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ASSESSING THE IMPACT OF FOREIGN ASSISTANCE: THE ROLE OF EVALUATION

A CONVERSATION WITH USAID ADMINISTRATOR GAYLE SMITH

Washington, D.C.

Wednesday, March 30, 2016

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P R O C E E D I N G S

MR. INGRAM: Good afternoon, everybody. It's my pleasure to welcome you in my dual role today as senior fellow here at Brookings and co-chair of the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network. We've gathered to take note of the fifth anniversary of AID issuing its evaluation policy, to take a look at that and see where it's headed.

Our program today is first to hear from Administrator Gayle Smith, who will provide some opening remarks and answer a few questions. And then I will moderate an expert panel of Ruth Levine and Wade Warren.

It would be a waste of time and a little silly of me to try to introduce Gayle Smith to this audience. You all know her too well, particularly her last seven years.

MS. SMITH: I'll leave now.

MR. INGRAM: You can leave now. (Laughter) You know her very well from the last seven years where she has led, guided the Obama administration's policies on development. But I will take a moment to connect her to the topic at hand.

The document that launched MFAN in 2007 that was written very much by Co-Chair Gayle Smith, the founding co-chair, and guided by her, talked about the importance of accountability of U.S. foreign assistance. Then the document that served as this administration's development policy, the Presidential Policy Determination of 2010, and that was under Gayle's direction and hand, also, it states the following, and I will quote: "Rigorous procedures to evaluate the impact of policies and programs, report on results and reallocated resources accordingly, incorporate relevant evidence and analysis from other institutions, and inform the policy and budget process."

So if you wonder why Gayle is not delivering a prepared speech today it's because she has been working on this issue for at least 10 years and knows it inside and out. AID took up this charge from the PPD and, in 2011, issued a revised new policy on evaluation that was written by, led by our panelist Ruth Levine, that was acknowledged by the American Evaluation Association as a model for what government should do. That policy has been a touchstone for MFAN as a key aspect of aid reform, and we have used it both as a model for what other agencies should do and, hopefully, our being a little bit a pain in the butt to urge AID and other institutions, other agencies to move that policy from being a good policy to being effective implementation.

With that, let me welcome Gayle. (Applause)

MS. SMITH: Thank you. This is a little bit like old home week. It also feels a little terminal. It's like, okay, now we've come full cycle here.

Let me just start out by thanking Ruth Levine, who was there at the beginning and played a huge role in the creation of this policy, but also the USAID team. Because as George suggests, I've now had the experience of leading what preceded the PPD, which was a presidential study, which went for nine months with all the relevant departments and agencies, to the PPD itself and implementation and then building initiatives based on that, and then starting to take a look at where we had come. What have we actually pursued and achieved out of the PPD and where might we have fallen short? To then moving over to AID and seeing what I thought I knew in action.

And I just want to say a sincere word of thanks to the team at AID because they have done a terrific job. And I think this is one of the most exciting changes I've seen at the agency.

And I'm also pleased that my friend and colleague and assistant administrator for the Bureau of Policy, Planning, and Learning, Wade Warren, is here. You will hear more from him, but let me just say a few things about what the progress is and what the change looks like from the time only five years ago when this was put in place.

And to be fair, there had been evaluation policies before. It might be fair to say that they were a little bit one-dimensional, not perhaps as iterative as the policy we have now. And then there were some periods where it wasn't quite clear who was on first. We'll leave that, that was in the long-ago past.

Looking at how evaluations are done today and just the rate, we've moved from an annual average of 130 a year to 230 a year. At the country level 59 percent of the approved strategies of USAID reference actual evaluations. Every bureau now has -- or will immediately finalize; no, I'm kidding -- now has an action plan for evaluation in 2016, so it's being layered into the DNA of the institution.

The agency's offering classroom training for people on evaluation with 1,600 people so far having been trained. And obviously, we're seeing project shifts when evaluations yield analysis and data that suggest we need a midcourse correction.

Those are just tangible, more quantitative than qualitative things, but let me say two other things about where I think the agency has come and what this new evaluation policy has meant. First, I find it to be iterative rather than static. In other words, rather than this being an evaluation policy that was put in place and then maybe two, three, four, five years later there's a need for another evaluation policy because the field has changed, I think the agency's done a superb job of building in a number of things so that the policy itself is iterative and changes with the times and what we learn about evaluations, so whether it's running impact evaluation clinics and then making the kinds of tweaks that are necessary.

Looking at sector synthesis, and the Bureau of Food Security has just done this based on, I forget, almost 200 evaluations of Feed the Future, to look at all of those in the aggregate and what does that tell us. Partnerships with outside groups that do evaluations for a living and academic institutions, so that there is the ability to, again, constantly upgrade what we do and how we do it. And then we're about ready, I think, to do another meta evaluation, looking at the time period from 2012 to 2016.

So this very much was not a one-off, let's have a new evaluation policy, see how many we can do, check that box, and be done. It has been more a question of how do we, A, build into the agency a culture and practice of evaluation; and, B, if the premise of doing, one of the premises, of doing evaluation is that you learn something from it, how do you learn from evaluation and, therefore, change the way you do evaluation when you learn the next thing?

And I will have to say I have been extraordinarily impressed by the tangibles that I can put my hands on, that I could refer to in my recent budget hearings where I did not get a sufficient number of questions about evaluation because I was prepared to say many things. (Laughter) But those are the tangible quantitative things you can touch and see and feel.

I think the biggest thing that I observe as administrator and I think one of the reasons this will likely prove to be a very big game-changer for the agency is a cultural shift. At the most obvious level it's a cultural shift between checking the box and saying, well, we did an evaluation of that project, without commenting on where it came out or what it meant, just got it done, put it on the shelf. But I think it also reduces the pressure on a federal agency to confirm that everything is fine and increases the incentives for saying here's what's happening, here's what the impact is, here's what we've learned, here's how it is going based on facts and evidence.

And those are two very different things and it's an important cultural shift. I'm looking at one of my colleagues, Patricia Rader, that I worked with at AID when I was there during the Clinton administration. And I think the culture in the community then, because you also didn't go to really big events at Brookings, where people wanted to talk a lot about evaluation and foreign assistance then -- seriously -- there was not a big advocacy, think tank, academic community coming together for this. But I think the incentives then were to confirm that it's all going very well, thank you very much. Because if there's any concession that something isn't going well, maybe there'll be fewer resources and then we can't do everything and then the world will end.

And I think that, again, the cultural shift is one that recognizes that development is an aspiration, but it's also a discipline. And if we can master the discipline and say here's where we got the outcomes we anticipated, here are two things we learned that caused us to make a midcourse correction, or we stopped this program altogether because we did an evaluation that turned out that our assumptions may have been incorrect, that's a game-changer and it's an incentive, again, to drive with evidence.

And my experience -- and my experience is limited, even though I do like to say I'm in my second year as AID administrator because I was confirmed on November 30th (Laughter) -- my experience is that with our interlocutors on the Hill, inside the government, as well, more confidence is inspired where we can say this is what we know, even when that means that something has not gone exactly the way we planned or we've learned something that we hadn't anticipated, rather than every project is a total success. So that's a big, huge cultural shift, incentivizing the use of evidence and facts and not having to kind of apologize or defend.

