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Comptroller General  
of the United States

Accessible Version

June 4, 2024

The Honorable Samantha Power  
Administrator  
U.S. Agency for International Development  
1300 Pennsylvania Avenue NW  
Washington, DC 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 (USAID) implementation of GAO’s recommendations and to call your continued personal attention to areas where open recommendations should be given high priority.<sup>1</sup> In November 2023, we reported that, on a government-wide basis, 75 percent of our recommendations made 4 years ago were implemented.<sup>2</sup> USAID’s recommendation implementation rate was 100 percent.<sup>3</sup>

As of May 2024, USAID had 41 open recommendations. Fully implementing these open recommendations could significantly improve agency operations.

Since our May 2023 letter, USAID has implemented both of our open priority recommendations. Specifically, USAID created performance goals to assess the progress of the Feed the Future initiative. USAID also established quantifiable targets for these goals and their associated performance indicators. These actions will help USAID meaningfully use performance data to assess and report on progress toward Feed the Future’s overall strategic mission.<sup>4</sup>

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<sup>1</sup>Priority 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 operations, for example, by realizing large dollar savings; eliminating mismanagement, fraud, and abuse; or making progress toward addressing a high-risk or duplication issue.

<sup>2</sup>GAO, *Performance and Accountability Report: Fiscal Year 2023*, [GAO-24-900483](#) (Washington, D.C.: Nov. 15, 2023).

<sup>3</sup>USAID’s implementation rate has been 100 percent for the past four fiscal years. See *Priority Open Recommendations: U.S. Agency for International Development*, [GAO-21-456PR](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 17, 2021); *Priority Open Recommendations: U.S. Agency for International Development*, [GAO-22-105799](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 18, 2022); *Priority Open Recommendations: U.S. Agency for International Development*, [GAO-23-106534](#) (Washington, D.C.: May 9, 2023).

<sup>4</sup>GAO, *Global Food Security: Improved Monitoring Framework Needed to Assess and Report on Feed the Future’s Performance*, [GAO-21-548](#) (Washington, D.C.: Aug. 31, 2021).

We identified four new priority recommendations this year related to improving workforce planning and management and managing the risk of fraud. (See the Enclosure for the list of recommendations.)

The four priority recommendations fall into the following two areas:

**Managing fraud risk.** Fraud poses a significant risk to the integrity of federal programs and erodes trust in government. Our first priority recommendation calls for agency guidance to require regular fraud risk assessments for USAID programs and documentation of program-specific fraud risk profiles in accordance with our Fraud Risk Framework. Our second priority recommendation calls for USAID to provide and track participation in mandatory fraud awareness training. By fully implementing these recommendations, USAID will strengthen its ability to manage the risk of fraud and have greater assurance that its staff and implementing partners know how to properly prevent, detect, and respond to fraud risks in its programs.

**Improving workforce planning and management.** USAID's Bureau for Global Health supports U.S. foreign policy by saving lives and promoting the health of communities and nations worldwide. As the global health landscape evolves, it is important that the Bureau for Global Health ensures its workforce is appropriately sized, has necessary skills, and is well-managed. Our first priority recommendation calls for USAID to develop and implement a workforce plan for the Bureau for Global Health.

Our second priority recommendation calls for USAID to institutionalize the Bureau's efforts to address negative leadership behaviors, such as bullying, identified in its January 2022 report on strengthening processes and teamwork. These efforts include establishing systems to promote accountability for any such negative behaviors. By fully implementing these recommendations, USAID will be better positioned to implement its health programming and ensure it has the workforce and organizational culture needed to execute its mission.

In April 2023, we issued our biennial update to our [High-Risk List](#). This list identifies government operations with greater vulnerabilities to fraud, waste, abuse, and mismanagement. It also identifies the need for transformation to address economy, efficiency, or effectiveness challenges.<sup>5</sup>

Several government-wide, high-risk areas also have direct implications for USAID and its operations. These areas include (1) [improving the management of IT acquisitions and operations](#), (2) [strategic human capital management](#), (3) [managing federal real property](#), (4) [ensuring the cybersecurity of the nation](#), and (5) [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, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), and the leadership and staff in agencies, including within USAID. In March 2022, we issued a report on key practices to successfully

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<sup>5</sup>GAO, *High-Risk Series: Efforts Made to Achieve Progress Need to be Maintained and Expanded to Fully Address All Areas*, [GAO-23-106203](#) (Washington, D.C.: Apr. 20, 2023).

address high-risk areas, which can be a helpful resource as your agency continues to make progress to address high-risk issues.<sup>6</sup>

In addition to your attention on these issues, we recognize the key role Congress plays in providing oversight and maintaining focus on our recommendations to ensure they are implemented and produce their desired results. Legislation enacted in December 2022 included a provision for GAO to identify any additional congressional oversight actions that can help agencies implement priority recommendations and address any underlying issues relating to such implementation.<sup>7</sup>

Congress can use various strategies to address our recommendations, such as incorporating them into legislation. Congress can also use its budget, appropriations, and oversight processes to incentivize executive branch agencies to act on our recommendations and monitor their progress. For example, Congress can hold hearings focused on USAID's progress in implementing GAO's priority recommendations, withhold funds when appropriate, or take other actions to provide incentives for agencies to act. Moreover, Congress could follow up during the appropriations process and request periodic updates.

