



USAID
FROM THE AMERICAN PEOPLE

OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL

**AUDIT OF COMPLIANCE OF
SELECTED USAID WEBSITES
WITH SPECIFIC
REQUIREMENTS OF SECTION
207(F) OF THE
E-GOVERNMENT ACT OF 2002**

AUDIT REPORT NO. A-000-07-003-P
July 16, 2007

WASHINGTON, DC



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Office of Inspector General

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Chief Information Officer, David C. Anewalt
LPA/PIPOS Director, Joseph A. Fredericks

FROM: IG/A/ITSA Director, Melinda G. Dempsey /s/

SUBJECT: Audit of Compliance of Selected USAID Websites with Specific Requirements of Section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002 (Audit Report No. A-000-07-003-P)

This memorandum transmits our final report on the subject audit. We have considered your comments on the draft report and have included your response in its entirety in Appendix II.

This report contains eight recommendations to help USAID improve the management and oversight of Agency and Agency-funded websites. Based on your response, management decision has been reached on recommendations no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. Please notify the Bureau for Management's Audit, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Performance and Compliance Division when final action is completed.

Again, I want to express my sincere appreciation for the cooperation and courtesies extended to my staff during the audit.

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SUMMARY OF RESULTS

The Office of Inspector General in Washington, D.C., initiated this audit to determine whether USAID met specific requirements of section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002, "Agency Websites." That section requires the Director, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), to promulgate guidance for Federal websites. In response, OMB issued Memorandum No. M-05-04, "Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites," December 17, 2004. (See page 3.)

Overall, this audit found that USAID websites met specific requirements section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002, except that USAID did not implement several requirements to ensure its public websites were citizen-oriented and visitor-friendly, as follows. (See page 5.)

- USAID/Washington and Mission websites did not always reside on the .gov domain.¹ (See pages 6-8.)
- USAID's funded websites² were not always marked with a disclaimer statement. (See pages 8-9.)
- Mission subdomains³ of USAID's website did not always comply with Federal requirements and USAID's policy. (See pages 9-12.) Specifically:
 - Required metadata,⁴ which enables the search engine to retrieve search results, were not always included in web content source code. (See pages 10-11.)
 - Date stamp was not always displayed on the webpage. (See page 11.)
 - Users were not always notified when leaving government websites. (See page 12.)

¹ Domains are web addresses that are used to help find websites on the Internet. According to OMB Memorandum No. M-5-04, Federal agencies must use only .gov, .mil, or Fed.us domains. USAID selected .gov to be the domain for Agency websites that present official Agency information. USAID websites are maintained on www.usaid.gov.

² USAID's funded websites are websites fully or partially financed by USAID under acquisition (e.g., contracts) and assistance (e.g. grants and cooperative agreements) instruments.

³ USAID mission websites are subdomains of www.usaid.gov and follow the format countryname.usaid.gov, such as http://bolivia.usaid.gov.

⁴ Among other things, metadata provides information about the purpose, language, author, and responsible agents associated with a webpage, so the webpage can be identified by the search engines.

- Mission subdomains of USAID's public website did not always label their files that require additional software or plug-ins. (See pages 12-14.)
- USAID did not compile an inventory of Agency-funded websites. (See pages 14-15.)

These weaknesses occurred primarily because USAID did not always monitor Agency websites and provide oversight of Agency-funded websites. As a result, USAID's websites were not always citizen-oriented and visitor-friendly. Therefore, we made eight recommendations to help USAID improve the management of Agency websites. (See pages 8 - 15.)

USAID management agreed to take corrective action on all eight recommendations in the report. Based on management's response, management decisions have been reached on recommendations no. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8. (See page 16.)

BACKGROUND

The E-Government Act of 2002 (Public Law No.107-347) was issued to (among other things):

- Promote the use of the Internet across Government agencies to provide citizen-oriented Government information.
- Transform agency operations by using, where appropriate, best practices from public and private sector organizations.
- Provide enhanced access to Government information and services in a manner consistent with laws regarding records retention, access for persons with disabilities, and other relevant laws.

Section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002, "Agency Websites," required that the Director, Office of Management and Budget (OMB), promulgate guidance for Federal websites.

In response to section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002, the Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued Memorandum No. M-05-04, "Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites," December 17, 2004. According to that memorandum:

Federal agency public websites are information resources funded in whole or in part by the Federal government and operated by an agency, contractor, or other organization on behalf of the agency. They present government information or provide services to the public or a specific non-Federal user group and support the proper performance of an agency function.

According to M-05-04, the head of each federal agency is required to (among other things):

- Establish and maintain information dissemination product inventory, priorities, and schedules.
- Ensure information quality.
- Establish and enforce Agency-wide linking policies.
- Communicate with the Public, State, and Local Governments.
- Provide the ability to search its public websites.
- Use approved domains.
- Maintain accessibility.
- Manage records.

The memorandum further states that the management of agencies' public websites should already be in compliance with Federal information resource management law and policy. However, OMB expected agencies to become fully compliant with new requirements imposed by the memorandum by December 31, 2005.

