a deep engagement in Liberian arts and crafts. I played a lot of tennis. So, to me, that was all good.

Q: This was before the civil war?

SIMMONS: Yes, it was still the days of President Tolbert. I returned to Liberia for a short visit just before the coup that toppled Tolbert, but have not been back since. While I keep an eye on the development issues in that country, it is hard to visualize a population that has quadrupled or quintupled in size since I was there. I would love to have greater opportunity to analyze the conflict recovery process there – especially from the perspective of the food and agricultural system.

BEGINNING TO WORK WITH USAID

Q: What came after your Liberian experience?

SIMMONS: Upon our return to the U.S. from Liberia, my husband and I decided that settling in Washington, DC would be a good option for possible employment. So I went down to the U.S. Office of Personnel Management, took the civil service test, and filled out the paperwork that could open the doors of USDA or even USAID in the areas of agricultural economics and international development. Unfortunately, I was ranked as a GS-2 on the basis of my work history in Nigeria and Liberia (where I was paid as a local employee in both cases) and could not even hope for a professional position. I appealed to OPM for a change based upon my academic achievements and was reclassified as a GS-12. That was perhaps the fastest promotion I ever got in my life.

Q: What jobs did that make you eligible for?

SIMMONS: Well, it made me eligible for jobs in USDA, which was my primary target at the time. I soon got a position with a USAID project being managed by USDA’s Office of International and Cooperative Development. Led by Bobbie Van Haeften, the project was called Consumption Effects of Agricultural Policies (CEAP). I was delighted to be working on topics I had been thinking about for a decade! The project was funded by USAID’s Office of Nutrition when Martin J. Forman was the director. While I did get to know Marty, most of my project contacts were with Jim Levinson, who was acting Office director while Marty was on sabbatical or assignment out of the country. The project with the Office of Nutrition was a great opportunity to learn about USAID and to pursue some of the issues that I had begun to address in Mauritius, Nigeria, and Liberia with a group of bright, engaged professionals. I found, however, that I really disliked working in a position designated by USAID as a RSSA (Resources Services Supporting Agreement).

With two bosses – USDA and USAID, it was difficult to get the kind of attention to the issues that we thought were important. The project was inherently cross-sectoral, so it required persuading agricultural policy folks that they could do something about consumption and nutrition and nutrition policy people that there were reasons to learn about and, possibly, influence agricultural policy.

Q: It's only been within the last two or three years that people have begun seeing those relationships, right?

SIMMONS: Maybe a little longer than that. But yes, the Bureau for Food Security (BFS) at USAID has finally begun to make some headway. BFS was set up as a stand-alone Bureau in the Obama Administration with the objective of bringing more focus to the challenge of food security. The sudden rise in global food prices in 2007/08 sent a shockwave through the global community. The world's poor were unable to meet their food needs and let their leaders know it through street demonstrations that occasionally turned violent. The belief that health interventions were sufficient to improve nutrition was rejected. The U.S. government (and BFS) strategy for improving food security was defined as having two pillars: increasing inclusive agricultural growth and reducing stunting (i.e., children too short for their age). Bobbie van Haeften and I have often laughed about how long we have tried to bring these two disciplines – agricultural economics/policy and consumption/nutrition – together. And USAID and BFS have not yet really succeeded as well as they should have.

Q: How did you move on from the USDA/USAID project experience?.

SIMMONS: John Mellor, the Chief Economist for USAID at the time and a former professor/supervisor at Cornell, recommended that I talk with John Eriksson in USAID's Bureau for Policy and Program Coordination (PPC). Dr. Mellor had been a key figure in my education at Cornell University. Others that I had met in USAID's Technical Assistance Bureau (Sandy Levin, Tony Babb) as a result of my work in the Office of Nutrition may also have steered me in the direction of John Eriksson; my recall is hazy.

John Eriksson was just setting up an Office of Rural Development in PPC and seeking a multidisciplinary staff. I was attracted by the concept of the Office and the possibility of working with USAID directly, not as a RSSA. I felt that USDA prioritized domestic issues over international concerns; USAID's mandate was more aligned with my own interests and experiences. So I put my paperwork in and I was hired in what I now know was a remarkably short time as a GS-13 for a position in the Office of Rural Development.

Doug Caton was the head of the Office and completely unfamiliar with Africa. He had cut his development teeth working on a rural reconstruction administration program in Taiwan in the mid '50s and the solution to most agricultural challenges in his mind had to do with irrigated rice. I have grown to appreciate Doug's experience in the last several years as I have served on the Board of the Asian Vegetable Research and Development

Center (AVRDC, now called the World Vegetable Center) headquartered in Shan Hua, Taiwan.

QUESTION: What was your new job in USAID?

SIMMONS: Our bread-and-butter work was reviewing every PID (Project Identification Documents) and PP (Project Paper) that had to do with (agriculture and) rural development. This was a key role for the Bureau of Policy and Program Coordination as it enabled USAID/Washington to keep tabs on what the Missions were thinking and doing, assess whether budget requests were appropriate, and provided a measure of design quality assurance to Washington leaders. We also did some topical analyses that emerged from multiple PIDs or PPs as well as analyses of budget allocations. There were many, many meetings and mountains of paper to read. We staffers in the Office of Rural Development also responded to letters from the public both in the U.S. and around the world: What the heck is USAID doing in such-and-such a country or on such-and-such an issue? We would write nice letters back, thank you for your input and/or concern.

It should be remembered, perhaps, that office communications back in the late 1970s were not computerized. Writing and getting cables to and from the field was exacting work with a typewriter. Even writing letters involved a lot of time with an IBM Selectric. In retrospect, the pace of work was glacial compared to today's fast turnarounds.

Q: So you were getting exposure to a complete range of issues in global development, rural development and agricultural development?

SIMMONS: Yes. And because of the broad nature of rural development, I developed collegial relationships across PPC, especially with the staff in PPC's Office of Health and the economists, as well as with people in all the regional bureaus. At that time, PPC was a really vital place to be. It led the Agency in thinking across regions and sectors and, because of its budgetary role, paid attention to the cost-effectiveness of projects and programs in different areas. We often joked that we ourselves did not always allocate our resources as cost-effectively as we might have; we would sometimes spend as much time and effort reviewing a $300,000 project as a $30 million project.

One of the initiatives that was most interesting, and, I think, had strong influence on the Agency, was that of impact evaluation. When Doug Bennet came in as the Administrator of USAID (1979-1981), he asked PPC's Center for Development Information and Evaluation (CDIE) to lead this initiative. The evaluations were to be readable (i.e., a "New Yorker style"), relatively short, and significant in scope, that is, focused on sectors or key program approaches. I jumped at the opportunity to participate in this impact evaluation process. I led the team evaluating USAID's agricultural research support in Nepal and was a member of teams looking at hybrid maize development in Kenya and the Bicol River Basin Development Program in the Philippines. I worked with the team assessing land tenure in Liberia and helped to coordinate the synthesis of impact of several rural road project evaluations. The fieldwork for each evaluation was done in just a few weeks, although it took longer to write up the results and even longer to translate findings into draft policy determinations for USAID.

Q: Please speak more about the significance of the impact evaluation process.

SIMMONS: I thought the initiative generated a great deal of learning for USAID. The evaluations were generally multidisciplinary and focused less on single projects than on broader outcomes and results. The evaluations provided some insight into the perennial issue of sustainability, exploring whether projects or the actions they inspired actually continued to have impacts in some way. Richard Blue and Robert Berg provided outstanding leadership and ensured that the findings in the papers were collated and, to the extent possible, incorporated into the Agency's policies and practices. The "New Yorker style" dictum was harder to follow than it might seem. Writing up findings in a way that was approachable and accurate, but without tons of footnotes and without huge numerical tables, seemed to me to be a worthy challenge.

Downsides were that the missions were generally not happy to be hosting evaluation teams; that made for some odd dynamics in some countries. Mission staff believed that the projects or programs being evaluated were often not their responsibility as they had been completed before their time.

Further, I'm not sure, looking back, that we marketed the reports outside the USAID community as well as we should have (e.g., to academia, the general public). I believe that the process did inform the USAID training efforts, in part because Richard Blue was a leader for those training programs. The impact evaluations encompassed, in the end, broad sets of case studies from around the world. By being a participant in the impact evaluation process, and because I was in a Bureau charged with thinking about policy for rural development, the experience deepened my professional education.

That said, many impact evaluations were heavily criticized because they took what I called the juridical approach to evaluation. In this approach, statistics alone did not drive the assessment; rather, each evaluation team would talk with, say, 120 people in two weeks in one country to try to recap the broader story of the project or program that had already been completed (without controls or comparators, anathema to adherents of randomized control trials). Since there were teams working across the world, the synthesis story combined the views of 500 or more people regarding the impact of USAID's engagement in the sector or program area. In many ways, I found the evaluation conclusions were more valid than if we had sent out teams all around the world to crunch the numbers and count the number of noses that had been touched by a particular project. It was true, however, that constructing counterfactuals in most cases was impossible.

Evaluation methodologies have progressed a lot since those days, though, and I am sure that impact evaluations today are more rigorous. However, there is a risk that the kind of broad-gauge, multidisciplinary examination of the situation on the ground – in which unintended impacts may be more significant than those intended – will be foregone.

Q: And if continued do you think they would be very useful ?

SIMMONS: Yes and no. By the time the rural road impact evaluation series was completed, for example, Peter McPherson had been appointed as the Administrator of USAID. As I recall, the series led to a very strong conclusion that rural roads played a critical role in terms of farmers' access to markets. But the Agency at that time was not really open to the levels of investment involved in infrastructure development. And it's true that the Bicol River Basin Development Program had involved the construction of a very large concrete highway that was, when we assessed the situation, largely being used as a platform for drying rice. But findings in other areas were more positive. Although I became a Foreign Service Officer in 1982 and was assigned to work out of Mali, I left behind a draft policy determination on rural roads with my colleagues for further discussion with the Administrator. He never liked it and it died without influencing USAID policy. I find this amusing in retrospect as I have recently worked with Peter McPherson in the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa and the Partnership has really pushed recently for greater investment in infrastructure to promote agricultural growth.

Q: Yes. Two things I remember about those evaluations: one is that I was just amazed sitting down with Doug Bennet to go over an evaluation that involved well digging that Doug, from his experience in India, knew so much and was able to talk about issues in agriculture with great expertise; The second was his belief that these evaluations, which you properly described as having been written in a way that was accessible, should go to the Hill because it would be very important for Congress to see them. And even if it showed that something failed, as long as you could demonstrate that AID was learning from these mistakes, it was well worth it.

You were working on these various matters while in PPC but then you became Foreign Service Officer?

SIMMONS: Yes. After we returned to the U.S. from Liberia, my husband worked as a consultant for a few years with assignments in Tanzania and Botswana. In 1980, he joined USAID's Foreign Service and worked in the Africa Bureau in a Washington project oversight office (AFR/PD). In 1982, we became a "tandem couple." He became the Program Officer in USAID/Mali and I joined the Foreign Service as a Backstop 10, assigned to be the agricultural economist on the Sahel Development Planning Team (SDPT) that was headquartered in Bamako, Mali.

FOREIGN SERVICE POSTING: MALI

Q: Was that hard to manage at that point or even later on – that is, to find two assignments together?

SIMMONS: Yes and no. We always tried to find postings where we could live in the same place but have jobs that did not entail either of us supervising the other. In Mali, the USAID country mission (at first, with David Wilson as Mission Director, and later, Gene Chiavaroli) was completely separate from the SDPT office, so our initial assignments worked out great. Larry Dash was the director of the SDPT, a position equivalent to that of a Mission Director. Of course, since I had a regional remit, I spent a lot of time travelling across the Sahel – Chad to Cape Verde. I became a very good friend of Air Afrique; I've got lots of Air Afrique stories.

The SDPT team included only about 10 people and each of us served as a technical expert to the USAID missions in the Sahel in a specific area – economics, forestry, livestock, health, etc. SDPT did not directly fund development projects although we provided oversight on funding for regional institutions set up as part of the multinational CILSS initiative supported by the Club du Sahel, a multilateral group of donors based at the OECD in Paris. I, for example, worked with the Institut du Sahel agricultural team that was led by a Bamako-based staff of Sahelians. As SDPT experts, however, our principal roles were to support mission efforts in project design, management, and evaluation. Given my background in PPC, I would have liked to undertake broader, policy-oriented studies that would have supported USAID, the Club du Sahel, and the CILSS, especially as CILSS had been explicitly set up in the mid-1970s to support recovery from the severe droughts in the region and to prevent further exposure to droughts. But there was little interest in having SDPT engage in such studies, so working with the Club and the Institut du Sahel professionals and doing country-based studies for missions, sometimes as a team, was the next best thing. I learned a lot about the difficulties of irrigated agriculture, the conduct of agricultural research, and the impossibility of planting sustainable forests in degraded savannas. As it turns out, farmers in Burkina and Niger did figure out how to do the impossible and there are now millions of hectares of naturally-regenerated forests in the region.

Q: Was there a separate line item funding for the Sahel or was it all within the Africa regional budget?

SIMMONS: USAID supported the regional organizations separately from the USAID country missions. There was a "Sahel office" in Washington which supported the partnership with the Club du Sahel at the OECD and the CILSS offices in West Africa. However, three years after I started working with the SDPT in Bamako, it was decided that this regional program – a separate line item in the USAID budget – could no longer be sustained and we, as a regional support team, were disbanded. We, of course, argued that this action would undermine the partnering relationships that we had developed with Sahelian counterparts and institutions and would prove to be pennywise and pound-foolish. This argument was lost.

All the rest of the SDPT staff left Mali, but because I was part of a tandem couple, I was offered a job in the USAID/Mali mission in a position that avoided conflict of supervisory oversight with my husband. I joined the USAID/Mali mission in 1985 as an Agricultural Officer.

Although I worked on the whole portfolio of mission agricultural projects in some capacity, my key function was to serve as the USAID member of a multidonor team that was supporting an agricultural policy reform program begun in the late 1970s, the Program for Restructuring Mali's Cereal Markets. Until that time, the government set quotas for buying grain (sorghum and millet), often at prices set below market levels, to ensure that there would be grain available for emergency distribution and other public programs, e.g., school feeding, as well as for market interventions were prices to spike. The pricing policies effectively ensured that farmers were heavily taxed and made them less responsive to both extension advice and to market participation. Removal of price controls and forced-procurement policies on sorghum and millet in the first phase of the project showed that PRMC analysis was correct. Farm prices rose and so did production. The Program was popularly known by its French acronym, PRMC, and was still alive and well as a platform for government/donor dialogue on agricultural policies into the 2000s.

The PRMC enabled a group of donors to work with the Malian government to reduce the direct intervention of the government in grain markets and to develop approaches (including the use of food aid) for emergency assistance that were more targeted and efficient. The U.S. was the largest food aid donor, but the World Food Program was the largest operational manager of food aid programming and chaired the PRMC. The French had interests in the development of the private grain sector and the Canadians were all about democracy and cooperatives. With the success of the reform of sorghum and millet markets by the early 1980s, the PRMC donor group then turned to the rice sector, a much more politically-sensitive sector in which state control was pervasive. This required consideration not only of production conditions and investments in the state-controlled irrigation facilities but also the options for processing and sale of the rice.

Q: Cooperation and collaboration was working.

SIMMONS: Yes, the level of dialogue and collaboration among the donors and with the government built a robust program, but it was time-consuming. Members of the PRMC met with the Office for Food Production and Distribution (OPAM) every couple of weeks as well as with the Ministries involved in agriculture and livestock more occasionally. And we spent a lot of time in between those major meetings working on papers and analysis. We all kind of tried to work together to make our different perspectives and capacities to mesh in a collective effort to introduce new reforms in the rice sector that would be good for farmers and for consumers. It was a very unusual USAID experience to work so intensely with a multinational, multisectoral team.

Q: Was this not replicated elsewhere in your experience?

