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INTERNATIONAL FOOD ASSISTANCE

A U.S. Governmentwide Strategy Could Accelerate Progress toward Global Food Security

Statement of Thomas Melito, Director
International Affairs and Trade

October 2009

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Highlights

Highlights of GAO-10-212T, a testimony before the Subcommittee on Africa and Global Health, Committee on Foreign Affairs, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

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.

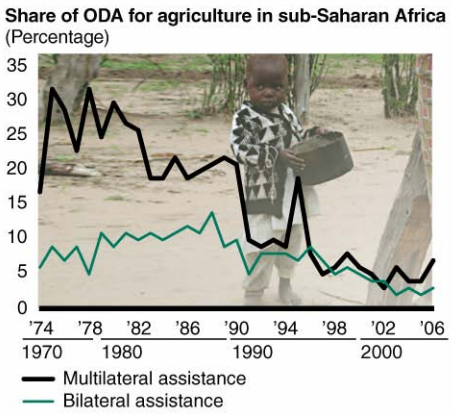
In this testimony, based on prior reports and ongoing work, GAO discusses (1) host government and donor efforts to halve hunger, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, by 2015, and (2) the status of U.S. agencies' implementation of GAO's 2008 recommendations.

View GAO-10-212T or key components.
For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or melitot@gao.gov.

What GAO Found

Efforts of host governments and donors, including the United States, to achieve the goal of halving hunger in sub-Saharan Africa by 2015 have been insufficient due to a variety of reasons. First, host governments' agricultural spending levels remain low—the most current data available show that, as of 2007, only 8 of 38 countries had fulfilled a 2003 pledge to direct 10 percent of government spending to agriculture. Second, donor aid for agriculture in sub-Saharan Africa was generally declining as a share of overall official development assistance (ODA) until 2005 (see fig. below left). Third, U.S. efforts to reduce hunger in sub-Saharan Africa were constrained in funding and limited in scope. These efforts were primarily focused on emergency food aid and did not fully integrate U.S. and other donors' assistance to the region. To reverse the declining trend in ODA funding for agriculture, in July 2009, the Group of 8 (G8) agreed to a $20 billion, 3-year commitment. The U.S. share of this commitment, or $3.35 billion in fiscal year 2010, represents more than double the fiscal year 2009 budget request for agriculture and related programming.

Share of Official Development Assistance (ODA) for Agriculture in Sub-Saharan Africa Has Declined Until Recent Years



Principles for Advancing Global Food Security Proposed by the U.S. Department of State

- Comprehensively address the underlying causes of hunger and under-nutrition
- Invest in country-led plans
- Strengthen strategic coordination
- Leverage the benefits of multilateral institutions
- Deliver on sustained and accountable commitments

Sources: GAO analysis of Organization for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) and U.S. Department of State data.

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.

Mr. Chairman and Members of the Subcommittee:

I am pleased to be here to discuss the extent to which host governments and donors, including the United States, are working to improve global food security.[1] This problem is especially severe in sub-Saharan Africa, the region where food insecurity is most prevalent with 1 out of every 3 people considered undernourished. The number of undernourished people worldwide has been growing and now exceeds 1 billion, according to the estimates of the United Nations (UN) Food and Agriculture Organization (FAO). As the largest international donor, contributing over half of all food aid supplies to alleviate hunger and support development, the United States plays an important role in responding to emergencies and ensuring global food security. 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 world leaders pledged to halve the total number and proportion of undernourished people reported worldwide from the 1990 level by 2015.

In recent years, GAO has issued a number of reports on international food assistance that made recommendations to improve U.S. food aid and global food security.[2] My statement today is based on our May 2008 report and other recent and ongoing work. [3] I will focus on two topics. First, I will discuss host government and donor efforts to halve hunger, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, by 2015. Second, I will discuss the status of U.S. agencies' implementation of GAO's 2008 recommendations to enhance efforts to address global food insecurity and accelerate progress toward halving world hunger by 2015, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa.

[1]Food security is access of all people at all times to sufficient, nutritionally adequate, and safe food, without undue risk of losing such access. FAO defines the elements of food security to include (1) food availability, (2) access, and (3) utilization.

[2]See the list of related GAO products at the end of this statement.

