

SIGAR

**Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction**

SIGAR 18-65 Audit Report

Regional Agriculture Development Program: Additional Evaluations and Assessments Could Improve the Performance and Sustainability of USAID/Afghanistan's \$301 Million Program



JULY
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SIGAR

Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction

WHAT SIGAR REVIEWED

Since 2002, the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) has spent almost \$2.1 billion for more than 60 agriculture programs. These programs focused on building the capacity of the Afghan agricultural sector, expanding farmers' access to credit, increasing the quality of valued crops, and providing economic alternatives to poppy farming. In 2010, the U.S. Government Accountability Office completed an audit of a portion of approximately \$1.4 billion in USAID agriculture efforts in Afghanistan and found that six of the eight programs it reviewed did not meet their performance targets. Over time, USAID's agriculture efforts have shifted from these types of programs to programs focused more on sustainable, agriculture-led economic growth through the private sector, which USAID anticipates will result in a more sustainable model for Afghan agriculture.

In October 2013, USAID initiated its latest and one of its largest agriculture programs: the Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP). This program consists of a group of four 5-year contracts awarded by region and valued at \$301 million. USAID awarded RADP-South and RADP-West to Chemonics, and RADP-North and RADP-East to Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI). RADP aims to expand sustainable agriculture and improve food and economic security for rural Afghans, in accordance with USAID's new approach to agricultural development in the country.

The objectives of this audit were to determine the extent to which USAID (1) applied lessons learned from its previous agriculture efforts to the design of RADP; (2) conducted required oversight of contract implementation and modified the RADP contracts as a result of challenges encountered, if any; (3) assessed overall program achievements; and (4) incorporated sustainability of program achievements into RADP's design, as guidance requires.

July 2018

Regional Agriculture Development Program: Additional Evaluations and Assessments Could Improve the Performance and Sustainability of USAID/Afghanistan's \$301 Million Program

SIGAR 18-65 AUDIT REPORT

WHAT SIGAR FOUND

SIGAR found that the USAID Mission for Afghanistan (USAID/Afghanistan) designed RADP in accordance with USAID requirements and guidelines to apply lessons learned from prior programs. RADP's design documents identified 15 past agriculture programs, such as Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture and Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for North, East, and West programs, that influenced RADP's design. Based on lessons learned from past programs, USAID designed RADP to focus on long-term development and move away from prior stabilization activities that provided short-term incentives.

USAID/Afghanistan conducted oversight of Chemonics' and DAI's implementation of the RADP contracts, as required by agency guidance. This included reviewing, approving, and maintaining contract deliverables, such as baseline data reports, work plans, and annual reports. Based on SIGAR's analysis of the 22 total deliverables required by the RADP contracts, USAID/Afghanistan reviewed, approved, and maintained all 11 deliverables for RADP-North and RADP-East, and 10 of 11 deliverables for RADP-South and RADP-West. The mission did not approve one deliverable for RADP-West, a baseline survey and data report, due to the poor quality of Chemonics' submission.

Despite oversight of the contracts implementation, USAID/Afghanistan has not consistently monitored and has yet to evaluate whether RADP is meeting program goals and the mission objective. USAID guidance and the RADP contracts require USAID/Afghanistan to monitor program implementation and accomplishments, and then evaluate RADP's achievement of overall program goals and the USAID/Afghanistan objective. Based on its analysis, SIGAR determined that the RADP contractors failed to establish targets for and report on performance indicators, and changed some of the performance indicators they tracked, year after year. In all three years for RADP-South and both years for RADP-North, the contractors lacked sufficient data for multiple indicators, failing to set targets or failing to report on progress. As a result, USAID could not determine whether RADP is making progress toward achieving program goals and the mission objective, or whether the agency should change the program's direction.

In addition to lacking necessary data for some performance indicators, the program did not meet all of its targets for the indicators it had sufficient data for in fiscal years 2015 and 2016. For RADP-South, Chemonics met roughly two-thirds of its targets (12 of 19) during fiscal year 2014 and fewer than half in both fiscal years 2015 (10 of 24) and 2016 (12 of 25). Chemonics met or exceeded just over half (12 of 20 and 11 of 20) of its targets for RADP-West in fiscal years 2015 and 2016. During its first year, RADP-West set targets of "0" for 6 of its 20 indicators, overstating its achievements in meeting targets. Ultimately,

USAID/Afghanistan terminated RADP-West in October 2016 and RADP-South in November 2017 for convenience due to poor contractor performance and a lack of what the mission deemed sufficient progress toward meeting program indicators. Meanwhile, for RADP-North, DAI met 3 of 25 targets in fiscal year 2015 but improved in fiscal year 2016, accomplishing over two-thirds of its targets (17 of 25).

In addition to inconsistent monitoring of RADP's implementation, to date, the mission has not completed evaluations of RADP-South, -North, -West, or -East, as contractually required, nor has the mission evaluated the program as a whole and, therefore, does not have enough information to determine whether RADP is achieving its overall program goals and the mission objective.

Finally, SIGAR found that USAID/Afghanistan only partially met its requirements to incorporate sustainability into RADP's design because it did not comply with USAID guidance to conduct a mandatory, in-depth sustainability analysis of the program. USAID/Afghanistan coordinated with the Afghan government and discussed sustainability in the design phase of the program, including developing a summary section on sustainability in the project appraisal document, as required by USAID sustainability guidance. Agency guidance also requires that USAID missions base this summary on an in-depth sustainability analysis for program design. Although USAID/Afghanistan included the required summary in project appraisal documents, it did not conduct the mandatory sustainability analysis to determine the sustainability of RADP's achievements against economic, institutional capacity, and technical or sector challenges. Since the mission did not base the sustainability summary on a full sustainability analysis, it may be risking U.S. taxpayer money on a program that may not be sustainable.

WHAT SIGAR RECOMMENDS

To assess USAID's current approach to agriculture programming targeting value chains and ensure that USAID/Afghanistan has time to adjust RADP-East, if necessary, SIGAR recommends that the USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan:

- 1. Create and implement a plan, with timeframes, to conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of RADP-East, in accordance with the RADP-East contract.**

To assess and adjust USAID's current and planned approach to agriculture programming targeting value chains, if necessary, SIGAR recommends that the USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan:

- 2. Apply the results of the RADP evaluation to modify, as appropriate, planned and ongoing programs, such as the Promoting Value Chain-West program and other activities in the Afghan agriculture sector covered by the April 2017 USAID Consolidated Project Appraisal Document.**

To ensure that USAID's two ongoing RADP contracts, RADP-North and RADP-East, meet USAID's sustainability requirements and can demonstrate how USAID/Afghanistan will sustain program achievements, SIGAR recommends that the USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan:

- 3. Immediately complete the required sustainability analysis for both RADP-North and RADP-East.**

SIGAR received written comments on a draft of this report from USAID/Afghanistan. USAID/Afghanistan concurred with the first and second recommendations, and did not concur with the third. In response to the first recommendation, USAID/Afghanistan said it created and implemented a plan, with timeframes, to conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of RADP-East. Assuming that the performance evaluation will be completed by USAID's target closure date of June 30, 2019, this should provide adequate time to make adjustments to the program. This recommendation will remain open until SIGAR receives a copy of USAID/Afghanistan's plan and the completed mid-term performance evaluation. Regarding the second recommendation, USAID/Afghanistan said it would apply the findings of the RADP evaluation when completed to modify, as appropriate, planned and ongoing activities. This recommendation will remain open until SIGAR receives documentation that USAID/Afghanistan considered and incorporated, as appropriate, findings from the evaluation of RADP into planned and ongoing activities. In its response to the third recommendation, USAID/Afghanistan said that it performed a sustainability analysis at the project appraisal document level, as required by agency guidance, and requested that SIGAR withdraw the recommendation. SIGAR does not dispute that USAID/Afghanistan completed a summary sustainability analysis and included it in the project appraisal document. However, the summary version included in the project appraisal document does not fully meet the agency guidance of a sustainability analysis. As SIGAR reported, it lacks several analyses of Afghan buy-in and capacity. Because USAID/Afghanistan's summary does not fully meet the requirements of a sustainability analysis, SIGAR maintains that the recommendation is valid and appropriate, and will remain open until USAID/Afghanistan completes a sustainability analysis that addresses the elements missing from its summary.



SIGAR

Office of the Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

July 30, 2018

The Honorable Mark Green
Administrator, U.S. Agency for International Development

Mr. Herbert B. Smith
USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan

This report discusses the results of SIGAR's audit of the U.S. Agency for International Development's (USAID) Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP). Initiated in October 2013, RADP consists of a group of four 5-year contracts awarded by region and valued at over \$301 million. USAID awarded RADP-South and RADP-West to Chemonics, and RADP-North and RADP-East to Development Alternatives Inc. The program aims to expand sustainable, agriculture-led economic growth and improve food and economic security for rural Afghans through a series of activities aimed at building capacity and connecting multiple agribusinesses to each other. This report focuses on USAID's incorporation of lessons learned from prior agriculture programs into RADP's design, its oversight of the program's contracts and performance, and its incorporation of sustainability of program achievements into RADP's design.

We are making three recommendations. We recommend that the USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan: (1) create and implement a plan, with timeframes, to conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of RADP-East, in accordance with the RADP-East contract; (2) apply the results of the RADP evaluation to modify, as appropriate, planned and ongoing programs, such as the Promoting Value Chain-West program and other activities in the Afghan agriculture sector covered by the April 2017 USAID Consolidated Project Appraisal Document; and (3) immediately complete the required sustainability analysis for both RADP-North and RADP-East.

We received written comments on a draft of this report from the USAID Mission for Afghanistan (USAID/Afghanistan), which are reproduced in appendix III. USAID/Afghanistan concurred with two of the three recommendations, but did not concur with the third. In response to the first recommendation, USAID/Afghanistan said it created and implemented a plan, with timeframes, to conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of RADP-East. Assuming that the performance evaluation will be completed by USAID's target closure date of June 30, 2019, this should provide adequate time to make adjustments to the program. This recommendation will remain open until we receive a copy of USAID/Afghanistan's plan and the completed mid-term performance evaluation. Regarding the second recommendation, USAID/Afghanistan said it would apply the findings of the RADP evaluation when completed to modify, as appropriate, planned and ongoing activities. This recommendation will remain open until we receive documentation that USAID/Afghanistan considered and incorporated, as appropriate, findings from the evaluation of RADP into planned and ongoing activities. In its response to the third recommendation, USAID/Afghanistan said that it performed a sustainability analysis at the project appraisal document level, as required by agency guidance, and requested that we withdraw the recommendation. We do not dispute that USAID/Afghanistan completed a summary sustainability analysis and included it in the project appraisal document. However, the summary version included in the project appraisal document does not fully meet the agency guidance of a sustainability analysis. As we reported, it lacks several analyses of Afghan buy-in and capacity. Because USAID/Afghanistan's summary does not fully meet the requirements of a sustainability analysis, we maintain that the recommendation is valid and appropriate and will remain open until USAID/Afghanistan completes a sustainability analysis that addresses the elements missing from its summary. Additionally, USAID/Afghanistan provided technical comments, which we incorporated into this report, as appropriate.



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SIGAR conducted this audit under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended; and in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards.

John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General
for Afghanistan Reconstruction

TABLE OF CONTENTS

Background.....	2
USAID Identified and Incorporated Lessons Learned from 15 Past Agriculture Programs in the Design of RADP	7
USAID Oversaw DAI’s and Chemonics’ Completion of RADP Contract Deliverables, as Required.....	10
USAID Has Not Consistently Monitored and Has yet to Evaluate Whether RADP Is Meeting Its Goals and the Mission Objective	12
USAID Partially Met Its Requirements to Incorporate Sustainability into RADP’s Design, but Did Not Conduct a Mandatory Sustainability Analysis	18
Conclusion.....	20
Recommendations	21
Agency Comments.....	21
Appendix I - Scope and Methodology	23
Appendix II - Prior USAID Agriculture Programs That Contributed Lessons Learned to the Design of RADP	25
Appendix III - Comments from the U.S. Agency for International Development	27
Appendix IV - Acknowledgments	30

TABLES

Table 1 - The Four Regional Agriculture Development Program Contracts as of December 31, 2017	4
Table 2 - Status of Performance Indicator Targets for RADP-South, RADP-North, and RADP-West.....	13
Table 3 - Prior USAID Agriculture Programs That Influenced RADP’s Design	25

FIGURES

Figure 1 - Simplified Agriculture Value Chain.....	3
Figure 2 - Some Previous USAID Agriculture Programs that Shaped the Agency’s Efforts in Afghanistan.....	9

ABBREVIATIONS

ADS	Automated Directives System
DAI	Development Alternatives Inc.
IDEA-NEW	Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for North, East, and West
RADP	Regional Agriculture Development Program
USAID	U.S. Agency for International Development
USAID/Afghanistan	USAID Mission for Afghanistan

Agriculture is critical to Afghanistan's food security and a driver of economic growth, accounting for up to 40 percent of the country's gross domestic product, according to the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID). Since 2002, USAID has spent nearly \$2.1 billion for more than 60 agriculture programs in Afghanistan.¹ These programs focused on building the capacity of the agricultural sector, expanding farmers' access to credit, increasing the quality of valued crops, providing farmers with agricultural incentives, and providing economic alternatives to poppy farming.² In 2010, the U.S. Government Accountability Office completed an audit of a portion of the approximately \$1.4 billion in USAID agriculture efforts in Afghanistan. It found that six of the eight programs it reviewed did not meet their performance targets in the most recent year for which targets were reported. For the two programs that met all their targets, the office found USAID failed to establish targets for several indicators and, as a result, could not fully assess performance for those indicators. It also found that performance declined from fiscal years 2006 to 2008 for the three longest-running programs it reviewed.