Furthermore, in June 2003, OMB established the Interagency Committee on Government Information (ICGI), as required by section 207 of the E-Government Act of 2002. The ICGI established several workgroups to make recommendations on issues related to federal public websites.

AUDIT OBJECTIVE

This audit was added to the Office of Inspector General's annual audit plan to answer the following question:

Did selected USAID websites meet specific requirements of section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002?

For this audit, the specific requirements are (1) establishing and maintaining information dissemination, product inventory, priorities, and schedules; (2) ensuring information quality; (3) establishing and enforcing Agency-wide linking policies; (4) providing the ability to search its public websites; (5) using approved domains; (6) communicating with the Public, State, and Local Governments; (7) maintaining accessibility; and (8) managing records.

A description of our scope and methodology is contained in Appendix I.

AUDIT FINDINGS

Selected USAID websites met specific requirements of section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002, except that USAID did not implement several requirements to ensure its public websites were citizen-oriented and visitor-friendly.

Some of the positive findings were as follows.

- Automated Directives Systems (ADS 557), dated July 7, 2000, is USAID's official policy directive and contains required procedures which outline how Agency information is distributed to the public. It also details how to respond to request from the public for information about USAID's programs and activities. ADS 557 was updated on July 14, 2006, to include policy for information posted to the World Wide Web, which is readily available to the general public. The updated version also describes the responsibilities of USAID's officials for oversight of the public websites. Specifically, the Director of Legislative and Public Affairs/Public Information, Production and Online Services (LPA/PIPOS), was designated to manage and control the operations and the content of USAID's websites in coordination with other offices. In addition, the Bureau for Management, Enabling Technologies and Integration, is responsible for technical services for websites.
- In response to OMB M-05-04, LPA/PIPOS disseminated a policy notice titled "USAID's Websites and .gov Domain," on November 28, 2005. The policy requires material on websites that provide official Agency information and are accessible to the public to be transferred to www.usaid.gov no later than December 31, 2005.
- USAID's XWEB guidance provides online guidance, requirements, and tools on how to develop a website to comply with Agency policy and Federal regulations.
- USAID developed and implemented its inventory of website content as required by Section 207(f)(2) of the E-Government Act of 2002, including the website publications priorities and schedules.
- USAID provided required information on its homepage in accordance with section 207(f)(2) of the E-Government Act of 2002. Among other things, the public could find on USAID's homepage the Agency Strategic Plan for Fiscal Years 2004 to 2009; the Agency annual performance plans; descriptions of Agency organizational structure, mission and statutory authority; and its point of contact for small businesses, as required by the Small Business Paperwork Relief Act of 2002.

Nonetheless, USAID did not implement several requirements to ensure its public websites are citizen-oriented and visitor-friendly. Specifically:

- USAID/Washington and Mission websites did not always reside on approved .gov domains.⁵
- USAID's funded websites⁶ were not always marked with a disclaimer statement.
- Mission subdomains⁷ of USAID's website did not always comply with Federal requirements and USAID's policy. Specifically:
 - Required metadata,⁸ which enables the search engine to retrieve search results, were not always included in web content source code.
 - Date stamp was not always displayed on the webpage.
 - Users were not always notified when leaving government websites.
- Mission subdomains of USAID's public website did not always label their files that require additional software or plug-ins.
- USAID did not compile an inventory of Agency-funded websites.

The following sections discuss these issues in detail.

USAID/Washington and Mission Websites Did Not Always Reside on the .gov Domain

Summary: USAID/Washington and Mission websites did not always reside on the .gov domain, as required. This problem occurred because, according to an LPA/PIPOS official, the websites were launched and resided on non-.gov domains before the requirements were issued that government websites reside on .gov domains. Further, LPA/PIPOS was not aware that those websites existed. As a result of not always having USAID mission websites on U.S. government domains, USAID may mislead users to believe the websites are not official federal public websites, thus affecting their confidence in the contents of the websites. In addition, not residing on the U.S. government domains excludes the websites from the USA.gov directory list, which serves as the "homepage" for the entire U.S. government by providing a

⁵ Domains are web addresses that are used to help people find websites on the Internet. According to OMB Memorandum No. M-05-04, Federal agencies must use only .gov, .mil, or Fed.us domains. USAID selected .gov to be the domain for Agency websites that present official Agency information. USAID websites are maintained on www.usaid.gov.

⁶ USAID's funded websites are websites fully or partially financed by USAID under acquisition (e.g., contracts) and assistance (e.g. grants and cooperative agreements) instruments.

⁷ USAID mission websites are subdomains of www.usaid.gov and follow the format countryname.usaid.gov, such as http://bolivia.usaid.gov.

⁸ Among other things, metadata provides information about the purpose, language, author, and responsible agents associated with a webpage, so the webpage can be identified by the search engines.

directory of U.S. government websites and a government-wide search index. It allows the public to access a vast amount of information across the Federal government.

