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TRANSCRIPT  
Online Event

**“USAID Digital Strategy Launch: A Conversation with Deputy Administrator Bonnie Glick”**

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FEATURING  
**Bonnie Glick**  
*Deputy Administrator, USAID*

HOST  
**Daniel F. Runde**  
*Senior Vice President; William A. Schreyer Chair and Director, Project on Prosperity and Development, CSIS*

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Dan Runde: Good afternoon. My name is Dan Runde. And I'm a senior vice president here at CSIS. I also hold the Schreyer Chair in Global Analysis.

I want to welcome the hundreds of you currently livestreaming this from your homes as we get ready to launch USAID's first-ever digital strategy. USAID has been a technology partner in global development for decades. Many of you don't know this, but USAID brought the internet to Africa through a really interesting initiative called the Leland Initiative 20 years ago. And USAID helped set the table for the proliferation of cellphones all over the developing world through policy advice, for helping setting up auctions and deregulation over a 25-year period. So USAID's been a long-term technology partner and a great partner for good in the developing world for decades. So it's totally understandable that USAID would launch its first ever – its first-ever digital strategy.

I'm really glad to have Deputy Administrator Bonnie Glick. Bonnie Glick is one of the good ones. She's a great leader in global development. She's had a wonderful career in the private sector. She was a diplomat, fluent Spanish speaker. She will give some remarks on the new strategy shortly. I want to remind all of our viewers that this is an interactive virtual event. We're doing live questions and answers. And I want to encourage all of you to go to our event page at CSIS.org and click on the "Ask Live Questions Here" button to submit your questions. As moderator, I'll then pose a few of those questions for the deputy administrator to answer.

Just one last point. I think the fourth industrial revolution, the explosion of cellphones, malicious actors and COVID are all some of the words in the word cloud that would come up if we did a word cloud on digital strategy. I know we have about 500 people watching online, so I – without further ado, I'm going to turn the floor over to the deputy administrator. Deputy Administrator Glick, the floor is yours.

Bonnie Glick: Dan, and your whole team at CSIS, thank you so much for the welcome here today, albeit a virtual welcome. It's something that we're all getting used to in this day in age. I also want to thank my USAID team that has worked very closely with your, both on the launch of the digital strategy but, even more significantly, on pulling together a digital strategy which all of you can now find online at the USAID.gov webpage. As Dan mentioned, we are all learning in real time about the impact of digital technology on society. One of the reasons that we took on the first-ever compilation of a USAID digital strategy is because it's a priority for us at USAID, and it's a priority of the Trump administration.

COVID-19, as many of you may know, was initially tracked and identified using digital tools, including algorithmic learning. Digital tools are critical, of course, for tracking and for treating patients all around the world. The global economy has shifted in the last few months, where we are all relying now more on digital communication, as in this format here today. Needless to say, there are many more examples of digital technologies that are shaping our understanding of – our understanding of COVID, our response to it, as well as, we hope soon, our recovery from coronavirus. It's vital for nations around the world to deploy these technologies effectively and equitably in the months and years to come. As Dan

mentioned, there are many of you too that are joining us from around the world. We are thrilled with that. And we hope to partner with you on that.

That's why today is so important for us. The digital strategy that we're launching today was many months in the making. We began on this well in advance of our knowledge of COVID-19. At USAID, we talk about what our focus is. What is our mission? Our mission ultimately is to end the need for foreign assistance. And in order to do that, we have to partner with developing countries around the world on what we call their journey to self-reliance. Those journeys to self-reliance are informed and guided by our American values of freedom, accountability and inclusion.

We're integrating digital technology into all of our work at USAID. It is vital, really critical, to have digital technologies available to people's lives and to those journeys to self-reliance. We'll adopt digital technologies into all of our work across all sectors. You, who are part of our important USAID and development ecosystem, will see digital tools incorporated into our programming in global health, in agriculture, education, in our 5G rollout around the world, in our energy programming, our programming that focuses on democracy promotion and transparency, as well as in large-scale infrastructure projects.

