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TRANSCRIPT

Podcast Episode

“Driving Impact Live: Leading USAID's Global Mission for Impact”

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FEATURING

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CSIS EXPERTS

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Hadeil Ali: How does the son of civil rights activists become the highest-ranked foreign service officer at USAID? How does leading a Black student union pave the way to a trailblazing career in international development? Clinton White, counselor of the United States Agency for International Development, joins us today to answer these questions and more. I'm your host, Hadeil Ali. Welcome to Driving Impact.

(Music plays.)

Announcer: Driving Impact, an exclusive insight into the personal backgrounds and careers of trailblazers on the frontlines of policy.

(Music ends.)

Ms. Ali: Counselor White, it's such a pleasure to have you here at CSIS and on Driving Impact.

Clinton White: Hadeil, thank you so much for inviting me. I'm very happy to be here and looking forward to the conversation with you.

Ms. Ali: So let's dive right in. What did 10-year-old Clinton White want to be when he grew up?

Mr. White: Now, that's a great question. You know, growing up as a young boy, you know, I figured, you know, always looking at sports or thinking about maybe history or something. But I think for me, you know, being 10, you know, there was sort of a defining moment. I can remember my mother cooking dinner one evening. And she had cooked brussels sprouts. And I don't know about you, but I don't like brussels sprouts. I still don't eat them, regardless of if you put, you know, butter, salt and pepper on them. But she had cooked this meal. And I was just, you know, kind of fussing about, you know, not wanting to eat the brussels sprouts. And then she told my brother and I, basically, you will eat those brussels sprouts. You're going to eat what I fixed you and you're not going to waste this food.

And so, reluctantly, I ate the brussels sprouts, along with the other food. And then the next day – and this was a time when Time and Life Magazine used to have, like, the big photos on the cover. And that particular time, it was during the famine that was taking place in East Africa. And so what she did was she cut the front page off and she stuck it on the refrigerator door. And so when I woke up and went downstairs to get something to eat, that's the first image I saw at the refrigerator. And it was a picture of these young boys, young girls, all starving, and their stomachs and bellies just popped out. And what she told me then was a reminder that every time that you open up this refrigerator I want

you to think about these starving people. And that – and think about all the food that you have, and think about what they don't have, and not to waste anything.

And that image stuck with me my whole life. And 22 years later, you know, it was something that had really inspired me to want to do more, want to do something more overseas in helping people. And I think that was, for me, that one of those moments that really sort of solidified that I wanted to do something internationally in helping people.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. And we have a great picture here to illustrate what you're talking about. Your parents?

Mr. White: Yes, mmm hmm.

Ms. Ali: Right? And yourself, and your sibling. I understand that your parents were active in the NAACP. What was it like growing up with parents who, I'm sure, were talking and having conversations about social justice and what it means to do something?

Mr. White: Yes. No, in our household, you know, they always taught us about respecting other people and also not – you know, not sitting back and watching things happen, but taking action and trying to do good for the – for people. And so, matter of fact, both of my parents actually were on the March on Washington with Martin Luther King here in Washington, D.C. And so they had always been involved and engaged in helping people, and the Civil Rights Movement. And, matter of fact, what they did in New Haven, Connecticut was they actually re-established the NAACP chapter there. And I can remember driving to Hartford with my father, and going to the NAACP building there in Hartford and getting the charter, and being there with him when it was passed on to take back to New Haven and to start, you know, the NAACP chapter there.

And for me, it was always around hearing their conversations around the friends and others who are active in these campaigns and these movements. And, you know, also myself being part of the NAACP youth group. But I also remember marching in January on cold days for Martin Luther King Day, because at that time it wasn't celebrated. And so I can remember getting up early in the morning and marching, which seemed like miles and miles at that age. But it was an important moment because, you know, we were trying to bring about change. And that's what's so key about the United States and other places, is that sometimes you have to go out and also help to make the change happen. And, you know, I also had an aunt who was one of the original freedom riders.