SIMMONS: Where I saw it somewhat replicated was in Ethiopia, both in the immediate aftermath of the civil war that ended in 1991 and in the early 2000s. As a senior program/policy advisor in the Regional Economic Development Office for East and Southern Africa (REDSO/ESA) from 1991-1994, I was part of a short-term team sent to Ethiopia to help convert the food aid-only USAID program of the 1980s into a more development-oriented program. At that time, there was some interest among donors in collaborating on a post-war recovery strategy, but even with my PRMC experience in the Sahel, collaborative program design proved to be very difficult and bilateral programs by and large went their separate ways. In the early 2000s, however, there was a real concern among Ethiopian leaders that donors were heading in different directions with humanitarian assistance programs in Ethiopia. Further, repeated food crises indicated that Ethiopia's "agriculture development-led industrial strategy" was not moving forward as quickly as needed.

In 2003, to be specific, USAID provided between $500 million and $650 million worth of food aid to Ethiopia to meet urgent food needs; at the same time, USAID was programming about $6 million a year in agricultural assistance even though more than 70% of all Ethiopian households were rural and most relied upon farming for both food and income. This disparity between USAID's food aid funding and agricultural development investments resulted, in part, from the fact that USAID's development assistance (DA) funding was so limited. Further, Ethiopia's agricultural policies and USAID's understanding of best practices for agricultural development were not aligned. The state continued to play a controlling role in markets, provided unsustainable agricultural input subsidies, etc. However, it was pretty evident that continuing to provide food aid without enabling people to better succeed in their agricultural production efforts was not a productive pathway forward. I was an Assistant Administrator for Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade (EGAT) in Washington at the time and drew the Administrator's attention to this huge imbalance in funding and the challenge of strengthening local food production. Andrew Natsios got the point immediately and supported efforts to rebalance the program.

So I drew on my PRMC experience, got the Office of Food for Peace and the EGAT Office of Agriculture to collaborate on some analysis of the situation, and, with PPC's help, convened a group of donors and key representatives of the Government of Ethiopia to define a new, collective approach to food aid in regions where food insecurity was a constant. This new approach was linked to a renewed emphasis on agricultural productivity and efforts to address chronic rural poverty. The resulting Productive Safety Net Program (PSNP) took a lot more work from a lot of people in the donor community and in the Government of Ethiopia, but I was pleased to hear the Ethiopian Prime Minister at an IFPRI 2020 Conference held in Addis Ababa in 2012 talk about "our" PSNP and its successes.

Food aid is still a factor in USAID support to Ethiopia, but the Government has increasingly moved (with institutional support from the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation as well as input from other bilateral and multilateral donors and infrastructural investments by China) to boost agricultural productivity and to take the lead on expanding the food safety net as needed to avert famine. In 2017, Alex de Waal, a regional expert, described the PSNP program and the Government of Ethiopia's ownership of it as evidence that we could see the "end of famine" through the appropriate exercise of political leadership and governance.

Unfortunately, the Ethiopian experience of 1985, when millions of people starved to death as a result of drought and deliberate inaction, is being replicated in South Sudan, Somalia, and other countries today. De Waal asserts that Ethiopia has shown what needs to be done to avert famine, but the political will and resources to build on the lesson of Ethiopia's experience are still missing in so many countries and famine is still a reality.

Q: So lessons of experience are not always heeded. Do you have any recommendations – based on your own involvement in the impact evaluations, the PRMC, and even the PSNP – as to how they can best be transmitted from one person, one situation, to another?

SIMMONS: I think that lessons of experience are always relevant to any kind of new initiative – but finding the people who can bring them forward, either through personal communication or through publications – is not always easy. I think that often what we think of as "new solutions" are really just reworking of old ideas and adapting them to new technologies, new opportunities, new leadership. Many people ask me how in the world I could have worked so long for USAID when so many of the activities in which I (and others) engaged did not always have the transformational outcomes that we hoped for. My answer often is that we were always learning; staying engaged stimulates creative learning and, in many cases, more effective outcomes turn out to be possible when the context shifts.

Perhaps the most exciting challenge that I worked on in the 1990s, for example, was work I did with colleagues in East and Southern Africa to open up avenues to enable emerging new telecommunications technologies to be used. A classic development challenge. While the IT revolution seems inevitable now, a tremendous amount of institutional as well as technological change was needed to make it happen. My REDSO colleagues and I were unsuccessful in accelerating the adoption of cellular telephony in Tanzania when we tried to do that in 1993/94; the resistance of the state-owned telecoms institutions was firm, even though they were clearly not providing citizens or businesses the services they needed at even a minimal level. But the analyses, legal work, and contacts with the business community that we initiated to pave the way for private involvement in the telecoms arena may have helped (I like to think!) to make the spread of the technology more rapid in the following years.

As was clear in Ethiopia, food aid programming is attractive to donors. They largely control the process, they deal with time-bound, concrete processes, and the impacts are visible and morally-good – saving lives. Health assistance shares some of these characteristics. In the 1990s, child survival was a top priority. Delivery of vaccines, vitamin supplements, and expanding infrastructure were clear "wins" and improved child survival. In the 2000s, the provision of HIV/AIDS anti-retrovirals rose to the top as critical life-saving interventions.

Agricultural development work is more frustrating and controversial, even though the outcome of food security and healthy lives is clearly important. Not every agricultural project results in a bountiful, affordable, and accessible food supply. The sector is complex and farmers, markets, and Mother Nature play leading roles in determining the outcomes year-to-year. Even the Green Revolution – the result, in part, of agricultural research investments and institutional developments supported by USAID – has its detractors: not all farmers benefitted, it bypassed Africa, the new seeds led to the loss of indigenous genetic material. But getting "the food and agricultural system" to work even a little bit better – more productively, more efficiently – is likely to be more sustainable and to have a larger impact over the long run. So from Nigeria to Liberia to the Sahel to Mali to the rest of the world, I continue to find agricultural development a worthy challenge.

Q: In the case of Mali, getting back to the chronology of your career track, was the putting together of these various pieces something which you or AID took the initiative on or was it everybody just saw that this was to their advantage? I mean, did AID have to play the leadership role?

SIMMONS: AID provided key analytical input to the PRMC process in Mali. A World Bank spouse, Louis de Merode, was a key figure for AID's input in the early 1980s. (The World Bank did not allow tandem couples.) An economist, Belgian (hence fluent French), and an energetic personality, Louis was important to the formation of the initial PRMC group and provided the intellectual glue to hold it together. Empirical and policy studies carried out by agricultural economists from Michigan State University also made important contributions to the process. When Louis returned to Washington and the World Bank in 1985, I was just coming off the SDPT job (which had improved my French) and agreed to replace him.

I joined the PRMC just as the group was considering how donors could better support the transformation of the rice sector. Mali is fortunate in having a large area of agricultural land that can be irrigated by releases of water from dams on the Niger River and its tributaries, by pumping water from the River and, in some areas, using seasonal floodwaters of smaller streams for off-season production. The value of being able to produce irrigated rice when drought conditions reduced rainfed production of sorghum and millet was clearly recognized as a major food security asset by all of Mali's politicians. Yet Mali's rice yields were low, double-cropping was not as widely-practiced as it could have been, and the performance of the rice sector was well below its potential. The initial hurdle to reform, of course, was state control of the rice price (too low to incentivize farmers, but just right for public acquisition of stocks that could be released to meet the food needs of politically-sensitive, low-income urban residents). A second hurdle was an inefficient government irrigation and extension management structure; as I recall, there was reportedly one extension agent on the payroll for every farmer in the irrigated areas known as the Office du Niger. And, third, the state-owned milling operations were inefficient and farmers avoided them in order to conceal their actual production or to sell at higher market prices.

Rice was one of the commodities that USAID could provide as food aid so it became a bargaining chip in the reform process facilitated by the PRMC. The government was reluctant to allow for more market-oriented development of the rice sector as it feared that urban consumers would get restive if the government could not dampen possible rice increases in urban areas with stocks acquired at state-set (lower) prices. The PRMC had a three-part argument. Reforms of sorghum and millet procurement/marketing policies had demonstrated the positive impacts in producing both lower market prices and greater supply. Allowing rice prices to respond to market factors would encourage both farmers and potential mill operators to invest more in their operations. And the state could better invest its resources in developing the quality of irrigation facilities and research to increase yields.

The PRMC discussions resulted in a proposal to test these ideas, with the promise that if the proposed reforms did not work as envisioned, food aid in the form of rice would be provided by USAID to the government food authority for use in stabilizing markets. In addition, it was agreed that if the reforms were undertaken and there was no shortage of rice or need for food aid in the form of rice, USAID would provide a policy/program grant of $1 million to enable the Government of Mali to pursue the reform program more broadly. I think this additional guarantee gave the USAID a bit of credibility in the PRMC group and helped to overcome political risks, keeping both donors and government engaged in that effort.

In 1992, the franc CFA, which was tied to the French franc, was devalued and Mali's rice became more competitive with international rice and the possibility of building a regional market for Malian rice became to be understood. An upward trend in Mali's production continued until 2001, but has apparently stagnated since then. A website updated as recently as 2014, however, lists the PRMC as an initiative of the Government of Mali and its development partners so the challenge of finding the right balance of market leadership, technological change, and state support for agricultural obviously still remains to be found.

Q: That's good. So, this was Mali and then what happened after that?

THE DEVELOPMENT FUND FOR AFRICA

SIMMONS: My husband Roger and I left Mali in 1987 and returned to Washington. Roger had a position in the Sahel Regional Office and I took a job in Africa's Development Planning Office. As a tandem couple, it was easier to find two positions in Washington; we did not identify any other great opportunities overseas at that time. The goal was always to find positions that were appropriately graded (he was an FS-01; I was an FS-02) and for which there were no questions of one supervising the other. In Mali, after SDPT was abolished, I ultimately became the senior agricultural officer but he was the senior program officer so we each reported to different people.

Q: That was permitted?

SIMMONS: Yes, it was permitted and we had terrifically understanding bosses. There were a number of other married professional couples in Bamako at the time, although usually only one worked for the Mission or Embassy and the other worked for a contractor. As I said, we came back to Washington in 1987. Our next overseas assignment was Kenya and we lived in Nairobi from 1991 to 1994. I was the head of the Policy and Program Division in REDSO/ESA, the regional office, and Roger was the Deputy Mission Director for USAID/Kenya. In 1994, we were recruited for the USAID/Russia mission. Jim Norris was the Mission Director and took on the responsibility for having both of us reporting to him. Roger served as the Deputy Mission Director and I was the Program Office Director from 1995-1997. There were other tandem couples in Moscow in both USAID and the Embassy. Given the high cost of housing in Moscow, it could be seen as a cost-saving approach to staffing!

Q: Okay. So, you're back to Washington in 1987; your job then was?

SIMMONS: I was a staffer in the Africa Bureau's Office of Development Programs (AFR/DP).

Q: Doing what?

SIMMONS: I can't remember my actual job title – something to do with strategic planning or policy planning. I reprised my PPC function of reviewing PIDs and PPs but I also worked on putting together the annual budget for the Africa Bureau (all the missions in Africa), developing the schedule of evaluations, and doing analyses as needed. When I arrived in Washington, I worked for Ned Greeley who was the head of the policy planning team, but when he left for an overseas assignment soon after my arrival in 1987, I began to do a lot more strategic planning work.

There were big changes afoot in both the Administration of USAID and in Congress in 1987/88 so there were emerging opportunities to be innovative. There was an ongoing effort on the Hill to do a comprehensive rewrite the Foreign Assistance Act (FAA) of 1961. George Ingram and Gary Bombardier were, as I recall, deeply engaged in this effort as committee staff. Although this ambitious rewrite was never completed, it generated a lot of discussion about what was working in USAID and what was not.

In 1987, the Agency began to provide what was called "non-project assistance," that is, to support countries' efforts to initiate new policies and broader programs in a more flexible way. My experience with policy reform in Mali provided some insight into how this could work. Also in 1987, Congress enacted the Development Fund for Africa (DFA) as an amendment to the FAA. The DFA authorized USAID to program development assistance to the region without regard to the functional boundaries in the FAA, waived the "buy America" rules, encouraged AID to concentrate resources in countries where conditions would allow for successful cooperation, and, more generally, allowed AID to use this programming flexibility to improve incomes and economic growth in the region. With my experience in the region, I was eager to work with others in AFR/DP to figure out ways to better match USG resources with outcomes on the ground in Africa.

Q: So, you were focused on the budgetary detail?

SIMMONS: No. I did continue to work on budget preparation for the Bureau, but I got much more deeply involved in "managing for results." With help from seminal thinkers like Larry Cooley at Management Systems International (MSI), our AFR/DP team developed an approach using logical frameworks (logframes) at the program rather than the project level. This approach encouraged missions to work with country counterparts to define outcomes (results) that USAID could support and to identify priority areas for investment in both projects and "non-projects." This approach introduced the program flexibility allowed by the DFA legislation into the design of country programs and, in theory, made mission staffs more accountable for results achieved. It was envisioned that country programs would allocate funds to different sectors in response to local priorities or opportunities and that there would be more cross-sectoral work undertaken – something that was hard to do using the FAA functional accounts. Missions in Africa undertook the preparation of new country strategies and developed an annual accounting matrix that the Africa Bureau planned to use to evaluate progress toward results.

It was pretty heady stuff. Jerry Wolgin was the Bureau's chief economist at the time and took the leadership on both use of the non-project assistance modality and the analysis of African countries' needs/potentials for using USAID resources effectively. John Westley was the head of AFR/DP and kept everyone engaged – calmly presiding over major arguments as to which directions to take (often Wolgin v. Simmons, I have to say). And Jim Govan was the *eminence grise* in the Budget Office in AFR/DP, bringing together deep knowledge of budget management as well as an unshakeable commitment to more effective use of USAID's financial resources.

We had an extraordinarily skilled evaluation person on staff, Cindy Clapp-Wincek, who developed courses on program logframes and helped to structure the planning and evaluation processes. We developed a language for "managing for results" and I and other staff worked with missions to put it into use. We worked hard on analyzing the annual results reporting tables to see how we could "add up" what was being achieved with the DFA resources.

I began to learn two huge lessons: (1) it is hard to measure national-scale "progress" toward big goals like "improving incomes" in the course of just one year and even harder to "add up" the results across more than a dozen disparate countries functioning in what the IMF now calls "multispeed Africa"; and (2) there was a lot of inertia in the AID programming and budgeting system. If a country had a big health program before the enactment of the DFA, and a disproportionate number of health staffers in the mission, the new priorities identified were likely to lie in the health sector. Cross-sectoral efforts were rarely pursued under the DFA. In theory, the DFA provided for something like a five-year window to demonstrate results, but, in practice, the federal government process of annual reports and budget requests kept the focus on the short-term.

Nevertheless, for many of us in the Africa Bureau at the time, implementing the DFA was an opportunity of a lifetime. My four years in Washington in AFR/DP flew by as I worked with the larger Bureau team to make it happen. Larry Sayres and Walter Bollinger provided leadership and support from the Africa Bureau Front Office. Larry was working closely on the larger FAA rewrite with Gary Bombardier and others. The AFR/DP group was particularly tight as we covered the functions from planning to budgeting to monitoring implementation to reporting to Congress. We even had little songs about using the program logframe that somehow became a fun in-joke sung at going-away parties and such.

Q: How did all of this Africa-focused work relate to the rest of what the Agency was doing in other regions?

SIMMONS: There were some issues regarding Africa Bureau relationships with the rest of the Agency. Many thought that we were setting up entirely new and different programming and management systems and, therefore, challenging the “regular” Agency systems. To some extent that was true. The fact that the nominee for USAID Administrator after Peter McPherson’s departure, Alan Woods, was never able to come on board due to illness and Ron Roskens, the Administrator of AID from 1990-92, was not a particularly strong leader empowered the Africa Bureau to forge a new path in implementing the DFA. I know that there was definitely a more positive spirit among the Africa Bureau staff than those in PPC, although I cannot remember who was the Assistant Administrator in PPC at that time – John Bolton?

Q: And you had strong congressional support that permitted the DFA to be passed.

SIMMONS: And we had a separate budget line that was just the DFA!. We took the challenge and the responsibility seriously, the ability to exercise more program flexibility, to work more closely with local institutions, to have a different strategy in Tanzania from that in Ghana. Even though the U.S. government as a whole did not get to the Government Performance and Results Act (GPRA) until 1992, USAID’s Africa Bureau was already well ahead in pursuing that pathway. We thought that managing for results was a great idea.

Q: And you managed to put this into practice. Now, you didn’t stay with it the whole time.