Some examples that we can point to quickly of where we've used digital platforms have been, for example, to improve tax compliance in the Philippines. Or, another example, in the Ukraine, where we worked on digital platforms to reduce corruption and to save government funding. We expect steady gains in the adoption of digital technology in our current work. Given the speed at which digital tools morph and change, those gains will soon eclipse all of our accomplishments to date. That's a good thing. We at USAID are fundamentally optimistic about the potential use of digital technology. And these digital tools can unify and democratize society. They can promote understanding and prosperity.

At the same time, however, they can also exacerbate gaps. We see those gaps between rich and poor, urban and rural, men and women, people who are educated and those who are unschooled. We believe and know that the digital divide is real. Our goal is to work towards closing it. But the digital technologies that are available in the world today can also be a force for domination, for division, and for discord. We see regimes use the internet as a form of propaganda. We see regimes use digital technologies to track and to control their citizens, and to subvert their freedom. And we've seen the use of digital technologies to advance the interests, as Dan mentioned, of malign regimes against free nations. Indeed, we've seen that against us in the United States.

So in our digital strategy, we emphasize that access to digital technologies must be universal. The use of digital tools should be consistent with all other ways that free nations operate. We need to respect the rights of individuals with openness, and we need to focus on good governance. But in order for us to be successful, in order for this digital strategy to have teeth and to gain traction, we have to count on you, our partners in the development sector, contractors, NGOs, as well as the private sector. We need your input. We need your insight. We need your ideas and your thoughts on improvement. Today we look forward to your questions, but in the future we look forward to very close collaboration.

Thank you all. Thank you, Dan. Thank you, CSIS, for hosting this important event today.

Dan Runde: Thanks, Deputy Administrator Glick. I think that was great.

Let me start with the question, just to your last point, what role, if any, does the private sector, development organizations, governments, and policy resource organizations – like ours here at CSIS – how can they help you achieve this vision? How can we help you?

Bonnie Glick: I spoke about a development ecosystem. The ecosystem is really quite large. One of the things that's been remarkable to see as we developed the digital strategy is that there were over 100 people just within USAID, mostly out of our Global Development Lab but peppered throughout the agency and in 28 missions overseas, provided input. But that wasn't all. We had members of the private sector, members of research organizations like CSIS, contractors, NGOs join in in over 200 public comments. It's one of the reasons that it takes a little bit of time to get a strategy launched, because we know that no one has a monopoly on good ideas. And we wanted to make sure that we could gain from the great suggestions that came to us from all over the world.

The process of putting this together was an iterative one. It was organic, generated from all of your good input. For us, we see it as an exciting opportunity to engage with people in R&D to set up living laboratories, really, all around the world to try out technologies to see where they can help countries along their journey to self-reliance. We believe fundamentally that there are smart people everywhere. I'm sure including the hundreds of people who are on this call today. And we encourage you to participate with us in this.

Dan Runde: If someone wants to get involved is there a website or an email that they might send something to?

Bonnie Glick: I think when you go to the link for the digital strategy, there will be a link for more information. You should be able to click on that and get some feedback from USAID directly.

Dan Runde: OK, good. As I'm thinking – as I'm listening to this conversation, I was also thinking about allies, Deputy Administrator Glick. I gave a speech in Japan to JICA, USAID's counterpart in Japan. They're very focused and in the process of putting their own digital transformation strategy together. I know that GIZ have launched a strategy. The Brits put out both – the Brits and GIZ have put out significant pieces on this. I know the Dutch are looking at this. And when I listened to your remarks I thought of Taiwan, I thought of South Korea, I thought of Australia. I'm sure you're just beginning to reach out to our allies about this. I'm sure there's interest in this from our allies.

Bonnie Glick: There's tremendous interest. And I would say, it's not just from our allies who are donors, but it's also from our allies who are in the emerging market countries. One great example that I like to learn is my first trip as Deputy Administrator was to Africa. And I went up to a province in northern Kenya where I participated in the launch of a water project. And the water project was delivered based on technology that was developed out of one of IBM's research labs. IBM has

something like 14 research labs around the world, and this was one in Kenya. And the amazing thing about that was not even so much that the technology came from Africa and was used in Africa. The truly extraordinary thing was that lab in Africa was able to license the technology that they developed for Kenya to the state of California to address drought issues. That, to me, is the full circle of self-reliance. And that's where we want to drive countries, in that very direction, which is extremely exciting, through the use of digital tools.

