



Highlights of [GAO-09-607T](#), a testimony before the Subcommittee on Government Management, Organization, and Procurement, Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has shifted from conducting its own activities to managing acquisition and assistance (A&A) instruments—contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements—it awards to implementing organizations. From fiscal years 2002 through 2008, USAID's A&A obligations increased from about \$5 billion to about \$11 billion. A&A staff—contracting officers (COs) and A&A specialists—are primarily responsible for managing A&A instruments. This testimony is based on a September 2008 GAO report that examined USAID's capacity to develop and implement a strategic A&A workforce plan and the extent to which USAID has implemented a mechanism to evaluate its A&A function.

What GAO Recommends

In its September 2008 report, GAO recommended that the Administrator of USAID develop and implement a strategic A&A workforce plan that matches resources to priority needs, such as the evaluation of the A&A function. Specifically, GAO recommended that the plan includes a process to collect, analyze, and maintain sufficiently reliable and up-to-date data on its A&A staff levels, and comprehensive information on the competencies of the A&A staff. USAID acknowledged that improvements are needed in the areas recommended. However, USAID continues to experience challenges with collecting data on A&A staff while working on its competency assessments.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, [click on GAO-09-607T](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or melitot@gao.gov.

USAID ACQUISITION AND ASSISTANCE

Challenges Remain in Developing and Implementing a Strategic Workforce Plan

What GAO Found

USAID lacks the capacity to develop and implement a strategic A&A workforce plan because it is missing two elements: (1) sufficiently reliable and up-to-date data on its overseas A&A staff levels and (2) comprehensive information on the competencies of its overseas A&A staff. Data on the numbers of overseas A&A specialists collected by two USAID offices were unreliable or out of date. GAO found significant discrepancies between these offices' data sets and officials acknowledged that their A&A staff level data are neither reliable nor up-to-date. Also, USAID has not collected comprehensive competency information on its overseas A&A specialists. GAO's model of strategic workforce planning notes the importance of these data in developing a plan that could enable the agency to better match staff levels to changing workloads. During fieldwork at 7 USAID missions, GAO found that the numbers and competencies of A&A staff did not match A&A workloads at some missions. The numbers of A&A staff with the needed competencies were less than adequate at some missions, while at others they were more than adequate. For example, officials at the mission in Mali said they had delayed time-sensitive projects because key A&A staff were not available when needed to approve contracts, while officials at the mission in Peru said the current number of A&A staff may be more than adequate. In GAO's survey administered to USAID A&A staff in headquarters and overseas, most of the survey respondents overseas reported difficulty in altering staffing patterns to meet A&A workloads. USAID's efforts to address its A&A workforce issues do not constitute a strategic A&A workforce plan that takes into account the entire A&A workforce. Without accurate and reliable A&A staff data, USAID does not have adequate information to address current workload imbalances.

USAID has not implemented an evaluation mechanism to provide oversight of its A&A function. The Evaluation Division in the Office of Acquisition and Assistance is responsible for providing this oversight to ensure that A&A operations follow USAID policies, primarily by assessing A&A operations worldwide. In fiscal year 2007, the division developed an evaluation mechanism that combines scorecard evaluations, in which COs self-assess their A&A operations, and onsite visits by division staff to selected locations based on the scorecard results and other factors. The division has completed scorecard evaluations at 4 missions and identified weaknesses in A&A operations. For example, the division found that one mission lacked resources to adequately monitor contractor performance. The division has set a goal of implementing this evaluation mechanism, including on-site visits to 5 missions within a 2-year period. However, according to agency officials, the division did not have the staff level needed to fully implement this evaluation mechanism. The division has increased its staff levels from 4 staff in fiscal year 2008 to 9 staff as of April 2009 and completed two more evaluations. However, USAID officials told us that OAA has not implemented the evaluation mechanism due to other priorities. As a result, USAID cannot certify the adequacy and effectiveness of management controls for the A&A function.