



Highlights of [GAO-09-980](#), a report to congressional committees

## Why GAO Did This Study

In passing the Food for Peace Act in 2008, Congress authorized up to \$22 million annually for fiscal years 2009 to 2012 to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) to improve, monitor, and evaluate the effectiveness and efficiency of nonemergency food aid programs. Congress also required USAID to report on its oversight of these programs and the Comptroller General to review and report to Congress on USAID's report. Through analysis of agency documents; interviews with agency officials, experts, and partners; and visits to Bangladesh and Haiti, this mandated report reviews (1) USAID's plans and actions to improve its monitoring and evaluation of nonemergency food aid programs and (2) the extent to which USAID has integrated its monitoring and evaluation of nonemergency food aid with program management.

## What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that the USAID Administrator (1) develop a concept of operations document to help reduce the risks associated with upgrading FFP's information technology system and (2) develop an integrated monitoring and evaluation plan to better oversee nonemergency food aid programs. USAID agreed with the first recommendation, but disagreed with the second recommendation, asserting that GAO did not fully consider its planning processes. GAO believes the recommendation remains valid in view of current findings.

## INTERNATIONAL FOOD ASSISTANCE

### USAID Is Taking Actions to Improve Monitoring and Evaluation of Nonemergency Food Aid, but Weaknesses in Planning Could Impede Efforts

## What GAO Found

USAID's actions to improve its monitoring and evaluation of these programs could be hindered by weak planning. Monitoring is essential to ensuring that USAID's nonemergency food aid programs in developing countries are implemented as intended, and evaluation helps to assure that these programs achieve their goal of reducing global food insecurity. First, with funding from the Food for Peace Act, USAID's Office of Food for Peace (FFP) plans to increase the number of field staff responsible for the monitoring of nonemergency food aid programs, has provided funding for the Famine Early Warning Systems Network, and has initiated an upgrade of its information technology system. However, FFP's plans for the information technology upgrade lack a concept of operations document, which describes system characteristics for a proposed system from a user's point of view and includes high-level descriptions of information systems, their interrelationships, and information flows. Second, with funding from other sources, USAID plans to carry out additional actions in an effort to improve its oversight of food aid, including the expansion of a computerized system for monitoring the implementation and management of nonemergency food aid programs. However, USAID has not determined a stable source of funding for these initiatives beyond the first year of operations due to legal restrictions that preclude the agency from using the newly authorized funding for grants and cooperative agreements.

USAID's monitoring and evaluation of its nonemergency food aid programs are consistent to varying degrees with some of the principles established by the American Evaluation Association's Task Force on Evaluation Policy to integrate evaluation into program management. GAO found that (1) FFP's actions were *generally consistent* with the principles for policies and procedures and for independence. For example, FFP has issued policies and procedures for monitoring and evaluating food aid programs and generally uses external evaluators to assess its multiyear assistance programs. (2) FFP's actions were *partially consistent* with the principles for scope and coverage, dissemination of results, professional competence, and resources. For example, FFP relies on a range of staff to perform its monitoring and evaluation, but does not have reliable data on the numbers of field staff who have competencies in monitoring and evaluation, or their specific skills. (3) FFP's actions were *not consistent* with the principles for monitoring and evaluation plans. While FFP plans some of its monitoring and evaluation activities—such as final evaluations for multiyear assistance programs—it lacks an integrated plan to ensure that monitoring and evaluation results will be used to improve program management.

View [GAO-09-980](#) or key components.  
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