



OFFICE OF INSPECTOR GENERAL U.S. Agency for International Development

MEMORANDUM

DATE: February 21, 2023

TO: USAID Bureau for Africa Assistant Administrator, Dr. Monde Muyangwa
USAID Office of Human Capital and Talent Management Assistant to the Administrator, Adetola Abiade

FROM: Inspections, Evaluations, and Special Projects Director, Amy Burns /s/

SUBJECT: USAID Bureau for Africa's Approach to Strategic Workforce Management Reflected Agency-Wide Challenges (E-698-23-001-M)

In July 2021, the U.S. Senate Committee on Foreign Relations requested that USAID Office of Inspector General (OIG) evaluate key aspects of USAID Bureau for Africa's strategic workforce management practices. The committee requested that USAID OIG select at least one mission in Africa to illustrate the bureau's management of its missions. In December 2021, we initiated an evaluation of the Bureau for Africa's human capital management practices. Our objectives were to evaluate the Bureau for Africa's approach for (1) assessing current and emerging staffing needs at the bureau level from fiscal year (FY) 2015-2021 and (2) supporting mission-based staffing needs assessments and allocations from FY 2015-2021, using USAID/Rwanda and USAID/Sudan as illustrative missions.

This memorandum summarizes the results of our evaluation regarding the Bureau for Africa and how that evaluation relates to OIG's recent Agency-wide audit on strategic workforce planning.¹ Because OIG published that audit in May 2022 after we began fieldwork on this evaluation, we could build upon the audit's efforts.

The May 2022 audit identified numerous challenges that impaired USAID's ability to establish a comprehensive human capital approach, including insufficient guidance for operating units (including bureaus and missions) on how to conduct strategic workforce planning and assess workforce needs. The audit included five recommendations to improve USAID's staffing, strategic workforce planning, and skill-gap tracking. The Agency concurred with all the recommendations and provided plans for corrective action with completion dates ranging from December 2022 to September 2025. All five recommendations were resolved but open as of February 2023.

¹ USAID OIG, "[Strategic Workforce Planning: Challenges Impair USAID's Ability to Establish a Comprehensive Human Capital Approach](#)" (9-000-22-01-P), May 25, 2022.

Our evaluation corroborated the audit findings with respect to the Bureau for Africa, USAID/Rwanda, and USAID/Sudan. We found that the Bureau for Africa’s approach to strategic workforce management reflected Agency-wide challenges. Although Agency policy broadly described bureau and mission roles and responsibilities related to strategic workforce management, Agency-wide guidance and tools for how bureaus and missions, such as the Bureau for Africa, USAID/Rwanda, and USAID/Sudan, should execute those roles and responsibilities was limited. Therefore, the Bureau for Africa, USAID/Rwanda, and USAID/Sudan assessed their staffing needs differently.

Because the audit found a lack of a comprehensive approach to human capital management in the Agency’s procedures, policies, and plans that the Bureau for Africa follows for strategic workforce management, we redirected our evaluation to focus on describing the Bureau for Africa’s activities within the existing framework and validating that the Bureau for Africa executed its role in FY 2021. Further, because the audit recommendations will have a cascading impact throughout the Agency, we decided not to make additional recommendations based on the results of our evaluation. Our analysis instead provides examples of Agency-wide policy gaps at the bureau and mission level and key functions that USAID can consider in implementing recommendations from the May 2022 audit.

We performed this evaluation from December 2021 to January 2023, in accordance with the Council of the Inspectors General on Integrity and Efficiency’s Quality Standards for Inspection and Evaluation. Our fieldwork included interviews with USAID officials primarily from the Office of Human Capital and Talent Management (HCTM), the Bureau for Africa, USAID/Rwanda, and USAID/Sudan. We reviewed Government Accountability Office (GAO) publications, USAID’s Automated Directives System (ADS), and supplemental policies and procedures to understand the Bureau for Africa’s core functions for strategic workforce management. We reviewed supporting documentation from HCTM, the Bureau for Africa, USAID/Rwanda, and USAID/Sudan to understand and validate the Bureau for Africa’s execution of those core functions. We focused our review on FY 2015-2021 for a broader picture of the Bureau for Africa’s approach to, and involvement in, staff assessments. USAID provided technical comments to the draft memorandum, which we considered and incorporated as appropriate.