On December 17, 2004, Office of Management and Budget (OMB) issued Memorandum M-05-04, "Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites." According to that Memorandum, Federal agency public websites must use only .gov, .mil, or Fed.us domains unless the agency head explicitly determines another domain is necessary for the proper performance of an agency function.

Automated Directives System (ADS) 557, "Public Information," revised on July 14, 2006, requires USAID/Washington and Mission websites to reside on approved .gov domains. These websites are assigned a subdomain Uniform Resource Locator (URL) by LPA/PIPOS, which is in the format "country.usaid.gov" on USAID's external website.

However, considering the geographical diverseness, technical differences, and administration issues, ADS 557 stipulated that standalone funded websites must not reside on .gov domains because they do not speak authoritatively on behalf of the Agency or the U.S. Government. Standalone funded websites are financed by USAID under acquisition instruments (contracts) and assistance instruments (grants and cooperative agreements).

Based on a search using a common search engine, the following 13 non-.gov websites appear to disseminate official U.S. government information, and thus need to reside on usaid.gov subdomain). However, there may be other websites that were not identified by the search.

- USAID/Mali (<http://mali.viky.net/usaid/cgi-bin/index.pl>)
- USAID/Mali (<http://www.usaidmali.org/>)
- USAID/Uganda (<http://www.usaid.or.ug/>)
- USAID/Kenya (<http://www.usaidkenya.org/>)
- USAID/Asia and Near East (<http://ane-environment.net/>)
- USAID/East Africa (<http://www.usaidredso.org>)
- USAID/East Timor (<http://www.usaideasttimor.net/>)
- USAID/Serbia (<http://www.usaid.org.yu/code/navigate.php?Id=8>)
- USAID/Senegal (<http://www.usaid-sn.org/>)
- USAID/Jordan (<http://www.usaidjordan.org/>)
- USAID/Bosnia/Herzegovina (<http://www.usaid.ba/>)
- USAID/Bolivia (<http://www.usaidbolivia.org.bo/>)
- USAID Visa Compliance System
(<https://www.vcs.usaid.org>) (<http://trainet.usaid.org/>)

An LPA/PIPOS official confirmed that these websites should reside on the usaid.gov subdomain. According to that Official, the above websites were launched and resided on non-.gov domains before OMB Memorandum M-05-04 and USAID's policy on the .gov domain (discussed above) were issued. Although the websites are now subdomains of USAID's public websites (www.usaid.gov), for unknown reasons, the information on non-.gov domains remained active and publicly available. In addition, according to that official, he was not aware that the websites existed. Therefore, they could not work with the website owners to determine how to treat the websites.

As a result of not always having USAID/Mission websites on U.S. government domains, specifically the .gov domain, USAID causes confusion to the public because it may mislead them to believe the websites are not official federal public websites, thus affecting their confidence in the contents of the websites. In addition, not residing on U.S. government domains excludes the websites from the USA.gov directory list because they cannot be searched by the USA.gov search engine, which serves as the “homepage” for the entire U.S. government by providing a directory of U.S. government websites and a government-wide search index. It allows the public to access a vast amount of information across the Federal government. Therefore, we are making the following recommendations.

Recommendation No. 1: We recommend the Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/Public Information, Production and Online Services, work with owners of the following websites to assess which should be shut down and take appropriate actions:

- USAID/Mali (<http://mali.viky.net/usaid/cgi-bin/index.pl>)
- USAID/Mali (<http://www.usaidmali.org/>)
- USAID/Uganda (<http://www.usaid.or.ug/>)
- USAID/Kenya (<http://www.usaidkenya.org/>)
- USAID/Asia and Near East (<http://ane-environment.net/>)
- USAID/East Africa (<http://www.usaidredso.org>)
- USAID/East Timor (<http://www.usaideasttimor.net/>)
- USAID/Serbia (<http://www.usaid.org.yu/code/navigate.php?Id=8>)
- USAID/Senegal (<http://www.usaid-sn.org/>)
- USAID/Jordan (<http://www.usaidjordan.org/>)
- USAID/Bosnia/Herzegovina (<http://www.usaid.ba/>)
- USAID/Bolivia (<http://www.usaidbolivia.org.bo/>)
- USAID Visa Compliance System
(<https://www.vcs.usaid.org>) (<http://trainet.usaid.org/>)

Recommendation No. 2: We recommend that the Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs, Production and Online Services, conduct an Internet search to determine whether other websites exist that present USAID’s official information. In addition, based on that search, Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs, Production and Online Services, needs to work with website owners to assess which should be shut down and take appropriate action.

USAID’s Funded Websites Were Not Always Marked With a Disclaimer Statement

<p>Summary: USAID’s funded websites were not always marked with a statement to disclaim USAID’s responsibility of their website contents, as required. This problem occurred because USAID did not provide adequate oversight of Agency funded websites. As a result of not displaying a disclaimer statement on the websites, users may be misled into believing that those websites provide official USAID information.</p>

ADS 557 requires that funded websites (whether under acquisition or assistant instruments) be marked on the index page and every major entry point with a disclaimer that states:

The information provided on this Web site is not official U.S. Government information and does not represent the views or positions of the U.S. Agency for International Development or the U.S. Government.

