

United States Agency for
International Development

Public Meeting on Democracy,
Human Rights & Governance

Opening Remarks

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Polaris Room
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JACK LESLIE: Hello, everybody. Welcome. What a great turnout. I'd like to think that maybe it's the first time Gayle has been at a public meeting event, but do you think that's why we're getting this crowd? No? Is it -

GAYLE SMITH: They generally follow me around.

[laughter]

JACK LESLIE: I think you're -- you're groupies [laughs]. Thank you, all, for coming and it is a great crowd. We're going to do something a little different today which I'll describe in a second, which should be fun. It's been a little bit of time,

probably too long since we last convened. As a public meeting we last had our -- the session I think in November of last year. A lot happened just before that that we commented on.

We, of course, had the adoption of the global goals in September and the global community reconvened again in Paris, as you know, to reach the landmark agreement on the global climate effort. We are now just on the other side and I think we'll hear from Gayle on this, the first ever world humanitarian summit. That was, as many of you know, four years in the making and really designed to begin to grapple with a very strained, to say the least, humanitarian system and to deal with the important issues of how we begin to equitably finance humanitarian needs. We're looking forward to a number of new opportunities in the remainder of this year. We've got the upcoming global entrepreneurship summit taking place in Silicon Valley later this month, where the work of USAID will be front and center and very -- and very, very important.

We are, all kidding aside, very, very lucky to have this agency now led by Gayle Smith; it's at such an important moment. She brings, as I think you know, such smarts and savvy and passion to this work. I think all of the work that went before her is

now in such terrific hands as we now approach a transition period that's very important to all of the issues that all of us care about. One issue that I know Gayle cares deeply about and is going to be the topic of this meeting of course is the conversation around democracy, human rights, and governance and so today what we want to do is to focus on that. We want to take a sharper look at DRG and look and seek your counsel really in devising the best mechanisms to strengthen partnerships, innovation, and impact.

So in line with our sort of new development model, we have a little bit new a way of doing our public meeting today. Following this plenary session, where Gayle will give her remarks, we're going to break all of you out into three groups; Jeanne will explain how that all works as she is going to lead this effort. We're going to explore, as I say, partnerships, innovation, and impact in evidence in the DRG.

So you'll have a chance to give your perspective, either on a -- maybe let me define what we mean by those: "partnerships" is of course how we can best structure these efforts to facilitate cross-sector collaboration and to integrate DRG principles across the different sectors. The second group, on innovation:

what's working well, what needs improvement, good examples of innovations that are transforming development efforts worldwide in this space and then finally evidence and impact: that is how we can use evidence in feedback loops to improve programs.

So we're going to ask you to participate in that and then we'll have you come back and we'll have each of the group's report and have a quick discussion. So it's my real pleasure to introduce a good friend of mine and a great friend of this cause: Gayle Smith.

GAYLE SMITH: Thanks.

[applause]

GAYLE SMITH: Thanks a lot, [unintelligible]. Right, I'm going to come up here so that I don't speak in stereo, because I got this and that. Here, take this off. Yeah?

Thank you. Hi, everybody, and thank you very much for being here. We really appreciate you dedicating the time and your thoughts and experience to this and I want to thank the members of ACVFA and Jack. It helps us -- you know, it's very easy in

this job to get focused on what we're doing -- there's a lot to do, a lot of it's great, a lot of it's hard -- and to get a little bit insular and sometimes I remind myself, "You really ought to get out more," and to have friends and colleagues on the outside that think about these issues, know about these issues, care about the mission of this agency, join with us from time to time is enormously helpful.

So first, thank you. Second, let me just say a little bit about where this frame of partnerships, innovation, and evidence came from and some of you may know this, but I'm finding things are coming a little bit full circle right now because what this came out of was the president's policy directive on global development and interestingly, there had never been one, which is really weird if you think about it. Now there has been one and some of the premises in that -- the goal was sustainable and inclusive economic growth. So that "sustainable" tells you something; the "inclusive" tells you something.

So to do that, DRG's got to be part of the fabric, right? We're not going to have something that's sustained over time and doesn't blow up and you're also not going to have something inclusive unless there's a deliberate effort to make sure that

the whole of society is participating, but then we spent a lot of time thinking about -- and the president pushed us on this -- is how do we do a few things differently?

So on partnerships, what does that mean? We all have a lot of partnerships that we've had for a long time; where do we need to break out and make some new partnerships and make them differently? How do we rethink our partnerships with government and is it just central governments? What about local government, local administrative officials?