[3]GAO, *International Food Security: Insufficient Efforts by Host Governments and Donors Threaten Progress to Halve Hunger in Sub-Saharan Africa by 2015*, GAO-08-680 (Washington, D.C.: May 29, 2008). More recent GAO reports include *International Food Assistance: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight*, GAO-09-977SP (Washington, D.C.: Sep. 30, 2009) and *International Food Assistance: Local and Regional Procurement Provides Opportunities to Enhance U.S. Food Aid, but Challenges May Constrain Its Implementation*, GAO-09-757T (Washington, D.C.: June 4, 2009). In addition, we are currently conducting a review of U.S. efforts to address global food insecurity, which we plan to issue in February 2010.

To address these objectives in our reports, we reviewed economic literature on the factors that influence food security, and we convened an expert roundtable to further delineate factors that have contributed to persistent food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa and efforts to address these factors. For our prior reports and our ongoing review of U.S. efforts to address food insecurity, we reviewed relevant reports by GAO and other agencies and organizations and met with numerous U.S. agency officials in Washington, D.C. and overseas. We also conducted fieldwork in a number of food-insecure countries and convened structured panels of nongovernmental organizations (NGO) and donors in four countries in sub-Saharan Africa. We conducted these performance audits in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives.[4]

In brief, Mr. Chairman, we found that, although world leaders have committed to halving global hunger by 2015, host governments and donors—including the United States—have made little progress, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. First, host governments have not prioritized food security as a development goal and, as of 2007, only 8 of 38 countries had fulfilled a 2003 pledge to direct 10 percent of government spending to agriculture. Second, donor aid directed toward agriculture was generally declining until 2005. Third, U.S. efforts to reduce hunger in Africa have been constrained in funding and limited in scope, focusing primarily on emergency food aid, and have not addressed the underlying factors that contributed to the recurrence and severity of food crises. To reverse the declining trend in ODA funding for agriculture, in July 2009, the Group of 8 (G8) agreed to a $20 billion, 3-year commitment. The U.S. share of this commitment, or $3.35 billion, includes $1.36 billion for agriculture and

[4]For a full description of the scope and methodology of our prior reports, see GAO-08-680; *International Food Assistance: Local and Regional Procurement Can Enhance the Efficiency of U.S. Food Aid, but Challenges May Constrain Its Implementation*, GAO-09-570 (Washington, D.C.: May 29, 2009); and *International Food Assistance: USAID Is Taking Actions to Improve Monitoring and Evaluation of Nonemergency Food Aid, but Weaknesses in Planning Could Impede Efforts*, GAO-09-980 (Washington, D.C.: Sep. 28, 2009). The U.S. Department of State (State), U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), and U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA) agreed with the updated information we provide in this testimony.

related programming in fiscal year 2010 to establish food security, representing more than double the fiscal year 2009 budget request.

In our May 2008 report, we recommended (1) the development of an integrated governmentwide U.S. strategy that defines each agency's actions with specific time frames and resource commitments, enhances collaboration with host governments and other donors, and improves measures to monitor progress and (2) annual reporting to Congress on the implementation of the first recommendation. The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) concurred with the first recommendation but expressed concerns about the vehicle of the annual reporting. The U.S. Departments of Agriculture (USDA), State (State), and Treasury generally concurred with the findings.

Consistent with our first recommendation, U.S. agencies are in the process of developing a governmentwide strategy to achieve global food security, with the launching of a global hunger and food security initiative. In April 2009, the new administration created the Interagency Policy Committee (IPC). In late September 2009, State issued a consultation document that delineates a proposed comprehensive approach to food security based on country- and community-led planning and collaboration with U.S. partners. According to a senior State official, the consultation document was a product of an interagency working group. Although the document outlines broad objectives and principles, it is still a work in progress and should not be considered the integrated governmentwide strategy that we called for in our 2008 recommendation. Such a strategy would define each agency's actions and resource commitments to achieve food security, including improved collaboration with host governments and other donors and measures to monitor and evaluate progress toward implementing the strategy. Regarding our second recommendation, USAID officials stated that they plan to update Congress on progress toward the implementation of such a strategy as part of the agency's 2008 Initiative to End Hunger in Africa, which is expected to be released in 2009.

