# Section 1. Approach and Methodology

This annex sets out the approach taken to developing the 2011 pilot Aid Transparency Index, including the methodology, the approach to data collection and the weighting and scaling of the index. This is a pilot, and a lot has already been learned about future refinements to the approach which are also set out below; however suggestions and feedback would be much appreciated.

In 2010 and early 2011, a number of assessments of the transparency of aid agencies were published, including the Center for Global Development/ Brookings Institution Quality of ODA report[[1]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#fte1), Brookings’ Ranking Donor Transparency in Foreign Aid[[2]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#fte2), AidWatch’s 2010 Annual Report[[3]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#fte3) and Publish What You Fund’s 2010 Aid Transparency Assessment[[4]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#fte4). A common challenge faced by all of these research projects was a lack of comparable and primary data on levels of aid information which constrained an accurate and specific assessment of aid information levels. The approach to the 2011 pilot index was driven by this main finding of the 2010 Assessment – that there is a lack of comparable and primary data available on aid transparency – meaning that there is no systematic, disaggregated way of assessing the transparency of organisations.

The pilot index was an attempt to start addressing this problem by shifting away from proxy indicators based on secondary data, towards a primary data collection methodology thus providing more robust evidence as the basis for analysing aid transparency. In addressing the major data gap found in the 2010 Assessment the aim is to allow a more systematic reflection on organisations’ aid transparency practices as well providing clear and specific ways in which transparency levels can be monitored for individual donors.

This section sets out the details of the methodology and data used in this new primary data collection approach as well as the limitations and challenges faced and the refinements planned. The methodology developed to assess organisations’ aid transparency looks at the transparency of agencies at the organisational, country and activity level.

**Who**: 58 separate organisations or entities which provide aid were included from 45 countries or multilateral agencies (including six U.S. agencies or departments, two World Bank Group agencies, five European institutions, two German agencies, two Korean agencies and two UK agencies).

**What**: 37 indicators of transparency were selected, with 35 specific information types checked. In addition at the organisational level the existence of a FOIA (or equivalent for IFIs, multilaterals and private foundations) and the organisation’s engagement in IATI were scored. (The full list of indicators, survey questions and the definitions used is set out in Section 2.) These indicators were selected using the information types agreed in the IATI standard, most of which are based on the DAC CRS. The 35 specific information types are a subsection of the information items where existing commitments to disclosure already exist, including in the DAC, IATI and the AAA.

**How**: For the majority of the 35 specific information types, these were collected by surveys initially undertaken by donor country-based CSOs or national CSO platforms, or a CSOs with a particular interest in that organisation or agency[[5]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte5). Where no organisation could be found to complete a survey, Publish What You Fund undertook the work. These initial surveys were then sent to the organisation or donor agency for an iterative process of verification and correction. (See Acknowledgments section for details of who undertook each of the surveys.) After that the results were standardised across indicators and re-checked.

**When**: The first version of the survey was developed for an initial round of data collection in March/April 2011 with European AidWatch CSO partners in 24 EU Member States and the EC for inclusion in the 2011 EU AidWatch report[[6]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte6). The survey was then extended to an additional 31 non-EU Member States and additional organisations in May–July 2011[[7]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#fte7). Further data verification, standardisation and cleaning then occurred in August and September 2011.

The approach was designed to sample and collate data about the publication of key types of current aid information for each donor and agency in ways that generate a comparable, robust data source that is specific, detailed and verifiable. The data collection process was based on a survey, and involved several steps to ensure that the results provided as comparable and robust an assessment of information availability as possible.

1. Donor country and entities selection

The aim was to extend the number of organisations covered in the 2011 pilot index from the 30 included in the 2010 Aid Transparency Assessment. Surveys were completed for all OECD DAC donors, all EU Member States and all IATI signatories and observers. A survey was also completed for China’s Ministry of Commerce as part of a research project on the transparency of Chinese aid[[8]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte8). It is anticipated that this approach will be extended to more organisations in future survey rounds, including all the UN agencies, a number of key ‘newer’ donors such as Brazil, Russia, India and South Africa, and some of the major private donor foundations such as the Gates Foundation.

A number of organisations were also included to make sure the pilot methodology was tested with certain types of donors to ensure it could be adapted and was appropriate to use, for example, for humanitarian aid focused donors (e.g. ECHO) or those focusing on direct private investment such as World Bank’s IFC and indirect fund-based investment approaches such as CDC in the UK.

