

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-15-479](#), a report to the Subcommittee on State, Foreign Operations, and Related Programs, Committee on Appropriations, House of Representatives

Why GAO Did This Study

While many developing countries have achieved important gains in primary school enrollment, students' reading skills remain very low. In response, USAID's 2011-2015 Education Strategy set a goal of improved reading skills for 100 million primary grade children by the end of 2015 (Goal 1). The 42 missions with funding for primary grade reading programs were to start programs aligned with the strategy by the end of fiscal year 2012 to allow time to assess results by 2015.

GAO was asked to review USAID's efforts to implement primary grade reading programs—Goal 1 of its education strategy. This report (1) examines five USAID missions' implementation, monitoring, and evaluation of reading programs and (2) assesses USAID's efforts to estimate progress toward its reading goal. GAO analyzed USAID's education strategy and other guidance, reading assessment data and methodologies, performance monitoring plans and reports, and program evaluations, and conducted fieldwork in five countries selected based on geographic diversity, funding for basic education, and availability of reading assessment data.

What GAO Recommends

USAID should select a methodology for estimating total numbers of children with improved reading skills, document a description of the methodology when reporting results, and set interim targets to assess progress toward a reading goal in any future education strategy. USAID concurred with GAO's recommendations.

View [GAO-15-479](#). For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov.

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INTERNATIONAL EDUCATION ASSISTANCE

USAID Has Implemented Primary Grade Reading Programs but Has Not Yet Measured Progress toward Its Strategic Goal

What GAO Found

U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) missions in all five countries where GAO conducted fieldwork were implementing primary grade reading interventions recommended in USAID's education strategy guidance. A key intervention in four of these countries is developing new reading instruction materials in mother-tongue languages—in some instances, multiple languages. In Ethiopia, for example, USAID's reading program developed new student textbooks and teacher's guides for each of eight grades and seven languages and involved teams of local teachers, language experts, and story writers, among others. The complexity of these interventions in Ethiopia, Malawi, the Philippines, and Uganda increased the time before they could be introduced in classrooms. As a result, some targeted student populations are not expected to benefit from improved reading instruction until late 2015 or 2016, too late to be measured to contribute to USAID's strategic goal of 100 million students with improved reading skills by the end of 2015. In addition, the missions were monitoring their reading programs and planned to conduct program evaluations consistent with USAID guidance.

USAID is currently unable to estimate progress toward the education strategy's reading goal because of four factors. First, because it took some missions longer to implement reading programs than USAID estimated, only about two-thirds of missions are expected to have data to estimate progress toward the goal by the end of 2015. Second, only a small number of missions provided USAID the complete data and supporting information that it needs to aggregate and analyze reading assessment results. Agency officials attributed the lack of complete data and information to an absence of timely guidance. In 2014, USAID issued updated reporting guidance. Third, USAID has not selected a methodology for calculating percentages of assessed children demonstrating improved reading skills, and extrapolating the results to estimate the total numbers of children with improved reading skills. Along with incomplete data and information, other factors contributed to a delay in identifying a methodology—for example, USAID did not ask its contractor to examine the methodology proposed in 2012 and explore alternatives until 2014. Fourth, the education strategy did not set interim targets for assessing progress toward the reading goal as suggested by leading performance management practices. Without a methodology and interim targets, USAID officials and others lack aggregate information about progress toward the goal to assess the current strategy and plan a realistic goal for a future strategy.

Status of Missions' Implementation of Primary Grade Reading Programs

— Countries starting projects in 2012 or earlier —|— Countries starting projects in 2013 or later —|

2008/2009	2010	2011	2012	2013	2014	After 2014
<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Democratic Republic of Congo Egypt Ethiopia Guatemala Mali Peru 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Dominican Republic Jamaica Liberia Malawi 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Georgia Honduras Kenya Rwanda South Sudan Tanzania 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Djibouti Haiti India Indonesia Mozambique Niger South Africa Uganda Yemen Zambia 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Bangladesh Kyrgyz Republic Pakistan Philippines Senegal Tajikistan 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Ghana Nepal Nicaragua Nigeria 	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Afghanistan Barbados/Eastern Caribbean Burma Jordan Morocco West Bank/Gaza

Source: GAO analysis of U.S. Agency for International Development data. | GAO-15-479