I think it also counters the tendency in the agency, although I still think there's a lot of this externally, quite frankly, to measure inputs or to drive with the instrument. And what I mean by this, this is something that was very much in my mind when we did the PSD and the PPD and still drives me utterly crazy, which is there is this notion somehow that if you're saying here's a development challenge or a country or a sector, the starting point is often, all right, how much are we going to spend? How many AID dollars do we put into that as a measure of either our commitment or impact?

And then we drive with the instrument. We say, well, we have $100 million for that and here's what we can do with $100 million and, therefore, that's the game.

That's not what this is about. And part of what we tried to do in the PPD is get agencies into the culture and habit of saying here's a problem or an opportunity. What's the diversity of resources we can array behind it? Those might include assistance. Those might include diplomatic capital. That might include risk assurance from OPIC. It might include some action in the World Bank through the Treasury Department. But rather than this measuring the inputs and driving with the instrument, I think the culture of evaluation allows us to broaden the analysis of what we're trying to do and what we're learning.

I also think -- and this is, again, I have felt strongly and it's one of the reasons that I am particularly proud that this administration chose to bring USAID into the policy deliberations process -- it's a really valuable way to marshal the knowledge that is in the building. I've learned a lot in my career and certainly for this job from men and women who are career USAID folks, been mission directors in two or three places, for example. And part of the reason I learn so much is they've got this institutional knowledge that has been built up over many years, many experiences, many countries.

Evaluations allow us to systemically build that knowledge base so that it can be drawn upon again and again. Because what you find in the policy arena is that the fact that we did something somewhere else three years ago, when that sounded like a really good idea, but we did an evaluation and it turned out that wasn't exactly the best way to do it, is a way to tap into a foundation of knowledge in the Ronald Reagan

Building, which I think is underutilized, but systematically bring it to the table.

I think my observation, I want to be very careful because to ensure that this works we've got to be vigilant and active and keep working it. I don't think anybody's ready or inclined to, as I say, check the box and say we're done. I find the culture of analysis evaluation evidence to have infected pretty much all parts of the building, and I'll give you a couple other examples of that.

A lot of it is on the program/project initiative side. Even on the management side of the agency or those cases where we have a challenge to address, something's gone wrong somewhere, there's a GAO report, I find with absolute consistency when I meet with people and they say here's what happened, we've done our assessment of why we think it's happened, which is, without exception -- yet -- extremely frank and evidence-based, and here's what we think the three solutions are. That culture I find in every single bureau I deal with and it gives me enormous confidence on all the work we have to do.

So I think there's a common practice. Ruth, you and the many people who worked on this and the people who have carried it forward and are doing it today deserve an enormous amount of credit because this wasn't something that was stuck on to the building or the agency to be championed by an individual and maybe it would succeed or maybe it would fail. It's the virus that successfully has infected the institution. (Laughter)

Now, all of that said, I think there are a lot of challenges going forward that I would point to. One is balancing the need for accountability with the imperative to learn, and those are two different things. As an agency, we constantly need to learn, as do our partners in the field and elsewhere, and so that we can reprogram that learning into what we're doing. But evaluation is also a very powerful tool for holding ourselves accountable and making the case to the American public and the Congress that we are good and effective stewards of the taxpayer money because we can show what the outcomes are and we can do evaluations on a regular basis so that if they are not what we anticipated, we can midcourse correct.

But those are two very, very big tasks. They're not in competition, but they are not the same. And I think in terms of how the agency manages this going forward, one of the things we need to think about is what's the appropriate balance between those two in terms of how we build on evaluation going on into the future?

The second is the diversity of things that this agency does. An evaluation in a global health maternal-child health program is one thing. An evaluation in a port of Somalia you cannot physically get to is a very different enterprise. And so I think thinking through as we move forward, what I've thought about is three of the missions that we have as an agency.

One is that area of work where we are a development agency, operating in environments where the conditions are best aligned for sustainable outcomes. That may be sector-based. That may be the work in global health. That may be country- or region-based. Evaluations in those cases are relatively easier than in the two other cases.

The second is those places where our job is to prevent, mitigate, and respond to crises. It's harder to do evaluations in those cases. Things move faster. We may not have access. Attribution is a bit difficult. Our programming is different. How do we do it in those cases?

And then in the third, which is where we're actually I think most often scrutinized, and, fairly enough, there's a lot of money that goes into this bucket, which is those areas and circumstances under which -- or where we operate, where the imperative is not exclusively but predominantly a national security imperative and where the development piece of the puzzle is absolutely critical. Iraq, Afghanistan, I mean, I think we can all name them.

How do you do evaluations in those cases where the external conditions may be very different than in that first bucket? So, your assumptions about whether you've got the political skin in the game, you've got peace and stability, you've got some of the externalities that increase the chances of sustainable outcomes. And you've got the added challenge of the fact that increasingly, in a lot of these environments, our people can't move around, so we're not doing those as directly as we might like to.

I think figuring that out and unpacking that a little bit, I would wager to say that we are very strong in bucket one. I think there are some very interesting things being done in buckets two and three, but I think we've got to think through two things in those two buckets. One of them is accountability and one of them is learning. The thing I'm encouraged by and excited about is I think the learning in those second two categories is vastly important for how we think about the role of this agency in complex and multiple environments.

The last thing that I would say is a challenge, but it's a welcome one, is one that's been a priority of mine since I actually thought, wow, I'm going to be the USAID administrator. But, in fairness, it was also a priority I think even from the day we started with the PSD and the PPD. How do we institutionalize this capability in such a way that it is part of the architecture and, indeed, the foundation of the agency?

Now, you know that one of the things that was done early in the administration was to I always wonder whether I should say establish or reestablish the PPL Bureau in the agency. That was a critically important move. It has made a fundamental difference in what the agency's been able to do over the last few years.

Strengthening that bureau, making sure it has the capacity, the credibility within the agency, the tools that it needs to lead on evaluation, drive it, but make sure that other parts of the agency are taking it up, that we build the feedback loop, that, I think, we have partially in place, but requires less people carrying an evaluation from one place to another and more the automaticity that comes when this is just part of the institutional culture.

I'm optimistic about it because I think we're probably a good 75 percent of the way there and I think we've got the right team to do it. But in terms of my priorities with respect to evaluation over the coming months it's really to institutionalize this capability so that it is something we can pass from one administration to the next and will be strengthened further rather than being something that is just kind of left to lapse or changed altogether.

So that's where I think we've come and that's where I think we are. That's where I think we're going. And, again, I look back at a lot of things we started early in the first term in terms of how we thought about development or, as George reminds me, we thought about at Wye River when we started MFAN. And I will say one of the things I've very proud of is we're not done yet. We're not going to succeed if we ever declare that we're done on something like evaluation, but we did it.

So that's all I would like to say. We're going to turn it over to the panel and take a few questions. (Applause)

MR. INGRAM: Gayle has a couple minutes to take a few questions.

MS. SMITH: Because I'm no longer the master of my own fate. They don't tell you some of this stuff when you take this job.

MR. INGRAM: So I'm going to ask you to respect her time and everybody's time here, quickly introduce yourself, ask a simple question, and we'll get a couple answers. Right back there. Here, right here. Put your hand up, Diana.