However, 14 out of 26 websites (54 percent) tested did not contain such a disclaimer statement in their homepage. Those problem websites were:

http://www.ict-eg.net/Auto/index_html
<http://carpe.umd.edu/index.asp>
<http://www.measuredhs.com/>
<http://www.mostproject.org/>
<http://www.ortmap.org/>
<http://www.sada.usaid.org.yu/en/index.cfm>
<http://www.sari-energy.org/whoweare.html>
<http://www.epdc.org>
<http://www.greencom.org>
<http://www.ebiz.org.mk>
<http://www.netmarkafrica.org>
<http://www.aed.hr/en>
<http://www.biocooplubnan.com./>
<http://www.pspiqc.org/>

This problem occurred because USAID did not provide adequate oversight of Agency-funded websites. In addition, according to an Agency official, USAID did not have staff or funding to monitor all Agency-funded websites. As a result of not displaying a disclaimer statement on the websites, users may be misled into believing that those websites provide official USAID information. Therefore, we are making the following recommendation.

Recommendation No. 3: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/Public Information, Production and Online Services, implement a process to provide oversight of USAID-funded websites to ensure those websites have a disclaimer statement repudiating USAID's responsibility of the website contents.

Mission Subdomains of USAID's Website Did Not Always Comply with Federal Requirements and Agency Policy

Summary: Mission subdomains of USAID's website did not always (1) include metadata in the website coding, (2) include a date stamp on the webpage, and (3) notify users when leaving the government website, as required. These problems occurred because USAID officials did not adequately monitor USAID's website. In addition, according to Agency officials, owners of mission websites were not always aware of Agency policies and guidance. These weaknesses may impair the capability of search functions and the

Agency's ability to maintain and track the content of its website. In addition, visitors may mistakenly believe that information from the non-government sites constitute the position and views of the Federal government. Finally, visitors' confidence in the website may be impaired, as they cannot tell which website contents are current.

Mission Subdomains of USAID's Website Did Not Always Utilize The Required Metadata Elements - OMB Memorandum M-05-04, section 5A, requires agencies to "...assist the public in locating government information." In addition, according to USAID's XWeb policy, "Technical Regulations for USAID Mission Web Sites Hosted Outside of USAID/Washington,"⁹ USAID/Washington and mission subdomains of USAID's external website are required to have six metadata elements: (1) responsible official, (2) author, (3) description, (4) keywords, (5) date posted and (6) language. Metadata plays a significant role in helping the search engines retrieve relevant search results.

However, owners of mission subdomains did not always carry out the policy. For example:

- 7 out of 12 (58 percent) mission subdomains of USAID's website tested did not have the "language" element, which is used to describe the primary intended audience of the page:

USAID/Albania	http://www.albania.usaid.gov
USAID/Ethiopia	http://ethiopia.usaid.gov/
USAID/Mali	http://mali.usaid.gov/
USAID/Morocco	http://www.usaid.gov/ma/
USAID/Nicaragua	http://nicaragua.usaid.gov/
USAID/Peru	http://peru.usaid.gov/
USAID/Philippines	http://philippines.usaid.gov/

- 3 out of 12 (25 percent) mission subdomains of USAID's website tested were missing two or more required metadata elements:

USAID/Lebanon	http://lebanon.usaid.gov/
USAID/Rwanda	http://rwanda.usaid.gov/
USAID/Timor leste	http://timor-leste.usaid.gov/

Although we were not able to determine the root cause of these problems, when the incidents were brought to the attention of an LPA/PIPOS official, he identified several possible contributing factors to the problem. First, local web masters who administered USAID mission websites may not know about the metadata requirements. Second, in some Missions, different web technologies were used that automatically code the website contents—not providing an option to modify the source code to include the required elements of metadata. Nevertheless, the Agency official acknowledged that it was his office's responsibility to work with the owners of the website to correct the problem.

⁹ USAID's XWeb policy is a mandatory reference to ADS 557, and therefore, incorporated by reference.

Not using required metadata elements may impair the capability of search functions and the Agency's ability to maintain and track content on its website. Specifically, it may (1) impair search relevancy and accuracy, (2) provide no audit trail concerning who created the information and when it was created, and (3) cause duplicative and obsolete content from being identified. Therefore, we are making the following recommendation.

Recommendation No. 4: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/Public Information, Production and Online Services, take actions to ensure that mission subdomain website owners are aware of the metadata requirements and add metadata where needed.

Mission Subdomains of USAID's Website Did Not Always Contain a Date Stamp on Their Webpages - OMB Memorandum M-05-04, section 1A, requires that Agencies "disseminate information to the public in a timely, equitable, efficient and appropriate manner." In addition, section 2A requires that agencies maximize the "quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information and services provided to the public."

According to USAID officials, USAID implemented the above guidance by requiring a date stamp (in the format mm/dd/yyyy) on every webpage. By providing the date stamp, it shows visitors the last time changes were made to the webpage and, thus, provides some level of assurance that the webpage provides timely and accurate information.

