AID TRANSPARENCY INDEX 2014

U.S. REPORT

Publish What You Fund
The Global Campaign for Aid Transparency

MFAN MODERNIZING FOREIGN ASSISTANCE NETWORK
www.modernizeaid.net

Oxfam America

Publish What You Fund is the global campaign for aid transparency. We work to make available and accessible comprehensive, timely and comparable information about development flows. The campaign seeks to empower civil society advocates, parliamentarians and officials with information, both in aid recipient countries and from the development cooperation providers working with them.

The Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN) is a reform coalition composed of international development and foreign policy practitioners, policy advocates and experts, concerned citizens and private sector organizations. MFAN was created to build upon the bipartisan consensus that has emerged over the last decade that the U.S. should play a leadership role in achieving economic growth and reducing poverty and suffering around the world, and that we can play this role more effectively, efficiently, and transparently.

Oxfam America is an international relief and development organization that creates lasting solutions to poverty, hunger, and injustice. Together with individuals and local groups in more than 120 countries, Oxfam saves lives, help people overcome poverty, and fights for social justice. Oxfam America does not receive money from the U.S. government.

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October 2014

The State of Play: 2014 Highlights

INTRODUCTION

There is now more accessible information on foreign assistance than ever before. Donors from around the world have made commitments to publishing more and better aid information, including the agreement to fully implement the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) by the end of 2015. As of September 2014, there were 284 IATI publishers globally, including bilateral and multilateral providers, NGOs, private sector organizations, and private foundations. Together, these organizations represent approximately 83% of committed Official Development Flows. Despite this progress, there are still very few quality publishers to IATI, with only partial coverage of their activities, and far too many gaps in the information that is published.

The U.S is making progress with IATI. As of September 2014, 10 of at least 22 U.S. agencies with a role in foreign assistance are publishing some information to the Foreign Assistance Dashboard and the IATI Registry.[1] The quality and completeness of the information remains very mixed however.

Perhaps the most important step forward in the U.S. in 2014 has been the Dashboard's adoption of the IATI schema with a tailored U.S. extension. This replaces the previous U.S.-designed standard with the internationally agreed IATI Standard. This improvement is more than a technical one, as it has a number of ripple effects that can positively affect data quality, data structure and ultimately data usability. There have also been a number of other initiatives and efforts to increase the understanding, accessibility, and use of aid data by U.S. agencies and civil society, all of which are aimed at accelerating U.S. progress on aid transparency.

With the Busan deadline less than 14 months away, the link between U.S. progress and the success of IATI becomes more critical.[2] Significant challenges remain, particularly around data quality and data use. The U.S. is the single largest bilateral donor – accounting for approximately 13.5% of flows reported to the DAC and spanning 123 countries.[3] Using current aid information to make informed decisions about allocating resources – either by U.S. agencies or other donors – will be greatly hampered without a robust picture of U.S. spending. Further, the visualization tools currently being developed – such as the newly released "d-portal" – use the IATI Registry as their data source.[4] The usefulness of these tools to any user depends on complete publication by all donors, especially the U.S.

This paper, which complements the 2014 Aid Transparency Index (ATI), provides a more detailed description of U.S. progress on aid transparency and more specific recommendations to help the U.S. meet its Busan 2015 deadline and other international aid transparency commitments.

SOME POSITIVE STEPS FORWARD

U.S. agencies and civil society have taken a number of positive steps to improve data quality and to lay the groundwork for ensuring that the data is both *useable* and *used*:

Linking aid and domestic budgets. The piloting phase of the IATI budget identifier is moving forward. The goal of this initiative is to help align information on development flows with country budget classifications. This should provide a more comprehensive and accurate understanding of the total domestic government and donor finances, thus allowing better planning and allocation of resources. MCC and USAID, along with a handful of other stakeholders, have participated in this important effort to finalize this part of the IATI Standard.

