PUBLICATION OF HUMANITARIAN FUNDING DATA

(aligned with commitment 1.1 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)

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PublishWhatYouFund
The Global Campaign for Aid Transparency

Publish What You Fund is the global campaign for aid and development transparency. Launched in 2008, we envisage a world where aid and development information is transparent, available and used for effective decision-making, public accountability and lasting change for all citizens. Publish What You Fund combines effective research, evidence-based advocacy and technical knowhow to improve the quality and usefulness of data. We continue to campaign, to amplify and to extend the benefits of aid transparency for better development and humanitarian outcomes.

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Background and project overview

The Grand Bargain[1] was launched at the World Humanitarian Summit in May 2016. Its goal to achieve $1bn in savings to address the gap in humanitarian financing was to be realised through a series of commitments in nine key areas.[2] In the area of transparency, a 'Transparency Workstream' was co-convened by the Dutch government and the World Bank to support signatories in implementing their commitment to publish timely and high-quality data on humanitarian funding and how it is allocated and used to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard (commitment 1.1; deadline May 2018).[3] This data had to be of appropriate quality to support data analysis, including the ability to identify the distinctiveness of activities, organisations, environments and circumstances. Signatories also committed to make use of available data in their programming and decision-making, to improve the digital platform and to support partners to both publish and access data.

> **BOX 1: What is the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)?**
>
> The standard is a set of rules and guidance for publishing standardised development and humanitarian data. Organisations can publish information on their finances (e.g. project budgets, funding allocations) and activities (e.g. locations of projects, project results). Data needs to be provided in the XML format. A range of organisations publish to the IATI standard, including donor governments, some UN agencies, and NGOs.

In the first phase of its activities (2017–2018) the Transparency Workstream focused on the commitment to publish data (commitment 1.1) in order to stimulate data availability, by enhancing the IATI standard to support the publication of humanitarian data and by providing support to signatories in publishing their humanitarian data. To unlock the full potential of transparent humanitarian data, it must not only be published but actively used to inform evidence-based interventions and efficiently allocate limited humanitarian resources to crisis settings. Therefore, the range of stakeholders had to be broadened to include humanitarian actors on the ground, to fully track financial flows and other information.

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1   For more information on the Grand Bargain, including the name of all signatories, please see:
     https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain
2   The Grand Bargain was signed by 61 signatories (24 member states, 21 NGOs, 12 UN agencies, two Red Cross movements, and two inter-governmental organisations)
3   When the team talk about IATI, this includes the IATI standard, the actual data that comes out of IATI, and the platform(s) that use IATI data (e.g. d-portal). For more information on the IATI standard, please see: https://iatistandard.org/en/

BOX 2: Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream commitments:

1. Publish timely, transparent, harmonised and open high-quality data on humanitarian funding within two years of the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul. We consider IATI to provide a basis for the purpose of a common standard.
2. Make use of appropriate data analysis, explaining the distinctiveness of activities, organisations, environments and circumstances (for example: protection, conflict-zones).
3. Improve the digital platform and engage with the open-data standard community to help ensure:
    a. Accountability of donors and responders with open data for retrieval and analysis;
    b. Improvements in decision-making, based upon the best possible information;
    c. A reduced workload over time as a result of donors accepting a common standard data for some reporting purposes; and
    d. Traceability of donors' funding throughout the transaction chain as far as the final responders and, where feasible, affected people.
4. Support the capacity of all partners to access and publish data.

For this reason, the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream, with funding from the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands, commissioned Publish What You Fund and Ground Truth Solutions to conduct research into the information needs and challenges faced by data users on the ground in protracted humanitarian response settings, to inform the efforts of the Transparency Workstream and Grand Bargain signatories.

Research methodology

The team conducted a combination of desk, online survey and key informant interview (KII) research of two case study countries – Bangladesh and Iraq – to make recommendations on how to increase transparency and to better meet the information needs of humanitarian responders, especially at a national and local level.

The research team chose Iraq and Bangladesh as its final case-study countries through a number of criteria (see methodology[4] for more on this). **Throughout, the team endeavoured to explore the research, and then present its findings, in a way which was consistent with what it heard from the mouths of those on the ground. As such, any omissions, for example regarding specific platforms or initiatives, should be interpreted with this understanding in mind**. While this provided an opportunity to compare and contrast two different protracted crises, the team recognises the limitations of this approach when trying to draw global lessons and insights.

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4   Methodology: www.publishwhatyoufund.org/projects/humanitarian-transparency/

The survey (187 responses) and KIIs (66 participants) provided information about the challenges faced by humanitarian responders across a range of roles and types of organisations in accessing, submitting, sharing and using data from over 100 organisations across Iraq and Bangladesh (acknowledging that the limited sample size results in some challenges regarding the statistical significance of individual findings). The number of survey and KII respondents is broken down by organisation type in the methodology document. The study was weighted in favour of national and local actors,[5] but included interviews with governments, UN agencies, cluster coordinators, international NGOs,[6] and donor mission offices. For more information, please see Publish What You Fund's full methodology in footnotes.