In October 2013, USAID initiated its latest, and one of its largest agriculture programs, the Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP).³ This program—a group of four 5-year contracts valued at \$301 million—aims to expand sustainable economic growth through agriculture and improve food and economic security for rural Afghans using “value chains” that connect agricultural suppliers, farmers, producers, and end users.⁴ Prior USAID Mission for Afghanistan (USAID/Afghanistan) agriculture programs included support for value chains, but according to USAID records and officials, RADP expanded this approach geographically, and, going forward, “RADP activities constitute the foundational platform of [the USAID/Afghanistan Office of Agriculture’s] agricultural program” through 2024.⁵

Given USAID's ongoing, agency-wide approach to agriculture programming, which uses value chains, and USAID/Afghanistan's investment in both time and dollars for this approach, we reviewed RADP's design and implementation through December 31, 2017. Specifically, the objectives of this audit were to determine the extent to which USAID (1) applied lessons learned from its previous agriculture efforts to the design of RADP; (2) conducted required oversight of contract implementation and modified the RADP contracts as a result of challenges encountered, if any; (3) assessed overall program achievements; and (4) incorporated sustainability of program achievements into RADP's design, as guidance requires.

To accomplish these objectives, we reviewed and analyzed the four RADP contracts, modifications, and deliverables, specifically, baseline data reports, monitoring and evaluation reports, work plans, annual and quarterly progress reports, and final reports. We identified USAID requirements for program design, including incorporating lessons learned, and determined whether USAID met its requirements and guidance. We identified contract deliverables and assessed the extent to which USAID ensured the contractors met contract

¹ See, U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Afghanistan Development: Enhancements to Performance Management and Evaluation Efforts Could Improve USAID's Agriculture Programs*, GAO-10-368, July 14, 2010.

² According to the USAID U.S. *Foreign Assistance for Afghanistan Post Performance Management Plan—2011-2015*, the U.S. government defines stabilization as securing Afghanistan and establishing conditions necessary to transfer reconstruction efforts to the Afghan people. This is accomplished by developing the capacity of Afghan institutions to withstand and diminish the threat posed by extremism, and deliver high impact economic development. Through the agriculture sector, the U.S. government's objectives are to increase agricultural jobs and income, and increase Afghans' confidence in their government.

³ USAID generally refers to individual contract awards or contracts as a “project.” However, the agency sometimes uses the term “program” to refer to several contracts addressing the same goals and objectives. For consistency in the report, we refer to RADP and the four individual contracts by the term “program.”

⁴ A value chain is the flow of a commodity from raw materials, to production, to commercialization or processing, and ultimately delivery to end-users or consumers. USAID describes value chains as a component in a market systems approach to agricultural development, which is designed to improve performance, productivity, trade, and ultimately, economic returns for all actors in a system. According to USAID, a market system approach comprises multiple value chains to more efficiently link the actors in those value chains. See USAID, *Feed the Future, Global Food Security Strategy Technical Guidance Objective 1: Inclusive and Sustainable Agricultural-Led Economic Growth*, August 4, 2017.

⁵ See USAID/Afghanistan, *Agriculture Consolidated Project Appraisal Document – Intermediate Result 1.2: Vibrant and Prosperous Agriculture Sector Developed*, April 3, 2017.

requirements. We also reviewed USAID's efforts to monitor, analyze, and evaluate program performance. We identified challenges USAID and the contractors reported in conducting and overseeing RADP efforts, and assessed if and how USAID and the contractors addressed these challenges to ensure the program's objectives have been or will be met at the end of RADP. In addition, we identified USAID requirements for program design, including incorporating sustainability of program activities, and determined whether USAID met its requirements and guidance. We interviewed officials from USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs; the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning; and the Bureau for Food Security; and from the USAID/Afghanistan's Offices of Program and Project Development, Acquisition and Assistance, and Agriculture. We also interviewed representatives from the RADP contractors—Chemonics Inc., and Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI)—DAI's third-party monitoring subcontractor; USAID's third-party monitor; the Afghan government's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock; as well as international organizations also involved with agriculture. We conducted our work in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Washington, D.C., from December 2016 through July 2018 in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. A more detailed discussion of our scope and methodology is in appendix I.

BACKGROUND

The focus of USAID's agricultural efforts in Afghanistan shifted several times between 2002 and 2018. Starting in fiscal year 2002, these efforts focused on providing humanitarian assistance to vulnerable Afghan populations, followed in 2004 by a focus on counternarcotic efforts. In 2009, the focus shifted to counterinsurgency and stabilization efforts to increase agriculture sector jobs and income from agriculture. In *Stabilization: Lessons From the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, we reported that the U.S. government found the stabilization strategy and the programs used to achieve it were not properly tailored to the Afghan context, and successes in stabilizing Afghan districts rarely lasted longer than the physical presence of coalition troops and civilians. As a result, the programs had minor lasting impacts.⁶ In 2010, USAID again shifted its focus, this time to sustainable, economic growth.⁷

In February 2011, USAID commissioned Dalberg Global Development Advisors to conduct an Afghanistan-wide agricultural assessment and use the results to develop a strategic framework for U.S. government agricultural programs in Afghanistan. The assessment identified key crops as well as the need for a regional focus, and recommended improvements in supplies, farming techniques, and government capacity. The assessment's findings and the resulting framework marked the transition of programming from stabilization toward economic growth by focusing on substituting imports with domestic production and increased exports. The framework highlighted private sector development as critical to promoting agricultural sustainability so that the country is not reliant on donors or the Afghan government.⁸ Two objectives of the framework were supporting food security and increasing income growth in Afghanistan.⁹ The framework was instrumental in USAID's creation of RADP.¹⁰

⁶ See SIGAR, *Stabilization: Lessons From the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, May, 24, 2018, p. i.

⁷ See SIGAR, *Quarterly Report to Congress*, January 30, 2010, pp. 17-18.

⁸ SIGAR defines U.S. government support to private sector development and economic growth as "two broad but overlapping and complementary categories: (1) overall support to creating an enabling environment, effective market structures, and institutions in which the private sector could thrive, and (2) targeted support to individual firms, entrepreneurs, and groups." See SIGAR, *Private Sector Development and Economic Growth: Lessons From the U.S. Experience in Afghanistan*, April 19, 2018, p. 16.

⁹ According to USAID, food security means, "having, at all times, both physical and economic access to sufficient food to meet dietary needs for a productive and healthy life." See USAID, *What We Do - Feed the Future Initiative, Increasing Food Security Through Feed the Future*. <https://www.usaid.gov/what-we-do/agriculture-and-food-security/increasing-food-security-through-feed-future>, accessed September 29, 2017.

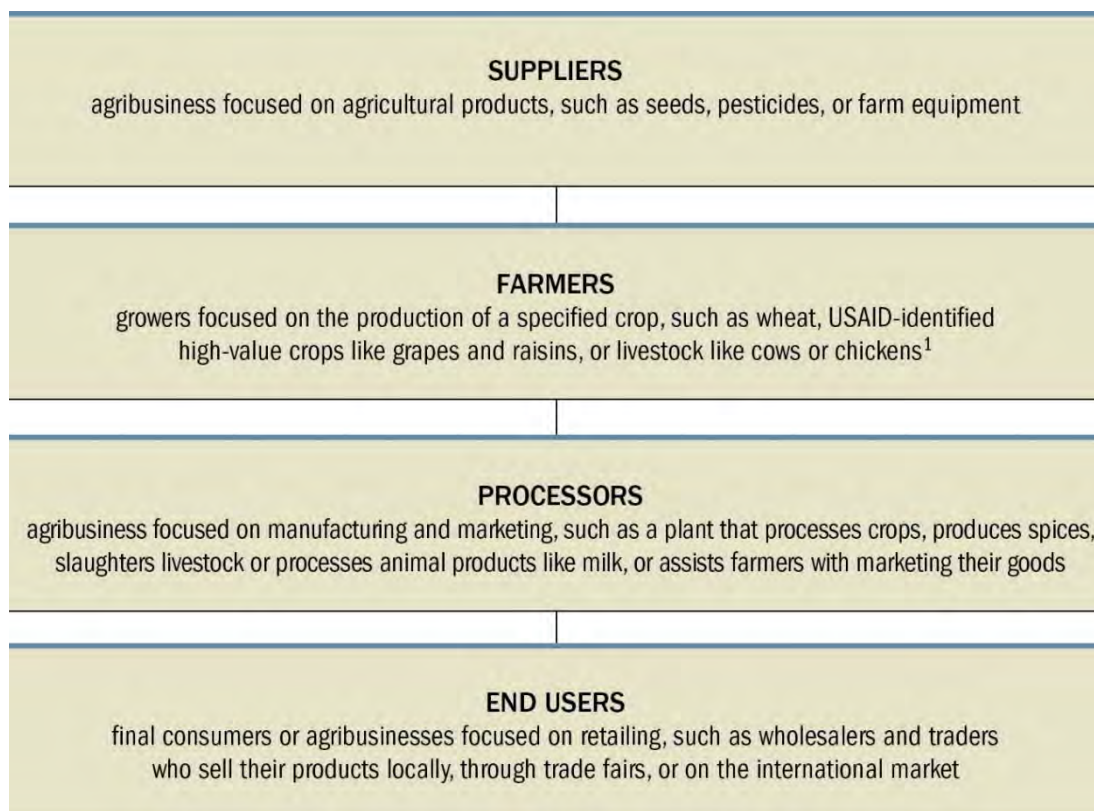
¹⁰ Dalberg Global Development Advisors, *Afghanistan Agricultural Assessment and Framework Development*, April 22, 2011.

USAID’s strategies for Afghanistan in 2015 and again in 2017 continued to focus on economic growth. RADP aligns with this focus and addresses several of USAID/Afghanistan’s development objectives. For example, one such objective is expanding sustainable, agriculture-led economic growth through the private sector, which USAID anticipates will result in a more sustainable model for agriculture in Afghanistan. RADP uses a value chain approach of increasing income or profit for each actor in the agriculture production chain from the supplier to the crop producer to the market, and ultimately to the consumer. Specifically, USAID states that

RADP will provide training in improved technology and cultivation practices and demonstration of techniques to increase production and quality of high-value crops for domestic consumption and export. Private-sector agribusinesses will be supported to enhance capacity to add value to raw crops and increase the economic value of Afghan agricultural products.¹¹

RADP identifies four different value chain actors: suppliers, farmers, processors, and end users.¹² Figure 1 provides a visual representation of RADP’s agriculture value chain.

Figure 1 - Simplified Agriculture Value Chain



Source: SIGAR analysis of USAID information.

¹ High-value crops generally refer to non-staple agricultural crops, such as vegetables, fruits, and spices. Most high-value agricultural crops are those known to have a higher net return per hectare of land than staples or other widely grown crops. See Consultative Group for International Agricultural Research, *Challenge Program: High Value Crops – Fruits and Vegetables*, http://www.cgiar.org/www-archive/www.cgiar.org/pdf/cp_cn_highvaluecrops.pdf, accessed November 8, 2017.

¹¹ See USAID, *Activity Approval Document for the Regional Agricultural Development Program*, June 2012.

¹² USAID designed and awarded the RADP-South contract first and used it as the basis for designing RADP-North and RADP-West. All three regions used the same structure for their value chain approach to RADP’s implementation. RADP-East is different from the other three regions in its approach, but defines the value chain and its actors in the same manner.

Prior USAID agriculture programs worked within value chains, but most of these programs focused on small landholders and farmers, not on the rest of the value chain's actors, such as agribusinesses, which process crops and then sell finished products. By focusing on the needs of the entire value chain, USAID designed RADP to contribute to the mission objective of sustainable, agriculture-led economic growth and the program objective of increasing food and economic security for rural Afghans. To meet these objectives, USAID and the contractors gauge progress toward six program goals: (1) developing a vibrant and prosperous agriculture sector; (2) increasing agriculture sector productivity and production; (3) increasing profitability of small and medium agribusinesses; (4) increasing women's participation in high-value agricultural value chain activities; (5) improving the enabling environment for agriculture growth; and (6) increasing and sustaining the adoption of licit crops. According to USAID, RADP will continue the transition from stabilization to economic growth through the private sector by supporting farmers and agribusinesses in the three RADP value chains: wheat, high-value crops, and livestock.¹³

RADP is comprised of four different contracts, which USAID awarded to DAI and Chemonics, covering the four regions of Afghanistan: South, North, West, and East.¹⁴ Table 1 summarizes the contractors, dates, and dollar amounts for the four contracts.

