2018 Aid Transparency Index

Guidelines

Publish What You Fund
The Global Campaign for Aid Transparency

Contents

The 2018 Aid Transparency Index Guidelines provides an overview of the Aid Transparency Index by Publish What You Fund. It covers the objectives, scope and history of the Index, and gives an overview of the current Index methodology. It also explains the changes made to the methodology following a review in 2016-17.

For more detail on the current methodology, please see the 2018 Aid Transparency Index Technical paper.

1.0 The Aid Transparency Index: Objectives, scope and history

1.1 Objectives and principles of the Index

The Aid Transparency Index is an independent assessment of the transparency of aid and development finance. It was developed in line with the vision of Publish What You Fund:

> "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."

The objectives of the upcoming Aid Transparency Index are:

- To assess the state of aid transparency among the world's largest donor organisations
- To track and encourage progress and facilitate peer learning, while holding donors to account
- To raise awareness of transparency and open data standards at the national, regional and international level, building on existing open data standards like the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).

Aid transparency was recognised and committed to in successive high-level agreements on aid and development effectiveness: the Paris Declaration of 2005, the Accra Agenda for Action of 2008 and the Busan Partnership for Development Effectiveness of 2011.[1]

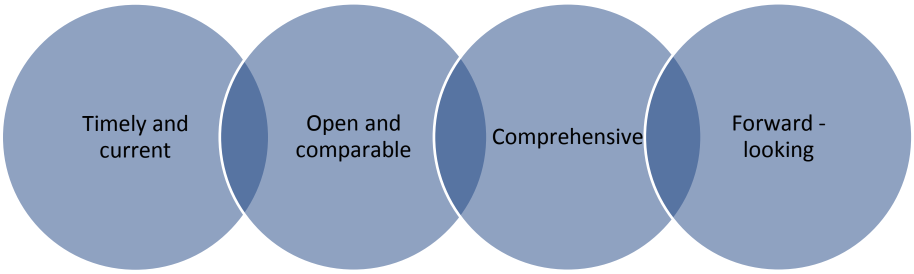
In 2015, the United Nations reaffirmed the principles of open data and transparency in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda on Financing for Development.[2] In the same year, the UN General Assembly adopted the Sustainable Development Goals, which acknowledged the role of transparent, accountable institutions at all levels, and recognised the right of public access to information.[3] The Aid Transparency Index is an assessment to ensure that these commitments are met in practice and not just in principle.

Principles of the Index

The Index is based on the four principles of development effectiveness agreed in the 2011 Busan Partnership Agreement: country ownership, focus on results, partnerships for

[1] The Busan Partnership Agreement and previous documents can be accessed here: www.oecd.org/development/effectiveness/busanpartnership.htm
[2] See paragraph 127 here: www.un.org/esa/ffd/wp-content/uploads/2015/08/AAAA_Outcome.pdf
[3] See goal 16 and targets 16.6 and 16.10 here: https://sustainabledevelopment.un.org/sdg16

development, and transparency and shared responsibility.[4] The principle of transparency and shared responsibility is described in paragraph 23 of the Busan Partnership Agreement and requires that data meets four criteria:



These principles are reflected in the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), which was launched as a political initiative in 2008 and adopted as a global open data standard in 2011. Publish What You Fund has been a member and supporter of IATI since it was established.

The governments and donor organisations who signed or endorsed the Busan Declaration committed to make all their aid transparent by 2015. In 2016, Publish What You Fund found that only a quarter of global aid by volume met a fully transparent standard.[5] However, that same year, donors met in Nairobi and reaffirmed the Busan principles and committed to address the 'unfinished business' of implementing the Busan Declaration, including transparency. The Index, therefore, remains as relevant today as it was in 2011. To date, there is no other independent assessment of the state of global aid transparency.

1.2 Scope of the Aid Transparency Index

The Index is designed to assess all types of official aid and development finance. This includes grants, loans (both concessional and non-concessional) and technical assistance, including regional, south-south and triangular cooperation. It includes, but is not restricted to, Official Development Finance (ODF) as defined by the OECD's Development Assistance Committee (DAC).[6] It also includes the development activities of foundations, humanitarian agencies, multilateral development banks and United Nations agencies.

