The Data Revolution and U.S. Global Development

Transparency and Accountability in U.S. Foreign Assistance

The U.S. has made important gains in foreign aid transparency. In order to build upon that progress and make the data revolution a central pillar of U.S. global development, the U.S. should:

- **Implement the U.S. commitment to publish humanitarian aid data**
- **Invest in gender equality through publication of robust gender data**
- **Improve U.S. aid transparency for stronger U.S. global development**

Transparency is a powerful asset in ensuring well-planned, better targeted and more effective spending. Every year the United States Government disburses more foreign assistance than any other bilateral donor in the world. With this significant contribution comes the right of taxpayers, Congress, policy makers, and the media to know where and how these resources are being used. Publication of timely, comprehensive, and comparable open aid data sets the foundation for effective decision making, ensuring that critical information is available for aid allocation, coordination, accountability, and learning. Taken together, these efforts provide the tools for better and more sustainable outcomes.

The need for quality aid information becomes even more critical given the significant changes in development approaches and available resources.

The rise in private sector finance, philanthropy, and blended financial flows, as well as the efforts to provide smarter assistance to emerging economies, are all part of the movement to produce better and more sustainable development outcomes. The efforts to support Domestic Resource Mobilization, for example, hinge in part on the ability to transparently see what a country raises and what it spends. And although Official Development Assistance is now a smaller part of the overall picture, it remains an important development tool, particularly for the lowest income countries.

The U.S. is the largest donor to what is now a record high for humanitarian assistance. However, while the humanitarian need and financing gap to meet those needs continue to grow, the effectiveness of this assistance is severely hampered by a lack of timely, comprehensive, and comparable open data for analysis and decision making. During the outbreak of Ebola in Sierra Leone, for example, the lack of data on the number of beds, health workers and ambulances resulted in a catastrophic mismatch between resources verses needs. Ninety percent of the patients were in the west part of the country, but 50 percent of the beds were in the east, hours away from sick patients. Months, and many lives lost later, the situation was finally resolved. This poor state of data – including uninformed resource allocation decisions and time wasted collecting critical information in an inefficient manner – cripples the

humanitarian response. Improved data transparency will not solve all the issues, but it will allow affected countries, aid workers, and donors to focus on the best decisions with respect to allocations and approaches.

Similarly, whether seeking to increase equality, economic growth, peace and security or improve outcomes for children and families, supporting women and girls are considered one of the best investments for a country's future. Keeping girls in school, ending child marriage, and providing effective maternal, child and reproductive health services will not only allow women and girls to realize their full potential but also opens up economic growth at the country level. The consensus to invest in women and girls is reflected in the UN Sustainable Development Goals. Meeting these goals requires setting clear targets, assessing progress and understanding results. Although gender-specific and disaggregated data are critical tools in this challenge, the state of this data is woefully underdeveloped and difficult to use.

During the last two Administrations, transparency has become a bipartisan development norm.[1] The President's Emergency Plan for Aids Relief and the Millennium Challenge Corporation, both created during the Bush Administration, emphasized transparency and data driven decision-making as hallmarks of their missions. The Obama Administration strengthened this trend through numerous data policy announcements as well as specific foreign assistance commitments to the Open Government Partnership and, importantly, by agreeing in 2011 to publish U.S. aid data according to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).[2] IATI is the only international standard that allows for the publication of comprehensive, comparable, timely, and accessible aid data in a machine readable format. There are now over 480 IATI publishers, with all information available on a single Registry.

With the work done to date, the U.S. is set on the right course. Going forward, through a combination of smart, targeted policies that deepen existing commitments, the U.S. can utilize the full potential of the data revolution and put timely, quality, and accessible information at the core of its development policies.

> The U.S. can realize a quintuple win – advancing accountability, providing new data for improved outcomes, ensuring mission discipline, facilitating coordination, and building stakeholder understanding and support.

This memo is being provided by U.S. stakeholders with experience and commitment to aid transparency. It is led by Friends of Publish What You Fund, a U.S.-based non-profit that promotes the transparency of international assistance information among donors, users and implementers, with a particular focus on ensuring effective spending, evaluation and accountability of all U.S. foreign assistance. The recommendations below build upon work already done, and seek to put data transparency at the heart of U.S. global development policy so that the U.S. is stronger, more accountable, and more effective in supporting global development.

Honor the "Grand Bargain" on Humanitarian Assistance

In 2012, global public and private humanitarian assistance reached $18 billion. By 2015, it had grown to an estimated $28 billion, the highest amount on record. The U.S. was the largest donor, responsible for $6.4 billion of this aid.[3] Forecasts show not only a growing need for this assistance but also a growing financing gap. Exacerbating the resource demands is the poor state of humanitarian data,

including the inability to track funding from the donors to the affected communities. Aid is reported using different definitions, timelines, objectives, and technical systems – all providing different levels of detail, results and impact – severely affecting the ability to plan and provide effective, collaborative, and responsive assistance.