Table 1 - The Four Regional Agriculture Development Program Contracts as of December 31, 2017

Contract	Contractor	Contracted Amount (\$ millions)	Award Date	Number of Modifications	Contract End Date	Total Spent (\$ millions)
RADP-South	Chemonics Inc.	\$125.1	10/2013	13	11/2017	\$105.0 (terminated ¹)
RADP-North	Development Alternatives Inc.	78.4	5/2014	10	2019	45.7
RADP-West	Chemonics Inc.	69.9	8/2014	6	10/2016	27.1 (terminated ²)
RADP-East	Development Alternatives Inc.	28.1	7/2016	2	2021	5.5
Total		\$301.5				\$183.3³

Source: SIGAR analysis of USAID information.

¹ According to the contractor, USAID terminated the RADP-South contract for convenience in November 2017 because of a shift in the agency's agriculture programming toward urban and suburban areas, the program's performance in achieving performance targets, and continued delays and issues related to the annual household survey and the subsequent annual report.

² USAID terminated the RADP-West contract for convenience in October 2016 because of rising administrative costs and its misalignment with the Afghan government's regional objectives. In September 2017, USAID/Afghanistan awarded a 3-year, \$19 million contract to the United Nations' Food and Agriculture Organization for the program "Promoting Value Chain-West," which follows up on the three value chains that RADP-West focused on. USAID/Afghanistan officials noted that the agency was soliciting and awarding a new program to follow-up on the work of RADP-West. They added, however, it is not, by technical definition, a follow-on program or extension of RADP-West.

³ USAID has spent \$183.3 million on RADP and has \$55 million left to spend on its ongoing programs.

¹³ USAID, *Value Chains and the Cluster Approach, Transforming Relationships to Increase Competitiveness and Focus on End Markets*, microREPORT #148, October 2008.

¹⁴ Both DAI and Chemonics used different teams to implement each contract.

Each RADP contract consists of four contract line items or components: (1) wheat value chain, (2) high-value crops value chain, (3) livestock value chain, and (4) enabling environment.¹⁵ According to the contracts, for each value chain, the contractor is “required to achieve sustainable and sustained improvements in productivity and profitability in [each] value chain through activities appropriate for [Afghanistan].”¹⁶ Additionally, for the enabling environment component, coordinated under RADP-South, the contractor is “required to achieve sustainable and sustained improvements in the legal, regulatory, and policy environments affecting value chain development and economic growth.”¹⁷ According to USAID’s request for proposal for RADP, the enabling environment component focused on supporting coordination between the regional programs and the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock. This includes coordinating and facilitating RADP’s overall policy approach, both regionally and nationally, with the ministry to ensure that common objectives and common policy problems that RADP identifies at the regional level are addressed at the national level.

In November 2017, USAID/Afghanistan terminated the RADP-South contract for convenience because the contractor did not achieve its program goals and objective. Chemonics officials further said that the following combination of factors contributed to this termination:

- USAID/Afghanistan’s change in focus from rural to more urban areas for implementation;
- Performance-related issues concerning an inability to achieve planned program results; and
- Delays in the contractor completing contract deliverables.

These last two factors also led USAID to terminate RADP-West for convenience in October 2016. With the termination of RADP-South, the enabling environment component also ended and will not, according to USAID/Afghanistan, be continued going forward.

USAID Guidance for Program Design and Implementation

USAID’s Automated Directives System (ADS) guides how the agency designs, implements, manages, and measures the performance of its programs.¹⁸ ADS guidance also recommends that USAID missions plan how they will conduct program monitoring and evaluation.¹⁹ USAID guidance on oversight of contract deliverables requires USAID officials to ensure that the contractor is performing in accordance with the terms of the contract.²⁰

¹⁵ The initial RADP contract did not have a RADP-East component because USAID was implementing a value chain approach in eastern Afghanistan under Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for North, East, and West (IDEA-NEW) at the time. Initially, USAID designed RADP to have a fourth, “central” region and contract that would focus on the enabling environment. In September 2015, USAID integrated this region and the corresponding activities into the scope of the RADP-South contract through modification 4. This new work would be accomplished through various private and public sector Afghan stakeholders by, for example, supporting the capacity of provincial and district-level Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock officials.

¹⁶ USAID, *Contract Number: AID-306-C-13-00018*, October 7, 2013.

¹⁷ USAID, *Contract Number: AID-306-C-13-00018*, October 7, 2013.

¹⁸ USAID updates the ADS chapters periodically. As a result, throughout this report, we cite the versions of the ADS guidance that were effective at the time of RADP’s design and implementation even if they are not the most current versions. Additionally, the ADS varies in terms of whether the agency must or should comply with its provisions. As a result, we identify both ADS requirements and guidance in this report.

¹⁹ USAID, ADS Chapter 200.3.5.5, “Evaluation and Monitoring,” January 17, 2012.

²⁰ USAID, ADS Chapter 202, “Achieving,” January 25, 2012. In addition to the ADS requirements, USAID must comply with the Federal Acquisition Regulation (FAR), including FAR Subpart 46.4, which requires the government to perform contract quality assurance at such times and places “as may be necessary to determine that the supplies or services conform to contract requirements.”

During the design of RADP, ADS Chapter 201 (“Planning”), ADS Chapter 203 (“Assessing and Learning”), and USAID’s *Project Design Guidance* set expectations and requirements for incorporating lessons learned into the program’s design.²¹ ADS 201 and ADS 203 both recommend that USAID officials review evaluations and lessons learned from prior USAID programs to design new programs. In addition, USAID officials said that the USAID Administrator’s Office required USAID/Afghanistan to use the acquisition and assistance review and approval document, as well as the ADS-required project appraisal document, during the design of RADP.²² USAID later incorporated the requirement into the ADS for programs implemented worldwide. These documents also contain a section directing the mission to reflect upon lessons learned from previous programs.²³

ADS guidance on the sustainability of program achievements calls for USAID to build key principles and tools into its program analysis and design. ADS 201 also calls for the involvement of the partner government in the overall development strategy and its implementation, and in identifying strategic partners who will be critical to the success of the program.²⁴ Specifically, ADS 201 calls for sustainability “to be built into USAID programs, when planning from the start, as a core operational principle.”²⁵ In addition, ADS 201 requires USAID to conduct a sustainability analysis as part of program design.

USAID’s System for Monitoring and Evaluating Program Implementation and Accomplishments

According to ADS guidance, measuring program performance includes systematically monitoring and evaluating progress toward meeting a desired result.²⁶ USAID monitors its programs by collecting and reviewing

²¹ USAID revised its program design and implementation guidance several times leading up to and during RADP’s implementation. USAID issued revisions to ADS Chapter 201, “Planning,” in March 2012, July 2013, and September 2013. In 2016, USAID changed the title of ADS 201 from “Planning” to “Program Cycle Operational Policy.” This new version of ADS 201 contained planning guidance and guidance from ADS Chapter 203, “Assessing and Learning.” USAID issued additional program design guidance in December 2011 (see USAID, *Project Design Guidance*, December 9, 2011).

²² ADS 201, effective August 2011, required use of the activity approval document. In March 2012, USAID revised ADS 201 to include new guidance on project design that introduced a mandatory sustainability analysis and other new requirements, and renamed the activity approval document the project appraisal document. For consistency throughout this report, we refer to the activity approval document as the project appraisal document, as this was the language in the ADS requirements that was applicable during RADP’s implementation period.

²³ USAID/Afghanistan officials told us they completed the project appraisal document and the acquisition and assistance review and approval document for RADP because the USAID Administrator required USAID/Afghanistan to use the documents prior to 2016, even though USAID did not incorporate them into the ADS until 2016.

²⁴ USAID, ADS Chapter 201, “Planning,” July 2, 2013.

²⁵ USAID ADS, Chapter 201, “Planning,” July 2, 2013. USAID revised ADS 201 in 2013 to include requirements for agency officials to build sustainability of program achievements into a program’s design. These requirements evolved from the 2011 *Administrator’s Sustainability Guidance for USAID in Afghanistan*, which a USAID official said was superseded by the *Project Design Guidance* issued in December 2011. USAID then incorporated the design guidance into the July 2013 and September 2013 revisions of ADS Chapter 201. See USAID, *Project Design Guidance*, December 9, 2011; USAID, ADS Chapter 201, “Planning,” July 2, 2013; and USAID, ADS Chapter 201, “Planning,” September 30, 2013.

²⁶ We define “monitoring” using USAID’s definition of “performance monitoring,” which is the “ongoing and routine collection of performance indicator data to reveal whether desired results are being achieved and whether implementation is on track.” See USAID, ADS Chapter 203, “Assessing and Learning,” November 2, 2012. According to USAID, performance monitoring is related to “activity oversight”—the “day-to-day assessment of contractor and grantee performance by a USAID official or others through site visits, stakeholder meetings, and the verification of implementer inputs, outputs, and deliverables.” See USAID, “Commonly Used USAID Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Terms,” Derived from ADS Series 200 and USAID, ADS Chapter 201, “Program Cycle Operational Policy,” March 23, 2017. USAID/Afghanistan’s multi-tiered monitoring and contractor performance assessment reports both involve program monitoring to varying extents. We define “evaluation” using USAID’s definition, which is the “systematic collection and analysis of information about the characteristics and outcomes of programs and projects as a basis for judgments, to improve effectiveness, and/or inform decisions about current and future programming.” See USAID, *Glossary of ADS Terms*, April 30, 2014.

data about program performance. One method it uses is a multi-tiered monitoring approach, which consists of multiple tiers, or sources, of information on which USAID relies to collect and verify program progress. According to USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs, USAID developed the multi-tiered monitoring approach to provide USAID/Afghanistan with the greatest degree of oversight possible. Prior to this, USAID/Afghanistan had a less complete picture of programs' performance because of deteriorating security across Afghanistan and the lacking capacity of USAID's contractors and subcontractors, including capacity to carry out activities, analyze data, and safeguard personnel. These factors limited the ability of USAID/Afghanistan staff and contracting officials to verify data in the field. Though still insufficient, USAID/Afghanistan turned to the multi-tiered monitoring approach to help overcome these challenges.

Although this approach was in use as early as 2014, USAID/Afghanistan approved it in the 2016 Mission Order 203.04, which described the five tiers of the multi-tiered monitoring approach and required USAID officials to triangulate performance data by using at least three of these tiers to verify program activities and results. USAID officials may draw upon five monitoring tiers of data to monitor a program. These tiers include data that has been obtained from:

- Tier 1—direct U.S. government observation
- Tier 2—contractor reporting
- Tier 3—information from the Afghan government and international donors
- Tier 4—information from civil society organizations and program beneficiaries²⁷
- Tier 5—third-party monitor reporting

A second method, led by USAID officials, includes assessments that take stock of the performance of USAID/Afghanistan contractors and programs. These assessments are distinct from a performance evaluation of a contract or program, which is led by independent experts outside USAID who collect and analyze data to determine what the contract or program has achieved. One type of internal assessment, the contractor performance assessment report, is a periodic, usually annual, assessment of contract implementation. The assessment reports serve as an administrative tool for USAID/Afghanistan to record and maintain information about a contractor's performance. For example, when conducting the performance assessments for the reports, USAID officials pay particular attention to the quality of the contractor's products and services, the effectiveness of its cost controls, the timeliness of its performance, and its business relations.

Beyond monitoring program activities, guidance requires USAID to evaluate the contractor's achievement of program results. Specifically, ADS Chapter 203 calls for independent third parties to evaluate the contractor's achievement of program results and use the findings to inform future programming decisions.²⁸ Although ADS guidance does not require a mid-term evaluation, all four of the RADP contracts require both a mid-term and final evaluation. ADS Chapter 201 states "evaluations should be timed so that their findings can inform decisions such as, but not limited to, course corrections, exercising option years, designing a follow-on project, or creating a sector strategic plan."²⁹

USAID IDENTIFIED AND INCORPORATED LESSONS LEARNED FROM 15 PAST AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS IN THE DESIGN OF RADP

According to USAID's guidance, it is essential that a program's design benefit from an analysis of lessons learned through high-quality evaluations of USAID's prior programs. Before launching the program design, a mission must ensure that it has reviewed prior program plans and conducted analytical work so it can build on

²⁷ For RADP beneficiaries—farmers and agribusinesses—this was conducted through phone calls.

²⁸ USAID, ADS Chapter 203, "Assessing and Learning," November 2, 2012.

²⁹ USAID, ADS Chapter 201, "Program Cycle Operational Policy," March 23, 2017, p. 124.

this knowledge base and avoid unintended duplication of efforts. Specifically, at the start of RADP, the USAID Administrator's Office required USAID/Afghanistan to complete an acquisition and assistance review and approval document and a project appraisal document during the design of new programs.³⁰ These documents require USAID to identify and incorporate lessons learned from past programs into the design of new programs. In the case of RADP, this means lessons learned from prior agriculture programs.