The Index is not intended to include administrative costs. If donors publish these activities in the IATI Standard, they are encouraged to tag them with the relevant OECD-DAC purpose code, if applicable, so that they can be excluded from consideration.[7]

Criteria for inclusion

Full criteria for inclusion in the 2017 Aid Transparency Index will be announced along with the timeline for data collection in July or August 2017.

[4] See the full document here: www.oecd.org/dac/effectiveness/49650173.pdf
[5] See: http://ati.publishwhatyoufund.org/25-of-global-aid-now-meets-transparency-standards
[6] The definition of ODF can be found here: https://stats.oecd.org/glossary/detail.asp?ID=1893
[7] Further details on how to implement this in practice in the IATI Standard are provided in the 2018 Aid Transparency Index Technical paper

In general, most of the organisations included in the Index are public institutions, providing a mix of grants and concessional lending arrangements. The majority are also engaged in and/or responsible for policy setting and financing activities, as well as programme implementation.

The Index assesses organisations rather than countries. This reflects the diversity of organisations engaged in aid and development finance, even within one country.[8]

Whilst we would encourage everyone to do so, publishing IATI data is neither a necessary nor a sufficient condition for inclusion in the Index. There are over 500 IATI publishers, including many research institutes and implementing organisations. Fewer than 10% of them currently meet the criteria for inclusion. There are also several providers of aid and development finance that do not publish IATI data, but are nonetheless eligible.

1.3 History of the Index

2010-12 Index methodology and inclusion

Publish What You Fund published an Aid Transparency Assessment in 2010, looking at three sets of indicators: the transparency of aid to partner country governments, transparency of aid to civil society organisations, and commitment to transparency. The assessment found that there was little timely, comparable data available on aid and development finance at that time.[9]

This initial assessment was followed by a pilot Index in 2011 and a full Index in 2012. The pilot Index collected data on 49 donors, working with civil society organisations to survey each agency or organisation. The 2012 Index repeated this exercise for 72 donors.

The first data was published in the IATI Standard in 2011.[10] This open data standard is machine-readable and structured, which makes it easier for computers to interpret and process data in large amounts, compared to free text published in documents or tables. However, that methodology did not differentiate between different data formats.

2013-16 Index methodology and inclusion

In late 2012, Publish What You Fund consulted with donors, civil society organisations and peer reviewers on how to revise the methodology to reflect the growing quantity of data published in the IATI Standard and to effectively monitor the Busan Commitment. The revised methodology was introduced for the 2013 Index, and used again for the 2014 Index, 2015 United States and European Union Aid Transparency Reviews, and the 2016 Index.

There were two major innovations in this methodology. One was the Aid Transparency Tracker, an automated tool for assessing data published in the IATI Standard. The other was a 'scoring format' for 22 indicators, in which data published in more useful formats scored more points. The graduated scoring rewards publication in standardised, machine-readable and/or open formats like XLSX, CSV and IATI XML, as these permit different levels of analysis, comparability and visualisation than text documents.

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[8] For more see the FAQs section

[9] All previous Index reports can be accessed at www.publishwhatyoufund.org/the-index/index-archive/

[10] Information on the IATI standard and technical guidelines is available here: http://iatistandard.org/

There were 67 organisations included in the Index in 2013 and 68 in 2014. For the 2016 Index, the number was cut to 46, to concentrate on larger and more influential organisations. The methodology allows for organisations' performance to be compared among the 2013, 2014, 2015 and 2016 Indices and Reviews, but not before.

2016-17 Methodology review

At the launch of the 2016 Index, Publish What You Fund announced it would review the methodology before the next publication. The objectives were to determine the most useful data for potential users across the development sector and beyond, and make sure that the Index rewards its publication. Based on consultations with potential data users, it sought to raise the bar on data published in the IATI Standard to encourage it to be both useful and used. At the same time, the review offered the opportunity to respond to additional feedback received from publishers and users of data on how to make the methodology even more robust.

