

U.S. Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa UAA Development Issues Committee, September 28, 2022

Development Issues Committee Co-Chair Steve Giddings welcomed participants to the meeting. He called their attention to the new U.S. Strategy toward Sub-Saharan Africa published in August 2022 at <https://www.whitehouse.gov/wp-content/uploads/2022/08/U.S.-Strategy-Toward-Sub-Saharan-Africa-FINAL.pdf>, which he noted had been a theme of interest at the recent UN General Assembly. He introduced the guest discussion leaders and invited them to offer opening remarks.

- Ervin Massinga, Principal Deputy Assistant Secretary, Bureau of African Affairs, Department of State;
- Diana Putman, Senior Advisor, Africa Bureau, USAID; and
- W. Gyude Moore, Senior Policy Fellow, Center for Global Development (CGD).

Biographical summaries for the three discussion leaders are available at <https://usaidalumni.org/development-issues-committee-speaker-bios>.

Ervin Massinga pointed out that the new US Strategy addressed the four objectives of:

1. Fostering Openness and Open Societies;
2. Delivering Democratic and Security Dividends;
3. Advancing Pandemic Recovery and Economic Opportunity; and
4. Supporting Conservation, Climate Adaptation, and Just Energy Transition.

He recalled that Secretary of State Blinken, in November 2021 speech in Abuja, had set the effort in motion by expressing the US desire for a relationship built on partnership that covered the various objectives listed above. (See “The United States and Africa: Building a 21st Century Partnership,” <https://www.state.gov/the-united-states-and-africa-building-a-21st-century-partnership/>.) This provided a foundation for his August 2022 speech in Pretoria discussing the recently adopted US Strategy. (See “Vital Partners, Shared Priorities: The Biden Administration’s Sub-Saharan Africa Strategy,” <https://www.state.gov/vital-partners-shared-priorities-the-biden-administrations-sub-saharan-africa-strategy/>.)

Following the Russian attack on Ukraine, we were faced with the need to develop the strategy in real time due to the impact of the war on trade and other consequences for African well-being. Tensions over Taiwan following Speaker Pelosi’s visit there also had implications for Africa and were the subject of dialogue that brought African voices to the fore. The partnership, with its emphasis on democratic governance, contributes to investments in Kenya. That, in turn, helped Kenya to conduct successful democratic elections.

We will seek to apply the same principles to other challenging situations in Africa, from Burkina Faso and Mali to Somalia.

At the upcoming African Leaders' Summit we will have an opportunity to engage leaders on issues of good governance and factors for fostering inclusive economic growth.

Diana Putman, who is about to complete her career at USAID in a few days, observed that the Strategy was prepared under the leadership of (former national intelligence officer for Africa) Judd Devermont at the NSC. He was meticulous in reviewing all previous strategies, recognizing that we need to pursue an approach that recognizes the importance and independent responsibility of Africa, which has a growing population, valuable resources, and is taking an increasingly prominent role in the leadership of major international organizations.

In fashioning the strategy, the distinction between governance and democracy was important. There is still strong majority support for democracy in Africa, but there also has been democratic backsliding, including coups, and increasing disinformation. This has put an emphasis on US support for civil society, independent institutions such as courts, and measures to promote integrity and control corruption. The sustainability of democracy depends on capacity for good governance.

One factor that enables more effective US programming is the Congressional grant of "notwithstanding authority." There had been many situations in which elected leaders had failed to provide competent governance, people had become disenchanted, and there was less resistance to coups. Now Congress has enabled programming to continue work that does not directly benefit a badly performing government. Congress has also provided new authority to support initiatives and organizations to advance peace and security.

There is hope that all aspects of support for health can be brought together in a more coherent way. There is also ongoing work to stimulate trade and investment as well as to conserve resources and adapt to climate change. High level US officials are making increasing visits to the region and maintaining participatory dialogue, including with the smaller countries.

An emphasis on private sector engagement is returning, recognizing that engaging the diaspora in the United States and putting representatives of the US and African private sectors together are important aspects of support for economic development.

