

INTERNATIONAL FOOD ASSISTANCE

Improved Targeting Would Help Enable USAID to Reach Vulnerable Groups

Highlights of [GAO-12-862](#), a report to the Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2011, USAID spent approximately \$1.7 billion on food assistance reaching over 46 million people in 48 countries. USAID targets food assistance so that benefits accrue selectively to only a portion of the overall population, typically the most vulnerable. Effective targeting is important to maximize the impact of limited resources, especially as USAID begins to use more nutritious but more costly specialized food products to address hunger and malnutrition among vulnerable groups. GAO was asked to (1) describe in-country factors that USAID and its implementing partners face in targeting vulnerable groups, and (2) examine the extent to which USAID’s targeting process supports effective targeting. GAO analyzed program data and documents; interviewed relevant officials; convened a roundtable of food assistance experts and practitioners; and conducted fieldwork in Ethiopia, Guatemala, Sri Lanka, and Zimbabwe.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Administrator of USAID improve USAID’s targeting of specialized food products to vulnerable groups by (1) issuing, as appropriate, improved interim guidance to assist implementing partners in deciding whether and how to target specialized food products; and (2) establishing and reporting program-specific indicators related to targeted vulnerable groups, to assess effectiveness in reaching such groups. USAID agreed with the recommendations and provided examples of recent efforts to address them.

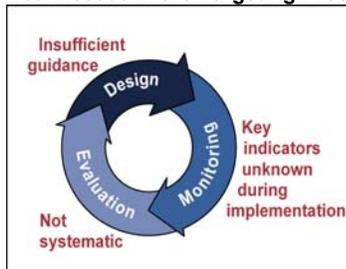
View [GAO-12-862](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or melitot@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

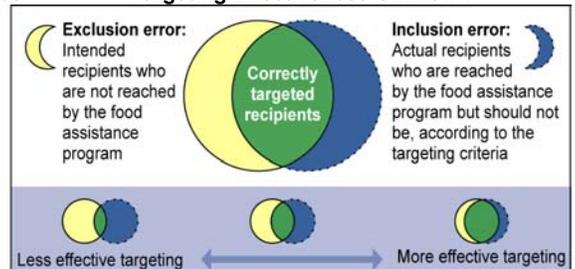
In-country, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and its implementing partners face a range of factors that, to varying degrees, affect their ability to target food assistance effectively to vulnerable groups. These factors include (1) the quality of data used to identify and reach recipients, (2) host government policies, and (3) sharing of rations among recipients and community members. Targeting effectiveness is reduced when data quality is poor, host government policies cause distortions in program design and implementation, and sharing prevents food rations from being consumed by the intended recipients in the intended amounts. USAID and its implementing partners try to mitigate such challenges by, for example, employing technology to improve data quality, coordinating closely with government officials to foster better relationships, and educating recipients about proper food usage to reduce sharing. In some cases, host governments have facilitated targeting efforts by, for example, establishing national targeting guidelines that set a common standard, or national statistical offices that assist in collecting data. Nevertheless, ensuring that food assistance reaches intended recipients remains difficult.

Weaknesses in the design, monitoring, and evaluation phases of USAID’s targeting process hinder targeting effectiveness, although the agency is taking actions to make improvements. In the design phase of the targeting process, USAID does not provide sufficient guidance on whether and how to target specialized food products. Specifically, USAID’s guidance on design currently is neither up-to-date nor complete, and does not adequately address key benefits and risks that inform decisions on whether and how to target specialized food products. In USAID’s monitoring and evaluation phases, weaknesses limit targeting effectiveness and hinder decision making. USAID currently does not require monitoring of key indicators needed to determine the level of targeting effectiveness. For example, during implementation USAID does not monitor actual recipients in its emergency programs. Furthermore, its evaluations do not systematically address targeting effectiveness. Without adequate guidance, monitoring, and evaluations, USAID cannot ensure targeting effectiveness in its food assistance programs. USAID is taking some steps to improve both guidance and monitoring. For example, USAID is updating guidance and plans to track indicators such as detailed age breakdowns that are key to better understanding targeting effectiveness. However, these steps do not fully address the weaknesses in USAID’s targeting process.

Weaknesses in the Targeting Process



Targeting Effectiveness Unknown



Source: GAO analysis based on USAID data and other sources.