Publish What You Fund
The Global Campaign for Aid Transparency

IATI FAQs

A guide to IATI.

1 IATI Governance and Process

1.1 Why is IATI a new initiative?

IATI was launched in September 2008 during the Accra High Level Forum (HLF) on Aid Effectiveness. The Accra Agenda for Action agreed at the HLF committed donors to publicly disclosing regular, detailed and timely information on volume, allocation and, when available, results of development expenditure to enable more accurate budget, accounting and audit by developing countries.

IATI aims to help donor signatories meet this commitment in the most coherent and consistent ways.

IATI brings together donors, partner countries, civil society organizations, parliamentarians and aid information experts to agree common information standards applicable to aid flows. To date, 18 donors have signed up to IATI. (NB. Now only 17 still in due to Finns pulling out).

1.2 How does IATI contribute to the work of the OECD-DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness?

IATI also contributes to Cluster C on Transparent and Responsible Aid which sits under the OECD-DAC Working Party on Aid Effectiveness (WP-EFF.) IATI has been tasked by Cluster C with developing reporting formats and definitions for sharing information about aid, drawing on the expertise of the

Working Party on Statistics (WP-STAT.) Proposals developed by IATI will be available to inform the Cluster's work.

1.3 Is IATI an initiative or an institution?

IATI is an initiative. It was launched in Accra in September 2008 and is intended to last until the next High Level Forum in Seoul in late 2011. After that time, it is intended that IATI's functions are taken on by other organizations. How this is done and which institutions are most appropriate will be discussed by the IATI Steering Committee and signatories in April 2010.

1.4 How is IATI administered?

IATI is administered by a virtual secretariat comprising of DFID, UNDP and the non-profit organization Development Initiatives for Poverty Research (DIPR.) The work of the secretariat is overseen by the IATI Steering Committee. So far five donors (Finland, Ireland, Netherlands, , Switzerland and UK, and) have provided funding to IATI and others are expected to follow suit shortly.

1.5 How is IATI governed?

IATI is governed by a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee. The Steering Committee is chaired by DFID and includes the following members: Netherlands, Germany, Australia, UK, EC, World Bank, UNDP, Rwanda, Malawi, Ghana, Vietnam, Papua New Guinea, Colombia, Dominican Republic, Burkina Faso, Montenegro, Nepal, BetterAid, Civicus, Publish What You Fund, Transparency International, Development Gateway, and Development Initiatives for Poverty Research.

The IATI Steering Committee has responsibility for overseeing IATI. They make key decisions about IATI project planning, budget utilization, and proposals on the information to be published under IATI. The Steering Committee meets 3-4 times per year.

The final decision on the IATI standards will be made by all IATI donor signatories and the IATI Steering Committee. Partner countries who have endorsed IATI, and interested civil society organisations, will be represented by members of the Steering Committee.

Technical work under IATI is taken forward by the IATI Technical Advisory Group (TAG.) The TAG is chaired by Brian Hammond, formerly head of statistics at the OECD-DAC. The TAG reports to the Steering Committee. Membership is open to any interested donor, partner country, civil society representative, and aid information expert.

1.6 How can I engage in IATI?

There are several ways to engage in IATI:

Sign up or endorse IATI. All donors are invited to sign up to the IATI Accra Statement, available here. Partner countries are invited to endorse the statement. This means that they support the aims and objectives of the initiative and will contribute to its design and implementation, while recognising the main obligations under IATI are placed on donors.

Join the Technical Advisory Group (TAG.) This group develops technical proposals for review by the IATI Steering Committee. It is open to users and providers of aid data and statistics (e.g. donors, partner countries, CSOs) and experts in using technology for aid effectiveness and the development of standards.

Send your comments on IATI papers and proposals. All those on the IATI mailing list receive papers and are able to provide comments. To join the list, please e-mail r-greenhill@dfid.gov.uk

Attend events including conferences and consultations where these occur. Details can be found on the IATI website at www.aidtransparency.net

1.7 What are the obligations for partner countries?

IATI envisages that the primary responsibility for producing and sharing aid information sits with donors. However, where information generated by donors is also (co-)owned by partner countries, partners are asked to allow that information to be made publicly available. This applies, for example, to partner country government strategic plans and aid effectiveness assessments

1.8 Shouldn't IATI encourage partner countries and civil society organisations to be transparent too?

IATI is focused on donor transparency. It is obviously critical that partner countries also improve transparency, but there are a number of other workstreams and initiatives which focus on partner country transparency. IATI does not wish to duplicate what others are doing.