2. Organisation or agencies selection

Surveys were initially completed by CSOs – who were asked to select the relevant organisation’s largest or primary aid agency because it was thought this was most likely to consistently provide the most information across donors. Answering the questions sometimes required looking at an aid agency as well as the Ministry of Foreign Affairs (or equivalent), if they were responsible for different areas, such as policy and execution. However, where there were multiple agencies delivering entirely different projects (such as PEPFAR, MCC and USAID in the U.S. or DFID and CDC in the UK), the questions were only to be asked about one executing agency. A survey was also undertaken for EU Fast Start Finance; however the results were not included in the final index[[9]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte9).

3. Aid recipient country and activity selection

CSOs then selected the current largest aid recipient country for that aid agency. If the current largest recipient country of aid from the *agency* was not known, the current largest recipient country of aid from the *donor government* as a whole was selected. If this was also unknown then the most recent OECD DAC figures (2009) were used to find the aid recipient to survey. Within the recipient country, the largest activity or project was then selected within that country programme. How certain it is that this is the largest project is clearly bounded by the level of information made available by that organisation. The aim was not to try and ‘catch out’ aid organisations, but by selecting the largest country programme and a large activity or project there was a greater likelihood that information would be available. Ideally this of course would be a representative average or ‘median’ project, but given the lack of availability of comparable information this is not currently possible (see Section 5, Conclusion 1 for further discussion on this issue). In order to ensure the comparability across donor organisations budget support was not used as an activity in the survey as this would have added in another variation in terms of modality.

4. Data collection

The approach to finalising the survey was an iterative process of searching, evidencing and checking the availability of information. Surveyors were asked to answer questions relating to 35 specific types of information included in the international best practice standard for aid transparency at the **organisational level** (5 indicators) and on the format and accessibility of information at **recipient country level** (4 indicators) and the **project or activity level** (26 indicators). The list of survey questions is by no means exhaustive but was designed to examine the availability of information at all stages from policy to implementation, including design, evaluation and audit.

The questionnaires were filled in by searching organisations’ websites and providing proof of the existence and availability of information by adding in the URL or link to that information. Data was collected on loan repayment terms but this was eventually excluded from the final results due to comparability problems, primarily because the question was not always relevant as only some organisations were focusing on grants as opposed to loans. It was also found that this information was mostly captured in response to a question on conditions.

It was also recorded in the data collection whether the information was “sometimes”[[10]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte10) available or whether it appeared that the organisation actually collected that information item, although it was not published. This data was not used in the weighting or indexing. The full dataset of all the items found to be collected, sometimes and always published for each organisation can be found in chart 4 in Annex 2 and also on the Aid Transparency Tracker website: [**www.aidtransparencytracker.org**](http://www.aidtransparencytracker.org/)

5. Data verification

Responses to the surveys were then reviewed and links checked by Publish What You Fund to ensure all findings were evidenced and standardised across the surveys. In order to establish that information was “always” published, Publish What You Fund selected a minimum of five activity level projects in the relevant recipient country in order to ascertain that this information was consistently available. If information was not provided for an answer then an additional search of agency websites in English and the local language was conducted. If there was a difference in the amount of information provided in English compared to the local language then whichever provided the largest amount of information was selected[[11]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte11).

The surveys were then returned to the CSO that filled them in to check and return to the relevant organisation or agency. Donor and aid organisations were given a deadline of three weeks to reply, but replies were still accepted and actively sought for another two weeks. For 14 organisations no response was received however and one organisation did not receive a survey[[12]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte12). If no response was received, Publish What You Fund reviewed the survey for a second time and conducted more extensive searches for each question. Nevertheless, the results for these organisations need to be viewed in this light.

Publish What You Fund’s verification and standardisation process included checking the evidence provided in all the organisation surveys (website URLs) to ensure that all scores of “published” were completely accurate. In several cases the URL provided as supporting evidence did not show the information suggested so the results were downgraded to either “sometimes” published if the information was published only for a few projects, or just “collected” if the information was not publicly available for any projects but the organisation was suggesting they did hold that information through their response. During this process, additional qualitative data was collected to inform the individual organisation profiles in Section 4. This included:

* the format that the information was provided in (project database, PDF, website),
* where the information was provided (a central donor website, country-specific donor website, embassy website),
* the language of publication (donor’s language, English, French, etc.),
* any other interesting features in the way the data was provided.

