

# Chief Innovation Officer of USAID on Development and Social Entrepreneurship

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In a brief interview with Maura O'Neill, Chief Innovation Officer and Senior Counselor to the Administrator at the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), we discussed the creation of her position, pioneering examples of social innovation, and the role of social entrepreneurship in international development.

**Rahim Kanani: How did your position of Chief Innovation Officer for USAID come about, and why is this role so important for the future of the agency?**

**Maura O'Neill:** When Administrator Rajiv Shah became the head of USAID, he appointed the first Chief Innovation Officer because of his focus on identifying ways to drive faster, cost-effective development results that would last. This is important because former Defense Secretary Gates said it is a lot cheaper to achieve our US Foreign policy objectives to development than having to send our military troops overseas. Innovation can help ensure that our tax payer dollars achieve the best results.

**Rahim Kanani: What are some model examples of innovation in development that you can point to and say, "wow, the world needs to know about this"?**

**Maura O'Neill:** USAID pioneered innovations in development including the green revolution and oral rehydration therapy, saving millions of lives globally. Most recently, in partnership with mobile operators, foundations, and companies we have pioneered mobile money in Afghanistan and Haiti, and now working to bringing other countries on board. Most of the 1.8

billion people globally, without access to formal financial services, now have a mobile phone. Enabling them to use their phones to send and receive money, purchase goods, pay bills, or run businesses will be a major driver in transforming developing countries' economies.

**Rahim Kanani: As you survey the landscape of innovation in development worldwide, what are some of the trends both the private sector and philanthropic communities should be paying particular attention to?**

**Maura O'Neill:** The most important trend is the range of smart partnerships that are emerging between companies, governments, and philanthropists. With a huge potential for business growth in the developing world, companies have moved from corporate social responsibility to increasingly seeing these partnerships as Profit and Loss investments.

**Rahim Kanani: Lastly, where does social enterprise and social entrepreneurship sit within the broader context of USAID's efforts, and where do you see these categories moving forward?**

**Maura O'Neill:** Global and corporate companies realize that they need stable governments, adequate infrastructure, and people not ravaged by disease if businesses and communities are going to thrive. Partnering with USAID “mashes up” our deep development expertise with the private sector to help make these development strides permanent. We see social entrepreneurship, both for non-profit and for-profit enterprises, as key to successful development. They also represent a whole new set of business opportunities.

Rahim Kanani