Gyude Moore said that the Center for Global Development was monitoring African reactions to the new US Strategy. He stressed that the Strategy should be looked at in the context of not only China's and Russia's involvement but also of the growing presence and involvement of other international actors in the region, including Turkey and Middle Eastern countries. . This leaves room for cooperation that may not necessarily ask Africans to commit to US preferences. The Strategy acknowledges that Africa is a significant global player in its own right. For example, global population growth after 2035 will be largely African.

The Strategy establishes a new baseline for US-African relations. It also recognizes the need for a complicated mix of measures to help Africa to deal effectively with vital issues such as the energy transformation now underway.

African partners are concerned that the Biden Administration policies may not continue if there is a change of administration in the US. Also, there is continuing uncertainty about the extent to which Congress will provide the funding for effective implementation. Some past US commitments were not fulfilled, and this prompts some caution. There is great interest throughout Africa in what looks promising, but the caution will remain. Africans will tend to wait and see how the Strategy is implemented.

Steve Haykin then led a session to address questions and comments from the participants.

As to funding, Diana Putman observed that Congress has protected foreign assistance budgets in the past. The recent supplemental addressing food security threatened by the Ukraine conflict also provided resources for Africa. However, Congress tends to believe that more money for health in Africa is a good thing. USAID has been seeking to shift some funding for democratic governance to Africa.

Erv Massinga noted that the values of the new Strategy were different. This posed a challenge in how we will provide resources and the volume of those resources. All the stakeholders need to be involved in the various Strategy objectives, He reiterated the importance of democratic governance and pointed out that China's investments in economic growth have not been a great boon to Africa.

Gyude Moore pointed out that the number of tech firms in Africa has grown because of investments from US-based firms.

Diana Putman clarified that the recent "notwithstanding authority" just permitted the continuation of programs that did not benefit governments that had performed badly in order to avoid cutting off support that benefited health, education, and civil society. This authority did not grant USAID any extraordinary authority to move money between accounts.

As to policy dialogue and priorities, Erv Messinga offered the example of South Africa, where peer to peer conversations, with lots of listening to each other, produced qualitatively better results. The same can be expected in dealing with other difficult situations, as in Ethiopia.

Gyude Moore suggested that population growth in Africa needs to be accompanied by increasing skills development. Diana Putman echoed the importance of workforce development.

Diana noted that a number of US organizations, including the new Development Finance Corporation as well as USAID, are seeking to promote US investment in Africa

by calling attention some attractive investment environments. At the same time, it is important to realize that in some countries there is a terrible investment climate. We need to address those difficult situations in our dialogue with Africa.

Gyude Moore recounted a discussion with Morgan State, an HBCU, about possibly involving more HBCUs in training programs in Africa. Also, support for improving the quality of governance, including the business environment, will be necessary.

Diana Putman confirmed there is continuing interest in funding the Young African Leaders Initiative (YALI) . But there should be a different approach to foster university to university relations and participant training. There is a need to convince Congress (and others) that this is important. She noted that enduring relationships with future African leaders were cultivated when USAID had strong participant training programs but that the significant decrease in funding for such programs had diminished U.S. opportunities to foster these relationships.

Gyude Moore thought that big numbers would be required to meet the training needs. In his experience, he had seen that China's offers of many scholarships were attractive to many African students. We should be thinking about what the situation will be 30 years from now.

Diana Putman said that capacity building was not strongly emphasized in the Strategy. It may be that the immediate focus is on developing a changed relationship, rather than on specific areas of concentration. These areas may need to be addressed as the Strategy is being implemented.

Gyude Moore suggested in a closing comment that China brings its values to Africa. But it does not insist that Africa accept those values. The United States, in bringing its values to Africa, needs to start with high-level dialogue and seek to build on that - encouraging or criticizing as the case may be - but always with the goal of building a mature relationship between the US and Africa.

Diana Putman pointed out that it is hard for us to avoid lecturing and to learn how to engage more effectively, including by listening and understanding what others think and want. Under the new Strategy, however, the conversation is changing. In this context, USAID's voice is also being heard in the Interagency on issues that go beyond specific "development" issues.

Steve Giddings closed the meeting by thanking the discussion leaders and reiterating, as Erv Massinga had suggested earlier, we may look for an opportunity to renew the dialogue on these issues at a later date.