Based on our analysis of RADP's design documents and interviews with USAID and contractor officials familiar with the design of RADP, we found that USAID/Afghanistan identified and incorporated lessons learned from past agriculture programs into RADP's design. Through our analysis, we determined that the RADP design documents—specifically, the acquisition and assistance review and approval document, and the project appraisal document—and the contracts identified 15 prior USAID agriculture programs that influenced RADP's design.³¹ After reviewing these programs, USAID/Afghanistan decided to continue and expand its efforts on value chain development.

Of these prior programs, USAID officials indicated that the Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture (AVIPA) program and its continuation, AVIPA Plus, significantly shaped the design of RADP through their focus on providing vouchers for farmers to purchase higher quality supplies, such as seeds. The Commercial Horticulture and Agriculture Marketing Program was also significant because it aimed to increase the yields and quality of targeted crops—such as pomegranates and almonds—and to increase their export to regional and international markets. The Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program, which USAID designed to improve agriculture production, sales, and exports, also influenced the design of RADP.

The Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for North, East, and West (IDEA-NEW) program created a bridge between stabilization goals and economic growth goals in USAID/Afghanistan's agriculture development work.³² Although this program initially focused on stabilization and alternative livelihoods, USAID later changed its focus to economic growth through improvements to value chains, such as increased market access and improved capacity of value chain actors, for example, through training on good agriculture practices. The IDEA-NEW contractor implemented the program in multiple locations throughout 19 provinces concentrated in the north and east of Afghanistan. RADP continued this nationwide expansion with regional programs.

USAID/Afghanistan applied lessons from the Rebuilding Agricultural Markets Program and the IDEA-NEW program to focus on building linkages between agriculture producers and processors, and re-establishing trade relations with India, Pakistan, Russia, Ukraine, and the United Arab Emirates. Building on the lessons learned from these programs, RADP continues USAID/Afghanistan's effort to expand agriculture trade in Afghanistan by establishing linkages between farmers, processors, retailers, and input suppliers to reach long-term agriculture development goals.³³ Figure 2 shows a timeline of some of the previous USAID agriculture programs that shaped the agency's current agriculture efforts in Afghanistan.

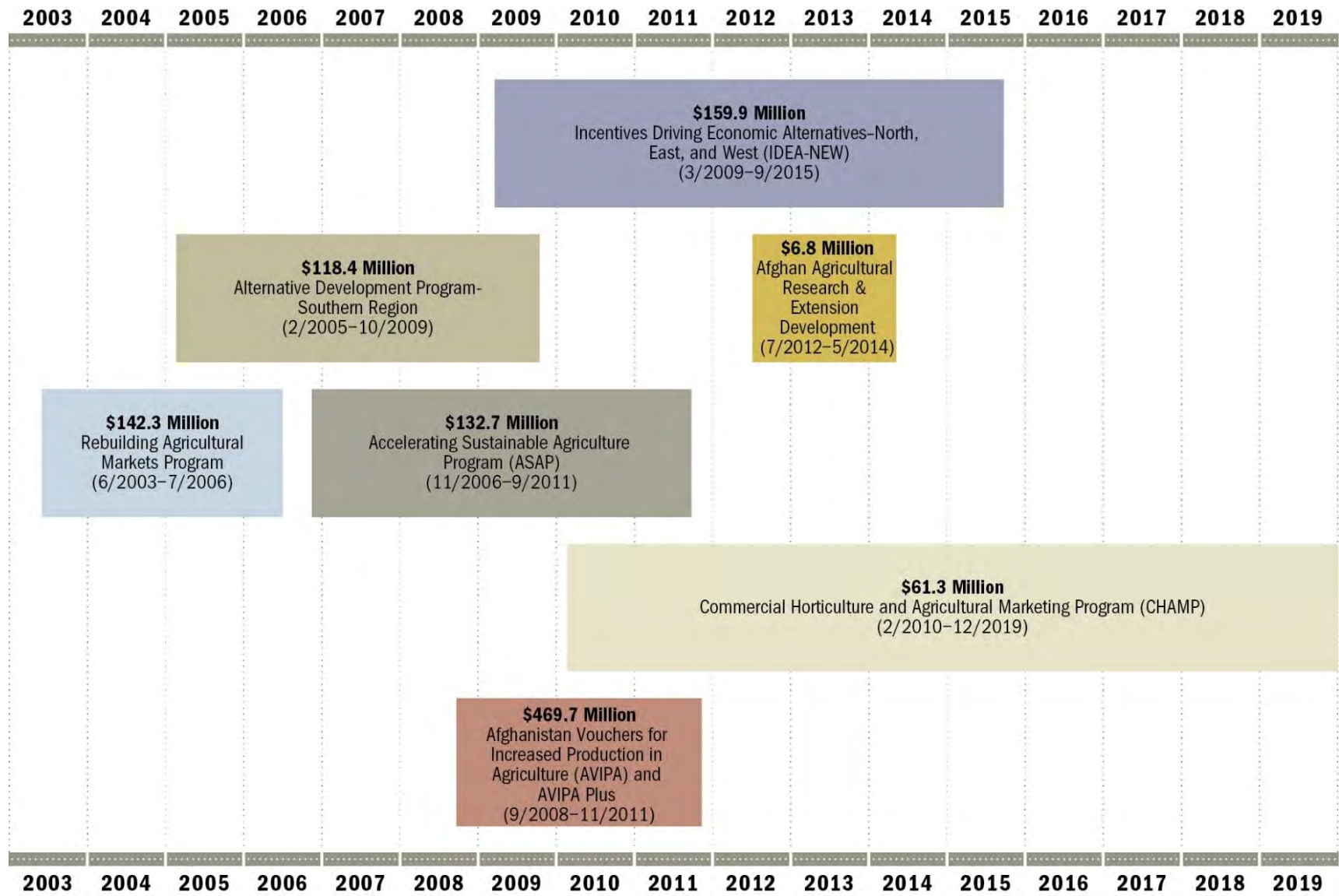
³⁰ As previously noted, the USAID Administrator's Office initially required USAID/Afghanistan to use both the acquisition and assistance review and approval document and the ADS-required project appraisal document during the design of RADP. USAID later incorporated the acquisition and assistance review and approval document requirement into the ADS for programs implemented worldwide.

³¹ See appendix II for a list of the 15 prior agriculture programs that provided lessons learned for the design of RADP.

³² See USAID/Afghanistan, *Sector Fact Sheet Office of Agriculture*, July 2016. According to USAID, economic growth "creates the opportunities impoverished households need to raise their living standards, provides countries with the resources to expand access to basic services, and—most important of all—enables citizens to chart their own prosperous futures."

³³ The *USAID/Afghanistan Plan for Transition 2015-2018* states that "Agriculture Development" is moving away from distributing subsidies to farmers and instead focusing on increasing agricultural productivity and strengthening linkages in value chains.

Figure 2 - Some Previous USAID Agriculture Programs that Shaped the Agency's Efforts in Afghanistan



Source: SIGAR analysis of USAID information.

USAID OVERSAW DAI'S AND CHEMONICS' COMPLETION OF RADP CONTRACT DELIVERABLES, AS REQUIRED

USAID Reviewed, Approved, and Maintained All RADP-North and RADP-East Performance Documents

USAID guidance for its missions, including USAID/Afghanistan, requires officials to oversee the contractors' completion of contract deliverables. Specifically, the guidance identifies three essential components of USAID's oversight responsibilities: (1) reviewing, (2) approving, and (3) maintaining contract deliverables, which consist of performance documents.³⁴ ADS Chapter 202 requires USAID missions, including USAID/Afghanistan and its officials, to review and approve a contractor's deliverables and, in the process, monitor the quality and timeliness of them.³⁵ The timely approval of quality documents, in turn, is one indication of program progress and whether stakeholders have access to information on potential problems and needed adjustments. Additionally, ADS Chapter 302 requires officials to maintain all contract-relevant documents, including performance documents.³⁶

Based on our analysis of RADP's contracts and contract deliverables, including performance documents, we found that USAID/Afghanistan met its requirements to oversee the completion of contract deliverables for both RADP-North and RADP-East, despite some early delays by DAI in submitting acceptable documents. DAI was responsible for submitting documents in support of five performance-related deliverables for the RADP-North contract and six for the RADP-East contract. We found that USAID/Afghanistan officials completed the required tasks for all 11 of the deliverables for both contracts.

Based on our review of program documents and interviews with USAID/Afghanistan and DAI officials, we also found that USAID/Afghanistan encountered some problems early on with DAI's submissions for RADP-North. USAID/Afghanistan's first contractor performance assessment report for RADP-North, submitted in 2015, faulted the contractor for submitting substandard and late drafts of two performance documents: a work plan and the baseline data report.³⁷ Among the deficiencies identified were missing activities, a number of typos, inaccuracies and inconsistencies, and generally poor layout, all of which contributed to the late submissions and additional rounds of revision between DAI and USAID/Afghanistan. The assessment report went on to note that management problems—namely, turnover in the contracting team's top two positions—hampered program progress. In response, DAI headquarters undertook a series of corrective steps, including hiring more permanent staff, providing coaching and support to its senior management, and prioritizing its communication with local stakeholders. USAID/Afghanistan viewed these steps favorably, according to the same 2015 assessment report, and in its 2016 assessment report, it rated DAI's management as "satisfactory," with one USAID/Afghanistan official praising the contractor for the timeliness and quality of its performance documents.³⁸ According to a USAID/Afghanistan official, after DAI took these corrective measures, USAID/Afghanistan approved subsequent documents for RADP-North with no reported delays.

As of July 2017, there were no reported delays with approving documents for RADP-East. USAID/Afghanistan approved and maintained records for all six of RADP-East's contract deliverables. We found no evidence that

³⁴ The four RADP contracts require DAI and Chemonics to complete several deliverables. For the purposes of our audit, we focused only on deliverables related to program performance—that is, deliverables whose documents detail the program's activities, establish standards for reporting and measuring program progress, and report program achievements. As such, the six types of contract deliverables we reviewed were the baseline data reports, monitoring and evaluation reports, work plans, quarterly reports, annual reports, and final reports.

³⁵ USAID, ADS Chapter 202, "Achieving," January 25, 2012.

³⁶ USAID, ADS Chapter 302, "Direct Contracting," June 30, 2015.

³⁷ USAID/Afghanistan, *Contractor Performance Assessment Report – RADP-North*, May 21, 2015.

³⁸ USAID/Afghanistan, *Contractor Performance Assessment Report – RADP-North*, May 21, 2015.

USAID/Afghanistan encountered problems reviewing and approving DAI's submissions based on our interviews with USAID/Afghanistan and contractor officials and our review of the RADP-East performance documents. Because the RADP-East contract, which USAID awarded in July 2016, was only 1 year into implementation at the time of our audit, it was too early to determine whether deficiencies similar to those encountered for RADP-North will occur and delay USAID/Afghanistan's review process.

Quality and Process Problems Delayed USAID's Approval of RADP-South and RADP-West Contract Deliverables and Contributed to the Termination of Both Contracts

USAID/Afghanistan met ADS requirements to oversee Chemonics' completion of 10 of the 11 submitted deliverables for RADP-South and RADP-West, but not without significant delays in approving critical documents. Ultimately, USAID/Afghanistan terminated RADP-West in October 2016 and RADP-South in November 2017, due in part to the substandard quality of these deliverables and their associated delays. RADP-West's baseline data report had not received USAID/Afghanistan's approval by the time of the contract's termination, surpassing its due date by over 14 months, and RADP-South's last two annual reports were revised and approved 23 months and 11 months after their respective due dates.

Both Chemonics and USAID/Afghanistan contributed to these delays. According to USAID/Afghanistan, Chemonics submitted substandard documents that required multiple rounds of review and approval by mission officials. However, Chemonics officials told us that USAID/Afghanistan's lengthy timelines for reviewing documents were unexpected. For the RADP-South contract, Chemonics submitted the annual reports for fiscal years 2015 and 2016 behind schedule and in substandard quality, prompting USAID/Afghanistan to issue two notices of underperformance, one for each document.³⁹ Meanwhile, for the RADP-West contract, Chemonics failed to meet one contract deliverable for the baseline data report because it did not receive approval—due again to its substandard quality and the resulting review process—before USAID/Afghanistan terminated the contract. Amid these delays, USAID/Afghanistan ultimately approved all five deliverables for the RADP-South contract within the scope of our analysis and five of six deliverables for the RADP-West contract.

Although USAID/Afghanistan approved all documents for RADP-South, problems with the quality of the contractor's documents resulted in delays throughout the process.⁴⁰ Chemonics submitted performance documents that did not meet USAID/Afghanistan's quality standards and, as a result, required additional rounds of revision between the two parties. Based on the contractor performance assessment reports and interviews with USAID/Afghanistan officials, these quality deficiencies dated back to when USAID awarded the contract in October 2013. According to USAID/Afghanistan's notices of underperformance, the contractor's more recent deficiencies centered on inaccurate and incomplete data on program achievements. These deficiencies are similar to the problems we found with RADP-South's quarterly and annual performance reports, which show that Chemonics missed annual targets and failed to report on several indicators on a recurring basis. According to USAID/Afghanistan and Chemonics officials, these deficiencies and delays contributed to USAID/Afghanistan's decision to terminate the RADP-South contract in November 2017.

