

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-16-819](#), a report to the Chairman, Committee on Foreign Relations, U.S. Senate

Why GAO Did This Study

For more than 60 years, the United States provided assistance to food-insecure countries primarily in the form of food commodities procured in the United States and transported overseas. In recent years, the U.S. government has increasingly provided food assistance in the form of cash transfers or food vouchers. In fiscal years 2010 through 2015, USAID funding for Emergency Food Security Program (EFSP) for cash transfers and food voucher projects grew from about \$76 million to nearly \$432 million.

GAO was asked to review USAID's monitoring and evaluation of cash-based food assistance. This report examines, among other things, (1) USAID's and implementing partners' processes for monitoring cash transfer and food voucher projects and (2) the extent to which monitoring data reported to USAID can be used to evaluate the performance of such projects. GAO analyzed program data, interviewed relevant officials; and conducted fieldwork in Kenya and Liberia, selected on the basis of criteria such as funding and types of projects. GAO also reviewed the final reports for a nonprobability sample of closed cash transfer and food voucher projects.

What GAO Recommends

USAID should (1) take steps to ensure compliance with its requirements for data in final reports and (2) strengthen the indicators it uses to measure the timeliness, cost-effectiveness, and appropriateness of cash transfer and food voucher projects. USAID concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-16-819](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or MelitoT@gao.gov.

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INTERNATIONAL CASH-BASED FOOD ASSISTANCE

USAID Has Established Processes to Monitor Cash and Voucher Projects, but Data Limitations Impede Evaluation

What GAO Found

The United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and its implementing partners have established processes to monitor cash transfer and food voucher projects. To monitor the implementation of these projects, USAID has assigned monitoring roles and responsibilities to staff, is developing country monitoring plans and monitoring tools, and is working to verify information that partners have provided through actions such as conducting site visits, and speaking with beneficiaries. To ensure that assistance is delivered according to their procedures and to the targeted beneficiaries, implementing partners monitor distributions, and interview beneficiaries regarding the distribution of the assistance. In addition, implementing partners conduct postdistribution surveys to gather information about the relevance, efficiency, and effectiveness of the assistance (see figure).

USAID Implementing Partner Representatives Surveying Beneficiaries of Cash Transfer Projects



Representative conducting a distribution survey for a cash transfer project in Liberia.



Representative conducting a postdistribution survey for a cash transfer project in Kenya.

Source: GAO. | GAO-16-819

Incomplete reporting and weaknesses in certain performance indicators limit USAID's ability to use monitoring data to evaluate cash transfer and food voucher projects' performance. GAO's review of 14 final reports, which USAID requires for each project, found that a majority of the reports lacked required data elements, such as prices for key staple foods. Only 1 report included all 12 required data elements, and the other reports were missing up to 8 elements. As a result, USAID has limited ability to assess the overall performance of these projects. Further, GAO found weaknesses in USAID's indicators for measuring cash and voucher projects' timeliness, cost-effectiveness, and appropriateness. USAID's indicator for timeliness does not track delays in implementation. In addition, the indicator for cost-effectiveness does not include a standardized unit for measuring project costs. Further, the indicator for project appropriateness does not have associated benchmarks for measuring cash transfer and food voucher projects' impact on local markets. As a result, USAID lacks information that would be useful for evaluating the projects' effectiveness relative to that of in-kind food aid. According to standards for internal control in the federal government, management should use quality information, including relevant data from reliable sources, to achieve an agency's objectives.