With support from the U.S., the May 2015 World Humanitarian Summit reached a "Grand Bargain"to improve the responsiveness, accountability, and collaboration of humanitarian action. The first commitment was a pledge to publish high quality data in a timely, transparent, and harmonized way, using the IATI Standard. Additionally, donors committed to better data analysis and improved accessibility for users.[4]

RECOMMENDATION: IMPLEMENT THE GRAND BARGAIN
The U.S. provides the planning, resources, training, and systems to meet its existing commitment to publish its humanitarian aid consistent with the Grand Bargain by May 2018.

Champion Equality by Eliminating the Gender-Data Deficit

The strong consensus to invest in gender equality, both by the U.S. and internationally, is undermined by a gender-data deficit. In the U.S., the ability to track allocations, spending, results, and learning is hampered by lack of comparability and clarity on definitions of necessary data. The Department of State and USAID, for example, use one set of definitions but other agencies, such as the Peace Corps, use another.

Further, there are pervasive gaps in available gender data. Although some of the reporting is done in alignment with the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) Gender Equality definitions, reporting planned disbursements against actual spending is rarely done. The 2012 USAID's *Gender Quality and Female Empowerment Policy* created strong expectations for much more robust gender data. If published, this would allow for deeper analysis and improved programing. However, whatever data has been developed is largely not publicly available and its impact on decision-making is unclear.

Finally, Data2X[5], a multi-stakeholder collaborative to address the gender-data deficit, has partnered with MCC and PEPFAR to improve the availability, accessibility and use of gender results in partner countries. Importantly, Data2X is currently looking to the potential of IATI – which was recently upgraded to allow for reporting of gender-disaggregated results – to develop and publish gender-related data to meet user needs.

RECOMMENDATION: GENDER FUNDING AND DISAGGREGATED DATA
The U.S. better develops, defines, and publishes more robust gender-based funding data, including spending data that tracks requests, allocations, disbursements, and results. Further, disaggregated sex and cross cutting gender data needs to be improved with attention paid to data comparability. All data needs to be incorporated into decision-making and publicly released. Data development and standardization should build upon the existing DAC Gender Equality definitions and utilize the potential of IATI to publish comparable and useable data.

Improve Data Transparency to Strengthen U.S. Global Development

The initial commitment to publish to IATI was made in November 2011. Significant progress has been made, although U.S. data continues to have problems with timeliness, quality and comprehensiveness. There has also been a lack of agency accountability, poor data systems that have not been upgraded, the absence of a data driven culture, and under-utilization of U.S. data. Further, confidence in U.S. data is undermined by the two different USG dashboards, both purporting to publish the same foreign assistance information but sometimes providing vastly different figures.

Data use issues are clearly tied to data quality issues, and users have expressed concern about relying on U.S. published data. However, the uptake in data use by different stakeholders is also hampered by the lack of user-appropriate tools, accessibility, and capacity. Additionally, only a limited number of U.S. civil society organizations or other implementers of U.S. aid have published to IATI, which affects the comprehensiveness and usability of IATI data. This should change.

1   www.friendsofpublishwhatyoufund.org/resources

2   www.aidtransparency.net

3   www.globalhumanitarianassistance.org/report/gha2016

4   www.worldhumanitariansummit.org/sites/
     default/files/media/A-71-353%20-%20SG%20Re
     port%20on%20the%20Outcome%20of%20the%20
     WHS.pdf

5   http://data2x.org

Recommendations:

- **PUBLISH ONCE, USE OFTEN**

Following best practice, use IATI as the U.S. data source for all relevant foreign assistance information needs, including for internal management purposes. Allow and encourage those agencies with the capacity to do so to publish directly to the IATI Registry. This will improve data quality, timeliness, and accountability, as well as promote IATI data use, and eliminate the duplication of multiple U.S. dashboards that provide inconsistent data.

- **PROMOTE A DATA DRIVEN CULTURE**

Agencies need to value data quality. Staff need to be trained, encouraged, and assessed on their data management skills. Systems need to be upgraded and properly resourced. And data needs to be used, both internally and externally, to ensure its quality is consistently improved.

- **BUILD THE DEMAND FOR DATA**

Data quality is only one impediment to the lack of uptake. Different stakeholder needs must be understood, appropriate tools, portals and applications need to be created, and demand – and in some cases, capacity –needs to be built. This will foster a supporting loop of better quality leading to more use.

- **JOIN UP IATI DATA WITH OTHER RESOURCE FLOWS**

There are other data flows and data standards that can work with IATI, providing a fuller and more valuable picture of resource flows. IATI can be linked to partner country budgets, for example, leading to better allocation decisions. Efforts to join IATI to other data standards, such as open contracting, should also be supported so that data from different sources can be more easily compared and used.