



# DONALD M. PAYNE FELLOWSHIP



**2019  
NEWSLETTER**



# WELCOME 2019 PAYNE FELLOWS!





# 2019 Fellows First Impressions



## **NATALIE FISZER** REP. JOSE SERRANO

This summer I had the opportunity to learn about USAID's current work around the world, speak with future colleagues working in different bureaus of the agency, and connect with Payne Fellows from both my cohort and past classes. During my time on Capitol Hill, I witnessed firsthand the development of international development and global health policy, and how executive agencies liaise with the legislative branch. I am excited to bring these experiences to the classroom as I begin my graduate studies at Columbia University.



## **NIESHA FORD** REP. KAREN BASS

Meeting the other Payne Fellows and gaining a better understanding of how Congress works, especially in relation to USAID were some of the highlights of my first summer as a Fellow. I particularly enjoyed attending all of the intern receptions on Capitol Hill that were made available to us.



## **MEKLIT GEBRU** REP. DONALD PAYNE JR.

Looking back, my experience on the Hill was amazing! I am so thankful to Congressman Payne Jr. and his excellent staff for welcoming me with open arms and providing me with guidance and mentorship to succeed on the Hill. Receiving a shout-out from Congressman Payne Jr. on the floor was an incredible honor, and one of the highlights of my time in his office,





## JESSICA HERNANDEZ

REP. BARBARA LEE

This summer in D.C. has been an amazing introductory experience to the Payne Fellowship! This summer we developed communication and networking skills that will continue to grow throughout our careers. I was able to learn so much about foreign policy and appropriations on Capitol Hill, all the while cultivating friendships with staffers, other interns, and the Rangel Fellows. However, the greatest part of our D.C. summer was getting to know the ladies in my cohort, and laying the foundation for a friendship and a sisterhood that will last a lifetime.



## AVANI MOOLJEE

REP. STEPHANIE MURPHY

The opportunities to network with people in and outside of USAID were invaluable to me as I prepare for my career. I enjoyed forming a bond with the ladies in my cohort, and not having to worry about a lot of the financial challenges of interning in DC that other congressional interns in my office had to worry about.



## MICHELLE NGIRBABUL

HELSINKI COMMISSION

My internship allowed me to significantly contribute to the Commission's mission on the Hill by helping organize and put on hearings, briefings, discussions, and complete daily administrative tasks. This experience gave me an inside view of Congress's role in foreign policy and international development. This experience has enriched my knowledge and helped me better prepare for my career as a diplomat in USAID's Foreign Service!



## SUSAN OJUKWU

REP. JOAQUIN CASTRO

One of the highlights for me was attending several hearings about some of the most pressing domestic and foreign issues of our time. Through my work on Capitol Hill, I developed a better understanding of the relationship between Congress and USAID. And of course, finally meeting and spending time with the other 2019 Fellows has been amazing too; they are all so intelligent and passionate! I'm very grateful to have had this experience and am excited about what the future holds.

**ROSE QUISPE**  
SEN. GARY PETERS



My experience this summer has been nothing short of fulfilling. I took advantage of networking events, represented the Senate office in multiple meetings with constituents, and grew closer to my cohort. The Senate office I worked in welcomed me into an environment, where I could grow in both my professional and personal life. While doing so, I formed strong relationships with foreign policy experts. This summer, I also made a new family with my 2019 cohort and the program staff. After the many discussions, workshops, and dinners, I left DC knowing I had a support system to rely on in my journey to becoming an FSO.

**MARIANNA SMITH**  
REP. JUAN VARGAS



The highlight of my summer was getting to know the other fellows. Whether we were helping each other navigate all things USAID or meeting up after work, it was so nice when we could all be together and know we have a built in support system. Working with Congressman Juan Vargas and his staff was also a summer highlight. I quickly felt like part of the team and the experience helped me better understand the relationship between the Hill and USAID. I can't wait to see where else this fellowship takes me!

**BEMNET TESFAYE**  
REP. MARCIA FUDGE



As a Congressional Intern, I feel I have grown both professionally and personally. Working on the Hill, I learned how to communicate effectively and efficiently, and to network. These skills helped as I attended briefings and hearings on landmark events such as India's 2019 general elections and on the crisis in Sudan. Personally, I have learned so much from the Fellows in my cohort. It was a pleasure to hear their awe-inspiring stories and their path to this fellowship. I am proud to be a member of the 2019 cohort!



