What is your role at USAID?

I serve as the Agency’s Senior Education Technology Specialist and in this role provide advice to our HQ, Mission staff and U.S. Government (USG) colleagues for appropriate integration of technology in national education programs in developing countries. I also founded and lead the All Children Reading Grand Challenge for Development and the Mobiles for Education Alliance.

What drew you to working on ICT in development?

I had the opportunity to support an online community bulletin board for a national organization working on good government issues in the 1990s. This made me intrigued by the role of technology for advocacy and knowledge exchange. Through various paths, this led me to a career in international development for the last 25 years including working as a distance education specialist at the World Bank, Peace Corps, and for the last 11 years at USAID.

What advice would you give to a colleague thinking about digital development and how to get involved?

I would recommend not starting with a technology solution in mind when encountering a development challenge. It’s more important to understand the context, attenuating circumstances, and assets already available before leaping to a specific technology solution. For those interested in a comprehensive approach for programming technology in education, you can look at our recently released USAID’s ICT4E How To Note, which was designed to assist USAID education staff and implementing partners to make informed decisions about ICT4E integration within USAID programs.

How can we better think about using digital tools?

Don’t get enamoured by any one particular digital tool. Start with understanding the challenge and using a checklist, such as the one we designed for ICT4E Interventions to Support Education in Crisis and Conflict Settings, to identify appropriate tech-based approaches.

What is one thing you think everyone should know about your work?

I spend a lot of time forging effective and sustainable partnerships for the Agency both globally and closely working with colleagues at the country-level. Many of the ICT4E approaches we are exploring depend on the skills, expertise, and reach of a variety of public and private sector institutional partners. This is also relevant for our moving one-off ICT4E interventions/approaches to greater replicability, sustainability, and scale.