MS. OHLBAUM: Thanks so much, Gayle. And thanks, George, for hosting this wonderful event. I'm Diana Ohlbaum, also with Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network. And as, of course, you know, USAID just released its study of how evaluations are utilized at USAID. And even though it was quite a long -- it's like 200 pages, I did manage to crunch through it.

And my question is what are your plans for taking the lessons that were learned in that evaluation, figuring out which of its recommendations need to be implemented, assigning people to do that, putting out a timetable, and following up on its recommendations?

MS. SMITH: I have a meeting with Wade next week. (Laughter) No. Actually, no, that's also true. (Laughter)

Look, I said from the time I came into the agency that this was one of my priorities because some of my priorities are, you know, locking in what's worked and some of the things we want to pass from one administration to another. Some of them may be current affairs, but I want to dedicate a real amount of time to the building in the agency and how it works. And this is very much at the top of the list with a couple of management issues.

But the way, my intention on that, is to sit down with the team that is doing this, widen that circle a bit because, again, we've got a lot of experience in the agency of different people who use evaluations in different ways, whether it is the legislative people for whom they are helpful in terms of accountability, the mission directors, the desk officers, the program officers. Put that team together and make a collective decision on how we would rack-and-stack the recommendations and then start it and get it far enough along because I don't know that we will get all the way there in a few months. But, quite frankly, it's irreversible.

So there will be a plan to do that. We've blocked out what we want to get done over the next 10 months, this is one of the blocks. And Wade is a very kind gentleman. He and his team know that this is a priority, which means we're going to do it, so stay tuned.

MR. COONROD: Thank you. John Coonrod with The Hunger Project. I have a question about the difference because it's very obvious the difference that it's made to USAID as a leading development practitioner in the world. How has the increased evaluations impacted the program countries, the governments, the policymakers? Has there been a visible difference made through these evaluations with the formation of national policies?

MS. SMITH: I believe there has. I'm more anecdotal than systematic on that, and Wade may want to speak more to that on the panel. But if you look at Mozambique, if you look at Ethiopia, if you look at Kenya, there are a number of cases where on the basis of an evaluation or evaluations and, quite frankly, a good relationship, our teams in the field have been able to sit down with ministers or other counterparts and say, look, here's what we're finding. Therefore, we suggest a change in this or that direction. And often that change is made.

Sometimes at the project level, a couple of times already -- and I say "already" because five years is both a long time and a short time -- we've seen changes to governments' national policies, so that it may extend beyond the reach of our particular assistance or program.

MR. INGRAM: One more question, Gayle?

MS. SMITH: Sure.

MR. INGRAM: Right here.

MR. ODELL: Hi. Malcolm Odell. I've been watching AID working with the agencies since it first was established and I did evaluations back when evaluations were done to check the box. And we did evaluations during the period when AID quit doing evaluations. And I've recently come to be able to do some in Pakistan, Afghanistan, and other places where now AID is really paying attention. Very, very exciting to see evaluation get this kind of attention finally, I think.

MS. SMITH: Great.

MR. ODELL: There's one gap, though, that I keep being very uncomfortable about and I'm not sure how it goes because a lot of talk about impact and that tends to be a counterfactual measurement of changes over time in a framework of a development hypothesis, but I almost never see real what I would call impact evaluations. What happens when the money stops? What happens 5, 10 years down the road?

Yanders Chacon has done an assessment of dozens and dozens, hundreds of programs around the world. She says real impact ex-post evaluation is almost invisible, almost never done except by a very few agencies in a very few cases. She found a few, I found one. But it seems to me that if we really want to know what's happening with development over time, we need to be able to come back five, seven years later, see what happened, really.

MS. SMITH: Yes. I actually think that's right and I think that -- I mean, what I've seen on that tends to come more from academic studies of where is a country 10 years after there was a big surge of assistance or something. So it's less precise and specific than an actual evaluation would be, but I think it's a very good idea.

I think incentivizing and building in, well, the incentives to do that, because, as I say, you know, we're building the capacity to do more evaluations to get it into the bloodstream. And if you say, okay, now we'd like you to go back and look at things that ended 5 years ago, 10 years ago, and do an evaluation, I think it's worth doing, but also putting it in the category of what do we know about sustainability and what does that tell us about broader policy? Not just programs and projects, but broader policy. Because I think particularly if you look at transitions in some very complex environments, some of the ones that you've looked at more recently, there are more externalities that we do not control and I would wager that often in 5, 10, 15 years we'd find some things we probably ought to know and know more systematically.

But I think you're right, I think it's a very important thing to look at. And, in fact, I did an event recently with one of the MDBs where that was our conclusion on a joint project that we had done, where I think there was a feeling that it had gone well, but I think the gut check of everybody is we ought to come back in three years and still whether we still think that.

SPEAKER: One quick comment. (off mic).

MS. SMITH: No, the budget is put in oftentimes at the very beginning and at the outset. Once you start getting into five years after the conclusion of the budget -- or the conclusion of the project, you sound like you've worked with Ed long enough to know that we have this budget cycle that doesn't -- I mean, it sometimes extends for many years, but like eight is kind of hard to stretch that we're going to hold FY '16 money for FY '22? That's an uphill battle. But I think that's probably a solvable problem if one of the next chapters in this ought to be looking back some years later. I think it's a really good thing to do.

Thank you, George.

MR. INGRAM: Gayle, thank you for your time, your knowledge, and for raising this issue to the top of the agency. (Applause)

MS. SMITH: Well, thank you all for working with us.

MR. INGRAM: And the panel's going to come up now. As the panel gets mic'ed there are eight seats up here in the front, so those of you in the back, please, eight of you come up here and grab these seats.

As you watch me look at my cell phone, I'm not Tweeting my comments, it's my only clock, so that's to keep us in time.

The announcement you saw indicated there was going to be a third panelist, Jodi Nelson. She returned from overseas travels and emailed us on Monday that she wanted to protect all of us by not bringing to this session the infection that she brought back from overseas. (Laughter)

But we have a superb panel. I think Ruth, to some extent, has already been introduced. She is the program officer at Hewlett for Global Development and Population, was at AID and wrote the policy that we're talking about; before that was at the Center of Global Development and has been around the development community, making us all wiser, for a long time.

Wade Warren, who is six weeks into your position?

MR. WARREN: Seven. (Laughter)

MR. INGRAM: Seven weeks into his position has been at AID for how long?

MR. WARREN: Twenty-two years.

MR. INGRAM: Twenty-two years. And in that time, he's served in the Health Bureau, the Africa Bureau, in missions in Africa; before that had the dubious past that I have of working on the Hill and with civil society. And I think came to the attention of most of us about 10 years ago when his emails reporting to the field on what was going into Washington, for those of us in Washington who thought we knew what was going on inside the Beltway, we found out we really didn't know until we surreptitiously got Wade's emails. So Wade has been, again, providing a lot of us with knowledge for a long time.

Ruth, your policy.

MS. LEVINE: USAID's policy, but yes.

MR. INGRAM: But yours more than anybody. When it was issued it was highly praised as a solid, good quality policy. What were your expectations and what's your assessment as to how it's gone?