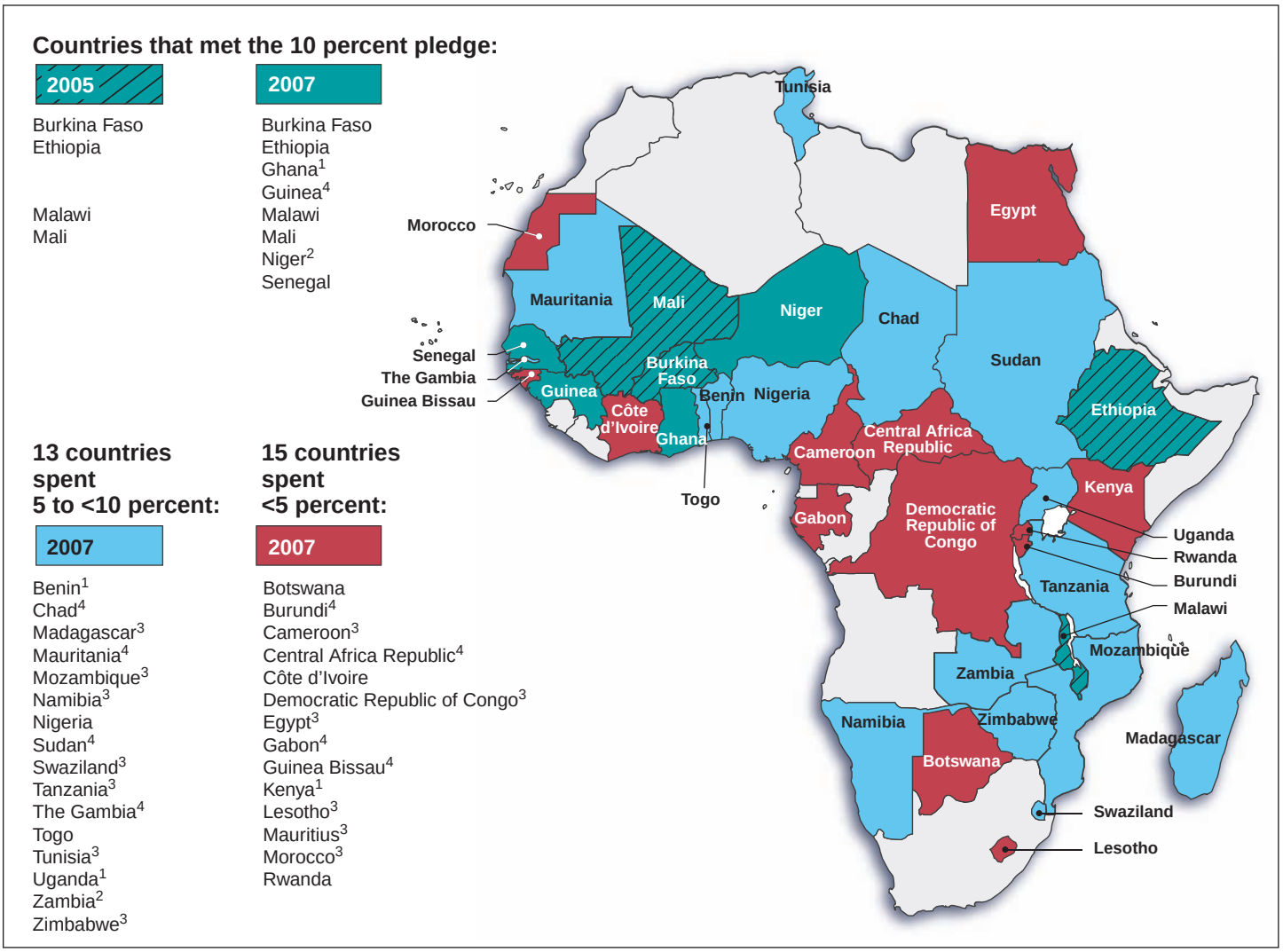
Efforts of Host Governments and Donors, including the United States, toward Halving Hunger by 2015 Have Been Insufficient, especially in Sub-Saharan Africa

Despite their commitment to halve global hunger by 2015, efforts of host governments and donors, including the United States, to accelerate progress toward that goal have been insufficient, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. First, host governments have provided limited agricultural spending, with only eight meeting their 2003 pledge to direct 10 percent of government spending to agriculture. Second, multilateral and donor aid to African agriculture generally declined from the 1980s to around 2005. Third, U.S. efforts to reduce hunger, especially in sub-Saharan Africa, have been constrained by resource and scope limitations.

Host Governments in Sub-Saharan Africa Provide Limited Agricultural Spending

Although African countries pledged in 2003 to direct 10 percent of government spending to agriculture, only 8 out of 38 governments had met this pledge as of 2007, according to the most current available data from the International Food Policy Research Institute. These data represent an increase of four additional countries that met the pledge between 2005 and 2007 (see fig.1.).