The review was carried out in three stages between October 2016 and April 2017:

Stage 1	October 2016	Consultation with a select group of people in partner countries, as well as independent experts and peer reviewers of the Index
Stage 2	November 2016 – January 2017	Open consultation on proposals developed by Publish What You Fund along with an online questionnaire
Stage 3	February 2017 March – April 2017	Review of feedback from the open consultation, and communication of decisions to date. Technical consultation on the Github platform, focusing on tests for specific indicators

Following the consultation[11], the major changes being made to the methodology are as follows:

- The weighting of the indicator scores has been changed to incorporate important feedback we received during the consultation. This includes information on how a project performed (such as a review or evaluation document) and some specific indicators such as sub-national location data and the sector of work.
- Some indicators have been combined or eliminated, reducing the total number from 39 to 35.
- Changes are being made to sampling for indicators that require additional verification, including an increase in the sample size. We are also incorporating titles and descriptions to the list of indicators sampled, where in previous years they have not been.

Three other issues were consulted on but will not be reflected in the new methodology:

- **Commitment to aid transparency**: an alternative indicator was considered based on the quality of an organisations' engagement with civil society, but it was not possible to find a consistent and fair way of measuring it.
- **Consideration of data use in the Index**: the feedback from data publishers and users suggested that it would not make sense to include data use in a measure of

[11] The consultation paper is available at www.publishwhatyoufund.org/aid-transparency-index-needs-you and the interim update is at www.publishwhatyoufund.org/aid-transparency-index-update-methodology-review

publication. Instead, Publish What You Fund intends to conduct separate work on data use, starting with the publication of a discussion paper.
- **Visibility of data**: many people who responded to the consultation expressed an interest in knowing what proportion of an organisation's portfolio is published in the IATI Standard. Publish What You Fund investigated four options for measuring this, but implementation was problematic due in part to differences in budget cycles, unpredictable funding of some organisations and lack of consistent data quality. Publish What You Fund remains committed to finding an effective solution and will start by outlining the findings of this exercise in a separate discussion paper.

More detail is provided in section 2.3 below, including the comparison of old and new indicators.

Comparing old and new Index scores

The changes in the methodology for 2017 mean that the scores will not be directly comparable with those of the 2016 Index or before.

Organisations that wish to get a sense of their improvement over time will, however, be able to do a partial comparison of the data collected for the 2016 Index[12] with data collected for the 2018 Index. This comparison will only be possible for data published in the IATI Standard on indicators and tests that remain similar in both years, as other comparisons would require re-running a manual survey. General trends, however, can still be interpreted through the categories used in the Index ranking. For example, an organisation that used to be in the 'Good' category in 2016 but dropped down to the 'Fair' category in the next Index could potentially drop its score by 20 percentage points. Such a difference cannot be attributed solely to the methodology changes.

Redactions and exclusions

In some cases, the business model or legal status of organisations makes it difficult or not possible for them to publish data on certain activities and indicators. This point has been made by a number of organisations.

Publish What You Fund has looked carefully at how the methodology could take this into account where applicable, but ultimately concluded that all organisations should be assessed on all indicators. The organisations assessed mostly represent official external financing and all have an impact on recipient countries and actors. They are, therefore, held to a common set of standards, within or without "official development assistance" flows.

Publish What You Fund, however, recognises that not all of the indicators are a direct fit with an organisation's particular modus operandi. To address this, the definitions for certain indicators have been amended to accept equivalent documents or information.[13]

In circumstances where exclusions may apply, the principle we have adopted is that these should be transparently stated at the time of publishing. Exclusions should nevertheless remain exceptions and should relate to specific types of information, to allow them to be challenged where they do not appear to be warranted, whilst still ensuring the purpose of legitimate exclusions is not compromised. For instance, if contracts contain commercially sensitive information, Publish What You Fund would still

[12] Data collected for the 2016 Index is available here: http://ati.publishwhatyoufund.org/index-2016/results/ - "Download Data"
[13] See Annex 1 in the Technical Paper

expect the contract to be published with redactions and the reasons for those redactions provided, including an explanation as to why publishing the information will cause material and / or direct harm.