MS. LEVINE: Yes, thanks a lot. So first it's incredibly great to be here for our fifth birthday party for the evaluation policy, which took about nine months to be born. (Laughter) And, you know, if I think back, it really wasn't -- I held the pen for much of it, not all of it, some other people in the room held the pen for part of it, but it was really a collective effort by some of the champions and experts in evaluation in the career and USAID staff, both in Washington and in the field. And so it really was, I hoped then and I think now really from the beginning, very much of the agency and not something that was tossed on at a particular moment in time.

So I left, honestly, before I thought I would because of an opportunity to -- a work opportunity in California. And so when I left I thought things could go one of two ways.

I thought one way things could go is that the momentum that we had built up, which was really considerable with hundreds of people coming to the evaluation interest group meeting and the building and really a lot of excitement about something as wonky and in the weeds as evaluation. I thought there was a possibility that that could dissipate and be replaced by another priority. There was no real limit to the number of priorities that the agency was experiencing over that period. So I thought, well, this could fade, so that was one possibility.

And the other possibility was that it really would be able to be carried forth by the incredibly capable team. And I see Cindy Clapp-Wincek, who took over my position when I left and really took on with a team that now has grown and with mission directors and with program officers in country and with all the bureaus, kind of point people for evaluation, that that might really work to carry forth not just the ideas, but the specific actions that are laid out in the policy.

So it could have gone one of two ways. I am extremely happy to see in the reports now that have been done quality and on utilization that it's mostly gone that second way, not a success without qualification, but largely really impressive story about the extent to which people have put time and effort and resources not just into doing evaluations, but into doing them right and using the findings.

So, you know, there's a ways to go, but it's really a good story.

MR. INGRAM: And if there was one thing in addition that you would have been part of the good story or that you would like to see in the next stage what would that be?

MS. LEVINE: I'm limited to one thing? (Laughter)

MR. INGRAM: Two and a half.

MS. LEVINE: Two and a half things, okay. So I think one thing is -- but the evaluation function, I think, has the potential to do kind of three things in an agency like USAID. One is to serve that accountability function which gains the trust of the American taxpayer and the people who represent the American taxpayer. That is incredibly important. And I think that has been done really quite well.

The second thing that the function can do is contribute to learning within the agency about how program design and implementation can be done to optimize the results. And I think that has been done pretty well and there's still room to go on that, particularly, I think, maybe on the quality side of the equation there's still some deficits in the evaluation quality, as the assessment a year or two ago showed. So I think that requires training, it requires resources, and just kind of constant vigilance.

And the ability within that building to say, you know what? That evaluation really wasn't good. You contractor who did it, you team that did it, you didn't do a good job. You have to either do it over or, you know, you're now known as not having done a good job on an evaluation. I think sometimes that's tough to do.

And then the third function is really to contribute, you have this incredible platform of experiences that are going on funded through USAID, and to use part of that as a platform to generate new knowledge about fundamental issues in development. You know, it's not a research agency, but it has the potential to contribute to the global evidence base in incredibly important ways, largely, I believe, through the conduct of rigorous impact evaluations.

And I think there's still a lot of work to do on that. There's still a lot of untapped potential. And that, again, takes building the capacity within the agency and within the community of organizations that do impact evaluations or could, and putting sufficient resources behind it.

So those are more than the two and a half, and I have a longer list. Maybe you'll come back to me.

MR. INGRAM: Good, thank you. Wade, I was pleased to see both in Gayle's remarks and in the report that you just issued on the fifth anniversary that they both talk not just about the successes, but the challenges. So give us your own take on what the successes of the evaluation policy are and what you're confronting now that you're the chief guy having to push this forward. What are the challenges you're facing?

MR. WARREN: All right, I will do that, but first I wanted to say a couple things. Thank you to you, George, and to Brookings and MFAN for organizing this event. I think Gayle was right, you wouldn't have necessarily seen an event like this in the years past, so it's really a treat for us who have been working in this field to have a platform like this to speak from, so thanks for that.

And I think we're embarrassing Ruth a little bit, but I did want to say that it's an honor for me to be on the stage with you given the role that you did play in the creation of the evaluation policy. I was working, actually, when Ruth came to the agency, I was working at the State Department in the Foreign Assistance Bureau, and I kind of watched from afar what she was doing in the newly recreated PPL Bureau, and I was impressed and I'm impressed now. So if Ruth is the mother of the evaluation policy, I think we would say that I am the very new stepfather of the evaluation policy having inherited it or married into it about seven weeks ago. (Laughter)

So in answer to your question about what have we done right and what could we do better, I think a number of things have gone well, as Ruth suggested. And the first one that I would note is that the evaluation policy has been embraced by senior people in the agency. And I think the fact that Gayle came and spoke, you know, from the heart about evaluation is evidence of that.

George asked us if he could get an advance copy of Gayle's remarks and we said, well, she doesn't have prepared remarks. She's just going to talk about evaluation. And the reason she was able to do that I think is because she cares so much about it. So having senior people at her level and mission director level across the bureaus who care about evaluation and take it seriously I think is one of the key elements of the success.

Another one I would say is just the hard work of training people. We had gotten out of the habit of doing strong quality evaluations and so we -- I think Gayle alluded to this -- we trained 1,600 people in the agency through classroom training on monitoring and evaluation, so that's a big lift and it's important to institutionalize the work.

We've also created some tools, I think, that help our staff do the work better and easier. We have pre-competed contracts that let them access evaluation specialists quickly and easily so that evaluations can be done more readily. We have what we call evaluation -- monitoring evaluation fellows. These are experts that we can bring on board, send to the field for six months to two years to help a particular mission do the evaluation work that they need to do.

And then we also -- there are partnerships that we participate in and, in particular, I'm thinking about the International Initiative for Impact Evaluation based in London. We're a member of it. They're an organization that promotes quality evaluation. They hold our feet to the fire a bit and make sure that we're taking quality evaluation seriously.

So I think we have done a number of things right. And Ruth is correct, it could have gone a different way, but because people were in PPL who cared and the leadership in the agency cared we were able to move in the right direction.

On challenges, you know, the staff told me that it's not a sprint, it's a marathon. And so I think the challenges are to continue to train people, to continue to make sure that leadership takes it seriously. And I think probably the biggest challenge that I see now is learning from the evaluations. And if a mission tries something in Indonesia and it fails, not having someone trying it in Kenya without realizing that it failed in Indonesia. So sort of getting the cross-fertilization across regions and across sectors for things that work and don't work, I think, is where we still have a lot of work to do.

MS. LEVINE: Can I just pick up on that?

MR. INGRAM: Please, please.

MS. LEVINE: It's not a sprint, it's a marathon. I think that's good to keep in mind. I actually think of it a little bit differently, but in the same sporty way, yes.

MR. WARREN: Okay. This is unlike you.

MS. LEVINE: I know. So I think of evaluation as being like working out. (Laughter) So it's difficult, it's not very much fun, and any given any there's something you'd rather be doing with your time. You get sweaty and you don't look particularly good until maybe over time you start looking better. (Laughter) And you start feeling better and stronger.

MR. INGRAM: And do you eventually enjoy the process?

MS. LEVINE: But you cannot give up. So in that way it's not like a marathon, like it takes a long time, but you have to keep doing it. You don't get to a finish line. There you go.

