The Heritage Foundation

USAID 2017–2021:
The Journey to Self-Reliance

Edited by James M. Roberts and Max Primorac

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Conservative political appointees at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) executed reforms and policies that would have previously been dismissed as unrealistic and audacious. The agency launched a reorganization that established a new structure to "end the need for foreign aid," while remaining true to America's humanitarian impulse to help people in need. Traditional American values suffused agency programs with a culture of life and family and religious freedom as a first freedom. Under the Trump Administration, USAID confronted the challenge posed by an aggressive communist China (and those of other malign global actors) and served as responsible stewards of American tax dollars. These reform efforts and achievements can provide Congress a basis upon which to reshape foreign aid authorizations and appropriations.

This report examines various U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) practices, regulations, and procedures that were in place prior to January 20, 2017, and considers in detail many significant reforms implemented by conservatives during the past Administration. While reforms in a single Administration, often undone at least in part by its successor, are not likely to fundamentally change the culture of a long-established institution such as USAID, the sharp contrasts in approach are indicative of the scope of the problems at USAID and point the way toward reforms that might create a more useful and efficient U.S. aid program.

Notable among the policy reforms and innovations outlined in the paper are:

• Steps taken to protect the lives of unborn children;

• Efforts to promote greater international religious freedom;

- Administrative changes to expand and diversify USAID's implement-ers and contractors;

- A New Partnerships Initiative to enable USAID to bypass large, Washington-based middlemen (international nongovernmental organizations [INGOs] and aid contractors) and instead directly fund smaller, nimbler, and more cost-effective local groups; and

- Implementation of other significant bureaucratic streamlining policies.

The Trump Administration implemented historic organizational and policy changes at USAID with the central goal of helping other countries end their need for development assistance while continuing the grand American tradition of responding generously to those in need. This overarching policy vision was known as the "Journey to Self-Reliance"[1] and it was the defining governing principle that informed every aspect of the agency's organizational transformation, policy shifts, and programmatic reforms. This report analyzes the Trump Administration's efforts to achieve this vision at USAID in two major sections. The first covers organizational reforms, which established new bureaus better suited to meet the global challenges set forth in the President's National Security Strategy of December 2017.[2] The second details reforms made at the policy and program level, which translated the Administration's philosophy of governance into facts on the ground.

Institutional and congressional resistance hindered the Trump Administration from placing its full complement of conservative appointees at USAID until midway through the President's term. Thus, not all the reforms identified here were implemented fully. More work will be needed in a future conservative Administration to complete the job of re-prioritizing the agency's goals and modernizing and streamlining it.

Section I: Organizational Reforms

I believe the purpose of foreign assistance should be ending its need to exist. Each of our programs should look forward to the day when it can end. And around the world we should measure our work by how far each investment moves us closer to that day.

—USAID Administrator Mark Green, August 9, 2017[3]

USAID's Transformation: Operationalizing the Journey to Self-Reliance. After eight years of the Obama Administration, the incoming conservative team found that USAID lacked a clear mission or definition of success, with bureaucratic units that had grown up organically and incoherently over many years. More than two-thirds of the agency's portfolio consisted of huge awards to expensive contractors and INGOs favored by the left. From the beginning, the new conservative team saw the need to overhaul American foreign aid by reducing USAID's inefficient managerial structure (as described in a paper published by The Heritage Foundation in late 2017[4]) and reforming its procurement practices.

After assessing these poor conditions, the new conservative leadership at USAID immediately began to reorient the agency's goals and values and fix the structures of delivering U.S. development and humanitarian assistance. Building upon conservative principles of good governance, public accountability, respect for taxpayer investments, and belief in the power of the free market, the new team steered USAID through a historic transformation that strengthened the agency and achieved better and more sustainable results throughout the world. This was the most comprehensive set of changes implemented at USAID in decades. Many of USAID's employees, the international development community, and America's partner countries embraced them.[5]

A simple vision guided this transformation: Every dollar spent and every program implemented by USAID should help governments, the private sector, and civil society finance and implement solutions to solve their own development challenges. While maintaining strong alliances and economic integration is important, no country's citizens want to be dependent upon the generosity of others. Ultimately, the people of every nation should aspire to transition from aid recipients to aid donors.

Key Highlights of the Transformation Policy. Conservative appointees at USAID implemented a turnaround policy dubbed "Transformation." Key features of the initiative included the following:

- **New processes.** To understand what was holding each country back from economic, social, and political development, the conservative leadership at USAID constructed a data-driven visual representation of every lower- and middle-income country in the form of "Roadmaps"[6] to inform policies, programs, and resources. These Roadmaps placed a premium on outcome-focused and data-informed decision-making. The goal was to ensure that as countries become more self-reliant, USAID would continually adapt its programs to be more relevant to each country's unique self-reliance journey.

