

Remarks by Sheri-Nouane Duncan-Jones

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The United States Agency for International Development is the US government's development agency. This Agency is a catalyst with partners in over 100 countries around the world, local organizations, private sector and through other partnerships to build communities and lift economic growth and prosperity. USAID's field presence and longstanding relationships with country governments and other local development partners serve as a foundation for the Agency's leadership role in development. This work strengthens open markets for goods, services and commerce and supports partners to become self-reliant. We promote prosperity through investments that expand markets for trade in services and goods and creates a level playing field to participate in global trade.

Through USAID programs, we focus in particular on developing and least developed countries to create opportunities to raise living standards, providing countries with the resources to expand basic services and most important of all – enabling citizens to chart their own prosperous futures.

To overcome the many challenges developing and least developed countries face and advance rapid, sustained and broad-based growth, we dedicate resources to help countries participate more effectively in global trade, including a focus on services-related outcomes. These types of interventions fall into four categories:

1. Mobilizing new investors and private capital to underserved sectors and geographies, to create productive jobs, new economic opportunities, and enhance access to and quality of services – from financial and energy to health and education;
2. Improving infrastructure like roads, bridges, water supply and electrical grids, which are critical to lifting the limits on a country's growth;
3. Working with private-sector companies to spur economic development, so citizens can participate in a vibrant economy that allocates resources wisely; and
4. Encouraging local channels of financing, empowering entrepreneurs in developing countries to improve their lives and shape their own futures.

USAID works to leverage the power of the global marketplace to help bring about an end to extreme poverty and build resilient, democratic societies—and to do so cost-effectively. The role that trade plays in all of our development programs is significant and USAID has an important role to play in connecting the developing world to global producers and consumers.

Over the past 15 years, USAID trade-related capacity-building assistance has been particularly successful in increasing the quality and value (as opposed to merely the volume) of developing country trade in a number of countries. While most of USAID's work focuses on broad economic development, in some specific instances programs focus on services. I'd like to outline three examples from Bangladesh, Djibouti and Lao.

In Bangladesh, USAID is upgrading technology to improve flow of market information to improve ag and non-ag value chain competitiveness. This system includes working with the production systems, end markets, support services such as financial and business development services and mechanization, value chain governance, the natural ecosystem, and the socio-cultural context. USAID also improves the competitiveness and growth of selected private sector industries, with the objective to increase off-farm employment opportunities for the poor. Private sector competitiveness is strengthened by enhancing the business enabling and policy environment, boosting relevant skills of men and women in the workforce and management, promoting implementation of quality standards and management systems, improving marketing capabilities, increasing business productivity and facilitating increased access to financial services.

In Djibouti, USAID launched a program to reduce unemployment by improving workforce readiness and competitiveness based on market needs. The request came directly at the behest of President Guelleh during negotiations with the USG over the lease of a military camp. The government emphasized infrastructure development for transportation and energy and Djibouti –

with the help of foreign partners – has begun to increase and modernize its port capacity. Due to the presence of the port industry, there are a number of opportunities for employment in that sector, as well as in related (i.e., transportation, logistics, etc.) areas. However, due to lack of workforce readiness, many of the jobs are either filled by foreigners or remain unfilled, and as such, the projects links back to assist the country to meet this need.

With 70 percent of employers in the Lower Mekong sub-region looking to hire, but only 16 percent finding recent graduates who have the skills they need, a regional USAID project in the People's Democratic Republic of Lao better prepares youth for employment by bridging the gap between educational institutions and employers. Through annual labor market assessments, the project identifies the priorities, challenges and opportunities in the region as voiced by employers, education institutions and job-seekers. These needs are translated to universities and vocational schools that then adapt their curriculum and teaching approach to better meet private-sector demands, and to engage enterprises to strengthen work-based (hands-on) learning opportunities, such as internships. With collaboration with leading multinational technology companies such as Cisco, Intel and Amazon Web Services technology and innovative instruction is introduced and leveraged in classrooms. The number of local industry partners is growing through learning hubs.

These are a few examples, and no one country example is exactly the same. With in-country offices in over 80 countries, USAID builds and develops relationships with partner governments, works to align with strategic plans and then depending on the country's specific objectives, and as appropriate in collaboration with private sector and other partners, together identify gaps, and design and implement programs; as you can see from these aforementioned examples, no one size fits all.

USAID trade capacity-building programs are beneficial to growing and developing services sectors, but may focus on broader disciplines with relevance and benefits to other sectors, such as education, infrastructure, computer and IT skills training, etc. to strengthen economic policies, remove trade barriers, and build well-functioning economic, political, and legal institutions. As a result, USAID programs help promote economic growth, reduce poverty, and sustain support for trade liberalization.

I'm happy to further discuss these and other country examples that might be of relevance to interested parties, and I can connect you to the in-country collaborators directly so you can hear and perhaps even visit to learn about their challenges and successes. I wish you all the best as you further develop and expand your services work. Thank you for inviting me to speak today.