Background

USAID policy broadly describes roles and responsibilities for strategic workforce management within the Agency.² Our evaluation references the following entities:

- *Office of Human Capital and Talent Management*: Provides leadership and direction for all aspects of human capital management. This includes recruiting staff, conducting workforce planning, and managing the Foreign Service assignment process. The related May 2022 audit included recommendations directed to HCTM. The audit found that (1) USAID did not reach congressionally funded staffing levels despite developing hiring plans, and the Agency

² USAID Automated Directives System, Chapter 101, “Agency Programs and Functions,” November 2021; ADS, Chapter 102, “Agency Organization,” June 2017; ADS, Chapter 401, “USAID’s Human Capital Framework,” November 2021; and ADS, Chapter 436, “Foreign Service Assignments Process and Tours of Duty,” June 2021.

faced challenges communicating adjustments to its hiring process, and (2) the Agency's ability to identify and address workforce needs was hindered by not having a common definition of skill gaps, insufficient workforce planning guidance, and the lack of a centralized tracking tool.

- *Bureau for Africa*: Provides technical leadership and field support to 32 bilateral missions/offices. The Office of the Assistant Administrator directs and supervises all activities of the bureau and its overseas operations and is responsible for the approval and direction of resource allocation among bureau offices and missions. The Office of Administrative Management Services (AMS) represents the bureau in management activities, such as personnel assignment, organization management, and administrative support. AMS plays an integral role in ensuring programmatic needs are “link[ed]...to organizational and staffing requirements.”³ AMS also aligns staffing requests with authorized workforce levels and confirms that these levels are appropriate for the conduct of USAID programs and strategic objectives.
- *USAID/Rwanda*: One of the overseas missions under the Bureau for Africa's purview, in Kigali, Rwanda. We conducted an analysis to select USAID/Rwanda as an illustrative example of a mission with stable funding and staffing needs. In FY 2021, USAID/Rwanda had more than \$85 million in obligated funds and 16 direct-hire staff.
- *USAID/Sudan*: One of the overseas missions under the Bureau for Africa's purview, in Khartoum, Sudan. We conducted an analysis to select USAID/Sudan as an illustrative example of a mission with dynamic funding and staffing needs.⁴ In FY 2021, USAID/Sudan had nearly \$423 million in obligated funds and 3 direct-hire staff.

The Bureau for Africa Gauged Bureau-Level Staffing Needs When Given the Opportunity to Expand Its Footprint

According to Federal internal control standards, an organization should perform routine assessments to be sure staff composition reflects the organization's needs.⁵ The standards also describe the importance of clearly documenting responsibilities, policies, and procedures for effective internal control.⁶ Furthermore, GAO has reported that a key principle of strategic

³ ADS, Chapter 102, “Agency Organization,” June 2017.

⁴ USAID/Sudan's funding has shifted based on the political situation in the country. Following demonstrations that led to the overthrow of the Sudanese president in 2019, Congress appropriated \$700 million to support a democratic transition. The U.S. government froze the funds in 2021 when the Sudanese military took power. USAID stated its intention to resume funding primarily to Sudanese civil society organizations, with some support to agriculture livelihood programs. The Agency programmed \$108 million in 2022, with none of the funding being provided to the Sudanese government.

⁵ U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government* (GAO-14-704G), “Control Environment,” Principle 3, “Establish Structure, Responsibility, and Authority,” and “Control Activities,” Principle 10, “Design Control Activities,” September 2014.

⁶ GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, “Control Activities,” Principle 12, September 2014.

workforce planning is to “determine the critical skills and competencies that will be needed to achieve current and future programmatic results.”⁷

Our evaluation found that the Bureau for Africa had not conducted any formal bureau-wide staffing assessments between FY 2015-2021. The Bureau for Africa’s approach to staffing assessments was reactive to hiring opportunities rather than proactive on a routine basis. According to Bureau for Africa officials, the bureau did not have Agency guidance or tools to drive the effort. Instead, the Bureau for Africa applied professional judgment to gauge point-in-time staffing needs when presented with an opportunity to create additional positions.