A round of standardisation of scoring and ensuring consistent interpretations of answers was then conducted across all indicators and organisations and finally a round of checks were conducted on total organisational budget for the next three years; annual forward planning budget for the next three years; and country level forward planning budget.

Summary of aid transparency indicators used

**7 at organisation level** – 2 on the commitment to aid transparency, in terms of:

* Existence of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA)
* Engagement in the emerging best practice on aid transparency (IATI)

Then 5 indicators for specific information types for the largest organisation of that donor, including on aid allocation procedures and the organisation’s total budget.

**4 at country level**– for the organisation’s biggest recipient country, including indicators on country strategy and annual audit.

**26 at activity or project level**– for a large project in the organisation’s biggest recipient country on information covering the project cycle from contracting, conditions, pre-project appraisals, budgets, through financial transactions to impact, as well as basic information such as activity title, dates, identification codes and sectors the project supports.

Scoring the indicators

For the 35 surveyed indicators, the information availability was judged by whether a specific piece of information was found to be:

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Always published**(scored 1) | *For organisation and country level questions:*consistently or regularly;*for the activity level questions:*for **all** projects in the recipient country[[13]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#fte13). |
| **Sometimes published**(scored 0 but used for sequencing of equal rank) | *For organisation and country level questions:*inconsistently or irregularly;*for activity level questions:*for **some** projects in the recipient country. |
| **Not published, but collected**(scored 0) | Where the information is not publically available but the organisation collects it internally. We believe that organisations collect information for almost all the questions asked, although they do not make all of it public. |

For the purpose of scoring for the index, the only results used were where information was considered to be always published. These were scored 1. All other responses were scored 0; however the other data is still presented in chart 4 in Annex 2 and used in the conclusions of the report. Despite the checking process undertaken by donors we have the least confidence in the quality of the “not published but collected” categorisation which cannot be verified independently given that it is not public.

At the organisational level an **additional two indicators were used as proxies to assess the commitment and accessibility of aid information**. These were whether or not the organisation has a Freedom of Information Act or equivalent and the donor’s engagement with the International Aid Transparency Initiative.

Existence of a Freedom of Information Act (FOIA) or equivalent policy (maximum 1 point)

Although FOIAs do not relate specifically to aid information, the existence of a FOIA (or equivalent policy) was taken to indicate the organisation’s overall commitment to making information available to citizens about its decision making processes, activities and expenditure. The data source for the existence of a FOIA is the October 2011 Fringe Intelligence O*verview of all FOI laws*[[14]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte14). Countries included in the index and classified as not having a FOIA are those where there is no law (Cyprus), it is only in draft (Luxembourg, Spain) or is adopted but not in force (Malta). For multilateral donors, IFIs and private foundations, a disclosure or transparency policy was accepted as equivalent to a Freedom of Information Act. Apart from the Hewlett Foundation, all organisations were accepted as having a policy irrespective of the appeals process and exceptions. This is a key area of quality that needs to be examined more closely in future rankings.

Engagement in the International Aid Transparency Initiative (maximum 2 points and double weighted)

Engagement in IATI was selected as a proxy for both commitment to aid transparency and the format and also accessibility of the information – which is why the decision was taken to double weight the indicator. IATI was selected because is specifically designed for the comprehensive publication of current aid information in a format that is comparable and timely as well as accessible because it is produced in a machine readable format[[15]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte15). IATI is explicitly built on the classifications and information types of the OECD DAC’s CRS and CRS++ systems. For more on the relationship between IATI and other aid information tools see T*he relationship between IATI and the CRS plus*, IATI Secretariat, February 2011.

Levels of donor engagement in IATI were collected from the IATI website (for signatory status and for plans for implementation), and is correct as of 7 October 2011. Donors can score a maximum of 2 points depending on their level of engagement with the Initiative. The scoring used is as follows:  
**2** = Implementing IATI – has begun publishing data to the IATI Registry or has informed the IATI Secretariat that it will do so before HLF-4 on 29 November 2011  
**1** = Signed but no implementation schedule or plans to do so before HLF-4  
**0.5** = Observer to IATI  
**0** = No engagement to date

Weighting, scaling, ranking and grouping

The Tracker survey and two additional FOIA and IATI results were collated for all the 58 donor agencies – see chart 4 in Annex 2. The ranking of organisations in terms of their aid transparency was developed from several options considered in close consultation with our peer reviewers[[16]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte16).