Overall key findings

The research findings are presented across four themed briefing papers, as set out below. It should be noted while reading these reports that a key theme throughout is the cross-cutting issue of data quality. While there are agreed components of quality data, we haven't produced a definitive definition because this research illustrates the extent to which quality is largely a local construct and requires engagement and feedback loops to understand and address.

Research Brief 1 – Publication of humanitarian funding data (aligned with commitment 1.1 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)

In this paper the research team presents its finding that funding data is of greater relevance to "coordinators" (e.g. recipient government officials and country-level coordination groups) than to "implementers" (usually the local level personnel who design and execute programmes and in turn report their activities "up the chain" to coordinators). The team also found that the quality of the available funding data is a serious concern and awareness and use of IATI data is lower than for data from the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS), which is itself used minimally (by only 1% of stakeholders in Iraq and 3% in Bangladesh had used IATI, while 3% in Bangladesh and 15% in Iraq reported regular use of FTS). In addition, however, it was noted that non-financial IATI data could be of use to a variety of actors within humanitarian response, for example 3/4W, results and outcomes data.

Research Brief 2 – Data collection, analysis and use in protracted humanitarian crises (aligned with commitment 1.2 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)

In this paper the findings relate to issues of data quality and the differing needs of "coordinators" versus "implementers"; the former require more oversight information while the latter require management information to help design and implement their programmes. The lack of defined information management roles (including the people to fill them) inhibits collection and use of a range of different data types, including needs assessments, 3/4W, impact data, and monitoring data. Effective data sharing is undermined by limited and inconsistent data sharing practises. How best to treat sensitive data was found to be another challenge that all stakeholders needed to overcome when collecting, analysing and using data. Finally, data collection methodologies were found to often be unclear, or without rigour, suggesting that minimum quality control standards for data collection would be of value.

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5   The research team defines national NGOs as operating in a single country, but in several regions of that country and local NGOs as operating in a single region within a country.

6   The research team defines international NGOs as organisations which work in multiple countries.

Research Brief 3 – **The use, challenges and opportunities associated with digital platforms (aligned with commitment 1.3 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)**

In this paper the research team presents its findings around awareness and use of different digital platforms for programming and publication purposes. The team found that the number and usability of existing platforms is, in the eyes of users, sufficient for accessing the operational and financial data they need. The team found that users want to be able to download raw data in easily accessible formats such as Excel and to be able to download the underlying methodologies to understand how data was collected, and thus more accurately determine its legitimacy and value. The team identified the most commonly used data platforms and considered issues around data quality and sharing, finding that inconsistency in reporting and underlying data quality issues inhibit data use.

Research Brief 4 – **Data use capacity in protracted humanitarian crises (aligned with commitment 1.4 of the Grand Bargain Transparency Workstream)**

In this paper the team identifies that data needs and corresponding capacity issues were similar across the two case study countries. The research finds that current funding models and reporting requirements inhibit data use capacity, particularly in local NGOs (but also INGOs) as they tend to receive less base funding, outside of projects, than other organisations, and do not have the time to report to multiple donors/platforms. Additionally, there is usually no explicit funding allocated to carry out needs assessments (a key requirement of on-the-ground organisations) and often either they cannot finance information management officer roles at all, or they lose their IM staff to bigger organisations. If data use capacity issues are addressed properly then it is likely that the use and publication of data (e.g. needs assessments, 3/4W, nutrition assessments, facility assessments, monitoring and evaluation data, and IATI data) among humanitarian organisations will also improve in the longer-term.

SECTION TWO

Publication of humanitarian funding data

Report purpose and scope

This research brief explores the user needs and challenges associated with the publication of humanitarian funding data. It is based on data collected via the online survey and the subsequent interviews undertaken during field trips for the project.

Specifically, the brief identifies key user groups to whom funding data is most relevant ("coordinators" and "implementers"), what other data these groups require and awareness of open data standards, services and portals for reporting/accessing funding data. As such, given the commitment by signatories of the Grand Bargain to publish their funding data to the IATI Standard, this brief focuses primarily on this open data standard for reporting aid and development funding, but it also addresses the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UN OCHA) Financial Tracking Service (FTS) and the presence of country aid information management systems (AIMS).