We have partnerships with NGOs, international NGOs, American NGO partners; what about civil society partners? How do we deepen those? The private sector, it's easy to look to; "Could you come fund this or fund this or do a special event with us?" How do you actually partner with them? Universities, academic and research institutions, something we've built up alone. What's a partnership, not an individual project, but how do we actually join forces with other partners so that we're bringing more partners to the game, but also challenging ourselves on a regular basis? So that's kind of the thinking of partnerships: diversify and deepen.

Innovation is many things. Now on the one hand it has meant -- and what we've seen and realized not just at USAID, but across agencies, is this embrace of two things. On the one hand, this notion of innovation -- I don't just do the same thing all the time, right? Keep thinking, going back to what you learned and what you know and ask yourself: is there a different, better, newer way I could do this?

Second, it's thinking about what the tools are of how we do our business. So whether it's on the financing side, some of the gains we've seen on developments in technology, what are new tools that we can create as, what I think were originally thought of as unconventional solutions, are increasingly becoming more commonplace, solutions that might not be the thing we always default to? So how do we really push ourselves to do that?

Evidence was a big feature of the study that preceded the signing of the PPD and then the actual implementation of the PPD over the last few years and again, on the surface, but I think what we were pressing for and what the president pushed us on is that development is an aspiration, but it's also a discipline. There are actually things we can study and know and the more we

avail ourselves of the evidence, the wiser our decisions will be and I think it's especially important in this field, because this is a field about which we all have a lot of passion and it's pretty easy, I know, I've done it myself, to think that the strength of my passion and opinion is sufficient to mean it must be true.

[laughter]

Right? So having the ability and the discipline to take a step back and say, "Is that really true," I think improves the work that all of us do and this is the sector in which it's the hardest, it's hard to measure. It's a lot easier to measure where you're getting on TB or malaria or getting girls in school or even retaining adolescent girls in school than it is to measure in the DRG space, but how do we bring more evidence to the mix? So part of what we want to ask you to do is think about these three things and how do we apply these and what might you advise us, suggest to us, say, "You're really on the wrong track here; you need to go this way and not that way." I'd throw two other things into the mix, if I may, just to ask you to think about and if they're helpful, use them; if not, discard them.

One is: What's the moment that we're in that we're thinking about democracy, rights, and governance, and I would describe it in a number of ways. I think on the -- on the one hand, on the plus side of the column, it is a moment where we are seeing extraordinary development gains, some of those propelled by assistance, some of those propelled by a newfound political leadership in a lot of countries, some of that propelled by citizens, but remarkable gains, more evident in the areas that we can measure than in those we cannot, but you see it on the side of growth, you see it in health, you see it in education, you see it in agriculture. So that's a plus side; there's an increasing body of evidence about what works and that the kind of change we all believe in can be realized.

The second is: There are an increasing number of tools on the table. With respect to capital, I think we're past the moment where the assumption is that development is an enterprise financed entirely by foreign assistance and an understanding that there is also private capital, there are domestic resources. There are the kinds of innovations that have come to the forward to date that are kind of force multipliers, that are other tools. There are different pathways; we're seeing a lot

of countries around the world that have made development gains, they all didn't necessarily get there by going down exactly the same path, but what that means is there's a very rich menu of tools and approaches available to us that I think we didn't have in the past.

Then there's the flipside. So there's one in the middle, which is I think we're in a period of rather extraordinary transition. If you look at countries in transition in one direction or the other, there are some countries -- and I suspect those of you that follow DRG issues have a good list in your head of those-- that might be going in the wrong direction. There are others that are in a moment of hope; it may be the end of an authoritarian era; it may be post-conflict; it may be a glimmer of hope when there's breathing space for people. That's an opportunity and a challenge, but particularly with respect to DRG I would ask you to think about that. Those transitions are key strategic moments of intervention and engagement. I think that's a feature of the landscape and one that's going to dominate.

The last is: we're in a period of crisis and I think new kinds of threats and challenges. We've got more and more complex

humanitarian crises around the world that at any time in recent history. We thought it was complicated enough with long-running, really dangerous wars and then somebody thought "Let's throw an Ebola epidemic into the mix." It's unprecedented. How do we think about all these issues at a time when we have all of this turmoil? I'd like to leave you, as my third -- just kind of sharing with you some of the thoughts I have, some of the questions I think about when I think about DRG: How have we approached it? How are we approaching it now? What are some of the things we need to think about as we go forward?

One, I think we're all aware of the trends in closing space for civil society. I think there's a question about how we recalibrate our efforts to respond to that, but what's our counter-argument? How do we tell the story about what it looks like, feels like, means, translate into if you have a vibrant civil society? Respectfully I think we, and I include myself in this, are really much better at pointing to the dangers of closing space for a civil society than we are at demonstrating what does the alternative look like; how do we get that out there more and more often?