**Weighting:** While different groups and constituencies do require and value the various aid information types differently, the basic approach taken here was of keeping the weighting as simple and clear as possible. The decision was taken to weight each of the levels (organisation, country and activity level) equally. However, a tool is provided on the Publish What You Fund website which allows people to reweight the data in line with their own prioritisation and assessment of the importance of different types of information.

Two specific approaches were particularly considered with the assistance of the peer reviewers. The first option gave equal weighting to each of the information types; the second option weighted equally at the level of the information provision (organisation, country and activity). The decision was taken to follow the second approach because the majority of peer reviewers felt that the first option would emphasise the activity level at the expense of the other two levels (organisation and country). With all data sources weighted equally, organisation level would have a weight of 20.51%, with 10.26% for country level and 69.23% for activity level.

**Scaling**: As with the 2010 Aid Transparency Assessment, the decision was made not to rescale the indicators as this would disguise actual performance of organisations in favour of ensuring that each level shared the same average. For example, if country level transparency had an average score of 40%, while activity level transparency had an average score of 65%, to rescale these would mean that important details about actual performance would not be revealed. There are no 100% scores for the three levels and re-scaling would make it appear that high-scoring donors have a “perfect” result or that low-scoring donors have zero scores when they do not. The interest here is in the actual performance of donors across the three levels and each information type indicator. The decision not to rescale each of the indicators means that the average score for each level is different, so a donor that scores 50% for organisation level transparency may be above or below average for that level. In Section 4: Organisation Profiles donor performance is shown against the average for each level, allowing the reader to review an organisation’s performance for each information item.

**Ranking**: Based on the weighted three levels, the overall ranking of the 58 agencies was then developed. Donors that scored the same are ranked equally, but “sometimes” answers have been used to visually sequence organisations with equal scores. Specifically this means that the UNDP and ECHO rank joint 10th but the UNDP is listed first as it has more “sometimes” answers than ECHO. Japan and the Czech Republic are ranked joint 23rd, but Japan has six “sometimes” answers compared to one for the Czech Republic. The three organisations coming joint 31st are presented in the following order: Ireland, Luxembourg and the Hewlett Foundation; as are the four organisations ranked joint 51st – Hungary, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. China and Greece are ranked joint 55th, with Greece listed second as there were no “sometimes” answers. Likewise Cyprus and Malta are joint 57th, with Cyprus listed before Malta as it has a handful of “sometimes” answers, whereas Malta has none.

**Grouping**: Several grouping options were considered in consultation with peer reviewers. There were differing views among the reviewers as to the best approach and number of groups. Options explored included 1.0 and 0.5 Standard Deviations; looking for ‘natural breaks’, and grouping in quintiles below and above the average score of 34%. In particular, some reviewers were concerned about margins of error within the data and creating a false sense of precision by grouping donors so explicitly. In the end the option of five groupings was selected as it was felt these groups provide a mechanism to compare donor performance within specific score ranges, but without creating ‘false’ groupings based on minimal differences in scores. The scores of 0–19%, 20–39%, 40–59%, 60–79% and 80–100% were chosen as it was agreed the five groups most accurately reflect the performance of the 58 organisations, noting that no organisation was included in the highest-scoring group of 80+%.

Challenges, limitations and lessons learned

Challenges

As mentioned above, this is an initial attempt to develop and apply this survey methodology to aid transparency, drawing on experience and approaches in the right to information field as well as in aid surveying. A number of specific challenges were faced and we are attempting to address them as much as possible in the approach being developed and as set out in the section below.