In addition to Chemonics' deficiencies, USAID/Afghanistan's review process had shortcomings of its own. For example, in a 2015 management review, Ernst & Young faulted USAID/Afghanistan for not providing timely feedback on RADP-South performance documents and recommended that it adopt a defined turnaround time

³⁹ According to Federal Acquisition Regulation 42.15, "Contractor Performance Information," a letter of underperformance is "a management tool that notifies the contractor of the contractual deficiency."

⁴⁰ In its comments on a draft of this report, USAID/Afghanistan said that it "did not accept the RADP-South final report, which suffered from the same poor quality that contributed to RADP-South's termination. [The contractor for] RADP-South was not allowed to collect its fee for this deliverable." However, we did not include the RADP-South final report in the analysis of deliverables discussed above because the program was ongoing during our fieldwork from January to November 2017 and this deliverable was not due until after the program's planned end date of October 7, 2018.

for contract deliverables.⁴¹ However, shortcomings in the mission’s review process remain a challenge. According to contractor personnel, delays in Chemonics’ preparation of the latest annual report stemmed, in part, from USAID/Afghanistan’s tendency to suggest changes to the contractor’s survey methods and analysis unexpectedly without considering their impact on existing timelines. USAID/Afghanistan officials’ emails with Chemonics officials confirm that these changes were unexpected. Moreover, based on the contractor’s communications, USAID/Afghanistan took over a month, on average, to respond to the contractor’s submissions—delays that the contractor had not anticipated. Consequently, USAID/Afghanistan did not approve the annual report until almost 11 months after the contractor first submitted it.

Chemonics’ shortcomings in completing contract deliverables were also apparent during its implementation of RADP-West. During the contract’s 2 years of implementation, USAID/Afghanistan rated the contractor’s preparation of quality and timely deliverables as “marginal,” the second lowest rating out of five possible. According to USAID/Afghanistan’s contractor performance assessment reports, Chemonics submitted the annual work plans and a baseline data report late, and the documents were substandard, requiring multiple rounds of revision that further delayed USAID/Afghanistan’s approval. Although the contractor took some steps to address these issues, these efforts did not improve the pace of program implementation, nor did they facilitate the completion of key deliverables. For example, USAID/Afghanistan attributed the poorly written baseline data report to methodological problems, while Chemonics cited poor oversight of the report’s subcontractor as its reason for not meeting USAID/Afghanistan’s standards on time. The baseline survey report was still incomplete when USAID/Afghanistan terminated the RADP-West contract for convenience in October 2016.

Timely completion of contractor performance documents provides USAID/Afghanistan with visibility of program activities and accomplishments. Chemonics’ delays in preparing required performance documents may affect RADP’s overall implementation and, more critically, should serve as an early warning of the program’s inability to achieve its desired results.⁴² For RADP-South, USAID/Afghanistan officials said that the contractor’s delays in reporting on indicators about productivity, sales, and household income in the fiscal years 2015 and 2016 annual reports affected program implementation, but they did not explain how. Additionally, because the annual report is a reference point, delay in its submission prevents USAID/Afghanistan from taking timely action to identify any challenges impacting the program and suggesting course corrections. With respect to RADP-West, the baseline survey report typically contains information about the demographics of local households, the capacity of local agribusinesses, and the feasibility of local value chains. Without this information, USAID/Afghanistan and Chemonics did not have all of the information they needed to implement RADP-West.

USAID HAS NOT CONSISTENTLY MONITORED AND HAS YET TO EVALUATE WHETHER RADP IS MEETING ITS GOALS AND THE MISSION OBJECTIVE

USAID/Afghanistan and the RADP contractors are required to track the program’s progress against program goals as measured by performance indicators and associated targets.⁴³ However, USAID has not consistently monitored, and the contractors have not consistently measured and reported on the performance indicators or

⁴¹ Ernst & Young, United States Agency for International Development (USAID)-Kabul Afghanistan Regional Agriculture Development Program-South (RADP-S) Draft Management Review Report, July 8, 2015, p. 11.

⁴² USAID, ADS Chapter 202, “Achieving,” January 25, 2012.

⁴³ According to USAID/Afghanistan, the performance indicators and targets are consistent with agency standards and are agreed to by USAID/Afghanistan and the contractors at the time of contract award. A performance indicator defines a measure of change for the results a project or activity intends to accomplish (see USAID, *Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS: Selecting Performance Indicators*, Second Edition. Number 6, 2010, pp. 1-2). A target is the specific, planned level of result to be achieved within an explicit timeframe (see USAID, *Performance Monitoring and Evaluation TIPS: Baselines and Targets*, Second Edition. Number 8, 2010, p. 1).

whether they are meeting their targets. According to the monitoring and evaluation plans for the individual RADP contracts, the contractors developed performance indicators that showed how their activities contributed to USAID/Afghanistan’s overall objectives, and set targets for those indicators that might signal the need to change the program’s direction or accelerate its performance.⁴⁴ In turn, USAID/Afghanistan, according to the ADS, is accountable for ensuring the contractors achieve these targets.⁴⁵ According to USAID and its contractors, they changed the performance indicators during the program. These changes were meant to align indicators across the RADP-South, RADP-North, and RADP-West contracts. However, this might have a negative impact on the program if the agency and its contractors change so many indicators that they cannot compare progress across years. According to USAID guidance, missions should be cautious about changing performance indicators because it compromises the comparability of performance data over time.

For the RADP contracts, the contractors and USAID/Afghanistan established performance indicators and annual targets, which USAID/Afghanistan expects the contractors to meet in a single year of performance; these are set for each year of the contract’s life. Within the scope of our audit, USAID/Afghanistan was responsible for ensuring the contractors met their annual targets for 3 years of the RADP-South contract, 2 years of the RADP-North contract, and 2 years of the RADP-West contract. Table 2 summarizes our analysis of RADP’s performance based on the contractors’ annual reports.⁴⁶ For each contract and year, we tabulated the number of targets and performance indicator results for which the contractors reported insufficient data for us to determine whether they had met their targets (“Could Not Determine”), the number of annual performance indicator targets the contractors reported as having met (“Met”), the number of targets the contractors reported as having not met (“Missed”), and the total number of indicators the contractors defined and used in their reports (“Total”).⁴⁷

Table 2 - Status of Performance Indicator Targets for RADP-South, RADP-North, and RADP-West

Indicator Status	Number of Annual Indicators						
	RADP-South			RADP-North		RADP-West	
	Year One (FY 2014)	Year Two (FY 2015)	Year Three (FY 2016)	Year One (FY 2015)	Year Two (FY 2016)	Year One (FY 2015)	Year Two (FY 2016)
Could Not Determine	7	9	3	20	6	0	0
Met	12	10	12	3	17	12	11
Missed	0	5	10	2	2	8	9
Total	19	24	25	25	25	20	20

Source: SIGAR analysis of USAID information.

Note: “FY” stands for fiscal year.

⁴⁴ USAID, *Regional Agricultural Development Program – South (RADP-S): Monitoring and Evaluation Plan*, September 1, 2015, p. 5.

⁴⁵ USAID, ADS 203.3.9, “Assessing and Learning,” November 2, 2012, p. 38; and USAID, ADS 201.3.3.3, “Planning,” March 23, 2012, p. 9.

⁴⁶ We did not assess the appropriateness of the indicators in meeting RADP program goals and the USAID/Afghanistan objective.

⁴⁷ In some cases, the data was insufficient for us to make a determination because the contractors did not report targets or results. In other cases, the contractors reported results but no targets against which we could measure those results.

USAID Lacks Data to Measure RADP’s Progress in Meeting Annual Performance Indicator Targets

We identified missing data and inconsistencies in the performance indicators the contractors tracked year after year for both RADP-South and RADP-North.⁴⁸ Table 2 shows this trend. Both Chemonics for RADP-South and DAI for RADP-North failed to set targets for some performance indicators, did not report data for others, and changed some of the performance indicators they tracked, year after year. Furthermore, USAID did not consistently ensure the contractors set targets and report on annual progress. Although USAID and Chemonics improved in monitoring and reporting on performance indicators and their targets, the problem existed since the beginning of the program and continued throughout.

In the first year of RADP-South’s implementation Chemonics did not provide sufficient data for 7 out of 19 of its performance indicators (37 percent). For example, Chemonics did not report performance data for the indicators “number of farmers and others who have applied new technologies or management practices as a result of [U.S. government] assistance,” “number of farmers demonstrating increased wheat and high value crop productivity,” and “number of beneficiaries demonstrating increased subject matter knowledge after [U.S. government] assistance.”

In RADP-South’s second year of implementation, it did not report data in its first annual report for 9 out of 24 of its indicators (38 percent), including one, “annual rate of livestock mortality in the target livestock population.” In addition to missing data, Chemonics also did not consistently track the same indicators from year to year. In the second year, it added 11 new performance indicators and removed 6 others. Of the 11 new indicators in the second year, Chemonics did not establish targets for 4—for example, the “number of farmers for whom high-value crop productivity has increased by a minimum of 35 [percent].” Chemonics also failed to report performance data for three of these new indicators without targets.

In RADP-South’s third year, Chemonics did not report performance data for two of the new indicators it added the previous year: “number of women directly benefitting from project intervention” and “number of participants trained through project assisted training events.” Chemonics also added three new indicators: “number of direct beneficiaries from project interventions,” “number of drafted implementation plans as a result of [U.S. government] assistance,” and “number of individuals who have received [U.S. government] supported short-term human nutrition training.” For this new indicator, Chemonics did not establish a target.

DAI experienced similar problems with missing data and inconsistent reporting for RADP-North. In the first year, DAI did not set performance indicator targets, or did not report data for 20 of its 25 performance indicators (80 percent). Of the 20 indicators with insufficient data, DAI did not report on annual performance for 9 indicators (for example, “value of sales of targeted commodities as a result of [U.S. government] assistance”), failed to set a target for 1 indicator (“number of agriculture-related firms benefiting from program support”), and neither set a target nor reported data on the remaining 10 indicators (for example, “percentage increase in household income from licit agriculture in targeted areas”).

DAI’s consistency improved in RADP-North’s second year, when it missed or inconsistently reported data for 6 of its 25 performance indicators (24 percent). Of these six indicators with missing or inconsistent data, DAI did not report on annual results for four of these indicators, in either fiscal years 2015 or 2016—for example, “percentage increase in household income from licit agriculture in targeted areas.” Additionally, for the fifth indicator, “annual rate of mortality in the target livestock population,” which DAI added in fiscal year 2016, it did not include data for the indicator in its annual report. Finally, for the sixth indicator, “improved profitability of agribusinesses as a result of [U.S. government] assistance,” DAI set a target of a 20 percent improvement.

⁴⁸ Even though contractor progress reports—including the monthly, quarterly, annual, and final reports—constitute only one of the five multi-tiered monitoring tiers, they represent an important source of data for tracking RADP’s performance. According to ADS Chapter 203, USAID missions often rely on contractors as the source of data for collecting data on performance indicators.

However, because DAI did not identify a baseline dollar amount for this indicator, it had no point of comparison to determine whether the \$1.4 million it reported for this indicator met the target.

Some of the missing data—indicators the contractors did not report on—can be explained by differences in the reporting periods and misalignment with the harvesting seasons for certain RADP crops. This timing issue, however, does not account for all of the missing data discussed above. For example, for RADP-South, Chemonics did not set a target for the indicator “number of individuals who have received [U.S. government] supported short-term human nutrition training;” however, it did report on it in its annual report.

According to USAID/Afghanistan, these indicators are critical to the mission’s ability to measure progress in its effort to increase the productivity and profitability of Afghanistan’s agriculture sector. The missing data and inconsistent reporting on annual progress leave USAID and the contractors unable to fully determine whether the program’s activities were successful on an annual basis. According to USAID, without established targets the agency is unable to determine whether “progress is being made on schedule, at the levels originally envisioned.”⁴⁹ Additionally, information on whether results have been achieved over time is not available. Further, targets help determine the progress made in achieving expected results and should be used to confirm whether the assumptions and hypotheses behind the program’s design are working and to adjust implementation of the program, as necessary.⁵⁰ Missing data leaves USAID/Afghanistan with less information with which to determine whether it is making progress in achieving program goals and the mission objective, and whether it should change the program’s direction.

RADP Missed Several Annual Performance Indicator Targets

In addition to USAID/Afghanistan’s lack of data and the resulting lack of visibility over the overall progress in meeting RADP program goals and the mission objective, our analysis of the contractors’ annual reports shows that the program did not meet all of the annual targets for the three contracts in any year.