Second, and this is a related point -- now, part of our job and

it will continue to be our job as USAID and as an administration is to call out those circumstances where people's rights are being violated, where democracy is going off track or not being realized at all. Our other challenge and part of our mission at USAID is to think about: so what are you going to do about it? How do we think about partnerships, innovation, and evidence in terms of where are the openings, because again it's great to be on the right side of history, but our job is to see more countries that are better governed and more people who can avail themselves of the opportunities and rights to which we all aspire, so what are the openings there?

Third, I think we're seeing all over the world people calling for more responsive and accountable governments. I think we need to get behind them, but also not get ahead of them. Given the strength, the vibrancy, the creativity of some of the civil society movements and others we're seeing around the world, how do we elevate them and put them in the limelight and give them more visibility?

Fourth, and this gets to evidence point: I think we're all pretty good, at least I know I'm really good, at asserting that democracy is the best -- the best path forward. I believe that

passionately; it's what I've been privileged to live. How do we make the case with evidence that it is -- it is a strength of view, it's a principle and we should always articulate it that way, but what's the evidence behind this notion that if you have an open society where citizens can engage -- what do we know? Again, how do we pull evidence in and then the last thing and again, I think this is a huge opportunity: we've got an increasing number of voices out there who care about these issues and we've got a huge opportunity to diversify the coalitions we've put together to work these issues and I'll just leave you with a thought.

I look at something like the Open Government Partnership which we launched with seven other governments in the first term; it started with eight governments, it is now 69. There are thousands of commitments, summits every year; there is an energy, a vibrancy, and a dynamism that has emerged from the simple concept of open government and of governments acting to forge these national action plans, but have accountability from civil society that has yielded a constructive, very frank, often critical dialogue between governments and civil society and enabled -- and spurred governments to govern more openly. I think one of the reasons that worked is that the founding

members was an odd constellation of countries. It was the U.S., the U.K. and Norway, South Africa, Mexico, the Philippines, Indonesia, and Brazil.

So you couldn't say -- it wasn't the G7, it wasn't the donors, wasn't the BRICs, wasn't the G-77, it wasn't any one region and I think the mere fact that it was a diverse coalition made it less possible for anybody to brand it as some plot by somebody to tell somebody else what to do. So I'd ask you, as a last point, to think about, in terms of partnerships and all the things we do, how do we think about diversifying the coalitions that we marshal to do this work?

With that, I'm going to turn over to the chair of our working group who walks the walk and talks the talk: Jeanne Bourgault from Internews, which is an organization, as I think many of you know -- has been a real champion in this field for a long time. We were just reminiscing in some horror at how long we've been at this, but to great effect. So with that, I want to thank you again for participating and taking the time out of your schedules, we really welcome what you're going to provide -- and turn it over to Jeanne.

JEANNE BOURGAULT: Thank you.

[applause]

I'm going to stand up, too, mostly because I can't see a third of the room, so I'm happy to be able to stand up here. I just want to say that the goal of our work today is -- the working group for the DRG programming met for the first time last week. I was elected chair yesterday -

[laughter]

-- so what we're really trying to do is open up the conversation as Gayle outlined, but we really want feedback from you all on these big questions we're trying to explore, really sort of providing USAID with input on applying the new models of development to the DRG sector. Our working group is going to be meeting over the next couple of months; we hope to provide some recommendations in the early fall.

One of the reasons I was elected to be on the working group is that some of the working group members reminded me that I've been on both sides of the equation. I actually started my

career in the democracy sector at USAID, so taking this on is deeply gratifying, looking over -- well over -- well over two decades, but 23 years ago I flew to Russia to help start the USAID mission in Moscow and it was an incredibly heady time. We had the first democratic parliamentary elections, the first presidential elections; we had coups, we had bashes, we had communists; everything was there to make it really, really fun for a DRG officer -

[laughter]

-- and we were awash with money and so that was -- it was just amazing, but even at that amazing time there were ways that we did our business that were deeply frustrating. I'll give you two examples of where I'm seeing what you all are talking about when you talk about the new model for development -- I have to look down on my notes on that, because it does not roll off my tongue, but your new model of development that we're thinking about here at USAID.

One was, despite all the resources we had, I was trying to do a small, little research project where I wanted to use a local partner to look at our programs and give me some feedback and I

was stymied at every level. I was stymied because I wasn't allowed to work with local partners in Russia at the time, I was stymied because the procurement process was so difficult, and I was stymied because the money was too little, given how much money we had to program. So I'm really excited about some of the innovation -

[talking simultaneously]

FEMALE SPEAKER: [unintelligible] money.

[laughter]

JEANNE BOURGAULT: [laughs] So much better, right? I'm excited to think about how we get more creative so those things don't happen. The second memory that I have when I look at what you all -- what's happening with this new models for partnerships, is the importance of local champions, the importance of that local engagement. We were -- one of the largest programs I ran was a rule of law program that was constantly challenged because there was a lack of a reform agenda, there was a lack of a champion for that program.