Dan Runde:

So it's interesting. I've been to that lab in Kenya that IBM has. And it blew my socks off. There were Africans – and it was mainly scientists from Africa who had Ph.D.s from the United States. And so think of it as 40, 50, or 60 rocket scientists from Africa in white lab coats who'd studied at Purdue, and Stanford, and Harvard, doing off-the-charts, really interesting technological breakthroughs in the African context that also, as you said, can be applied anywhere, including California. I was amazed.

And one of the things that prompts me to say, Deputy Administrator, is we did a whole exercise with our friends at RTI looking at innovation-led economic growth. And we had to go look at science and technology plans for developing countries. And at first I thought, what the heck? Science and technology plans for developing countries? You know what those are? Those are the deepest aspirations that countries have for their future. That's what – if you look at a science and technology plan for a developing country, and for any country, it's a form of touching their deepest aspirations for their future. So I think this is very interesting, what you're talking about.

Now, you put this digital strategy together over a year ago, well before COVID-19 and well before we had to do this. So what prompted you to put this digital strategy together? Tell us about that.

Bonnie Glick:

Sure. It's been a long time in coming, is one thing that I'll say. We're keenly aware that we're operating in a 21<sup>st</sup>-century environment, and we should leverage the tools that are available to use in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Those tools include technology, but they also include this broader ecosystem. One of the efforts that we're undertaking at AID is to engage with the private sector in a more fulsome way. Not just large American companies providing corporate social responsibility, although that's important, but also engaging with local private sectors. The local private sector in a country where USAID operates is going to be the entity that creates jobs for that country and helps the citizens of that country move forward on their journey.

It's important for us to look at this digital strategy launch as an opportunity to activate innovation around the world. And frankly, I sit here, and I see myself as a legacy person in foreign policy. The future belongs to younger people. And it's important for us to have things that are exciting for young people to participate in. So I look at the digital strategy as well as an important tool for us to recruit new people into USAID, both in the United States as well as overseas.

Dan Runde:

That's great. OK, so we're doing this, and we're being digitally transformed, Deputy Administrator Glick, if I can put it that way. We're in the midst of a global pandemic. We're just starting to grapple with the spread of infections. Many of these countries have health systems that could easily be overwhelmed and

populations with little to no safety net. So you know, you could argue why are we doing this? Why are we having a conversation about digital transformation when we've got this going on?

Bonnie Glick: Right. This coronavirus is something that while this specific pandemic was not planned for, we know that across time, across the world, we operate in an environment where there are epidemics. We have this digital strategy integrated and interwoven into everything that we're working on, to include global health programs. Over the last 20 years, USAID has invested \$140 billion into global health programs. And one of the things that we've done is we've built up platforms that allow us to deliver assistance in whatever form.

And this has been in the area of the United States President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief, which people call PEPFAR. We've seen it through the Ebola crises. And one of the things that we saw that was so important is that we have platforms that are interoperable, so that we're not reinventing the wheel each time there's a global epidemic or pandemic, as we're in today. We at USAID are not new to global health. But we want to be able to apply the new tools that are out there.

Dan Runde: Yeah. I mean, I think it's interesting, given sort of COVID, we've been digitally transformed. Everybody's been digitally transformed. You may not be interested in digital transformation, but digital transformation is interested in you.

Bonnie Glick: Well, hello, yes.

Dan Runde: : You know, I just think it's – let me just – I want to just remind the audience about the live Q&A again, that viewers who are joining us live, that this is an interactive virtual event. And we're going to be doing live Q&A in about 10 to 15 minutes. So if you haven't already, I encourage you to go to our event page at CSIS.org and click on the Ask Live Questions Here button to submit your questions.

OK. So Deputy Administrator Glick, the digital strategy's first objective is to improve measurable development in humanitarian assistance outcomes through the responsible use of digital technology in USAID programming. What do you mean by responsible use of digital technology?