IATI is a global initiative to improve the transparency of development and humanitarian resources and their results for addressing poverty and crises. The IATI open data standard enables humanitarian and development actors to publish a broad range of data including financial information (budgets, disbursements and expenditure) in a standardised format. The IATI Standard enables publication of more than just financial data; geographical location, details about implementing organisations and also results and evaluation data can be captured. The standard has also been enhanced in versions 2.02 and 2.03 to include some specific humanitarian fields relating to the requirements of FTS (specifically in relation to humanitarian response plan data) and the Grand Bargain commitments on cash, localisation and earmarking. As of May 2019, more than 1,000 organisations had registered as publishers to the IATI Standard, with more than one million activities recorded in the IATI registry.[7]

FTS is a service operated by UN OCHA which aims to present a complete picture of all international humanitarian funding flows. Since 1992, it has collected voluntarily submitted reports from government donors, UN-administered funds, UN agencies, NGOs and other humanitarian actors and partners, including the private sector. According to its website "*FTS verifies and combines these reports using a consistent methodology, ensuring that data is fully comparable and presented as a seamless whole*". In 2017, FTS reported that the platform recorded the funding of 8,000 organisations, covering 650 appeals, processing approximately 2,000 contributions per month.

It is noteworthy that an FTS–IATI pilot scheme is currently underway which aims to improve the automated sharing of financial data between donors reporting in the IATI Standard and the FTS. Essentially, it would allow FTS to ingest IATI data which could improve the accuracy/alignment of humanitarian data and reduce the reporting burden on donors.

Over the past 10 years, alongside the emergence of IATI, and the growth of FTS, there has been substantial investment in AIMS to enable recipient governments to monitor, analyse and manage incoming aid flows. These systems primarily take three forms – aid management platforms built by Development Gateway, development assistance databases built by Synergy Systems, or else grassroots systems designed and contracted by recipient governments. Of the two case study countries, only Bangladesh possesses an AIMS, and in this case it is a development assistance database built by Synergy Systems. An assessment of the Bangladesh development assistance database suggests that IATI data is not currently being ingested into the system.

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7   As of yet there is no means to calibrate what proportion of all agencies/funding this represents however publisher stats are available here: http://publishingstats.iatistandard.org/

An alternative source of statistical information on official development assistance (ODA) is the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) . There are two main data updates each year. In April, high-level aggregated figures are published on total aid given by donor countries for the previous calendar year. In December, these figures are retroactively updated with details on how the money was allocated by recipient country, sector (health, education, etc), geographical region and by income group (least developed, upper middle income, etc). In December, details are also available right down to individual project level. In addition to these two main updates, partial database updates occur in June and September each year.[8]

Findings

FINDING 1A – FUNDING DATA IS OF GREATER RELEVANCE TO "COORDINATORS" WHILE "IMPLEMENTERS" NEED MANAGEMENT INFORMATION

At the field level, the research showed that the need for funding data is of primary relevance to "coordinators". Coordinators are often recipient government officials and country-level coordination groups who require funding data to understand the scale of the response, the variety of actors and to perform oversight to ensure that scarce resources reach the greatest number of affected people. Funding data is, as expected, of less relevance to "implementers", those who design, source funding for and execute programmes at the local level. These implementers reported that their requirements include better management information (security and accessibility information, 3/4W data, etc) and needs assessment/beneficiary data.

TABLE 1: COORDINATORS VS IMPLEMENTERS

COORDINATORS		IMPLEMENTERS	
Who:	country governments and coordination groups (e.g. clusters, donors, UN agencies)	Who:	local and national NGOs, INGOs, and often UN agencies (act as response coordinators while also delivering services directly to vulnerable populations)
Focus:	oversight, policy, evaluation and commissioning/funding implementers	Focus:	designing, sourcing funding for and executing programmes
Information needed:	scale of the response, variety of actors, financing	Information needed:	management information (security and accessibility information, 3/4W data, etc), needs assessment and beneficiary data

Implementers prioritise the need for up-to-date, granular, validated management information to inform the design and implementation of their programmes. Specifically, to aid project design, they need information to help them determine the specific mix of services to provide to ensure that their expertise is allocated where the need is greatest, minimising duplication and preventing gaps in the response.

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8   https://www.oecd.org/dac/financing-sustainable-development/development-finance-data/faq.htm

Coordinators, by the nature of their roles, seek information detailing the number, types and activities of actors within the response. However, unlike implementers, coordinators require this information to be consolidated in the form of needs assessment registers, project databases or multi-sector reports to provide an overall picture of what is happening. Coordinators explained that they require such information to prevent duplication of programmes, identify information gaps, ensure appropriate targeting of resources, and react in a timely manner to ensure humanitarian needs of affected populations are met. There was definitely a sense among coordinators that many actors in the response fail (in part due to a lack of resource – see Brief 4) to report their activities frequently (if at all) through the appropriate cluster reporting mechanisms and as such there are potenatially activities taking place which do not meet the rigour or standards associated with humanitarian response.