MR. INGRAM: Good. I like that. Good analogy.

Now, I want to pick up on one of your comments, Ruth, and talk about quality, the quality of an evaluation. And three years ago, there was this mega assessment of the quality of AID which I read, which to me sort of read a little bit like a checklist of here's what you have to have in it, but didn't indicate to me how I know if an evaluation's of quality or not. And you made the comment you'd like to get to a point where evaluations are rejected because they're not good enough.

So if both of you could talk about how do you assess whether or not the quality of a -- the content of the evaluation is sufficiently valuable to be useful?

MR. WARREN: I can start.

MS. LEVINE: You start.

MR. WARREN: I know less than you do, so I'll say what I know. (Laughter)

MS. LEVINE: I can correct you, yes, okay.

MR. WARREN: You can correct me. So we did a study in 2013 of the evaluations that had been done up until that time from the release of the new policy with a view to whether -- what the quality was like. And I think it indicated, obviously, that we still had a ways to go, but it also showed the evaluations were being done better than they were. And, you know, it's not just you know it when you see it. There are actually things that you can look for in an evaluation. Were the findings supported by evidence? Were the shortcomings or limitations of the evaluation itself made clear in the description? Is there a clear distinction between the findings and the recommendations? Are the recommendations clear and actionable?

And, you know, we still have a ways to go, but I think we did find more of that in 2013 than we would have before. And as Gayle said, we're going to do another one of these studies next year and I hope we'll see continued improvement in quality. So fix that up.

MS. LEVINE: No, that was great. I think, you know, when we talk about checklists it feels bureaucratic. It feels like, oh, it's just ticking the box in this kind of mindless way, which is bad. But as Wade was saying, there are specific observable things that distinguish a poor-quality evaluation from a good-quality evaluation. And I think one of the virtues of the work that we did with this evaluation task team early on was arrive at some checklists about what has to be included in a scope of work and what has to be included in an evaluation report, and sort of distinguishing from high quality from low quality.

And so I think that gave really a lot of people in the agency the tools that they otherwise wouldn't necessarily have had. They would have had good judgment, but not necessarily the tools to be able to say it's not up to snuff, this evaluation report, and it's because it's missing X, Y, Z. So I take a little bit of exception to the idea that a checklist isn't useful. In this case I think it was extremely useful and the assessment that was done a couple of years ago reflected kind of an aggregate version of that.

MR. INGRAM: Let me push you on one point, Wade. One thing I've heard the last few years from evaluators is a complaint that they're in the midst of an evaluation and they find that there's a new thread that would be interesting to pursue. But the scope of work is so narrowly drawn that they don't have the flexibility to pursue, to devote resources to that, and they can't get the scope of work changed. How does the agency deal with that? I mean, is that something that you all have thought about, how you handle that?

MR. WARREN: So I would say that that is a complaint you could hear not just from people who work with us on evaluation, but across the board, that we lock our partners into a scope of work that even if they see something they'd like to do differently, sometimes it's harder to get a change. And we are addressing that explicitly. In an event we were at last week I talked about the fact that USAID is revising its strategic planning project design and monitoring evaluation guidance and we're doing it very explicitly to build in this idea of adaptive management. So if you see something that needs to be changed along the way, you have more latitude and ability to do that.

So I think we would apply that concept to an evaluation, as well, if we saw that it needed to be corrected in midstream. We would be, I hope, more flexible in that regard.

MR. INGRAM: You've led into my next question.

MR. WARREN: Okay.

MR. INGRAM: Nicely done, Wade. Impact evaluations and performance evaluations. Ruth is known as one of the gurus of impact evaluations. She thinks they're very important, but she also appreciates the other. And the impact evaluations are a more scientific approach where you can have a control group.

Ruth, talk to us about the tradeoffs between them and when they're both appropriate. And, Wade, talk to us about how you deal with evaluations when AID is moving in the direction of more context-sensitive programming and having the ability to adjust projects according to changes in the environment. And doesn't that complicate the evaluation process?

MS. LEVINE: So performance evaluations, which look broadly at whether a project or a program actually did what it said at the beginning it was going to do in terms of generating the outputs, training the people it intended to train, and generally contributing to the hopefully positive overall change that's observed. Those are the majority of what USAID does and should do. It's an appropriate kind of approach for virtually all projects.

Impact evaluation is something where you can really examine some fundamental assumptions that are often at the heart of an entire project or program. So let me give an example.

In the case of a program that is intended to increase yields for small-holder farmers, there's often an assumption that if you train farmers and you give farmers particular inputs, that the yields will improve. And entire projects, entire, if you will, presidential initiatives are built around those sorts of assumptions. But what if they're wrong? What if the ability of an extension agent to transfer knowledge to a farmer and to have that farmer, he or she, use that knowledge, what if that actually doesn't work?

Well, we're never going to find out unless we actually test that. And so in cases where there's this deep fundamental assumption, particularly about changes in human behavior that occur when you have different resources or different incentives, that's when you can use sometimes impact evaluations, essentially have social experiments, that are conducted in a way that permits you to understand what the net impact is of a particular set of interventions.

So it is, in fact, more scientific. It's only appropriate in some cases. It needs to be thought of from the very beginning and the whole project has to be designed that way. So, obviously, that constrains the use to a pretty limited set of questions, but they are super important questions to be asking.

And it's also, as I said earlier, a way for this agency to use its vast resources and knowledge to contribute to better development practice among many others, not just USAID.

MR. WARREN: I was thinking maybe I could give you an example, George, of when we did an impact evaluation. We tried two different approaches to a problem and found out that one of them worked better than the other one, and what we did about it.

So in Mozambique, we had an education sector, a childhood reading program. We were working with second and third graders trying to increase their reading levels. And there were two ways the project was implemented.

The first one was just with the interventions around the reading materials and working with the teachers on instructing the children. The second one that was done -- and also we worked with the school administration on broader management issues in the school itself. We did a midterm impact evaluation. We found that the reading outcomes were much, much stronger in the second case where we were working both with the teachers and children, but also with the school administration.

So we then consulted with the government of Mozambique. I think there was a question about how do our evaluations are used by the countries where we work.

We consulted with the government of Mozambique and based on that consultation we expanded the project in two ways, from not just second and third graders, but also first graders, and then scaled it up from 120 schools to more than 1,000 schools in Mozambique. So that was a way that we learned on the fly from a project and changed the way we were implementing across a broader number of sites.

MR. INGRAM: Good, thanks. One more question before I turn to the audience and ask you all to take over the microphone. Learning, obviously we all think that it's very important for evaluations to be used for learning. Gayle noted the tension between accountability and learning.

Wade, talk to us about what AID -- how they're instituting feedback loops, what you're doing to take the knowledge and information from evaluations and then sharing it within the agency and beyond the agency. And, Ruth, you can second guess him by then describing what an ideal learning system is. What are the different pieces that you would have in a learning system in order to maximize the value of the learning.

MR. WARREN: Okay. So I guess first I should say that I'm glad we're talking about learning. And for those of you that know the history of the agency well, PPL, the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning, is a successor bureau for a previous bureau that was called Policy, Planning, and Coordination. And I love the fact that the name was intentionally changed in its new incarnation to have "learning" as part of the title of the bureau because it is so important to what we do.

