

**“Diversity, Equity, Inclusion, and Accessibility in U.S. Diplomacy and Development”
U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee
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**Testimony of United States Agency for International Development (USAID) Chief Diversity
Equity Inclusion and Access (DEAI) Officer
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Chairman Menendez, Ranking Member Risch, Members of the Committee, thank you for the opportunity to speak today about the progress USAID has made to date – and the remaining opportunities to do more – on diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility (DEIA) within our Agency.

In the span of USAID’s 60 years of global development work, the Agency has relied on the dynamism and fresh perspectives of a uniquely talented workforce, always aiming to improve policies and outcomes to better reflect our values and bring to bear the best of what America has to offer. With the leadership and support of President Biden, Administrator Power, and a strong bipartisan coalition in Congress, USAID is finally able to unite its disparate diversity, equity, inclusion, and accessibility efforts, an ambitious undertaking I have been privileged to lead since being sworn in in March of this year. As the Agency’s first ever Chief Diversity Officer, I lead an office of outstanding and committed individuals who are working tirelessly to ensure USAID is diverse, equitable, inclusive, and accessible throughout its practices, programs, policies, and partnerships. I oversee our DEIA efforts across the Agency, not only in our workforce and workplace, but also in how we deliver assistance, design programs, and form partnerships. I want to acknowledge Ambassador Gina Abercrombie-Winstanley and her work at the Department of State and let the Committee know that the Department and USAID are working together to ensure we maximize and accelerate efforts where we have mutual interests.

Administrator Samantha Power has prioritized a comprehensive approach to DEIA from her first day in office when she signed USAID’s 2021 DEIA Strategic Plan. Since then, she has continued to demonstrate that DEIA is a priority by establishing the DEIA Office within the Office of the Administrator, creating the Agency’s first Chief Diversity Officer position, and ensuring the Agency has dedicated staff to support this important work. I would like to thank the Committee and your colleagues in Congress for providing the office with a dedicated budget to support the programs and activities that will help increase diversity in our workforce, expand opportunity to the organizations with which we partner, and ensure equity is incorporated across our employment lifecycle, our partner base and in the communities we serve.

This new office is now staffed by a team of 18 dedicated DEIA experts that reflects the diversity we expect to see across the Agency: a mix of civil service, foreign service, and institutional support contractors with a variety of talents and abilities. USAID has also hired 13 full-time DEIA Advisors, roles created in specific Bureaus and Independent Offices to work in collaboration with my team to advance USAID's unified DEIA strategy.

As mentioned, I oversee USAID's 2021 DEIA Strategic Plan, an updated version of USAID's DEI strategy, which contains 10 goals to enhance diversity, and promote an equitable and safe workplace. My office also supports the implementation of USAID's Equity Action Plan, which seeks to reduce potential barriers to accessing benefits and services, procurement and contracting opportunities, and Agency actions and programs. To achieve continuity across our efforts, we routinely engage with USAID Bureaus and Independent Offices, including the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (PPL), the Bureau for Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM), the Bureau for Democracy, Development, and Innovation (DDI), and the Bureau for Management, as well as the Office of Civil Rights (OCR) and the Office of the General Counsel, regional and functional bureaus and our overseas Missions.

On the diversity front, the Agency strives to remove any potential barriers to equal employment opportunity in a bid to build a workforce that reflects the diversity of our nation. We work collectively to recruit, retain and promote the Agency's talent, yet we still have more progress to make with communities of color, veterans, persons with disabilities, persons of different religions, persons of different sexes and gender identities, and persons in rural areas. To address these challenges, we have expanded our Affirmative Employment Division within the Office of Civil Rights to include the establishment of a robust Special Emphasis Program – to identify and remove any potential barriers to equal employment opportunity in Agency policies, programs, processes, and practices for groups that are traditionally underrepresented or have been historically subjected to discrimination in the workforce. We are adding posts with work-study opportunities and increasing paid internships; those managed by USAID and with third parties such as the Hispanic Association of Colleges and Universities, and the Urban League.

As we prioritize the diversification of our talent pool, we are actively working to ensure USAID is an employer of choice for individuals with disabilities, including disabled veterans. As such, we are prioritizing the use of the Schedule A hiring authority for individuals with disabilities and Disabled Veteran non-competitive hiring authorities. These non-competitive authorities are invaluable in ensuring we achieve our goals of reaching 12% of our employees be Persons with Disabilities and 2% be Persons with Targeted Disabilities or Serious Health Conditions within the next two years.

We are also actively working to diversify our candidate pool through new and renewed partnerships and engagements with Minority Serving Institutions (MSIs) such as Historically

Black Colleges and Universities (HBCUs), Tribal and Indigenous Colleges and Universities (TCUs), and institutions serving the Hispanic, Asian American (AA), and Native American Pacific Islander communities. Last year, we held the first conferences for HBCUs and Hispanic Serving Institutions (HSIs) with a total of over 3,000 registered students, faculty, and partners. This fall we will host our second annual HSI and HBCU Conferences and will be expanding conference outreach to AA and Native American Pacific Islander Serving Institutions (NAPISI) and planning the Agency's first TCU symposium in the spring. Our partnerships with MSIs are intended to do more than diversify our talent pipelines, however; we hope that these institutions can also collaborate with USAID as thought leaders in global development, and also ultimately join our cadre of implementing partners and sub-partners. On top of the Memoranda of Understanding we have signed with Delaware State University, Tuskegee University, Florida International University, and Alcorn State University, we are teeing up new partnerships to be announced this fall and exploring new partnerships with HSIs and TCUs.