And, you know, she was at the University of Chicago, and, you know, she saw on TV the burning buses that were happening in Mississippi. And for her, that was also a defining moment of, you know what, I've got to go out and do something to change. And so she basically got on one of those buses. She wrote a letter to my grandfather and mailed it. And, you know, at that time, it was the snail mail. And so she knew by the time she got to Mississippi, whether she would be in prison or whatever was going to happen to her. But she had to make that change. She had to be involved in something which is a lot of times bigger than ourselves. And, you know, so those kind of experiences, and being around people like that, that really wanted to bring about positive change and equality for everyone, really sit in with me.

And I would just say one other thing. I can remember also in the school that I went to my class was very diverse. It was a small private school. But not the whole school was very diverse, but mine had more diversity than any class, I think, that's ever been there. And we all were growing up together, and norming, and storming, and just learning. And I can remember, at one point, two actors came to New Haven to perform at the Yale Repertoire Theater. And this was the time during apartheid. And the play that they were doing was *Sizwe Bansi is Dead*, that was written – one of the actors, John Kani, who recently was in the Marvel Comics Black Panther movie, who played the father of the Black Panther. You know, both of them were there. And I can remember them telling us about what was taking place and how they were fighting against the injustice happening in South Africa.

And matter of fact, John Kani, if you recall, he was beaten so bad that he lost one of his eyes. And so hearing their story and listening to that, as somebody that was in the fifth grade at that particular time, really also set in with me sort of this feeling of, we have to do better for everybody. We can't just sit back when things like this are occurring, but we have to be available and also take action to help bring about the changes that are needed.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. And thinking about what is our higher purpose, right?

Mr. White: Absolutely.

Ms. Ali: And we all have our way of doing that. And that might be through service, that might be doing that at home, that might be abroad. It looks differently, but really what I'm hearing from you is, what is your calling, and figuring that out.

Mr. White: Yes. Absolutely.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. Counselor, you talked about your parents, your aunt, your grandma as well, who grew up in the Jim Crow south, and later on in Connecticut became a successful entrepreneur. What is her story? And what values did she instill in you and your family?

Mr. White: No, yes, my grandmother – my maternal grandmother, Emma Hart Williams, really played a big part in my life. You know, not only did we spend a lot of time there with her and my grandfather, you know, my aunts and uncles and my cousins, but, you know, they had moved up from Macon, Georgia, escaping, as you said, the Jim Crow south, and creating and forming a new life up in Connecticut. And they had 10 kids. And, you know, they were poor, but there was so much love in that family. And everyone looked out for each other.

And one of the things that she did, outside of cleaning houses to make money, is that she also did a lot of sewing. And she also, you know, put together these hats. So, you know, together these hats. And her hats were, like, the talk of the town. You know, women would wear them. It was, like, oh, that's an Emma Hart hat, or an Emma Williams hat. And people would wear them to church, or wear them out, and things of that nature. And that was another way that she generated income.

And then, you know, they started investing in property, and they ended up having a number of property in Connecticut. And that particular time and era, you know, wasn't, you know, something that you would typically see with Black families. But, you know, they were teaching us, you know, those values of what's important. And I think one of the biggest lessons that I learned from her was about adversity.

I feel that, you know, sometimes you have to look at some of these negative experiences and things that you're going through so that you can learn from that, and that you gain strength from those things. And that when you're able to sort of meet those adversities and overcome them, it makes you stronger as a person. And also it brings people together, it ties us together. But I think that's a lesson that sometimes we just can't run away from those things. But when you face them, you can overcome them.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. Adversity and perseverance.

Mr. White: Absolutely perseverance.

Ms. Ali: I'm already, Counselor, hearing in your story this theme of service. And very early on, you're engaged in different community service projects. How much of your family story is part of the reason why you took up tutoring, right, and other things that you were doing very early on?

