



Highlights of [GAO-09-498](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

The African continent is important to U.S. economic, strategic, and foreign policy interests, and efforts have been made to improve commerce and connectivity to benefit the two regions. However, the continent has the highest aviation accident rate in the world, which has hindered progress. Recognizing the importance of improving aviation safety in Africa, the United States and the international aviation community have worked to improve aviation safety in Africa.

This congressionally requested report discusses (1) challenges in improving aviation safety in Africa, (2) key U.S. efforts to improve aviation safety in Africa and the extent to which they address the identified challenges, and (3) international efforts to improve aviation safety in Africa. To address these issues, GAO synthesized literature and aviation safety data, interviewed federal officials, and visited four African countries.

What GAO Recommends

The Secretary of Transportation should (1) lead a collaborative effort to reassess the SSFA program's goals and identify the level of budgetary and human capital resources necessary to achieve those goals and (2) develop a comprehensive strategy to lead efforts to coordinate the governmentwide resources available to accomplish the program's goals. DOT generally agreed with GAO's findings and recommendations.

To view the full product, including the scope and methodology, click on [GAO-09-498](#). For more information, contact Gerald L. Dillingham at (202) 512-2834 or dillingham@gao.gov.

INTERNATIONAL AVIATION

Federal Efforts Help Address Safety Challenges in Africa, but Could Benefit from Reassessment and Better Coordination

What GAO Found

Improving aviation safety in Africa is an important goal for the United States and the international aviation community. However, achieving that goal presents several challenges. The major challenge is the relatively low priority that political leaders in many African countries have accorded aviation safety, in part because of more pressing concerns such as widespread poverty, national health care issues, and a lack of awareness about the potential benefits of an improved aviation system. This relatively low priority placed on improving safety is reflected in the other challenges that were frequently identified in the literature GAO reviewed and by the officials GAO interviewed. These challenges include weak regulatory systems, inadequate infrastructure, and a lack of technical expertise and training capacity.

U.S. assistance to improve aviation safety in Africa has helped to address some challenges. For instance, the Department of Transportation's (DOT) Safe Skies for Africa (SSFA) program—created in 1998 as a presidential initiative—is the principal U.S. effort to improve aviation safety. One of the primary goals of the SSFA program is to increase the number of African countries that meet international aviation safety standards. Through memorandums of agreement, the State Department provides funding for the program and DOT manages the program. DOT and the Federal Aviation Administration work to help African countries meet international aviation safety standards by providing technical assistance and training. However, funding for the program has been inconsistent since its inception, with funding levels ranging from a high of \$8.5 million from the Department of State's fiscal year 2003 appropriation to zero from its appropriations in fiscal years 2008 and 2009. DOT officials stated that current budgetary and personnel limitations hamper their ability to effectively implement the program. For example, DOT has currently limited SSFA activities to countries making tangible progress in improving safety, rather than directing activities to all participating countries. Given the potential benefits associated with improved aviation systems, two agencies that focus on economic development—the U.S. Trade and Development Agency and the Millennium Challenge Corporation—have also provided funding for aviation safety-related projects in Africa. However, coordination of U.S. efforts on the continent has not been consistent, because of differences in agency missions and program processes, resulting in potential duplication of effort and missed opportunities to leverage limited resources.

Several international efforts have been implemented to assist and encourage African countries in improving their civil aviation systems. For example, in response to widespread concerns about the adequacy of aviation safety oversight on the continent, the International Civil Aviation Organization developed the Comprehensive Regional Implementation Plan for Aviation Safety in Africa to help African countries meet their international obligations for safety oversight. The World Bank also provides funding for African countries to address aviation needs and deficiencies.