That having been said, I think I alluded earlier and I think Gayle also talked about it is probably the area where we need to do the most work, to make sure that the findings from evaluations are understood by people who are making decisions about project design and strategic planning and use in an appropriate way.

So we think, you know, that we've just published the utilization study a week ago and from what we can tell, from the analysis that we've done, missions are using their evaluations in their own project design and their own strategic planning. We have a thing called an Evaluation Registry where we ask every mission when they do their annual report they submit information about what evaluations they've done and how they've used them. And they say, at like 70 percent, that they used the evaluations for project design and strategic planning.

But I think where we don't do as well probably is across regions and across sectors. There are a couple of things we're doing to try to address that. We've asked every bureau in the agency to come up with an evaluation agenda, so to identify some things where we think we need more learning and where we can encourage missions to look into specific -- undertake specific evaluations so that we have a better pool of understanding in Washington.

And I'm thinking of before I came to PPL I was in the Global Health Bureau. And many of our technical bureaus design projects that are used by many missions, so there are sort of central mechanisms that missions can buy into. And I know in the Global Health Bureau every time we designed a new project, the project designers went and looked at all the evaluations that had taken place around the world that were relevant to that subject and then tried to design a new project that took into account the findings from around the world.

But I do still think that's probably where we need to do more work. That's the big challenge ahead, is how to feed the learning back into what we're doing.

MR. INGRAM: And when they would look at all those evaluations to see how better to design the next project, would they ever then make that knowledge available outside the agency?

MR. WARREN: Yes. So most of our evaluations are placed on the development and experience clearinghouse, which is not an easy thing to navigate.

MR. INGRAM: Right, but I'm talking about the aggregation that was done.

MR. WARREN: I don't know because the -- well, I shouldn't say I don't know. I would say I don't think so because the synthesis of the evaluations was then fed into the procurement, which is procurement-sensitive at that point.

MR. INGRAM: But it seems to me that that synthesis would be most valuable.

MR. WARREN: I think you're right. Some of our bureaus have attempted to synthesize evaluations across a whole range of activities, so the Bureau for Food Security recently synthesized, I think, 196 different evaluations and did place that in the public eye. But we can do more.

MR. INGRAM: Okay. Ruth, the ideal system.

MS. LEVINE: So, yes, I'm not going to probably answer exactly that question because that's a big one and I don't know that any -- I'd be interested to hear if any organization has reached what it feels as kind of the ideal place that's always a challenge to institutional learning to carve out the time and the brain space for it. But I think some of the elements that I can talk about, and some of them are clearly in place, so one is really a message of importance from leadership at all levels in the agency, but certainly from the top. And I think USAID should feel very, very fortunate -- I feel fortunate -- that Gayle is in this role and has taken such an interest at this point. So I think that's one piece of it.

I think another is, maybe the most important, is really curiosity on the part of people at all levels in the organization and in implementing partners who take decisions that are best taken if they're informed by not just the evidence from USAID evaluations, but from a whole range of sources. So that curiosity, which is tied to sort of a commitment to do the best work, but it's something about the curiosity.

And the part of that 223-page report about utilization that I thought was the best was that more than half, a little more than half, of the people who reported using evaluations, which was the majority of people who had been consulted, said that they were surprised by the findings that they had seen. Now, think about that. Most people know the projects they work on very, very well. They probably were not surprised by a lot of the findings. Yes, it was slow. Yes, it didn't quite do this or it was really super in this dimension. But the idea that more than half the people could actually be surprised by something I thought was great news and I'd like to see that number go up.

MR. WARREN: It shows the value of evaluations.

MS. LEVINE: It shows, I think, the value of the evaluations, yes. If you could know everything just from observing on a day-to-day basis, well, then you know everything.

So very quickly, I think generating quality content because the worst thing you can imagine is that people learn, but they learn the wrong thing because the evaluations or the research was done poorly, so I think that's pretty fundamental.

The utilization report really lays out how important the kinds of dissemination. You know, people don't want just the thick reports. They want the conversations. They want the briefings. They want to engage. So that's clearly part of it. Takes time, takes money.

And then the last thing I'll say is that there's something that USAID doesn't have that would really be I think essential for the full potential of evaluation to be realized and that is to have the flexibility and the latitude to actually make all the kinds of changes that the evaluations suggest should be made. So USAID gets its many, many colors and flavors of money courtesy of the U.S. Congress. It gets many, many directions from at least one other U.S. Government entity and probably several.

MR. INGRAM: Is that a secret which one it is?

MS. LEVINE: You know, you can pick your favorite. Pick your favorite partner.

And it is constrained in many ways by the procurement and other systems. And so what that means is that the changes that can be made as a function of what people learn are only a portion of what they really might be able to do. So I think that's something that -- I think if USAID could have solved those problems it would have, so that takes a higher power.

MR. INGRAM: Great.

MR. WARREN: Can I add one?

MR. INGRAM: Please.

MR. WARREN: Because it's something we haven't discussed. It didn't come up in Gayle's remarks or so far this afternoon and I think it's important to talk about it. It's the extent to which the agency is or individuals in the agency are or are not risk-adverse. And do we have the room to fail and the latitude to fail? And are people willing to admit and embrace an evaluation that shows that a project failed? And I think, you know, we're watched by a lot of people inside and outside the government, and having the latitude to be willing to admit that something failed and we need to try a different solution is not something that we always feel that we have. So that's just a reality of working in the environment that we're in.

MR. INGRAM: Good. All right. Your easy job's over because I've asked the questions that you might have anticipated. Now you have to address questions that you didn’t anticipate.

So, Madeleine, up here, there are two hands right here in the front and let’s take those two first. Your name and a quick question.

MR. HERSHEY: I’m Bob Hershey. I’m a consultant. How has the Internet come into this in terms of getting the data on the projects and gathering the funding and gathering the local inputs from where you’re doing the project?

MR. INGRAM: Let’s take the second question.

MR. WARREN: You’re going to take two? Okay.

MS. ELKINS: Oh, okay. Well, mine’s completely different. I’m Catherine Elkins and I’m here from Westat up in Rockville, Maryland. And I want to get back to this quality issue. Not to berate anybody, but with the checklist I think one of the things that I thought from the 2013 report was that it was an evaluation of evaluation reports more than of the evaluations. And especially when you start talking about synthesis of evaluations and learning the wrong lessons from evaluations, you really compound those errors very rapidly if the wrong methods were used, if there’s a lot of slippage, if the report is cleverly written, but has glossed over some of the things that a methodologically astute person would have noticed, but someone with a checklist will not.

So I’d like to hear more about how the next assessment will be done and hope that I’ll hear more about methodology and data quality.

MR. INGRAM: Good, okay.

MR. WARREN: Okay. On the question of the Internet and data, I could talk a long time because it’s a topic that interests me. In fact, I terrify the staff in PPL when I talk about all the things that I think we should be doing or could do around data and they like try to make me go away and be quiet.

Because I think in a way the agency is sort of awash in data and we don't do nearly as good a job as we should of making it accessible and understandable so that people can use it for decision-making and, to some extent, for reporting, but particularly I think not for decision-making. And so there are -- you know, I don't think we have a good handle on where there are gaps in the data, where more than one part of the agency is collecting data in a redundant way where we don't need to be doing that. Other agencies are collecting data that we're also collecting. So I think there are all kinds of things around the collection and use of data.