A senior Bureau for Africa official identified two key hiring opportunities between FY 2015-2021. In both situations, Bureau for Africa officials did not receive detailed guidance for how to assess current or emerging staffing needs and had not documented supplementary procedures to guide the bureau’s internal approach or decision-making processes.

- *FY 2020 Full-Time Equivalent (FTE) Reset.*⁸ In February 2020, an announcement from the USAID Administrator led to five new FTEs within the Bureau for Africa. Accompanying guidance indicated that the new positions should reflect strategic goals, such as the USAID/State Department 2018-2022 Joint Strategic Plan, but did not specify how the Bureau for Africa and other offices gaining FTEs should assess needs (e.g., informal input or a formal needs assessment). To determine how to fill its five new positions, the Bureau for Africa solicited input from bureau leadership. From this input, the Bureau for Africa prioritized two country desk officers, one public health advisor, one supervisory program analyst, and one energy specialist.
- *FY 2021 COVID-19 Task Force Hiring.* In August 2020, HCTM coordinated the approval of an Agency-wide opportunity to hire limited-term staff using COVID-19 funds.⁹ Unlike the FTE reset process, a Bureau for Africa official reported that the bureau did not receive a formal announcement. The Bureau for Africa consequently determined its own process and number of needed positions. The Bureau for Africa responded to the opportunity with a request for two public health advisors and an advisor for monitoring, evaluation, and learning. According to Bureau for Africa officials, the bureau based this request on internal discussions and prior experience responding to the 2014 Ebola outbreak in West Africa.

Without a comprehensive staff assessment, Bureau for Africa officials said it was difficult to determine whether the bureau currently has an adequate staffing composition to deliver on its mission. Documenting internal procedures to guide and replicate staffing decisions may help to ensure that the Bureau for Africa is equipped to achieve its goals and respond to new priorities.

⁷ GAO, *Human Capital: Key Principles for Effective Strategic Workforce Planning* (GAO-04-39), Principle 2, “Determine the Critical Skills and Competencies That Will Be Needed to Achieve the Future Programmatic Results,” December 2003.

⁸ An FTE is an available full-time Federal civilian position in terms of annual productive workhours, not the actual workload performed by the person. A new FTE means an additional direct-hire able to perform full-time work.

⁹ Based on authority from the Office of Personnel Management, “Coronavirus (COVID-19) Schedule A Hiring Authority,” March 20, 2020.

The Bureau for Africa Supported USAID/Sudan’s Mission Management Assessment and Facilitated Aspects of Agency-Wide Staff Allocation Processes Based on Information from Missions

To achieve its management objectives, an organization should use quality information that is relevant, timely, and at the requisite level of specificity for decision making, according to Federal internal control standards.¹⁰ USAID policy gives mission leadership the responsibility of determining the mission’s organizational structure and aligning staffing requirements with program and administrative responsibilities. While HCTM and bureaus play a role in ensuring that staff structures align with sound position management principles,¹¹ Bureau for Africa officials described how missions drive the collection of information that ultimately informs those staffing decisions.

The *USAID Interim Strategic Workforce Plan Fiscal Year (FY) 2020-2022* explained that workforce analysis is a traditionally decentralized process, whereby missions, bureaus, and offices assess and articulate their needs using guidance from HCTM.¹² Under this decentralized model, the Bureau for Africa, USAID/Rwanda, and USAID/Sudan described a deference to mission leadership to know when staff assessments are needed and how to best meet current and emerging staffing needs, whether through Foreign Service Officers (FSOs), locally employed staff, or other mechanisms. Bureau for Africa staff stated that a combination of leadership experience, knowledge of the local environment, and mission-specific constraints (e.g., office space and available funding) provided this basis.