Mr. White: No, I think a lot of it had to do with it. You know, I would – as you said, I would see my parents out there. And both of them were in the service industry. My father was the director for the housing authority and my mother was a school nurse, also had worked at a nursing home. But also, just giving back to the community. And I think for me that really resonated, because I always wanted to get back any way that I could. And so, you know, whether it was at school delivering Christmas trees, or helping out at functions and delivering food, also tutoring.

You know, I really got energized by tutoring young people, especially in disadvantaged or underrepresented neighborhoods where, you know, when I was in Pensacola during college at west Florida at that particular time, I can remember, you know, the Black Student Union, we went out and we started tutoring at this one particular center that was right across the street from all the public housing. And to be able to talk to those young people and to provide them with not only tutoring in school, but some of our own life lessons, you know, we could really see a change in their eyes. You know, maybe they came in a little bit sandy, but they were a lot clearer after we were engaging with them.

And I think for us too, it gave us some intrinsic, or it – we valued that interaction because we were hoping that this next generation would actually be able to overtake us and continue the kind of things that we were doing. And so for me, service has always been a big part of my life.

Ms. Ali: And not just service. Also, poetry and singing, and the arts more generally. When and how did you spark the interest in singing and writing poetry?

Mr. White: Yes. I feel like at a young age poetry, you know, sort of influenced me. But also, you know, just growing up with your friends and things of that nature, where, you know, when I started – when I was younger, rapping and things of that nature, you know, you take a word and then you sort of build out something like, oh, take this word and what can you do with it? But also, you know, I was writing things down. And not in a typical way of like a journal, but things that I would encounter or see I would sort of write them down and try to think about really, like, what was behind this, or what was I feeling and expressing.

And so then I would translate that into poetry. And then I had sort of stopped for a while. But now I've really picked it up after the last six or seven years and continue to write about things that I encounter or see. Where I've been posted overseas, I've written about the Caribbean, about Libya. But I feel like with poetry it's a way for you to bond with

people. It's a way for you to, even at a lot of times, be vulnerable, because you're sharing something that's very personal that's inside of you, and how people respond or feel that. And so for me, writing the poetry, I try to make sure that, yes, it's in a simple way that people understand it, but also, you know, has a number of similes and metaphors and things of that nature, that there's a lot underneath it.

And I feel like if I can – if those words that you're reading or hearing, you know, if you can feel them, you know, like silk to your ears, or if you can hear them, and it sort of resonates with you inside, or if you're reading them, you know, that there's something that lights up in your eyes because you may be connected to it – I feel that through poetry and through arts those are other ways that, you know, we can culturally build the kind of relationships that we need.

And this, you know, also translates into the work that we do at USAID and really thinking about culture, and how culture really needs to be a part of our programs that we design, it has to be a part of the work that we're doing in the various countries. And people have to feel that connection and feel that they are involved in a way. And through that, you know, then when it comes to our economic growth, or when it comes to our democracy and governance, or comes to working in education, you know, these things, and being a part of the culture, really do resonate and help us to achieve the goals that we want.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. I think a lot about the arts being a form of expression, but also a form of liberation as well.

Mr. White: Yes.

Ms. Ali: Counselor, I think this is a great time to talk about the memento that you brought. As you – as you know, we ask all of our guests to bring a memento, something that symbolizes a meaningful moment in their journey. Could you share with us what you brought here today, and why you decided to share it with us?

Mr. White: Yes. So today I brought in the play billet when I was in ninth grade that I performed "Raisin in the Sun" by Lorraine Hansberry. And this is a play about a Black family in the '50s in Chicago, and how they were overcoming the obstacles and how their family really stuck together to be able to think about a better life for themselves. And it's based on the poem by Langston Hughes called "Harlem," and really talks about, you know, a dream deferred like a raisin drying in the sun. And for me, you know, this particular play, you know, I had to actually try out for it. And so I was competing against all of these other young guys, because I played the son Travis. And so it was sort of the first time I actually had

to do a tryout for a play. And so I was thinking to myself, like, oh, man, what if I don't get this?

