The number of undernourished people worldwide now exceeds 1 billion, according to the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). Sub-Saharan Africa has the highest prevalence of food insecurity, with 1 out of every 3 people undernourished. Global targets were set at the 1996 World Food Summit and reaffirmed in 2000 with the Millennium Development Goals (MDG) when the United States and more than 180 nations pledged to halve the number and proportion of undernourished people by 2015.

In a May 2008 report, GAO recommended that the Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), in collaboration with the Secretaries of Agriculture, State, and the Treasury, (1) develop an integrated governmentwide U.S. strategy that defines actions with specific time frames and resource commitments, enhances collaboration, and improves measures to monitor progress and (2) report annually to Congress on the implementation of the first recommendation. USAID concurred with the first recommendation but expressed concerns about the vehicle of the annual reporting. The Departments of Agriculture, State, and Treasury generally concurred with the findings.

In this testimony, based on prior reports and ongoing work, GAO discusses (1) host government and donor efforts to halve hunger, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, by 2015, and (2) the status of U.S. agencies’ implementation of GAO’s 2008 recommendations.

Consistent with GAO’s first recommendation, U.S. agencies are in the process of developing a governmentwide strategy to achieve global food security. In September 2009, State issued a consultation document that delineates a proposed comprehensive approach to food security. Although the document outlines broad objectives and principles (see fig. above right), it is still a work in progress and should not be considered the integrated governmentwide strategy that GAO recommended. It does not define the actions, time frames, and resource commitments each agency will undertake to achieve food security, including improved collaboration with host governments and other donors and measures to monitor and evaluate progress in implementing the strategy. Regarding GAO’s second recommendation, USAID officials plan to update Congress on progress toward the implementation of such a strategy as part of the agency’s Initiative to End Hunger in Africa 2008 report, which is forthcoming in 2009.