* **Donor organisations not covered**. The coverage of agencies is by no means comprehensive. The main constraint here was capacity inside Publish What You Fund or finding CSO partners able to undertake the surveys. An obvious gap is the UN system where only one agency is covered.
* **Representative nature of an organisation**. In a number of cases of highly fragmented donors an agency or department was surveyed but these one or two agencies only cover a relatively small proportion of aid spent by that country overall. These results are not a particularly good proxy for the whole of the country or organisation’s aid transparency. Consequently the agency or organisation is always specified. The ranking is also made on the basis of agencies rather than countries. This issue particularly applies to Austria, China, the European agencies, France, Spain and the U.S. agencies. Only the UNDP is included as it is not representative of the UN more broadly. In future years coverage would ideally be extended for fragmented donors with several agencies.
* Similarly,**it is not clear how representative the activity selected is**. The information types assessed are **not a comprehensive list of all the information and data donors collect or make available**.
* **Donor organisations did not to respond to cross-checking the survey results** – some organisations did not respond to the survey results sent to them. These were the AsDB, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, GAVI, Germany KfW, Hungary, the IADB, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and U.S. Department of Defense. Unfortunately Ireland did not receive a survey for review during the data collection period. Additional searches were conducted in these cases in an attempt to ensure accurate responses. Results for these donors should be considered in this light.

Limitations

* The finding on the levels of “**information collected but not published**” is the most problematic of our data. For a number of cases, donors did not respond and instead the judgement that an item was collected was based on existing knowledge by the respondent. Consequently these responses were not used for scoring and ranking levels of individual organisation transparency; however some broad trends can be seen in the table in Annex 2 and these are explored in the findings and conclusions.
* A significant problem with the current survey is that it did not look at the **format** each information item was provided in and this was only explored during the verification process by Publish What You Fund. Information that is provided in a machine-readable format (e.g. CSV, XML or Excel) is more useful than if the format is for example text or a website, or particularly in PDF which is not machine-readable and is extremely difficult to extract information from. Some more quantitative approaches will be explored and considered for future survey rounds. Related to this, there may be information that was missed or even donors themselves are not aware of due to **poorly designed and hard to navigate websites**. Given the importance of accessibility in making the investment in publication useful, in future we will consider ways to assess how easy it is to find information on websites.

Specific indicator challenges

* **A binary yes/no assessment of FOIA or equivalent policies** is clearly not sufficient. Not all legislation or disclosure policies, nor their implementation, is to the same standard. The challenge of a lack of systematic collection of FOIA quality has recently been addressed by the Centre for Law and Democracy and Access Info Europe, who recently published a Global Right to Information Rating[[17]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit" \l "fte17). This rating will be considered as a data source in future survey rounds in order to provide a more nuanced analysis of FOIA quality. Ideally this methodology will be extended to multilateral and non-state based agencies to assess ‘FOIA-equivalent’ disclosure and transparency policies in the same manner.
* **Certain questions were queried by respondents, particularly those on collaboration type (Q9), flow type (Q10), type of aid (Q11), type of finance (Q12) and tied aid status (Q19)**. Initially, some respondents answered “always collected” to these questions if this was implicitly stated, for example if all of the organisation’s projects are grants and it does not provide loans. The answers to these questions were checked by Publish What You Fund during the verification process and were only accepted if the answer was explicitly stated by the organisation. “Always” answers were accepted only if it was explicitly stated per activity, or in a country strategy paper or in a clear place on the organisation’s website if there was the same answer (i.e. ‘all grants’) for all projects. See table 1 in Section 2 for how questions were defined.
* **There were also differing interpretations to Questions 3 and 4** (total organisation budget for next three years and annual forward planning budget for next three years). In several cases, organisations had long term budgets of three or more years but not rolling budgets. In this case, the decision was taken to accepted all budgets that were “for the next three years”. This means that donors at the end of a long term fixed budget cycle did not receive points for this question, but donors at the start of one did. This is undesirable, and so the next iteration of the survey will also aim to capture the important distinction between fixed and rolling budgets.
* Data was collected on **loan repayment terms** but this was eventually excluded from the final results due to comparability problems, primarily because the question was not always relevant as only some organisations were focusing on grants as opposed to loans. It was also found that this information was mostly captured in response to a question on conditions.
* This pilot version of the index also highlighted the **existence of other important pieces of data that were not covered by the survey questions**. The next iteration of the survey will also look for, at organisational level:  
  – an overarching strategy document,  
  – an annual report,  
  – an online project-level database,  
  – the format that this information is provided in,  
  – the office responsible (accountable) for publishing information about aid activities.  
  At activity level:  
  – the sub-national geographic location,  
  – commitments as well as (and separately measured from) expenditures,  
  – the accessibility and the language the information is provided in.  
  Suggestions on other data that we should consider capturing would be welcome.
* **Lack of “current year” data**. Occasionally for activity level indicators, respondents could not find current data or did not realise what they found was out of date. Answers were accepted only if the activity was currently being implemented and the data was published within the last 12 months at the time of data collection.
* Generally, some questions were interpreted differently, were not clear to respondents or were insufficiently explained. This was addressed during the standardisation process, however for the question on procurement (Is the tender for the activity published?), there were particular challenges and that might mean **procurement data has been missed**. This is because procurement data is often published on separate central government websites and the information was sometimes hard to find.
* The survey focuses specifically on aid transparency of organisations rather than broader cultures of transparency. Whilst **country-specific initiatives** such as the U.S. Foreign Assistance dashboard have been mentioned in the organisation profiles in Section 4, these were not captured systematically or scored in the index, so there may be other country-specific aid transparency initiatives that have not been included.
* Data was collected within a specific time period, meaning that recent progress by some donors in relation to their aid transparency may not be reflected in the ranking. For example, EuropeAid published to IATI on 14 October 2011 and any additional information released as a result of this has not been captured in the 2011 survey. Several other organisations are expected to publish to IATI before this report is published. Given the experience of the Netherlands – which was surveyed both before and after it published to the IATI Registry[[18]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#fte18) – it is anticipated that a significant increase in the amount of information available and thus their likely scores in future iterations of this index.