But then, you know, I did get the part. And this is where, when people speak about life and art intersecting, you know, for me, it was the same kind of experience where, one, I was performing in this play, I was singing, I was, you know, had my lines, I was dancing. But I was also learning about myself and a little bit more about history and the things that people were encountering and facing when it came to discrimination, or when it came to being able to overcome various obstacles and challenges to realize your dreams, which are so important.

And it was also during a period of time where, you know, my family had moved from one neighborhood in Newhallville in New Haven, which was an all-Black neighborhood, to another neighborhood that was just being integrated. And the amount of – initially, the amount of racism and discrimination that we faced was really hard for us. And I mean, really – even for the other families that were there and some of the things that were done to our house and things of that nature. But it was also an important point in time because my parents basically were telling us that, you know, as people, we have the right to live wherever we want to live, and be who we want to be, and to not let anything take us – or, devalue ourselves from that.

And I can remember that kind of experience and living that, and how we treat one another, you know, not letting that interfere with how I treated other people. You know, I really grew from that particular experience in life. And I think for me, you know, this is why I sort of bring this every place – every post that I've been, because it's a reminder of who we are and what we can achieve.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. And a reminder of our responsibility, right?

Mr. White: Yes.

Ms. Ali: I think about how that's connected to the decision that you made to spend the bulk of your career in the public sector. Although you started off working a little bit in the private sector, you made the decision to really dedicate, right, that service piece to the public sector over 20 years. What drew you initially to a career in international development, and specifically at USAID?

Mr. White: Yeah, I think for me it was actually after finishing my master's degree and finishing college and going back to St. Petersburg and working in the banking industry, I always thought about, again, you know, going

back to the picture from the Life or Time Magazine about how can I work overseas, in international work. And I thought maybe perhaps in the bank it could be done through international banking, but realized, you know, that probably wasn't the path.

But I then came across a friend of mine who actually introduced me to a gentleman named John Hicks, who later became the ambassador to Eritrea. But at that particular time, he was the assistant administrator for the Africa Bureau. And also his senior advisor, Doris Martin. And so, you know, I met – you know, I met with them. They spoke to me about USAID and about the work. And I hadn't really heard of USAID previously. And that's just sparked an interest of, you know what? This is the kind of career, and this is the kind of work that I want to do. And so I ended up initially working for an organization called the Mitchell Group, which did a number of contracts with USAID on education, and health, and other areas. And ended up going overseas to Namibia as my first place, and really getting a sense of what this work entails from that field perspective. And it was an education program that we were implementing in Namibia.

And so for me, that was sort of when I knew this is where I wanted to go. And eventually I did apply at USAID through other mentors, you know, who sort of helped me along. And I ended up getting into the foreign service as a controller, which is our financial management backstop. And that's where it took off. And met other mentors throughout my career, helping and navigating me, but always giving back, because I feel any country that you're in, you should be giving back. Not only with our programs and activities, but volunteering, but also understanding the culture, understanding the people that we're helping or working with and their dreams, and helping them to aspire to achieve them.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. And it's great also, Counselor, to see examples – you studied marketing and you – and you had an MBA. Sometimes we think about careers in international development as solely having a degree in international affairs, or political science, or international development. But also seeing examples that maybe in college, maybe you wouldn't have thought about a career in international development. But later on, experiencing – those different experiences that you talked about as well, that sparked that interest. We don't all have to study the same thing.

Mr. White: Mmm hmm, no, exactly. And I think that's what's so key and critical about the work that we do. That you can come in pretty much with any background, any backstop, any, you know, experience, and be able to add value to what it is that you do. And I feel like with my marketing and with my master's in business administration, the work that we did

in organization development and leadership really helped me to understand culture, understand team building, teamwork, understanding to be inclusive of everyone, that everyone is counted, everyone is seen and heard, and that everyone adds value to whatever it is that we're doing.