SIMMONS: No, I left Washington for an overseas posting in 1991. As a tandem couple, my husband became the Deputy Mission Director in Kenya (where John Westley was, by that time, the Mission Director) and I headed up the Program and Policy Division in REDSO/ESA.

Q: Oh, you did stay until ’91? So, by that time most of these DFA programs actually had been completed.

SIMMONS: The ideas and processes associated with the Development Fund for Africa had, by the time I left Washington, been institutionalized into the Africa Bureau and, to a lesser extent, in the Agency.

Q: And overall what would say was the outcome? How do you assess the results of this fantastic opportunity?

SIMMONS: I think that the Congressional introduction of the Development Fund for Africa into the Agency sparked a process of institutional change that positioned the Agency well for the larger USG GPRA movement in the 1990s and the overall "results based management" approach to organizational development that we still see today. As I noted earlier, the rest of the Agency somewhat resented the Africa Bureau's access to flexibilities and responsibilities introduced by the DFA so the Agency staff as a whole did not participate as actively in the change process as it could have, nor were some of the obstacles encountered by the Africa Bureau addressed as collaboratively as they might have been had the rest of the Agency been engaged. As I look back toward the DFA, however, I think that the core ideas associated with managing for results was embedded pretty broadly in the Agency.

But Congressional support faded pretty quickly and budget resources did not reflect commitments or progress made. Further, there was a strong oncoming rush of events associated with the 1989 fall of the Berlin Wall, the emergence of perestroika in the Soviet Union, and then the break-up of the former Soviet Union. These were all reasons to shift priorities, even in Africa, away from those appropriate to a Cold War mentality. The Ethiopian civil war ended in 1991 and resulted in the creation of Eritrea. The Clinton victory in the 1992 Presidential election in the US brought in a new group of political appointees with new ideas. And the genocide took place in Rwanda in 1994. Such global events all required the Agency to respond to new challenges.

In my REDSO/ESA position (1991-1994), I and my staff were engaged in following up on the end of the Ethiopian civil war, the growth of democratic movements in East Africa, the demands for greater support for education programming, initiatives to boost gender-focused programming, and business development initiatives (including in the telecommunications sector as I mentioned earlier). Agriculture and rural development issues were managed in a separate office.

While there was a great deal of work to do and results-based management was an approach I strongly felt was useful in policy and program planning, we began to feel the impacts of the new Clinton Administration and incoming AID Administrator Brian Atwood. The opportunities to provide development assistance to Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union drew the attention of Congress. Setting up AID missions in those countries began to require that missions in Africa and other regions be closed to free up sufficient Foreign Service staff to manage the new missions.

At the same time, AID's incoming Assistant Administrator for Management, Larry Byrne, proposed to revise the Agency's management and reporting systems from the ground up. A "New Management System" was to be developed to integrate planning, budgeting, program design, and evaluation – all on the basis of a yet-to-be-designed computer-based system. While e-mail connectivity and the early stages of the internet were beginning to be part of AID's electronic revolution, in the early 1990s bandwidth and connectivity issues were far from being solved. Disaster was just around the corner.

AA/M Byrne reportedly promised Congress that he would get rid of all the regulations, reduce guidance from Handbook 3 (the bible for AID project design) from six inches high to six pages, and that staffers would be held responsible for their individual actions. This highly computerized planning system would, at a punch of a button, enable everyone to see exactly how much money was related to what result, etc. etc.

Q: Which really never worked.

SIMMONS: It never worked, although it was not for lack of trying on the part of USAID staff. The technology was not operable over the global USAID space, insufficient thought had been given to issues of coding and estimating so that the "push button" results would be consistent or comprehensible, and the huge diversity of USAID operations could not be managed in three easy pieces.

By the time I became the Program Director for USAID/Russia, a lot of the New Management System (NMS) had been designed and theoretically installed on our mission electronic systems, but only the budgeting, obligation, and expenditure sections actually worked more or less as intended. We could name a project (part of the mission's billion dollar portfolio) and list the implementing partners but we could not identify quantitatively exactly how many dollars for which NGO actually had what development impact. In my view, the NMS actually became a huge distraction from what should have been a fundamental expansion of USAID efforts to manage for results. So by the end of the 1990s, AID was back to sector-based programming with priority directed to program areas where results were most easily counted – number of children vaccinated, number of people fed.

Q: Without taking such a big sweep, if you're just looking at what you accomplished with the Africa-

SIMMONS: My assessment of the Development Fund for Africa is that it changed the way a lot of people thought and did programming in USAID. There was a great deal more consciousness about linking expenditures to results, although the reality of how to do that was still a work in progress at the end of the DFA initiative. Still, the concepts of results-based management and having a "theory of change" based upon a program logframe analysis were relatively well-established in USAID by the mid-1990s. The terms are still used widely throughout the development community.

But USAID in the 1990s was an organization undergoing tumultuous, disruptive change. Beyond the disruptions associated with the New Management System and the opening of more than 20 new USAID missions in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, there was a churn of mission openings and closings in Africa, the hiring of Foreign Service Officers was frozen at some point (1991 or 1992), the use of personal service contractors was expanded in some areas (especially health and in the programs of Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union), and, then, in 1996, the Agency was forced to undertake a Reduction-in-Force due to constraints in the Operating Expense (OE) Account and a number of Foreign Service Officers were shown the door.

Q: Right – as I recall 50 or more of the most talented people in the Agency were forced out during that period.

SIMMONS: Yes, the Reduction in Force (RIF) was demoralizing as it indicated the standoff between Congress, especially Senator Helms, and the Clinton Administration. The State Department did not seem willing to intervene, even though State had designated an office in State (S/Newly Independent States or S/NIS) to supervise USAID programs in that region and the RIF cut into staffing there as well as in elsewhere in the Agency.

BACK TO THE FIELD: REDSO/ESA AND RUSSIA

Q: Tell me a little more about your work in East and Southern Africa.

SIMMONS: As the Program and Policy Division Director for REDSO/ESA, I had a multidisciplinary staff (democracy/governance; education, women in development; economics) that responded to requests from missions in the region for program design, evaluation, and sectoral expertise. A scheduling conference held in fall (the beginning of the new fiscal year) allowed mission and REDSO staff to bargain over time commitments; most REDSO staff, including me, spent about 60 percent of their time outside of Nairobi. Each of the three years that I spent in REDSO/ESA was different. For me, 1991 was dominated by the end of the civil war in Ethiopia; 1992 was focused on telecoms development initiatives in several countries, with the privatization of telecoms in Tanzania a big focus of effort; and 1993, on small and medium enterprise development in Kenya.

Q: Did you know anything about telecoms?

SIMMONS: No. But I did know that new telephone technology was coming in (Nokia was the hardware leader at the time although the promise of the satellite-based Iridium network captured a lot of attention) and that there was a lot of interest in bringing this new technology to East Africa, where coverage by the public systems (the agencies called Posts, Telecommunications, and Telegraphs (PTT)) was exceedingly poor. Partly because of business in general and partly because of the importance of tourism, there was great pressure to improve connectivity. People were hearing about the new cellphone technologies and satellite phones that could even work in remote areas, and wanted to know how to get it.

One of the REDSO engineers and I began to work very closely with industry. Within USAID, there were already initiatives being undertaken in Latin America to rewrite telecoms laws and regulations to facilitate the new technologies. So in spite of the fact that cellphones at the time were like big bricks, there was interest in bringing them to areas like Arusha in Tanzania, where tourists would benefit by having access to international connections and tourist companies could reduce risks, perhaps increasing their business by attracting millions of dollars' worth of tourism.

The Tanzania mission was able to bring in consultants from USDA who were experienced in establishing rural telecommunications systems as well as legal experts who helped to draft laws for privatization of the telecoms part of PTT. Both the private sector and the government of Tanzania showed substantial interest, but the project got derailed by a World Bank loan to the Government of Tanzania for modernizing the old, non-performing PTT. While I was disappointed that the project did not go through, I learned a lot about the privatization of infrastructure and, as we predicted, African countries were ready for the advent of more efficient telephone services. Growth in privately-owned telecoms services is now seen as a major driver of growth in Africa; ownership of cellphones is ubiquitous and completely transformed the ways of doing business. Access to the internet lags somewhat as bandwidth remains limited, but African companies have led the world in development and use of innovative technologies (like mobile money) based upon cellphones.

Q: There were hardly computers in the early 1990s!

SIMMONS: No, we had personal computers by that time as well as office computers. Remember that I programmed an ICI 2k machine in Nigeria in 1970-73 and worked with the 6k computer at the Ministry of Planning and Economic Affairs in Liberia in 1974-77. I took my first Apple II to Mali in 1982 and entered the personal computer era. My husband and I soon decided, however, that we needed portable computers and bought ourselves "luggable" Compaqs that were about the size of sewing machines. We took them back and forth from home to the office every day – no classified material – and found they made a huge difference in our ability to do analyses, write reports, etc. USAID email as an official means of communication came in later, I think in the 1990s.

I recall that USAID use of email aroused concerns with the State Department as USAID communications were insufficiently transparent to State – which was still using meticulously typed cables. But the transition was all so gradual, I literally do not remember when the transformation happened. We replaced Lotus with Excel, WordPerfect with Word, etc. but computerization and satellite communication tools were, as I recall, fully embraced and embedded in USAID action by the mid-1990s.

Q. Tell me a little more about what you did in Ethiopia.

A. Ethiopia's civil war was brought to a negotiated end in 1991, as the head of African Affairs at the State Department, Herman Cohen, met with the several groups poised to remove the Derg regime after years of warfare. He helped to arrange the departure of Mengistu (to exile in Zimbabwe) and the allocation of power among various fighting groups. His efforts also resulted in the creation of a new African state as Eritrea (where the fighting force was the Tigrayan Peoples Liberation Front) was separated from Ethiopia (where there were several different groups, with the Ethiopian People's Revolutionary Democratic Front the dominant power). USAID had had an office in Addis Ababa throughout the conflict in order to manage the shipments of U.S. food aid, which we estimated were about $125 million a year on average (although the drought/famine response in 1984/85 had been significantly higher).

Bill Pearson, the Mission Director in 1991, soon called upon REDSO/ESA to help convert the USAID operation from its focus on food aid to a more robust development assistance program. I and several REDSO colleagues did repeated reconnaissance trips to both Ethiopia and Eritrea to see what the situation was. I remember vividly a field trip north of Addis where we saw many farm cooperative buildings and equipment burned to the ground. We were told just how much farmers hated the forced collectivization of agriculture and the grain procurement policies of the Derg. It was clear that rebuilding local agricultural capacity was going to be more than a technical job. But agricultural recovery was a clear place to start with economic assistance.

Eritrea was a different case. Agriculture had been less affected by the policies of the Derg, but the port town of Massawa had been bombarded so hard that it could not handle trade. There was a clear opportunity to rebuild the port and, perhaps, to bring in labor-absorbing industries that would generate jobs for the war-ravished country.

Q, Were you able to design a program that was adequately funded for the scale of the rebuilding effort?

SIMMONS: No. This was a huge frustration. A first proposal from our team was for a program in Ethiopia that would be sized at roughly the size of the prior food aid budget, with food aid and development assistance components complementing each other. Washington, however, saw an opportunity for cost-savings and declared a "peace dividend" that would result in cutting the funding level back to $25 million per year. We were shocked; this was not a level of resources that would enable the incoming government being set up by the Ethiopian Peoples' Revolutionary Democratic Front (the EPRDF) to respond to the devastation of the war. The population at the time was estimated to be about 50-60 million, with 80% or more living in rural areas. The victorious army wore shorts and plastic shoes. Roads were in poor shape and markets, which had been fully controlled by the state during the Derg regime and were still subject to erratic government purchases, were not really functional. I spent a lot of time talking with Ethiopians and arguing with Washington.

We on the donor side thought that there were opportunities for mobilizing markets and market incentives in the areas of food and agriculture that would enable the population to participate in the new EPRDF regime and, within a short period of time, allow food aid levels to decline. How to get the market moving was a question that donors joined together to discuss. The government representatives we met were less persuaded that market forces were a good idea; they were looking forward to taking over control of the various state agencies that the Derg had established and just running them more efficiently. We did identify a common idea, though, that of getting more trucking capacity into the country. Under the Derg, trucking was tightly controlled, with most of the trucks owned and managed by a state agency; much of the capacity operated by private truckers under state contracts was 20 or 30 years old. USAID and the Swedish aid agency, SIDA, agreed that providing capital for private truckers to acquire new trucks would be a good idea, and a prerequisite for getting markets moving, although there were questions about how maintenance services and spare parts would be available to private owners.

I think that SIDA—and maybe the Dutch -- ultimately did provide this assistance. Volvo and DAC trucks were in wide use so expanding and renewing the fleet made sense to these donors. However, the USAID contribution was subjected to a Congressional requirement that all trucks had to be a specific American brand for which there were no service capacities. We in USAID saw this as a recipe for disaster and the deal fell apart. We then turned our attention to supporting an increase in the import of fertilizer so that production of the major staple crops – wheat, barley, corn, and teff – would increase. Given the limited capacities of the state-owned Agricultural Input Supply Corporation (AISCO), we reasoned that fertilizer distribution within the country could involve private sector dealers accredited to AISCO. Unfortunately, the Prime Minister of the Government of Ethiopia proved to be leery of private sector involvement in the economy and, while the program went ahead, it was undermined by officials who felt threatened by potential market expansion.

This became a persistent issue for more than a decade. The government would make moves in the direction of "making markets work" but then would undercut Ethiopians brave enough to try private enterprise. The government became well-known for its support of "party-statals" in which the state enterprises were sold to or taken over by party stalwarts rather than private entrepreneurs.

Q: This approach is not only found in Ethiopia.

SIMMONS: Today in Ethiopia, there is a better understanding of markets and what they can do for an economy. Nevertheless, the Federal Government of Ethiopia (which is still under control of former EPRDF leaders, who hail mostly from the region of Tigray) remains the pre-eminent power for economic decision-making and there are the usual allegations about political influence and corruption. The current political unrest associated with the physical expansion of the city of Addis Ababa is, in part, related to the federal exercise of eminent domain, with no or minimal compensation, into territory that is, in theory, under the control of the Oromo "nationality" or region. (Note that Ethiopia adopted a federal system of government in which the regions are ethnically more-or-less homogenous, that is, the territory is associated with a nationality.)

The problem is that the regions do not have equal economic potential and migration between regions has been discouraged. It makes it hard for people to cope with droughts or unemployment as there are barriers to them moving elsewhere. Ethiopia has also had issues with leasing of land to foreigners (the Karuturi Farm, now described as a failed land deal) and with state control of transport facilities (leading to private sector losses when shipments are not made on time).

Fortunately, however, opportunities for rural Ethiopians to produce food and other commodities (especially coffee, livestock, and horticultural products for export) for markets have grown. Further, in the early 2000s, Prime Minister Meles Zenawi also began to allow towns and urban areas to develop, so youth who were otherwise going to have little access to family farmland have off-farm opportunities for employment. Perhaps the most interesting aspect of market development in recent years has been the establishment of an agricultural commodity exchange (ECX) and the provision of funding by the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation for the founding of an Agricultural Transformation Agency (ATA). Both institutions benefited by the return of expatriate Ethiopian professionals who provided skills and leadership.

But it has been a long process….from the early days of encouraging market development in Ethiopia in 1991 to it actually happening in 2010 or so is more than 20 years. In Eritrea, a story I have not told, our REDSO team was completely unsuccessful in even starting a viable USAID development assistance program. While one was launched later, it has been plagued with difficulties. There is a reason why so many Eritreans are on those boats going from Libya to Italy.

Q: *just to close out the chronology of your career, though, from this point then from REDSO in Nairobi you went to?*

SIMMONS: Moscow.

Q: Okay. So, I'm not going to ask you the question now but the next question I'm going to ask you when we start again is whether all this training in Africa made it difficult for you or easy for you to adapt to this Russian situation given that, as I recall from the time that Russia opened up that they were complaining that the World Bank was sending them people who had learned about development in Mali, I remember them even using Mali as an example, rather than- and were trying to apply those lessons to Russia.