Aid Transparency Tracker: Building an online platform for collecting and presenting aid transparency information

The most significant shift in the approach to data collection for next year is the development of an online data collection tool – the Aid Transparency Tracker. The purpose of the Tracker is to build a common framework and platform to track whether key types of aid information are available. Publish What You Fund has been working with Global Integrity to develop this survey tool. It is web-based and relies on crowd-sourcing, meaning that surveys can be added to and updated from anywhere in the world. Anyone can complete a Tracker survey and check, update, use and re-use the data for their own research purposes. Using the 2011 survey data presented in this index, the Aid Transparency Tracker was launched in November 2011 and can be accessed at: [**www.aidtransparencytracker.org**](http://www.aidtransparencytracker.org/)

Going forward, the aim is to build a public resource for researchers, CSOs, aid agencies, governments and other organisations involved in monitoring the transparency and accountability of aid both in donor and recipient countries. We welcome interested organisations getting in touch either by signing up on the website or by contacting us directly. The data collection and verification will automatically be available and accessible to all. For example, CSOs or governments in recipient countries could examine a range of donor organisations operating in their country in order to monitor their current levels of aid transparency, hold them to account for their activities and encourage them to publish more information about their activities in this country. This information could also be used by CSOs or researchers in each of the donors’ countries to monitor donor performance across a range of countries or sectors.

In terms of the Index, Publish What You Fund would like to use the Tracker data collected on a rolling basis, but also checked and updated systematically – perhaps annually or biannually – so it can be used to develop an annual Aid Transparency Index for comparisons of progress and tracking the level of aid transparency across a range of donors. However a key element of the design is that it will also allow the tracking of aid transparency levels across country contexts and/or transparency of aid to particular sectors over time.

By providing the data via a public online tool that all can contribute to, the aim is to accurately track levels of aid information available, show changes over time and facilitate clear, practical improvements in the levels of information. All survey responses will be presented in real-time, meaning that results can be regularly checked and allow donors’ progress to be assessed between annual rankings. In order to ensure the quality and accuracy of the data collected, donors will be provided with the opportunity to verify and correct the survey data provided. The tool allows all of these processes to occur in a smooth workflow, to ensure that the process is straightforward and that information is captured in a standardised, useful and rigorous format. We will work with CSOs in obtaining completed Tracker surveys for as many aid agencies and donors as possible.

It is anticipated that this data collection and analysis will become easier as more donors publish to the IATI Registry, automating a large amount of the data collection, particularly at the activity level. It is anticipated that the Quality of FOIA Index developed by Access Info and the Center for Law and Democracy will be used to pre-fill the FOIA question with a more accurate and meaningful measure of agencies’ responsiveness to public requests for information.

In developing the Aid Transparency Tracker survey and this pilot index, the aim was to find out whether it is possible to collate sufficient primary data to compare the aid transparency of donors. Our conclusion is that even with this initial data set and pilot methodology, it has been possible to develop a robust approach that allows us to assess and compare donor organisation aid transparency in a systematic way. For future indices, the 37 indicators used in 2011 will be built on to create a more comprehensive checklist that will facilitate analysis for a larger number of information items, and across additional donor and aid organisations and to go into more detail on, for example, the format that the information is provided in, the language it is available in and how frequently the information is made available (for example monthly, quarterly or annually) and with what time lag.