The IATI Standard allows for exemptions as long as the reasons are stated in an exclusions policy document. However, stating exemptions for specific projects is currently not possible within the existing Standard. Donors can contact the IATI Secretariat directly to address the issue of project-specific exemptions in a future upgrade of the IATI Standard.

2.0 Index methodology

2.1 Process for compiling the Index

The next Index will be compiled over a six month process. As usual, it will include approximately three months of interactive data collection followed by a period of analysis and report writing.

Preparation phase	August 2017	Organisations included in the Index and timeline announced Data Quality Tester updated
Data collection	Q4 2017	Aid Transparency Tracker updated Data collection opens
	Q1 2018	Data collection closes
Analysis and launch	Q1-Q2 2018	Analysis, Index writing and editing
	Q2 2018	Index report and website launched

All organisations' data will be collected in two stages. First, their IATI data will be put through the Aid Transparency Tracker, which runs automated checks and tests on data published to the IATI Registry. Second, data is collected via a manual survey for indicators that are either not published to the IATI Registry or do not pass the Tracker tests. The Data Quality Tester (detailed below) will be available during the whole period for donors to independently check their data.

Publish What You Fund will announce which organisations will be included in the next Index in August 2017. We will also confirm the timeline for data collection and dates for the first assessment of donors' data. The interactive assessment of donors' information will remain available for review, comment and updates until the end of data collection.

2.2 Components of aid transparency

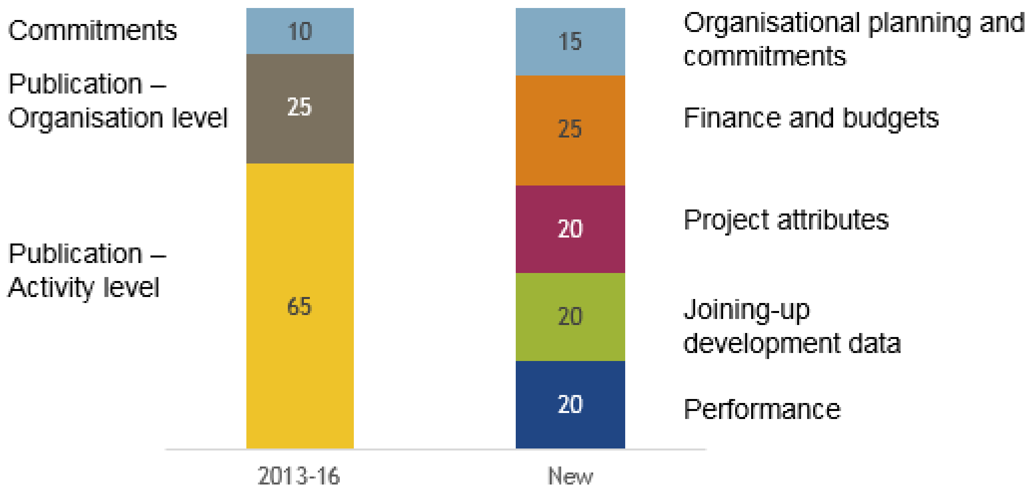
The original structure of the Index followed the structure of the IATI Standard, which distinguishes between organisation and activity files. Feedback received during the consultation suggested that this is confusing to people not familiar with the IATI Standard. Accordingly, the revised methodology is based on five components of aid transparency that were identified through discussions with stakeholders:

- **Organisation commitments and planning** refers to any aid transparency commitments an organisation has made, alongside any planning documents published by them or their parent organisations (including national governments) where applicable.

- **Finance and budgets** refers to data published which allows anyone else to follow the money; from the total budget of a given organisation down to individual transactions for each development activity.
- **Project attributes** refers to descriptive, non-financial data on development activities. This includes project titles and descriptions, as well as information needed for project monitoring such as sub-national locations or sectors.
- **Joining-up development data** refers to the diverse nature of flows, activities and actors within the development sector and the need for the data to be linked and connected to provide a full picture for the user.
- **Performance** refers to data and documents that are essential to assess whether a project is or has achieved its development objectives (e.g., reviews and evaluations).