- **New tools and policies.** Leadership crafted a new agency-level strategy, provided guidance on mobilization of domestic resources (also called Financing Self-Reliance), and emphasized diversifying USAID's partner base and simplifying its procurement processes.[7] USAID also developed its first-ever *Policy on Private-Sector Engagement*.[8] The strategy recognizes that the free market and the private sector are the only true engines for development, and that collaborating closely with domestic and international businesses—and addressing constraints to economic growth—are absolutely essential. The development sector's size is measured in the billions of dollars, while capital markets total trillions of dollars, which presents a major opportunity to leverage funding from investors to achieve strategic goals.

To operationalize the transformational policy reform, USAID rationalized the agency's span of control and improved its function/structure alignment by creating five new bureaus and proposing a sixth:

1. The Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance[9] combined the former Office of U.S. Foreign Disaster Assistance (OFDA) and Food for Peace to integrate food and non-food international disaster assistance. The goal was to achieve better humanitarian outcomes and ensure stronger alignment to the U.S. government's foreign policy interests.

2. The Bureau for Conflict Prevention and Stabilization[10] focuses on addressing fragility, preventing conflict, and responding rapidly to key political transition and stabilization needs.

3. The Bureau for Democracy, Development, and Innovation[11] focuses on providing accountable, transparent, and world-class technical expertise to developing countries, while empowering the agency's field missions to make more data-driven programmatic decisions.

4. The Bureau for Resilience and Food Security[12] unites USAID's efforts to reduce hunger and malnutrition and improve nutrition and water security. The goal is to help build more resilient communities that could better mitigate and recover from natural or human-made crises.

5. The revamped Bureau for Asia reabsorbed the assistance portfolios for Afghanistan and Pakistan to achieve better strategic integration of programming across South and Central Asia and gained the new focus of countering malign Chinese influence across the Indo–Pacific region.

6. An additional bureau, the Bureau for Policy, Resources, and Performance (PRP)[13] was proposed but did not receive congressional concurrence. It would have aligned agency-wide policy development, new country-based strategies, and oversight of performance with existing budget functions for both Operating Expenses and Program funds. The intent was to inject greater accountability into budget and performance-review processes and allow USAID to articulate its real budgetary requirements more precisely.

While these changes achieved a great deal, there were a few things that were left to accomplish as of January 20, 2021:

- Launch PRP without delay.

- Continue to produce annual Roadmaps, and promote their use as an objective, analytical tool and discussion framework in planning and resource allocation.

- Align USAID's budgets to strategies. USAID's Country Development Coordination Strategies (CDCSs) serve as five-year guideposts for its overseas Missions to ensure strategic and programmatic alignment with wider agency goals through mandatory annual reviews between 2020 and 2025. USAID had not yet aligned its revamped strategies to the Administration's budget request. Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, the State Department, and USAID should work together to ensure all of the agency's resources focus on ending the need for foreign assistance.

- Outsource tactical human resource functions and finish the job of establishing new, more flexible hiring categories. These two proposals are critical to ensuring that the agency has the right people with the right skills to realize the conservative vision of the "Journey to Self-Reliance."

- Finish the task of an agency-wide reorganization to close or merge additional bureaus and programs to maximize agency efficiency and minimize its administrative overhead costs.

Relief, Response, and Resilience Structure (R3). Launched in August 2020 and located within the Office of Administrator, the presidentially appointed R3[14] associate administrator oversaw three of the new bureaus: Humanitarian

Assistance, Conflict Prevention and Stabilization, and Resilience and Food Security. The three bureaus' focus was on failing states that face massive population dislocation, violence, disease, and hunger—countries at the bottom of the trajectory to self-reliance that often pose potential national security threats to the United States. The R3 associate administrator is tasked with breaking down bureaucratic stovepipes that undercut the effectiveness of U.S. aid programs and ensuring that the three bureaus take a strategic and integrated approach that optimizes the three complementary lines of effort, starting from the budget process to more purposeful coordination across programs.[15]

Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (BHA). Launched on June 6, 2020, the BHA fuses the previous OFDA and Food for Peace into one unified bureau that speaks with one voice and more effectively links up with development efforts conducted by other parts of the agency.[16] Its portfolio includes food, water, shelter, emergency health care, and related protection support for the most vulnerable communities. Managing a $7.2 billion annual portfolio, the agency's largest, the BHA is the federal government's lead coordinator for international disaster emergencies.

In 2020, the BHA led the U.S. government's responses to the Beirut port explosion in Lebanon; two outbreaks of Ebola in the Democratic Republic of the Congo; the Venezuelan regional crisis; the COVID-19 pandemic; hurricane disasters in Central America; and ongoing crises in Bangladesh, Nigeria, South Sudan, Syria, and Yemen. Last year, the BHA funded 43 percent of the total global budget of the World Food Program (WFP), the year the WFP won the Nobel Peace Prize.