Bonnie Glick: That's a good term. It's a little bit buzzwordy, but it's really important that we dig into it. As you alluded to, and as I talked to a little bit earlier, we need to make sure that we're using digital tools as a force for good. We talked earlier about the fact that there are malign actors who are using digital tools, who are using the internet for surveillance of their citizens, who have undemocratized the internet. We look at the use of these digital tools as an avenue for free speech, as an avenue to empower women, to expand market access, to serve as vehicles for the use of mobile money.

When you use mobile money in transaction, you increase not just the security of the transaction but the personal security of merchants, particularly women merchants, in the marketplace. They're not walking around with bags of money. They're walking around with a cellphone, which doesn't even have to be a smartphone, that's carrying their funding on it. The key is, we have to be cyber vigilant. We need to make sure that the internet and the tools we use are safe. At the same time, we don't want to be cyber vigilantes. We want to make sure that there is enough that's appealing in the use of digital tools, particularly for the \$4

billion people around the world today who don't have access to these digital tools. We need to make the safe use of digital technology, digital tools, appealing to people.

One of the ways at USAID we're looking at doing that, that's critically important, is through training and building the capacity of leaders in the ICT space, in the technology space around the world. What we're working with local leaders on in ministries of telecommunication – we're working with them to help enable good decisions when they consider their nation's technology requirements and technology aspirations. This, of course, will lead very naturally into a discussion about 5G.

5G is the direction that the developed world is rapidly heading in. And emerging markets are – will be slower to arrive at, but eventually they will get there. So it's important to help train local leaders around the world in emerging markets about the importance of making good decisions and selecting 5G platforms that make good democratic sense for their countries and will not bind them into systems that might have backdoors into surveillance – might, simply put, be called undemocratic.

Dan Runde: Got it. OK. Now, which initiatives in the strategy do you see as being the ones that can move the needle the most?

Bonnie Glick: So overall our approach is to increase the adoption of digital tools. That is fundamental to success across the board with our digital strategy, that people use the tools and the technologies that we'll have infused into all of our programs. I cannot even guess where all of this will lead. You spoke before about the Leland Initiative. Congressman Mickey Leland, this was named for him. He was tragically killed when he was on a development mission in Africa. And there's no more special way to honor his legacy than to have a program named in his memory.

The Leland Initiative in 1996 aimed to bring the internet to Africa. But over the course of time, we had seen that change into so many other ways to bring development through technology to Africa and, indeed, all over the world. So if you think about it sequentially, even just using the Africa example, we began at USAID with the Leland Initiative, which led many years later to Power Africa, an effort across the U.S. government and with private sector to electrify the African continent.

We've moved to these digital platforms that are interoperable and allow us to share information across platforms. We're now looking cyber-optic connectivity in African countries. And across the world, this will ultimately lead to 5G and decisions, all of which informs today's digital strategy. But at the same time, it also informs the digital strategies that we'll be developing tomorrow and into the future.

Dan Runde: Excellent. Excellent. We've got our first question from the public. This is from Ambassador Eric Nelson from the U.S. Embassy in Sarajevo: Digital technologies are a primary strength of the U.S. economy. What opportunities do you see for public-private partnerships with U.S. tech firms?

Bonnie Glick: Hi, Ambassador Nelson. It's good to hear from you. Thanks for the question. And it is a great question. This area is ripe for U.S. technology firms. In terms of public-private partnerships, one of the ways to look at that is to think about American

technology companies and their presence in the countries around the world. So in your case, in Bosnia and Herzegovina. It's great for us to be able to say that an American component is part of Bosnia and Herzegovina's trajectory towards 5G.

But at the same time, whether it's an American technology firm, or a Swedish, or a Korean, or a Finnish technology firm, they're all interwoven into all of the technology are components that are made in the United States. And so it's important for American interests to have those incorporated into global projects around the world. Key too in all of this, as you well know, is finding ways to engage with local private sector companies and working with Bosnia and Herzegovina's companies to have them engage and integrate it into a democratic technology landscape in Sarajevo, and of course well beyond that.

Dan Runde: Our second question is from right here in Washington: In the context of digital transformation how can you, say, be thinking about cybersecurity? There's great-power competition going on. and how – you know, how should we be thinking about cybersecurity in the context of global development and USAID's relationship with other partners in the AID implementation community?

