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Washington, DC 20548

Comptroller General
of the United States

Accessible Version

May 18, 2022

The Honorable Samantha Power
Administrator
U.S. Agency for International Development
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue, NW
Washington, D.C. 20523

Priority Open Recommendations: U.S. Agency for International Development

Dear Administrator Power:

The purpose of this letter is to provide an update on the overall status of the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) implementation of GAO's recommendations and to call your personal continued attention to areas where open recommendations should be given high priority.¹ In November 2021, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 76 percent of our recommendations made 4 years ago were implemented.² USAID's recommendation implementation rate was 100 percent. As of April 2022, USAID had 29 open recommendations. Fully implementing these open recommendations could significantly improve agency operations.

Since our April 2021 letter, USAID has implemented all three of our open priority recommendations related to workforce trend analysis, senior leadership attention to diversity, and analysis of financial data on the timeliness of expenditures.

We are adding two new priority recommendations related to establishing performance measures to assess progress of the global food security initiative. (See enclosure for the list of recommendations and actions needed to implement them.)

The two priority recommendations fall into the following area.

Establishing performance measures. Each new priority recommendation would help improve USAID's ability to use performance data to assess Feed the Future's (FTF) performance. We believe that it is important that USAID and its 11 federal partner agencies monitor FTF's performance as an interconnected whole, with FTF-wide performance goals clearly linked to performance indicators with measurable targets. Implementing these recommendations will help ensure that USAID and its partner agencies can meaningfully use and interpret performance indicator data to assess and report on progress toward FTF's performance goals and overall strategic mission.

¹Priority recommendations are those that GAO believes warrant priority attention from heads of key departments or agencies. They are highlighted because, upon implementation, they may significantly improve government operation, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

²GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report: Fiscal Year 2021*, [GAO-22-4SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 15, 2021).

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In March 2021, we issued our biennial update to our [High-Risk List](#), which identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement or the need for transformation to address economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges.³

Several government-wide high-risk areas have direct implications for USAID and its operations. These include (1) [improving the management of IT acquisitions and operations](#), (2) [improving strategic human capital management](#), (3) [managing federal real property](#), (4) [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#), and (5) [address risks associated with the government-wide personnel security clearance process](#). We urge your attention to the government-wide high-risk issues as they relate to USAID. Progress on high-risk issues has been possible through the concerted actions and efforts of Congress, the Office of Management and Budget, and the leadership and staff in agencies, including within USAID. In March 2022, we issued a report on key practices to successfully address high-risk areas, which can be a helpful resource as your agency continues to make progress to address high-risk issues.⁴

Copies of this report are being sent to the Director of the Office of Management and Budget and appropriate congressional committees including the Committees on Appropriations, Budget, Foreign Relations, and Homeland Security and Governmental Affairs, United States Senate; and the Committees on Appropriations, Budget, Foreign Affairs, and Oversight and Reform, House of Representatives. In addition, the report will be available on the GAO website at <http://www.gao.gov>.

³GAO, *High-Risk Series: Dedicated Leadership Needed to Address Limited Progress in Most High-Risk Areas*, [GAO-21-119SP](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 2, 2021).

⁴GAO, *High-Risk Series: Key Practices to Successfully Address High-Risk Areas and Remove Them from the List*, [GAO-22-105184](#) (Washington, D.C.: Mar. 3, 2022).

I appreciate USAID's continued commitment to these important issues. If you have any questions or would like to discuss any of the issues outlined in this letter, please do not hesitate to contact me or Thomas Melito, Managing Director, International Affairs and Trade, at melitot@gao.gov or (202) 512-4128. Contact points for our Offices of Congressional Relations and Public Affairs may be found on the last page of this report. Our teams will continue to coordinate with your staff on all of the 29 open recommendations. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely yours,

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gene L. Dodaro". The signature is written in a cursive style with a large, prominent "D" and a long horizontal stroke extending to the right.

Gene L. Dodaro
Comptroller General
of the United States

Enclosure – 1

cc: The Honorable Shalanda Young, Director, Office of Management and Budget

Enclosure

Priority Open Recommendations to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID)

Establishing performance measures

Global Food Security: Improved Monitoring Framework Needed to Assess and Report on Feed the Future's Performance. [GAO-21-548](#). Washington, D.C.: August 31, 2021.

Recommendations: The USAID Administrator, in consultation with its 11 Feed the Future (FTF) partner agencies, should establish

- FTF-wide performance goals to assess progress toward its strategic and overarching goals and
- FTF-wide targets for indicators required as applicable to meet its overall mission

Actions Needed: USAID agreed with our recommendations and, as of March 2022, has taken some initial steps toward implementing both recommendations. For example, USAID has established two performance goals—which appropriately include targets—in the Department of State and USAID Joint Strategic Plan. We will consider both recommendations implemented when USAID establishes performance goals that allow it to assess progress toward its strategic and overarching goals, completes remaining data collection and analysis to serve as the necessary evidence to quantify and set targets, finalizes its target-setting guidelines, and sets targets for the indicators USAID and its partners identify as required as applicable across the initiative. Without implementing these recommendations, USAID cannot meaningfully use and interpret performance measures to assess and report on progress toward FTF's performance goals and overall strategic mission.

Director: Chelsa Kenney

Contact information: kenneyc@gao.gov or (202) 512-2964