



Highlights of [GAO-10-368](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

Eighty percent of Afghans are dependent on agriculture for their livelihoods. Agricultural assistance is a key U.S. contribution to Afghanistan's reconstruction efforts. Since 2002, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has awarded about \$1.4 billion for agricultural programs to increase agricultural productivity, accelerate economic growth, and eliminate illicit drug cultivation.

This report (1) describes the change in U.S. focus on agricultural assistance since 2002, (2) assesses USAID's performance management and evaluation of its agricultural programs, (3) analyzes the extent to which certain programs met targets, and (4) addresses efforts to mitigate implementation challenges. GAO reviewed USAID documents; analyzed program data; and interviewed program implementers and USAID officials in Washington, D.C., and Afghanistan. GAO has prepared this report as part of its ongoing efforts to monitor key aspects of U.S. efforts in Afghanistan.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the USAID Administrator take a number of steps to enhance performance planning, monitoring and evaluation, and knowledge transfer procedures. USAID agreed with our recommendations, highlighted ongoing efforts to improve in these areas, and noted the high-threat environment in which they are operating.

View [GAO-10-368](#) or key components. To view the E-supplement online, click [GAO-10-756SP](#). For more information, contact Charles Michael Johnson Jr., at (202) 512-7331 or johnsoncm@gao.gov.

AFGHANISTAN DEVELOPMENT

Enhancements to Performance Management and Evaluation Efforts Could Improve USAID's Agricultural Programs

What GAO Found

The United States' focus in providing agricultural assistance to Afghanistan shifted from food security programs in 2002 to counternarcotics-related alternative-development programs in 2005. This focus on providing farmers with alternatives to growing opium poppy lasted through 2008. In 2009, the Administration shifted the focus of its agricultural strategy in Afghanistan from counternarcotics to counterinsurgency, noting that economic growth and new job creation were critical to U.S. efforts in Afghanistan because they provide alternatives to narcotics- and insurgent-related activities.

USAID's Automated Directives System established planning, monitoring, and evaluation procedures that USAID was expected to follow in Afghanistan. USAID planning efforts prior to 2009 largely follow these procedures. However, since the end of 2008, USAID has operated without a required Mission performance management plan for Afghanistan. In addition, USAID did not approve all implementing partner monitoring plans for the eight USAID agricultural programs, which represented about 75 percent of all USAID agricultural awards since 2002. USAID also did not assure all indicators had targets. USAID undertook efforts to monitor agricultural programs, but due to security concerns could not consistently verify reported data. USAID did not consistently analyze and interpret or document program performance for these eight programs, active between 2007 and 2009, on which our review focused. In the absence of this analysis, USAID did not document decisions linking program performance to changes made to the duration or funding of programs. USAID conducted one evaluation covering three of the eight programs, but the extent to which or whether USAID used the evaluation to enhance current or future programs is unclear.

We found that the eight agricultural programs we reviewed did not always establish or achieve their targets for each performance indicator. USAID requires implementing partners to submit information on indicators, targets, and results. We measured performance for the eight programs by comparing annual results against annual targets and determining the extent to which targets were met. Six of the eight programs did not meet their performance targets in the most recent year for which targets were reported. For the two programs that met all their targets, we found they failed to establish targets for several indicators and, thus, we could not fully assess performance for those indicators. We also found that the three longest-running programs in our review showed declines in performance from fiscal years 2006 to 2008.

USAID faces several challenges to implementing its agricultural programs in Afghanistan, such as the security environment, and has taken steps to mitigate other challenges, such as working to improve Afghan government capacity. However, while USAID's lack of documentation and high staff turnover have hampered USAID's ability to maintain institutional knowledge, the agency has not taken steps to address this challenge.