The following engagements illustrate the Bureau for Africa’s support to missions for staff assessments and allocations:

- *Supporting Mission-Based Staff Assessments.* The Bureau for Africa piloted a comprehensive assessment of USAID/Sudan in FY21 based on updates to ADS 527mac.¹³ The trigger for the assessment was the appropriation of \$700 million, which the Bureau for Africa identified as being beyond the capacity of USAID/Sudan’s two FSOs to manage. The assessment reviewed the challenges faced by the mission, resulting in themes that included project design and management, strategic vision, and staffing and related recommendations. By contrast, USAID/Rwanda completed an internal staffing assessment in 2018 without the involvement of the Bureau for Africa. This mission-led assessment was done at the request of mission leadership and produced recommendations related to staffing.

¹⁰ GAO, *Standards for Internal Control in the Federal Government*, “Information and Communication,” Principle 13, September 2014.

¹¹ ADS, Chapter 102, “Agency Organization,” June 2017.

¹² USAID, “Interim Strategic Workforce Plan Fiscal Year (FY) 2020-FY 2022,” February 20, 2020.

¹³ ADS, Chapter 527mac, “Mission Management Assessment Guidance,” May 2014. In January 2023, USAID announced the revised guidance, “Organizational Effectiveness Reviews,” which according to the Agency reflects an “updated, evidence-based approach to organizational learning and learning implementation.”

- *Facilitating Aspects of Agency-Wide Staff Allocation Processes.* Of eight key steps in the Agency-wide Foreign Service Assignments Process, Agency policy identifies two that involve bureau-level participation with regard to missions: position validation and priority designation of FSO positions.¹⁴ The Bureau for Africa also facilitates missions' off-cycle requests for additional staff resources. Missions provide the information that underpins these processes.
 - *Position Validation.* An annual process by which missions certify FSO needs for the upcoming year, to include adding, removing, and reclassifying existing positions. Under this process, missions submit their information into an HCTM workflow management tool, LaunchPad.¹⁵ The Bureau for Africa ensures that missions' validation packages are complete before forwarding the information for HCTM's review. Bureau for Africa officials reported deferring to missions to determine which positions to validate and, aside from conducting completeness checks, do not vet the underlying information.
 - *Priority Designation of FSO Positions.* An annual process by which missions, via their geographic bureaus, recommend FSO positions to be prioritized, which if approved by HCTM, would be filled before other positions. After receiving the ranked lists from the missions, the Bureau for Africa follows internal protocols to consolidate priority position lists into one list and then sends their recommendations to HCTM. The Bureau for Africa defers to missions to determine their rank order of positions and does not vet the underlying information. While the Bureau for Africa's Office of the Assistant Administrator approves the priority position list for the missions under its purview, HCTM ultimately designates priority FSO positions based on input from all operating units to reflect Agency-wide strategic priorities.
 - *Off-Cycle Resource Requests.* An ad hoc process by which missions can request additional staff resources outside of the annual Foreign Service bidding process. The Bureau for Africa reported helping missions understand requirements and facilitating processes related to administrative actions, like National Security Decision Directive 38 (NSDD-38) requests.¹⁶ According to a Bureau for Africa official, the bureau's process for off-cycle requests was not documented. Moreover, USAID/Sudan officials indicated a lack of transparency and timelines with the Bureau for Africa's process in considering USAID/Sudan's September 2021 off-cycle request for three additional U.S. direct-hire positions. In addition, a Bureau for Africa official emphasized the difficult tradeoffs for ad hoc requests given that funding for new positions would often need to come from another mission.

Reliance on missions to provide quality information aligns with the Agency's decentralized framework and speaks to the importance of giving missions flexibility to adapt to their unique

¹⁴ADS, Chapter 436, "Foreign Service Assignments Process and Tours of Duty," June 2021, defines the Foreign Service Assignment Process as the assignment system used to fill non-executive Foreign Service vacancies and states that the goal of the assignments process is to "support the strategic allocation of the Agency's human capital to meet the Agency's programmatic, legislative, and administrative requirements."

¹⁵ LaunchPad, USAID's centralized portal for human resource services, stores personnel performance information and records, assessment information, and work assignments.