The BHA also started to vet the recipients of humanitarian assistance outside Syria for the first time. Major actions were taken to avoid diversion of taxpayer funds to terrorists and other entities that undermine U.S. national security, while still maintaining USAID's ability to carry out foreign policy priorities and deliver urgent aid in crises.[17] In January 2021, USAID approved Chapter 319[18] of its policy handbook, the Automated Directives System (ADS), which broadened the systematic vetting of partners in seven high-risk countries and territories, including those organizations that deliver humanitarian assistance.

ADS Chapter 319 centralizes USAID's formerly fragmented vetting assets within the Office of Security and thus allows for the vetting of sub-awardees over which the agency has heretofore had little to no visibility. It also facilitates the vetting of unlicensed and unregulated financial service providers known as Money-Transfer Agents, or *hawalas*[19]—financial institutions used by INGOs in states without functioning banking systems but also by terrorist and criminal syndicates to finance their global operations.[20]

On March 19, 2021, the U.S. Justice Department announced it had reached a $6.9 million settlement with USAID implementing partner International Rescue Committee for procurement fraud in its cross-border aid to internally displaced persons in Syria, fraud that had occurred during the Obama Administration.[21] USAID's acting inspector general called the settlement "a strong message that USAID-funded implementers must have systems in place to detect, deter, and prevent fraud in humanitarian aid." ADS 319 makes future cases of such fraud more difficult.

While having the largest workload among the bureaus, with 3,000 individual procurement actions annually, the BHA had among the fewest number of qualified contracting staff to manage its multibillion-dollar portfolio. In many cases, it would take USAID 600 days to hire key Personal Services Contractor staff, which forced top talent to turn elsewhere for employment. Internal regulatory improvements cut the hiring timeline for PSCs by 75 percent, and the BHA was authorized to hire at least six more contracting staff to handle its procurement actions.

In addition, USAID leadership began integrating the OFDA's separate information technology system into the agency's larger framework by the end of fiscal year (FY) 2021, to reduce redundancies and related costs as well as enhance corporate protections against cybersecurity attacks. Most important, the fusion of the two separate offices with separate staff, managers, corporate culture, and internal systems proceeded absent any break in the U.S. government's international disaster responses, which reflected the Trump Administration's focus on good stewardship of taxpayer money.

Bureau of Development, Democracy, and Innovation (DDI). The DDI launched in November 2020 to provide technical support to USAID's missions throughout the world. The DDI consolidated various parts of the agency that used to provide missions with a fragmented menu of critical in-house technical services.[22]

The DDI placed under one managerial roof all of the agency's many technical centers and hubs that were formerly scattered across different bureaus. The old structure and system had undercut USAID's efforts to respond quickly to changing trends and national security threats. The DDI became a one-stop-shop for private-sector reform and market development, working with and investing in faith-based organizations, education, technology, innovation, women's empowerment, energy, infrastructure, and good governance. The DDI became home to four centers and five hubs that can now respond more quickly to evolving global trends while moving countries along the continuum of development from conflict to resilience. The consolidation of existing resources did not require any new funding.

USAID's Center for Faith and Opportunity Initiatives (CFOI). The previous CFOI was migrated from the Office of the Administrator into the Hub for Local, Faith, and Transformative Partnerships (LFT)[23] within the DDI to ensure that USAID could apply a faith lens to all programming and future funding considerations. Historically, USAID's faith office played a networking role for faith- and community-based organizations that were seeking to forge relationships with the agency and identify potential funding sources. While the LFT hub would continue this role, the office was empowered to provide solutions drawn from faith-based organizations (FBOs) and communities. In October 2020, the CFOI held its first Evidence Summit on Strategic Religious Engagement—the first USAID summit to focus on religion in development.[24] Its findings made clear that FBOs that are working in development have greater local trust, manage more sustainable programs, are more efficient with funds, and produce better outcomes than do government institutions. As an outcome of the summit, the CFOI produced a draft USAID Policy on Strategic Religious Engagement (SRE).[25]

To institutionalize this agenda, USAID established a Sector Council for Strategic Religious Engagement and International Religious Freedom as the main coordinating body for the agency's efforts to promote religious liberty around the world.[26]

Section II: Key Policy Reforms and Programmatic Achievements

Effective Partnering and Procurement Reform. Under the Obama Administration, USAID had prioritized large contracts and grants to United Nations (U.N.) agencies and a small number of for-profit companies and INGOs. These transactions were justified on the basis of speed and reduced administrative burden on the agency (because of the minimal oversight and follow-up required). Procurement reform was critical to congressional demands that USAID diversify its partnership base beyond the traditional Washington, DC, Beltway community of contractors and implementing NGOs—and as a way to introduce innovation into agency programming.