Figure 1: Performance of Countries in Sub-Saharan Africa in Meeting Their Pledge to Direct 10 Percent of Government Spending Toward Agriculture



Sources: GAO analysis of the New Partnership for Africa's Development/International Food Policy Research Institute data; Map Resources (map).

Note: The levels of agricultural investment as a share of total expenditure are for 2007 (unless otherwise noted).

[1]Estimate for 2008.

[2]2006.

[3]2005.

[4]2004.

The primary vehicle for addressing agricultural development in sub-Saharan Africa is the New Partnership for Africa's Development (NEPAD)[5] and its Comprehensive Africa Agriculture Development Program (CAADP).[6] The African Union (AU) established NEPAD in July 2001 as a strategic policy framework for the revitalization and development of Africa. In 2003, AU members endorsed the implementation of CAADP, a framework that is aimed to guide agricultural development efforts in African countries, and agreed to allocate 10 percent of government spending to agriculture by 2008. Subsequently, member states established a regionally supported, country-driven CAADP roundtable process, which defines the programs and policies that require increased investment and support by host governments; multilateral organizations, including international financial institutions; bilateral donors; and private foundations. According to USAID officials, the CAADP roundtable process is designed to increase productivity and market access for large numbers of smallholders and promote broad-based economic growth. At the country level, host governments are expected to lead the development of a strategy for the agricultural sector, the coordination of donor assistance, and the implementation of projects and programs, as appropriate. As of October 2009, according to a senior USAID official, nine countries had signed CAADP compacts, and five more countries were scheduled for a CAADP roundtable process, which defines programs that are to be financed by host governments and donors.[7]

[5]The New Partnership for Africa's Development, formerly known as the New African Initiative, was established by the African Union in July 2001.

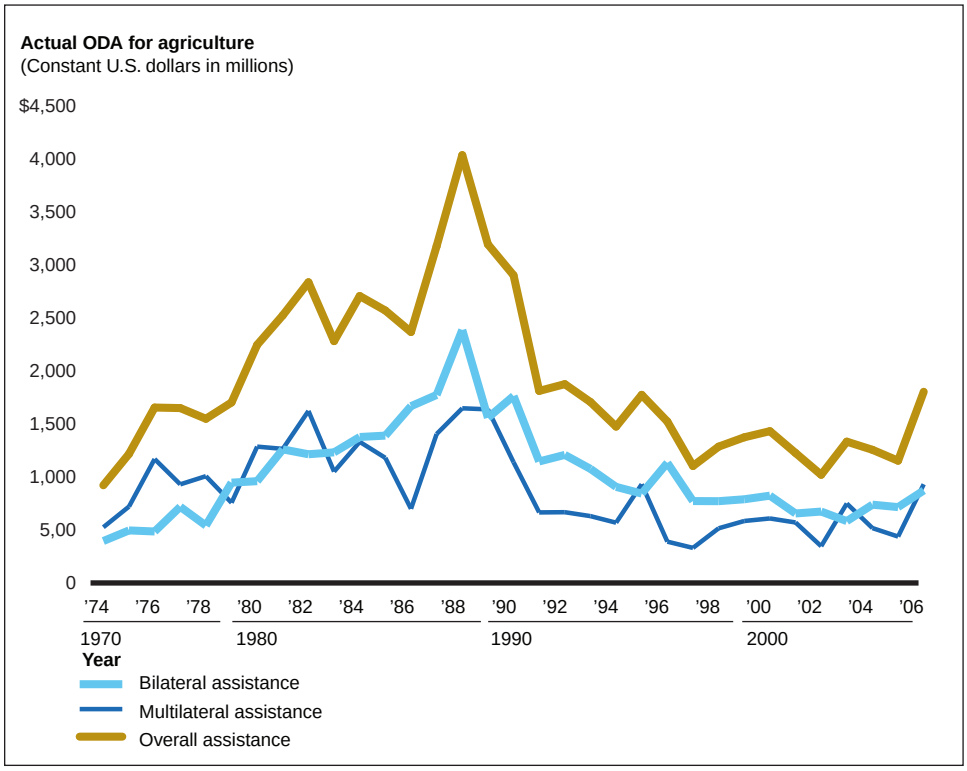
[6]According to officials from USAID's East Africa Mission, support to CAADP is coordinated by a partnership platform, a group of senior representatives of multilateral and bilateral donors.