Dashboard adopts the IATI schema with a U.S. extension. After originally using a U.S.-designed standard to publish USG data to IATI, the Dashboard followed a 2013 ATI recommendation to adopt the IATI Standard with a tailored U.S. extension. This change to the publication approach allows USG data to conform to the common standard from the outset while still capturing important data used for other specific U.S. reporting requirements. Additionally, the new schema provides for smoother, more systematic, and structured information sharing from the agencies to the Dashboard and the IATI Registry. MCC has since produced its own IATI XML structured files to comply with the Dashboard and IATI requirements simultaneously, with a correspondingly positive impact on data quality.

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[1] Departments of Agriculture, Defense, Health and Human Services, State, Treasury, Inter-American Foundation, MCC, Peace Corps, U.S. African Development Foundation and USAID.

[2] IATI is included as part of the common, open standard of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation. As part of their commitment to the Global Partnership in Busan in November of 2011, donors agreed to fully implement the common standard, including IATI, by the end of 2015.

[3] This includes both ODA and OOF. See the OECD DAC Creditor Reporting System: http://stats.oecd.org/Index.aspx?datasetcode=CRS1

[4] D-portal is a country-based information platform that tracks resource flows. See: http://d-portal.org/

A significant redesign of the Dashboard. In order to improve its usability and to better identify and target the needs of its primary audience, the Dashboard team has recently engaged the NGO and transparency community on data use and design consultations for a more user-friendly Dashboard. The new site is expected in the fall of 2014.

MCC improvements to data quality and transparency. MCC has recently released the first of a series of internal websites that allows MCC staff to explore its own IATI data through dynamic visualizations. Additionally, the agency plans to present a research piece on transparency and accountability this fall, drawing on MCC's experience over the past few years.

The NGO community prioritizes aid transparency. U.S. civil society has embraced the global call for better quality aid information for wider use among domestic and local stakeholders. For example, the Modernizing Foreign Assistance Network (MFAN) recently outlined the key priorities for USG's full and effective implementation of its existing commitments on transparency in "Aid Effectiveness: The Role of Transparency".[5] Oxfam America will be releasing a policy paper outlining what civil society partners have said about the aid information they need, and the information that is currently available to them. InterAction has developed an online tool – NGOAidMap.org – that aims to increase the amount of publicly available data on international development and humanitarian response by providing detailed project information from its members.

USAID piloting aid information use. As part of the effort to better explore the data needs, usage, and future priorities of partner countries, including both governments and civil society, USAID is the first agency to undertake three aid transparency pilot studies in Bangladesh, Ghana and Zambia. The results are expected in late 2014, and should help identify not just the priority needs of partner countries but also what tools should be designed to improve the use of aid information.

The Open Government Partnership. The second U.S. National Action Plan reaffirmed a previous commitment on foreign assistance transparency, pledging that, by 2015, agencies managing or implementing foreign assistance "will work to add or expand detailed, timely, and high-quality foreign assistance data to ForeignAssistance.gov."[6]

2014 Open Government Plans. All U.S. agencies included in the 2014 ATI have developed Open Government plans. Notably, MCC has included in its plan a commitment to make aid data publication a core part of its operations. USAID has agreed to investigate and then publish a costed management plan for publishing additional fields to IATI.

It will take a concerted effort, including far more political leadership, to publish high quality IATI data. That is the overriding, critical need if the U.S. is to fully deliver on its aid transparency commitments by 2015.

[5] http://www.modernizeaid.net/wp-content/uploads/2014/09/MFAN_Transparency_One-Pager_8.5x11_091214a.pdf
[6] http://www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/docs/us_national_action_plan_6p.pdf

THE CHALLENGES FOR DELIVERY OF AID TRANSPARENCY

The success of some U.S. agencies, and the lack of progress of others, is due to several factors:

Policy and technical leadership are not linked. Although having advantages in terms of their smaller size and newer concepts – and therefore systems – the sustained progress of MCC and the significant improvements by PEPFAR have been greatly bolstered by the fact that the political and technical leadership have come together to make quality aid data and aid transparency a priority.[7] These two functions *cannot* operate independently.