However, IATI encourages NGOs to improve their own transparency, where possible in line with the IATI standards as they are developed. IATI will be approaching international NGOs in 2010 to discuss how to take this forward.

2 IATI and the OECD-DAC

2.1 Wouldn't it be better to focus on improving the DAC's Creditor Reporting System (CRS) and data supply in the CRS++ format?

The OECD-DAC's Creditor Reporting System (CRS) database is the gold standard in producing verified, high quality statistics on past aid flows. The CRS is designed to track aid contributions from donors and to hold donors accountable for meeting aid commitments, and it fulfils this function very well. However, there are a number of reasons why the CRS is not ideally placed to meet all the information needs of partner countries, civil society organisations, citizens and parliamentarians:

- Timeliness: information is currently between 11 to 23 months out of date by the time it is published in CRS. This is due to an annual reporting cycle and the need to report comprehensive ODA data from multiple agencies, and undertake quality assurance for statistical integrity.

- Information not statistics: It is vital that verified, high quality statistics are collected on aid activities and this is a function that the DAC CRS does extremely well. But IATI is about information rather than statistics. IATI is focused on publishing a wider range of detailed information in a more timely manner, in a form that is accessible to stakeholders in partner countries.

- Level of detail and type of information: Information currently captured by DAC is only a subset of the suggested IATI requirements. Much more information is needed to track where the money has been spent and what it is planned to be spent on, as well as information in policy and project documents.

- Unit of analysis: The CRS does not show information by project. Information is either shown at the level of individual commitments or disbursements, or is aggregated to sector level. IATI will provide information on individual aid projects, making it easier to trace where the money is going.

- Coverage: IATI is not limited to DAC donors. IATI already has five non-DAC signatories (Asian Development Bank, GAVI, Hewlett Foundation, UNDP and World Bank) and is reaching out to other non-DAC donors and NGOs to encourage them to share information in line with the IATI standards.

- Classifications: The classifications used within the DAC are designed to meet the needs for international statistical reporting. They do not meet the needs for partner countries to align aid flows with their own budget classifications. IATI will aim to allow donors to report classifications that meet the needs of the DAC and of partner countries

- Capacity: Both the DAC secretariat and donor statistical reporters have limited capacity. As much IATI information will not comprise verified statistics, IATI publication does not need to go through the statistical reporter. Instead it could be automated or published directly by staff in country offices.

2.2 Isn’t IATI just a duplicate effort to DAC reporting?

There are already many overlapping reporting systems. IATI seeks to reduce these and apply common standards and definitions to those that remain. We are seeking to establish a common way of recording and publishing aid information that enables a variety of users to access the data they require and present the information in different ways.

We believe this complements DAC reporting since:

- Where common definitions have already been agreed through the DAC, these will be used as the basis for IATI reporting

- IATI is likely to include qualitative information, while DAC reporting is focused on statistics

- IATI aims to simplify and harmonise the reporting, and help donors to meet the growing need for more information, especially at country level

- IATI publication doesn’t need to be centralised or go through the statistics reporter. Where relevant for the donor, information can be published at country level

- IATI will aim to publish provisional data more quickly, so that it can be used by partner country governments and other stakeholders in a timely manner. This is particularly important for partner countries, which require aid information to inform their budget processes.

2.3 Will IATI mean additional workload for statistical reporters?

Not necessarily. In many cases the publication of IATI information will not go through the statistical reporters, or even be centralised. Information may be automatically published by central systems or published manually through country offices (as is the case currently when reporting to country aid management systems).

2.4 What does this mean for DAC Working Party on Statistics (WP_STAT) as custodians of aid information standards?

IATI will use the DAC standards where they exist, and the DAC Working Party on Statistics (WP-STAT) will continue to be custodians of these standards. However, IATI is likely to include a much wider set of information than that included in the DAC CRS.

Where IATI is proposing publication of information beyond that currently collected by the DAC, IATI will define the standards, drawing on other existing standards (including the DAC) where they exist. We would welcome the assistance and expertise of the WP-STAT when doing this.

In some cases IATI might need to define standards for information that is closely related to that collected by the DAC (e.g. total donor commitment). In these cases, IATI will work closely with the DAC Secretariat and the WP-STAT to develop the proposed definitions.

A full list of IATI information areas and which category they fall into can be found on the IATI website here.

3 Global and Local Standards

3.1 How does IATI aim to combine global standards with local classifications, for example fiscal years and sectoral classifications?