[[1]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref1) N. Birdsall and H. Kharas, Quality of Official Development Assistance Assessment, Brookings Institution and Center for Global Development, 2010.

[[2]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref2) H. Kharas and A. Ghosh, The Money Trail: Ranking donor transparency in foreign aid, Brookings Institution, 2011.

[[3]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref3) EU AidWatch, Penalty Against Poverty: More and better EU aid can score Millennium Development Goals, CONCORD, 2010.

[[4]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref4) Publish What You Fund, 2010 Aid Transparency Assessment, 2010.

[[5]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref5) The majority of surveys were conducted by CSO or NGO national platforms for the various development CSOs operating in a country. For multilaterals and IFIs, CSOs focusing on those organisations were approached, for example the Bank Information Center (for World Bank IDA & IBRD survey) and NGO Forum on ADB (for the AsDB survey).

[[6]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref6) EU AidWatch, Challenging Self-Interest: Getting EU aid fit for the fight against poverty, CONCORD, 2011.

[[7]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref7) We originally extended the survey to a further 32 donor agencies but have only presented results for 58 in total rather than 59 due to the removal of a survey for EU Fast Start Finance (see footnote 9).

[[8]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref8) For more on this research, see S. Grimm et al., Transparency of Chinese Aid: An analysis of the published information on Chinese external financial flows, Publish What You Fund and the Centre for Chinese Studies, Stellenbosch University, 2011.

[[9]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref9) A survey was undertaken for EU Fast Start Finance (FSF) using a database on the EC CLIMA website. It was not clear how the survey would be applied to FSF however, as there is no organisation or largest recipient country to speak of (FSF is a collation of funding by different EU donors) and it was also not clear who should be responsible for publishing the information. This survey was therefore excluded from the final index.

[[10]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref10) Sometimes was defined at the organisation level as information that was sporadically or inconsistently published; at the country level as information that was sporadically or inconsistently published, or only for previous years; and at the activity level as information that was a) published for only some of the activities examined; b) information that was published incidentally rather than in a specific field, for example, if the sectors were only mentioned in the title, or if the objectives were mentioned in the description; or c) if the website stated any of the following or similar qualifiers when introducing the projects: major projects, lighthouse projects, key projects, case studies, example projects, a selection of projects.

[[11]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref11) Language becomes particularly relevant when considering the needs of recipient country citizens, so this is something that we will seek to address in the future.

[[12]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref12) The AsDB, Australia, Belgium, Bulgaria, Denmark, GAVI, Germany KfW, Hungary, the IADB, Latvia, Lithuania, Portugal, Romania and U.S. DOD did not respond. Ireland did not receive a survey for review during the official data collection period. Publish What You Fund apologises for this. A survey has since been shared with Irish Aid for reference.

[[13]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref13) To establish that information was “always” published, when checking and verifying the surveys, Publish What You Fund selected a minimum of five activity level projects in the relevant recipient country in order to ascertain that this information was consistently available.

[[14]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref14) R. Vleugels, Overview of all FOI laws, Fringe Intelligence Special Edition, October 2011.

[[15]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref15) For example, the OECD’s Creditor Reporting System (CRS) is explicitly an ex-post statistical reporting mechanism and was not designed as a transparency or disclosure tool. CRS data is published two years after the fact, thus it does not contain current or real time management information. It is therefore not a source for establishing timeliness of information, an essential component of aid transparency. The EU’s TR-AID is an information gathering system and database that has been developed to support sharing of information amongst EU institutions and Member State donors. It is still being developed but it is being designed to be compatible with the IATI so that IATI data can be continuously fed into to TR-AID.

[[16]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref16) See under Acknowledgments for list of peer reviewers.

[[17]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref17) Centre for Law and Democracy and Access Info Europe, Global Right to Information Rating, September 2011.

[[18]](http://lin-pwyf-stage.aptivate.org/wp-admin/post.php?post=1712&action=edit#ref18) The initial data for the Netherlands was collected in March–April 2011. During the final data verification process, the survey was updated to reflect the September IATI data release.