These components are summarised in the diagram below:

The chart below shows how the weighting of components has changed compared with the previous methodology.



2.3 Indicators assessed

The indicators are listed in the table below, which compares the weighting used for the 2016 Index with the revised methodology. The table also describes the data collection techniques. For more on this, please see the technical paper and section 2.4 below.

Overall, the changes result in a reduction in the number of indicators from 39 to 35.

Component	Indicator	2016 weighting	2017/2018 weighting	Change	Basis of test
Organisation commitments and planning (15%)	FOIA	3.33	1.875		Manual survey only
	Accessibility	3.33	1.875		Manual survey only
	Organisation strategy	2.5	1.875		Tracker and document, or manual survey
	Annual report	2.5	1.875		Tracker and document, or manual survey
	Allocation policy	2.5	1.875		Tracker and document, or manual survey
	Audit	4.17	1.875		Tracker and document, or manual survey
	Procurement policy	2.5	1.875		Tracker and document, or manual survey
	Country or sector strategy & MoU	2.5	1.875		Tracker and sampling, or manual survey
Finance and budgets (25%)	Total organisation budget	4.17	4.17		Tracker or manual survey
	Disaggregated budget	4.17	4.17		Tracker or manual survey
	Project budget	3.25	3.33		Tracker or manual survey
	Project budget docs	2.17	3.33		Tracker and sampling, or manual survey
	Commitments	3.25	3.33		Tracker or manual survey
	Disbursements and expenditure	3.25	3.33		Tracker or manual survey
	Capital spend	3.25	3.33		Tracker or manual survey
Project attributes (20%)	Title	1.63	1		Tracker and sampling
	Descriptions	1.63	1		Tracker and sampling
	Planned dates	1.63	1		Tracker or manual survey
	Actual dates	1.63	1		Tracker or manual survey
	Current status	1.63	1		Tracker or manual survey
	Contact details	1.63	1		Tracker or manual survey
	Sectors	1.86	3.5		Tracker or manual survey
	Sub-national location	1.86	3.5		Tracker and sampling, or manual survey
	Implementer	1.63	3.5		Tracker or manual survey
	Unique ID	3.25	3.5		Tracker or manual survey
Joining-up development data (20%)	Flow type	1.86	3.33		Tracker or manual survey
	Aid type	1.86	3.33		Tracker or manual survey
	Finance type	1.86	3.33		Tracker or manual survey
	Tied aid status	1.86	3.33		Tracker or manual survey
	Conditions	4.33	3.33		Tracker and sampling, or manual survey
	Procurement: Contracts Tenders	 2.17 2.17	 3.33		Tracker and sampling, or manual survey
Performance (20%)	Objectives	2.17	5		Tracker and sampling, or manual survey
	Impact appraisal	4.33	5		Tracker and sampling, or manual survey
	Evaluations	2.17	5		Tracker and sampling, or manual survey
	Results	4.33	5		Tracker and sampling, or manual survey

2.4 Data collection process and techniques

Aid Transparency Tracker

All organisations' data will be collected in two stages. First, their IATI data will be run through the Aid Transparency Tracker, which runs automated tests on data published to the IATI Registry. Second, data is collected via a manual survey for indicators that are either not published to the IATI Registry or do not pass the tracker tests.

The tracker tests data relating to all of the indicators that can be published to IATI, a total of 33 out of 35. The two excluded indicators are an assessment of Freedom of Information laws and accessibility – whether an organisation promotes access to and use of its information. Under the previous methodology, the tracker was used to assess 36 out of 39 indicators. The tracker is available online, and the source code is on Github.[14]

Verification by document review and sampling

A total of 16 out of the 33 indicators tested by the tracker require additional verification to ensure the information published to IATI is of a consistently high quality and therefore useful. Five out of these 16 indicators are verified by reviewing the full document, as these relate to organisational commitments and planning. The other 11 indicators are verified by sampling to ensure that at least half the activities sampled meet the required criteria and definitions for that indicator.