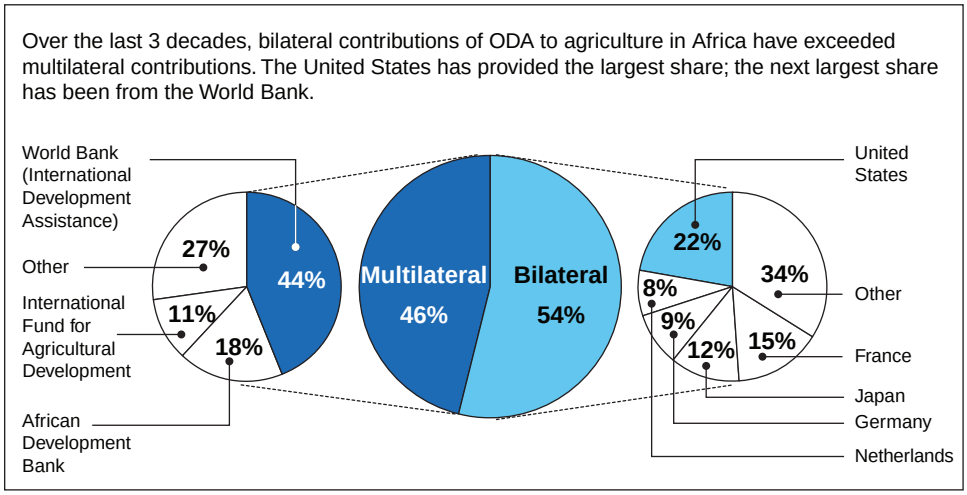
[7]The nine countries with signed CAADP compacts are Benin, Burundi, Ethiopia, Liberia, Mali, Niger, Rwanda, Sierra Leone, and Togo. The five countries with roundtables scheduled are Gambia, Ghana, Nigeria in October, and Senegal and Uganda in November 2009.

Multilateral and Bilateral Donor Assistance to African Agriculture Has Declined Until Recent Years

Until recent years, donors had reduced the priority given to agriculture. As a result, the share of official development assistance (ODA) from both multilateral and bilateral donors to agriculture for Africa significantly declined, from about 15 percent in the 1980s to about 4 percent in 2006 (see fig. 2).

Figure 2: Trends in Multilateral and Bilateral Official Development Assistance (ODA) to Africa for Agriculture, 1974 to 2006





Source: GAO analysis of OECD data.

Notes:

1. OECD's classification of ODA to agriculture may underreport funding to agriculture. For example, OECD's ODA to agriculture excludes developmental food aid.

2. ODA commitment for agriculture in Africa has been increasing since 2005, with the 2007 levels almost doubling the levels in 2005.

The decline in donor support to agriculture in Africa over this period is due in part to competing priorities for funding and a lack of results from unsuccessful interventions. According to the 2008 *World Development Report*, many of the large-scale integrated rural development interventions promoted heavily by the World Bank suffered from mismanagement and weak governance and did not produce the claimed benefits.

In the 1990s, donors started to prioritize social sectors, such as health and education, over agriculture. In recognition of the growing global food security problem, in July 2009, the United States and assembled leaders at the G8 Summit in L'Aquila, Italy, agreed to a $20 billion, 3-year commitment to reverse the declining trend in ODA funding for agriculture.[8]

U.S. Efforts to Address Food Insecurity in Sub-Saharan Africa Were Constrained in Funding and Limited in Scope

U.S. assistance to address food insecurity has been constrained in funding and limited in scope, especially in sub-Saharan Africa. In recent years, the levels of USAID funding for development in sub-Saharan Africa have not changed significantly compared with the substantial increase in U.S. funding for emergencies. Funding for the emergency portion of Title II of Public Law 480[9]—the largest U.S. food aid program—has increased significantly in recent years, while the funding level for nonemergencies has stagnated. In fact, the nonemergency portion accounted for 40 percent of Title II funding in 2002, but has declined, accounting for only 15 percent in 2008. While emergency food aid has been crucial in helping alleviate the growing number of food crises, it does not address the underlying factors that contributed to the recurrence and severity of these crises. Despite repeated attempts from 2003 to 2005, the former Administrator of USAID was unsuccessful in significantly increasing long-term agricultural development funding in the face of increased emergency needs and other priorities. Specifically, USAID and several other officials noted that budget restrictions and other priorities, such as health and education, have limited the U.S. government's ability to fund long-term agricultural

[8]Members of the G8 are Canada, France, Germany, Italy, Japan, Russia, the United Kingdom, and the United States. The European Union is also represented.