One noteworthy observation of this work was the difference[9] between the responses to the team's online survey and the in-country KII discussions.

With regard to data use,[10] during the survey phase of this work, respondents in Iraq explained that the data they used most frequently was that pertaining to needs assessments (73% of respondents), 3/4W (52%), mapping and location data (46%), monitoring (46%), population/demographics (41%), security (39%) and data on financial flows (17%). This pattern was strikingly similar in Bangladesh albeit with the addition of natural hazard data (49% of respondents) and health data (35%). With regards to financial flow data, 17% of survey respondents in Iraq reported that they used this frequently and this was primarily voiced by INGOs and NNGOs with a handful of UN agencies and a single coordination body claiming the same. In Bangladesh the number of respondents reporting frequent use of financial flow data was 15% with NNGOs and INGOs leading the charge, followed by a single UN agency and coordination group). In each case the proportion of "implementers" to "coordinators" stating that they make use of financial flow data was about equal (see Research Brief 2 for more on data use).

Meanwhile, during the subsequent KIIs, which were very much structured around the roles of individual stakeholders, the decisions they need to make and the actions they need to take, financial flow data was mentioned much less frequently. Instead, when discussing financial data, it was much more apparent that stakeholders were referring to using their own budget and reporting data, or else collecting market data (such as the price of shelter equipment) to help forecast costs of upcoming activities. As such, financial flow data, defined as information relating to the amounts, channels, agents and outcomes of activity, were much less frequently mentioned, and in this case only by coordinator type organisations who used the information to gain awareness of who was doing what and where at a macro/response level.

With regards to data needs,[11] survey respondents in Iraq and Bangladesh explained that, in order to plan and implement quality assistance programmes for beneficiaries, they need more (quantity, granularity and frequency of) needs assessment data (reported by 75% of respondents in Iraq and 72% in Bangladesh) and population/demographic data (56% in Iraq and ~63% in Bangladesh), followed by mapping, natural hazards and health data in Bangladesh and by mapping and location, security data, 3/4W and data on financial flows in Iraq.[12] In Iraq 30% of respondents, and 35% in Bangladesh need more financial aid flow data. Again, in both cases, the majority of organisations seeking further financial aid flow data were NNGOs and INGOs.

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9   One possible explanation for this difference, discussed by the research team, is that during the survey respondents responded "on behalf of the crisis"; attempting to articulate a macro view of data use and needs rather than the perspective of their own role, organisation and objectives which were easier to explore in person.
10   Survey question: What type of data do you use at least once a month? (select all that apply from a list).
11   Survey question: What type of data do you need more of? (select all that apply from a list).
12   In retrospect, a weakness in the methodology identified by the research team was not to determine a means of calibrating availability versus awareness to determine to what extent the "experienced needs" of actors were as a result of their not being aware of certain data sets.

But once again, the KIIs highlighted that greater quantities of financial flow data would rarely be of benefit to implementers during their operations. Rather there is a sense among these groups that this information simply should be transparent and available, as a matter of principle, even if there is no obvious immediate use case.

One government stakeholder questioned "*how can the response be managed and assessed if this data is not available*" going on to state that "*when NGOs partner with UN Agencies we are not clear where the funds they (the UN agencies) receive are going*". Again, the need was articulated in terms of market data to help prepare budgets, information about potential fundraising sources, etc. At that point they require local procurement information to determine the costs of services and supplies such as fuel, generators and lodgings, but also for programme items such as non-food items and equipment including water pumps, tents, machinery (this need was especially the case for local NGOs). Implementers then seek information about the presence and focus of different funders, the contact details of their employees and insight into procurement practises in order to be able to apply for funding to implement activities. Meanwhile coordinators provided concrete examples of why they need such information and demonstrated examples of use – in the case of recipient governments the argument was to help better plan transition of the response, while coordinators explained their mandate to provide oversight of the response more broadly, to understand how different sectors are staffed and resourced, and the total extent of development funding.

IRAQ	BANGLADESH

$ Only 12% of stakeholders in both Iraq and Bangladesh felt uncomfortable sharing financial information with other actors.