A second program that I ran was working with entrepreneurs who were really, really keen to open up television stations around Russia. It was a wild success and it is why I landed where I did, but a small amount of resources, with the right entrepreneurs makes a huge difference and so those are I think the -- what you're doing here really captures those lessons.

So our working group is trying to tackle the questions that USAID is looking at, these new development reform -- these new models of development. There's sort of two big themes that I want -- I want to focus on when we think about those. One is the drivers behind these new models of development, the new resources that are in the field, all the technological innovation, all of these things, they're not always good for democracy and I think we need to remember that and as we think about it from a DRG perspective. Some of the new resources floating into the world are doing very bad things or difficult things.

In my small corner of the world, the Chinese investment in media across Africa is extraordinary and vastly outweighs anything that we can do and it isn't helping provide voice to our colleagues in Africa.

The explosion of new technologies -- and we know the empowering power of those new technologies -- also are a force of danger and fear and harassment and surveillance, so we need to remember that the balance of these good things is also being balanced with other and while much of the technological disruption is really good, it's also disrupting the core institutions that we've relied on forever for democracy and so it's breaking everything that we've done for the last two decades open. So we need to remember that these drivers, while they're drivers of good, they're also drivers of challenge, particularly for this sector, but on a positive note I am really, really excited about these things. I think that the focus of what we're looking at today is really important for the DRG sector.

So on the -- on the concept of partnership: Partnership is in our DNA; partnership is everything we do. There's not a single DRG program that isn't about building the local capacity of partners and we can do it at the local level, the regional level, the national level. It is our DNA; we will be good at this; we have a lot to add there.

On the innovation front, I think that some people sometimes

think DRG's a little fusty, we sort of do our little institutional reform and don't have a lot of innovations happening, and that's completely untrue, as I think many of you in this room know. Anyone who's watched what NDI Tech is doing, you'd be blown away, any of you that look at what human rights activists are doing with video this days, any of you who are working on the internet space and the top notch, top notch programmers helping track and try to keep the internet safe knows that DRG programming is on the very, very frontlines of innovation. So I'm really positive that we can make a lot of good contributions here and then finally on the evidence base and thinking about feedback loops: Democracy is the ultimate feedback loop.

Everything that we do in democracy is providing that voice back to the conversations that we're trying to have, whether it's a balance of power between government institutions, whether it's citizen activism and independent media providing that government accountability, whether it's the ultimate feedback loop of an election box, this is -- this is the feedback loop, the ultimate feedback loop for all of our efforts, so it's so important that we're part of this. Today we are going to break into three groups to look at these three questions, from partnerships,

innovation, and evidence base. I almost forgot that last one
[laughs].

[laughter]

We, as a working group, explored a few questions and what we really want to hear from you are the questions you want us to answer as a working group. On the question of partnerships, from a DRG perspective, again we're very, very good at this, but I think we're looking broadly at it, but how do we help all partnerships across development really walk the democracy walk? How can we make sure they're bringing in that empowerment and that citizen voice to all of their work as we're looking at partnerships? That's one of the questions that we're asking.

On the innovation part, I think all of us have sort of been engaged on the social innovation camps and co-creation. The question is really where do we get an impact from that? Where are we finding the long-term sustainable impact after we've done these really innovative systems of thinking about the programming and how do we make sure we're getting long-term impact and then, going back to that other point, given that the technology can have both a positive and a negative effect, how

do we mitigate those negative effects and keep the very, very good positive?

Gayle mentioned, on the evidence-based piece -- democracy piece is the hardest. How do we -- how do we, both as a sector, really grapple with the evidence base and how do we work with other sectors and across sectors to help make our case?

Ultimately what we really want to do with these three new forms is really to get to the impact question. All of these changes, all of these different approaches, how can we have the biggest long-term, sustainable impact in the communities in which we work?

So we're looking forward to the work of three working groups here and I was told that I know what's going on, I don't really, but I know that they -- the you on your nametags have letters and if you're on those name -- those letters -- if you have a "P," you're supposed to stay in this room. If you have an "A," you're supposed to go to Hemisphere A and if you have a "B," you're supposed to go to Hemisphere B and I'm -- am I getting this right? I'm looking -

MALE SPEAKER: What's the -- what's the "P" stand for?

JEANNE BOURGAULT: Polaris room. Oh, thank you [laughs] and then from there you will be guided through a conversation. Thank you all very much.

[applause]

JACK LESLIE:

I'm told there will be people outside with signs to escort you if you're not sure where "A" and "B" is, so head on out.

[end of transcript]