Limited technical expertise. For most of the agencies, the expertise to deliver on their transparency commitments either does not exist in-house or is very limited. Basic problems with publishing information such as missing dates, project descriptions and titles are far too frequent.
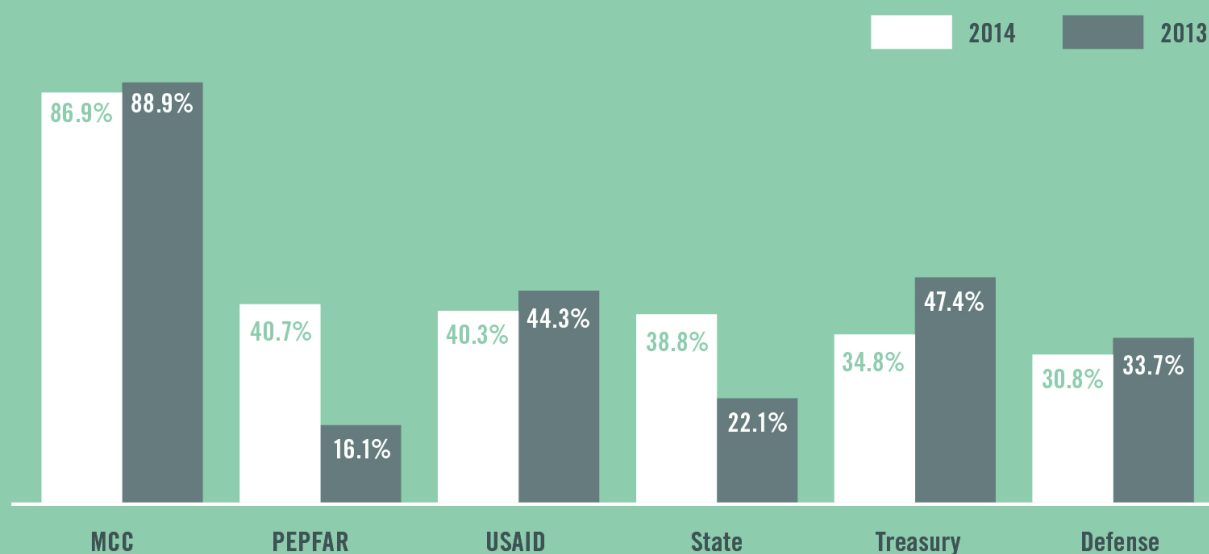
Systems are often an obstacle. For many U.S. agencies, existing financial, procurement, auditing, and other systems are either antiquated and/or were never designed for publishing the types and level of data called for by IATI.

The plan for delivery on aid transparency is missing. Agencies administering foreign assistance need to develop a management plan that examines their systems, analyzes the data gaps that need to be filled, and then identifies the necessary resources (both technical and financial) to meet existing aid transparency commitments.

The aid transparency agenda, its progress, and data use are not promoted. Far too little is being done to promote the Dashboard, IATI, and the potential of quality aid data to improve development outcomes. This includes briefing agency officials on USG's efforts to deliver on aid transparency commitments. Wider agency personnel, including offices abroad, embassies, and other external partners should also be included. For example, during the consultations on the OGP National Action Plan, it became clear that several agencies were talking about open government without awareness of the Dashboard or IATI, or even of the existing commitments on aid transparency.

The impact of these challenges is an incomplete and at times misleading picture of U.S. foreign assistance for the users of aid information. It prevents informed decision making within and across U.S. aid agencies. It also presents challenges to other donors, partner countries, and other stakeholders. Given the size of U.S. aid flows, users should have the full picture of U.S. aid available, both for internal use and for all other external stakeholders.

CHART 1. COMPARISON OF PERFORMANCE BETWEEN 2014 AND 2013

2014 | 2013

Agency	2014	2013
MCC	86.9%	88.9%
PEPFAR	40.7%	16.1%
USAID	40.3%	44.3%
State	38.8%	22.1%
Treasury	34.8%	47.4%
Defense	30.8%	33.7%

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[7] The U.S. President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR) is the U.S. Government initiative to help save the lives of those suffering from HIV/AIDS around the world. The Office of the Global Aid Coordinator (OGAC) coordinates PEPFAR.

