



Proposed USAID Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance (HA)

For many years, InterAction has engaged with U.S. Government (USG) efforts to reform humanitarian assistance to ensure it is more efficient and effective. To compliment the discussion around global humanitarian system reform, parallel opportunities to improve USG-specific activities should also be pursued. In its paper on [Humanitarian Reform Outcomes](#), InterAction highlighted alignment between USG commitments in international fora and potential USG humanitarian reforms. As USAID unveiled structural reforms for input, InterAction and its members engaged in a series of briefings with USAID officials at both leadership and working levels, including those engaged in shaping the proposed Bureau for Humanitarian Assistance. While efforts to achieve further reforms must be ongoing – including for offices that sit within different U.S. agencies engaged in humanitarian assistance activities – improvements to USAID’s restructuring marks a positive step forward.

Proposed Bureau Overview:

Lead by an Assistant to the Administrator (AtA), the proposed HA Bureau will bring together different modalities (sectors) of humanitarian assistance managed across USAID into a single bureau. This primarily impacts the existing offices of Foreign Disaster Assistance and Food for Peace – which together manage nearly \$6 billion in annual appropriated funding. The HA Bureau will combine various programmatic and policy functions into a single management structure with eight offices underneath it. These include offices for: Humanitarian Business and Management Operations; Field and Response Operations; Partnerships and Strategic Communications; Humanitarian Policy, Programs and Partnerships, Technical and Program Quality; Africa; Asia, Latin American and the Caribbean; and the Middle East, North Africa and Europe.

Areas of Increased Effectiveness and Coordination:

- **Streamlining all forms of humanitarian assistance.** Combining food and non-food humanitarian assistance into a single bureau could allow USAID greater coherence, efficiency and effectiveness in providing life-saving assistance, regardless of sector or modality.
- **Higher priority.** Elevating USAID’s humanitarian functions to a bureau level could elevate USAID leadership on humanitarian priorities in the inter-agency process within USG.
- **Speaking in unison.** Combining core humanitarian offices could allow for higher-level representation in international fora and for the USG to speak in them with a more united voice.
- **Bridging humanitarian and development work.** Continuing and potentially expanding support for programming that bridges humanitarian and development objectives – such as the resilience and development work implemented under Food for Peace non-emergency programs—could lead to more holistic and effective responses to humanitarian challenges.

Areas for Further Consultation or Continued Questions:

- **Pursue additional reforms.** In accordance with the Grand Bargain, we recommend USAID:
 - Explore how to engage in increased multi-year funding in protracted conflict and/or displacement settings;
 - Develop a mechanism to provide more timely response in sudden onset emergencies;
 - Better plan and coordinate humanitarian activities across the government, including with other agencies;
 - Implement a broader strategy that integrates people affected by protracted crises and/or state fragility into country/regional strategic planning and development programming.
- **Connect policy, assistance, and programming.** To better connect policy, humanitarian assistance and evidence-based programming, a strong two-way information channel should be established between the proposed HA bureau and other critical bureaus and offices including: the proposed Bureaus for Policy, Resources and Performance, and Development, Democracy, and Innovation, as well as, the Hubs on Gender Equality and Women’s Empowerment and Youth and Inclusive Development, and Centers on Education and Environment, Energy, and Infrastructure.
- **Integrate humanitarian work in the field.** As USAID integrates humanitarian assistance functions into a single bureau in Washington, it must also harmonize humanitarian activities at the field level. This includes providing a seamless approach between food and non-food programming and better coordinating with other USG agencies providing humanitarian assistance in the same locations.
- **Identify how to best achieve integration across modalities without losing technical expertise.** Institutional knowledge and mechanisms that should be preserved – including those dealing with finance, procurement, and personnel.
- **Accommodate and internalize appropriate oversight.** As the accounts that fund the current USAID humanitarian offices being combined into the proposed Bureau of Humanitarian Assistance have different statutory authorities’ coherent congressional oversight across separate authorizing committees and appropriations subcommittees will be required.