



Highlights of [GAO-08-1059](#), a report to the Committee on Oversight and Government Reform, House of Representatives

## Why GAO Did This Study

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) over the years has shifted from conducting its own activities to managing acquisition and assistance (A&A) instruments—contracts, grants, and cooperative agreements—awarded to and implemented by mainly nongovernmental entities. For fiscal years 2002 through 2007, USAID's A&A obligations doubled from about \$5 billion to \$10 billion. A&A staff—contracting officers (CO) and A&A specialists—are primarily responsible for managing A&A instruments. GAO was asked to examine (1) USAID's capacity to develop and implement a strategic A&A workforce plan and (2) the extent to which USAID has implemented a mechanism to evaluate its A&A function. GAO analyzed USAID documents and data, interviewed officials, visited missions in seven countries, and administered a survey to A&A staff.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the Administrator of USAID develop and implement a strategic A&A workforce plan that matches resources to priority needs, such as the evaluation of the A&A function. Specifically, GAO recommends that the strategic A&A workforce plan includes a process to collect, analyze, and maintain sufficiently reliable and up-to-date data on USAID's A&A staff levels, and comprehensive information on the competencies of the A&A staff. GAO received written comments from USAID acknowledging that improvements are needed in the areas recommended.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-08-1059](#). For more information, contact Thomas Melito at (202) 512-9601 or [melitot@gao.gov](mailto:melitot@gao.gov).

# USAID ACQUISITION AND ASSISTANCE

## Actions Needed to Develop and Implement a Strategic Workforce Plan

### What GAO Found

USAID lacks the capacity to develop and implement a strategic A&A workforce plan because it is missing two key elements: (1) sufficiently reliable and up-to-date data on its overseas A&A staff levels and (2) comprehensive information on the competencies of its overseas A&A staff. Data on the number of overseas A&A specialists collected by two USAID offices—the Office of Acquisition and Assistance (OAA) and the Office of Human Resources (OHR)—are unreliable or out of date. GAO found significant discrepancies between these offices' data sets, and officials acknowledged that their A&A staff level data are neither reliable nor up-to-date. In addition, USAID has not collected comprehensive competency information on its overseas A&A specialists. GAO's model of strategic human capital planning notes the importance of these data in developing a strategic A&A workforce plan that could enable the agency to better match staff levels to changing workloads. At the missions GAO visited, GAO found that the numbers and competencies of A&A staff did not match A&A workloads. The number of A&A staff with the necessary competencies was less than adequate at some missions, while at others it was more than adequate, according to agency officials. For example, officials at the mission in Mali said they have delayed time-sensitive projects because key A&A staff were not available when needed to approve contracts, while officials at the mission in Indonesia said the current number of A&A staff may be more than adequate. Most of the A&A survey respondents overseas also reported difficulty in altering staffing patterns to meet A&A workload demands. Although USAID has made some efforts to address its A&A workforce issues, these efforts do not constitute a strategic A&A workforce plan that takes into account the entire A&A workforce. Without accurate and reliable A&A staff data, USAID does not have adequate information to address current workload imbalances.

USAID has not implemented an evaluation mechanism to provide oversight of its A&A function. OAA's Evaluation Division is responsible for providing oversight to ensure that A&A operations follow USAID policies, primarily by assessing the agency's A&A operations worldwide. However, for fiscal years 2003 through 2005, it conducted on-site evaluations at only 9 of its targeted 85 missions. In fiscal year 2007, the Evaluation Division developed a new evaluation mechanism that is expected to use scorecard evaluations, in which COs self-assess their A&A operations, and a risk-based approach to determine locations for further on-site visits. The division has completed piloting these scorecard evaluations at four missions and identified weaknesses in A&A operations. For example, the division found that 1 mission lacked resources to adequately monitor contractor performance. The division's goal is to implement this evaluation mechanism, including on-site visits to at least 5 missions, within 2 years. However, agency officials informed GAO that the Evaluation Division currently does not have the staff level needed to fully implement this evaluation mechanism. Without implementing the evaluation mechanism, USAID cannot certify the overall adequacy and effectiveness of management controls for the A&A function.