For RADP-South, Chemonics met 12 of its 19 performance indicator targets (63 percent) during its first year of implementation. For example, in fiscal year 2014, for the indicator “number of households benefitted by agriculture and alternative development interventions in targeted areas,” Chemonics set a target of 5,000 households and reported an annual result of 8,685. However, Chemonics’ ability to meet its targets decreased in its second and third years. In the second year, Chemonics met 10 of its 24 targets (42 percent). For example, for the indicator “number of farmers trained in improved post-harvest techniques,” Chemonics set a target of 9,000 farmers and reported training 11,836 farmers. Chemonics did not meet its target of 5 percent for the indicator “percent change in annual production of key crops as compared to non-beneficiary farmers.” For fiscal year 2015, Chemonics reported no change for this indicator.

In the third year, Chemonics met 12 of its 25 targets (48 percent). For example, for the indicator, “number of hectares with increased high value crop production as a result of [U.S. government] assistance,” Chemonics set a target of 1,280 and reported 11,946 hectares for the year. Chemonics did not meet its target for the indicator “number of farmers for whom high-value crop productivity has increased by a minimum of 35 percent.” Chemonics’ target for this indicator was 25,000 farmers, but it reported 2,937 farmers.

According to Chemonics, this trend in its reduced ability to meet its annual performance indicator targets reflected concerns it reported based on its surveys of Afghan farmers. In both fiscal years 2015 and 2016, the contractor described as “low” the number of farmers who reported increased wheat, high-value crop, and livestock productivity. According to USAID/Afghanistan and the contractor, these concerns were a factor behind

⁴⁹ USAID, *Performance Monitoring and Evaluation Tips - Baselines and Targets*, 2010, p. 2.

⁵⁰ USAID, ADS Chapter 201.3.5.5, “Program Cycle Operational Policy,” March 23, 2017, p. 114.

USAID/Afghanistan's decision to terminate the RADP-South contract for convenience a year before its completion date.

For RADP-North, meanwhile, DAI missed 2 of its 25 targets (8 percent) and met 3 (12 percent) in its first year of implementation. As we discussed above, DAI did not set targets or report data for the remaining 20 targets in fiscal year 2015. For the indicator "number of households benefitted by agriculture and alternative development interventions in targeted areas," DAI set a target of 7,800 households and reported benefitting 14,916. For the indicator "percentage of female participants in U.S. government-assisted programs designed to increase access to productive economic resources (assets, credit, income or employment)," DAI set a target of 15 percent and reported 14 percent. According to a USAID/Afghanistan contractor performance assessment report of DAI, the contractor's low level of first-year accomplishments was the product of unrealistic targets and delays in data collection.

Although these issues continued into the contract's second year, USAID/Afghanistan and DAI said that changes in the contractor's monitoring and evaluation systems helped improve its ability to report accurate and timely data on program performance. In its second year, DAI's performance for RADP-North improved, with the contractor meeting 17 of 25 targets (68 percent). For example, for the indicator "value of sales of targeted commodities as a result of [U.S. government] assistance," DAI set a target of \$11.9 million and reported \$14.6 million. At the same time, for the indicator "number of hectares with increased high value crop production as a result of [U.S. government] assistance," DAI set a target of 2,275 hectares, but only reported 68 hectares.

For RADP-West, Chemonics met 12 of its 20 targets (60 percent) in its first year and 11 of its 20 targets (55 percent) in its second year of implementation. However, these figures overstate the contractor's accomplishments. During its first year, RADP-West set targets of "0" for 6 of its 20 indicators—for example, "percent decrease in post-harvest food losses in activity sites." USAID/Afghanistan recognized this and highlighted the contractor's shortcomings, such as stalled implementation of program activities, inconsistent reporting on program accomplishments, and difficulties setting indicator targets, in a contractor performance assessment report. These shortcomings continued into the contract's second year. For example, for the indicator "number of policies/regulations/administrative procedures... as a result of [U.S. government] assistance..." Chemonics set a target of two policies and reported zero. USAID/Afghanistan recognized Chemonics' continued shortcomings, which ultimately contributed to USAID/Afghanistan's decision to terminate the RADP-West contract 3 years short of its completion date.

In addition, USAID/Afghanistan officials and their third-party monitors noted concerns about meeting some targets. For example, one USAID/Afghanistan official cited security concerns as a reason RADP-South might miss its targets and therefore may need to adjust them. Multiple USAID/Afghanistan officials noted the difficulty of setting targets for RADP-North, but did not provide further explanation. Further, one USAID/Afghanistan official noted it was particularly difficult to measure the performance indicator for technology adoption because it could take years for program beneficiaries to adopt new or improved technologies and management practices. USAID/Afghanistan's third-party monitor identified deficiencies when it verified and reported on select activities, such as farmer training, for RADP-South in fiscal year 2015 and for RADP-North in fiscal year 2016. In the case of RADP-South, the third-party monitor noted farmers' appreciation of RADP trainings but highlighted several instances of old, damaged, or non-existent facilities in which to conduct farming demonstrations. In the case of RADP-North, the third-party monitor reported that over 90 percent of farmers found the training useful but that fewer than 10 percent had received text messages critical to one of the program's marketing activities.⁵¹ Farming demonstrations and marketing activities are both key to achieving RADP's goals and the USAID/Afghanistan objective of improving food and economic security for rural Afghans.

⁵¹ See USAID, *Regional Agriculture Development Program-North Fiscal Year 2016 Annual Report*, October 31, 2016, p. 36. To establish direct and targeted communications between actors in the value chains, under RADP-North, DAI provided marketing grants to help suppliers send agriculture-related text messages to farmers. This allowed suppliers to develop a good working relationship with existing and potential new buyers for their products.

Whereas missing performance data means that USAID cannot fully determine whether RADP achieved results over time and whether the program as designed is making progress in achieving program goals and the mission objective, missed targets indicate that RADP is not achieving desired results and that USAID may need to modify the program and its activities. These two issues raise questions about the program's performance and whether or not it will achieve its desired goals and objective.

USAID Has Not Completed the Required Independent Evaluations of RADP

USAID/Afghanistan has not obtained an independent, third-party evaluation of RADP to determine the extent to which the program has achieved its overall program goals and the USAID/Afghanistan objective, as required by ADS guidance and the terms of the RADP contracts. This is despite having spent \$132 million of the program's \$301 million on two terminated contracts. Specifically, ADS Chapter 203 calls for independent third parties to evaluate the contractor's achievement of program results. The ADS does not specify whether these should be mid-term or final evaluations, but calls for USAID to schedule them so their findings inform future programming decisions.⁵² Although the ADS does not require mid-term evaluations, the four RADP contracts all require USAID/Afghanistan to commission external third parties to conduct both mid-term and final evaluations that measure the progress being made to achieve program goals and the USAID/Afghanistan objective.

In October 2017, after we completed our fieldwork, USAID/Afghanistan told us that USAID's Bureau for Food Security contracted with a firm to initiate a mid-term evaluation of the RADP-South, RADP-North, and RADP-West contracts beginning in November 2017. This evaluation did not include the contractually required mid-term evaluation of RADP-East because it had not reached its midpoint in implementation. According to USAID/Afghanistan officials, the evaluation of RADP-South, -North, and -West, would be completed, reviewed, and published by March 2018.

When we requested an update on the RADP evaluation in early May 2018, USAID/Afghanistan officials told us that the evaluation of RADP-South, -North, and -West, scheduled to be done by March 2018, was not completed. Further, the officials told us that the Bureau for Food Security now also planned to include RADP-East in its evaluation and that it expected the final report from the evaluation to be completed in the first quarter of fiscal year 2019. However, at the same time, officials from the Bureau for Food Security said that the bureau's contract did not include an evaluation of RADP-East and that they only received an e-mail request from USAID/Afghanistan expressing interest in adding a RADP-East evaluation a few days earlier. Additionally, the officials said USAID/Afghanistan had not yet provided the Bureau for Food Security with a new statement of work for the evaluation expanding it to include RADP-East. According to both Bureau for Food Security and USAID/Afghanistan officials, this expansion will impact timeframes and the budget for completion of the ongoing evaluation of the RADP-South, -North, and -West contracts. In its comments on a draft of this report, USAID/Afghanistan said that it had created and implemented a plan to conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of RADP-East and set a target completion date of June 30, 2019.

According to USAID's original contract and work plan for the RADP evaluation, USAID would assess the three contracts to determine the effectiveness of the program and identify which activities worked and which need to be changed ahead of new programs. As we have previously reported, key principles for conducting an effective and comprehensive program assessment include developing and documenting a planned approach and establishing timeframes with milestones.⁵³ An evaluation of RADP can provide USAID/Afghanistan with the information and analysis it needs to prevent it from repeating mistakes and increase the chances that ongoing and future USAID investments in Afghanistan's agriculture sector will yield greater benefits than past ones. One

⁵² USAID, ADS Chapter 203, "Assessing and Learning," January 17, 2012, and November 2, 2012.

⁵³ SIGAR, *Afghan Women: Comprehensive Assessments Needed to Determine and Measure DOD, State, and USAID Progress*, SIGAR Audit 15-24, December 18, 2014; and U.S. Government Accountability Office, *Defense Management: DOD Needs to Improve Future Assessments of Roles and Missions*, GAO-14-668, July 31, 2014.

such program is USAID's Promoting Value Chain-West, a \$19 million program that works in three of the same value chains as RADP-West, which USAID terminated in October 2016.

Moreover, an evaluation of RADP promotes accountability by disclosing findings to key stakeholders like the Afghan government and other donor nations, and enhances learning by generating knowledge about the magnitude and determinants of RADP's model on achieving greater market development.⁵⁴ These outcomes are increasingly important as USAID/Afghanistan uses RADP activities as the foundation for its overall agricultural efforts through 2024, according to the agency's 2017 consolidated plan for agricultural projects in Afghanistan.⁵⁵

USAID PARTIALLY MET ITS REQUIREMENTS TO INCORPORATE SUSTAINABILITY INTO RADP'S DESIGN, BUT DID NOT CONDUCT A MANDATORY SUSTAINABILITY ANALYSIS

USAID Incorporated Some Aspects of Sustainability into RADP's Design and Coordinated with the Afghan Government

ADS guidance calls for USAID missions to include sustainability as a core operational principle from the start of a program. The guidance also calls for the partner government to be involved in overall strategy development and implementation, and it states that involving the host government is an important aspect of program sustainability. We found that USAID considered aspects of sustainability during the design phase of RADP and identified sustaining some program achievements as a goal of the program in the design documents. These achievements include building linkages between farmers and businesses, and building the capacity of the Afghan government to monitor, enforce, and improve agriculture sector regulations through the enabling environment component of the program. USAID/Afghanistan envisioned that the enabling environment component would focus on working with the private sector and the Afghan government to identify and strengthen agriculture regulatory constraints, support farmer organizations, and increase international trade opportunities. Although this component was part of the RADP-South contract, it would be implemented across Afghanistan.

In January 2018, an official with USAID/Afghanistan's Office of Agriculture told us that, with USAID's termination of the RADP-South contract in November 2017, the enabling environment component was also terminated, and USAID did not plan to continue it under RADP-North and RADP-East, which are expected to continue through 2019 and 2021, respectively. Later, in its comments on a draft of this report, USAID/Afghanistan said that this was incorrect and that this component was given to RADP-North. However, the August 27, 2017, modification for the RADP-North contract that USAID/Afghanistan gave us in September 2017 did not include this change.

The RADP project appraisal document and contracts contain sustainability-focused language that envisions long-term positive impacts for individual farm households, farmer organizations, agribusinesses, the Afghan government, and the environment. For example, the project appraisal document notes that RADP will work to improve food security for farm households by training farmers, introducing new technologies, increasing diversity of their crops, and using post-harvest techniques to increase the quantity and quality of food. Additionally, the project appraisal document notes that the Afghan government's capacity to monitor, improve, and enforce regulations in the agriculture sector after the program ends is important for program sustainability, and that RADP will help the Afghan government to achieve this capacity. Finally, the RADP contracts discuss

⁵⁴ USAID, *USAID Evaluation Policy, Evaluation – Learning from Experience*, January 2011.

⁵⁵ See USAID, *Agriculture Consolidated Project Appraisal Document – Intermediate Result 1.2: Vibrant and Prosperous Agriculture Sector Developed*, April 3, 2017. This document consolidates existing USAID programming and anticipates new programs, in support of developing Afghanistan's agriculture sector through 2024.

sustainability by linking farmers and the private sector through the value chain approach to continue activities after the program ends. For example, the contracts note that USAID/Afghanistan will develop farmer and agribusiness capacity, and will introduce the use of appropriate technologies and agricultural practices to improve production techniques and market opportunities for crops and livestock in the agriculture sector. In addition, during our interviews, several current and former USAID officials told us that USAID designed RADP to build the linkage between farmers and the private sector, and shift from short-term activities to long-term sustainable goals by supporting the private sector, with the aim that the program activities between farmers and the private sector will continue after the program ends.