However, of the 12 USAID/Missions subdomains reviewed, five (42 percent) did not have a date stamp. Those five websites were:

USAID/Ethiopia	http://ethiopia.usaid.gov/
USAID/Lebanon	http://lebanon.usaid.gov
USAID/Mali	http://mali.usaid.gov
USAID/Rwanda	http://rwanda.usaid.gov/democracy%20gov.html
USAID/Timor-Leste	http://timor-leste.usaid.gov/EG.htm

This problem occurred because USAID did not regularly review the subdomains to ensure they provide a date stamp showing when the page has been modified or updated. As a result of not having the date stamp on their webpages, visitors (such as researchers and media users) do not know whether the contents are current. Therefore, we are making the following recommendation.

Recommendation No. 5: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/Public Information, Production and Online Services, implement a process to review mission subdomains of USAID's website on a definitive schedule to ensure last modified date is included on every webpage.

Mission Subdomains of USAID's Website Did Not Always Notify Users When Leaving Government Website - OMB Memorandum M-05-04, section 3A, requires Agencies to establish and enforce explicit agency-wide linking policies, including management controls for linking within and beyond the agency.

In addition, USAID's Technical Regulations for the Agency's external website requires that all links to sites not residing on a government server must use the "goodbye" script informing users that they are no longer on the government site. This script states:

You are now exiting the USAID Web Server
You will now be entering the site:

[Name of a Particular Site is Here]

Thank you for visiting USAID
We hope you found your visit informative and enjoyable.
Note: References obtained from this server do not constitute
endorsement or warranty.

However, USAID did not completely comply with its policy in notifying users when exiting government sites. Specifically, of the 12 mission subdomains reviewed, 4 (33 percent) did not notify users when they were leaving the government site and linking to a non-government site. Listed below are the four subdomains:

<http://ecuador.usaid.gov/dr/>
<http://www.usaid.gov/sv/>
<http://www.usaid.gov/ht/>
<http://moldova.usaid.gov/>

These weaknesses occurred because LPA did not adequately monitor mission subdomains. Adequate monitoring will help ensure that mission subdomains that do not use the good-bye script are identified and corrected. As a result of not notifying users when they are leaving a government website, users could mistakenly take the information from the non-government site to be the positions and views of the Federal government. Therefore, we are making the following recommendation.

Recommendation No. 6: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/Public Information, Production and Online Services, implement a process to monitor mission subdomains of USAID's website to ensure that they use the good-bye script to inform users when leaving the government site, as required.

Mission Subdomains of USAID's Public Website Did Not Always Label Their Files That Require Additional Software or Plug-Ins

Summary: Mission subdomains of USAID's public website did not always include a text description of file type and size in their files that require additional software or plug-ins,
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as required. This problem occurred because USAID's technical guidance for mission subdomains does not address this issue. In addition, USAID officials did not adequately monitor USAID's website. As a result, these weaknesses may impair the capability of search functions and the Agency's ability to maintain and track the content on its website. In addition, this weakness may frustrate web visitors and make them less likely to access information on USAID's website.

OMB Memorandum M-05-04, section 1A requires that Agencies "disseminate information to the public in a timely, equitable, efficient and appropriate manner." In addition, section 2A requires that agencies maximize the "quality, objectivity, utility, and integrity of information and services provided to the public." Choosing the appropriate format can promote equitable access to the information and services. Finally, section 5d states that agency public websites should provide all data in an "open, industry standard format permitting users to aggregate, disaggregate, or otherwise manipulate and analyze the data to meet their needs."

In June 2003, OMB established the Interagency Committee on Government Information (ICGI) to make recommendations on issues related to federal public websites. ICGI recommended using a text description of the document, when linking to a document in an alternative format. These alternate formats include, but are not limited to: Portable Document Formats, WordPerfect, MicroSoft Word, MicroSoft PowerPoint, and statistical data files (e.g., Structured Query Language and MicroSoft Excel). The description should include the file name, file type, file size, and effective date.

In addition, USAID's XWEB Technical Regulations for USAID/Washington's external website requires that whenever a file type other than .html is used, the file type and size must be notated. This is key information for informing visitors (1) of the software or plug-ins needed to view the document and (2) with slow connection speeds that have difficulty downloading large documents.

Although the publications on mission subdomains of USAID's website used industry standard format in accordance with OMB's policies, files on the following 4 of 12 subdomains reviewed (33 percent) did not include text descriptions, as required.

[http://lebanon.usaid.gov/\(ynglyh55gt5pjcb0mo3rxmb3\)/files/objectives.aspx](http://lebanon.usaid.gov/(ynglyh55gt5pjcb0mo3rxmb3)/files/objectives.aspx)¹⁰
<http://rwanda.usaid.gov/democracy%20gov.html>¹¹
<http://ukraine.usaid.gov/>
<http://www.usaid.gov/ma/>

This problem occurred because LPA/PIPOS did not adequately monitor to ensure files that required additional software or plug-in on their websites were properly labeled. In addition, unlike USAID's XWEB Technical Regulations for USAID/Washington's external website (discussed above), the mission technical guidance for developing web pages does not address this issue.