12%   **12%**
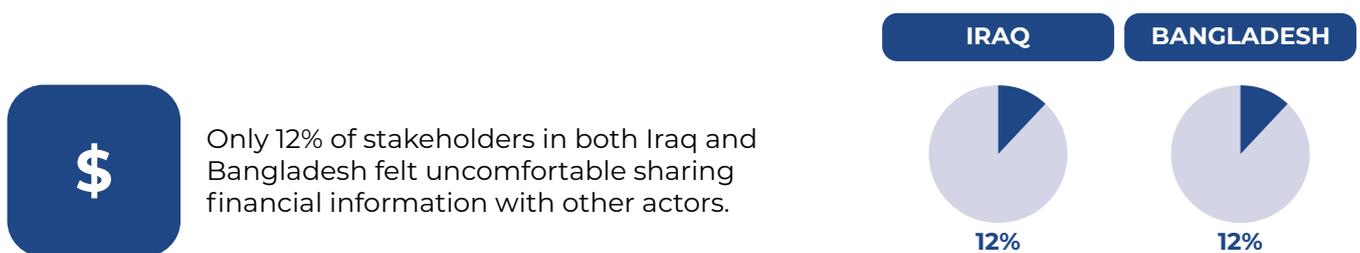
In Bangladesh 12% of survey respondents said they felt uncomfortable sharing financial data (mostly NNGOS followed by INGOs), this was 12% in Iraq (mostly INGOs with some NNGOs). During key informant interviews a number of reasons were given for this including concerns about how other stakeholders might use the data, and a lack of confidence in the quality/validity of a publisher's own data.

FINDING 1B – FUNDING DATA, AND THE AUXILIARY DATA THAT ACCOMPANIES IT, IS RELEVANT TO COORDINATORS IN THE FIELD BUT QUALITY NEEDS TO BE IMPROVED

Based on both survey feedback and the in-country KIIs it is clear that "coordinators" have a demonstrated need for the type of financial data reported to IATI/FTS. However, a number of stakeholders raised concerns about the quality of data from these two sources and specifically questioned its comprehensiveness, timeliness, relevance and to what extent it is validated/accurate. These concerns appear so substantive that the team was unable to find any use cases of IATI or FTS data for decision making (although noting that in Iraq FTS mechanisms/reports [and monthly funding dashboards] are used for information sharing in coordination meetings, including some high-level meetings).

DATA IN PRACTICE

During the in-country key informant interviews the research team heard a number of instances where actors were using FTS data. In Iraq, one INGO told the team that they "*use FTS as an important tool to document financial contributions*", and that while they "*don't use it as a decision-making tool*" they found it useful for understanding what organisations are doing in the response. An NNGO in Iraq remarked "*we use [FTS data] when we want to analyse how the sector is being funded, understand where the gaps are, and when writing our proposals. The data is alright*". The team heard similar examples in Bangladesh, with one NNGO telling us that they used FTS data "*to determine who is funding what in Cox's Bazar and across Bangladesh more widely*" and another "*used FTS data as an advocacy tool to help guide [their] fundraising and find the gaps in certain sectors so we can address them*". Meanwhile other users talked about a need to be careful with or calibrate FTS data, "*we use FTS as partners need to report to this when they receive funding. Some of the numbers we were receiving were not reflective of the activities being undertaken, so now we are putting this on ActivityInfo before going on FTS to get a more accurate record*". Another put the issue of accuracy and completeness more bluntly – "*we suggest you use FTS data with a very healthy lump of salt*".

Furthermore, during the KIIs, local offices of INGOs and donors highlighted that they do not always recognise and/or trust the data they find in IATI which has been submitted by their global HQs due to the fact that a) they are not aware of who (or what team) publishes this data and b) that the data does not reflect the reality they see on the ground.[13]

To inform their understanding of response activities, coordinators also sought data regarding financial flows. Specifically, they sought granular financial data indicating specific actors and programmes, but also macro information regarding the scale of the current response, and the level of funds committed versus expended. Coordinators in both Iraq and Bangladesh wanted to see financial flow data for both humanitarian response plan (HRP) and non-HRP flows into the country (specifically within HRP funding streams they wanted to see the detail of all funds including the often-large proportion designated as "unallocated").[14] In Bangladesh, the national government expressed concern that without up-to-date and complete financial information, including not only in-country expenditure but also that made outside of the country for overheads and fees, it would be impossible to transition the management of the response confidently and responsibly to the government in the coming years. Specifically, local organisations expressed frustration that currently a number of stakeholders, but most specifically a number of UN agencies, do not share their expenditure details via standards such as IATI, nor provide a breakdown of their overheads, fees, or the amounts that actually stay within the country where the response is taking place. There was a sense that transparency, and the shared learning that would result, could drive efficiency and operational excellence thus freeing resources to fill funding gaps across the response.

