**Proposed commitment for the UK’s Open Government Partnership’s 2021-2023 National Action Plan**

20 July 2021

This proposal is put forward by Publish What You Fund (PWYF), Development Initiatives and Bond, on behalf of the Bond Transparency Working Group (TWG), a group of development and humanitarian organisations that work to improve transparency and accountability of the international development sector.

**Rationale**

The UK’s Open Government Partnership’s (OGP) 2021-2023 National Action Plan (NAP) presents an opportunity to strengthen transparency and accountability on development spending. Official development assistance (ODA) is a core element of a Global Britain and a means for us to promote open societies and democracy around the world. Ensuring information on ODA spending easier to access, understand and use means that taxpayers in donor countries and citizens in developing countries can more easily hold governments to account for using funds wisely. It also enables international development actors to coordinate and plan their activities more effectively.

The last year has posed a range of challenges to transparency and accountability in the international development sector. We present a set of proposed commitments, in an attempt to constructively engage the UK government on this issue and stand ready to work with them to ensure aid spending is transparent and accountable. Our concerns relate to:

* Transparency around the aid cuts process has been lacking. The government has released no overall picture of the cuts, refused Freedom of Information requests, and we have seen stonewalling by ministers and officials. Many NGOs are still waiting, a quarter of the way into the financial year, to hear if lifesaving programmes have been cut or not.
* Risks that merger of the Department for International National Development (DFID) and the Foreign and Commonwealth Organisation (FCO) will lead to less transparency overall in UK aid spending, which can be measured using the Aid Transparency index (ATI). Prior to the merger, DFID’s transparency record has been strong. DFID consistently achieved a ‘very good’ score on PWYF’s ATI, while in the last ATI, the FCO achieved a ‘[fair](https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/the-index/2020/)’. The Index tracks and measures donors’ progress towards transparency and is the only independent measure of aid transparency among the world’s major development agencies. The department also released annual transparency reports and regularly updated their organisation and project data to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard.
* Limited progresses by the government in acting on Independent Commission for Aid Impact’s (ICAI), which scrutinises UK ODA spending, recommendations in 2019-2020. Their recent [follow-up review](https://icai.independent.gov.uk/new-report-icai-follow-up-review-of-2019-20-reports/) of reports for 2019-2020 has highlighted the ongoing transparency issues.
* There are now [12 other government](https://www.gov.uk/government/statistics/statistics-on-international-development-p%5b%E2%80%A6%5dtics-on-international-development-provisional-uk-aid-spend-2020) departments and contributors involved in spending more 5% or more of UK Official Development Assistance (ODA). Their share of ODA spend had been increasing, whilst their transparency had not always kept pace. In particular Department for Work and Pension, Department for Education and Ministry of Defence which scored low on the recent [UK Aid Transparency Index](https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/projects/improving-uk-aid-transparency/).

**Proposed commitments for 2021-2023 NAP**

As such, the TWG believe it is highly pertinent to include commitments on aid transparency and accountability in the 2021-2023 NAP and propose the following commitment.

The UK government will demonstrate leadership in transforming the transparency of global development assistance by including traditional and no-traditional ODA spending:

1. Continuing to publish information on official development assistance (ODA) in line with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard, so that UK assistance can be tracked through the delivery chain; and
2. Ensuring transparency and accountability in ODA decision making and spend. This would include but is not limited to:

* Consultations with development partners on aid budgets
* Publishing future budgets using predefined categories in accessible formats– particularly when amendments happen
* Accountability for 2020 and 2021 aid cuts as well as future strategic decisions, including info on countries, sectors and projects by publishing full details
* Rebuilding trust with development partners through strong transparency

1. Adopting and publishing a meaningful, inclusive and deliberative approach to ensure effective engagement with civil society. This requires being open and accountable, ensuring participants are kept informed; and creating a well-structured and consistent process.

Progress on these will be measured by:

* Increased rating on the ATI index. Each government department should adopt the previous aid strategy commitment for all UK ODA-spending departments to achieve a ‘good’ or ‘very good’ UK Aid Transparency Index rating by 2022.
* Increased rating in ICAI follow up reviews. In the 2022, follow-up the FCDO receives an adequate score, demonstrating “enough progress has been made in the right areas and in a sufficiently timely manner in order to address the core concerns underpinning ICAI’s recommendations”.[[1]](#footnote-2)
* Recommencing annual progress reports towards the ‘Open Aid, Open Societies’ 2018 Transparency Agenda.
* Timely publication of Government departments’ IATI data on activities, including the total committed funding figure for each activity; reflecting budget changes.

1. ICAI (June 2021). *ICAI follow-up review of 2019-2020 reports.* Available:<https://icai.independent.gov.uk/wp-content/uploads/ICAI-follow-up-2019-20-reviews.pdf> [↑](#footnote-ref-2)