Bonnie Glick: Well, cybersecurity is critical to protection of individuals all over the world. So when we think about aid beneficiaries in a crisis situation, for example, they may have nothing more than a cellphone as their source of information around the world and around what's happening to them. If you're a part of a community that's on the move, there are currently something like 70 million people around the world who are on the move, not where they should be living, whether as refugees or internally displaced people. Having tools that protect them online is critically important so that they can get information that they need for their family's survival.

Critical too, as we're sitting here in our remote locations and not all joined together, critically important is the need to preserve security in cyberspace for children who are learning remotely, who may be in a Southeast Asian country, but their schools are closed. And we want to make sure that they're safe when they're interacting with their teachers and their classmates in cyberspace. So the concept of cyber is infused in everything that we do that has to do with digital technologies. And critically important as well for us to be able to move forward in digital transparency and digital democratization.

Dan Runde: Yeah. Deputy Administrator Glick, on that point two things. One is my son was taking a class with one of the – one of the technologies, and they got bombed by some folks even here in Northern Virginia. So this issue of cybersecurity for classrooms is a real thing. And we experienced it ourselves. The other thing is, I'm just thinking about all of the development ecosystem and making sure all of the projects and work that's going on, everyone's doing this by distance, so certainly your beneficiaries but oftentimes our government partners, and you referred to that a little bit also. But I'm just thinking about just our ability to just do our work, whether it's elections interference or whether it's – whether it has to do with just the ability of our partner – AID's partners to do its work on a daily basis. I would assume this is a critical issue as well.

Bonnie Glick: Absolutely, it is. And the good news there is that your son was actually doing his work.

Dan Runde: Right. He was doing his work, that's right. Exactly. He was absolutely doing his work. That's right.

OK. I've got a third question. Edward Barth from IBM Research asks us: Some hallmarks of enterprises with an effective digital strategy are the ability to act with more agility to share information or resources with partners, collaborators and clients with less friction, and to rapidly and effectively adopt best practices from inside and outside the organization. How do you see USAID manifesting these advantages under the new digital strategy?

Bonnie Glick: So thank you, Ed. Great to hear from you too. It's a – one of the hallmarks of our digital strategy is the ability to reach out to people who know stuff we don't know. Again, it goes back to that concept that we don't have a monopoly on all of the good answers. And actually, through the use of digital tools, we're able to reach out to partners across this ecosystem. And one of the things that we highlighted earlier was the work done by IBM Research. So I'm grateful to you for asking the question, because it demonstrates as well to the listening audience the importance of these relationships, and the importance of the ecosystem, being able to feed off of each other in a very positive way that adds to growth across the board.

The neat thing about working with partners is there's win-win that's built into these strategies. We no longer look at collaboration as a bad word. We look at collaboration as a necessity. And it's something that we look forward to doing with everybody who's on the call today who's interested. So thanks for the question.

Dan Runde: Great. Hallah from URC: This is great. Is there a plan to include this strategy in the Journey to Self-Reliance Roadmaps for countries?

Bonnie Glick: So thanks, Hallah. That's a great question. And for those of you who aren't aware, USAID has developed country roadmaps for every country in which USAID operates. It's about 130 different countries around the world. And you can find that also on our USAID.gov webpage. What we look at in the Journey to Self-Reliance Roadmap is each individual country's capacity as well as commitment to development initiatives. And the use of tools, digital tools and technology, are enablers in all countries around the world of that roadmap towards self-reliance. The extent to which countries choose to use the digital tools available to them in a democratic way will be a large marker for us in terms of their commitment, as well as their capacity, to advance along their country roadmap towards self-reliance. Great question.

Dan Runde: Great. Great.

We've got a question from Tufts University. Heather asks us: You mentioned employing the digital strategy in USAID's upcoming 5G programs. Can you tell us more about that? And what is USAID doing on 5G?

Bonnie Glick: That's a great question that I like a lot. I spend a lot of time talking about the importance of 5G. And initially, it raised eyebrows. People thought, why are you talking about 5G in countries that aren't even at 3G? And the truth of the matter is that eventually they'll be at 5G, and now is the time to be talking about it so that they can make these informed decisions. And so what USAID does is we talk to countries' ministers of information, communication, and technology, ICT, around the world. And we talk to them about the importance of the decisions that they're making.

