

**Two opposing views of USAID.** By Anna Gawel, *Devex Newswire*, 12 May 2026

### **Frustration all around**

My colleague Michael Igoe reports on **two top former USAID officials, with two totally opposing views on the defunct agency**, in his Pro Insider newsletter, which publishes every Saturday. Here's a peek:

**Daniel Handel** worked at USAID for over a decade, focused mostly on aid effectiveness and breaking the mold. He moved to [Unlock Aid](#) at the height of last year's aid dismantling and now, in the wake of Unlock Aid's own dismantling — more on that from Michael later — Handel has launched a project called **The New Foreign Assistance**.

Handel is keeping the details under wraps, but he's wide open in his criticism of his former employer (USAID, not Unlock Aid), airing a litany of grievances.

While crediting “an excellent run of reformist leadership across administrations,” Handel **alleged dysfunction at just about every level** — from political appointees “frustrated with staff and Congress making reform difficult” to Congress “frustrated with the defensiveness and evasiveness of the bureaucracy” to partner governments “frustrated with how little input they had into what programs were funded.”

“Program participants often were no better off than if USAID had simply gotten out of the way and given them the money spent on their behalf,” he tells Michael, **praising the Trump administration's focus on trade, not aid**; leveraging private investment; and other changes.

Now, for a vastly different though equally unvarnished view of what went down last year, we turn to former USAID Administrator **Samantha Power**, who spoke at a recent conference Michael attended at Harvard.

“A bunch of tech bros, on a whim, decided to **destroy six and a half decades of work and impact**,” she said of Elon Musk and his team at the Department of Government Efficiency.

“We should avoid assuming that just because something happened, that it was destined to happen,” she added, calling USAID's dismantling “a fever dream by no more than a dozen individuals who **made something catastrophic unfold in the**

**world.”**

Power’s catastrophe or Handel’s progress? Those are just two views in a wide, ongoing debate about the past, present, and future of aid that Michael will reveal each Saturday, exclusively for Devex Pro members.