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TRANSCRIPT

**Administrator Samantha Power at the Launch of USAID's
Policy Framework: Driving Progress Beyond Programs**

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Washington, DC

ADMINISTRATOR POWER: Good morning, everyone. And good afternoon, good evening to those joining from far away. Thank you, Clinton [White], not only for emceeding today and for being counselor every day, but by being such an instrumental force behind so many of the core ideas within this policy framework. From combating climate change and disinformation, to strengthening our workforce and bringing the perspective to the front office, from the field, from having led so many missions and served in so many posts around the world.

Fundamentally, this is going to work out there in the world, in the communities where we work, and we would be much less effective as an agency without you every day, ground-truthing the ideas that people come up with here at headquarters, including me – so thank you, Clinton, for keeping us honest.

I also want to thank Michele [Sumilas], who is out there in California, being catalytic, hustling up new partnerships for this agency, as she said, putting the progress beyond programs vision into action, as she does every day. Her and her team's leadership in assembling this policy framework in carrying out so many of the consultations that she's described over a really lengthy period of time now has been absolutely indispensable – we would not be here without her and her team.

And I want to echo her thanks, as well to Maany Peyvan, who's really been a true thought partner, certainly to me, but thought leader, here at this agency. We are incredibly fortunate to be able to recruit him back to USAID, he had served here in a prior life. But I think it's very fair to say that without his leadership and thoughtfulness, this document would look very different. And often, you know, we learn through writing, some of us. And in general, I think over the last couple of years, some of the foundational speeches that we've been able to give, I think have helped us understand, you know, what the demands of this agency are, what the needs of this agency are, what the needs of the world are, and that all shows up as well within this incredibly important policy framework.

I think it's fair to say that each administration has a chance to chart its development agenda, and we are here this morning to encapsulate ours and to chart ours – [the USAID policy framework entitled “Driving Progress Beyond Programs.”](#)

That ethos comes from a simple, unfortunately but inescapable truth. Which is that, despite the record budgets for international development that a durable, bipartisan consensus in Congress has managed to secure, over time – again in some cases growing budgets, depending on the sector – the scale of need around the world is outpacing the public resources available to meet them. It's just a core unfortunate fact.

Despite the tremendous strides made over the last few decades in reducing extreme poverty, in addressing hunger and malnutrition, in boosting life expectancy, lifespans, cutting maternal and child mortality, fueling democracy's rise, getting kids into school, spurring rapid economic growth in so many parts of the world, many of those gains, as you well know, have already been rolled back of late, or battered in some fashion.

And we know the culprits. The COVID-19 pandemic itself claimed nearly seven million lives and left primary healthcare systems in tatters. The consequences of that will be felt, of course, for many years to come. That pandemic also battered the finances, as well, of low- and lower-middle income countries, helping fuel inflation, supply chain challenges, as we well know, and placing 60 percent of the world's poorest countries either at or near, debt distress. So this is a sort of financial health challenge that is really new at this scale. And many are grappling with how to manage it given all of the domestic needs that our partners are facing.

Such economic turmoil has, of course, been devastating, pushing more than 75 million people into extreme poverty last year and worsening inequality. That, in turn, can lead to wider societal cleavages, threatening stability and giving rise to populist anger. So everything is connected, it feels, to everything else.

Meanwhile, on top of all of that, and exacerbating all of that, is climate change, subjecting farmers to irregular rains and the hottest growing temperatures faced in history – imperiling future harvests and destroying established livelihoods that people have been able to count on for generations, if not, in some communities, for millennia. Fiercer storms, more intense floods, and longer-lasting droughts are leading to humanitarian disasters of, again, rarely-witnessed, if ever witnessed scale.

There are spoilers afoot, as well. While the People's Republic of China has made mammoth investments in infrastructure throughout Africa, Asia, the Middle East, and even Eastern Europe, it has done so, more often than not, through opaque financing agreements at non-concessional rates, which again, has left many countries facing debt distress and experiencing right now, significant, so-called buyer's remorse, about the debts that have been incurred and the interest payments that are recurring. Beijing is also pursuing a much more aggressive foreign policy, as we well know, backing autocrats, exporting surveillance technology, and pumping resources into foreign disinformation.

The Russian Federation is cruelly putting mercenaries on the ground in Africa to prop up repressive regimes and, of course, it has launched its own brutal, unprovoked invasion of a peaceful neighbor that had been making impressive strides in fighting corruption, generating prosperity, and embracing democracy, strengthening the rule of law.