The fact that there isn't currently a homegrown American 5G out of the box solution in some ways gives us even a little bit more credibility in this conversation. We can talk about solutions that come out of Taiwan, or out of Sweden, or Finland, or Korea. And we can talk about them in the context of being solutions that allow for democratic use of technology. And it is easy to contrast them with other solutions coming out of autocratic regimes that are nondemocratic at the outset.

One of the things that's important for countries, developing countries in particular, is that they not be taken in by a flashy salesperson who offers them an out of the box plug-and-play solution for 5G, but that comes with all sorts of strings attached, including giving up sovereignty over control of those communications lines for their citizens. So we talk frankly and openly about the importance of decisions that countries make as it – as it relates to their 5G decisions in the future. It's a critical development issue for us.

Dan Runde: Excellent. Excellent. OK. We've got – next question is from Yoni Bock from MIT Lincoln Laboratory asks: In what way will the emphasis on increased technology and innovation become part of the career journey of USAID staff, all the Civil Service, Foreign Service, and personal services contractors? Will an expectation of applied innovation and technological proficiency become part of how bureaus, offices, and staff are funded and evaluated?

Bonnie Glick: Yoni, thanks for the question. For those of you who don't know, I was supposed to be up at Lincoln Labs probably right about now, and I'm sorry that we're not there with you in person talking about innovation and talking about partnering with MIT Lincoln Labs. It's a great question that relates directly to our workforce. And it's important, again, for us to understand how we recruit and retain talent in USAID. And we want to be considered an agency at the forefront of recruiting people with tech and innovation skills, so that they can become leaders of the USAID workforce.

In terms of including tech skills into performance evaluations and things like that, come back to me in a year's time and let's see where we are on that. But it is a good question. We want to have a staff that is trained and aware of, and more used to using, cutting-edge technologies moving forward. I certainly saw it today with the number of people who were able to help me to get set up for this video conference.

Dan Runde: OK. We've got a seventh and final question from Ruth Goodwin-Groen from Better than Cash Alliance, who asks: Can you talk more about your vision for overcoming the digital divide so more women can have access to digital technology, especially to be able to replace cash with digital payments?

Bonnie Glick: Ruth, that's a great question. And I think it's really important for us to consider all of the great ways that we can use technology, particularly as it relates to women's economic empowerment. As so many of you know, this is a Trump administration priority. And it's being – it's being shepherded by Ivanka Trump personally, who feels so tied to the issue of women's economic empowerment worldwide through her Women's Global Prosperity Initiative – and Development Initiative. She calls it WGDP, which I think is really great, because it goes to the heart of what we're trying to accomplish for women's economic empowerment.

Having women have access to technology is something that in many countries requires both education as well as reeducation. When you think about certain very conservative societies where women play a more, quote, "traditional" role, it's sometimes hard to

convince people about the importance of women having access to technology. And what we rely on very often are the outliers, the examples of the pioneering women who have been able to use technology to make a difference in their society, to become job creators, potentially for other women in their society, who have access to their own capital through digital savings for having an ability to build their own businesses that then contribute to the tax base and the overall GDP of the country.

We have invested to date about \$50 million in the Women's Global Development and Prosperity Initiative. And we look forward in the years to come to funding this at a much higher level. At USAID, we see the critical importance of including 50 percent of the world's population. And I might say, 50 percent of the most productive part of the world's population. But I appreciate very much, Ruth, your focus on this and the importance that we all have in looking at women and looking at the way that they can become critically important contributors to their home economies and development.

Dan Runde: Deputy Administrator Glick, thank you so much. I want to thank the hundreds of viewers who have been watching this live online and have joined us. And I know that you really have submitted some excellent questions. Deputy Administrator Glick, congratulations to you and to AID. This is an important strategy. And we look forward to working with you here and collaborating with you at CSIS on making this a reality.

Bonnie Glick: Dan, thank you so much. We look forward to the future collaboration, as well as with those of you who are on the phone and who are interested in learning more about our digital strategy. It's at [USAID.gov](http://USAID.gov). Please check it out.

Dan Runde: Thanks, Deputy Administrator Glick. And thanks, everybody, for tuning it. Goodbye.

(END)