

# INTRODUCTION TO THE ISSUE FROM THE UNITED STATES AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT

*Gillian Caldwell, USAID Chief Climate Officer*

**Gillian Caldwell** serves as the United States Agency for International Development's Chief Climate Officer and is responsible for directing and overseeing climate and environment work across the agency. She also serves as Deputy Assistant Administrator for the Bureau for Development, Democracy, and Innovation's Center for Environment, Energy, and Infrastructure and the Office of Environmental and Social Risk Management. Caldwell has worked to protect human rights and the environment throughout her career. For example, prior to joining USAID, she served as the Chief Executive Officer of Global Witness, which has a focus on tackling climate change and deploys investigations into corruption and natural resource extraction to drive systems change worldwide. Caldwell has a B.A. from Harvard University and a J.D. from Georgetown University.



As Chief Climate Officer for the United States Agency for International Development, I am responsible for helping to shape and lead the climate and environment work across the agency. USAID works in more than one hundred countries and is one of the world's leading funders of research and programs that incorporate social and behavioral science findings. Using evidence-based approaches and locally developed solutions is core to the Agency's approach.

Understanding communities' structure, power relations, economics, culture, and context is critical to achieving sustainable development outcomes. To be successful, we need to understand and participate as partners with local communities, most importantly the marginalized and vulnerable groups that don't always have a voice in the decisions that affect them. When we apply insights from social and behavioral science in our programs, we are much better equipped to make a difference in people's lives.

There are examples of this throughout USAID's work, but perhaps most notably in our efforts to respond to the global crisis of ocean plastic pollution, under our Clean Cities, Blue Ocean program. A garbage truck's worth of plastic pollution enters our oceans every minute—a rate that is expected to double by the end of this decade and triple by 2040. This pollution threatens the world's delicate marine ecosystems, major industries such as fishing and tourism, food security, and, ultimately, human health.

At USAID, we work at the local level to eliminate plastic pollution directly at its source, before it can reach the ocean. This means improving solid waste management systems and strengthening policies and practices for the 3Rs—reduce, reuse, recycle.

One example is through our work with Soneva Namoonaa, one of our local grantee organizations in the Maldives, which you will read about later in this issue. Soneva

Namoonaa is working closely with several island communities and the Atoll Councils to pilot a small island waste management model that prevents plastic and other waste from entering the ocean. Their research found that the differences within each community—varying governance and leadership structures, community attitudes and involvement, and spatial challenges—had a profound impact on whether a waste management initiative was successful or not. There was no one-size-fits-all approach; rather, each strategy needed to adapt to the needs, contexts, and norms of that community. Additionally, it is important to note that as many as 20 million people worldwide work in the *informal* waste sector, and they are responsible for over half of all plastic waste collected and recycled globally. To address the plastic pollution crisis, it is imperative that we understand the realities and needs of those individuals and households on the frontlines of waste management.

From the pages of academic journals into the building blocks of actual policies around waste management, social and behavioral science insights enhance the potency and rigor of our efforts. The series of articles presented in this issue of *Practicing Anthropology* provides deeper insights into the application of social and behavior change within the context of solid waste management and the protection of our oceans. I'm grateful for the journal, for their contributions to this field of study, and for their collaboration with USAID. ■