Likewise, those who were aware of IATI complained that the UN system on the ground largely does not report, and that because awareness of IATI is so low, it is impossible to get a holistic picture of what is happening in the response. Users also voiced frustration with the lack of timeliness of reporting in contexts where the funding landscape can change rapidly. Stakeholders also complained about the limited functionality and questionable usability of the d-portal platform which allows them access IATI data, normally stored in an XML format, in a human-readable HTML format. They argued that a direct download to Excel of CSV files would be much more useful than a series of webpages and visualisations.[15]

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13   Stakeholders cited missing projects, incorrect start dates, unknown implementers/intermediaries, and differences in project titles.
14   Not designated to a specific funding category, miscellaneous.
15   It should be noted that while d-portal allows a CSV download of IATI data, the CSV file only includes a restricted number of columns – not the entire data set.
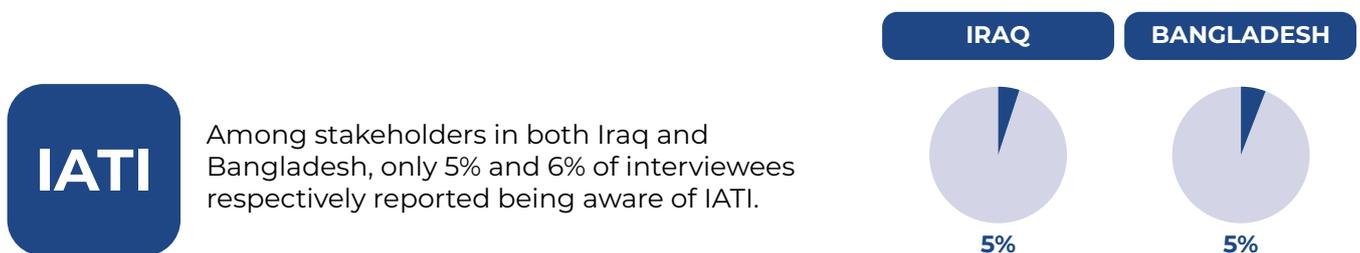
❝ **The UN system does not publish their data to IATI** ❞

Donor, Bangladesh

Coordinators, particularly the clusters and sub working groups within clusters, stated a need for results and evaluation data. Specifically, they wanted to better understand the results of programmes, so they would know how effective they have been, to what extent they can be replicated/scaled up, or adapted in future for greater impact, and to provide a platform to learn from others' best practice and adapt future programming. Such groups wanted to see outcome data shared as both information products (reports, briefings, visualisations) and in its raw form (Excel, CSV, etc) with a link to the detailed methodology used to collect the data. Stakeholders explained that without the raw data and methodology it was hard to trust the provenance or reliability of the data.

There was also a clear need among coordinators for information products (such as briefs, analysis and visualisations) which can package and present raw data in a format which aids understanding and decision making. An opportunity was also identified regarding non-financial data which the IATI Standard can accommodate; specifically, the ability to report on objectives, results and evaluations which "coordinators" identified as a priority. Again, there was a recognition that if this information were shared in a timely manner, with links to source data, and evidence of robust methodologies, this could be useful for policy development and action planning. However logically, and given capacity challenges illustrated in Brief 4, it was recognised that any reporting additional to that already undertaken to meet donor requirements could be unsustainable.

At the national level, the Bangladesh government does use a development assistance database to track aid and development flows. However, a number of stakeholders suggested that the quality of data held within the system, is not of sufficient coverage/quality to enable effective decision making. Across the board, in both countries, stakeholders were either unaware of OECD DAC data as a source of financial flow information, or did not use it because the inherent 18–24 month delay in data publication by OECD member states rendered the information inadequate for making field level decisions.

FINDING 1C – AWARENESS OF IATI DATA IS LOW

IATI

Among stakeholders in both Iraq and Bangladesh, only 5% and 6% of interviewees respectively reported being aware of IATI.

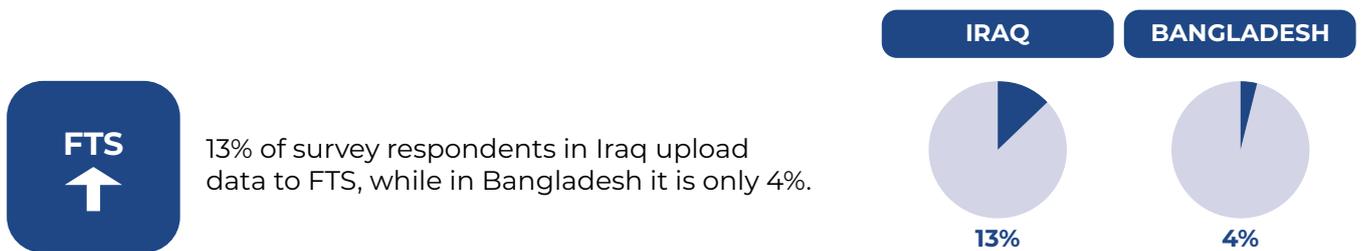| IRAQ	BANGLADESH

5%   5%

At the global level, the awareness of IATI as a standard for delivering timely, transparent, harmonised and open high-quality data has increased significantly, as have the number of IATI publishers, and the quality and quantity of data being reported to the IATI Standard. However, at the country level, within both the Iraq and Bangladesh responses, awareness and utilisation (for both reporting and accessing data) of IATI remains low. Among stakeholders in both Iraq (two NGOs, one INGO and two UN agencies) and Bangladesh (one NGO, three INGOS and one UN Agency), only 5% and 6% of interviewees respectively reported being aware of IATI. Among all survey respondents only a fraction (1% in Iraq and 3% in Bangladesh) said that they had used IATI data.