IATI aims to design a standard that has common global standard elements where appropriate, but most importantly has flexibility to incorporate local standards where necessary. Donor staff would classify projects according to a combination of universal and local classifications. Most of the data collected about each project would be universal – for example the dates and amounts of transactions and financial terms.

In addition to the universal classifications, projects would also be tagged with any specific classifications and information needed for local systems (e.g. national budget classifications and those used in local aid information management systems (AIMS)) This would apply for example to sectoral/budget classifications, administrative units, country financial years, language, sub-national geographic classifications, and country specific results indicators.

This may seem like additional work because it means double coding some information for each project. But donors already have to double code every project so that they can report it both to the DAC and to the local aid information management system. The main difference from now would be that projects would routinely be classified as they are developed and agreed, and this information would be published more rapidly as unified, consistent and universally accessible data, rather than supplied separately when requested.

3.2 Will reporting to partner country aid management systems meet IATI publication requirements?

No. IATI seeks to remove the dependence on any one system or database to make information transparent or accessible. While Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS) have the potential to increase aid transparency and facilitate good governance by creating an enabling environment for aid tracking, disclosure, and accountability, at present:

- Most aid management systems are designed to meet Ministry of planning/finance needs (e.g. annual reporting). They often do not meet the needs of other stakeholders such as Parliaments or line ministries, which may then introduce their own systems.

- Holding the data in bespoke systems makes it difficult for others to get at them to develop innovative new services that make the data more accessible

- Most aid management systems are not yet publicly available.

This does not mean that reporting via IATI will be additional to reporting to the country aid management system. The IATI standard will be designed to ensure that information reported via IATI will meet the needs of the Aid Information Management System, many of which already make use of international (mainly CRS) standards.

Several donors , including the European Commission, are ready to fund the introduction of AIMS if partner countries wish to introduce such systems.

3.3 How will IATI help developing countries to access good quality information from donors?

Many partner countries have Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS) which are of enormous benefit to them in collecting and monitoring information on aid. Partner countries also collect and record aid information as part of the budget processes, in line with the Paris Declaration commitments. However, partners report that they continue to struggle to access good, up-to-date information from donors to populate their AIMS and budgets. We believe IATI can make a valuable contribution to these systems and the data collection processes to make the data more complete and their collection more sustainable. IATI would improve information in developing countries because:

– donors would make a stronger and more accountable commitment to provide comprehensive data and information;

- donors would put in place more systematic mechanisms to collect, structure and publish information needed by developing country governments;

- data provided by donors would also be publicly available at the same time, resulting in stronger internal pressures to improve quality of the data;

- because information would be public, civil society would be able to hold donors to account so increasing donors' incentives to report comprehensively and accurately;

- publication of a common dataset to serve as the basis of all reporting by donors would reduce inconsistencies, double counting and missing data, and make it possible to reconcile data from a variety of sources.

IATI information datasets would contain all the information, suitably classified, needed for local AIMS. Developing countries would not have to change their classifications at all.

AIMS can also add value to IATI by feeding information back to the IATI registry for example from donors that have not signed up to IATI

4 Implementation

4.1 How and where will information be published? What is a registry?

To ensure that multiple users and intermediaries are able to access information, IATI proposes that data and documents must be available in a standard format, rather than being locked away in many different bespoke databases.

Under the emerging IATI proposals, donors would be responsible for gathering detailed information about each project or programme, and classifying them according to both global and local classifications. Donors would assemble this information using their own internal systems, apply internal quality control, and then export it into data files in a common electronic format.

Donors would publish their IATI information online, either on their own website or, if they prefer, on third party sites, and they would register the location of the data with the IATI registry.

The IATI registry is a kind of online catalogue that points users to the information they need. The registry would keep track of which IATI data sets are available, what they cover, and where they are located. It is not a database, and does not keep a copy of the data. The registry is a signposting system used either by a person – using, for example, a web browser – or by a computer programme such as a database.

4.2 How will users access information from the registry?

To ensure that multiple users and intermediaries are able to access information, IATI proposes that data and documents must be available in a standard format, rather than being locked away in many different bespoke databases.

The average user will use the services of 'infomediaries' to present the information they need. Infomediaries are organisations that collect and share information on particular topics. Infomediaries might, for example, collect all the available information on malaria and HIV, and provide services summarising this information for users.

This will make the information more accessible, for example via databases that pull all the information together for a mainstream audience, and small niche applications designed to meet the needs of small groups of users.