# 2018 FELLOWS: FIELD EXPERIENCE





# 2018 Fellows Field Experience



## **DEBBIE ALFRED** ETHIOPIA

My internship experience piqued my interest in the intricate issue of a child's language of instruction. While in Ethiopia, I had the opportunity to research the government's policy on the appropriate language of instruction starting at the primary level. In a country where 81 languages are spoken, the issue of education delivery is not a simple one. I plan on diving deeper into this issue during my second year of graduate school and explore how other countries manage to balance the roles of instruction and language within diverse groups.



## **CAROLINE CARRASCO** ZAMBIA

This summer while at USAID/Zambia, I learned about program evaluation and tracking indicators to assess program impact. To build on some of these skills, I plan on taking a financial management and budgeting course during my last year of graduate school.



## **ISABELLE GENTA** COLOMBIA

In my summer internship, I have seen how beneficial it is to be well versed in a number of technical areas and how those areas intersect. Learning about the variety of ways that climate change impacts every level of human society in my graduate studies enabled me to take on conducting a Climate Risk Screening of the Mission's new development objectives and strategy. Now I hope to expand my upcoming coursework to include topics outside of natural resource management and international development.





**ANNA GHOUNLY**  
UKRAINE

I spent the summer working in USAID's Regional Mission for Ukraine and Belarus where I was tasked with creating a research report on Chinese-Belarusian relations. Drawing upon my experience writing research papers in graduate school, I produced a 25-page report utilizing 81 sources to provide the most comprehensive overview of China's growing presence in Belarus. Given my interest in sanitation issues, I will take a "Water and Sanitation in Complex Emergencies" course this fall, as well as courses in quantitative analysis, program evaluation, cost-benefit analysis, and impact investing.



**ASHLEY HAMILTON**  
MALAWI

This summer I was tasked with completing the Gender Analysis for Malawi's Country Development Cooperative Strategy. I was pleased to find that many concepts I learned in my graduate courses had real applicability to the work that I was doing. Specifically, our team was interested in working alongside the Government of Malawi to successfully harness a demographic dividend in the country. As an intern working with limited time, I am grateful that my courses facilitated my transition into the roles and responsibilities.



**PRATHIBHA JUTURU**  
WEST AFRICA

After completing my overseas internship, I recognized that I would greatly benefit from taking more international policy courses on top of my engineering courses. I took a variety of policy courses this past academic year, which have given me a better understanding of international development, foreign aid, and international environmental policies. To build on these, I will take International Environmental Law and US Policymaking in Africa, which I believe will give me a better understanding of international policies and their impact on a country's development pathway.



**TENZIN NAMDOL**  
NIGERIA

So much of business school is about learning to manage yourself and manage others, including those who are your peers, your supervisors and those who you are supervising. These skills inherent in business school were relevant working at USAID Nigeria during the summer where I worked with local FSNs, FSOs, my direct supervisors, the office leadership and the Mission Director. After my experience this summer, I am particularly interested in taking a negotiations class because the core of Private Sector engagement is part relationship management and part effective negotiations.





**VIVIAN OLABAMIJI**  
INDONESIA

Through this internship I learned a lot about what USAID does to help countries get to the point where they can plan, finance, and implement solutions to their own development challenges. Moving forward, I will seek more opportunities either through additional internships or research to further develop my skills in program design and implementation. I believe this will help me better support the agency's mission to help countries on their journey to self-reliance.

**MICHELLE OLAKKENGIL**  
GHANA

Coming from a very technical and research-focused experience at Harvard, my overseas-internship experience allowed me to put theory into practice and application. As a part of my internship, I worked in the USAID/Ghana Health, Population, and Nutrition Office, supporting the team in family planning (FP) and gained knowledge in USAID global FP programming and Ghana's national FP landscape from the donor perspective. I also gained a broad exposure to other health topics including, social behavior change communication, HIV/AIDS; malaria; water, sanitation, and hygiene; maternal, newborn, and child health; surveillance, monitoring, & evaluation and health systems strengthening. Through this experience, I became more confident in my abilities and what I can contribute as a Foreign Service Officer.



**AARON SCHERF**  
SOUTH AFRICA

The past summer with USAID Southern Africa in the program office's monitoring, evaluation, and learning team has given me great insights on how USAID uses data to inform their strategies and report on activities to stakeholders, as well as how these systems could be made better through cutting edge data science techniques. To build on that, This year I plan to focus on data science and geographic information system applications for impact assessment and monitoring programs.