In response to feedback received during the methodology review, we have made a few changes to the sampling procedure. First, we have added titles and descriptions to the list of activities sampled, as this information is essential to understand the context of the data. Second, we have increased the number of samples taken from ten to 20, to ensure our sampling has sufficient reach across a donors' portfolio. Third, we are only sampling current projects, rather than any file held on the IATI Registry. Where there are fewer than 20 current activities, they are all verified as part of the test.

Manual survey

If an organisation does not publish data to the IATI Registry, or the data does not pass the automated data quality tests on the tracker, then data is collected by manual survey. The survey is completed by Publish What You Fund researchers and checked by independent reviewers as well as commented on by donor organisations. The information is collected manually and entered onto the donor page on the tracker. Donors and reviewers can then see the survey information side-by-side with any information gathered through the automated tracker. They can also provide comments and further explanations or plans for publication.

As in previous years, the manual survey is based on the data published relating to the largest bilateral recipient country. When information is missing for this country, information is cross-checked against four other randomly selected activities in other recipient countries.

2.5 Data Quality Tester

Publish What You Fund has developed the Data Quality Tester[15] to meet the needs of organisations who want to assess the quality of their IATI data before publishing it, and/or assess their data against the new methodology. Similarly, they can test new data before uploading it to the IATI Registry.

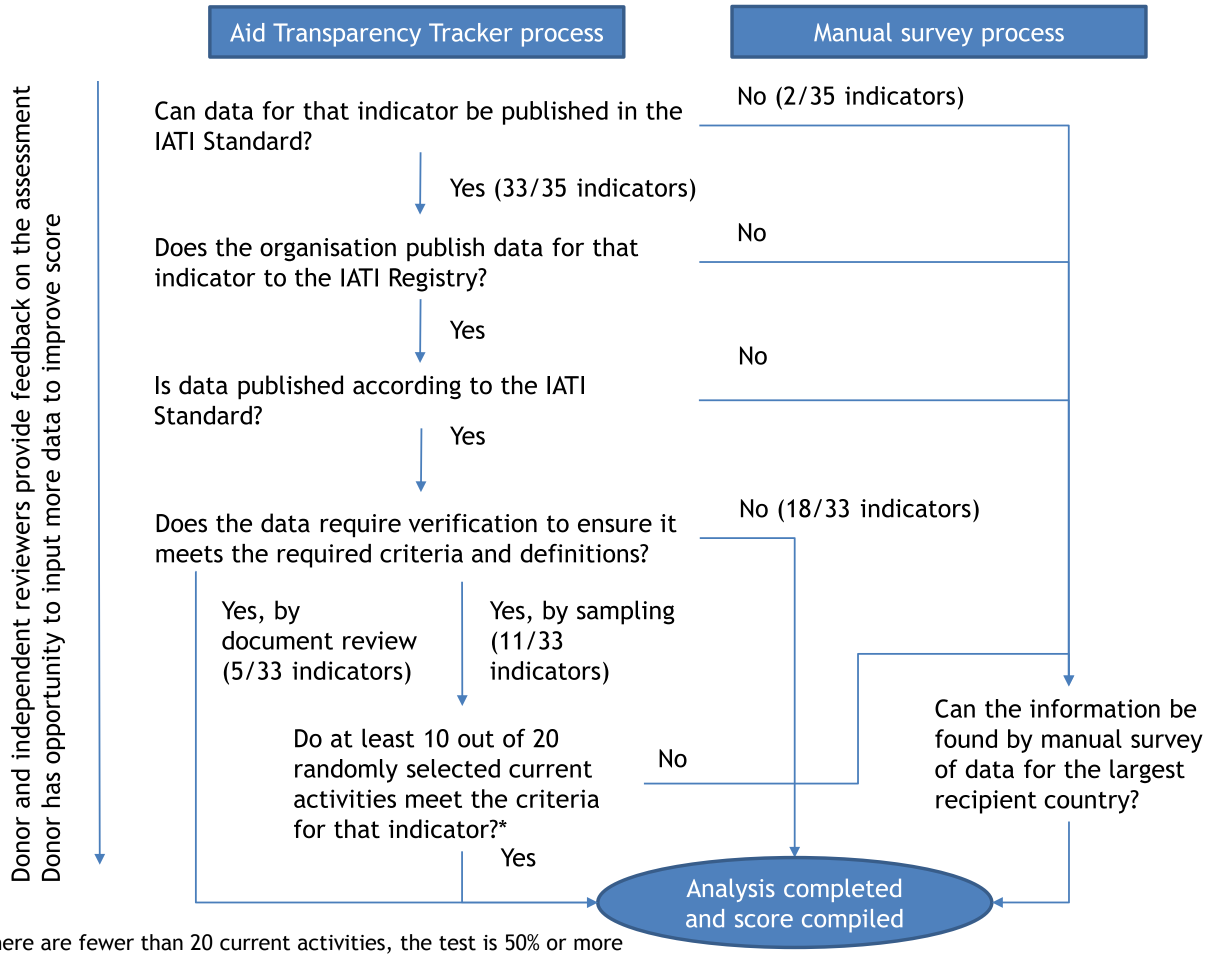
The Data Quality Tester is suitable for organisations who want to start publishing in the IATI Standard and for those that do not qualify for inclusion in the Index, or that used to be assessed but are not currently. As the number of IATI publishers continues to grow,