There are likely to be sector-specific portals (e.g. on tropical diseases), country or regional portals such as aid information management systems (AIMS), as well as global portals to access the whole information set.

These will all be sharing common data and so be consistent with each other. It will thus be possible for users to mix and match according to their specific needs.

4.3 Why is decentralised publishing and a registry better than a large central IATI database?

We do not think it is desirable for IATI to develop a one-size-fits-all database. We believe that creating a huge IATI database would not only limit the potential for innovation and undermine existing initiatives, but also feel the one-size-fits-all model is unlikely to be successful in meeting all the needs of the wide variety of stakeholders we have identified.

IATI should not force anyone to use someone else's database; it should enable developing countries to develop systems that meet their own needs, and to get the information they need automatically from donors.

There are many databases already available, which serve their intended audiences. IATI seeks to support these existing initiatives by enabling donors to publish information in a common format and using common definitions. This will make it easier for those databases to gather and use the data. It will also ensure that data published in different databases and in different locations are consistent and coherent.

4.4 How will IATI ensure that information is high quality and accurate?

As donors move to become more transparent, it is important that the information they publish is of sufficient quality. There is a direct trade-off with timeliness – information is more useful if it is available in good time, especially for aid management purposes, but this reduces the time available for central scrutiny and checking.

Any moves to greater transparency have to balance the need for high quality data with the need to make more information accessible in a timely manner. Specific features of the IATI proposal for minimising the risks and maintaining quality are:

- projects and programmes would be usually classified and coded at the time by the staff with the most direct experience of those projects;

- organisations often take more care over accuracy of information that is going to be published;

- mistakes often arise from problems reconciling and aggregating information from many different sources. IATI would make it much easier to reconcile information;

- the adoption of common definitions would reduce the risk of misunderstandings both for users and for those assembling the information.

4.5 Can publication be automated?

Yes, there is potential to automate the publication of IATI information and updating of the IATI registry.

The proposed approach for publishing information allows flexibility for donors to choose how best to publish and the degree to which it is automated. This largely depends on how much of the information is captured in donor systems.

For donors with comprehensive, centralised systems that capture all the relevant information complying with IATI definitions, we believe automated publication should not pose a challenge.

For others that don't have centralised systems or processes, it may be preferable to manually publish information from country offices.

For most, at least initially, it is likely to be a mixture of the two. Some information publication can be automated (e.g. regular publication of past disbursements), and some may be manually published (e.g. annual forward planning budgets). Over time, it may be that donors will modify their systems to enable increased automation.

Donors already have to assemble the information needed to supply partner government systems and ad hoc requests for information. By providing this information through a data repository, the needs of partner governments can be met more systematically and comprehensively, accessibility can be increased while reducing the duplication of effort for donors.

4.6 Will IATI enable reporting to AIMS to be automated? Do partner countries have the capacity?

IATI is being designed to meet the information needs of partner countries and their budgets and aid management systems. We believe that there is potential for reporting to AIMS to be automated, and this will enable partner countries, if they choose, to make minor adjustments to their aid management systems to enable that automation. This would save huge effort for partner countries trying to maintain the information in their aid management systems. Where partner countries do not wish to make any changes to their systems, they will not have to. IATI will nevertheless provide them with substantial benefits, as outlined above, and they will be able to continue to enter information into their systems manually.

IATI will be doing pilots in six partner countries during 2010 to test some of these concepts and learn lessons. We anticipate some possible problematic areas including:

- different interpretation of a project in central donor systems than at country level in AIMS

- projects that are co-funded could be challenging, and can be dealt with differently in different AIMS

- we have found that in most cases centralised systems do not have detailed forward planning information.

These are of course the same problems that already exist in manual reporting. At the moment, the problems either cause additional work or they are simply side-stepped by failing to report in a way that is consistent with partner country systems. IATI will enable us to address these problems in a more systematic way.

4.7 If donors have this information in internal systems, will it be easy to publish in IATI format?

Yes, if the information exists and is aligned with the IATI definitions, it should not be technically difficult to export in an IATI format. The challenge comes where the information exists, but uses different classifications and definitions to IATI information. In such cases an automatic mapping between definitions can be done where possible; otherwise systems need to be modified to incorporate the new definitions or information must be manually reported.

4.8 What will be the implications for donors of meeting the IATI standards?

Donors will have to do some things differently as a result of greater transparency irrespective of the system used to implement it. The information some donors collect and use internally and provide to partner governments is not intended to be made public. Any system which makes this information available to the public will mean those donors will have to tighten their processes to make this information suitable for publication. This is an unavoidable result of publishing this additional information, and does not depend on the choice of mechanism for IATI.