The Effective Partnering and Procurement Reform (EPPR)[27] project was a series of policy and operational reforms to increase the effectiveness of USAID's programs and bring greater innovation to its procurements. As Administrator Green noted, "None of the reforms will achieve lasting impact unless we fundamentally change our approach to contracts and

grants. The Agency's core focus must be to execute and manage effective awards."[28] By the end of 2020, the EPPR had already achieved more than half of the 170 recommendations approved for action.

The EPPR brought the journey to self-reliance objective into contracts and grants and revitalized the agency's commitment to locally led development, especially in partnership with more effective FBOs. USAID's first-ever *Acquisition and Assistance Strategy* in December 2018[29] boosted its capacity to diversify its partner base; be less prescriptive, more collaborative and adaptive; connect the design, procurement, and implementation of programs to foster agility and rapid innovation; focus on value for money; and empower USAID's procurement workforce (especially its Contract and Agreement Officers) to take risk, embrace new ideas, and terminate obsolete programs that had failed to produce results or were no longer fit for purpose.

In late 2017, the *U.S. Department of State/USAID Joint Strategic Plan*[30] set forth three new, agency-wide metrics that would drive and measure the EPPR. These metrics signaled a strategic shift toward a more diverse USAID partner base and the use of a range of hitherto underutilized tools to achieve locally led development that are critical to achieving sustainable development outcomes:

1. Increasing the use of new and underused partners, defined as those organizations that received less than $25 million from USAID over the most recent five-year period, a key step in establishing the New Partnerships Initiative (NPI)[31] and refocusing the agency on locally led development. Nearly all USAID missions established NPI Action Plans, which included these new metrics and country-specific targets.

2. Increasing collaborative design in procurement, including co-creation, which enables USAID and its partners to "workshop" their way toward creating new consortia and innovative programs. For FY 2021, USAID's missions set as their target that *more than half of all new awards should* use co-creation.[32]

3. Improving the performance of USAID's local partners. The Capacity Building for Local Development metric became part of the Foreign Assistance Framework managed by the State Department. Nearly 70 USAID missions in the field set targets that cover over 8,000 local partners, a number expected to reach 15,000 or more over time. The agency's first-ever Policy on Local-Capacity Development, launched under the EPPR in FY 2020, is due to be finalized later in calendar year

2021. USAID established a Locally Led Development Agency Leadership Council and technical Sector Councils to oversee the new local capacity strengthening policy and metric and to support adaptation of all agency program or sector strategies to locally led development.

USAID published its first Risk-Appetite Statement to make clear that the agency had a high tolerance for programmatic risk through harnessing new technologies and innovations; promoting sustainability through local ownership and resource mobilization; working with the private sector; embracing flexible, iterative design and implementation; and employing innovative modalities for acquisition and assistance.[33] USAID was the only federal department or agency to have made such a risk-appetite statement public on its website.

In addition, the agency shifted toward performance-based approaches, or pay-for-results programming, by using award incentives and milestones-based awards. These shifts were applied in NPI programming and within the agency's Global Health Bureau, especially for the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief.

In response to a damning report issued by USAID's Office of Inspector General in 2019,[34] conservative leadership established adaptive-management policies and new accountability for award managers and their supervisors to incentivize staff to better manage both assistance and acquisition with an insistence on a greater focus on measurable outcomes.

To support these reforms in award-management that were implemented by the Bureaus for Management (M) and Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL), the agency overhauled its operational policy for its Program Cycle[35] by eliminating low-value bureaucratic steps in the planning and design of activities. These changes created greater flexibility that some senior career staff in the Management Bureau had long resisted but rank-and-file agency staff overwhelmingly supported.[36]

Under the EPPR, USAID leadership launched a Deployable Innovations Initiative to identify and scale up proven new ideas funded by the agency. This effort enabled USAID (and its partners) to benefit new ideas, technologies, and processes across sectors such as education and global health.

As a result of these changes, USAID's innovative delivery of aid and the performance of its awards had never been stronger. Legislation to institutionalize NPI won bipartisan support.[37]

Bureau for Global Health (BGH). The BGH at USAID has been the lead U.S. agency for maternal, women's, and child health; nutrition; and infectious diseases, including Ebola, COVID-19, HIV/AIDS, and malaria. During the Trump Administration, the BGH's leadership focused on the following 11 strategic areas:

1. **Strengthened private-sector engagement.** The BGH expanded and increased funding for its Center for Innovation and Impact, which works with private actors in the health sector on projects such as development-impact bonds, capital funds, and innovative technologies. It engaged the Millennium Challenge Corporation and the new U.S. International Development Finance Corporation.

2. **Strengthened global technical leadership.** While the BGH's budget and staffing had increased substantially over the past decade, its technical capacity could not assess the impact of the Bureau's programs accurately, and USAID was not holding its implementing partners accountable for achieving agreed outcomes. The BGH enhanced its technical oversight of its programs, projects, and funding and revised its metrics for program evaluation. Technical staff increased their engagement within and outside the BGH, especially with other U.S. government departments and agencies, standard-setting and normative bodies, and global clinical specialty organizations.