USAID/Afghanistan coordinated with the Afghan government to help ensure the sustainability of the program. During our interviews, multiple USAID and Afghan officials described there being consistent communication between both parties during the design of RADP, a key aspect of sustainability as noted in ADS 201. This communication involved staff from USAID/Afghanistan's Office of Agriculture, the contractors, and Afghan government entities, primarily at the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock. One ministry official confirmed that there was a high level of involvement by Afghan officials during the program's design and implementation. The official also told us that USAID designed RADP to build capacity within the ministry to help sustain program achievements. As a further example of coordination, DAI's Chief of Party for RADP-East said that USAID identified the value chains it selected for RADP-East through an open process involving many Afghan and international agriculture experts, and Afghan and U.S. government officials, including holding a 2-day focus group meeting with Afghan government officials and farmers to discuss value chain selection. Similarly, a USAID official said that high-level meetings occurred between USAID and ministry officials during RADP's design and during the ministry's ongoing annual reviews of contractor work plans.

In addition to regular meetings and work plan reviews, USAID and the ministry signed memoranda of understanding to coordinate their activities at the central and provincial levels, and set clear expectations for both parties. For example, a ministry official also noted that RADP will identify regulatory constraints to economic growth within value chains and work with the Afghan government to develop laws and policies that help create an environment that encourages greater economic growth. The constraints analyses were part of the program's enabling environment component led by Chemonics under the RADP-South contract and examined Afghanistan as a whole. However, as noted, USAID's termination of RADP-South ended these efforts for the entire program.

USAID Did Not Conduct a Mandatory Sustainability Analysis for RADP

As required by ADS 201, conducting a sustainability analysis during program design is critical for identifying economic and institutional capacity, as well as technical or sector challenges that might affect the sustainability of program outcomes. More specifically, a sustainability analysis examines (1) the willingness of the local entities or individuals to take ownership of the program, (2) the institutional capacity of all stakeholders involved in the program to help ensure sustainment of program achievements, and (3) the political and financial feasibility to ensure that there is a political will and financial ability to sustain these achievements. The analysis explains how a program intends to address these factors to provide guidance for implementation.⁵⁶

Although USAID/Afghanistan discussed sustainability in the project appraisal document, as ADS 201 requires, we found that the mission did not conduct the mandatory sustainability analysis. When we asked USAID/Afghanistan about the sustainability analysis, officials asserted that the mission met its ADS requirements through the project appraisal document's sustainability section, which is a summary of how the program will focus on sustainability. According to USAID's additional guidance on sustainability analysis

⁵⁶ USAID, ADS Chapter 201, "Planning," July 2013; and USAID, *Discussion Note – Sustainability Analysis Methods for Project Design*, March 2014.

methods for program design, the mandatory sustainability analysis required by ADS 201 is a deeper analysis that explores broader sustainability considerations for each element of a program, such as financial implications, institutional capacity of stakeholders involved in the program, political dynamics, local demand and ownership, and social and cultural factors.⁵⁷ The summary in the project appraisal document does not meet this requirement. For example, the sustainability analysis should include an explanation of whether the host government has bought in to the program and its motivation to maintain the achieved results of the program. The summary does not contain this explanation. The sustainability analysis is also supposed to include an assessment of the specific institutions and government systems critical to the program's sustainability, to ensure that the Afghan government has sufficient skills, knowledge, policies, systems, and staff to support the sustainability of the program achievements. Again, the summary does not contain this assessment.

According to an official from USAID's Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs, USAID added the requirement that project appraisal documents include a sustainability analysis when it revised ADS 201 in March 2012. The official said that because USAID began to design RADP prior to this revision, the agency followed the previous ADS 201 guidance, which did not require a sustainability analysis. When the Acting Mission Director approved the RADP activity approval document in June 2012, it met all of the sustainability requirements in the pre-March 2012 version of ADS 201.⁵⁸ According to this official, it likely took USAID/Afghanistan some time to operationalize the new ADS 201 guidance. Therefore, it is not surprising that the RADP activity approval document followed the requirements in the previous ADS since the document was probably still going through the development, review, and clearance process when the new ADS was issued. However, we maintain that programs should be evaluated and approved based on the policy, regulations, and laws that are in place at the time of approval. We believe it is even more important to comply with current policy, regulations, and laws that may have been changed to reflect lessons learned, such as the importance of sustainability, when proposing a multi-million dollar program. As such, regardless of what USAID calls the RADP design document, it should have met the sustainability requirements in the March 2012 version of ADS 201.

As noted above, the ADS calls sustainability a core operational principle for achieving program results. By not conducting the mandatory sustainability analysis, USAID/Afghanistan is implementing a program without full knowledge of how RADP intends to meet its sustainability objectives, risking U.S. taxpayer money on contracts totaling \$301 million. Without a sustainability analysis to examine the capacity of the stakeholders involved in the program and the host government's willingness and ability to maintain the program results, USAID/Afghanistan will continue operating RADP and other value chain-based programs without full knowledge of whether the programs' results will be sustainable.

CONCLUSION

USAID was proactive in using lessons learned from its previous programs to design RADP. As USAID/Afghanistan intends to use RADP as the cornerstone of its agricultural programming through 2024, collecting and using lessons learned will be essential to ensuring future taxpayer investments are made wisely. However, the lack of performance evaluations of RADP as a whole or its regional contracts leaves the U.S. and Afghan governments uncertain about the program's effectiveness in achieving sustainable, agriculture-led economic growth by focusing on private sector value chains. Furthermore, USAID/Afghanistan terminated two of the four RADP contracts, RADP-South and RADP-West, without full knowledge of whether the program's assumptions about private sector agricultural value chains produced intended results.

Evaluations of program performance are a required part of USAID's oversight requirements and can help inform the agency of which activities have led to success and should therefore continue, and which ones it

⁵⁷ USAID, *Discussion Note – Sustainability Analysis Methods for Project Design*, March 2014.

⁵⁸ Prior to the revision of ADS 201 in March 2012, USAID used the term "activity approval document" rather than "project appraisal document."

needs to modify to better achieve a program's intended objectives. The results of USAID's ongoing mid-term evaluation, when completed, can help the agency identify RADP's progress in achieving its program goals and the USAID/Afghanistan objective for agriculture, and whether adjustments to the program are needed to safeguard the taxpayer funds that USAID spent and will spend on the program.

Now that USAID/Afghanistan has a plan to conduct a single mid-term evaluation covering all four RADP contracts, it has time to evaluate the RADP-East contract and make any necessary adjustments to enhance its effectiveness. The evaluation's results can also inform future USAID agriculture programs in Afghanistan. In fact, USAID/Afghanistan has already awarded a contract for a new agricultural program—Promoting Value Chain-West—that has similar goals as RADP-West, such as targeting value chains, without knowing what worked and what did not work within this region under RADP-West. More importantly, USAID/Afghanistan can use the evaluations' findings to adjust its agriculture portfolio, which is based on the RADP model, as necessary.

Additionally, although USAID/Afghanistan designed RADP with prior agriculture programs' lessons learned and sustainability of achievements in mind, it did not conduct a required sustainability analysis during the program's design. Without this analysis, USAID/Afghanistan may be implementing the two ongoing RADP contracts, RADP-North and RADP-East, without full knowledge of whether Afghan agribusinesses can sustain the program's activities after its completion, potentially jeopardizing U.S. taxpayers' investment in a program that has spent over \$183 million of \$301 million awarded thus far, and that has at least \$55 million yet to be spent on its two remaining contracts.

RECOMMENDATIONS

To assess USAID's current approach to agriculture programming targeting value chains and ensure that USAID/Afghanistan has time to adjust RADP-East, if necessary, we recommend that the USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan:

- 1. Create and implement a plan, with timeframes, to conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of RADP-East, in accordance with the RADP-East contract.**

To assess and adjust USAID's current and planned approach to agriculture programming targeting value chains, if necessary, we recommend that the USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan:

- 2. Apply the results of the RADP evaluation to modify, as appropriate, planned and ongoing programs, such as the Promoting Value Chain-West program and other activities in the Afghan agriculture sector covered by the April 2017 USAID Consolidated Project Appraisal Document.**

To ensure that USAID's two ongoing RADP contracts, RADP-North and RADP-East, meet USAID's sustainability requirements and can demonstrate how USAID/Afghanistan will sustain program achievements, we recommend that the USAID Mission Director for Afghanistan:

- 3. Immediately complete the required sustainability analysis for both RADP-North and RADP-East.**

AGENCY COMMENTS

We provided a draft of this report to USAID for review and comment. We received written comments from USAID/Afghanistan, which are reproduced in appendix III. USAID/Afghanistan also provided technical comments, which we incorporated into this report, as appropriate. USAID/Afghanistan concurred with two of the three recommendations and did not concur with the third.

With respect to the first recommendation, USAID/Afghanistan concurred and said it has created and implemented a plan, with timeframes, to conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of RADP-East.

Additionally, USAID/Afghanistan provided a target closure date of June 30, 2019. Because RADP-East is scheduled to end in July 2021, this timing will allow USAID/Afghanistan to adjust the program, as appropriate, during the approximately 25 months of implementation remaining. This recommendation will remain open until we receive a copy of USAID/Afghanistan's plan and the completed mid-term performance evaluation.

USAID/Afghanistan concurred with our second recommendation and said it will apply the findings of the RADP evaluation when completed to modify, as appropriate, planned and ongoing activities. Additionally, USAID/Afghanistan provided a target closure date of March 31, 2019. With the Promoting Value Chains-West program scheduled to end in September 2020, this timing will allow USAID/Afghanistan to adjust the program, as appropriate, during the approximately 18 months of implementation remaining. However, if the evaluation is completed as anticipated in March 2019, this calls into question whether USAID/Afghanistan will be able to adjust RADP-North since only 2 months of implementation will be left before the contract ends in May 2019. Applying the evaluation's findings will be important considering that RADP is the foundation for USAID/Afghanistan's agriculture programming, as stated in the April 2017 USAID Consolidated Project Appraisal Document. This recommendation will remain open until we receive documentation that USAID/Afghanistan considered and incorporated, as appropriate, findings from the evaluation of RADP into planned and ongoing agriculture activities.

USAID/Afghanistan did not concur with our third recommendation. The agency requested that we withdraw this recommendation because it believes it performed the level of analysis required by the ADS 201 in effect in March 2012 and incorporated sustainability into its RADP project design in a wide variety of ways. While we do not dispute that USAID/Afghanistan completed a summary sustainability analysis and included it in the project appraisal document, USAID/Afghanistan did not analyze all the key sustainability issues identified in the ADS, which identifies the sustainability analysis as "a new requirement for all project designs."⁵⁹ Furthermore, ADS 201.3.9.3(c) states that "missions should summarize [the sustainability] analysis in a short document to be included in the 'Project Analyses' annex to the [project appraisal document]."⁶⁰ The summary included in the project appraisal document lacks an analysis of host government buy-in and its capacity to support the sustainability of the program achievements. Without this information, USAID/Afghanistan cannot be certain of RADP's sustainability or the viability of the RADP model as a foundation for its future agriculture programming. Accordingly, we maintain that the recommendation is valid and appropriate and will remain open until USAID/Afghanistan completes a sustainability analysis that addresses the elements missing from its summary.

⁵⁹ USAID, ADS Chapter 201, "Planning," March 2012, p. 44.

⁶⁰ USAID, ADS Chapter 201, "Planning," March 2012, p. 45.

APPENDIX I - SCOPE AND METHODOLOGY

This report provides the results of SIGAR’s audit of the U.S. Agency for International Development’s (USAID) Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP), which is intended to support agriculture efforts in Afghanistan from 2013 through 2021. RADP is comprised of four 5-year contracts in the four regions of Afghanistan—South, North, West, and East—awarded to two contractors, Chemonics Inc. and Development Alternatives Inc. (DAI). The four contracts are:

- RADP-South, which Chemonics implemented from October 2013 through October 2018;
- RADP-North, which DAI started implementing in May 2014 and is expected to continue through May 2019;
- RADP-West, which Chemonics implemented from August 2014 through September 2016 when USAID terminated it for convenience; and
- RADP-East, which DAI started implementing in July 2016 and is expected to continue through July 2021.

The objectives of this audit were to determine the extent to which USAID (1) applied lessons learned from its previous agriculture efforts to the design of RADP; (2) conducted required oversight of contract implementation and modified the RADP contracts as a result of challenges encountered, if any; (3) assessed overall program achievements; and (4) incorporated sustainability of program achievements into RADP’s design, as guidance requires.

To accomplish our objectives, we reviewed relevant regulations and guidance, including the Federal Acquisition Regulation and sections of USAID’s Automated Directives System (ADS) that were effective from 2011 to 2016. For all of the objectives, we reviewed and analyzed USAID’s contracts, modifications, and contract deliverables for RADP, specifically, baseline data reports, monitoring and evaluation reports, work plans, annual and quarterly progress reports, and final reports. We interviewed officials from USAID’s Office of Afghanistan and Pakistan Affairs; the Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning; and the Bureau for Food Security; and from the USAID Mission for Afghanistan (USAID/Afghanistan) Offices of Program and Project Development, Acquisition and Assistance, and Agriculture. We also interviewed representatives from Chemonics and DAI, DAI’s subcontracted third-party monitor; USAID’s third-party monitor; the Afghan government’s Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock; and international organizations also involved with agriculture. We also collected information from these sources through requests for information and our own independent research.