SIMMONS: Right. I, however, thought that my work in Ethiopia helped me to connect well with Russia. Ethiopia's dictator, Mengistu Haile Mariam, who had been exiled in 1991, was a familiar face in the Kremlin line-up for many years, including those with Gorbachev in the late 1980s. The economic system in Ethiopia, where we had such a hard time introducing market concepts, bore strong resemblances to the system in Russia. In Ethiopia, I even learned the term for forcing state-owned companies to turn over any "profits" to the state each year – surprising my new Russian colleagues with an arcane term which, of course, I have now forgotten. I did not have to draw upon Mali's association with socialism; Ethiopia was a much fresher example. The tenets of communism remained strongly embedded in the post-civil war era and, as prime minister from 1995-2012, Meles Zenawi continued to think and act along those lines.

Q: So, then you learned well. You have all this wonderful background. That's terrific.

Emmy, thank you very much. This is going to be the end of section one of the Emmy Simmons life story for the oral history. So, thank you very much.

Q: It's the 10th of January and this is Alex Shakow and we are at ADST headquarters. And I am pleased to be with Emmy Simmons for part two of her oral history interviews. When we last were speaking a little while ago we were just about to move to the period when you were off to Moscow having spent your career working in Africa. And I asked you this offensive question about whether you were, like many of the other experts who came into this new environment to work in what was a strange and exotic Eastern European Soviet-style operation and whether this was contrary to the life of a regular AID staffer used to working in poor developing countries. And you quickly stressed that in fact you were an expert in this whole area because you had worked in Ethiopia with-

SIMMONS: A wonderful communist regime.

Q: -with the beginnings of African totalitarianism featured. Anyway, so let's pick it up there and you can say more about what you found. Your job in Moscow, this is now 1994?

SIMMONS: Yes, my husband and I were asked to join the USAID/Moscow mission toward the end of summer in 1994. We agreed and spent 11 weeks in Washington working on getting at least 2/2 ratings in Russian. We did, with help from wonderful tutors, and by the skin of our teeth. Unfortunately, we did not invest as much time as we needed to improve our skills, so Russian has joined Ilocano and Hausa in the roster of languages I no longer speak.

Q: And what was your job in Moscow?

SIMMONS: I was the Senior Program Officer, but, with a portfolio (and a spending pipeline) of something over a billion dollars, and to manage the tandem couple rules, I was referred to as the Program Director. Jim Norris was the Mission Director and both my husband, who was the Deputy Mission Director, and I reported directly to him. As the Deputy Mission Director, my husband Roger basically did all the human resources management, supervised the financial management people, and, more generally provided oversight on the administrative functions of hiring, firing, and managing the assignment process. As Program Director, I managed the budget, the program design and evaluation processes, and worked with the contracting officer to ensure that our acquisitions were timely and in order. We owe a debt of thanks to Jim Norris for supervising us in an objective and fair manner; to my knowledge, there were never any issues.

Q: Was this a unique arrangement or is this something that was prevalent in other AID programs where you had couples or were you sufficiently unusual that this was breaking new ground?

SIMMONS: I think this was somewhat unique because of the size of the program and the unique nature of the Russian program. The USAID program was established in 1991/92 and it grew very quickly. The Ambassador in 1991, Robert Strauss, informed Congress that it was sure to be a short-term program as once Russians had grasped the principles of a market-oriented democracy, there would be no further need for USAID assistance. I suspect many in the Embassy also hoped for the day that the USAID Mission would close as they found it embarrassing to be providing "assistance" to a longtime foe and competitive superpower. The USAID/Russia program did finally close in 2012/13.

Q: But in 1994, the program had been underway for what, three years?

SIMMONS: Yes. It was an unusual program in that Russian-speaking specialists as well as a broader range of technical experts were needed. The initial design team from the Bureau for Newly-Independent States (NIS) started up project initiatives in all sectors. One huge program undertaken at the outset involved resettling Russian military officers from the Baltics to Russia, principally by building or funding housing for them in Russian cities.

Roger was critical in ensuring that all of the Mission's Personal Service Contractors, many of whom were new-hires with little prior USAID experience, actually knew and followed USAID systems. Fortunately, the Mission had also attracted a number of experienced Foreign Service Officers, who, like us, wanted to be sitting in the front row of the Russian drama so Rog was not alone in making this happen, of course.

Q: How did he determine whether they were capable or not?

SIMMONS: He did training courses, he spent personal time with them to ensure familiarization with systems and he supervised the whole personnel evaluation process very closely. A number of the new employees were Americans who had participated in Russia-based training programs during the communist era. A number of Russians who had had international training and/or spoke good English were also employed as Foreign Service Nationals. They were essential not only for administrative duties but also for working on many of the program designs and activity management. Because the program had grown so rapidly in budgetary terms, it was not completely clear when I arrived that the quality of the programs was as good as it needed to be.

So as Program Director, I worked with the office chiefs and staff to interact with many contractors and grantees and projects. The Agency-wide introduction of the New Management System – which we discussed earlier – posed huge difficulties in terms of transitioning budgets and reporting processes. The NMS was a time-consuming and unproductive experience that, by the time I left Moscow, was pretty much seen as an Agency failure. The Washington team backstopping the programs in Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union were fantastic as they managed to keep Congressional notifications and the procurement processes on track in spite of the NMS challenges. The RIF in 1996 cost us a few senior staff and affected morale. Morale was further affected by an Embassy decision to relocate the mission from an old building on the Embassy compound—which had been quickly renovated to serve as an initial home for the Mission -- into a new building designed to be a warehouse – just housing the USAID mission "temporarily."

And Washington's expectations about how quickly Russia would actually transform to a market-oriented democracy proved to be wildly unrealistic. As I mentioned earlier, in view of the political importance of Eastern Europe and the Former Soviet Union, the State Department had established coordination and oversight offices for Eastern Europe and the Newly-Independent States (S/NIS). Unfortunately, S/NIS was staffed it with politically-appointed individuals who had little or no prior experience with development assistance. The chief of S/NIS during my time in Russia, Richard Morningstar, visited Moscow often, but quickly found that his private sector solutions as a biotech industry leader were not always met with great acceptance by Mission staff. At one time, he proposed that we could "save money" if we reduced the sizes of projects, a proposal that was inconsistent with USAID's mandate. And both the Vice President Al Gore and Congressional staffers were fairly regular visitors as well so a lot of time was devoted to preparing these visits and trying to ensure that they provided insight into the work that USAID was doing.

Q: Did the S/NIS arrangement work?

SIMMONS: No, in my view, neither the New Management System nor the S/NIS coordination and oversight contributed to the success of USAID in Russia. The layering of responsibility between USAID and State added very little in terms of program quality and it certainly required more management time. The NMS premise, that one could neatly box all information about a billion dollar portfolio with projects in parastatal reform and private sector development, NGO development, environment, health, education, and democracy/governance up in a computer-based accounting system still loaded with bugs and glitches and "push a button" for results… well, that one didn't work too well either.

However, I think we were all overly-optimistic about the process of bringing about simultaneous political, economic, and social transformation in Russia. One of my early project visits, for example, was to Tver, a city in which virtually the entire population worked for one large state-owned company. An assessment had found that the company had several divisions, each specialized in some area of chemicals and engineering. The idea embedded in the project design was that each of the divisions would become a standalone private enterprise. This was obviously somewhat of a risky proposition for the city and its people if these new businesses didn't work out.

Just a small example of the challenge encountered by this privatization reform: The cinema screen division of the company had the monopoly for the production of cinema screens for the entire Soviet Union; the company had produced some 20,000 screens a year for many years. The screens produced were then sent to some state organization which distributed them all over the USSR. Privatization sounded like a good plan, but none of the managers had any idea of who future customers might be or what the actual market demand for cinema screens might be. So the first year of privatized operation, they produced 20,000 screens as usual but sold only 2,000. This clearly indicated a larger problem than they had expected and they realized that they had no information relevant to any kind of a "market." At the time I made my visit, they had decided that continued production of cinema screens would not be viable and were moving toward testing the manufacture of vinyl covers for car seats. The idea of car ownership was a part of the capitalist transition that many Russians liked and, it was reasoned, new coverings for car seats would be in market demand.

The decision to support privatization of Soviet state corporations was made before I arrived in Moscow. (There is a large literature on post-cold war privatization using allocations of shares to the entire population.) But as the privatization projects began to be implemented it was clear that so many new ideas, services, information, and financing were needed that success in privatization was not, as Ambassador Strauss envisioned, going to be quick or painless. The Mission's Private Sector Office was well-staffed and there were a number of excellent support contracts in place, including, among others, Harvard University, the New York Stock Exchange, a number of topflight legal firms, the U.S. Treasury, and the International Executive Service Corps and the Financial Services Volunteer Corps. (Note that the participation of Harvard in financial reforms ultimately led to a lawsuit by USAID to recover misappropriated funding and redress conflicts of interest.) The establishment of the Russian stock market was a major advance in building the framework of a capitalized market economy (in theory, giving all those stock shares given away to the population something of value). Banking supervision was an important area of USAID support although the emergence of the Russian mafia and a number of politically-connected "oligarchs" posed huge challenges.

Q: Was that an AID project or a Treasury project?

SIMMONS: USAID/Russia managed the finance and banking portfolio although Treasury provided specific technical assistance for projects. The Mission had what I would call foundational projects in virtually every sector: finance, government, environmental management, small business development, democracy/governance, health, agriculture, and education. In addition to the foundational projects, there were specific activities aimed at specific outcomes, some political priorities for either Russia or the U.S. (like the military resettlement program) and others to address emerging issues (such as the potential for oil drilling in the Russia Far East by major U.S. petroleum companies).

Q: What were the relationships like with the Russian government?

SIMMONS: Between 1995 and 1997, U.S. relationships with the Russian government were reasonably good, although the Chechnya issues provoked regional conflict.. Presidential elections were held in 1996 and Boris Yeltsin, who had emerged as an advocate of democracy in 1991, was elected as President. There was relative safety and security across much of the country and lots of experimentation with economic and social reforms and democratic organizations.

Where USAID led cooperation on economic and other sectoral reforms, there were good relationships and interactions with a number of counterparts. The military rehousing effort led to strong interactions with the mayors of St Petersburg and Moscow. The finance sector reforms, including the establishment of the stock market, involved close working relationships with key people. While the devaluation of the Russian ruble in 1991 had had devastating impacts on the hard-won savings of much of the Russian population, the privatization of housing in that same year was met with great hope and anticipation. USAID’s Office of Housing, headed by fluent Russian-speaking Foreign Service Officer George Deikun, managed a cooperative agreement with the Urban Institute; under the leadership of Ray Struyk, that program made real contributions to development of private housing in Russia. The Urban Institute established a counterpart Russian nongovernmental organization, the Institute for Urban Economics, that continues to work on social issues in Russia. Looking back on it, it is possible to make an argument that the privatization of housing was the one thing that kept Russian moving toward democracy in the late 1990s. There was disappointment with the tenure of President Yeltsin, concern that the oligarchs were unfairly benefiting from the oil wealth and the privatization of industries, and difficulties with transforming the system of collectivized agriculture. But the gradual reform of access to housing was something that ordinary people believed that they could benefit from.

Q: If you compare working with the Russian government with the experience you had working with governments in Africa and working where you had been before, were you dealing with much more qualified people? Were you dealing with a more positive and enthusiastic environment? Or the contrary? I mean, to what extent did you find any interesting comparisons or contrasts with your previous experience? You were dealing here with a radical change in the way in which this government was operating, in your discussions about privatization and all the rest, But these bureaucrats that you were dealing with presumably had been engaged in government work for a long time…

SIMMONS: Interestingly, in many cases, our programs and activities were dealing with the “young Turks.” These were ambitious, well-educated people who found that the post-1991 reforms offered them a great opportunity to shine. Chubais, Nemtsov, Sobchak, Boyko, Vasiliev. I don’t remember all the names of counterparts just now, but there were an amazing number of people in each sector eager to innovate and try something new. Even the mayor of Moscow, Yury Luzhkov, and his staff seemed eager to bring in new financial accounting systems and to take responsibility for the progress of the city. And there were hosts of people working on specific initiatives across the country: an SME development organization in Khabarovsk, doctors driving changed healthcare practices in specific hospitals, the manager of a mirror factory in St. Petersburg, a bakery owner in Tver, union leaders reforming the coal sector. The number of nongovernmental organizations grew by leaps and bounds as local leaders saw opportunities to bring reforms to different areas. And many of the health programs built amazing relationships with different healthcare institutions. The approach to treatment of childhood diabetes was transformed with assistance from the Lutheran Hospital in La Crosse, Wisconsin, for example.

Q: And they were leading these departments in ways that conveyed the message down to the population?

SIMMONS: If you mean "the message" of market-oriented democratic change, then yes, to some extent. It should be noted, though, as Mancur Olson, a well-known economist at the University of Maryland pointed out at several Russian conferences, that the process of change would not be smooth as every single Russian was habituated to an economy that functioned on the basis of corruption. People often joked that the economic approach under the communist regimes was "you pretend to pay me, I pretend to work" but the corruption went far beyond that as people sought to survive in political regimes that were often against them. As I recall, seed potatoes being tested by ConAgra (an American company) were all stolen before harvest two years running, somewhat limiting the incentives for continued foreign investment.

Q: How did you cope with corruption?

SIMMONS: The military housing project provided an example. Parsons (now called Parsons Brinckerhoff) was the overall project manager for the work of constructing new apartment buildings for the officers who were to be resettled. During the Khrushchev era, apartment buildings were made of prefab concrete units stacked together to make three- to five-story buildings. The prefab units were not well finished and expected to last only 25 years. The military housing project proposed to upgrade the standards of construction somewhat – noting that the old Khrushchev buildings, somewhat dilapidated, were still in full use in the 1990s. Further, the project supervisors were required to ensure to USAID that the building standards were followed and that the construction materials did not walk away. This turned out to be a challenge. I visited one building – not approved – in which the stairs were already crumbling as the wrong ratio of cement/sand had been used. Under the terms of the contract, these buildings were rejected and had to be reconstructed to meet standards. Apparently, expectation that performance standards would be enforced was something of an eye-opener for the Russian sub-contractors. On the other hand, one wonders whether the formative lesson was actually well-learned. The stories of construction associated with the Olympics in Sochi, Russia, were all too reminiscent of stories I heard in the 1990s. One Sochi report indicated that, at the last minute, contractors were trying to put toilets into new buildings without having them connected to anything.

Q*: Did you do much work with the private sector?*

SIMMONS: One thing that I found surprising in Russia was the eagerness of American companies and organizations like IESC (International Executive Service Corps), universities, and even topflight law firms to work in Russia. In Ethiopia I had to beg IESC to identify people who could help with a cotton/textile sector reform. But it was like pulling teeth – apparently the IESC volunteers were all headed to Russia!

Ironically, the U.S. ambassador to Russia during my tenure was not eager for USAID to facilitate projects in agriculture. It may simply have been that USAID's efforts implicitly made Russia look like a developing country rather than a peer superpower. But he was particularly concerned that programs addressing the reform of the collective farms were going too deeply into the heartland of committed communism..

For example, we had a big project to help break up the *kolkhoz* and *sovkhoz,* collective farms that had been established in the 1920s and 1930s. We soon discovered that reorganization or privatization of these farms was impeded by the fact that 50 or 60 percent of the people who lived on these farms were actually retired. The farm was expected to generate enough funding to pay them pensions and, in addition, to allow them to cultivate small plots of land around their houses on the farms. So the challenge of breaking up the farms and enabling them to operate as private entities in a commercial environment became a social security issue as well as an agricultural development challenge. How do you set up economically-viable farms and how do you determine what the right size is, what skills need to be developed? One technical advisor, for example, described going to a collective dairy farm that had a mountain of butter in a cold store, but had no means to package it, brand it, or sell it. At the same time, Moscow's new supermarkets were beginning to sell packets of butter from New Zealand.

Q: It really wasn't an agricultural issue; it was an issue of these cross cutting social and other financial institutions.

SIMMONS: We went to the Ambassador to seek his support for expanding the agricultural program, but he drew the line. He did not believe that we had the capacity to undertake the social and political issues as well as the economic. At the time, I felt he was wrong, but, in retrospect, his read of the political situation was probably the correct one. A real irony of Russia's agricultural reform is that the U.S. used the monetization of food aid in Russia in 1998/99 as a way to capitalize the pension funds. This enabled the Russian government to move pensioners off the farm accounts and to rebuild the large farms as commercial enterprises, especially for the production of wheat. Russia now competes with the U.S. in the wheat export market.

