

2016

U.S. BRIEF

Acknowledgments

Publish What You Fund is the global campaign for aid transparency. Launched in 2008, we work to make information on aid flows and activities open by default, and to make sure it is shared and used. We believe that whether it's fighting poverty, famine or climate change, transparent aid is better aid. We want to see information on aid that is freely available and accessible. We want to see everyone from donors to citizens use that information. And we want to see greater development, better governance, democratic participation and reduced poverty as a result. This report was produced with support from the Joffe Charitable Trust, the Indigo Trust and Friends of Publish What You Fund. Friends of Publish What You Fund acknowledges the contributions of the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, Oxfam America, Save the Children and Plan International USA.

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Five Years On: What is the State of U.S. Aid Transparency?

This is the fifth year that Publish What You Fund has assessed the United States (U.S.) progress on aid transparency. Since the U.S. commitment to joining the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) in Busan in November 2011, the Aid Transparency Index has been tracking the quality of the publication of U.S. aid information by five U.S. agencies and one initiative.¹

Publish What You Fund's 2011 Pilot Aid Transparency Index was released before the U.S. had signed up to IATI. Not surprisingly, U.S. agency performance ranked from 'very poor' (DOD and Treasury) to 'poor' (State, PEPFAR and USAID) to 'fair' (MCC).² From that point on, publication quality improved, but in many of the annual assessments, progress was slow and uneven.

In 2013, however, MCC topped the Index ranking and it has consistently stayed a top performer. Others have struggled to make steady progress – showing improvements in one year, only to drop back in the next. In the 2015 U.S. Aid Transparency Review, which assessed whether the U.S. agencies were “on” or “off” track to meet the 2011 Busan commitment to aid transparency by the end of 2015, only two agencies were “on” track – MCC and USAID.³ Although that overall prognosis was disappointing, a number of the U.S. agencies that had not fared well recommitted themselves to improvements in their data quality.

Five years on, the work is showing results. For the first time in 2016, all of the U.S. entities scored at least in the 'fair' category, with three of those just on the cusp of 'good'. MCC continues its leadership, coming in second on the ranking. Treasury jumped over 24% points from the 2015 Review, the largest leap by any U.S. agency in 2016. As detailed below, however, there is still much work to be done, with only one U.S. aid agency, MCC, meeting the Busan commitment.

The best way to continue to make improvements is through agency use of its own data

The U.S., as the largest bilateral donor, plays a critical role in foreign assistance. Ensuring that U.S. aid data is “visible” to others – including other donors, recipient countries and citizens – is vital to showing as complete an aid picture as possible. Improvements to the quality of aid information should be viewed as a management necessity – indispensable to making more effective decisions. The best way to continue to make improvements is through agency use of its own data. Ensuring data use internally will be a significant step to making it useable externally, which is when some of the big dividends for IATI will be realized. That should be the next goal for all U.S. publishers.

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¹ Department of Defense (DOD), the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC), the Department of State (State), the Department of the Treasury (Treasury), the United States Agency for International Development (USAID) and the President's Emergency Fund for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).

² See: <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/index/2011-index/>

³ See: <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/resources/papers/2015-aid-transparency-reviews>

U.S. Aid Data Analysis

The analysis below provides a snapshot of each of the six U.S. entities and a short recommendation for priority actions for each agency.⁴

MCC: IN COMPLIANCE WITH BUSAN

MCC scores 89.6%, placing it in the 'very good' category and second in the 2016 Index ranking. It performs well across the board for commitment, organisation and activity-level indicators, publishing 34 out of the 36 Index indicators in the IATI Standard. MCC is the leading U.S. agency and should be the benchmark for the other U.S. agencies.

- **Data highlights:** MCC made disaggregated data available for bulk download via the organisation's open aid portal for the first time. MCC now publishes a three years forward-looking budget of the organisation, as well as contracts and sub-national locations to the IATI Registry.
- **What is missing from IATI:** Tenders are always available but not published to IATI. Evaluations are sometimes available on the organisation's website. Furthermore, scores on sub-national locations, results data, and budgets could be improved by increasing coverage of MCC's activities.