We also plan to leverage our Development Diplomats in Residency (DDIRs) Program, through which talented Foreign Service Officers are embedded within higher education institutions in the U.S. to strengthen our partnerships, enhance regional outreach and recruitment activities, and allow for development concepts to be incorporated into the educational curriculum of institutions.

The elevation and unification of these efforts in USAID's Front Office is about more than just changing what this Agency looks like. It's about changing how it feels to work here, to partner with us, and how we deliver results, elevating a far more inclusive array of voices, making sure they have seats at the table, and grappling with the legacies of racism and sexism that plague all our country's institutions. It's about overcoming a history of gatekeeping that prevents underrepresented groups both in the United States and abroad from having a meaningful say in our humanitarian and development work.

To minimize biases during the hiring process as more diverse candidates apply for employment, USAID is piloting masked hiring, a process that promotes the mitigation of bias by masking information such as demographics and focuses on objective criteria for positions. This process is currently being piloted within the civil service and within some of our non-direct hire mechanisms.

We continue to invest in the career advancement and professional development of our current workforce, including staff based in Washington and around the world. For staff from underrepresented groups, we are expanding our support for the International Career Advancement Program (ICAP), which provides leadership development to mid-level professionals from underrepresented backgrounds. Over the past year USAID has doubled the number of ICAP participants, and we aim to further expand participation in the program fifty percent next year. We have also increased our support for the Donald M. Payne International Development Fellowship

Program, which recruits highly competitive candidates from underrepresented and disadvantaged backgrounds to join USAID's Foreign Service and intend to expand the Payne Fellowship Program from 15 to 30 Fellows in the coming year. I appreciate that many Members of Congress have hosted Payne Fellows for summer placements. I hope you will continue to support our Payne Fellows who gain invaluable first-hand experience on the legislative process.

In my role as CDO, I engage with staff across the Agency and serve as a standing member of USAID's Senior Leadership Group Panel, which selects key Foreign Service leadership assignments. And we will be including DEIA competencies and objectives into annual civil service performance evaluations, and foreign service precepts across all workforce levels, including senior leaders, a clear step forward in ensuring leadership accountability for creating an inclusive and diverse work environment.

As a learning organization, we are committed to capacity-building for our global workforce. USAID has expanded access to a wide range of DEIA-related training through our Respectful, Inclusive, and Safe Environments (RISE) learning and engagement platform. USAID's RISE training has reached more than 6,100 individual staff since June 2020 and is a gold standard for the federal government. Over a third of our workforce, including over half of USAID leadership, has participated in at least one of the 660 RISE trainings or events held since June 2020.

USAID has also developed our first-ever DEIA climate survey, which, when complete, will establish a baseline for DEIA related metrics and enable longitudinal evaluation across the workforce. The survey will expand our insights into the diversity of USAID's workforce through the collection of expanded demographic and sexual orientation and gender identity data and will help us better understand staff perceptions on USAID DEIA efforts.

USAID's DEIA efforts go beyond building a diverse workforce and an equitable and inclusive workplace, we are also committed to expanding the universe of USAID implementing partners by reducing potential barriers for underrepresented groups and organizations from the U.S. or overseas. In November, we launched the [WorkwithUSAID.org](https://www.workwithusaaid.org) platform, a free online resource hub built to support new and existing partners with the knowledge, tools and networks to navigate how to work with us. Since its launch, we have hosted 37 external events to promote the platform, reaching over 10,000 people with 2,373 approved partner profiles uploaded to date, of which 390 are U.S. companies.

As we grow and expand our partnership base, our localization initiative is critical to diversifying the Agency's implementing partners. Localization encompasses a range of processes and actions that USAID is undertaking to ensure our work puts local actors in the lead, strengthens local systems, and is responsive to local communities. USAID's localization efforts include streamlining the Agency's internal processes to facilitate partnerships with vetted local organizations and

expand our stable of non-traditional partners. One important way USAID approaches localization is through our New Partnerships Initiative (NPI). For NPI, Missions and Operating Units must specifically outline plans for enhancing equity and inclusion through their acquisition and assistance practices and program implementation in the countries in which USAID operates.

As we provide development and humanitarian assistance, we are also tapping into the expertise of U.S. small and disadvantaged businesses through the work of USAID's Office of Small and Disadvantaged Business Utilization (OSDBU). To expand our work with these small and disadvantaged businesses we have included the businesses in the Agency's draft 2022 Acquisition and Assistance Strategy, provided training to Agency staff on how to work with small and disadvantaged businesses, and are doing targeted outreach to the small business community throughout the U.S.

Finally, we are updating and enhancing our policies to ensure that our programming is inclusive, equitable, and reaches marginalized and underserved populations. Our inclusive development approach is rooted in both a "below the line" principle, ensuring we *do no harm* to those who are vulnerable and marginalized, and an "above the line" principle that intentionally and proactively includes these groups, including persons with disabilities, LGBTQI+ people, Indigenous Peoples, and non-dominant racial, ethnic, and religious groups. USAID is also enhancing implementation of its nondiscrimination for beneficiaries' policy, including by making "Inclusive Development" training mandatory for all staff and developing an accountability mechanism that can help stakeholders provide feedback to the Agency on its programs.

We believe all our efforts at USAID will help us bring diverse perspectives and talents into the national security workforce and provide opportunity and equitable access in an intentional and deliberate way. In closing, echoing testimony from my colleague Ambassador Abercrombie-Winstanley, I am grateful to the Members of this Committee for your attention to and support of our efforts to strengthen our work and improve development outcomes for the communities where we work through a comprehensive and unified DEIA strategy. With your support, we will continue to ensure that USAID is reflective of the values we strive to live up to as Americans. Thank you for the opportunity to speak today. I look forward to your questions.