Q: Did you and Jim Norris have frequent engagements with the ambassador?

SIMMONS: Jim Norris or Roger (my husband) went to the Ambassador's senior staff meeting every morning. I was the USAID representative on occasion. Ambassador Pickering was an extremely experienced Ambassador and skilled diplomat. There was a lot about USAID's program that he appreciated and, overall, he was supportive of the program. I think his focus was on larger issues having to do with the U.S.-Russia political and military relationship, but he also appreciated the opportunities for economic and grassroots democracy reform that USAID was pursuing.

Q: It was more the idea of having AID present at all that he was opposed to?

SIMMONS: That's how I would interpret it, yes. Not so much what we were actually doing, but the belief that USAID is appropriate for low-income countries while other organizations – like the World Bank, the International Finance Corporation, ExIm Bank, Treasury, or, now, even the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), should work with more "developed" countries. This is a complicated issue that continues to draw attention from Congress, State Department, and USAID leaders. How and when should USAID-assisted countries "graduate" from foreign assistance?

My view is that this is a budgetary and institutional issue masquerading as a philosophical or political one. Every nation needs support from other nations periodically – look at U.S. –U.K. collaboration in 2007 when financial markets crashed. But needs – whether technical, financial, or human – vary significantly across time. Why should the United States "graduate" from its dependence on immigrant seasonal farm labor when it can be clearly beneficial to American consumers wanting fresh fruits and vegetables, the farmers who grow them, and the families of the migrants?

Based, in part, on my Russia experience, I think there is room for redefining relationships of mutual cooperation and assistance in more creative, but respectful, ways. I have been working recently, for example, to foster a relationship between Chile and Mozambique on developing systems for building and managing public-private partnerships for infrastructure development. But there is little support for "assistance" efforts that fall outside of the traditional official development assistance (ODA) kinds of relationships.

Q: But overall, do you believe that much of the actual project or program work that was underway was effective or not? Or maybe you can't generalize.

SIMMONS: I can't generalize. There were some projects that were not effective as the initial analysis was wrong, or there were too many pieces of support missing, or there was a lack of political will either on our part or the Russians. There were other projects that were effective but operating at too small a scale to really make a sustainable impact; in some cases, the World Bank came in to scale up pilots carried out by USAID or other bilateral donors. There were other projects, such as those establishing the stock market and promoting better bank supervision, that were foundational in creating a market economy; their continued effectiveness depends on the functioning of the overall political economy going forward. As I mentioned, I think that privatization of housing was an enormously important political reform as it made it possible for Estonia, Lithuania and Latvia to move forward as independent countries. You should interview Carol Peasley and George Deikun to get their take on that.

Q: Did you, were you able to select the partners that AID relied on, whether it was the Urban Institute or others? Or were those pretty much set? I mean how much were you in a position as the program director to initiate some of the contacts and call upon the right people to fit into this Moscow AID program?

SIMMONS: The start-up of the Russia program from 1992-94 apparently involved a number of sole source procurements (contracts) and grants; some seemed to be politically-motivated, while others were simply necessary to get actions underway. During my time in Russia, we largely did competitive procurement. We did, however, use an innovative mechanism – the Indefinite Quantity Contract, or IQC – that enabled us to do non-competed task orders with firms that had already won umbrella contracts under a full-and-open IQC competition. We very rarely did a sole source for program design and implementation, although we continued a relationship with the University of North Carolina to conduct periodic surveys of socio-economic and nutrition conditions in households across the country.

Some of the early contracts/grants proved to be critical for launching the development assistance program, while others pursued ideas that proved to be unsuited to the Russian environment and the time required for an idea to come to fruition, e.g., transforming a state research institute into a land grant university within a few years. The program managed by the Urban Institute may have been a sole source because that's such an unusual area for USAID, but it proved to be critical to the housing privatization and, more broadly, the development of a real estate market. The Institute continued to work with the Russian counterpart it established to address other social development issues in the years after I left Russia. The selection of Parsons for the construction of the military housing was, I believe, a competitive award as were at least some of the contracts for support of privatization efforts and stock market development.

Q: And about the Russian employees at the USAID mission. You mentioned that Rog had worked with them a lot in making sure they would be effective. How crucial were they to the success of the program?

SIMMONS: Both the Personal Service Contractors (PSCs) who were Russian-speaking and the Russian Foreign Service Nationals were critical to the USAID effort in Russia. Some of the USAID PSCs and FSNs have gone on to have terrific careers outside of USAID. Jeanne Bourgault, a key PSC in the Office of Democracy/Governance, is now the CEO of Internews. She led in the privatization and expansion of Russian news outlets and introduction of the concept of media freedom – a concept that, you will note, has been rolled back in today's Russia. The Russian PSC who headed the small business unit in the Private Sector office is now in the U.S. and continues to engage in SME development. My administrative assistant, a very talented Russian woman, has become a Third Country National for USAID as a contracts officer; she did a successful stint in Iraq. The Russian PSC who supported the stock market effort is now at the IMF here in Washington.

Q: Any last thoughts about Moscow before we move back to the United States and to Washington?

SIMMONS: Perhaps this. The expanded involvement of the State Department in the oversight of the development programs in Eastern Europe and Newly-Independent States and the creation of the Special Advisor positions and special offices led to a model of State/USAID interaction that has not, in my view, been productive for either party. The 2006 establishment of State/F (the Office of Foreign Assistance) mirrored the structure introduced in the Eastern Europe/Newly-Independent States era. I think the approach has contributed little either to the quality or efficiency of the AID program. Dual reporting always takes time and there has been little value added from the State coordination or oversight. The decision to place the management of the PEPFAR program in the State Department– where the PEPFAR Director reports directly to the Secretary of State -- also built upon the Russia/NIS experience and the whole-of-government involvement in the Russian assistance program. I also think, with no actual proof, that the State/AID experiences in Europe and Eurasia contributed to the decision to establish the Millennium Challenge Corporation as a separate entity rather than as a new program approach with USAID. The MCC Board is chaired by the Secretary of State and the Administrator of USAID is one among many members. The combination of diplomacy and development authorities within State has placed USAID in a distinctly inferior position in the distribution of organizational power.

Q: But is the value-added ever above zero?

SIMMONS: Close cooperation between State and USAID is essential to defining a clear and coherent foreign policy and its implementation in specific countries. Ambassadors have the responsibility to lead the US government representatives within a specific foreign country. But how that engagement or cooperation is structured and managed, I would argue, should not involve duplication of responsibilities for program design and budget management or a strongly-hierarchical relationship.

USAID obviously benefited from State involvement when unanticipated political or diplomatic roadblocks emerged in Eastern Europe or the former Soviet Union. But I believe there was little benefit from the budgetary or management oversight provided by the Special Advisors or their offices. It was not clear from a field perspective, for example, that State Department testimony regarding the Eastern European or Former Soviet Union/Newly-Independent States programs was highly effective in expanding or deepening Congressional support.

One also wonders whether the sense of accountability – both for political reform as a key interest of the State Department and for economic, health, and environmental reforms as key interest areas for USAID – was appropriately apportioned between State and AID. In retrospect, I can see where the assignment of responsibility for representing U.S. interests was somewhat confused. It would be interesting to inquire whether Ambassador Pickering's views of S/NIS, for example, are more positive than mine.

Q: So, with all these issues, were those three years in Moscow enjoyable?

SIMMONS: The Russia stint was intense but very enjoyable. Learning about Russia and watching the substantial changes taking place in Moscow and the economy more broadly was so much fun. Even the heavy winter snows were fine; waking up in the morning to the sound of men shoveling the sidewalks below our windows was a wonderful memory, as was the sight of Russians eating ice cream cones outdoors when the temperatures were below freezing. Riding the trolley to work every day was always interesting. Roger and I treasured our spring and fall afternoons people-watching in our neighborhood park, Patriarch's Pond. The art scene in Russia is amazing. We visited all the parks in the Moscow vicinity – even though our car suffered piece-by-piece removal of parts when parked in front of the Embassy! – and marveled at the Stalin-era canals and the more contemporary carpeting of the forest picnic areas with smashed glass.

Working six days a week was fine as I believed that the work that AID was doing was important to developing a new relationship between the U.S. and Russia and, we believed, potentially life-changing for so many ordinary Russians. In 1995-97, there was a consensus that with the end of the Soviet Union and the apparent collapse of a socialist/communist economy and the formation of a government supported by “the people” -- Yeltsin climbing on the tank -- that there was an opportunity to demonstrate how a new economic approach would lead to many Russians realizing the positive benefits that a market-oriented democracy could generate. We in AID believed that we had something to offer and we engaged with other donors -- the British, the Germans, the World Bank – to pursue this great enterprise of restructuring the society and the economy.

AID was perhaps more focused on supporting citizen participation in governance and democracy than other donors. We supported NGOs and media development to enable people to get information from a variety of sources. I visited a new, privately-run TV station in Novosibirsk being supported by AID at one point; they were delighted to find that they could support their newsgathering by running crawls on the bottom of the screen offering goods and services to their viewers. Now, whether that democracy/governance agenda was too ambitious, and whether the level of support that AID offered was even close to realizing lasting results in the topic of another discussion. You should have a conversation with Bill Hammink about that.

The budget for AID –a pipeline of a billion dollars -- seemed pretty impressive but the scope of activities undertaken was herculean. By 1997, Congressional commitments were definitely waning, expectations were that the development efforts should be moving toward sustainability (thus laying the groundwork for “graduation”), and our annual appropriation was cut back to $150 million. Congress has a great appetite for rapid progress and an assumption of responsibility for continuing efforts from the partner country. Somehow the lessons of experience don’t seem to be understood the same way by everyone. We’re watching the same process go on right now in Afghanistan. There seems to be a feeling that after 10 years of assistance, everything should be fine and we can now move on to other more politically pressing issues.

There is a myth about the Marshall Plan that lives on. The Marshall Plan is often remembered as having provided a substantial amount of funding for a period of five years and, within this short period, successfully – and “sustainably”-- transforming post-war Europe, mending shattered societies, economies and governments into a set of functioning nations fully ready to peacefully collaborate on rebuilding their nations as well as creating a strong union of former enemies. The reality, of course, is that achieving this goal remains a work in progress for the European Union.

Q: How would you assess your Russian experience and its impact on your thoughts and career? Do you feel differently today than when you left Moscow in 1997? And what is your bottom line on this experience and what you learned from it?

SIMMONS: The experience of doing development assistance work in an industrialized country that had been perceived as a political and economic rival of the United States for so many years highlighted for me the need to move beyond the dichotomy of "developed" and "developing" countries. These categories are not fixed and have little meaning. Even categorization by income level (the average per capita GDP) has proven to be misleading; Nigeria is very proud of being a "middle income" country but it does not have the institutions, capacities, or political stability that most people would associate with that status. One might better consider it still to be "transforming."

In some ways, all countries are "developing" as their demographic profiles change (more urban, less rural; aging populations), new public investments are required (e.g., for facilitating access to new information technologies, accommodating self-driving vehicles), and competing political and social ideologies vie for ascendancy and shift power from one group to another. My Russian experience convinced me that we in the U.S. need to take more variables into account as we think about development: the maturity of various institutions, emerging issues like climate change, areas of social and economic transformation (the digital revolution), and areas of weakness, fragility, or potential conflict.

Russia was a mature communist economy but had institutions entirely unsuited to the challenges of a democratic market economy. If the country was going to be serious about achieving the goal of abandoning the tenets of communisms and adopting a more democratic, market-oriented approach– which Russia seemed to be in the mid-1990s – then wholesale transformation and innovation were required at all levels of the economy and society. In that case, the input of countries that already had formed democratic market economies – like the U.S., Germany, the U.K. – was clearly useful. I am not sure donors like AID always picked the right targets or partners to work with, and I know we were overly-optimistic about the potential for change, but when I was in Russia I felt that there was a congruence of goals that drove the efforts we made to support development in the country and the broad participation of civil society and aspiring entrepreneurs.

When Russia changed its mind about pursuing the goal of a democratic market economy, financial resources were flowing in from oil sales and the modernization of Moscow and other cities was well underway, the input of external development assistance organizations was less relevant. So Russia went from being a mature industrialized economy with a highly-repressive social system to being a transforming economy with a weak commitment to social change and an aging, shrinking population. The roadmap for change was being drafted and redrafted by the political leaders, economic oligarchs, and civil society across the country. And it is not entirely clear to me what pathway the country will take over the next decade or two.

There's a phrase that's often used in AID about the aim of "working ourselves out of a job." So long as there are political, environmental, economic, and social challenges that are impeding the achievement of local, national or global goals, there is always a need for development-oriented institutions to facilitate solutions. The new SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals, agreed in the UN in 2016) are in fact "global goals" and recognize that they will require actions in all countries – not just the "developing" countries – if they are to be achieved by 2030. There is a new universality in the SDGs and less emphasis on the donor-recipient relationship.

The 2015 Paris Climate Conference (COP 21) was also a step in this direction of sustained, long-term, mutually-accountable change. Much of the global change everyone wants – reduction of greenhouse gas emissions – involves all countries and mutual efforts will be needed to make this happen. The Paris Accords demonstrated that different countries have different responsibilities and are pursuing different development pathways but it also emphasized mutual accountability and the benefits of international collaboration in many areas (e.g., in creating new technologies, global carbon markets, etc.).

So, in spite of Ambassador Pickering's discomfort with the idea of Russia accepting technical and financial assistance from a number of bilateral and international development organizations, including USAID, I concluded that, when provided with respect, such technical and financial assistance was both relevant and beneficial to many Russians.

BACK TO WASHINGTON: THE GLOBAL BUREAU AND THE BUREAU FOR ECONOMIC GROWTH, AGRICULTURE AND TRADE

Q. Okay, so how did you manage to get back to Washington and were you happy about it?

SIMMONS: Returning to Washington from Moscow in 1997 was a total surprise. A former PPC colleague, Ann Van Dusen, called me from Washington one day and asked if I would like to be the Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Office of Economic Growth and Agricultural Development (DAA/EGAD) in AID Washington's Global Bureau. I was astonished as I had had little contact with the technical support offered by the Global Bureau. However, I thought it would be a great professional challenge and accepted. I had met the AA/Global Bureau, Sally Shelton-Colby, on her visits to Moscow and knew AID Administrator Brian Atwood personally from his visits to Kenya following the Rwandan genocide. Brian was very welcoming as he followed up on the invitation extended by Ann and I knew I was excited to reconnect with lots of colleagues I had worked with over the years. My husband was able to find a position in Africa Bureau. We moved back to DC in the late summer of 1997.

Apparently, Janet Ballantyne had been designated as the DAA/EGAD (succeeding Walter Bollinger, my old boss in Africa Bureau's DFA days) but I believe she was reassigned as a Mission Director before she took up the position. My background in agriculture proved to be a strong point in my recruitment for the job. I knew that the Agency had not hired any agriculture officers since 1991 or 1992 and that several had been affected by the RIF in 1996. So this was an opportunity to refocus on my experience in agricultural programming from the world outside of Russia.

However, I discovered three challenging things upon arrival in Washington: the budgets available to EGAD (which included microenterprise development and the Development Credit Authority program as well as the Offices of Economic Growth and Agricultural Development) were pitifully small and what central funding there was, was largely Congressionally-earmarked; the U.S. land grant universities were seriously upset with the Clinton Administration for never recognizing the importance of agriculture and naming members of the Congressionally-mandated Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD); and the DA/AID Carol Lancaster really believed that USAID had no role in economic development programming and provided no support for the economists in EGAD.

Q: So, as head of economic growth and ag development, what were you responsible for?

SIMMONS: EGAD as part of the central Global Bureau was responsible for strategic planning and central funding for research, managing central programs/projects that missions could "buy into" for services, supporting in-house learning, providing technical staff support out to requesting missions, and maintaining professional linkages with colleagues and organizations in the Washington area (the World Bank, OPIC, USDA, etc.). EGAD had both Foreign Service Officers and General Service (GS) staff and we had a small number of Fellows (mostly from the American Association for the Advancement of Science) and personal service contract (PSC) staff. Overall, I think there were about 200 people on staff – at all levels.