And also, leadership. You know, really not just leading and strategically thinking what it is that we need to do, but also as a leader how do you manage people? How do you treat people so that they also feel empowered, or that they're also contributing and feel that their voice counts to what it is that we're hoping to achieve? And I feel, you know, bringing in those experiences have helped me in my career, and hopefully I've helped others.

Ms. Ali: Yeah, creating that culture. Speaking about culture, you spent – you talked about Namibia. You spent time in Egypt, in Pakistan, Senegal, Ghana. Spending time across different regions of the world, different cultures, what is something that you learned that helped you better understand international development and the work that USAID is doing across the world?

Mr. White: Yeah. I think for me, what I've learned most is that when we're doing this work and you're thinking about what is it that we're hoping to achieve, what I'm hoping that we get out of this is that people will actually know that the work we're doing is improving their lives, and that they're also taking a part of it and improving it with us.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. And that no matter your background, no matter your story, everyone deserves that human dignity. Counselor, I want to highlight one of the initiatives during your tenure as the regional representative for the Barbados-based USAID mission. What is this photo? I understand something related to a youth council.

Mr. White: Yes. So while I was the regional representative for our Eastern and Southern Caribbean mission, and we were based in Barbados, one of the things that I had wanted to do was to start a youth group – a youth body that would help us and advise us. A youth advisory group to advise us on our programs and activities, help us to think more strategically of the things that we need to focus on in the Caribbean.

And so when we first began to pull this together, you know, there were some things that we were receiving from Washington about how we had to pull this together. But we were not going to be deterred or anything. We wanted to ensure that we did follow whatever procedures we had to do, but we were going to do this because it mattered of how we looked at the young people, how they were engaging in the

Caribbean, and how they should be a part of the development work that we're doing.

And so when we pulled this together, we brought youth from all of the 11 countries that we covered, as well as others from the LGBTIQ community, from other ethnic groups. But one story in particular about this was one young man who – in St. Lucia we have a program for juvenile justice and helping a lot of juveniles who've gotten in trouble with the law reintegrate back into society. And so there was one young man who was still at this particular center. And, you know, we – you know, we said to ourselves, you know what? We need to make sure that everybody is part of this.

And so we wanted to make sure that he actually became part of this youth advisory group. And so we didn't know really how it was going to happen. So we reached out to the center. We reached out, you know, to folks in the government. And, you know, we said, you know, we really want this young man to be a part of it. And so we found a way for him to be a part of it, and for him to actually travel to Barbados.

And what really made it sort of a homecoming, or bringing it all together, we didn't – we weren't sure how the other youth were going to react when he, you know, was brought in and became a part of this. But as soon as he walked in, everybody – I mean, everybody – ran up, gave him a hug, and told him, you know, hey, glad to see you. Didn't treat him any differently. Sit on down over here. You're part of this group. And from then on, you know, nobody was treating anybody any differently. Everyone was treating everyone the same. And that's what we're talking about.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. It's so beautiful to hear. You know, I think the youth tends to be a voice that's undervalued and underrepresented. And to see that it was important to bring them together, as you say, as strategic advisors. I mean, we don't typically bring youth together, right, to really think about how they can help us shape our strategy or what we're doing. But, Counselor, you also got me thinking about, you know, the opportunities, right, with this young man that you're talking about. Who has access to those opportunities? I always talk about, you know, talent is there. The talent is there. But who gets access to certain spaces, right, to certain opportunities. And that opportunity that that young man got, you know, we don't know – maybe, you know, but we don't know how much it changed his life.

Mr. White: Well, I'll mention this much to you, because I do stay in contact with him. But one of the things that he said before I left, because we did an event in St. Lucia and actually he came out and learned how to play the

drum. And what he told me, and what he said to the – to the audience at this program, basically was that he's been so inspired by just the opportunities and what he's seen that when he does, you know, get back into society, he wants to do the same kind of work that we do at USAID for his country, and wants to be able to represent and help not only other young people, but just help people in the world. And I feel, you know, that, to me, was a gamechanger in terms of him realizing that he wanted more for himself and that he was – you know, and that he saw something that maybe he didn't realize, that's bigger than him. But now he had something to aspire to.