USAID: NOT IN COMPLIANCE WITH BUSAN

USAID scores 59.1% which drops it just back from the 'good' to the 'fair' category, but still represents more than an 18% points increase since the last Index. As the largest U.S. aid donor, it is important that USAID continues to improve its data quality, including finishing the considerable efforts underway in line with the Cost Management Plan. Priority should be given to the quality of the information published to the IATI Registry, specifically on basic information such as titles and descriptions.

- **Data highlights:** All organization-level information is published to the IATI Registry and USAID has added actual dates.
- **What is missing from IATI:** A total of eleven activity-level indicators are not published to IATI. USAID does not score on nine of them as these are either not published (such as budgets and budgets documents) or made available only sometimes (such as objectives and results). USAID does not publish any

activity performance data or any budgetary information for its development activities.

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DEPARTMENT OF THE TREASURY: NOT IN COMPLIANCE WITH BUSAN

Treasury scores 58.1%, a 24% points increase in a short period of time since the 2015 Review, making it the biggest improver among U.S. agencies. It now ranks in the 'fair' category, taking third place among the U.S. agencies. Treasury should prioritize the publication of country strategies as well as additional information on its development projects in the IATI Standard.

- **Data highlights:** Ten new activity-level indicators have been added to the IATI Standard (actual dates; aid type; collaboration type; commitments; conditions; disbursements and expenditure; finance type; flow type; implementer; tied aid status) and four organizational indicators (annual report; audit; organisation strategy; procurement policy).
- **What is missing from IATI:** Thirteen information items assessed in the Index are not published to the IATI Registry. Nine of these cannot be found in any of Treasury publications or on its website. This includes sub-national locations, Memoranda of Understanding, budget documents, budget, budget identifier, results, and impact appraisals. Country strategy papers and recipient country budgets are also missing.

PEPFAR: NOT IN COMPLIANCE WITH BUSAN

PEPFAR scores 57.6% in 2016, placing it in the 'fair' category, and taking fourth place among the U.S. agencies. PEPFAR made significant strides in its transparency efforts in 2014 and 2015 but has made only modest improvements since then. PEPFAR should update the data published on its portal and increase its publication of IATI data at the activity-level.

- **Data highlights:** PEPFAR published three new indicators to the IATI Registry: actual dates; disbursements and expenditure; sub-national location.

- **What is missing from IATI:** Evaluations, budget documents, contracts, and conditions are not published at all and impact appraisals, results and Memoranda of Understanding are published only sometimes. PEPFAR no longer publishes the budget identifier.

DEPARTMENT OF STATE: NOT IN COMPLIANCE WITH BUSAN

State scores 53.9%, placing it in the 'fair' category, and taking fifth place among the U.S. agencies. This score is a 12.5% points increase from the 2015 Review and is more than a 30% points increase from 2013. State should prioritize the quality of its data and publication of the basic IATI fields such as titles, descriptions, and objectives.

- **Data highlights:** State now publishes seven new activity-level indicators in the IATI Standard (actual dates; aid type; collaboration type; finance type; flow type; tied aid status; implementer) and three new organisation level indicators (procurement policy; annual report; country strategy).
- **What is missing from IATI:** Fifteen out of the twenty-eight activity-level indicators are not currently published in the IATI Standard. State does not score on twelve of these indicators such as titles, descriptions, objectives or results as the information is either not available at all or not consistently. Planned dates are no longer published in the IATI Standard.