3. **Diversified the agency's partner pool through engagement with local and faith-based partners and procurement reform.** Historically, approximately 85 percent of funding from the BGH has gone to a small number of large INGOs. Overhead costs for these organizations are high. Some INGOs pass only 20 percent of the funds they receive from USAID to smaller local partners, which do the bulk of service delivery.[38] INGOs pay salaries far in excess of the wages of local health workers and pull physicians and nurses out of local health institutions, which leads to staffing and capacity problems. Conspicuously absent from INGOs' work plans is a focus on capacity-building for local partners, which remain highly dependent on foreign organizations. During crises or conflicts, such as the COVID-19 pandemic, INGOs might not be able to continue their in-country activities. By diversifying USAID's pool of implementing partners, the agency increased funding for local organizations to care for their communities and built the resilience of health networks.

Even more striking was the BGH's inability to fund FBOs. Field surveys and discussions with implementing partners revealed that the bureau and missions were shutting FBOs out of funding or even treating them with hostility when they attempted to engage directly with USAID. In certain regions, such as sub-Saharan Africa, these

organizations provide 80 percent to 90 percent of health care, especially to the extremely poor. Under conservative leadership, the BGH reached out to Christian and Muslim FBOs and their networks, expressed openness to working with FBOs, and participated in 2020's "Evidence Summit on Strategic Religious Engagement."

BGH's leadership focused on (1) requiring more local capacity-building as a condition of the award; (2) increasing smaller awards to local partners; (3) building collaboration and improving communication with smaller and local NGOs; and (4) participating aggressively in the agency's EPPR process. The latter allowed the BGH to streamline its processes for evaluation and procurement, make them more transparent and efficient, and use innovative ways to work with partners, such as through co-creation.[39]

4. **Consolidated donor and multilateral engagement and increased accountability.** Communication by USAID with other donors on global health has typically been on an ad hoc basis. In addition, the U.S. government had failed to hold multilateral partners (United Nations agencies and other international organizations) to a high level of accountability. The BGH consolidated donor and multilateral engagement into one team and removed language promoting abortion from U.N. documents, policy statements, and technical literature.

5. **Streamlined bureaucracy.** The BGH's size and complexity has led to a proliferation of organizational structures, policies, and procedures that inhibit the bureau's effectiveness. As with other operating units within USAID, the BGH underwent restructuring under USAID's Transformation. While the final restructuring was not completed, the BGH implemented multiple non-structural changes based on staff feedback. The proposed BGH Transformation provides a blueprint for future improvements in efficiency, coordination, and programmatic integration.

6. **Improved health care and support for women, children, and families.** Given its institutional legacy (until 2017) of continuing to focus on 1960s-era population-control strategies, agency leaders found that the BGH's traditional investments to support and improve the health of women, children, and families lacked impact on broadly understood challenges (for example, resilience, family

stability, and the zero-dose child[40]). The BGH's leadership refocused attention on the health of women and children (including unborn children); cervical cancer as a public health crisis and threat to existing maternal-child health and HIV-control programs; optimal health for women; and education on sexual-risk avoidance and family support, especially for families with adolescents. USAID's traditional global health assistance splinters families and communities into disease-related constituencies.[41] In response, the BGH's conservative leadership created a "Request for Application for Resilient Families" that made the family, not individuals or target populations, the unit of intervention.

7. **Created a better supply chain.** The Obama Administration bundled the BGH's investments in purchasing medicines and medical supplies for the U.S. government's international health programs into a single, multi-billion-dollar program and awarded it to an entity with no supply-chain experience. This company had significant difficulty in performing during the first two years of the contract, which resulted in an inspector general investigation and congressional hearings.[42] The agency's conservative leadership launched a function- and efficiency-focused redesign for the next supply-chain contract to prevent a "too-big-to-fail" scenario and ensure accountability across the global supply chain, promoting local engagement and capacity-building.

8. **Protected life.** USAID is the U.S. government's principal funder of "reproductive health" programs globally and the primary pass-through for many U.N. programs that support family planning. In their efforts to advance a pro-life agenda at USAID in countries around the world, leadership was directly supported by the President. In his September 2019 address to the 74th United Nations General Assembly, President Trump laid down very clear markers. He was the first American President ever to speak frankly and straightforwardly about abortion (and pro-life alternatives to it) at the U.N., telling delegates that innocent unborn lives would be protected during his presidency. He rejected the many U.N. development projects that assert a global right to taxpayer-funded abortion on demand.[43] The Trump Administration ended support for the U.N. Population Fund because of the organization's support of communist China's violent one-child policy, which resulted in forced abortions and sterilization. USAID successfully reinvested the funding that would have gone to the U.N. Population

Fund into other programs that improve women's health and dignity without undermining respect for life.