¹⁰ The complete URL is provided to direct to the exact web pages where the problem was identified

¹¹ Ibid, footnote 10

As a result of not having text description labels included in the file, web visitors may become frustrated when trying to access or download information and less likely to access information on the website. The Director of LPA/PIPOS acknowledged this weakness and affirmed that his office and the mission website owners are responsible for ensuring that files are labeled. We, therefore, are making the following recommendations.

Recommendation No.7: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/Public Information, Production and Online Services, implement a process to monitor Agency-funded websites to ensure files that require additional software or plug-ins provide text descriptions of the file type and file size.

Recommendation No. 8: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/Public Information, Production and Online Services, update technical guidance for mission websites to require labels for files that need additional software or plug-ins.

USAID Did Not Compile an Inventory of USAID-funded Websites

Summary: USAID did not have an inventory of its funded websites, as required. According to an Agency official, the problem occurred because USAID did not have staff or funding to assemble the inventory. Not keeping a complete inventory prevents LPA/PIPOS from providing oversight of Agency websites to ensure that they are properly managed and controlled.

According to ADS 557, LPA/PIPOS is responsible for maintaining the inventory of Agency-funded websites.

However, LPA/PIPOS did not maintain an inventory of Agency-funded websites. According to an LPA/PIPOS official, he was aware of the need to assemble an inventory. However, with limited staff resources, the Agency official felt that he could not dedicate a person to that function, as it would be time consuming to maintain because new websites are launched frequently.

Websites are one of the best and most cost-effective ways to reach out to a wide range of users because it allows interested users world wide to learn about the Agency. Accordingly, it is essential that USAID ensure information on the websites is accurate, relevant, and user-friendly. Not keeping a complete inventory prevents USAID officials from providing oversight of Agency websites to ensure that they are properly managed and controlled.

In Report No.A-000-07-002-O, "Applying Agree-Upon Procedures for Assessing USAID's Implementation of Section 522 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act, 2005," dated December 19, 2006, the OIG reported that USAID did not have a complete inventory of funded websites. The report recommended that USAID's Chief Privacy Officer, in collaboration with LPA/PIPOS, assemble a complete inventory of USAID-funded websites.

In response to the report, USAID's Chief Privacy Officer, in collaboration with LPA/PIPOS, agreed to assemble an inventory of USAID's funded websites by October 2007. As of the date of this report, final corrective action had not been taken on the recommendation. Therefore, we will not make another recommendation at this time.

EVALUATION OF MANAGEMENT COMMENTS

USAID management agreed to take corrective action on all eight recommendations in the report. For Recommendation Nos. 1, 2, 3, 4, 5, 6, 7, and 8, USAID management provided corrective action plans and target completion dates for each recommendation. Therefore, we consider that management decisions have been reached for the above recommendations.

In addition, USAID's response states that final action was taken on June 11, 2007, for Recommendation No. 8, which required an update of technical guidance for mission websites to require labels for files that need additional software or plug-ins. USAID management stated that they have provided technical guidance for mission websites on the XWEB. However, they did not provide supporting document in their response. Therefore, the Office of the Inspector General can not confirm whether final action has been taken on Recommendation No. 8. Consequently, we are requesting the Director, LPA/PIPOS, to provide USAID's Bureau for Management, Office of the Chief Financial Officer, Audit, Performance and Compliance Division, supporting documentation, to determine whether final action has been taken.

USAID's management comments are included in their entirety in Appendix II.

SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

Scope

The Office of Inspector General, Information Technology and Special Audits Division, performed this audit in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. The purpose of the audit was to determine whether USAID's websites met the following requirements of section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002:

- Established and maintained information dissemination, product inventory, priorities, and schedules.
- Ensured information quality.
- Established and enforced Agency-wide linked policies.
- Provided the ability to search its public websites.
- Used approved domains.
- Communicated with the Public, State, and Local Governments.
- Maintained accessibility.
- Managed records.

We also assessed internal controls over each of these areas. However, we did not evaluate the privacy and security requirements.

Audit fieldwork was conducted at USAID headquarters in Washington, D.C., from September 19, 2006, through March 29, 2007.

Methodology

To answer the audit objective we reviewed laws, regulations, and best practices related to Federal websites. This included, but was not limited to, section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002; Office of Management and Budget Bulletin No. M-05-04, "Policies for Federal Agency Public Websites" December 17, 2004; and best practices for agency websites prescribed by the Web Managers Advisory Council.

In addition, we:

- Analyzed USAID's website policies, procedures, and guidance to determine whether they were consistent with Federal requirements and best practices.
- Interviewed responsible Agency officials to gain an understanding of USAID's implementation of requirements for its websites.

- Used a common search engine to identify other Agency websites.
- Selected judgmental samples of mission subdomains of USAID's website and web pages as well as those funded through USAID's acquisition and assistance instruments. For the items selected, we conducted tests to determine whether the website and/or web page met requirements.