**MAI YER XIONG**  
PHILIPPINES

From the internship experience, I learned that the Economic Growth backstop would be the best fit for my skillset and interests. I plan to enroll in courses this upcoming year that will strengthen my understanding of finance and the private sector. This summer, I realized how important it is for FSOs to have strong interpersonal skills. I want to continue to strengthen my management skills and will cross-register for some management courses at the Johns Hopkins' business school.



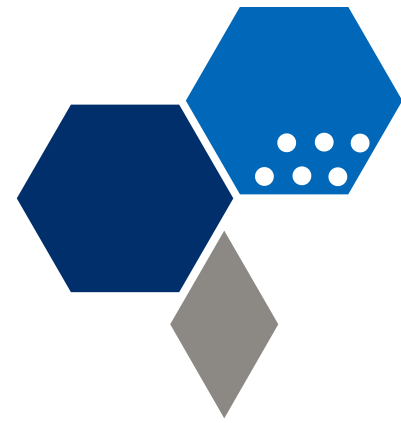


# CONGRATULATIONS 2017 FELLOWS!





# 2017 Fellows Reflections



## CHARLES BENTLEY

One of the greatest assets the Payne Fellowship provided me was a relentlessly supportive team. The 2017 Payne cohort became a family that cheered me on through the challenges of school, research, internships, and our entry into USAID. I'm immensely grateful that I had them throughout this process, and will continue to cherish their friendship and support as we work to tackle some of the world's greatest problems together.

## HOANG BUI

The program connected me with mentors who helped guide my course selections at the Harvard Kennedy School, which in turn helped me to contribute to projects I was assigned during my summer experience with USAID/Haiti. In Port-au-Prince, I worked with a dedicated team under the direction of a director who supported my professional development, and who significantly contributed to my understanding of the Foreign Service. Throughout my years as a graduate student in Boston, I connected with other Payne Fellows and we became close friends. These strong relationships would not have existed without the Fellowship bringing us together. With the preparation from the Payne Fellowship and USAID, I feel confident to join the Agency as a Health Development Officer, working to improve the living conditions and preserving the well-being and dignity of all those whom we will serve.



## RASHIDA HAWA KABBA

One of the great benefits of being part of the Payne Fellowship is creating wonderful friendships with the other fellows in the program. Some of my fondest moments as a Payne fellow are the ones I have shared with other fellows who I now consider really close friends. During our USAID internship abroad in 2018, Phelisha Midy and I both traveled from our various posts in Nepal and India to visit one another. She also traveled from Washington, D.C. to New York to attend my graduate school's annual gala with me just so I wouldn't go alone!







### **LA'NITA JOHNSON**

Attending American University for my International Training and Education master's program was the most invigorating part of my time as a Payne Fellow! For my final capstone project, I had the opportunity to develop a 157-page Program Training Design and Facilitator Guide that creates anti-gang prevention efforts for recently immigrated Northern Triangle youth – which was a true highlight. Also, another fond reflection was the ability to represent the American education system both domestically and abroad, especially at the EducationUSA college fair in Guatemala. Lastly, I've truly enjoyed the opportunity to make lasting relationships with my cohort peers! They helped to keep me grounded throughout graduate school and I couldn't have made it through the experience without them!



### **KATHLEEN KIRSCH**

As my fellowship draws to a close, I am extremely thankful to have had the opportunity to attend my dream graduate program through the support of the Payne Program, develop lifelong friendships, and grow personally and professionally during my internship at the USAID West Africa Regional Mission in Ghana last summer. I am excited to enter the USAID Foreign Service as an Engineering Officer, and want to say a huge thank you to the Payne Fellowship for this incredible opportunity!



### **PHELISHA MIDY**

My fondest memory of the Payne Fellowship is the overseas internship. It served as an insightful learning opportunity to gain knowledge of the type of work USAID is doing to foster sustainable development around the world. I had the privilege to meet foreign officials, private sector companies, and local organizations and discuss opportunities to create programs or policies that would be used to better the lives of the beneficiaries. While on the ground, I realized that foreign aid serves not only as a mechanism to save lives but also as a way to strengthen foreign relations, promote diversity, and foster collaboration.