Ms. Ali: That higher purpose that we've been talking about.

Mr. White: That higher purpose, absolutely.

Ms. Ali: Yeah, yeah. Counselor, you've mentioned a lot partnerships and the importance of partnerships with various domestic or international groups and stakeholders. And I want to illustrate the importance of partnerships through a photo here of an example at the National Black Business Conference in Atlanta. Tell us about this partnership that that you were working on.

Mr. White: Yes. So Prosper Africa at USAID, under British – I had actually went down to Atlanta and to do the signing of this MOU with this National Black Business Alliance and these organizations that comprised of it. And for me, this kind of partnership is two things. One, it does speak highly about USAID and the fact that we are doing so much more to do more outreach to be more inclusive of who we're partnering with. Because we know that in these global challenges, we have to partner with many people. It can't just be the same organizations and groups. We need to hear what other people are doing. We need to understand how they can actually help us, but not just help us but just help others in challenge – you know, in coming to solutions to these global challenges.

So this partnership, for me, really, you know, said a lot about what we, at USAID and the U.S. government, are trying to do. Because, one, it is building the capacity of these organizations to work more into this international space. But it's also creating opportunities for these Black businesses and others to actually work, not only in Africa, but Latin America, the Caribbean, anywhere in the world, to develop trade and investments. But also, to develop relationships and partnerships with other businesses so that then, you know, the U.S. will benefit, these other countries will benefit, and these organizations that have not – or may not have been working with USAID so much, now have same opportunity.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. And when we talk about values of diversity and inclusivity, that's what it looks like in action, right?

Mr. White: Absolutely.

Ms. Ali: It's not only who we bring in – you're thinking about that talent – but it's also how we approach our work, right? And that's a great example through – that's one example of many partnerships where that's happened.

Mr. White: Yes. And it's – you know, and I would just add, it's not just, you know, signing the document, but now beginning to see what we're doing in Africa and also staging things in the Caribbean as well as Latin America. And that, to me, you know, says – it adds value to and volume to the words not being written, but the actions, as you said, are being followed through.

Ms. Ali: Yeah, absolutely. Counselor, this all brings us to today. You were sworn in in October 2022 as counselor for the United States Agency for International Development. And we have a beautiful picture here of your swearing-in ceremony. Let me first ask you if you recall the emotions that you had in that moment.

Mr. White: Yes. You know, for me, it was emotional in a sense of, you know, I never thought I would even be in this position. It wasn't something I, you know, to be quite honest, even really aspired to. But to get that call and ask to serve in this particular role, that said a lot to me. You know, if this administration, of this administrator and others, you know what I can contribute or can, you know, add value to what we're trying to do at USAID, and in the government writ large – U.S. government writ large.

But also, the fact that, because my wife is there with me, which is great, and my kids are in college so they were online. But it also says a lot about family, and that whatever I'm achieving I could never achieve it without my family. They are the most important part of my life and what I do. And so to have their backing for something like this, that also meant a lot. But then for me to be able to, at that moment, be able to address the audience that was both there and online – and there were a lot of people online. I was like, oh my goodness. (Laughter.)

Ms. Ali: I'm sure friends and family online as well.

Mr. White: Yes. But, you know, in my remarks, to be able to highlight all of those people that are actually doing a lot of the work overseas and in

Washington, and to name them and to speak to them, and the kind of things you're doing – whether it's localization, whether it's on climate change, whether it's on, you know, our progress beyond programs, development diplomacy, realizing that I'm a part of all of them, and they're a part of me, and for – and so I don't ever want to feel like I'm going to fail them. And I wanted to make sure that in this role I came prepared and ready to take it on, whatever that is. But also to craft it and create it in a way that, you know, became, sort of, you know, me and what I can contribute.