IATI can, however, help donors to avoid unnecessary administrative costs of collecting information and multiple reporting. This can not only minimise the costs of greater transparency in the future, it can also reduce the existing costs of reporting aid information.

Preliminary analysis has suggested that the costs of implementing the IATI proposals for donors would be offset by the efficiency savings within 1-2 years, although further work is required to refine and test these calculations. In addition, IATI is expected to result in improvements in aid effectiveness by reducing diversion and capture, reducing unpredictability, improving accountability and service delivery, improving co-ordination, facilitating research, improving aid allocation and increasing public support for development.

4.9 If donors do not have the information in their systems, how can they meet IATI requirements?

If information doesn't exist in donor systems, but is known (e.g. held within documents), then either donors will have to modify their systems to capture the information in a structured format, or publish it manually. This is a consequence of donor commitment to greater aid transparency. IATI provides a mechanism to enable donors to do this automatically in future, and to add value to what would otherwise be inaccessible information.

4.10 We are concerned about the quality of the information in our systems, how can we ensure that data are verified before they are published?

Quality of information is a common and legitimate concern amongst all donors. The experience from donors that have gone through the process of publishing information onto their own websites is that a one-off special exercise was required to clean up data and documents before publication. This should be done in conjunction with an initiative to educate staff on the importance of quality information, generally as part of a response to meeting the needs of more proactive publication under Freedom of Information legislation.

We also believe that transparency and public access to information is an extremely powerful incentive to improve the quality of information published, and can have a positive impact on the quality of information being captured in internal systems (and therefore improve internal reporting and DAC reporting). Most of the information will be published by staff working directly with partner countries and so they will be taking due care of the accuracy of the information that they share.

For some purposes, final quality assured information is needed, and this process of quality assurance takes time. For some other purposes, it is more important to have timely information which has not yet been through a central checking process. The IATI standard will include a marker to indicate the status of relevant, mainly statistical, data: quality checked or still to be quality checked. Different users can then choose whether to restrict themselves to the final data.

4.11 What language will donors have to use for publication?

As a minimum, information should be published in the language used when working with the partner country government.

4.12 How can donors encourage those agencies through which they channel aid to adopt the IATI standards? Through NGOs – for multilateral contributions – for budget support? Won't it involve counting?

Where money is channelled through NGOs, donors should ask them to also publish information on the projects being funded by these funds, as part of their reporting responsibilities. We will design the standard in a way that avoids double counting (e.g. by asking providers of information to specify their funding source).

For core contributions to multilateral agencies, data are already measured in the DAC system at two points in time: the payment to the multilateral and again when the multilateral spends the money in a partner country. By recording the channel used to provide funds and the type of flow, IATI will record both of these transactions. Already two multilateral development banks have signed up to IATI and so will be publishing their outflow data to the IATI registry. Donors could encourage the others to do likewise.

For budget support, for the purposes of IATI, this is considered to be the end of the chain for donor transparency and there is no further obligation on donors to publish information beyond the commitments they give to recipient governments and the subsequent related information. The scope of IATI is limited to donor aid flows and does not extend to transparency of expenditure of partner country budgets. It is important for there to be effective monitoring and accountability of budget execution in all countries. We hope that where budgets are more transparent, the information about budgets could eventually be linked to the IATI aid data to tell a complete story. The adoption of open standards for data about aid will facilitate this linkage.

5 Infomediaries – Info Users

5.1 I am an intermediary who wants to develop new information service. How will I be able to access information?

IATI will make it possible for third party organisations and individuals to access and use the information supplied through IATI via the registry. This will allow users to develop applications and services to present the information in order to meet specific needs.

Current thinking is that the registry is likely to provide links to raw data in machine readable formats, and so will allow automated access. There should be some sort of subscription service that will inform interested parties of new data available. In the future, it is possible this access could be expanded to include application programming interfaces (APIs) that allow direct programmatic access to live data stores.

5.2 Will there be restrictions on how I can use this information (e.g. for commercial use?)

How information will be licensed through IATI will be a topic for discussion in the Technical Advisory Group. The details of how it will be licensed, and whether it can be used for commercial purposes are still to be agreed, but we aim to make the information openly licensed, with as few constraints for accessing and using it as possible. There are different licensing models available, including models that require attribution when used, and models where info must be shared using the same license.