

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-22-104431](#), a report to congressional addressees

Why GAO Did This Study

The COVID-19 pandemic has created new humanitarian needs and exacerbated existing vulnerabilities around the world. In response to the pandemic, Congress appropriated and State and USAID obligated \$908 million in supplemental funding in fiscal year 2020 for international humanitarian assistance activities.

The CARES Act includes a provision for GAO to monitor the federal government's efforts to respond to the COVID-19 pandemic. This report examines how State and USAID adapted their monitoring of humanitarian assistance activities supported by COVID-19 supplemental funding. This report also describes how implementing organizations adapted their projects to the COVID-19 context and the challenges they faced.

GAO reviewed State and USAID planning, funding, and guidance documents and interviewed officials; obtained data on all humanitarian assistance awards funded from COVID-19 fiscal year 2020 supplemental appropriations. GAO also reviewed relevant documents for a nongeneralizable sample of 12 awards (seven to NGOs, five to public international organizations), selected on the basis of factors such as geographic representation and type of implementer.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends USAID better communicate expectations for documentation of field-level oversight, and assess the tradeoffs of more-frequent reporting. USAID concurred with the recommendations.

View [GAO-22-104431](#). For more information, contact Chelsa Kenney at (202) 512-2964 or kenneyc@gao.gov.

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COVID-19

Better USAID Documentation and More-Frequent Reporting Could Enhance Monitoring of Humanitarian Efforts

What GAO Found

The Department of State (State) and the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) shifted to remote monitoring of their humanitarian assistance awards in response to COVID-19, but USAID documented field-level oversight inconsistently. State and USAID officials reported using technology, such as video conferencing, to communicate with agency staff and with organizations implementing the awards but generally ceased in-person meetings as well as site visits by headquarters-based staff. State used a standardized template to consistently document oversight of two nongovernmental organization (NGO) awards GAO reviewed. However, USAID did not consistently document field-level oversight of five NGO awards GAO reviewed. USAID staff were either unaware of the relevant guidance on field-level oversight or believed it was no longer in effect. Communicating to staff the expectations for documentation would help USAID preserve institutional knowledge and ensure management has information needed to make programming decisions.

USAID required implementers using fiscal year 2020 COVID-19 supplemental funds to submit monthly reports, which contributed to lessons learned and informed headquarters staff. In March 2021, USAID reverted to semiannual reporting for new awards but did not fully assess the trade-offs of doing so. Such an assessment could help USAID weigh competing factors, such as increased risks while monitoring remains curtailed by the pandemic versus the burden placed on implementing organizations by more frequent reporting.

Organizations implementing State and USAID humanitarian assistance awards adapted to COVID-19 chiefly through low-tech remote solutions and faced implementation and monitoring challenges. These adaptations included (1) increased use of social distancing and personal protective equipment (see figure), (2) teleconferences or video conferences instead of in-person meetings, and (3) increased use of remote tools, such as telephone surveys. Implementers faced related procurement, technology, and logistics challenges, which delayed program implementation.

Masked and Socially Distanced Humanitarian Assistance Training in Honduras



Source: Global Communities. | [GAO-22-104431](#)