The Office of Agriculture had a small team of three people who had PhDs in biotechnology. They managed a small project with Michigan State University to introduce national leaders in some countries (Kenya, Indonesia) to the concepts of agricultural biotechnology and the creation of genetically-modified organisms (GMOs). This area was so new and the staff so specialized that they were the sole in-house support for mission programs addressing these issues although they could also draw on technical assistance from a support project with Michigan State University.

Q: Were you able to concentrate on your real love, i.e. agriculture, or were you pulled in so many directions as a Washington bureaucrat?

SIMMONS: I did spend a lot of time, especially in my first year in Washington, focusing on the agenda of the Office of Agriculture. I found out that it was much less effective than I had realized; there was little cooperation with the economists on key market and enterprise issues and staff guarded their own projects jealously. Since I am an agricultural economist by training, I always expected the bridging of disciplines to be much easier.

Q: What was wrong?

SIMMONS: There were few Foreign Service agricultural officers in the Office– because of the freeze on hiring – and many of the GS people were well entrenched in their own areas of focus. For that matter, few missions had more than one Foreign Service BS-10 agricultural officer, so interaction between field staff and Washington staff was limited.

There were no all-Agency training programs for the agricultural staff. And the land grant universities that believed the Clinton Administration had ignored them were vocal in their requests for an improved – and better-funded – relationship with USAID.

Q: But globally did AID still have a fairly substantial agriculture program?

SIMMONS: No. In 1997, as far as we were able to figure out, the level of obligations for the entire global investment in agricultural development for AID was $276 million. And this was at a time when AID had a development assistance (DA) budget of approximately $3 billion. This level of agricultural support represented a sharp decrease from earlier years when AID was a leader in the field. AID was a founding member of the Consultative Group on International Agricultural Research in 1971, joined with others in major agricultural reform programs like the PRMC in Mali (where, for example, the mission portfolio also included programs in livestock development, agricultural research, and integrated regional development in a cotton/maize zone), and had an extensive program of university partnerships for agricultural research – the Collaborative Research Program (or CRSPs) – and development of expertise through large training programs.

Q: So how did you address this situation?

SIMMONS: The first area of action was to respond to the land grant universities' demand that a Board for International Food and Agricultural Development (BIFAD) be constituted, as required by law, to advise the Administrator. Ed Schuh, a long-time leader at the University of Minnesota, persuaded the Administrator that refusing to name a BIFAD was a political liability and was giving the Agency a bad name on the Hill and in the academic community. Ed suggested names of people to serve on the BIFAD and the process moved forward. I would have to check but I think we had an initial BIFAD meeting by 1999.

A bigger area of action was to solve the budget battles between the Global Bureau's Office of Environment and the Office of Agriculture. David Hales, the DAA for the Environment Office, was certain that "sustainable agriculture" fell under his authorities because of the way that appropriations were done; our Office of Agriculture staff were persuaded that they shared responsibility. The AA/G, Sally Shelton-Colby, helped to referee some of the conflicts and, ultimately, some of the funding for sustainable agriculture was directed to support CGIAR centers that did work on resource use (water, soils, forests) and, I think, for a few other Office of Agriculture-managed programs.

Q: Was this because they are just bureaucratic issues or was it because the people involved insisted on keeping "agriculture" and "environment" in separate boxes?-

SIMMONS: It is probably a bit of both. The reality is, though, that Congressional earmarks definitively separated them. Agricultural funding was heavily earmarked for specific programs, including support for the land-grant university-led Collaborative Research Support Programs, collaborative research between Israel and countries in the Middle East, the operations of International Fertilizer Development Center, and others.

At one point, the central agriculture budget managed by EGAD's Office of Agriculture was 110 percent earmarked. So to try to provide a little more technical leadership to the Agency – as in the area of biotechnology, for example – we had to try to loosen up the boundaries. We didn't have a penny for any new projects because all the available budgetary appropriations were already spoken for.

However, we identified three projects that were the legacy of prior projects started with universities in the early 1980s that had gradually lost support and funding: a vegetable project with Idaho State University, a project on grain storage with Kansas State University, and project with Louisiana State -- on fish, as I recall. The total budget in 1998 for all three projects was about $1 million. They each had a full-time staff person working on the project headquartered in their university but that left very little in the way of resources to actually do something beyond making a couple of field trips or holding a conference.

At the same time, we were beginning to realize that there were new opportunities for modernizing food systems, especially by introducing new processing technologies and improving food safety management. So we proposed to close out the three legacy projects that were arguably not accomplishing much and use those resources to move this new project forward. A couple of really great Foreign Service Officers in the Office of Agriculture took up the design challenge, consulted widely with the food technology industry, and brought in food safety experts. The project was designed to be a pilot effort, with missions contributing funds ("buying in") for initiatives specific to their local challenges. I thought it was an excellent design and would provide both new information and a valuable service to many mission agricultural programs. But, of course, you can imagine the flood of letters we received from the Hill in defense of the programs we planned to zero out in order to release resources for the new activity!

Q: But you weathered that.

SIMMONS: We did, yes. We did a full and open competition and awarded cooperative agreements to two land grant universities to lead the new initiatives: Michigan State University (for plants) and Louisiana State (for animals).

Q: Did you learn from that how to cope with congressional pressures? Did you find a way around these objections? Did you just speak truth to the staff ?

SIMMONS: Yes. In a couple of areas we developed good relationships and had productive discussions with the Hill. We managed to persuade Congressional supporters that an unconditional grant to the government of Israel's development assistance agency (MASHAV) – which was also coming out of the budget of the Office of Agriculture and PPC – could be replaced by our efforts to develop mission-funded programs involving collaboration between MASHAV and USAID. Given the migration of Jews from the former Soviet Union to Israel in the 1990s, for example, there was a real opportunity to foster collaborations between MASHAV and USAID in health and agriculture in Central Asia. While EGAD did not recuperate the total level of centrally-budgeted resources for

MASHAV, our efforts to engage missions led to the development of a more effective field program relationship. The Legislative and Public Affairs Bureau in Washington, the Mission Director in Israel (West Bank/Gaza program), Larry Garber, and the Mission Director in the Central Asia program, Glenn Anders, were all very helpful in making this happen. MASHAV hosted us in Jerusalem and we tried to ensure that this was seen as a positive step forward in U.S.-Israeli relationships.

Q: So did these positive outcomes on relationships with the Hill have positive impacts in other ways?

SIMMONS: Not really. Each issue falls within the domain of different Congressional committees and individuals. The EGAD biotech program, for example, would not have happened without the budgetary earmarking by Senator Kit Bond from Missouri, the home of the Danforth Center and Monsanto. Biodiversity conservation was an important priority for Senator Pat Leahy and his staffer, Tim Rieser, so that was consistently earmarked. At one point, we had more money earmarked for biodiversity conservation than we had for agricultural production.

There were many meetings on what was called the “hydraulics” of budgets with various staffers on both Senate and House sides. At one time, energy was a priority so agriculture funding was cut. But this affected agricultural work of high importance to other members of Congress, so there was pushback and compromise. The one area that was always ripe for budget-trimming was economics; EGAD’s lead Office for Economic Growth in 1998 had a total budget of something like $800,000. This had to be stretched to cover analysis (a major issue with the collapse of financial systems in the Asian Tiger economies), research, training, field support, everything. I never felt that I developed the kind of relationship with the Hill budget staffers to develop the kind of trust or persuasive arguments that were needed to agree on achieve EGAD goals for the Agency.

I am sure I made lots of rookie mistakes as a senior manager in Washington, but I also knew enough to work to build a sound program in spite of obstacles political and financial. Our economists, for example, in spite of low levels of budget support, more than proved their worth in dealing with the Asian financial crisis of 1998. They were also critical in following up on the “Battle in Seattle”, the U.S.-hosted World Trade Organization (WTO) meeting in Seattle that resulted in disaster. Marches about GMOs turned into violent demonstrations, multiple proposals regarding trade reforms in developing countries were put on the table, and African countries concerned with their competitiveness in the trade arena demanded that more assistance be directed to trade capacity-building and trade facilitation.

With support from Jim Michel, the AID Counselor newly-returned from a stint with the OECD/DAC, the economists in EGAD and the Africa Bureau significantly expanded collaboration with USTR and the World Bank on trade issues after the Seattle debacle. The EGAD staff and the Africa Bureau technical staff to work together on proposals for trade capacity building with a short-term target of strengthening the role of African trade negotiators in the next round of WTO discussions in Geneva. It was apparent that many trade reps from Africa were going to WTO meetings without having been fully briefed or understanding the details of the issues.

So EGAD economists put together a program of technical support for developing country representatives to Geneva and then for the trade people in the back offices back in their home countries. USTR was not totally persuaded that this would be a “help” to the U.S. agenda, but, again, with Jim Michel’s hat as a former Ambassador fully in place, the team put together dog and pony shows showing that AID staffers actually understood trade issues and could provide assistance that would strengthen negotiations and be a win-win for everybody. Bob Zoellick as the head of USTR supported this collaboration and EGAD’s economic growth program was literally rebuilt on the back of the trade capacity-building program. EGAD took responsibility for setting up a database that made transparent the breadth of U.S. government support for trade capacity-building; USTR was happy to take ownership. The information was very useful in helping our missions understand where the support capacities were. We did a lot more work in terms of liaising with the World Bank and others on trade issues, even though it was largely staff work as there was little funding for contracting deeper analyses on our own. The missions had money, though, and once they kind of understood how trade facilitation, how doing things and counting things like improving border crossings, improving standards, all of this was actually going to help their programs work better they really got onboard. So EGAD ended up being the force behind a really helpful program, helpful to the USG, helpful to USTR and helpful to our counterparts in various missions and countries. The CAFTA initiative benefited enormously from the analytics and support of the EGAD economics team.

Anecdote: One of the economists, David Cowles, managed to get the last seat on the official flight taking the US team to Doha in 2001 – where the Doha Development Round was launched. He was literally in the last seat at the back of the plane going out to Doha, but, after impressing the USTR leadership with his useful interactions with leaders from developing countries, was promoted to a seat near the front of the plane on the way back. David described his strategy as “coffee diplomacy.” He invited representatives for coffee and brought up (on his computer) the relevant parts of the database to ground discussions of potential efforts in their specific countries with a detailed knowledge of USAID investments to date.

EGAD’s microenterprise team recognized that Congressional earmarks for this field could enable USAID to exert substantial leadership in the global push to build microfinance institutions and worked with great success to tell the story of their work, based on close monitoring and evaluation of the projects around the world. And EGAD’s Development Credit Authority program provided risk sharing on key projects in various countries, including working with banks and NGOs to get farm credit out. So there were rewarding initiatives throughout EGAD.

Q: It sounds like it. And in these five years that you were there (1997-2002), it sounds as though you had this success on the trade, economic growth side; what are the things that *you most remember as being contributions on the agriculture side that you were able to achieve?*

SIMMONS: The Office of Agriculture staff had participated actively in the 1996 World Food Summit, working closely and collaboratively with Tim Wirth, the Undersecretary of State for Global Affairs, and his staff. While, as I have indicated, the Agriculture Office was demoralized by constant shrinkage in the USAID agricultural budget and the lack of Administration attention, I was always surprised by how effective staffers could be when they exercised their expertise and judgment.

Chris Brown, a Foreign Service Office with significant field experience, for example, brought the issue of a cocoa disease decimating Brazil's production to the fore. He single-handedly worked with industry experts and built the beginnings of a public-private partnership with Mars, Inc. to raise the profile of cocoa research and supply chain management in West Africa, which produces the majority of the world's cocoa. This led to work on reducing child labor in cocoa production as well as new work on the genetic diversity of the world's cocoa. While Andrew Natsios believes he invented public-private partnerships with the establishment of the Global Development Alliance program in 2002, the USAID-Mars partnership was already strong by that time.

We also managed to support: a university-led revision of Title XII (the law authorizing agricultural development assistance) that was helpful in clarifying some of the changes happening in the global agricultural scene; the establishment of a new BIFAD – recognizing the leadership and support from Ed Schuh at the University of Minnesota; and the start-up of a new project to support mission efforts to introduce new food technologies and improve food safety. A conflict with the Environment Office leadership over who had responsibility for – and access to funding for – "sustainable agriculture" periodically erupted but provided a good opportunity to coordinate on climate change and biotechnology issues.

The biotech team was incredibly productive, not only leading on the science but on science policy. While there were only two or three biotechnology PhDs on the team at any one time, they were supported by the agreement with Michigan State University. Josette Lewis, as a AAAS Fellow, and Rob Bertram, a GS staffer with a long history of working with the CGIAR Centers, provided important intellectual leadership and good activity management to introduce our own mission staff and their counterparts to the emerging possibilities of GMOs (genetically modified organisms) and the institutional requirements that were needed to introduce or use them.

The area in which I was a complete failure was in restructuring the research programs that were carried out by the U.S. universities as Collaborative Research Support Programs (or CRSPs). We had been invited to provide substantial input for the revision of Title XII, the FAA legislation that governs the USAID-university relationship. Texas A&M colleagues led on the rewrite and it was sponsored by Congressman Kevin Brady from Texas. As I recall, USAID had three points of input: adding nutrition to the areas of interest shared by USAID and the CRSPs, bringing the private sector into international research partnerships, and suggesting that U.S. land grant universities should collaborate more fully with the international research centers funded by the donor-members of the CGIAR. At the time, the land-grant universities that were managing or participating in the CRSPs were highly-protective of their funding and authorities; few embraced deeper collaboration with the international centers.

*Q: That's a lesson that I would have thought lots of people should have learned over the years, that if you can get people on the outside to pursue exactly what you want done there's much more chance of it being successful_*

SIMMONS: Yes, I believed that, with this new language, we could reframe the research relationships that USAID supported to be more complementary, that is, with collaborative work involving the U.S. universities already participating in CRSPs, the CGIAR international centers, and other university partners that were not land-grant universities. As we were moving into biotech, it is was apparent that we could usefully draw more effectively on the strong life sciences capacities of universities not in the land grant system. So my strategy was to build on the legislative reform to reduce the sniping that was going on as various institutions competed for the limited USAID resources, and gradually develop a more focused research budget for the Agency as a whole.

Q: And were you able to get funding for it? You had said you viewed this as a failure?

SIMMONS: It was a failure. At the time, the total agricultural research spending (central funds from EGAD and some mission-funded programs) was about $35 million. Thanks to the Office of Agriculture oversight, it was about evenly split between the CGIAR support and the eight or so CRSPs operational at the time. But I felt that many of the CRSPs were not strategically aligned with what USAID was doing. Just to cite an example: the sorghum and millet CRSP (which had started around 1978) had a major millet breeding program in Niger. However, as a result of opening the former Soviet Union program, AID had completely closed down the Niger development mission in 1992. While humanitarian assistance was being provided to Niger, largely by NGOs, USAID had no collateral support to offer the Nigerien research team that the CRSP was supporting.

I proposed that, given the presence of a large agricultural development program in Mali, it would be more appropriate to shift the CRSP's research attention to that country. This was considered to be heresy and did not win me any friends among the CRSPs. I took a more positive tack with the Integrated Pest Management (IPM) CRSP and suggested that they reframe it as a Horticultural CRSP. All of the IPM work was being done on vegetables but, with the more limited focus on pest management, no attention was being given to challenges in marketing the vegetables. This proposal was even less popular! While BIFAD stepped forward to support for a process of rethinking the mandates of the CRSPs, there was total resistance to changing any of the current portfolio – although several good ideas for expanding it were floated!

So, for me, a full supporter of agricultural research as a driver of agricultural growth, this was a painful failure. When Raj Shah became the Administrator of USAID in 2010, he took action from the top. He abolished the CRSP (Collaborative Research Support Programs) title and declared they would henceforth be called Innovation Labs, and, in addition, there would be more of them! It was so bold and daring! There are now 20-some Innovation Labs, including one on Horticulture and one on Nutrition!

Q: But not for the most part with universities?

SIMMONS: Yes, I believe that the Innovation Labs are all led by universities – but not necessarily land grants. And AID plays a much larger role in reviewing their work plans, and their work is more closely linked with USAID's Feed the Future strategy.

Q: You were ahead of your time.