Past USAID policy frameworks have outlined critical priorities – embracing the tools of science, technology, and innovation to fuel development breakthroughs and aligning on a mission for development actors to work ourselves out of jobs. A very, very worthy ambition. To be very, very clear

these objectives remain absolutely essential today, just as they have been in years past. But in a world of global threats and heightened geostrategic competition, these goals simply will not be achieved unless we broaden our aperture, and focus on the impact we can make beyond the scope of our budgets and any particular programs.

We, at USAID, need to align on clear objectives, we need to marshal a broad coalition to tackle those objectives, and we need to make the necessary investments in our people and our processes to make progress against those objectives.

The first and most urgent task, again, is to determine our top priorities. At USAID, we have honed in on five:

One, responding to complex emergencies in the short-term, while investing in peace, resilience, and food security in the medium and long-term.

Second, helping countries withstand the effects of an already-changing climate, while encouraging net-zero growth. So, again, to be very clear, adaptation as well as mitigation.

Spurring a democratic renewal – this is number three – by fighting the forces that undermine it: corruption, digital repression, foreign disinformation, and outright authoritarianism.

Fourth, reversing the shocking decline in life expectancy brought about by COVID-19 and the decimation of primary care systems.

Fifth, addressing the grueling economic headwinds countries are facing to put them on a path back to inclusive economic growth.

Now, none of these priorities, of course, exist in isolation. Again, everything is connected to everything else it seems – you can't stand up a strong health system if you're in economic turmoil. You can't boost agricultural productivity if droughts and floods are routinely destroying your crops, or worse, if they are going to get worse and worse and worse in the years ahead. The status quo isn't pretty – but again, if we can't curb emissions it's going to be much more bleak in the future. You can't promote inclusive growth if corrupt elites are siphoning off wealth while autocrats are persecuting marginalized or vocal populations.

Luckily, and this really is the unique privilege of working at USAID, we have within this agency the tools and hard-won expertise to tackle each of these massive issues under one roof. That's really unusual in the world, to have a place where all of this coexists, but despite the fact that it does, we do have those capabilities here, we can't do this work alone.

And that is why as you'll see the second chapter of our policy framework is so very crucial. It outlines the new partnerships that we need to embrace to rise up to face today's challenges. Like President Biden, I firmly believe that there is nothing that is beyond America's capacity – nothing that our nation cannot do. But there are some things we cannot do alone.

So we, at USAID, need to elevate the practice of so-called development diplomacy to engage diaspora communities, multilateral institutions, development banks, regional bodies, partner governments, and even in a more sustained and intense way, our own interagency counterparts who have tools that we need them to bring to bear at scale. In doing so, we are seeking to align our efforts and consolidate our

impact. We need to be an even more thoughtful and integrated partner to the global private sector, as well, and to foundations, seeing them not as a piggy bank, per say, but as engines of job growth with unique knowhow, with global supply chains that themselves can be brought to bear on tackling the toughest problems. And finally, as we've been clear about since my earliest days as Administrator, we need to work much more often and deliberately with organizations based in our partner countries – local organizations – ensuring that the work we do is truly locally-led, and thus, that will render the gains that we make much more sustainable once our programs wind down.

That's our agenda to broaden our impact. But we also, in order to do any of this, have to address the needs within our organization. And that is the final focus – but by no means our final focus – in the Policy Framework, and it is the key, the ultimate key, to unlocking Progress Beyond Programs.

Already we have made significant strides to rebuild and empower an over-extended workforce and to recruit and to retain with a much sharper focus on increasing and maintaining diversity. We've invested in communicating much more effectively – and often – and building support at home and abroad for this work, as well as recognizing that the information ecosystem has changed and we need to adjust and communicate more effectively against a backdrop of massive, intentional disinformation about what we are trying to do. That is a truly different circumstance than a decade ago – the scale of what we are up against to convey, again, the impact of our programs. After years of attrition, we are rebuilding our economist workforce and grounding our work in the latest evidence, providing macroeconomic counsel, as well, but also bringing in behavioral science in a new way and in a much more systematic way. And here we've very much hear from you all around the world, we are doing something very, very important that others have tried but we are determined to make a major dent in, which is tackling the needless bureaucracy that ties the hands of our staff, that keeps people chained to desks instead of out in the world with our partners, with local organizations, finding those local organizations. And we are aiming to return three million hours of our workforce's time to them within the next year simply through the elimination of red tape and paperwork and other administrative burdens. You'll hear from Paloma [Adams-Allen] in a little bit about some of that work, I'm sure.

Confronting the challenges of our time, embracing new partnerships, and investing in USAID's enduring effectiveness – this is our path to making an impact that extends and that outlasts the life of any particular program. It also gives us the best shot at rising to this really challenging moment in history. And I thank you all for your role in contributing to this vision and for your role in moving out aggressively on implementation.

Thank you.

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