Congress also plays a key role in addressing any underlying issues related to the implementation of these recommendations. For example, Congress could pass legislation providing an agency explicit authority to implement a recommendation or requiring an agency to take certain actions to implement a recommendation.

Copies of this report are being sent to the Director of OMB and the appropriate congressional committees. In addition, the report will be available on the GAO website at [Priority Open Recommendation Letters | U.S. GAO](#).

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<sup>6</sup>GAO, *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).

<sup>7</sup>James M. Inhofe National Defense Authorization Act for Fiscal Year 2023, Pub. L. No. 117-263, §7211(a)(2), 136 Stat. 2395, 3668 (2022); H.R. Rep. No. 117-389 (2022) (accompanying Legislative Branch Appropriations Act, H.R. 8237, 117th Cong. (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 Kimberly Gianopoulos, Managing Director, International Affairs and Trade, at (202) 512-8612 or [GianopoulosK@gao.gov](mailto:GianopoulosK@gao.gov). 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 the 41 open recommendations. Thank you for your attention to these matters.

Sincerely,

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 flourish extending to the right.

Gene L. Dodaro  
Comptroller General  
of the United States

Enclosure

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

## Enclosure

### Priority Open Recommendations to the U.S. Agency for International Development

#### Managing fraud risk

*Central America: USAID Should Strengthen Staffing and Fraud Risk Management for Initiative Addressing Migration to the U.S.*, [GAO-24-106232](#). Washington, D.C.: March 14, 2024.

**Year Recommendations Made:** 2024

#### Recommendations:

- The Administrator of the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) should ensure that agencywide guidance requires regular fraud risk assessments for its programs—including programs supporting USAID initiatives—as well as documentation of program-specific fraud risk profiles in accordance with leading practices in the Fraud Risk Framework.
- The Administrator of USAID should ensure that agencywide guidance requires the regular provision of, and tracking of participation in, mandatory fraud awareness training for USAID staff involved in administering foreign assistance as well as for representatives of all partner organizations implementing the assistance.

**Actions Needed:** USAID agreed with these recommendations. As of March 2024, USAID said it is working to (1) amend agencywide policies to highlight the need for annual fraud risk assessments for its programs in accordance with leading practices and (2) communicate the need for mandatory fraud awareness training for program staff and implementing partners.

To fully implement these recommendations, USAID needs to show that it has amended agencywide guidance to require (1) regular fraud assessments for its programs that align with GAO's leading practices for assessing fraud risk and (2) mandatory training fraud training for program staff and implementing partners. By taking these actions, USAID will strengthen its ability to manage the risk of fraud and have greater assurance that its staff and implementing partners know how to properly prevent, detect, and respond to fraud risk in its programs.

**Director:** Latesha Love-Grayer

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#### Improving workforce planning and management

*USAID: Management Improvements Needed to Better Meet Global Health Mission*, [GAO-23-105178](#). Washington, D.C.: June 9, 2023.

**Year Recommendations Made:** 2023

#### Recommendations:

- The USAID Administrator should ensure that the Assistant Administrator for Global Health develops and implements a workforce plan for the Bureau. Such a plan could communicate the Bureau's optimal mix of direct hire and non-direct hire staff, as well as senior leaders; outline key actions to better align its staffing with its mission, priorities,

and funding; and identify how it plans to address persistent vacancies in civil service positions and the underrepresentation of certain racial or ethnic groups in its workforce.

- The USAID Administrator should ensure that the Assistant Administrator for Global Health institutionalizes efforts to address negative leadership behaviors identified in the Bureau's January 2022 report on strengthening processes and teamwork, such as by taking steps to (1) establish systems to promote accountability for such behaviors, (2) measure the impact of any changes made to address such behaviors, and (3) ensure senior management support for any such efforts.

**Actions Needed:** USAID agreed with these recommendations. As of March 2024, USAID said it is using new and existing authorities to increase the number of direct hire staff in the Bureau for Global Health and is taking steps to analyze staffing needs. USAID also said the Bureau for Global Health is finalizing a workforce plan and implementing activities to address barriers to the recruitment and hiring of underrepresented racial and ethnic groups in the workforce. Additionally, USAID told us that, in October 2023, the Bureau for Global Health began mandatory trainings for its workforce and workshops for managers that focus on equity and inclusion.

To fully implement these recommendations, the Bureau for Global Health needs to show it has developed a workforce plan that contains elements described in our recommendation and institutionalized efforts to address negative leadership behaviors. By addressing these recommendations, USAID will help the Bureau for Global Health ensure it has the workforce and organizational culture needed to execute its mission.

**Director:** Chelsa Kenney

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