[14] The Aid Transparency Tracker is available at http://tracker.publishwhatyoufund.org/
[15] The Data Quality Tester is available at http://dataqualitytester.publishwhatyoufund.org

the proportion who can be included in the Index will fall, but the tester is available to all organisations who are publishing, or preparing to publish, IATI data.

Whilst a useful marker on data quality, the results of the tester are not directly comparable with the results from the Index, as it does not cover the full range of indicators from the Index methodology. It also does not include a document sampling or manual survey component.

The process for data collection and sampling is summarised in the diagram below:



*If there are fewer than 20 current activities, the test is 50% or more

3.0 Frequently Asked Questions

What is the timeline for the Index?

Publish What You Fund will announce a timeline for data collection in August. It is anticipated that data collection will run for approximately three months from Q4 in 2017 to Q1 2018, and the next Aid Transparency Index will be published in Q2 2018.

Which organisations will be included in the Index?

Publish What You Fund will announce the organisations to be included in the next Index in August 2017. The total number included is expected to be similar to the 2016 Index, but inclusion may vary in line with newly established criteria.

Why is there more than one agency for some donors?

The Aid Transparency Index assesses more than one agency for some large donors (including the European Commission, France, Germany and the United States) with multiple ministries or organisations responsible for significant proportions of ODA. This disaggregation is for three reasons. One, there is often wide variation in the amount of information made available by different agencies in a single country or multilateral organisation. Two, agencies often have substantial autonomy in deciding how much information they make available. Finally, given the variation in performance, there is no consistent or fair way to aggregate the quality of data from multiple agencies into a single country or organisation score in a way that reflects wide variations in performance.

Does Publish What You Fund include its own funders in the Index?

Funders can be included if they meet the set of criteria established to select donors for the Index. The complete list of Publish What You Fund's funders is available at www.publishwhatyoufund.org/about-us/funders

Can Publish What You Fund advise donors individually on how they can improve?

Publish What You Fund is always interested to engage with donors and discuss how they can increase their transparency. The most active period is during the three month period of data collection and following the publication of the Index report, when organisations are sent a preliminary assessment of their data and given the opportunity to make changes. There is less opportunity for engagement during the analysis and report production period preceding the launch.

Publish What You Fund is not in a position to provide detailed technical support. However, organisations are invited to assess the quality of their data using the Data Quality Tester and are free to share this information with third parties as well.

How were the independent reviewers/CSO partners for the Index selected?

The independent review process is voluntary and unpaid. Most independent reviewers are drawn from academic institutions or national NGO platforms. The usual procedure is to approach the platform organisation and ask if they can help with the review, or recommend a member organisation that can. If there is no national NGO platform or suitable member organisation, Publish What You Fund works with civil society organisations it has partnered with in the past on the Index or in other advocacy efforts.

For multilateral organisations or development banks where there is no direct match with an NGO platform or CSO, Index peer reviewers are asked to provide recommendations for people or organisations with expertise in the organisation assessed.