

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-732](#), a report to the Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

In fiscal year 2014, USAID awarded about \$1.3 billion for emergency and development food aid under Title II of the Food for Peace Act. USAID's implementing partners may provide what is known as conditional food aid—that is, food in exchange for beneficiaries' participation in activities intended to support development. For example, food-for-assets activities are intended to address beneficiaries' immediate food needs while building assets to improve longer-term food security. Questions have arisen about whether the dual goals of addressing both immediate and long-term needs may compromise the ability to achieve either goal, underscoring the need to understand conditional food aid.

This report examines, among other things, (1) USAID's use of conditional food aid through Title II development and emergency awards in fiscal years 2013 and 2014 and (2) the extent to which USAID has assessed the effectiveness of food-for-assets activities in development projects. GAO analyzed agency and partner documents and interviewed agency and partner officials in Washington, D.C., and in three countries selected on the basis of project type and representing a variety of partners.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that USAID (1) establish a mechanism to readily identify all Title II programs that include conditional food aid activities and (2) systematically assess the effectiveness of food-for-assets activities in development projects. USAID concurred with the recommendations but disagreed with some aspects of GAO's findings. GAO continues to believe its findings are valid, as discussed in the report.

View [GAO-15-732](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or Melitot@gao.gov.

September 2015

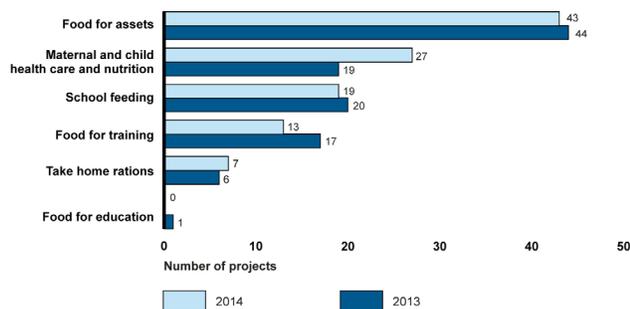
INTERNATIONAL FOOD ASSISTANCE

USAID Should Systematically Assess the Effectiveness of Key Conditional Food Aid Activities

What GAO Found

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) does not track the use of conditional food aid in projects funded under Title II of the Food for Peace Act. However, GAO's comprehensive review of USAID data found that most Title II projects included conditional food aid in fiscal years 2013 and 2014. Despite the prevalence of conditional food aid activities, USAID does not regularly collect data on conditional food aid provided through Title II projects and, as a result, could not readily provide data on the use of these activities in USAID's projects. Without the ability to identify all conditional food aid activities, USAID cannot systematically oversee the projects that include them. According to USAID's operational policy, USAID operating units must strive to continuously learn and improve their approach to achieving results in order to meet development goals. GAO's review of available USAID data for fiscal years 2013 and 2014 found that 111 of 119 Title II development and emergency projects included conditional food aid activities and that funding for these projects totaled \$2.1 billion—87 percent of all USAID funding for Title II projects during this period. USAID and its implementing partners implemented various conditional food aid activities, most commonly a type known as food for assets, through these projects (see fig.). Beneficiaries of food-for-assets activities typically must work at constructing community assets, such as roads or irrigation systems, in exchange for food.

Types of Conditional Food Aid in USAID Title II Programs, Fiscal Years 2013 and 2014



Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) and World Food Program (WFP) data. | GAO-15-732

USAID cannot systematically measure the performance of food-for-assets activities across all Title II development projects and therefore cannot determine the effectiveness of food-for-assets activities in achieving short-term or longer-term development goals. According to USAID's operational policy, measures of program effectiveness should be matched to meaningful outputs under the agency's control. While USAID uses indicators to assess the effectiveness of Title II projects, USAID cannot use these indicators to systematically assess the specific effectiveness of food for assets across its Title II projects. However, during GAO's interviews with 10 implementing partners that implemented 14 projects, partners identified several benefits specific to food-for-assets activities, such as developing needed infrastructure, teaching skills to beneficiaries, and achieving short-term increases in food security. Partners also cited challenges in implementing these activities, such as difficulty in ensuring the sustainability of created assets as well as interruptions resulting from weather and civil conflict.