### **CHIGOZIE OKWU**

Reflecting on my time with the Payne Fellowship, my fondest memories are working for USAID's Indonesia Mission and attending graduate school at the University of Michigan. While working for USAID/Indonesia, in the summer of 2018, I interacted with employees who helped me see that I was interested in working on environmental challenges in developing countries. When I returned to graduate school, I enrolled in classes that taught me about different global environmental topics, such as climate change, sustainable energy, and fisheries management. I know that my academic and professional background has prepared me to work for USAID's Foreign Service.





### JACQUELINE ROJAS

Each aspect of the fellowship brought new memories and experiences that will serve me on this journey towards becoming a USAID Foreign Service Officer. One of my favorite experiences was working with USAID/Ghana's Program Office. I not only gained exposure to the work of a Program Officer, but was able to contribute to projects in the Health and Democracy and Governance offices while building my professional network. I also value the relationships formed with my USAID mentor and the 2017 cohort. Their support, advice and friendship has been critical in this journey. It is incredible to think on how far we have come, but it is even more exciting to reflect on the adventures that lie ahead.



### ELAINE LI

One of the greatest value-add of the fellowship is knowing that you already have a network of folks who are around the world that you can call upon. I also appreciated my time with USAID/Ethiopia, where I experienced firsthand what it was like to serve abroad, and also met several FSOs and mentors who have been incredibly supportive of me as I finished my last year in school. Knowing that I will have such a strong support network makes me excited to start my role with USAID and I look forward to meet others whom I will look up to and learn from.



### SUSANA ROJAS-QUICO

As I reflect on the two-year graduate school journey, I am thankful for the opportunities the Payne Fellowship has opened along the way. Not only did it make Georgetown a financial reality, but it also influenced my course selections and decision to intern with the Office of U.S Foreign Assistance Resources this past summer. There are too many fond memories throughout the fellowship to recall but the highlights include meeting my fellow cohort during our first summer in DC together, interning with the program office at the USAID/Guatemala mission, and connecting with our FSO mentors who have been invaluable during the transition process.



### HUNG VO

I thoroughly enjoyed working in USAID/Albania! Interacting with country partners was an invaluable experience, and one I otherwise would not have had. The opportunity to go to the field and help monitor projects felt more rewarding as I was able to really use the skills—critical thinking, management, planning—that I worked to build in my undergraduate and graduate career.



# Message From the Director

Fiscal Year 2019 was a year of growth in partnerships for the Payne Fellowship Program. Realizing that we can't carry our mission without the support of a great network, our dedicated and excellent team collaborated with many supporters, volunteers and mentors of our program. We appreciate all the assistance provided by USAID staff who coordinated with us overseas internship placements, on-boarding and orientation logistics.

Special thanks to the following congressional offices and commission that hosted our fellows this summer: **Rep. Donald Payne Jr., Rep. Jose Serrano, Rep. Karen Bass, Rep. Barbara Lee, Rep. Joaquin Castro, Rep. Juan Vargas, Rep. Marcia Fudge, Rep. Stephanie Murphy, Sen. Gary Peters and The Helsinki Commission.**

This year, our strong partnership with the **USAID Alumni Association (UAA)** and the **International Career Development Program (ICAP)** resulted in a significant increase in the number of Payne mentors as well as access to professional development opportunities that enhanced the fellows' summer internships.

Also during this period, new partnerships were established with the following schools:

- **American University School of Public Affairs (SPA)**
- **University of Chicago Harris School of Public Policy**
- **Gallaudet University, Graduate School**

We continue to work on adding to the current list of 28 affiliate schools and look forward to new partnerships. In our recruitment efforts, we are fortunate to have the support of the **Hispanic Employee Council of Foreign Affairs Agencies (HECFAA)** and **Blacks in Government (BIG)**, delivering very well attended webinars. In addition, through a partnership with the **Africa Society**, two 2018 Payne Fellows competed for and received fellowships to conduct research on the Democratic Republic of Congo.

As we strive to recruit the best and brightest, we encourage you to spread the word about our program and let any deserving individual know about this unique opportunity to join the US Agency of International Development Foreign Service. **Our application deadline is November 1st, 2019!**

To date, we have 21 fellows and 29 alumni of the program who are now Foreign Service Officers, representing the strength and diversity of our nation. **Congratulations to Jacob Morrin (2013 Fellow) for becoming the first Payne Fellow to receive tenure!** We are proud of carrying out the legacy of Congressman Donald M. Payne Sr. while providing opportunities to those who have been for too long underserved and underrepresented.

Thank you to all who make this possible,

**Maria Elena Vivas-House**  
**Director**