SIMMONS: I might have been ahead of my time but the acceptance of the Innovation Lab concept also reflects the dramatically-changed funding situation. The global food price shocks of 2007/08 and the leadership of President Obama on making assistance for food security a priority had a lot to do with it. One principle of successful change management: Do it when you can grease the skids with extra resources. When budgets are going up, it's so much easier to be creative and shift things around. When I was in EGAD, money for agricultural development was so tight that it was just ridiculous.

Q: Was this part of an overall scarcity of budget for the Agency as a whole or part of a larger pattern of low funding levels for agricultural development?

SIMMONS: It was a larger pattern of declining and low support for agricultural development. The World Bank between 1986 and 2002 cut its agriculture program funding by 85 percent. USAID bottomed out in 1997 but did not really increase funding very significantly until 2009. The CGIAR was supporting 16 international agricultural research centers and USAID remained a stalwart in providing "unrestricted" (or flexible) funding for many of the centers. But the CGIAR system as a whole was struggling. I took the U.S. chair at the donors' council in 1998 and really got involved in process of identifying new resources that might be tapped, increasing the focus and effectiveness of ongoing programs at the centers, and the like. Ismael Serageldin, a Vice President at the World Bank, was serving as the director of the CGIAR at the time and he was unrelenting in devising strategies for increasing funding support. But from 1992 to 2002, total funding pretty much went straight down. When Ian Johnson, a World Bank VP for Environment, replaced Serageldin in 2000, it was thought that he might be able to bring more environmental resources to the CGIAR agenda as well as to identify more non-traditional partners and funding resources (i.e., not bilateral governments or multilateral institutions).

Ian Johnson did come up with a reform plan that focused on increasing the efficiency of the system so that available funding would go further. He reduced the number of meetings attended by all donors and Centers, with the hope of achieving cost-savings with virtual meetings. But initial moves toward reducing the number of centers supported by the CGIAR as a cost-saving measure were largely rejected, although one Center was closed for lack of support. One new program was funded by the Netherlands to more broadly address water-related issues; led by IWMI, one of the CGIAR centers, it was envisioned that resources from other entities specifically interested in water would join the program in a "beyond the CGIAR" effort.

Ian also supported the formation of the Global Crop Diversity Trust, a new entity that came out of discussions in 2000 at the annual meeting among several of the consultants on non-traditional donors and several of us seeking solutions to the CGIAR's budgetary woes. The idea behind the Trust was the establishment of an endowment (fund) that would generate enough interest each year to ensure that all the CGIAR gene banks were funded in perpetuity. At that time, each Center was struggling to find enough annual funding to keep their precious germplasm resources viable. At the World Summit on Sustainable Development in Johannesburg in 2002, Andrew Natsios was asked to make unscripted remarks at a CGIAR side event and called the formation of the Trust a "no brainer." While the Global Crop Diversity Trust is now operational, it has not yet amassed an endowment sufficient to the challenge. A Norwegian contribution to establish the Svalbard Global Seed Vault has, however, ensured a back-up plan for much of the germplasm held in CGIAR genebanks and brought public attention to the issue.

Katherine Sierra, a VP for Infrastructure at the Bank, took over the CGIAR reins in 2007 or so, at a time when funding remained very tight. By that time I had left USAID. However, I was on the Boards of two CGIAR centers, so I remained very engaged in the challenge of global agricultural research. Bill and Melinda Gates's interest in agricultural research being done by the centers resulted in an inflow of funding to the CGIAR starting in about 2004. Their initial approach to funding (under the tenure of Raj Shah as the director for agriculture at the Gates Foundation) was highly disruptive as they encouraged competition among the centers for funding. Many saw this competitive approach as eroding the desired collaboration among the centers "as a system." Many European donors were also nervous about this "private" involvement, especially as the Foundation capped funding for overheads at 15% -- a figure below most centers' actual overheads. However, now the Gates Foundation is a major source of funding for the system and a strong partner. The original private sector foundations that had been important in starting the system – Rockefeller and Ford – have pretty much withdrawn from the CGIAR.

The global food price shocks of 2008 had a silver lining for the fortunes of the international agricultural research centers as they sparked a rise in the financial fortunes of the CGIAR.

Q: So how did you move from being the DAA/EGAD to being the Assistant Administrator (AA) of the Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade Bureau?

SIMMONS: In 2000/01, with the election of George W. Bush, it was evident that the Clinton/Atwood decision to create a Global Bureau with separate technical divisions (the Offices of Health, Environment, Education, Women in Development, Democracy/Governance, and EGAD) was going to be reconsidered by the incoming Administration.

As DAA/EGAD, I did several briefings for Andrew Natsios, the incoming A/AID, reflecting his strong interests in and commitments to agricultural development. In July, 2000, he asked if I would consider serving as the politically-appointed and Senate-confirmed Assistant Administrator for a new Economic Growth, Agriculture, and Trade Bureau (EGAT). It was intended that the new EGAT Bureau would include the former Office of Education, the former Office of Women in Development, and the Office of Environment. Democracy and governance was shifted to the new Bureau for Democracy, Conflict and Humanitarian Assistance (DCHA).

I agreed to Andrew’s proposal, interviewed with the White House personnel team, and started the extensive clearance process. The security clearance was well underway when the events of September 11, 2001 occurred. I was informed that the FBI office in Baltimore no longer had time to process my paperwork, so my actual Senate hearing and appointment did not happen until April 2002. Fortunately, I was allowed to continue in my Foreign Service role as an advisor in the new EGAT Bureau, where we spent a lot of effort considering potential organizational formats for managing this complex set of mandates.

Jock Conly was named as the acting Assistant Administrator (AA) for the EGAT Bureau as my clearance process went forward, with the understanding that he would become the DAA when I received my Senate confirmation. Working with Jock was a delight. He had been a DAA in what is now the Europe and Eurasia Bureau and I had worked fairly closely with him on program development and management issues from Russia. He had been a program officer with USAID/Pakistan in the early 1990s and was a good friend of Jim Norris, the Russian Mission Director. He had also been the USAID Mission Director in Kenya at the time of the bombing there, giving him amazing management experience. We had lots of mutual friends among the Kenyans as well as with the development community in Nairobi.

Andrew Natsios insisted that I come to all the senior staff meetings and simply sit in the back row as former DAA/EGAD. We knew from the start of his tenure that he had strong interests in reorganizing USAID. The former Global Bureau was not to his liking so a set of new Bureaus was created and we worked to see how the offices and programs could be restructured to work more effectively. I, for example, wanted to avoid the “sustainable agriculture” tussles of the prior administration. The model that we came up with for EGAT was bringing together the environment office, the education office, the women in development office, the microfinance office, the office of agriculture, the office of economic growth, and the DCA office in a flattened structure with each office chief a key part of an ongoing senior management team. We made a play for the office of democracy and governance because we felt that that made a stronger linkage with policies in all the other technical offices, but Andrew was convinced it was essential forming the new DCHA Bureau: democracy, conflict, and humanitarian affairs. DCHA also included the office of foreign disaster assistance, the office of transition initiatives, and a new group focused on conflict mitigation and management-

Q: How did Andrew go about sorting this out? Was it an open process of discussion? Were there a handful of you that were his advisors and you were sitting in a closed room somewhere sorting all this out? How engaged was the rest of the Agency in this reorganization?

SIMMONS: The reorganization process was very participatory and open. At one point, it became very acrimonious as one of Andrew's first decisions was to shrink the regional bureaus and to transfer all their technical staff the technical bureaus (EGAT, Health, DCHA). He was particularly concerned with ensuring that there was sufficient agriculture staffing to support an expanded initiative in this sector. By taking all the technical people out of the regional bureaus, he hoped to maximize the technical strength of the Agency in the three new central bureaus.

Q: Did that make sense to you?

SIMMONS: No, actually, it didn't. In technical terms, he was right; our regional technical teams were very, very thin. But based on my old Africa Bureau experiences, I felt that there were cultural reasons to have strong regional bureaus. Regional bureaus in USAID also paralleled the power structure of regional bureaus in State. Further, the technical people in regional bureaus had stronger ties with regional institutions and actors and felt accountable to these partners. They thought that centralizing the technical staff would weaken or break these ties and result in less effective program support. In Africa Bureau, for example, there were nascent ties to an emerging all-Africa entity known as the New Economic Partnership for Agricultural Development (NEPAD). And the Latin America Bureau technical people had strong ties and history in that region, facilitated by their skills in Spanish. Folks in the Bureau for Eastern Europe and the former Soviet Union believed that they had special needs to be able to work with the State Department oversight. So I could understand why the regional bureaus wanted to keep at least a minimum of technical staff. They proposed to liaise with the central bureaus but also to keep an eye on specific technical evolutions going on in their regions, whether it was trade or education or whatever.

In the end, though, the A/AID made the decision and there was a certain amount of horse-trading on individuals between regional and central bureaus.

Q: So, did this provide a disruptive environment for the first year?

SIMMONS: 2001, the first year of the Bush Administration was overwhelmed by the events of 9/11 and the initiation of war in Afghanistan. This was followed, as you know, by the 2003 invasion in Iraq. All of a sudden, new, large-scale humanitarian and development assistance responses had to be stood up for collateral efforts in both countries. The Department of Defense was obviously in charge, but the State Department was working to bring diplomacy to bear in the re-establishment of local authorities.

Andrew Natsios's background in civ-mil affairs in the military and in disaster response in USAID enabled him to be positive about the potential for effective USAID roles in both countries. The decision to invest significant USAID resources in infrastructure in Afghanistan – a road from Kabul to Kandahar, efforts to get power generation back up and running – was taken fairly early on. EGAT was able to provide some specialists, although the Agency's engineering staff had long been decimated. One EGAT engineer, Gordon Weynand, stepped up to the plate, addressing the challenge of increasing the power output of the Helmand River dam. He discovered unused German turbines that had never been installed since before the Soviet days in Afghanistan and worked collaboratively with the Germans to see if they could still be used. I can't remember who led on the road. While EGAT was hard-pressed to be effective on these issues, the experience did result in a renewal of engineering staff resources and the formation of an Office of Infrastructure in EGAT. And we had a few remnants of the technical staff associated with the long-time USAID housing/urban development programs in the staff. Alexi Panehall, for example, provided useful services to the Embassy and Mission in Kabul regarding urban investments there.

Q: Did this whole Afghanistan thing then come to dominate your work in the first couple of years?

SIMMONS: No, Afghanistan did not dominate EGAT's agenda. This was largely because the Agency set up a separate Washington office for Afghanistan; the demands of the fast-growing program had to be covered by bringing in new contractors and staff, so our EGAT role was basically just providing technical expertise when we could. The Afghanistan program was also funded on a supplementary budget basis; there was no expectation that central funding – which was significantly smaller – could provide substantial help.

Iraq was a different story. The program there needed more technical help in agriculture and economic recovery and made it attractive for Foreign Service officers to ask for postings there. They were promised that, after one year, they would automatically be given "postings of their choice." So that created a real problem for EGAT's recruitment of mid- or senior-level technical staff from the Foreign Service to head up the EGAT offices.

I had noted, when I was DAA/EGAD, that experienced Foreign Service officers were more attuned to emerging development issues in the various regions and more prepared to work with missions' efforts to respond to them. Long-term GS staff, while technically competent, often did not have that same commitment to field support or, in some cases, were the single Agency specialist in a specific field, e.g., land reform, GIS utilization, etc. and were simply unable to respond to all requests.

So in setting up EGAT, we determined that Office chiefs would, to the maximum extent possible, be Foreign Service positions. Unfortunately, in part because of the advantages of an Iraq tour and in part simply because of shrinkage in the pool of technical talent across the Agency, we had few or no Foreign Service applicants for the Office chief positions.

Q: I'd have thought that with more FS married couples and that there would be more FS staff who would like to be in Washington. Not so?

SIMMONS: Well, EGAT did have a couple of Foreign Service Officers who wanted to be in Washington, but when their spouses found good career prospects, the FS Officers did not want to leave. That was a different issue.

REFLECTIONS ON TENURE AS AA/EGAT

Q: So, what, if you look back on those years, were the major accomplishments of being the assistant administrator in EGAT, once your clearance came through and the Senate confirmed you in the position?

SIMMONS: Continuation of the trade-related work by the Economic Growth team was solid. Additional work on business competitiveness and policies that would enhance the enabling environment for business was another positive area of progress. The work of the DCA, the Development Credit Authority, continued to grow under the leadership of John Wasielewski, and began to show the way toward a blended finance approach.

Our microenterprise development team was dynamite and continued to build that area of financial development. As part of the EGAT organization, we folded the former Office of Microenterprise Development into a new Office of Poverty Reduction; this benefited from the addition of people from the housing/urban development area and a few economists who had been reassigned from regional bureaus and PPC. The point of creating the new office was to signal to external partners that AID really did care about reducing poverty – which, at that time, was being openly questioned on the international scene. It reduced the authority and independence of the former Microenterprise Development Office, though, so they were not totally happy.

Nevertheless, the stated commitment to poverty reduction led to EGAT's and my personal engagement in the OECD's Development Advisory Committee (DAC) work on developing pro-poor policy guidelines and helped us to strengthen the messages regarding USAID's commitment to economic growth more widely.

The Office of Agriculture continued to face challenges.. Although agricultural development was perhaps the top priority for the Administrator, staffing, collaboration between the environment and agriculture people, and linkages with the economic growth team on agribusiness all remained problematic. At some point, Congress focused on water issues and promised additional resources for this area, but then earmarked all assistance for the water and sanitation side. So that became an irritant for efforts to add value to crop irrigation initiatives.

EGAT was very involved in one of Andrew Natsios's other big initiatives, the development of public/private partnerships or, as it was called, Global Development Alliances. As I mentioned earlier, I believed that our partnership with Mars had already demonstrated our understanding of the benefits of this approach and our abilities to pursue such partnerships. While Chris Brown provided the leadership on the USAID side, Jeff Hill from the Africa Bureau and John Lunde from Mars had taken the collaboration to significantly new heights. When confronted by the possibility of devastating cocoa diseases and inconsistent sector support in major producing countries, the cocoa buyers such as Mars, Cargill, and others realized that it was in their interest to be more supporting on research, development and even policy issues now.

The USAID/Mars partnership really transformed the way that the industry participated in the development effort. They began to understand the value of a government partner that would enable them to interact with policymakers in Cote d'Ivoire and Ghana, to support research at public research centers like IITA (one of the CGIAR centers), and to focus on the legality and transparency of their purchasing decisions. The whole industry has really come a long way to accepting a public/private approach to doing business.

This experience informed some of the other GDAs that EGAT helped to develop: in the use of GIS, expanding community water systems, building markets for certified forest products.

Q: Is this a good example of a private corporation recognizing the importance of development and working with a development agency-

SIMMONS: Absolutely. For Mars, the collaboration was not simply a humanitarian gesture; it reflected a commitment aligned with core decision-making for sustainable business. A later Global Development Alliance agreed with Chevron was more in the corporate social responsibility (CSR) mode; Chevron invested in USAID projects to improve basic education in Angola.

Q: What were some of the major issues related to this public-private collaboration?

SIMMONS: I am sure if you talked with Holly Wise or Dan Runde, both of whom led the Global Development Alliance initiative, you would hear about many of the issues that arose. I walked into one issue, somewhat unwittingly, back in the EGAD days, the waning of the Clinton Administration when Brady Anderson was the A/AID after Brian Atwood left. It was instructive.

We were eager to share the Mars partnership story with the A/AID as there had been some good achievements. A team from Mars came to USAID to do a briefing, but as they introduced themselves one person identified herself as a lobbyist not only for Mars but for dairy and sugar interests as well. Direct communications between A/AID and lobbyists proved to be against the USAID rules, so I had to escort the lobbyist out. It was embarrassing, but not fatal. It is true that her story bolstered the importance of the public-private partnership for the benefit of Americans as well as Africans but that did not go over well.

Q: But the project itself-

SIMMONS: But the project itself went forward, yes. And in many ways, it helped me to argue with the incoming A/AID, Andrew Natsios, that one did not need to throw the baby of old partnerships out with the bathwater in creating the new Global Development Alliance initiative. I don't know whether I persuaded him as we fully embraced the GDA language and had several other public-private partnerships in EGAT.

Q: Anything that you would like to say about the experience of working with different administrators?

