

GLOBAL FOOD SECURITY

USAID Is Improving Coordination but Needs to Require Systematic Assessments of Country-Level Risks

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal years 2010 through 2013, the U.S. government allocated \$7 billion to implement global food security programs implemented under the FTF initiative by USAID and its U.S. FTF partner agencies, which include the Departments of Agriculture, State, and the Treasury, and the Millennium Challenge Corporation. To enhance FTF efforts to increase agricultural productivity and reduce malnutrition in 19 chronically food insecure countries, USAID has outlined two approaches: an FTF whole-of-government approach, which aims to improve coordination and integrate expertise and resources of all FTF partner agencies, and a country-led approach to build country capacity to sustain U.S. efforts by including the host government and other stakeholders in planning and implementation.

GAO was asked to study the FTF initiative. GAO examined (1) the extent to which USAID has implemented a whole-of-government approach and (2) how USAID has facilitated a country-led approach. GAO analyzed FTF-related agency documents, conducted a survey of all USAID and U.S. FTF partner agency representatives implementing FTF in 19 focus countries, and interviewed FTF agency officials in Washington, D.C.

What GAO Recommends

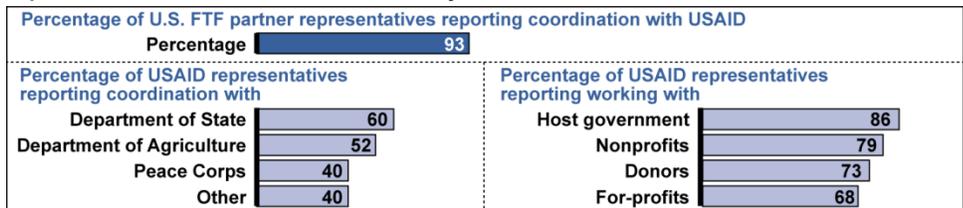
The USAID Administrator should require FTF country staff to conduct periodic risk assessments associated with pursuing a country-led approach and to develop plans to mitigate the risks identified. USAID concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-13-809](#). To view an e-supplement with more data, see [GAO-13-815SP](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or MelitoT@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has made progress in coordinating with U.S. partner agencies through the whole-of-government approach for the Feed the Future (FTF) initiative that began in 2010. According to USAID documents, this approach involves coordination and integration of expertise and resources across U.S. partner agencies with global food security programs. In reports issued in 2008 and 2010, GAO found that U.S. agency food security efforts were fragmented and uncoordinated. Under FTF, GAO found that USAID leads the whole-of-government approach by better coordinating and integrating partner agencies' knowledge and expertise at three levels: at headquarters in Washington, D.C.; in each of the 19 FTF focus countries; and between the countries and headquarters. In headquarters, USAID and FTF partner agencies established joint strategies and new data management systems to track funding and results across the U.S. government. At the country level, in GAO's survey of U.S. FTF partner agency representatives in 19 FTF focus countries, 93 percent reported coordinating with USAID.

Reported Coordination with U.S. and Country Stakeholders in the 19 FTF Countries



Note. All percentages have a margin of error of no more than plus or minus 4 percent.
Source: GAO survey.

USAID has facilitated a country-led approach but has not systematically assessed risks associated with this approach. USAID has facilitated the approach by providing assistance to the host governments in developing country plans and coordinating on FTF with country stakeholders, including nonprofit and for-profit organizations. U.S. FTF partner agency representatives answering GAO's survey reported working with multiple country stakeholders on FTF. In its March 2010 report, GAO found that the country-led approach was vulnerable to a number of risks, including insufficient capacity of host governments to meet funding commitments for agriculture. USAID has since made some progress in monitoring these risks, including tracking the number of focus countries that increase public expenditure for agriculture. However, GAO's current study found that USAID's FTF multiyear country strategies did not systematically assess risks to the country-led approach. For example, 12 of the 19 strategies did not contain sections discussing assessments of risks such as the host government's insufficient capacity and policies that inhibit private sector investment. GAO also found that fewer than half of the risks identified had corresponding discussions of mitigation strategies. Although USAID country guidance documents indicate that country teams must assess risks associated with USAID's development objectives, the agency does not require country teams to systematically assess and mitigate risks to the country-led approach. Without requirements for FTF country staff to identify and mitigate risks associated with the country-led approach, the U.S. government's ability to achieve its goals for improving global food security could be limited.