There are also lots of issues around using the Internet or electronic tools to actually collect the data. When I was in the Global Health Bureau working a lot on the HIV/AIDS initiative, where there's an enormous amount of data that's collected and, you know, literally the tablet that you use to go into the field to collect the data and CDC was using one version and USAID was using another, and they couldn't talk to each other. You know, there are many issues around the collection of data even at that sort of field level.

So I think it's huge. I mean, it's to our advantage that we have these tools and the Internet to let us gather all this data, but we need to do much better at synthesizing it and using it, I think.

MR. INGRAM: Ruth, you want to add to that?

MS. LEVINE: I could take the other question.

MR. WARREN: Okay, go ahead.

MS. LEVINE: Okay. So I think your question's really terrific. And I think point taken that a checklist is, you know, one way and it primarily does look at the evaluation report as a reflection of the work that was done. I'll come back to that point in a minute.

And I think there's room for maybe more nuanced assessment the next time around. The time to do a quality assessment on the agency certainly has a stronger methodological capacity than it did five years ago with the evaluation fellows, with so many people being trained, and with the impact evaluation clinics. Still highly dependent. It will always, I think, be highly dependent on specialized expertise from outside and needs to find ways to use that potentially for peer review and for other things that would help to keep -- life up the quality of what's really complex work.

I think the other -- let me just come back to the reports issue for a minute because this is a problem that is way above the level that we're talking about here. In science and social science, but also in biomedical science, basically what we have are articles or we have reports. And so they're subject to all the issues about how do we actually know what the quality is. And the way that the social sciences increasingly and the biomedical sciences now for a long time have tried to deal with that is not just through peer review, which is important, but also through putting into the public domain the data from the studies.

And so that was also part of the evaluation policy is to have a repository of the data, the underlying data that were used to draw the conclusions for the evaluations. It's not always possible, but when it is and when confidentiality can be assured and so forth, that permits the enterprising people who do exist in the world to actually double-check and see did the evaluation report actually -- was it true to what the data say?

So I think that's another, that external validation, verification is something that folks should do. With or without USAID money, it's something that you should do.

MR. INGRAM: Good, okay. Madeleine, there are two -- on the left, there are two questions right there.

MR. SILVER: Hi. Arthur Silver. I was sent out to Pakistan in 1968 as the agency's first mission evaluation officer. Of course, when I got to Lahore, I was told, no, you're an assistant program officer. (Laughter)

My question is would there be any interest in creating a tiny office of USAID historian, who would handle the job of expanding access to the institutional memory that the administrator spoke of, might cooperate with the USAID Alumni Association, which is trying to work on this, might be staffed with cheap interns, and could be able to put lessons learned into a compact and a very accessible form?

MS. STUKEL: Hi. I'm Diana Stukel from FHI 360. And I guess I have kind of a fundamental question that's always been percolating about the way we do impact studies in the development work as contrasted with how it kind of works in the medical world and clinical trial world. And from what I can see, I mean, in the clinical trial world if you had an intervention or a product that you wanted to disseminate and scale up and invest in, you would do research studies and you would see where there's impact and you would try it in different contexts and so forth. And only at the point at which you knew with certainty that it worked would you invest and scale up.

And we in the development world, we do things -- I don't just mean USAID, I mean broadly everywhere that I've seen -- we do things a little bit differently. We think we have interventions that might work in all kinds of areas and we find ourselves scaling them up sometimes before we have that body of evidence because of ethical considerations. It might be difficult to not give interventions if we think that they have a use or there's political pressures or technical difficulties with impact studies. And then we find ourselves in the position after the fact of undertaking impact studies to see whether there was an effect. And we say, well, if there wasn't, we dismantle it or we tweak it or whatever.

And I know I can see why it's evolved that way, but there is a difficult tension between the accountability part that says the taxpayer dollar might be spent on interventions that may or may not work. And the learning part, which is sort of we want to learn and we're starting to learn and I think it's great that many agencies have started to invest in that, but we might be doing it in a backwards way in some cases. I'm not saying in all cases, I'm saying in some cases I've seen this.

So I'm sure a lot of thought has been given to that reality of the development world and the difficulty of it and I just thought maybe some comments on that would be interesting.

MR. INGRAM: Ruth, I'm sure you can address the second question, but I think first Wade should say yes to the first one because some of us agree with him.

MR. WARREN: I've got to say more than yes. So in full disclosure, I was a history major in college and I love the idea. What I was going to say is when the agency celebrated its 50th anniversary recently we don't have a historian, we didn't have a history.

So many of you may know, Janet Ballantyne, who was a long-time mission director in the agency, they basically put her in a room by herself and said write the history of the agency. And so she did, but what she did, which was produce a history of the agency, we did the same thing in the Global Health Bureau. There was no history of the incredible work that this agency has done in global health over the past 50 years, and so we contracted with a person to write a history of Global Health from USAID's perspective. But we don't do that in any systematic way at all and I love the idea.

MR. INGRAM: The Europe and Eurasia Bureau did the same for both democracy and for economic growth in the former Soviet Union/Eastern Europe about five years ago.

MR. WARREN: Yes.

MR. INGRAM: Ruth?

MS. LEVINE: Yes, I'll just take the second. I think the distinction is not between -- it's a really interesting question. I think the distinction is not between the biomedical world and development. I think it's between the biomedical world and social and economic policy. I think that's the distinction because if you look in the United States, you have exactly the same phenomenon, these kind of like, well, I have an idea about how to lift people out of poverty in Detroit, you know. It's called charter schools. It's like what?

And then only over time do you accrue evidence to, as you say, either amend or tweak bright ideas that people have. So I think it's a social and economic policy question.

The distinction, for me anyway, in the development world and what evaluation's actually even more important for social and economic actions in development is because sitting here in Washington, we do not get feedback on a daily basis about what's working and what's not. We are so much more susceptible to being swayed by lovely stories about what might be working and we don't sort of see with our own eyes, again, on a daily basis.

And so having systematic ways to get that feedback and in ways that are credible is, I think, even more important, although there are many of your colleagues in The Brookings Institution who argue very vehemently, and I agree with them, too, for a better evaluation of U.S. social and economic policy and who'd do it.

MR. INGRAM: Okay. Are there two questions in the back, Madeleine? Right there. You choose, Madeleine.

MS. PACQUE-MARGOLIS: I'm Sara Pacque-Margolis and I've been working in the M&E field for USAID, OGAC, and implementing partners for many years.

And one thing that hasn't come up or I haven't heard it explicitly in your comments is one of the major constraints I've experienced is the lack of capacity in the field amongst our partners in the field, our development partners. And if we really want to talk about learning and a culture of evaluation I would argue that nothing has made as big a difference -- I'm looking at some of my former USAID colleagues -- than the investments that have been made in the capacity-building of our counterparts in the countries where we work. So I'd like to hear your thoughts on that.

MS. MARET: Thank you. I'm Feno Maret from the Urban Institute. You give a nice example on the learning in Mozambique. Can you talk a little bit more, for example, a concrete example on the accountability?