> **I have previous experience with IATI but feel that it is a lot of work to input smaller projects**
>
> **Humanitarian donor, Bangladesh**

> **We're aware of IATI but it's our HQ that uses it**
>
> **INGO, Iraq**

Until recently when a new query builder was launched, the majority of users have accessed IATI data through the d-portal platform. Of those surveyed, five organisations in Iraq and the same number in Bangladesh were aware of d-portal as a source of data and while it was not frequently cited as a commonly used source (i.e. in user's top three sources of data) five organisations in Bangladesh (four INGOs and one NNGO) and one UN agency in Iraq reported sharing data using IATI.

FINDING 1D – AWARENESS OF FTS IS HIGHER, BUT THE COMPLETENESS OF DATA IS A CHALLENGE

IRAQ   **BANGLADESH**

FTS

13% of survey respondents in Iraq upload data to FTS, while in Bangladesh it is only 4%.

13%   **4%**

While awareness and use of FTS was higher than for IATI, challenges with the quality and comprehensiveness of data served to undermine the trust which stakeholders held in it and thus inhibited the use of FTS data for decision making. Within Bangladesh almost a quarter of respondents stated they were aware of FTS, while in Iraq the proportion was close to half. Of all respondents, 3% in Bangladesh and 15% in Iraq said it was one of the top three platforms they used most often. In Bangladesh this was only INGOs, in Iraq it was mostly NNGOS followed by a handful of UN agencies and finally a few INGOs.

> **We use this platform as it is an important tool for us to document financial contributions. We don't use it as a decision-making tool, but a way to look at what other organisations are doing in Iraq**
>
> **Donor, Iraq**

Respondents reported that their trust in FTS data was frequently undermined as a result of the presence of self-evident discrepancies. For example, a number of stakeholders mentioned differences between FTS figures and the funding outlined in the HRP – or seeing large sums of funding portrayed as "unallocated" on the FTS webpages. One information manager explained that, of the funds tracked by FTS in Bangladesh, approximately 25% of these were "unallocated" and that "as much as another $200m of funding is provided outside of the HRP" – which FTS does not then have visibility of. Another similar challenge with FTS, relating to the humanitarian–development nexus, is the proportion of development funding which is not captured by FTS – a significant challenge in places such as Bangladesh where humanitarian and development activities take place side by side. Where data is available, there are concerns about validity. One specific stakeholder, a donor agency, raised concerns about the accuracy of FTS data given that they felt it was possible for donors and other stakeholders to submit information which would then not undergo any scrutiny, while other agencies failed to submit any information.

> **Partners often don't report to FTS or mis-report what they are getting**

Working group lead, Iraq

> **There is frequently a difference in funding figures on FTS due to partners not reporting often enough**

Coordination working group, Iraq

In Iraq, 13% mentioned that FTS is one of the platforms they upload data to, this was primarily INGOs and NNGOS with a couple of UN agencies and a single coordination body. This was 4% in Bangladesh and all INGOs.

Given its challenges, it was not clear, even at the highest levels, to what degree FTS data was or could be used for effective decision making, particularly by those on the ground.

FINDING 1E – OTHER SOURCES OF FINANCIAL FLOW DATA FACE THE SAME QUALITY AND TIMELINESS CHALLENGES

In Bangladesh the AIMS is managed by the Economic Relations Division (ERD) of the Ministry of Finance. According to the government's own staff, the AIMS records and processes information provided by donors on development activities, humanitarian assistance and related aid flows in the country. The quality of the information held within is limited by the inconsistency in the frequency and comprehensiveness of donor reporting to the government. Also, it was unclear whether the AIMS not currently imports either OECD DAC or IATI data, which could be used to calibrate submissions from donors in country.[16]

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16   The research team discussed the need for greater alignment of definitions and standards and the integration of systems but it was felt that this was a second-order issue when compared to the cross-cutting challenge of data quality.