[9]Section 3001 of Pub. L. No. 110-246, the Food, Conservation, and Energy Act of 2008 changed the title of the underlying legislation from the Agricultural Trade Development Assistance Act of 1954—also known as Pub. L. No. 480—to the Food for Peace Act.

development programs. Also, the United States, consistent with other multilateral and bilateral donors, has steadily reduced its ODA to agriculture for Africa since the late 1980s, from about $500 million in 1988 to less than $100 million in 2006.[10]

Launched in 2002, the Presidential Initiative to End Hunger in Africa (IEHA)—which represented the U.S. strategy to help fulfill the MDG goal of halving hunger by 2015—was constrained in funding and limited in scope. In 2005, USAID, the primary agency that implemented IEHA, committed to providing an estimated $200 million per year for 5 years through the initiative, using existing funds from Title II of Public Law 480 food for development and assorted USAID Development Assistance (DA) and other accounts. IEHA was intended to build an African-led partnership to cut hunger and poverty by investing in efforts to promote agricultural growth that is market-oriented and focused on small-scale farmers. IEHA was implemented in three regional missions in sub-Saharan Africa, as well as in eight bilateral missions: Kenya, Tanzania, and Uganda in East Africa; Malawi, Mozambique, and Zambia in southern Africa; and Ghana and Mali in West Africa.[11] However, USAID officials acknowledged that IEHA lacks a political mandate to align the U.S. government food aid, emergency, and development agendas to address the root causes of food insecurity. Although it purported to be a governmentwide strategy, IEHA was limited to only some of USAID's agricultural development activities and did not integrate with other agencies in terms of plans, programs, resources, and activities to address food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, at the time of our review, because only eight USAID missions had fully committed to IEHA, and the rest of the missions had not attributed funding to the initiative, USAID had been unable to leverage all of the agricultural development funding it provides to end hunger in sub-Saharan Africa. This lack of a comprehensive strategy likely led to missed opportunities to leverage expertise and minimize overlap and duplication. For example, both the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and USDA are making efforts to address agriculture and food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa, but IEHA's decision-making process at the time of our review had not taken these efforts into consideration. In addition, IEHA had not leveraged the full extent of the U.S. assistance across all agencies to address food insecurity in sub-Saharan Africa. For example, one of the

[10]This ODA funding includes the U.S. Presidential Initiative to End Hunger in Africa.

[11]In addition, Nigeria and South Africa receive biotechnology funding through IEHA but do not have a comprehensive IEHA agenda.

United States' top priorities for development assistance is the treatment, prevention, and care of HIV/AIDS through the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which is receiving billions of dollars every year.

The new administration has committed to improving international food assistance by pledging U.S. leadership in developing a new global approach to hunger, and the Secretary of State has emphasized the importance of a comprehensive approach to sustainable systems of agriculture in rural areas worldwide. The U.S. share of the G8 commitment of $20 billion, or $3.35 billion, includes $1.36 billion for agriculture and related programming in fiscal year 2010 to establish food security, representing more than double the fiscal year 2009 budget request level.

Consistent with GAO's Recommendations, Efforts to Develop a U.S. Governmentwide Strategy to Address Global Food Security Are in Progress

In our May 2008 report, we recommended that the Administrator of USAID (1) work in collaboration with the Secretaries of State, Agriculture, and the Treasury to develop an integrated governmentwide strategy that defines each agency's actions and resource commitments to achieve food security, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, including improving collaboration with host governments and other donors and developing improved measures to monitor and evaluate progress toward the implementation of this strategy and (2) report on progress toward the implementation of the first recommendation as part of the annual *U.S. International Food Assistance Report* submitted to Congress.[12] 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.

Consistent with our first recommendation, U.S. agencies have launched a global hunger and food security initiative and, as part of that initiative, are working to develop a governmentwide strategy to address global food insecurity. In April 2009, the new administration created the Interagency

[12]Pub. L. No. 480, section 407(f) states that "the President shall prepare an annual report that "shall include . . . an assessment of the progress toward achieving food security in each country receiving food assistance from the United States Government." This report is intended to contain a discussion of food security efforts by U.S. agencies.