¹⁶ NSDD-38 is a presidential directive that gives the Chief of Mission, in coordination with the U.S. State Department, approval authority on any proposed changes to the size, composition, and mandate of overseas full-time mission staffing for all U.S. government agencies.

environments. However, this approach could put the Bureau for Africa at risk of using irrelevant and unreliable information that does not support the achievement of its objectives. Notably, OIG’s May 2022 strategic workforce planning audit found that missions may face challenges assessing skill gaps and workforce needs consistently:¹⁷

“[F]ive of the seven missions reviewed reported that they had not received guidance from HCTM on how to assess workforce needs...[S]taff across operating units identified mixed results on developing operating-unit-specific policies related to workforce planning or processes to analyze their workforce needs, despite providing HCTM with justifications for staffing levels at multiple points in the budget and hiring processes. Specifically, none of the seven missions reviewed had established standard operating procedures on reviewing their workforce needs, and six of the eight Washington-based operating units reviewed acknowledged not having written standard operating procedures on reviewing workforce needs.”

In addition, Bureau for Africa officials acknowledged not having a process to consider a mission’s full staff composition—including locally employed staff and contractors—which could put the Bureau for Africa at risk of processing staffing requests based on an incomplete picture. Bureau for Africa officials also acknowledged not having a documented process to weigh tradeoffs of staffing decisions, even though filling a request for one mission typically requires shifting resources away from another mission.

Concluding Observations

The bureau- and mission-level observations discussed in this evaluation are symptoms of systemic, Agency-wide challenges to strategic workforce planning. The following table summarizes key aspects of OIG’s May 2022 strategic workforce planning audit that our evaluation corroborated.

Table 1: Corroborating OIG Strategic Workforce Planning Findings

<i>The May 2022 audit found:</i>	<i>This evaluation corroborated:</i>
Operating units reported that they had not received formal guidance from HCTM on key strategic workforce planning activities, including how to assess workforce needs.	The lack of guidance from HCTM to the Bureau for Africa on how to assess current and emerging staffing needs.
Staff across operating units identified mixed results on developing operating-unit-specific policies related to workforce planning or processes to analyze their workforce needs, despite providing HCTM with justifications for staffing levels at multiple points in the budget and hiring processes.	The lack of documented operating-unit-specific procedures developed by the Bureau for Africa to assess workforce needs despite providing HCTM with justifications for FTE reset and COVID positions.

¹⁷ The Bureau for Africa was one of the eight Washington-based operating units reviewed for the audit. USAID/Sudan and USAID/Rwanda were not reviewed for the audit.

The May 2022 audit found:

Without strategic workforce planning guidance, USAID lacked a comprehensive approach to human capital management.

This evaluation corroborated:

The lack of a consistent approach for the Bureau for Africa, USAID/Sudan, and USAID/Rwanda to assess comprehensive workforce needs.

As part of our evaluation, we analyzed USAID policy, workforce planning best practices, and Federal internal control standards to identify key functions for assessing workforce needs. The seven key functions we identified are:

1. Document policies and procedures to assess staffing needs.
2. Set the direction and goals of staffing assessments.
3. Continually assess organizational structure and current and emerging staffing needs.
4. Document assessments of current and emerging staffing needs.
5. Assess skills needed to respond to current and emerging needs and how to maintain continuity of these skills.
6. Communicate with staff and promote transparency in an effort to assess current and emerging staffing needs.
7. Align staffing needs assessments to current and emerging mission and programmatic goals.

HCTM and the Bureau for Africa concurred with these functions and emphasized that this framework should be set at the Agency level and cascade down to operating units for implementation. Therefore, while we do not make new recommendations from this evaluation, we offer the information for HCTM’s consideration as HCTM works to finalize strategic workforce planning guidance and take other corrective action to address recommendations from the May 2022 audit.¹⁸

We will continue to carefully monitor USAID’s strategic workforce planning through the audit recommendation closure process and additional oversight work. We appreciate the assistance you and your staff provided to us during this engagement. If you have any questions, please feel free to contact me at 202-704-9259, or Hannah Maloney, Audit Support Division Director, at 202-704-9263.

¹⁸ This includes Recommendation 4, which states that HCTM should “[f]inalize strategic workforce planning guidance, to include USAID’s updated Strategic Workforce Plan, workforce planning Automated Directives System chapter, and materials to assist Agency operating units in identifying and addressing skill gaps.”