SIMMONS: I worked most closely with Andrew Natsios and I have tremendous respect for him. As I look back at his tenure, though, I realize what a difficult time it was. I believe that he engineered a largely realistic and functional reorganization of USAID and took the issue of technical re-staffing of the Agency seriously and successfully. I deeply appreciated the level of authority that he delegated to me as AA/EGAT and his responsiveness to issues that we brought forward, e.g., the formation of a new relationship with volunteer organizations like IESC. He embraced the role of USAID in addressing the development challenges in Afghanistan and Iraq even though the resources available for effective action were minuscule and his levels of ambition for transformative change were so high.

But the creation of PEPFAR and its location in the State Department rather than USAID was a bureaucratic loss. He was wounded by the establishment of the Millennium Challenge Corporation as a separate development organization in which his role on the Board was limited. I have already noted that Brian Atwood/Carol Lancaster team suffered setbacks as well. Perhaps one might generalize on the challenges of responding to the scope and diversity of issues in which the Agency is expected to engage. But I believe that the Clinton Administration contributed to the weakening of the technical and field expertise that had always been the Agency's strength and political interests in the Bush Administration responded to the diminution of USAID's technical capacities in ways that further diminished USAID's influence. The MCC was a chance to start with a clean slate and AID input was not welcomed.

By the time I left the Agency in April 2005, I characterized USAID as an "abused woman." The Agency had been beaten and bloodied in many policy and funding battles but, in spite of the abuse, had managed to address critical needs and challenges in dozens of countries, affecting millions and millions of peoples' lives.

I am sure I did not fully understand all the forces that were in play at the time. Obviously, Congressional challenges were important, disagreements about the US-led conflicts in Afghanistan and Iraq took a toll, relationships within the Administration were competitive and sometimes destructive. The much-touted three-legged stool of defense, diplomacy, and development was not very stable. I was not surprised when Andrew Natsios left USAID in December 2005 for an academic post at Georgetown University.

The incoming Obama Administration took office in 2009 on a wave of concern for global economic growth and food security. President Obama's Inauguration Speech warmed my heart with its talk of "working alongside" farmers in developing countries and helping "clean waters flow." But it soon became evident that organizational infighting and differences with Congressional leaders were going to still be a challenge. Learning from the failure of the three-legged stool in the Bush Administration, Secretary of State Clinton mapped out a strategy for diplomatic and development collaboration by taking a page from the Department of Defense strategic playbook and developing the first-ever Quadrennial Diplomacy and Development Review in 2010.

In 2009, the Obama Administration did foster a "whole of government" approach to developing the U.S. response to the L'Aquila Food Security Initiative signed by the G-8 (and later confirmed by the G-20 in Pittsburgh). But the effort to share authorities between State and AID for the coordination of the Global Food Security program was rocky, to some extent in spite of the personal efforts of the individuals named to lead. Gradually, Feed the Future became more of a USAID initiative; the authorization of the Global Food Security Act in July 2016 made it clear that USAID would lead operationally.

But the interagency frictions continue at all levels. In the last year or so, a number of think tanks and consultants have proposed everything from modest to draconian reforms of the U.S.'s international assistance efforts. I have found that the concepts laid out by the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network resonate well with my experience. Giving primary authorities to one organization (such as AID) and having the head of the organization be a Cabinet position seems to me to be fundamental to resolving the power imbalances that currently exist. But it is not yet clear what Congressional champions will emerge to support them legislatively.

Right now I'm doing a lot of work on conflict and food insecurity, obviously two areas of interest that flow from my experiences in USAID. They lead one quickly to the notion of how the U.S. could better engage productively with "fragile and conflict-affected" states where it is difficult to demonstrate and/or attain sustainable, positive results. As we have discussed, just providing food aid to keep people alive is insufficient. But supporting a wholesale restructuring of a society and economy is the work of generations – and Congressional/Presidential expectations of concrete progress do not extend that long into the future.

Q: But these challenges predate you…. And they are likely to continue.

SIMMONS: Yes, as I also said earlier --- every country in the world is in a constant state of "development" as the context for growth, prosperity, and peace and the opportunities to take action in line with national interests are also evolving.

A LIFE AFTER RETIREMENT FROM USAID IN 2005

Q: Let us try to finish up with a few moments about your post-AID career. Why did you leave in 2005? You're still a very young woman, you could have stayed on forever. Henrietta Fore, I'm sure, would have been pleased to have you stay on. What happened?

SIMMONS: I was uncertain as to the outcome of the 2004 election. I thought Senator Kerry was likely to win. So I began, in the run-up to the election, to consider my options if President Bush lost. In the event, he won and Andrew Natsios asked me to stay on, but by then I had realized that departure from USAID after nearly 30 years might be refreshing.

I thought that, as a parting gesture, I could identify a number of candidates who would be able to provide sound technical leadership but also do a more effective job in Congressional and university relations than I seemed to have done. I did propose a number of names, but ultimately my political DAA, Jacqueline Schafer, a person with experience on the Hill, the Environmental Protection Agency (EPA), and the Department of Defense, was nominated for the position.

In 2009, EGAT was divided by the Obama Administration into the Bureau of Food Security and the E3 Bureau (Economics, Education, and the Environment). That's another story.

Q: So how did you feel when you left the Agency after so many years?

SIMMONS: From 2001-2005, the EGAT agenda was fully-absorbing – a period of great change globally and in all the sectors for which EGAT had responsibility. I had great support from AID Administrator Andrew Natsios, a super team of office leaders within EGAT, and a staff capable of addressing complex issues. Our participation in the OECD/DAC initiative on Promoting Pro-Poor Growth helped us to overcome a growing reputation in the development field that "USAID only supports health and humanitarian programs."

Many of the initiatives that had been started in my EGAD days continued to challenge us in EGAT and I had reason to believe that some of the newer areas of involvement would grow. Work on supporting the expansion of the digital revolution was launched and an infrastructure office was set up in recognition of the importance of both IT and the growing need for energy and road infrastructure as well. The start-up of a Presidential Initiative to End Hunger in Africa seemed to promise a boost to agriculture and food security efforts in that continent but never got the financial support needed, especially, as I have noted earlier in talking about the situation in Ethiopia in 2003, in comparison to resources directed to emergency food aid.

The wars in Afghan and Iraq led to demands for consultative input from EGAT. Although only a few staff got deeply involved in technical support to the USAID Missions' projects, the challenge of working in post-conflict situations began to be more clearly seen. The launch of the President's Emergency Plans for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) absorbed resources more rapidly than Congress could increase overall appropriations – and the Agency tilt toward health and humanitarian assistance is reinforced. The establishment of the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) as an independent organization widened a public conversation about USAID's ineffectiveness in the development sphere, contributing to a certain demoralization of EGAT staff who believed that a lack of resources had held us back (in trade policy as well as in trade facilitation, agricultural research, environmental management and climate change, education, and other areas). But the MCC has also demonstrated that direct U.S. engagement with partner countries around the world, in ways that are more flexible that those than USAID has been allowed to use, can generate more interesting development impacts.

QUESTION: So what did you do after you retired?

SIMMONS: I was, again, enormously lucky. I was eligible for a pension, of course, so I was able to accept opportunities that did not pay salaries as well as some that did. At my retirement party, an acquaintance at the Association of Public and Land Grant Universities (now APLU, then NASULGC) who was chairing the Board of the CGIAR center in Ibadan, Nigeria – the International Institute of Tropical Agriculture, or IITA – asked if I would be interested in serving on the Board. I said "yes." A few weeks after I left AID, another acquaintance invited me to stand for election to the Board of the CGIAR's International Livestock Research Institute, headquartered in Nairobi. Two meetings a year for each organization enabled me to reconnect at the field level with people, research, and a rapidly-evolving Africa.

Then two leaders at the National Academy of Sciences' Roundtable on Science and Technology for Sustainability, on which I had participated as an observer in my AA/EGAT role, asked me to join the Roundtable as a full member. So my dance card filled up quickly.

I served on each Board for six years and as the co-chair of the Roundtable for two or three. I also fully enjoyed working with the Partnership to Cut Hunger and Poverty in Africa from 2005-2017. The Partnership is a nongovernmental advocacy group hosted by Michigan State University. Peter McPherson, both a former USAID Administrator and ex-President of Michigan State University, served as the Board Chair and I served as both a member of the Board and as the (sometimes remunerated) author of various analyses of food aid and US government support for agricultural development.

The work of the Partnership built closely on my experience but also nudged me into new areas of thinking and analysis. The trends in USG budgetary support for agriculture were not good; only the robust investments of MCC in rural infrastructure and other agriculture-related programs provided any upward momentum. USAID funding continued to be dominated by expenditures in health. Through this work with the Partnership, I got to know people working at a number of food aid-related NGOs as well as Julie Howard, the Executive Director of the Partnership and, in the Obama Administration, a senior manager in the Bureau for Food Security and Chief Scientist for

AID. Unfortunately, in 2016, the Partnership merged with IGD, an organization that promotes African entrepreneurship and business.

Since my initial post-AID commitments, I have been on many other Boards and Committees and Advisory Groups. I try to limit my commitments to about six projects or memberships at a time, focus on engagements that fit within a "box" bounded by food, agriculture, Africa, and sustainability. My most recent major commitments have been with the World Vegetable Center Board, AGree, and the Global Panel on Agriculture and Food Systems for Nutrition.

Q: Re the Roundtable, I've always been amazed that NAS manages to get all those wonderful people without paying them.

SIMMONS: Isn't it amazing? Being a member and then co-chair of the Roundtable was one of the great unpaid privileges of my post-AID career. It was an opportunity to reconnect with Rich Bissell, who is the head of Policy and Global Affairs at the Academies, and whom I had first met when he was with the Science and Technology Bureau at USAID. The Roundtable was able to pursue several activities in different areas and attract topflight academics and analysts to participate for very small sums of money. Very unlike USAID contractors and grantees! I met a whole new group of scientists and policy wonks through this engagement. I was especially pleased that one of the initiatives that we pursued on "what makes good partnerships for sustainable development" seemed to advance the field.

Q: AGree is still active, is it not?

SIMMONS: AGree, established by a number of foundations, to "drive positive change in the food and agriculture system by connecting and challenging leaders from diverse communities to catalyze action and elevate food and agriculture as a national priority" is still active as an initiative but it is no long fully funded for the full scope of its activities. With the Farm Bill rewrite coming up in 2018, several of us who have been associated with AGree for several years as co-chairs or advisors are hoping to re-engage on some of the hot-button issues today. The one area that has been significantly funded – and where work is still ongoing -- is the potential for linked reforms in the areas of crop insurance and soil conservation. While the very first issue identified by AGree advisors back in 2012 was reforming the system of immigration to give more security to farmworkers, this is still a work in progress. There has been some engagement of my fellow AGree co-chairs – former Secretary of Agriculture Dan Glickman, former Deputy Secretaries Jim Moseley and Kathleen Merrigan – with the Trump Administration but it is not clear whether there is an appetite for deeper discussions or topical events.

Q: Since you were a political appointee in a Republican administration--this may be your great opportunity, to come back into political action. But you've been able in your post AID career to take advantage of the interests that you had during your AID period and use them in constructive ways to help promote agriculture and research and the kinds of things you were interested in, even if you didn't always get a chance to succeed in, right?

SIMMONS: Well, I have benefited from a lot of serendipity in being able to engage on what I continue to believe are key bipartisan issues in the U.S. and issues in which the U.S. shares concerns with the rest of the world. People often ask if I want to go "back to work." I believe I do "work" but I do not want to re-enter the world of full-time jobs and management responsibilities. I have often been offered consulting opportunities – one recently on a new area of interest, the urbanization of food systems – but have generally turned them down. While the challenge of urban food and nutrition security is important to me, I have developed a lifestyle that includes, but is not driven by, a daily commute to an office.

Q: Oh well. Because of all these other things, because you also have a life that you want to lead that is separate and apart-

SIMMONS: Yes, the silver lining of global interest in food security that resulted from the global food price spikes in 2008 has opened up all sorts of new questions, ideas, energies, and organizational roles. So now I feel, in many ways, that I am back to my roots: food, agriculture, nutrition, and Africa. And there is enough interest in actually investing to make this happen. What I worry about is that Africa's population is growing fast and their options for rapidly increasing agricultural productivity and food security are not. In spite of Kofi Annan's call for a "uniquely African Green Revolution" and the Gates Foundation's investments in the Alliance for a Green Revolution in Africa (AGRA), there is still a long way to go.

Today, however, the wheel has turned somewhat and USAID attention to agriculture has increased so I remain hopeful that momentum will be maintained. The shock of sharply-rising food prices in 2007/08 brought world attention back to the food situation. People began to realize that business as usual was not going to enable the 2050 population of 9.6 billion people or so to realize food security. There is not that much more land and water to bring into production and there are risks of food crises emerging more frequently in the next 20 or 30 years. Over the last decade, awareness of the pressures of climate change on agriculture has risen. Outbreaks of conflict have intensified concern with food insecurity as well as human security. So my interest – and the interests of so many others -- in addressing the challenge of food and agriculture has taken on a new profile. The language of sustainability, resilience, and productivity growth are now associated with, as the U.S. government says, "feeding the future." For me, Africa is the geographical focus for critical attention.

Q:-But I remember vividly while at the World Bank in the mid '80s that there was a real decline in investment in agriculture in Africa. I think it was partly because people thought they didn't know what would work, that there were so many different climates in Africa and they hadn't figured out exactly what would work - I mean, does that ring true to you?

SIMMONS: Absolutely. Initially, going back to the 1980s, there was little understanding of why Africa's agricultural challenges were so different from those confronted in Asia and Latin America – where the Green Revolution had been so successful. The sheer size of the continent and its vast agroecological diversity were simply not recognized. Instead, people asked: "What's wrong with these Africans?"

However, many analysts realized that there had been less attention in investment in research on commodities that were important to Africa: sorghum, millet, cassava, maize, cowpeas, animals. In fact, as we showed in the USAID Impact Evaluation on Maize in Kenya in 1980 (or so), hybrid maize had been successfully introduced in some environments in Kenya in the 1960s and was doing well. But open-pollinated varieties suited to less fertile and well-watered lands were low-yielding, and stored maize was often infected with aflatoxin, a carcinogen.

Further, new sorghum and millet varieties proved hard to develop and higher-yielding varieties of cassava were not available until the 1990s. Peanut production in West Africa completely collapsed in the late 1970s and 1980s, causing economic disruption as well as the loss of a nitrogen-fixing component in the farming system. When I lived in Nigeria, great pyramids of bags of groundnut (peanuts) rose all over northern Nigeria after the October harvest. But production collapsed for two reasons: the spread of a viral disease called rosette and the prohibition of marketing aflatoxin-infected groundnuts in Europe. The entire market, the entire production collapsed and basically an entire cash – and food -- crop for millions of people disappeared.

People then in West Africa, 10 million farmers or so, started growing cotton for the global market but found that it was really hard to compete, given the distances, available technologies, and, yes, U.S. support for its own producers. So, it was a complicated issue. The World Bank I think gave up on agriculture way too soon and this led to a larger decline in agricultural investment; USAID could never fill the gap. I still see a lot of incomprehension of the scale of the African agricultural challenges today. Africa is not just the Uttar Pradesh of India on a larger scale. It's way, way more complicated than that.

Q: But I recall that those were the debates that were going on at that time.

SIMMONS: Exactly. And although the situation has changed a lot since the food crisis of 2008, there is still not enough serious discussion about the development of a sustainable global system that makes safe, nutritious and affordable food accessible to all.

So, for me, continued international engagement provides for an interesting life but a life that I hope has meaning. Whether your efforts have the impact that you want them to have is one of those nagging questions. However, I have been lucky to be able to bring creativity, some management skills, and a commitment to collaborative effort to bear. If I were to live another 40 years, I am sure my agenda would evolve, but I can't see how the challenges of food, agriculture, sustainability, and Africa are going to go away. So I hope I am able to continue to pursue my passions and do what I can to make the world a better place.

Q: Well, you have the passion. You are wonderful and you are terrific to have done this and speaking on behalf of AID alumni, I thank you for what you've done for AID over all these years. Thank you for what you've managed to accomplish and what your level of energy is still. That's a great tribute to you. So, thank you very much, Emmy, we appreciate it. And 40 years from now-

SIMMONS: Oh yes, exactly.

End of interview