



441 G St. N.W.
Washington, DC 20548

Comptroller General
of the United States

May 9, 2023

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW
Washington, D.C. 20523

Priority Open Recommendations: U.S. Agency for International Development

Dear Administrator Power:

The purpose of this letter is to provide an update on the overall status of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) implementation of GAO’s recommendations and to call your continued personal attention to areas where open recommendations should be given high priority.¹ In November 2022, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 77 percent of our recommendations made 4 years ago were implemented.² USAID’s recommendation implementation rate was 100 percent over this period. As of April 2023, USAID had 31 open recommendations. Fully implementing these open recommendations could significantly improve agency operations.

Since our May 2022 letter, two priority recommendations remain open. We ask that you direct your continued attention to these two priority recommendations. (See enclosure for the list of recommendations.)

The two recommendations fall into the following area.

Establishing performance goals and targets. Both priority recommendations would help improve USAID’s ability to use performance data to assess Feed the Future’s (FTF) performance. We maintain that it is important that USAID and its 11 federal partner agencies monitor FTF’s performance as an interconnected whole. Specifically, we recommended that USAID, in consultation with its partner agencies, establish FTF-wide performance goals and set measurable targets for performance indicators. Implementing these recommendations will help ensure that USAID and its partner agencies can meaningfully use performance indicator data to assess and report on progress toward FTF’s overall strategic mission.

¹Priority recommendations are those that GAO believes warrant priority attention from heads of key departments or agencies. They are highlighted because, upon implementation, they may significantly improve government operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

²GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report: Fiscal Year 2022*, [GAO-23-900398](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 15, 2022).

As you know, in April 2023, we issued our biennial update to our [High-Risk List](#). This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. It also identifies the need for transformation to address economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges.³

Several government-wide, high-risk areas have direct implications for USAID and its operations. These include (1) [improving the management of IT acquisitions and operations](#), (2) [improving strategic human capital management](#), (3) [managing federal real property](#), (4) [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#),⁴ and (5) [managing government-wide personnel security clearance process](#).

We urge your attention to the government-wide, high-risk issues as they relate to USAID. Progress on high-risk issues has been possible through the concerted actions and efforts of Congress, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the leadership and staff in agencies, including within USAID. In March 2022, we issued a report on key practices to successfully address high-risk areas, which can be a helpful resource as your agency continues to make progress to address high-risk issues.⁵

In addition to your continued attention on these issues, Congress plays a key role in providing oversight and maintaining focus on our recommendations to ensure they are implemented and produce their desired results. Legislation enacted in December 2022 includes a provision for GAO to identify any additional congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations and address any underlying issues relating to such implementation.⁶

There are various strategies Congress can use in addressing our recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on USAID's progress in implementing GAO's priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act. Moreover, Congress could follow up during the appropriations process and request periodic updates. Congress also plays a key role in addressing any underlying issues related to the implementation of these recommendations. For example, Congress could pass legislation providing an agency explicit authority to implement a recommendation or requiring an agency to take certain actions to implement a recommendation.

³GAO, *High-Risk Series: Efforts Made to Achieve Progress Need to be Maintained and Expanded to Fully Address All Areas*, [GAO-23-106203](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 20, 2023).

⁴With regard to cybersecurity, we also urge you to use foundational information and communications technology supply chain risk management practices set forth in our December 2020 report, GAO, *Information Technology: Federal Agencies Need to Take Urgent Action to Manage Supply Chain Risks*, [GAO-21-171](#) (Washington, D.C.: Dec. 15, 2020).

⁵GAO, *High-Risk Series: Key Practices to Successfully Address High-Risk Areas and Remove Them from the List*, [GAO-22-105184](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2022).

⁶James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, § 7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022); H.R. Rep. No. 117-389 (2022) (accompanying Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, H.R. 8237, 117th Cong. (2022)).

Copies of this report are being sent to the Director of OMB and the appropriate congressional committees. In addition, the report will be available on our website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

I appreciate USAID's continued commitment to these important issues. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the issues outlined in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me or Jason Bair, Managing Director, International Affairs and Trade, at (202) 512-6881 or bairj@gao.gov. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Our teams will continue to coordinate with your staff on all of the 31 open recommendations. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gene L. Dodaro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" and a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
of the United States

Enclosure

cc: The Honorable Shalanda Young, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Enclosure

Priority Open Recommendations to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

Establishing performance goals and targets

Global Food Security: Improved Monitoring Framework Needed to Assess and Report on Feed the Future's Performance. [GAO-21-548](#). Washington, D.C.: August 31, 2021.

Year Recommendations Made: 2021

Recommendations: The USAID Administrator, in consultation with its 11 Feed the Future (FTF) partner agencies, should establish

1. Quantifiable and measurable performance goals for the initiative to assess progress toward FTF's strategic objectives and overarching goal.
2. FTF-wide targets for FTF-wide performance indicators required as applicable across the initiative.

Actions Needed: USAID agreed with our recommendations and, as of February 2023, has taken some steps toward implementing both recommendations. For example, USAID established two performance goals, which appropriately include targets, in the Department of State and USAID Joint Strategic Plan. USAID is in the process of collecting data to inform additional performance goals and quantify associated targets. We will consider both recommendations implemented when USAID establishes performance goals that allow it to assess progress toward its strategic and overarching goals, completes remaining data collection and analysis to serve as the necessary evidence to quantify and set targets, and sets targets for the indicators USAID and its partners identify as required as applicable across the initiative. Without implementing these recommendations, USAID cannot meaningfully use performance measures to assess and report on progress toward FTF's performance goals and overall strategic mission.

Director: Chelsa Kenney

Contact Information: kenneyc@gao.gov or (202) 512-2964

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