Policy Committee (IPC).[13] In late September 2009, State issued a consultation document—a work in progress—that delineates a proposed comprehensive approach to food security based on country- and community-led planning and collaboration with U.S. partners. According to a senior State official, the consultation document was a product of an interagency working group. Although the document outlines broad objectives and principles, it is still a work in progress and should not be considered the integrated governmentwide strategy that we called for in our 2008 recommendation. A comprehensive strategy would define the actions with specific time frames and resource commitments that each agency undertakes to achieve food security, particularly in sub-Saharan Africa, including improving collaboration with host governments and other donors and developing improved measures to monitor and evaluate progress toward implementing the strategy. In prior products, we have identified six characteristics of an effective national strategy that may provide additional guidance to shape policies, programs, priorities, resource allocations, and standards to achieve the identified results.[14]

The consultation document outlines three key objectives: (1) to increase sustainable market-led growth across the entire food production and market chain; (2) to reduce undernutrition; and (3) to increase the impact of humanitarian food assistance. State has also identified five principles for advancing global food security strategy, as follows:

- comprehensively address the underlying causes of hunger and undernutrition,
- invest in country-led plans,
- strengthen strategic coordination,
- leverage the benefits of multilateral mechanisms to expand impacts, and

[13]The IPC replaced the Sub-Policy Coordinating Committee on Food Price Increases and Global Food Security, which the Policy Coordinating Committee (PCC) on Development, chaired by USAID and State, established in May 2008. The Sub-PCC was to start the process of developing an interagency food security strategy. U.S. agencies met bi-weekly until the group dissolved in January 2009 and was subsequently replaced by the IPC.

[14]*Combating Terrorism: Evaluation of Selected Characteristics in National Strategies Related to Terrorism*, GAO-04-408T (Washington, D.C.: Feb. 3, 2004) and GAO, *Rebuilding Iraq: More Comprehensive National Strategy Needed to Help Achieve U.S. Goals*, GAO-06-788 (Washington, D.C.: July 11, 2006). These reports identified six characteristics of an effective national strategy, as follows: (1) a statement of purpose, scope, and methodology; (2) problem definition and risk assessment; (3) goals, subordinate objectives, activities, and performance measures; (4) resources, investments, and risk management; (5) organizational roles, responsibilities, and coordination; and (6) integration and implementation.

- deliver on sustained and accountable commitments.

Regarding our second recommendation for annual reporting to Congress on an integrated governmentwide food security strategy, USAID suggested that, rather than the International Food Assistance Report (IFAR), a more appropriate report, such as the annual progress report on IEHA (which is not congressionally required), be used to report progress on the implementation of our first recommendation. USAID officials stated that they plan to update Congress on progress toward implementation of such a strategy as part of the agency's 2008 IEHA report, which is forthcoming in 2009. A summary of the 2008 IEHA report, released in September 2009, identified three food security pillars—(1) immediate humanitarian response, 2) urgent measures to address causes of the food crisis, and (3) related international polices and opportunities—used to respond to the 2007 and 2008 global food crisis. However, as we concluded in our 2008 report, IEHA neither comprehensively addresses the underlying causes of food insecurity nor leverages the full extent of U.S. assistance across all agencies to fulfill the MDG goal of halving hunger by 2015, especially in sub-Saharan Africa.

Finally, in response to a request from Congresswoman Rosa DeLauro, Chair of the House Committee on Appropriations, Subcommittee on Agriculture, Rural Development, Food and Drug Administration, and Related Agencies, we are currently conducting a review of U.S. efforts to address global food insecurity. Report issuance is planned for February 2010. At that time, we plan to report on (1) the nature and scope of U.S. food security programs and activities and (2) the status of U.S. agencies' ongoing efforts to develop and implement an integrated governmentwide strategy to address persistent food insecurity by using GAO criteria identified in prior products.

Mr. Chairman, this concludes my statement. I would be pleased to respond to any questions you or other Members of the Subcommittee may have.

GAO Contact and Staff Acknowledgments

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Related GAO Products

International Food Assistance: Key Issues for Congressional Oversight. GAO-09-977SP. Washington, D.C.: September 30, 2009.

International Food Assistance: USAID Is Taking Actions to Improve Monitoring and Evaluation of Nonemergency Food Aid, but Weaknesses in Planning Could Impede Efforts. GAO-09-980. Washington, D.C.: September 28, 2009.

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