And another question is I'm working on a project of USAID called Public Sector Systems Strengthening in Tanzania, and we are doing the operations research. And the struggle we have is that the -- I mean, to have that culture of learning and the feedback loop in the team, it's very hard. So I think it joins her question on not only building the counterparts, but also the partners.

MR. INGRAM: Great. Ruth, you want to start off on the first one.

MS. LEVINE: Yes. I mean, I just agree. I just completely agree. (Laughter)

MR. INGRAM: Right. Does anybody here disagree? (Laughter)

MR. INGRAM: It's a matter of priority, yes.

MS. LEVINE: I don't think anyone would disagree.

MR. INGRAM: Fair enough, good.

MS. LEVINE: I mean, I think that done right and intentionally, the evaluation function can contribute to what I think the agency aspires to in terms of really responding to nationally locally defined priorities really helping to strengthen capacity and understanding in the partner countries. So I think that there's a lot of potential for that.

I do think that it takes more resources, it takes more time. And it takes partners -- I don't know what the right word is -- it takes the people who are doing the evaluation work, the actual conducting the evaluation, it takes them really having a commitment, as well, to work with and explain to and coach and mentor local counterparts. And it's not just money and it's not just time. It is also that commitment, which I think many people have, but not everybody.

MR. WARREN: And then on accountability, I'm not quite sure how to answer your question. We've done a lot of thinking in the agency as part of this revision of our guidance around strategic planning, project design, and monitoring and evaluation on what does it mean to be accountable and how do you hold people accountable and what level of result can a mission reasonably be held accountable for? And so we're trying to get that right.

In the past it's been more aspirational and missions had these very broad objectives and Washington said we were holding them accountable for those objectives even though they were thing that were so broad that they were, A, hard to measure and, B, you could never say whether our programs were the driving factor behind the achievement of that objective. So we're trying to strike the level of accountability at the right place, where you can measure it and where our programs are making a difference.

And then I think an evaluation becomes an important part of that because that's partly how you know, through monitoring, you know whether you are achieving the result that you're going to be held accountable for. And then through evaluation you can find out why what you're doing was working or not working. I sense that may not have answered your question, but that's sort of my thoughts about accountability.

MR. INGRAM: Good. We have time for one more quick question that is appropriate for a closing question. (Laughter) And Madeleine, you can select. Go ahead, Madeleine. Put your hands up.

This gentleman's in the front's been trying to get a question in since the beginning of the Q&A. And he thinks I've been ignoring him and I have. (Laughter)

SPEAKER: I was sure of it. It's just like evaluation. No, I think that the point that I wanted to highlight is the following.

I think that the issue of evaluation we have to be in a way a little bit like gender in the following sense. Everybody agrees it needs to be done, but don't bother me with it. And I think that evaluation has that issue. I mean, I think how do you face a question of accepting evaluation as part of the normal issue as opposed to have a bunch of guys who do evaluations?

So, in other words, you may be an engineer doing a road or an agronomist or a sociologist or whatever. And you have keeping in mind that it's not -- what you're doing is fine, but may not necessarily solve the problem. And what type of incentives does the institution give so that you would be able to do that?

Because, you know, the administrator said, we are in a culture where it's not very nice to say my program didn't work out, although it should be a great lesson. But really the way it's taken is it was a failure. So how do we cope with that? How do we make people appreciate that the evaluation is not one more thing that I have to do, but it's part of what I have to do?

MR. WARREN: So I think we're striving to do just that. And I don't think in the agency in the last few years it's been just a check-the-box kind of a response. We have a lot to learn. We're making progress, we're training people. We're talking about evaluation internally and at events like this. And we're trying to bake it in or make it a part of what everybody does as a regular course of business and not just a thing that has to be tended to because somebody told them.

MS. LEVINE: So I just respond from my personal experience. So, you know, when I was asked by Rashad to take on the role that I took on, I did think it was going to be really an uphill battle and that I was going to have to somehow persuade people that this was an important thing to do and that it needed to be part of kind of the everyday work of the agency; that a development professional needed to pay attention to these things.

And day one my email was flooded with people who said thank god we are now going to do better evaluation again, because there had been such a sense over the previous years of de-professionalization of the agency staff and the loss of the library of the evaluation function. A few people are nodding their heads.

MR. WARREN: Strategic planning.

MS. LEVINE: Of the strategic planning, of budget, of any sort of policy function, of the cerebral cortex of the agency. There was such a sense of loss and then of hope that that could be rebuilt, and this was a really material, tangible way to do that.

So I think the challenge really was more on the how than on the -- you know, for any institution or any person to change you need motivation, you need to know what to do, and it needs to be made possible to do it. You need the incentives, you need little barriers to do something lowered.

The motivation was absolutely there and so the challenge was really on, well, okay, so what are the specifics of what people can do, particularly people who had kind of gotten out of practice, a little out of shape? (Laughter) No offense, like not personally out of shape or anything, no.

MR. WARREN: Go back to your analogy. (Laughter)

MS. LEVINE: Yes. And then what to do to make it easier, as you were talking about, you know, have trainings that people could go to, but, even more importantly, have a mechanism where they could get access to resources more quickly and so forth.

So anyway, I guess I just think what you raise is what I had expected. And I just don't think -- it was not the reality that I found and I think that's why there's really been a big change. And as quickly as the agency lost that capacity, I think it's regained it in really better ways.

MR. INGRAM: Right. Wade, a concluding remark?

MR. WARREN: I don't think I can top that. I mean, in the first place, she can say things that I can't say and she has the perspective of having seen what she came into the agency and found and she helped get us to an important point. And it's really nice to hear your observations that we've continued to build on what you first helped us create and I thank you.

MS. LEVINE: Well, it's a pretty great team. It really is.

MR. INGRAM: Ruth, anything else?

MS. LEVINE: I'm done. Thank you, George.

MR. INGRAM: Well, I have to highlight what has been noted several time and that is 5 years ago, 10 years ago, you wouldn't have gotten the administrator of USAID to take the time to come to a public event, to make remarks from her head, not from a prepared speech. I don't know of any AID administrator in my lifetime who could have done that.

It took quite some doing to get this event scheduled because we had to match Ruth's schedule with Gayle's schedule, and I'm not going to tell you which one was more difficult to schedule. (Laughter)

MS. LEVINE: I live on the West Coast.

MR. INGRAM: But they both stay very busy and they are both -- you know, they bring incredible knowledge and experience and reputation to this issue. And as evidence of how important Gayle takes this issue and takes learning, I think it was the designation of Wade to head the PPL Bureau, who's one of the most respected and I would say viewed as one of the most creative career people at USAID. So I think evaluation is in good hands.

And in spite of it being in good hands, Wade, you will find us at MFAN pushing you ahead further. So, you know, we've been nice to you today. (Laughter)

Thank you all. Let's thank the panel. (Applause)

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I, Carleton J. Anderson, III do hereby certify that the forgoing electronic file when originally transmitted was reduced to text at my direction; that said transcript is a true record of the proceedings therein referenced; that I am neither counsel for, related to, nor employed by any of the parties to the action in which these proceedings were taken; and, furthermore, that I am neither a relative or employee of any attorney or counsel employed by the parties hereto, nor financially or otherwise interested in the outcome of this action.

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Expires: November 30, 2016