And so I came sort of with a piece of paper of things to the administrator of, hey, you know, I know that you have me working on foreign FSN empowerment, or foreign service national empowerment, foreign service strengthening, burden reduction, working on whatever – private sector engagement, all of these things. But I also wanted to ensure that, you know, I came with some ideas and some solutions that hopefully can help us to advance on our priorities.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. And the way you shaped the role as well, and that that makes me think about Administrative Power in her remarks mentioned that in your time abroad, you never lost sight of making a difference at home. And I see that clearly with the partnerships between USAID and Historically Black Colleges and Universities, or HBCUs. What is the goal of those partnerships? You know, why did USAID decide to create those partnerships? I know there are many. And how does it benefit the organization?

Mr. White: Yes. No, I think for us at USAID it was very important that, when we talk about an inclusive agenda, when we speak about diversity, equity, and accessibility, you know, all of those things can't just be words. As you said earlier, we have to demonstrate what we're doing. And I think that these MOUs that we've created with these minority-serving institutions, like the HBCUs and others, you know, really do demonstrate how serious we are about this work. But not only that, these are organizations that are doing the same thing that we're doing, that are doing the same work that other institutions are doing and can help us solve these greater challenges that we're faced with. Whether it's strategic competition in what we see, whether it's food security and water security, whether it's the information integrity, our dis- and misinformation that's taking place, or working on democracy, they're also doing the same type of research.

And so for us to be able to say, hey, you know, we want to work with your organizations. We want to see how we can partner and collaborate because not just, you know, put labels or anything, but because it's the right thing to do, and because they bring that experience and expertise.

And so that's why, you know, I feel very much committed to it and ensuring that they're at the same table. And matter of fact, for the first time at our mission director conference a few months ago we brought them in for a session. And they came in and they spoke about the various topics that I just described. And all of the mission directors – you know, some of them you know, had never really interacted with these organizations. But they all left and all engaging of, you know what, this does make sense. We see this value.

And many of them went up to them to see how they could look to see partnering. There's one institution, Tuskegee University, that won a \$5 million grant with us in helping the universities in Nepal when it comes to food security and agriculture. You know, and it comes from mission directors like Sepideh, who was the mission director at that time in Nepal, really, you know, looking at our progress beyond programs, looking at our priorities, and saying, you know, how do we change our business model? How do we become more inclusive? And that's, you know, sort of what we're beginning to see more and more of in our agency. And not just sort of a one-time thing, but these things will be more sustainable as we go along.

And it is spending time at these universities and other places to reach the young people as well. You know, it's not just going out to these institutions and speaking to the students, but speaking in rural areas in the Midwest, like in Illinois, going down to the south and speaking to young people, going to high schools and middle schools. Because a lot of times, people may not know what USAID does. That we're, you know, part of the federal government, that we're the development arm of the federal government, and how we're helping other countries to alleviate poverty or to help them in their democracy and governance, or to help them with their education systems and building the capacity, or working with their local institutions so that they can do the same things that we do here in their countries.

And, you know, when you have that opportunity to really engage with the young people, and sit with them, and get to know them, and they can ask you all these questions and hear about the work you're doing, that to me is one of the biggest inspirations that I've come across because I've seen and witnessed where students at one university are now working at USAID because of what they encountered. Or that there's a young lady at one high school who we first met when she was a sophomore. Now she's a senior. And that she was from the Congo, and then at a refugee camp in Tanzania, and then moved to the U.S. to Connecticut, where she's sort of first-generation student coming through high school here.

And now, not only was she inspired about what she heard from us, you know, she actually joined several organizations around climate justice, around environment, you know, to give back to the community. She started organizations at her high school to help raise awareness to things that weren't happening and the things that should be done. And that now she thinks about a career doing development work. And not only that, she's going to be the valedictorian of her school. I mean, that's, to me, is what's so important. Because now somebody that may not even been thinking about this kind of work, you know, just from our interactions, been able to inspire. But not only for her to be inspired, but that inspires us to want to do more to keep doing it.