The agency mobilized a coordinated U.S. government (State, USAID, and U.S. Health and Human Services (HHS)) team to promote the Administration's pro-life position in all multilateral negotiations, including at the annual U.N. Commission on the Status of Women and the Nairobi Summit.[44] As the lead agency representing the United States at the G7 Development Ministerial in 2018, USAID successfully kept abortion language out of the final documents.

The Trump Administration reinstated the Mexico City Policy, renamed as the Protecting Life in Global Health Assistance (PLGHA) policy,[45] which prohibited the use of U.S. global health assistance to fund or promote abortion. The BGH created informational materials, training, implementation, monitoring, and reporting on the PLGHA Policy and rigorously enforced it. The BGH also played a significant role in assessing the impact of the PLGHA on health-related activities in the field. The PLGHA did not reduce funding for women's health around the world by even one dollar. It did ensure that the main pur-veyors of the international abortion industrial complex—most notably Marie Stopes International (now renamed MSI Reproductive Choices) and the International Planned Parenthood Federation—could not receive financing from USAID for four years.

9. **Revised documentation on "sexual and reproductive health and rights."** The World Health Organization, other U.N. agencies, and many governments and international bodies have defined *sexual rights, sexual and reproductive rights,* and *sexual health* as unalienable rights to promote abortion—including for minors—and to undermine parental rights, marriage, and the family. The BGH's conservative leadership collaborated with HHS, the White House, and the State Department to revise documents and policies that attempted to promote "sexual and reproductive rights."[46] These actions resulted in internationally agreed-upon documents that not only promoted Administration policy but also empowered the governments of countries that are receiving U.S. foreign assistance to withstand such revisionist tactics. The BGH also removed similar language from its funding announcements.

10. **Integrated programs in Washington, DC, and in the field.**
    USAID's global health programs are often siloed, with programs for
    malaria, child health, HIV, or family planning delivered without suffi-
    cient planning to leverage care, training, monitoring, or coordination.
    Women are often forced to come to clinics on different days for chil-
    dren's immunizations, family planning, testing and treatment from
    HIV, and nutrition. The agency promoted the sharing of resources
    through "resilient health institutions" that are accessible, accountable,
    high quality, efficient, locally sustainable, and coordinated.

11. **Responded to COVID-19.** The BGH took a lead role in USAID's
    response to the COVID-19 pandemic. However, when the existing
    response structure proved inadequate, the BGH's leadership stood up
    a Sustained Crisis-Response Team, modeled after similar units cre-
    ated to address natural and man-made disasters.[47]

International Religious Freedom. President Trump's Executive Order
(E.O.) 13926 on Advancing International Religious Freedom, issued on June
2, 2020, capped the Administration's commitment to "the protection of
religious freedom for all people worldwide as a moral and national security
imperative."[48] E.O. 13926 instructed the Secretary of State, in consultation
with the Administrator of USAID, to prioritize religious freedom "in the
planning and implementation of United States foreign policy and in the for-
eign assistance programs of the Department of State and USAID." By then,
USAID already had incorporated religious freedom into its core structures.
    Administrator Green declared at the 2018 Ministerial to Advance Reli-
gious Freedom, "We see freedom of worship as an essential element in our
pursuit of government that is citizen-centered and citizen-responsible…
inseparable from freedom of expression, assembly, association, and free-
dom from discrimination." Partnerships with FBOs would permit USAID
"to reach corners in communities where governments cannot effectively go,
or where they have chosen not to go."[49] At the subsequent annual Ministerial,
Green doubled-down on USAID's commitment to religious freedom: "What
we call our first freedom, is not merely an American value. It's a universal
one. And it is a human right."[50]
    Longtime USAID bureaucrats slowed initial efforts to partner with FBOs
by citing the false trope that partnering with religious organizations, espe-
cially churches, violated the First Amendment's Establishment Clause.[51] U.S.
government officials also argued that humanitarian assistance could only
be distributed in accordance "with need, not creed," even when religious

minorities were targeted with genocide, as in Iraq. USAID contractors that stood to lose funding also pushed back.[52] By mid-2018, USAID affirmed the legality of the agency's partnerships with FBOs: the Rule on Participation by Religious Organization in USAID Programs (Part 205 of Title 22 of the Code of Federal Regulations); Partnership Guidance and Answers to Frequently Asked Questions (FAQs) for FBOs; and the Legal Guidance and Answers to FAQs for USAID Staff.[53] By summer 2020, USAID had mandated training on international religious freedom for all its foreign staff.[54]

Agency bureaucrats claimed that FBOs and houses of worship lacked institutional capacity and familiarity with USAID's reporting require-ments. This argument was used to justify USAID's continued dependence on expensive global NGOs and U.N. agencies. In fact, working directly with small and local entities brings substantial costs savings to U.S. taxpayers, is more effective at delivering assistance, and generates far more visibility to beneficiaries of the generosity of the American people.[55]

To facilitate funding to church-run entities, USAID launched the NPI "to expand and diversify USAID's partner base and change the way the Agency does business. By working with new or underutilized partners, the Agency hopes to bring more innovative approaches to U.S. foreign assistance; focus on strengthening capacity and commitment in partner countries by tapping into existing networks of community- and faith-based organizations, and to reach new populations."[56] NPI became a critical tool in providing local FBOs opportunities for direct funding opportunities from USAID.