RESULTS FROM THE 2014 AID TRANSPARENCY INDEX

The performance of the six U.S. agencies included in the 2014 ATI is varied. For some agencies, implementing aid transparency has been a priority while for others it continues to be a challenge. The number one agency in the 2013 ranking, MCC, remains a leader on aid transparency and performs very well in 2014. Others such as USAID, Treasury and DOD have scored lower in 2014 compared with 2013. PEPFAR has showed the greatest improvement of any U.S. agency and has expressed its continued commitment to improve its transparency and open up its data.

MCC has improved its publication since 2013, which now includes a comprehensive file of all its current compacts including valuable results and evaluations information. MCC took the extra step of being the only U.S. agency to publish its own IATI implementation schedule, which was assessed by Publish What You Fund as ambitious in comparison to other donors' schedules.[8]
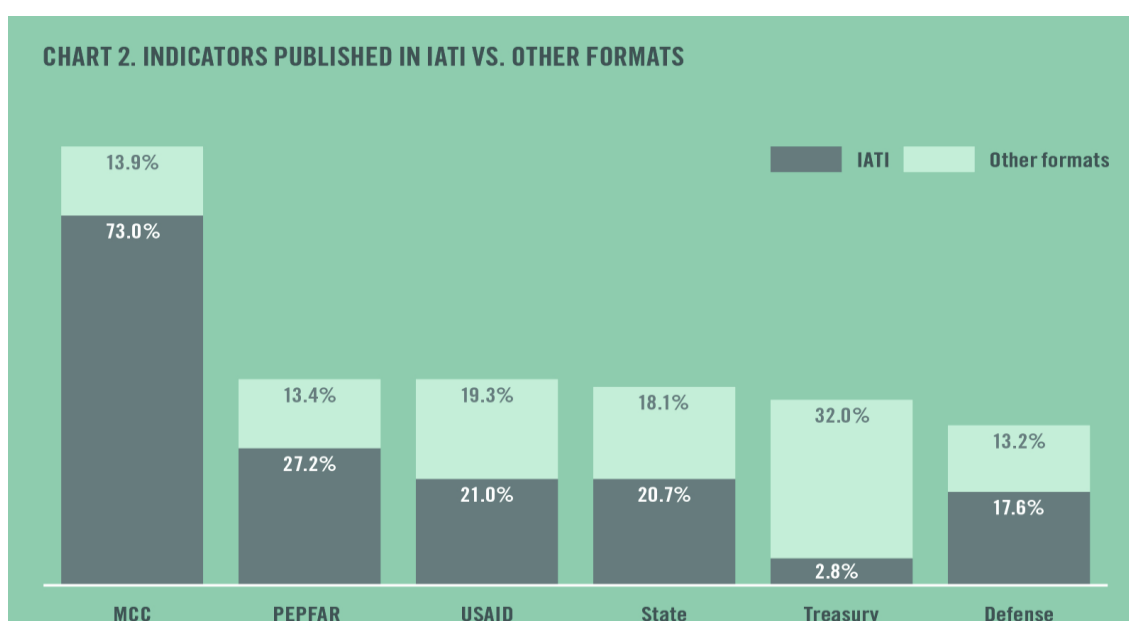
The State Department and PEPFAR should be recognized for their first publications to IATI, although data quality and coverage still need to be addressed. For State, the problems include missing titles, dates, and other basic information, as well as failing to link this information to actual projects. For PEPFAR, the data published is current and comprehensive, aligning well with the IATI Standard's guidelines for best practice, but there are a number of IATI fields that are not yet covered.

Treasury has dropped more than five places in the ranking because activity dates were lacking in its IATI publication, thus making it impossible to determine whether the data is current. Additionally, while the data in the Dashboard and in turn, the IATI Registry, includes information from the Office of Technical Assistance and contributions to multilaterals, debt relief continues to be excluded. This only presents a partial picture of Treasury's international programs.