Ms. Ali: Mmm hmm, and keep doing that work, right? And it's not only about going out to those different universities, like you said, but also the importance of the students coming to Washington, coming to USAID, and meeting with people across the organization. I know one of the partnerships that you have is with Delaware State University. And we have a picture here of you engaging with some of the students. As you're sharing some of those stories, Counselor, it made me think about my own experience as someone who went to Georgetown for grad school, and seeing all those opportunities, and who came to speak to us, and even just the speakers, right, the level of speakers that came, the career fairs and all of that.

But in undergraduate, going to small – very, very small liberal arts university in the Midwest, nobody was interested to come talk to us, right? You didn't – we didn't have career fairs. We didn't have any of these things. And so thinking even about the right to imagine, right, that – or the possibility to imagine these different paths or different careers, it's so important that everyone gets to hear about those experiences. So you made me reflect about kind of the big difference that I experienced between my undergraduate campus versus being at a school like Georgetown.

Mr. White: Yes.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. Yeah.

Mr. White: And as you said, it is so important. And I think here we had about 25 students that spent the day with us from Delaware State University, and learning about what USAID does, learning about international development work. But also having the opportunity to interact with everyone. You know, we have so many different hiring mechanisms at USAID – whether it's our career direct hires, whether it's our institutional support contractors, our foreign service nationals. They had a chance to interact with all of them, to learn about their stories,

and to take that away to know that there's so many different opportunities. But also, the fact that what we do and how we do various things – whether it's on the development or humanitarian side – you know, they can think about and imagining the kind of careers and degrees that they're obtaining and how to apply that at a place like USAID.

Ms. Ali: Yeah. And we know that the challenges are many, right? But we need the people. We need the workforce, and the diversity of that workforce, to be able – to allow us to tackle those ever-growing challenges.

Counselor, we're unfortunately close to time. So as you know, to close out we like to ask our guests three questions, every episode of Driving Impact, rapid fire. Are you ready?

Mr. White: I'm ready.

Ms. Ali: What are three words you would use to describe your career?

Mr. White: Yes. The three words I would use is respect, trust, and communication.

Ms. Ali: In your opinion, what does it mean to be American?

Mr. White: In my opinion, I think it's the American values. I feel like we understand that we're imperfect, but we try to always improve and build upon that. And, to me, that is where, you know, it gets back to, you know, how we treat one another, how we view each other, how we value ourselves and the people around us, so that we can always overcome the challenges and issues that we face collectively. And that, to me, is how we continuously improve our own selves and our communities and the global community.

Ms. Ali: And what is giving you hope right now?

Mr. White: I think what gives me a lot of hope are the youth, the young people. You know, when I describe the people that we've come encountered with, whether it's in St. Lucia or here in the U.S., that opportunity to engage with them and hear from them their perspectives, or asking us questions about the work that we do, and seeing, you know, the light in their eyes brighten when you talk to them about the kind of work and how you're helping people, and people are realizing their own dreams, are you bringing hope. Or, you know, in some cases, you know, where we've saved somebody's life and they're telling us that. You know, I think with them, and then seeing how they're growing, I can sleep at night.

Ms. Ali: Thank you so much, Counselor, for sharing your story with us. And thank you for sharing the evolution of it as well, and so many values of adversity, the importance of service, and perseverance.

Mr. White: And thank you for having me. I appreciate it.

Ms. Ali: You heard it yourself, the inspiring story of Counselor Clinton White. The son of social justice advocates who draws inspiration from his family's legacy to instill the values of diversity and inclusion at USAID, and across the globe. Thank you for tuning in to today's conversation. You can find more episodes of Driving Impact on YouTube or wherever you listen to podcasts.

(END.)