In 2018, USAID's Bureau for the Middle East established the Religious and Ethnic Minorities and Coordination Unit (REM Unit) to coordinate with Vice President Mike Pence's Genocide Recovery and Persecution Response in Iraq initiative. The unit expanded its remit across the Middle East and North Africa with an additional $50 million in funds to support religious and ethnic minorities in Egypt, Jordan, Lebanon, Libya, Morocco, and Syria.[57]

The agency created a new, senior-level chief adviser for international religious freedom position that reports directly to the administrator and is tasked with coordinating a "Whole-of-USAID" approach to achieving this Administration priority. The chief adviser co-chairs the newly formed Stra-tegic Religious Engagement and International Religious Freedom Sector Council. The Sector Council, composed of senior officials from USAID's regional and technical bureaus, formulates and approves U.S. assistance projects that advance religious freedom.

The chief adviser hosted a series of internal agency "fireside chats" with the administrator and leaders from communities victimized by genocide—including Chinese Uighurs, Iraqi Yazidis, and Burmese Rohingya—to build

awareness among thousands of USAID's staff worldwide around religious persecution globally and to demonstrate how the agency's missions can address and prevent such persecution.

USAID updated its CDCSs to incorporate religious freedom and partner with FBOs. USAID's missions were required to report how they are promoting religious freedom and protecting the rights of ethnic minorities. This requirement provides an assistance response to the annual reports on international religious freedom of the U.S. Department of State and the U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom.[58]

USAID also partnered with the governments of Hungary and Poland and with two global FBOs, the Knights of Columbus and Malteser International, and with the Rome-based Community of St. Egidio to distribute humanitarian aid, deliver psycho-social support, and revive culture and livelihoods.

Vice President's Genocide Recovery Program in Iraq. Although the Obama Administration had declared the Islamic State in Iraq and Syria guilty of genocide against Iraq's religious minorities, it failed to assist Iraq's churches and other local organizations in helping the hundreds of thousands of refugees who had fled their homes in the Nineveh Plains and Sinjar. Under the direction of Vice President Mike Pence,[59] USAID took the lead role in a $400 million genocide-recovery program to provide direct help to Christians and other Islamic State victims.

The agency embedded a double-hatted Special Envoy of the Vice-President/Special Representative of the Administrator for Minority Assistance Programs at the U.S. Consulate General in Erbil to oversee the aid effort, cut through bureaucratic obstacles, catalyze direct partnerships between the agency and local churches, empower traumatized communities, pull in other donor support, require international U.S.-funded international agencies to coordinate with local leaders, and advocate on their behalf before senior Iraqi officials.[60] USAID forged strategic partnerships with FBOs such as Samaritan's Purse, the Knights of Columbus, Aid to the Church in Need, YAZDA, Nadia's Initiative, Malteser International, and dozens of local faith-based and other civic organizations to provide a range of assistance, including infrastructure (water, power, sewerage, schools, health clinics, rubble removal); psycho-social support; business loans; the restoration of cultural centers; community building programs; and home repairs for those in need. The U.S. embassy in Baghdad and its consulate general in Erbil integrated their diplomatic engagement in Iraq with these assistance efforts and pressed Iraqi leaders to rein in their militias and respond to the material and security needs of the people of Ninewa Province, leading to the opening of roadblocks that had been preventing the return of religious minorities.[61]

Communist China's Development Challenge. Conservative leaders at USAID played a pivotal role in pushing back against communist China's malevolent foreign policy. On September 10, 2018, the agency released its Clear Choice Framework,[62] which institutionalized the focus on great-power competition laid out in the President's National Security Strategy. USAID presented the world with a clear choice between America's emphasis on liberty, sovereignty, and free markets versus China's mercantilist authoritarianism that practices predatory financing dressed up as assistance to capture countries into debt traps and render them subservient to Chinese strategic interests.[63]

USAID's counter-China effort spanned the energy, infrastructure, and digital sectors. In 2020, the agency launched its first *Digital Strategy*,[64] which explained the need for safe 5G access in emerging markets amid the "looming threats posed by authoritarian governments and malevolent actors who use digital tools to suppress political dissent and other individual freedoms while also limiting competition in the marketplace."[65] A year earlier, USAID had announced its Countering Malign Kremlin Influence Development Framework to offset Russian subversive efforts to weaken U.S. influence in Europe, promoting energy independence and cybersecurity protections.[66] In late 2019, USAID announced $440 million to "expand partnerships with governments, civil society, and the private sector in countries in the Indo-Pacific region in support of…energy, infrastructure, digital connectivity, trade, and other economic activities."[67]