Finally, we reviewed applicable results and recommendations in OIG:

- Audit Report No. A-000-06-003-P, "Audit of USAID's Implementation of Key Components of a Privacy Program for its Information Technology Systems," June 8, 2006.
- Memorandum Report No. A-000-07-002-O, "Independent Auditor's Report on Applying Agreed-Upon Procedures for Assessing USAID's Implementation of Section 522 of the Consolidated Appropriations Act of 2005," December 19, 2006.

We did not set a materiality threshold for this audit.

MANAGEMENT COMMENTS

June 13, 2007

TO: IG/A/ITSA Director Melinda G. Dempsey

FROM: LPA/PIPOS Director, Joseph A. Fredericks

SUBJECT: LPA/PIPOS' response to the audit draft report of Compliance of Selected USAID Websites with Specific Requirements of Section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002.

This memorandum serves as a response from LPA/PIPOS to the OIG draft Audit Report no. A-000-07-00X-P, dated April 26, 2007. We appreciate the opportunity to review the draft of the Audit Report and to provide this response.

LPA/PIPOS is committed to maintaining the highest standards of information quality and requirements compliance for all official USAID web sites and USAID-funded web sites. Further, we note that in some instances our internal requirements for web site quality and compliance go well beyond the Federal government-wide standards. We are pleased that the report recognized the efforts we have made thus far to communicate the requirements of the E-Government Act of 2002 to necessary stakeholders within USAID and among USAID partners. We also recognize that there is much work to be done. This response summarizes the steps we are going to take, and in many cases have already made, in order to ensure full compliance of USAID public websites with E-Government requirements.

Since the OIG investigation, LPA/PIPOS has been engaged in a project to improve and standardize the process by which new web sites are reviewed. A necessary part of this process has been the creation of an inventory of USAID web sites.

1. USAID/Washington and Mission Websites Did Not Always Reside on Approved .gov Domains

Recommendation No. 1: We recommend the Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/Public Information, Production and Online Services, work with owners of the following websites to assess which should be shut down and take appropriate actions:

This recommendation is confirmed by LPA/PIPOS and will be completed by September 15, 2007. We are in the process of working with owners of all of the named web sites, and multiple others, in order to discontinue use of the non-.gov domains. As of this response, all of the webmasters of the named sites have been contacted, and usaid.gov subdomains have been issued for all of the sites as appropriate. In most cases, the non .gov web domain has been shut down or is being used on a temporary basis to forward visitors to the correct domain. LPA/PIPOS will issue an agency-wide notice immediately after issuance of the OIG report reminding USAID missions of this requirement.

Recommendation No. 2: We recommend that the Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs, Production and Online Services, conduct an Internet search to determine whether other non.gov websites exist that present USAID's official information. In addition, based on that search, Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs, Production and Online Services, needs to work with website owners to assess which should be shut down and take appropriate action.

This recommendation is confirmed by LPA/PIPOS and will be completed by October 13, 2007. This office is currently working and will continue to work in conjunction with M/AA/Office of Security Services in order to identify additional sites that are in violation of domain naming requirements. Internet searches play a prominent role in this effort as LPA/PIPOS identifies Mission websites that are in violation of ADS 557 and section 207(f) of the E-Government Act of 2002.

2. USAID's Funded Websites Were Not Always Marked With a Disclaimer Statement

Recommendation No. 3: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/PIPOS, implement a process to provide oversight of USAID-funded websites to ensure those websites have a disclaimer statement repudiating USAID's responsibility of the website contents.

This recommendation is confirmed by LPA/PIPOS. Prior to the publication of OMB Memorandum M-05-04, the status of USAID project sites vis-à-vis LPA/PIPOS approval was unclear, and many projects designed and built web sites without informing LPA of their sites' existence. These web sites were created prior to the requirement that project web sites carry the required disclaimer. This has led to a considerable backlog of project web sites that do not currently carry this required disclaimer.

Action Plan: LPA/PIPOS staff members have been instructed to include this item as part of the standard checklist of required elements necessary for USAID-funded website review. New sites that violate this requirement will be notified of the deficiency. Webmasters of websites that are found to be in noncompliance will be contacted and informed of this requirement. If this disclaimer is not added in a reasonable timeframe, LPA/PIPOS will work with the General Counsel and the Cognizant Technical Officer for the contract in order to enforce compliance. This recommendation will be completed by December 1, 2007

3. Mission Subdomains of USAID's Website Did Not Always Utilize the Required Metadata Elements

Recommendation No. 4: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/PIPOS, take actions to ensure that mission subdomain website owners are aware of the metadata requirements and add metadata where needed.

This recommendation is confirmed by LPA/PIPOS. Although meta-data has been a required element of USAID mission sites for several years now, compliance has not always been as rigidly enforced as it should have been. LPA/PIPOS is taking action to correct this.