DEPARTMENT OF DEFENSE: NOT IN COMPLIANCE WITH BUSAN

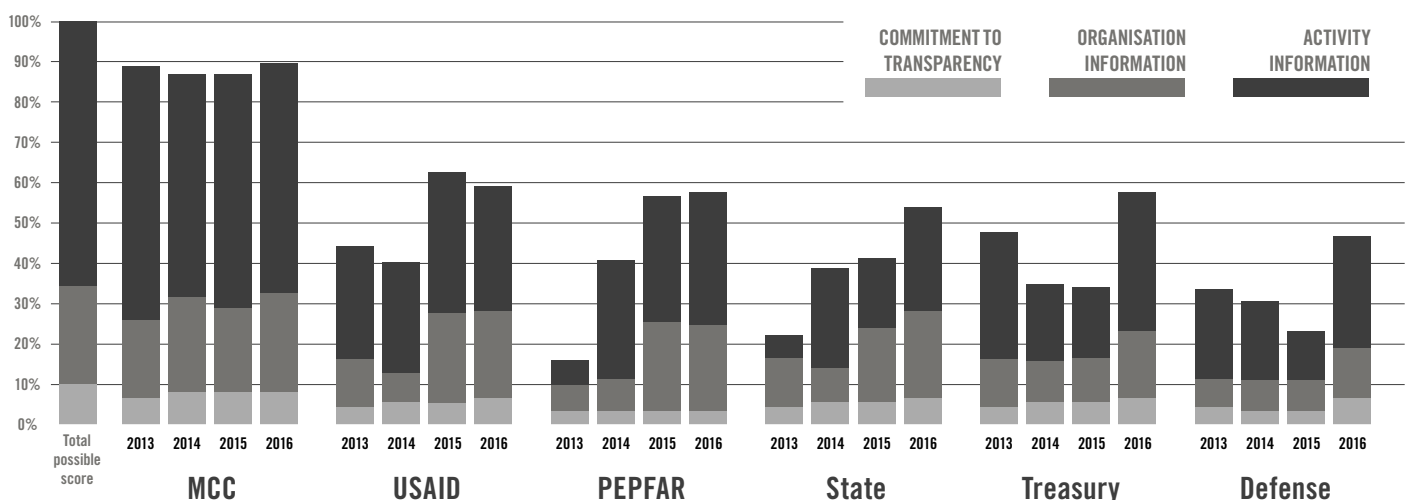
After sliding in the last three assessments, the Department of Defense scores 46.7% on the 2016 Aid Transparency Index. DOD is now in the 'fair' category for the first time, although it still remains the lowest scoring U.S. agency. This has been a good turnaround for the department, but it must maintain this pace of improvement in order to see meaningful transparency. Priorities for DOD should include publishing timely data, completing the organization file and publishing more data on its development projects in the IATI Standard.

- **Data highlights:** DOD publishes nine new fields at the activity-level to the IATI Registry (actual dates; aid type; collaboration type; commitments; disbursements and expenditure; finance type; flow type; implementer; tied aid status) and three new fields at the organizational level (annual report; audit; procurement policy).
- **What is missing from IATI:** The organisation file including financial and planning information is incomplete. Fourteen out of twenty-eight of the indicators on development projects are not published in the IATI Standard. Basic information such as planned dates and titles were published to the IATI Registry in 2015 but are not anymore. Performance data (such as results) and activity-related documents (such as evaluations) are not available at all.

4 The 2016 Index, and the individual donor pages <http://ati.publishwhatyoufund.org/> provide additional detail about each agency, including further details on each indicator's performance, a history of performance in the Index and recommendations.

5 The graph includes results starting from the 2013 Index, as the methodology has been stable since then. For more details on the methodology and scoring system, see the Technical Paper available at www.publishwhatyoufund.org/index/2016-aid-transparency-index/

Graph 1.
U.S AGENCIES' PROGRESS ON AID TRANSPARENCY, 2013-2016⁵



Aid Transparency Highlights – What’s New?

The U.S. government, individual agencies, and the NGO community have taken different steps to improve aid transparency and open data.

Highlights include:

OPEN GOVERNMENT PARTNERSHIP:

In the Third National Action Plan (NAP) released in October 2015, the U.S. made two new commitments with respect to U.S. foreign assistance data. First, to improve the quality, comprehensiveness and completeness of U.S. data. Second, to “raise awareness, increase accessibility, and build demand for foreign assistance data”.⁶

MCC:

MCC is partnering with PEPFAR and Data 2X to improve the availability, transparency, accessibility, and use of gender results data in partner countries. In collaboration with Data 2X and the UN Foundation, MCC has begun publishing disaggregated results data to IATI and has released its initial lessons learned on collecting and publishing disaggregated results information.⁷ One early application will be in Cote d’Ivoire, where MCC is organizing a competition with local civil society to address the gender data gap.