To determine the extent to which USAID applied lessons learned from its previous agriculture efforts to the design of RADP, we reviewed ADS Chapters 201 (“Planning”) and Chapter 203 (“Assessing and Learning”), and the agency’s program design guidance to identify USAID’s requirements for applying lessons learned during program design. Then, we analyzed the RADP contracts, contract modifications, and design documents to identify USAID’s approach for applying lessons learned and determine which programs influenced RADP’s design. We obtained those program’s final reports and evaluations from USAID/Afghanistan, USAID’s Development Experience Clearinghouse, and Afghan Info, and reviewed the lessons learned they offered to USAID for future programming.⁶¹ In addition, we interviewed current and former USAID officials, including officials who designed RADP, to determine the extent to which USAID incorporated those lessons learned into the RADP’s design.

⁶¹ Development Experience Clearinghouse is USAID’s online resource for USAID-funded technical and program documentation uploaded worldwide. USAID/Afghanistan manages Afghan Info, which is a dynamic, web-based information management system that stores USAID’s programming information in Afghanistan. Afghan Info contains progress reports and implementation- and performance-level information across USAID’s development portfolios.

To determine the extent to which USAID conducted required oversight of contract implementation and modified the program because of challenges encountered, we obtained the contracts, contract modifications, and contract deliverables and assessed whether USAID/Afghanistan's inventory of contract deliverables matched the contractors'. We narrowed our focus to the deliverables relevant to program performance, namely, work plans, baseline data collection plans, monitoring and evaluation plans, quarterly and annual progress reports, and final reports. We assessed which of these documents the contractors prepared and submitted to USAID/Afghanistan versus which of them USAID/Afghanistan reviewed and eventually approved. To identify the causes of unapproved or delayed documents, we requested and reviewed USAID/Afghanistan's contractor performance assessment reports and the contractors' quarterly and annual reports. We supplemented these findings with testimonial evidence from USAID/Afghanistan officials familiar with the program's deliverables.

To determine the extent to which USAID assessed overall program achievements, we reviewed USAID/Afghanistan's system for collecting and analyzing data, and evaluating the findings from that data. We requested information from USAID/Afghanistan, Chemonics, and DAI on RADP's program performance—that is, data that captured the results of program activities annually and cumulatively. Specifically, we compared these results, which we obtained from the contractors' annual reports, against the targets USAID/Afghanistan and contractor officials set, as stated in their monitoring and evaluation plans. This analysis yielded a list of targets that the program had met, missed, or lacked enough data to determine, providing a high-level view of the program's record of performance. We corroborated these findings with other sources, including USAID/Afghanistan's annual contractor performance assessment reports, third-party monitors' activity reports, and USAID officials' statements. To establish whether USAID/Afghanistan used this data to commission and complete an independent evaluation, as required in the RADP contracts, we reviewed additional USAID/Afghanistan and contractor records from fiscal years 2014 through 2016, and then followed up with USAID/Afghanistan for details regarding other USAID plans to evaluate the program.

To determine the extent to which USAID incorporated the sustainment of program activities into RADP's design, as required by ADS 201, we reviewed USAID's requirements for incorporating the sustainability of program activities and achievements into programs' design, reviewed the RADP contracts, and interviewed current and former USAID officials, Afghan government officials, and officials from Chemonics and DAI. We obtained documents and records from USAID on the agency's approach to incorporating sustainability in RADP's design. Using our document analyses and interviews, we then determined whether USAID met the ADS requirements for incorporating sustainability at the time of the program's design. We also determined the extent to which USAID involved the Afghan government, as required, to sustain RADP's achievements by analyzing program documents and interviewing current and former USAID and Afghan government officials.

We utilized some computer-processed data from USAID to identify the programs the agency implemented from 2002 through 2017 that supported agriculture efforts in Afghanistan. We determined the data was sufficiently reliable for the purposes of this audit by corroborating the information USAID provided us with other sources, such as the contracts and modifications, USAID financial reports, and interviews with agency officials. We also assessed internal controls to determine the extent to which USAID and the contractors had systems in place to oversee and report on RADP. The results of our assessment are included in the body of this report.

We conducted our audit work in Kabul, Afghanistan, and Washington, D.C., from December 2016 through July 2018, in accordance with generally accepted government auditing standards. Those standards require that we plan and perform the audit to obtain sufficient, appropriate evidence to provide a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. We believe that the evidence obtained provides a reasonable basis for our findings and conclusions based on our audit objectives. This audit was performed by SIGAR under the authority of Public Law No. 110-181, as amended, and the Inspector General Act of 1978, as amended.

APPENDIX II - PRIOR USAID AGRICULTURE PROGRAMS THAT CONTRIBUTED LESSONS LEARNED TO THE DESIGN OF RADP

We determined that the U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID) Mission for Afghanistan (USAID/Afghanistan) identified and incorporated lessons learned from past agriculture programs into the design of the Regional Agriculture Development Program (RADP). Through our analysis of RADP design documents, we identified 15 prior agriculture programs that influenced USAID/Afghanistan's design of RADP, as shown in table 3.

Table 3 - Prior USAID Agriculture Programs That Influenced RADP's Design

Program Name	Years Implemented	Total Spent (\$ millions)	Objectives
Rebuilding Agriculture Markets Program	2003 - 2006	\$142.3	Increase the marketable value of wheat, fresh and dried vegetable, fruit, livestock, and poultry by \$250 million.
Alternative Development Program-Southwest	2005 - 2009	\$118.4	Rebuild and accelerate licit economic growth and business activity where poppy is thriving, and provide an immediate alternative source of income to poor households.
Accelerating Sustainable Agriculture Program	2006 - 2011	\$132.6	Improve agriculture production by increasing sales and exports of agriculture products, creating new jobs, and introducing modern agricultural technologies and practices, and helping the Afghan government and agricultural ministries to formulate agricultural sector policies and strategies.
Serbia Agribusiness Project	2007 - 2012	Amount not available ¹	Implement a broad array of technical assistance, training, and grant activities throughout the berry fruit sub-sector value chain.
Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture and Afghanistan Vouchers for Increased Production in Agriculture Plus	2008 - 2011	\$469.4	Increase access to high-quality agricultural supplies to improve yields and food availability, and enhance rural families' farm production and productivity through cash-for-work projects and grants.
Lebanon Business Linkages Initiative	2008 - 2011	Amount not available ¹	Expand market access through business linkages and improve access to finance and other supporting markets.
Afghanistan Farm Services Alliance	2008 - 2012	\$8.5	Work with Afghans to develop farm service centers, which are profit-oriented, privately-owned enterprises intended to provide the agricultural supplies, services, and market linkages Afghan farmers need to transition to successful commercial agriculture.
Incentives Driving Economic Alternatives for North, East, and West	2009 - 2015	\$156.4	Improve economic opportunities in rural areas and reduce dependency on illicit opium production.
Agriculture Credit Enhancement	2010 - 2015	\$74.4	Establish the Agricultural Development Fund and manage it until its transition to the Afghan government, and increase the availability of credit to farmers.

Commercial Horticulture and Agriculture Marketing Program	2010 - 2019	\$51.9	Work with leading Afghan processing and export firms to enhance the supply chain, marketing, and export promotion of Afghan fruits and nuts.
Southern Regional Agriculture Development Program	2011 - 2012	\$69.8	Improve agricultural production through agricultural infrastructure, improve access to agribusiness markets through grants and training, improve the local institutional capacity Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock and the Directorate of Agriculture, Irrigation and Livestock.
Afghan Agricultural Research and Extension Development	2012 - 2014	\$6.8	Provide capacity building for the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock and its provincial directorates with the aim of developing and deploying technology and knowledge-based solutions and provide advisory service to farmers.
Irrigation and Watershed Management Program	2013 - 2013	\$14.9	Expand and enhance Afghan government and community-level capacity to manage water resources to improve agricultural production and productivity.
Afghanistan Agriculture Extension Project II	2014 - 2017	\$20.2	Build the capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock and its directorates to deliver effective extension services to rural clientele in targeted regions.
Capacity Building and Change Management Program II	2014 - 2017	\$20.7	Strengthen the human, financial, and institutional capacity of the Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation, and Livestock.

Source: SIGAR analysis of information from USAID and the Government Accountability Office.

¹ Because these were USAID programs in Serbia and Lebanon, USAID/Afghanistan did not track spending for the programs. However, USAID collected lessons learned from each program and applied them to RADP.

APPENDIX III - COMMENTS FROM THE U.S. AGENCY FOR INTERNATIONAL DEVELOPMENT



MEMORANDUM

July 20, 2018

TO: John F. Sopko
Special Inspector General for
Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR)

FROM: Herbert Smith, Mission Director *W*

SUBJECT: USAID Response to Draft SIGAR Report titled "Regional Agriculture Development Program: Additional Evaluations and Assessments Could Improve the Performance and Sustainability of USAID/Afghanistan's \$301 Million Program" (SIGAR Report 18-XX under Code 117A)

REF: SIGAR Transmittal email dated 06/21/2018

USAID thanks SIGAR for the opportunity to comment on this report.

USAID is proud of the goals and accomplishments of the Regional Agricultural Development Program (RADP) and its four regional contracts. Approximately 80 percent of Afghans depend on agriculture for their livelihoods, at all levels of the value chain from production to end processing. In order to improve food security and incomes for Afghans in rural areas, RADP built, and continues to build, the capacity of Afghanistan to produce more and higher quality crops, focusing on wheat, high-value crops, and livestock. RADP interventions increased licit agricultural production, and strengthened the viability of Afghanistan's agricultural production from farm to market, building the capacity of the private sector to continue to make progress even after the end of RADP.

The RADP authorization was signed in 2012, and the first of its contracts was awarded in 2013. Since then, RADP and its component contracts have resulted in the following achievements:

- Supported over 150,000 households with targeted agriculture interventions;
- Increased agricultural produce sales by \$190 million;

U.S. Agency for International Development
Great Massoud Road
Kabul, Afghanistan

Tel: 202-216-6288 / 0700-108-001
Email: kabul.usaidinformation@usaid.gov
<http://afghanistan.usaid.gov>

- Increased productivity for key crops, including an increase of 54% for wheat, Afghanistan’s staple crop, as reported by RADP-N in its 2017 annual report.

SIGAR Recommendation No. 1

Create and implement a plan, with time frames, to conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of RADP-East, in accordance with the RADP-East contract.

USAID Comments: USAID concurs with Recommendation 1. USAID has created and implemented a plan, with time frames, to conduct a mid-term performance evaluation of RADP-East. The performance evaluation is being conducted by PEEL, which is managed out of USAID/W.

Target Closure Date: June 30, 2019.

SIGAR Recommendation No. 2

Apply the results of the RADP evaluation to modify, as appropriate, planned and ongoing programs, such as the Promoting Value Chain-West program and other activities in the Afghan agriculture sector covered by the April 2017 USAID Consolidated Project Appraisal Document.

USAID Comments: USAID concurs with Recommendation 2. USAID will apply the findings of the RADP evaluation when completed to modify, as appropriate, planned and on-going activities.

Target Closure Date: March 31, 2019.

SIGAR Recommendation No. 3

Immediately complete the required sustainability analysis for both RADP-North and RADP-East.

USAID Comments: USAID does not concur with Recommendation 3.

USAID performed a sustainability analysis at the PAD level, as required by the ADS 201 in effect in March 2012. USAID/Afghanistan further considered and incorporated sustainability into its RADP project design in a wide variety of ways, many of which are well-detailed by SIGAR in its report (see pp 24-25). USAID believes it met the ADS 201 sustainability requirements effective March 2012, especially in light of guidance in Section 201.3.9.3 stating: “Not every project will undergo the same breadth and depth of analysis. ... Projects

designed in highly dynamic environments may for example reduce the depth of some aspects of analysis at this stage of design and include them in early stages of project implementation.”

USAID requests that this recommendation be withdrawn.

Appendices:

A – Technical Comments

Cc: U.S. Embassy/Kabul

APPENDIX IV - ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

Julie E. Silvers, Senior Program Manager

James Smith, Analyst-in-Charge

Ahmad Fawad, Program Analyst

Sarat Ganji, Program Analyst

Michael Graham, Senior Program Analyst

This performance audit was conducted
under project code SIGAR-117A.

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- improve management and accountability over funds administered by U.S. and Afghan agencies and their contractors;
- improve contracting and contract management processes;
- prevent fraud, waste, and abuse; and
- advance U.S. interests in reconstructing Afghanistan.

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- Phone International: +1-866-329-8893
- Phone DSN International: 312-664-0378
- U.S. fax: +1-703-601-4065

Public Affairs

Public Affairs Officer

- Phone: 703-545-5974
- Email: sigar.pentagon.ccr.mbx.public-affairs@mail.mil
- Mail: SIGAR Public Affairs
2530 Crystal Drive
Arlington, VA 22202