USAID, the largest spending U.S. aid agency, has also fallen in the ATI ranking compared to 2013. USAID's outdated systems remain a challenge and hinder full implementation of IATI. The agency nonetheless makes vast amounts of information available on different websites such as http://map.usaid.gov and https://dec.usaid.gov/dec/home/Default.aspx. Therefore, one significant step would be to join up its information systems and data feeds to better capture and subsequently publish information that is already available in a consistent, easily searchable, and user-friendly format.

The Department of Defense, already low in the 2013 ranking, dropped even further in 2014, and it has only partially engaged with the ongoing transparency discussions.

Overall, U.S. agencies still have a long way to go to make their aid transparent and to meet their IATI commitments. Though agencies are collecting a vast amount of information, much of it is not made publicly available in an open, internationally comparable format. U.S. agencies have developed data catalogues and inventories, mostly under the guidance of the Open Government Directive, but limited current information is published systematically to IATI.

CHART 2. INDICATORS PUBLISHED IN IATI VS. OTHER FORMATS

- IATI
- Other formats

Agency	IATI	Other formats
MCC	73.0%	13.9%
PEPFAR	27.2%	13.4%
USAID	21.0%	19.3%
State	20.7%	18.1%
Treasury	2.8%	32.0%
Defense	17.6%	13.2%

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[8] Of the 52 schedules that were available for assessment, 20 are assessed as ambitious and 13 as moderately ambitious, meaning the majority of organizations included in the ATI are yet to outline any concrete plan to start publishing their information in a more timely and comparable format.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR GETTING TO 2015

The U.S. not only needs to meet its Busan commitments, but it should be more ambitious on its goals for the delivery of aid transparency. There are many challenges to meeting these goals, including the large number of agencies that administer foreign assistance, with different business models and roles, and the systems that are both old and/or not designed to deliver more than financial information. As a result, it will take a concerted effort, including far more political leadership, to publish high quality IATI data. **That is the overriding, critical need if the U.S. is to fully deliver on its aid transparency commitments by 2015.**

The following recommendations are offered as priority steps for the U.S.:

All agencies, especially State and USAID, should **develop and publish a costed management plan** to implement IATI fully by the end of 2015. Attention to systems upgrades and other information system changes cannot wait, and should be part of the planning process.

The Dashboard should **focus on improving the data quality of existing publishers**, especially the State Department and USAID, which together account for over 75% of U.S. foreign assistance. This will help concentrate efforts on the primary foreign assistance agencies and minimize the risks of providing an incomplete aid picture for domestic users and other stakeholders, including those receiving aid.

When publishing to the IATI Registry, the Dashboard should segment aid data by agency, rather than aggregating into a single file per country. This will help to protect the quality of each agency's data and preserve its integrity.

Agencies should **aim to improve data quality at the source** by automatically generating their IATI XML information from their own systems and from the beginning of the project cycle. USG should inform missions and staff working on information gathering about the system changes happening in HQ.

Additional technical expertise – both within the Dashboard and within the agencies – is absolutely necessary and resources should be allocated for that purpose.

Agencies should be encouraged to **use their own IATI data for internal management**, allocation of resources, and evaluation of existing and future efforts. This not only makes use of valuable data, but can improve data quality and internal support for aid transparency efforts. Countries such as the Netherlands and Sweden currently use their IATI data as an internal management tool. Putting such a value on this data not only makes good management sense, but it also raises the internal profile of the information.

Agencies should **encourage the use of aid information externally** by partner countries, infomediaries, the NGO community, and others. Agencies like USAID have provided funding for academic institutions such as the College of William and Mary and organizations such AidData to geo-code their data and create subnational maps and dashboards. Others should consider similar initiatives to promote data use.

TABLE 1. U.S. PERFORMANCE IN THE 2014 ATI

Agency name	Overall % score	Index overall rank (out of 68)	Indicators the agency scores on (out of 39)	No of indicators published to the IATI Registry (out of 36)
MCC	86.9	3	39	30
PEPFAR	40.7	30	26	15
USAID	40.3	31	27	11
State	38.8	32	25	11
Treasury	34.8	36	29	1
Defense	30.8	38	19	9