MCC is setting up standardized systems in all new compact countries to assist Millenium Compact Accounts (MCAs) with managing and reporting on MCC program funds. MCC is working with one compact to design a mechanism to allow automated reporting on MCA activities to IATI.

USAID:

In July 2015, USAID published a four-part Cost Management Plan with the specific goal of improving the quality of its IATI data, as well as streamlining internal reporting procedures.⁸ The first three phases were approved, funded and have been underway since the spring of 2015. The fourth stage was deferred pending decisions on USAID’s Development Information Systems (DIS); the next important decision will be to integrate IATI publication into the DIS.

STATE:

At the end of 2015, State released the Foreign Assistance Data Review (FADR), documenting the current foreign assistance management process and the existing data and systems environment.⁹ The FADR provides a roadmap to an integrated system solution to improve the Department’s ability to track and report on its foreign assistance programs and funds. Development of this integrated solution is planned for September 2016.

Data gathered through InterAction’s NGO Aid Map is published and regularly updated to IATI

INTERACTION:

Since February 2016, InterAction has been running its NGO Aid Map gathering data produced by Interaction members. Data gathered through the NGO Aid Map is then published and regularly updated to IATI.¹⁰

⁶ The Third Open Government National Action Plan for the United State of America, www.whitehouse.gov/sites/default/files/microsites/ostp/final_us_open_government_national_action_plan_3_0.pdf The second commitment stems from recommendations of USAID’s Aid Transparency Country Pilot Assessment. www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/AidTransparencyCountryPilotAssessment.pdf

⁷ See: data2x.org

⁸ See: www.usaid.gov/documents/1870/usaid-iatl-cost-management-plan

⁹ See: www.state.gov/documents/organization/250931.pdf

¹⁰ See: www.ngoaidmap.org/

Recommendations

The political commitment to aid transparency made by the U.S. in Busan was slow to materialize in practice. Five years on, however, there is a different story to tell on U.S. aid transparency. In the two biggest U.S. agencies that administer foreign assistance, USAID and State, the commitment is being implemented through more systematic efforts to revamp information systems. MCC is continuing in its leadership role, not only by publishing high quality aid data, but by exploring ways in which the organisation and others can better use its data.

If you produce data, publish it.

For almost all of the U.S. entities, improving the breadth (types of foreign assistance) and depth (detailed enough to get an accurate picture) of the information published in the IATI Standard needs to be the first priority. Far too often, basic information – such as titles – are either not published or are not useful.

Promote data use.

Ensure that U.S. offices know of and use agency data. Raise awareness both in headquarters and in the country offices so that these staff can access, use, and improve IATI data. Promote and use the same data with external stakeholders. The Foreign Assistance Dashboard now operates under an open license which should encourage reuse of the data. Ensure that agencies are doing analytics of what data is used to better understand users' needs.

For all U.S. agencies, the commitment and the challenge has been laid out in the new National Action Plan (NAP). First, improve the quality and comprehensiveness of U.S. data. Second, raise awareness, increase accessibility, and build demand for foreign assistance data. It is incumbent on the leadership at the White House and in the agencies to ensure these U.S. commitments are met.

As priority steps, donors must:

Appreciate the management value of U.S. aid data.

One of the biggest consumer of U.S. data should be the U.S. government. As a first step, then, leadership needs to promote the business case for better data. Open data, particularly when it is comparable, timely, accessible and comprehensive, is an extremely valuable management asset and agency leadership should be its champion.

Use global processes.

Continue U.S. engagement in global processes to advance open data and transparency worldwide, building on the Addis Ababa Action Agenda and the Sustainable Development Goals.

For all U.S. agencies, the commitment and the challenge has been laid out in the new National Action Plan



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