

GAO Highlights

Highlights of [GAO-20-555](#), a report to congressional requesters

Why GAO Did This Study

USAID is the primary U.S. government agency helping countries adapt to the effects of climate change. USAID has provided this assistance through activities that directly address climate adaptation as well as indirectly through activities that received funding for other purposes, such as agriculture, but which also support climate adaptation goals.

GAO was asked to review issues related to U.S. foreign assistance for climate adaptation. For USAID, this report examines (1) funding the agency provided for climate adaptation assistance in fiscal years 2014 through 2018, and (2) how climate risk management is implemented. GAO analyzed funding data and documentation of agency activities and climate risk management; interviewed agency and project officials; and conducted fieldwork in three countries receiving adaptation assistance—Guatemala, the Philippines, and Uganda. GAO selected these countries based on the amount of funding they received for climate adaptation activities, geographic diversity, and variety of observed and projected climate effects, among other factors.

What GAO Recommends

GAO recommends that USAID communicate to its missions and bureaus that they are expected to report all data on funding that indirectly addresses climate adaptation. USAID agreed with the recommendation and outlined a number of steps the agency plans to take to improve the reporting of these data.

View [GAO-20-555](#). For more information, contact David Gootnick at (202) 512-3149 or gootnickd@gao.gov.

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CLIMATE CHANGE

USAID Is Taking Steps to Increase Projects' Resilience, but Could Improve Reporting of Adaptation Funding

What GAO Found

The U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) provided at least \$810 million to directly and indirectly support climate adaptation from fiscal years 2014 through 2018—the latest available data at the time of GAO's analysis. However, USAID ended new funding for programming activities that directly address climate adaptation (i.e., direct funding) in fiscal year 2017 in part due to a shift in administration priorities, according to agency officials. However, following a congressional directive in the fiscal year 2020 appropriations act, USAID restored direct funding for adaptation programming. GAO found that USAID did not consistently report all funding data for activities that indirectly addressed climate adaptation, which does not align with expectations in foreign assistance guidance and internal controls standards. USAID's direct adaptation assistance had the primary program goal of enhancing resilience and reducing vulnerability. For example, in the Philippines, a USAID activity assisted communities in preparing for extreme weather events by developing maps of potential hazards to aid in evacuation planning. USAID attributed funding that indirectly addresses climate adaptation assistance (i.e., indirect funding) from programs with other goals such as agriculture, where priorities include supporting food production and distribution. For example, in Guatemala, a USAID agricultural activity worked with farmers to transition to crops with greater economic benefits that are also drought tolerant. However, not all missions with indirect adaptation assistance reported these funding data and reporting has varied, in part, because the agency has not clearly communicated the expectation to do so. Without addressing this issue, USAID risks providing incomplete and inconsistent data to Congress and others.

A Community Leader Shows the Hazard Map Prepared as Part of a U.S. Agency for International Development Project to Help Adapt to Climate Change in the Philippines



Source: GAO. | GAO-20-555

Since October 2016, USAID has generally required projects and activities to conduct climate risk management, which is the process of assessing and managing the effects of climate change. USAID requires documentation of this process and GAO's review found 95 percent compliance for USAID's priority countries for adaption funding. USAID has experienced some challenges with its initial implementation of climate risk management and is assessing these challenges and identifying improvements. For example, mission officials said that some technical staff lack expertise to do climate risk management and that their environment offices had a small number of staff to provide assistance. To help staff conduct climate risk management, USAID is building staff capacity through trainings and is in the process of evaluating implementation of the policy and whether it requires any changes, among other efforts.