Within the larger Japan–U.S. Strategy Energy Partnership, several sub-initiatives emerged, including an agreement on U.S.–Japan energy cooperation in sub-Saharan Africa through the inter-agency Power Africa initiative coordinated by USAID.[68] In 2020, USAID dispatched a development adviser to Greenland amid Chinese strategic claims of being a "near Arctic state" despite almost a thousand miles of physical separation.[69]

In December 2020, USAID signed a Memoranda of Understanding (MOU) with the U.S. Department of Homeland Security and the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration to strengthen U.S. government partnerships with the governments of countries in the Western Hemisphere and the larger Indo–Pacific region. Specifically, the MOUs seek to increase cooperation to detect and halt illegal, unreported, and unregulated fishing, and address criminal activities practiced by state-backed Chinese fishing fleets that violate international norms, economically ravage coastal communities, exacerbate food insecurity, and deplete maritime resources.[70] In the Middle East, USAID signed MOUs with the governments of Israel, Kuwait, Qatar, and the United Arab Emirates that opened new prospects for joint programming in Africa, Asia, and the Middle East in order to further counter Chinese development advances.[71]

USAID created a senior executive-level "clear choice coordinator" position to counter China's malign development efforts along with a fully dedicated and funded six-person Secretariat placed within the Policy, Planning, and Learning Bureau. The clear choice coordinator and Secretariat provide agency leadership policy, partnership-building, communications, and data and analysis to buttress the U.S. government efforts to offset China's predatory lending and other malicious tactics.

Furthermore, an agency-level Clear Choice Executive Council and working group between USAID and the U.S. International Development Finance Corporation, chaired by the USAID deputy administrator, elevated the agency's role in resisting Chinese malign activities. During 2020, all USAID's five-year CDCSs incorporated the Clear Choice Framework into their programming and annual reporting.[72] USAID–State Department working groups at U.S. embassies began coordinating diplomatic and development activities, especially regarding Chinese "debt-trap-diplomacy" Belt and Road Initiative development models.

USAID Branding Reform. Conservative leaders at the agency made significant strides regarding USAID's public recognition. USAID's assistance had too often gone unnoticed—buried beneath the self-promoting PR efforts of USAID contractors and NGOs—by recipient governments and communities that were receiving assistance. USAID contractors and NGOs played on unfounded security fears which concealed the fact that the American people and their taxes are the source of the assistance. USAID rescinded the blanket branding waiver in Iraq in the summer of 2018 after aid recipients there falsely credited U.N. agencies for what was actually American aid, and USAID took similar steps elsewhere around the world.

In November 2020, USAID's conservative leadership officially revised ADS Chapter 320[73] to enhance accountability and increase the visible branding of American-funded projects.

In particular, the revamped ADS chapter raises the threshold for the issuance of branding/marketing waivers, especially blanket ones for all programs in a country. Instead of these waivers being issued almost automatically at the mission level without any oversight (as was the case in the past), they must now receive the concurrence of the administrator of USAID. The revised chapter gives greater authority to the senior adviser for brand management in the agency's Bureau for Legislative Public Affairs, a position that had been vacant for many years, to review and intervene in branding and marketing matters, maximize the visibility of U.S. assistance, and ensure consistency across the organization. Also in 2020, USAID updated its *Graphic Standards Manual and Partner Co-Branding Guide.*[74]

In December 2020, the White House required federal departments and agencies that provide foreign assistance to use a common logo selected by the President, and in January 2021, President Trump signed into law the USAID Branding Modernization Act,[75] which allows the USAID administrator additional flexibility in branding U.S. assistance.

Despite this progress, a deeply embedded culture remains in the foreign aid bureaucracy that views the recognition of U.S. efforts, and the influence they engender, as somehow embarrassing and entirely secondary to a larger philanthropic mission. Good works and influence do not need to be exclusive, and focused leadership is necessary, so the recipients of American generosity understand clearly who is helping. America's hostile international rivals are never shy about taking credit for their development projects. The United States should not be shy about it, either.

Conclusion

Conservative political appointees at USAID executed reforms and policies that would have previously been dismissed as unrealistic and audacious. The agency launched a reorganization that established a new structure to "end the need for foreign aid," and captured in the guiding principle of "the Journey to Self-Reliance" while remaining true to America's humanitarian impulse to help people in need. Traditional American values suffused agency programs with a culture of life and family and religious freedom as a first freedom. Under the Trump Administration, USAID confronted the challenge posed by an aggressive and malign communist China (and those of other malign global actors) and served as responsible stewards of American tax dollars.

These reform efforts and achievements can provide the next conservative Administration with a solid base from which to launch even bolder reforms while offering a future Congress a basis upon which to reshape foreign aid authorizations and appropriations.

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