> **Bangladesh government currently operates an online AIMS which needs to be more actively updated. It should also be the duty of the non-governmental organizations and private organizations to contribute to this portal by making their data available to the government to be added to the online portal. The use of data will increase and improve once data is readily available to the masses**

NNGO, Bangladesh

A handful of stakeholders, mostly government representatives and senior level donor staff, referred to the OECD DAC Common Reporting Standard (CRS) as a source of statistical information on financing. Some 115 organisations publish data to the CRS data set. This includes a combination of major development donors, UN agencies and private foundations. The data is split between 49 sectors, such as energy, agriculture and transport. Each sector is then divided further into sub-sectors, for example, energy policy and energy conservation. There are 275 sub-sector codes in total. There are just three humanitarian sectors: emergency response, reconstruction relief and rehabilitation, and disaster prevention and preparedness. The definition for each sector is noticeably broad. For example, the definition for "emergency response" encapsulates: shelter, water, sanitation, education, health services, the supply of medication, malnutrition management and the supply of non-food relief items. This lack of disaggregated codes for the humanitarian sector is reflected in the overall country profile of resource flows. In Iraq, for example, a total of $3.15bn is reported to have been disbursed across 35 sectors in 2017. Of this, over $1bn is allocated to "emergency response", with little further break down. This may make it challenging for a user of this data to meaningfully track humanitarian resource flows within the country.

Stakeholders on the ground highlighted that use of the CRS dataset was limited, a) because of the limited number of reporting donor countries, and b) because the data is often up to two years out-of-date. None of the stakeholders made reference to the European Disaster Response Information System (EDRIS)[17] – a platform which contains real time information on ECHO and Member States' contributions to humanitarian aid.

Conclusion and recommendations

While there has been positive movement in global publication efforts, the over-riding finding of this research brief is the identification of data quality as a serious impediment to data use. While the low awareness of data sources such as IATI and FTS needs to be addressed, it seems implausible that users will be able to have trust in the data, or indeed use it for any meaningful decision making, if issues of timeliness, comprehensiveness and accuracy are not dealt with.

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[17]   EDRIS contains records of humanitarian aid contributions dating back to 1999 and it is free of access for reporting purposes. However, recording national humanitarian aid contributions and data input is restricted to the Member States' Ministries of Foreign Affairs. Member States are responsible for encoding the information. Information on EU funding is transferred from EDRIS to the global humanitarian Financial Tracking System managed by the UN. EDRIS also feeds in data into the EU Aid Explorer – an EU-wide database on humanitarian and development aid funding.

Equally, engagement around data quality and awareness needs to focus on the use cases of coordinator-type organisations to ensure that their specific needs are met (rather than generic use case examples). However, this is not to dismiss the very real concerns of implementer-type organisations, and specifically civil society organisations, who have a very real and important need to know that transparency of funding flows exists, as a principle, even if the data is something they may not use themselves.

If data quality and awareness are addressed, then it is feasible that non-finance related IATI data such as that pertaining to project objectives and results could be of use to coordinators.

Data comprehensiveness can only be improved by the publication of larger quantities of data on an increasingly frequent basis with quality being improved through rigorous and transparent data verification and validation. This is going to either require donor agencies of all types to publish and validate on behalf of their grantees, or else for the grantees themselves to publish and undertake quality checks themselves.[18] If it is to be the latter, then there are legitimate concerns about both the capacity of grantees to publish funding flow data (see Research Brief 4 for more on the data capacity of NNGOs and INGOs) and also the fact, based on this research, that much of this reporting would not immediately benefit the publisher themselves and instead would add to the current unilaterally upward flow of data from grantees to donors (see Brief 2 for more on data sharing practises).

In response to the findings above the research team has provided the following recommendations:

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR ALL GRAND BARGAIN SIGNATORIES ENGAGED IN THE TRANSPARENCY WORKSTREAM:

a. To improve the quality of funding data, agencies should increase their reporting quantity, frequency and timeliness, and IATI/FTS should improve the accuracy of the data by enhancing the verification and validation process. This in turn will serve to build trust with, and be of use to, stakeholders on the ground.

b. Evaluate options for increasing the quality and completeness of funding data and whether this should be done by donors, INGOs, NNGOs or others. This may require better collaboration between HQ level and country level stakeholders and the introduction of feedback loops to highlight data quality issues. It is unfeasible, especially given the timeframes and other pressures within humanitarian response, that NNGOs will be able to build the capacity to provide this reporting.

c. Consider how "non-financial" elements of the IATI Standard can support humanitarian response, specifically looking at pre-existing elements of the standard such as objectives, results and evaluations, but also review the potential to include 3/4W data, needs assessments and other more timely data sets recognising that stakeholders explained that the humanitarian environment can change on a weekly basis. Consideration needs to be given to existing donor reporting requirements and opportunities for synergies therein, rather than duplication of effort for already burdened NGOs.

d. Recognise that any efforts to increase usability of IATI data need to include an awareness-raising element at the in-country/on the ground level in order that stakeholders understand the potential of IATI data, including via portals/tools that use and make IATI data accessible, such as D-portal, Devtracker, and the Query Builder. Subsequent orientation/capacity building may be required (see Brief 4 for more).

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18   It is noteworthy that both DFID and MINBUZA have mandated this of grant recipients.