Action Plan: LPA/PIPOS staff members have been instructed to include this item as part of the standard checklist of required elements necessary for USAID Mission website approval. New sites that violate this requirement will not be approved. Webmasters of already-approved Mission websites that are found to be in noncompliance will be contacted and informed of this requirement. Mission websites that do not comply within a reasonable timeframe will have their LPA/PIPOS approval rescinded and their sites will be de-linked from the USAID/Washington web site. LPA/PIPOS will issue an agency-wide notice immediately after issuance of the OIG report reminding USAID missions of this requirement. This recommendation will be completed by September 31, 2007

4. Mission Subdomains of USAID's Website Did Not Always Contain Date Stamp on Their Webpages

Recommendation No. 5: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/PIPOS, implement a process to review mission subdomains of USAID's website on a definitive schedule to ensure last modified date is included on every webpage.

This recommendation is confirmed by LPA/PIPOS. This is a relatively new requirement for USAID Mission Websites, originating in OMB Memorandum M-05-04, and many older USAID mission sites were not designed with this requirement in mind. It will take some time to retrofit older mission sites to comply with this requirement.

Action Plan: LPA/PIPOS staff members have been instructed to include this item as part of the standard checklist of required elements necessary for USAID Mission website approval. New sites that violate this requirement will not be approved. Webmasters of already-approved Mission websites that are found to be in noncompliance will be contacted and informed of this requirement. Mission websites that do not comply within a reasonable timeframe will have their LPA/PIPOS approval rescinded and their sites will be de-linked from the USAID/Washington web site. LPA/PIPOS will issue an agency-wide notice immediately after issuance of the OIG report reminding USAID missions of this requirement. This recommendation will be completed by October 31, 2007

5. Mission Subdomains of USAID's Website Did Not Always Notify Users When Leaving Government Website

Recommendation No. 6: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/PIPOS, implement a process to monitor mission subdomains of USAID's website to ensure that they use the good-bye script to inform users when leaving the government site, as required.

This recommendation is confirmed by LPA/PIPOS. This was not required until the publication of USAID's linking policy in December 2005, and consequently many older USAID mission sites were not designed with this requirement in mind. It will take some time to retrofit older mission sites to comply with this requirement.

Action Plan: LPA/PIPOS staff members have been instructed to include this item as part of the standard checklist of required elements necessary for USAID Mission website approval. New sites that violate this requirement will not be approved. Webmasters of already-approved Mission websites that are found to be in noncompliance will be contacted and informed of this requirement. Mission websites that do not comply within

a reasonable timeframe will have their LPA/PIPOS approval rescinded and their sites will be de-linked from the USAID/Washington web site. LPA/PIPOS will issue an agency-wide notice immediately after issuance of the OIG report reminding USAID missions of this requirement. This recommendation will be completed by October 7, 2007

6. Mission Subdomains of USAID's Public Website Did Not Always Label Their Files That Require Additional Software or Plug-Ins

Recommendation No. 7: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/PIPOS, implement a process to monitor Agency-funded websites to ensure files that require additional software or plug-ins provide text descriptions of the file type and file size.

This recommendation is confirmed by LPA/PIPOS. Although the requirements of Section 508 of the Rehabilitation Act of 1973 require download links to necessary software plugins on web pages that contain non-HTML content such as Adobe PDF and Microsoft Word files, the requirements do not specifically state that the links to these files need to be labeled as such.

Action Plan: LPA/PIPOS staff members have been instructed to include this item as part of the standard checklist of required accessibility elements necessary for USAID Mission website approval. New sites that violate this requirement will not be approved. Webmasters of already-approved Mission websites that are found to be in noncompliance will be contacted and informed of this requirement. Mission websites that do not comply within a reasonable timeframe will have their LPA/PIPOS approval rescinded and their sites will be de-linked from the USAID/Washington web site. LPA/PIPOS will issue an agency-wide notice immediately after issuance of the OIG report reminding USAID missions of this requirement. This recommendation will be completed by November 31, 2007

Recommendation No. 8: We recommend that USAID's Bureau for Legislative and Public Affairs/PIPOS update technical guidance for mission websites to require labels for files that need additional software or plug-ins.

As of this memorandum, the technical guidance for mission websites on the XWEB has been updated to require labels for files that need additional software or plug-ins. This recommendation was implemented on June 11, 2007.

7. USAID Did Not Compile an Inventory of USAID-funded Websites

LPA/PIPOS recognizes the need for a complete inventory of USAID-funded websites and is working to achieve this goal. As part of the project undertaken to standardize the web site review process, LPA/PIPOS has begun compiling an inventory of USAID-funded Websites. This undertaking has been delayed and slowed due to Operational Expense shortages that have kept the LPA Web Team understaffed and have not allowed the hiring of a staff person dedicated to this task.

Action Plan: As capacity permits, the inventory is maintained and updated by LPA/PIPOS staff. Due to the sheer volume of existing web sites, including web sites for discontinued projects that are maintained as a public record and new sites that are

currently in development that have not yet been reported to LPA, it is likely that this inventory will never be fully “complete.” It will serve, however, as the central repository for all sites of which LPA is aware, and we aim to make it as complete as possible. This recommendation will be completed by December 31, 2008.

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