

# **With Publication Comes Responsibility:**

**Using open data for  
accountability in Benin and  
Tanzania – A discussion paper**



# Acknowledgements

Publish What You Fund is grateful to the people involved in producing this paper.

Particular thanks goes to the government representatives, civil society organisations and donor country office staff in Benin and Tanzania who have taken the time to respond to our questions and provided insights on the topic. We would also like to thank the people who reviewed drafts of this paper and shared their expertise with us. Any omissions or errors remain the responsibility of the author.

Publish What You Fund

October 2017

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# Executive Summary

What is being spent, in which sector and where? What did development cooperation activities set out to do and what did they achieve? These are the sort of questions that are asked of people and organisations engaged in aid and development work.

Historically, a lack of transparency in the development sector made it difficult to answer these questions. In the last decade, however, things have started to change.

International donors and national actors have begun publishing open data that is unprecedented in its detail and scope. However, to date there are only anecdotal examples of the way this data can be and is being used for accountability and little evidence that it has made a difference to development outcomes.

This paper combines primary research from Benin and Tanzania with secondary research on the use of open data for accountability to explore what happens at country-level once it is published: who is interested in using it, how and what for? If the data is not being used, what are the obstacles and how can they be overcome?

The first part makes a contribution to a new framework around using data for accountability in partner countries. It recommends firstly that country-level data needs and potential users are identified ahead of publication and secondly, that feedback mechanisms are implemented so as to create a circular process from transparency to accountability.

Five key findings emerged from the scoping work in Benin and Tanzania:

**1. There is a clear and repeated need for more high quality information on aid and development finance.**

Donor country offices, partner country governments and civil society organisations all expressed a need for more high quality data on development, including how aid and development finance is allocated and implemented. Interviewees also articulated potential uses of the data if it were made available to them, suggesting the need for a more comprehensive mapping of data needs and possible uses at country-level.

**2. International donor-led initiatives are not yet meeting country-level needs.**

Major international donors have disclosed data on their aid and development finance activities without any particular users or uses at country-level in mind. This means that the data is difficult to interpret in the context of national development objectives and needs, which limits its relevance and use.

**3. Both the development and data landscapes are fragmented and this is increasing.**

Aid and development finance is fragmenting, with a growing number of actors and diverse financial flows. This fragmentation is mirrored in the socio-political dynamics involved in implementing development activities. It is also replicated in the management systems and governance of the development data that guides open data initiatives. As a result, data is kept in silos, with limited sharing or coordination between – and within – donor organisations, government departments and civil society.

**4. A lack of trust in open data and its applications impedes its use as an accountability tool.**

Interviewees raised concerns about the sources of open data, how it was collected, verified and disclosed. The lack of trust in the quality and reliability of the data is exacerbated by difficult relations between stakeholders in some cases. Problems of data accessibility and literacy, for example, would become easier to solve with greater levels of trust.

**5. With publication comes responsibility.**

All parties have a responsibility to go beyond mere publication to make data truly accessible, usable and used. In particular, this means creating spaces and mechanisms for all potential data users to question the data available, give and receive feedback. Ultimately, publishers need to develop a relationship with data users. It is on that basis that data can be turned into actionable information and used for accountability and to improve development outcomes.

The paper concludes with implications for the open data movement, for donors, partner country governments, civil society and third parties. It opens a discussion for suggestions on how donors and partner country governments can take concrete steps to address quality issues and encourage the use of aid and development finance data for accountability. Only then can data form the basis of constructive and sustainable partnerships for change.

# Introduction

*“Transparency is seen as one of the cornerstones of good governance. You’ll hear about it spoken a lot even in manifestos and development plans. But the biggest issue has been translating these ideas into practice”* senior official in Ministry of Finance, Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, March 2017.

Over the last decade, a broad range of transparency and open government initiatives have emerged. These promote the transparency of aid and development finance activities (International Aid Transparency Initiative), budgets (International Budget Partnership Initiative), public procurement (Open Contracting Partnership) and the extractives industry (Extractives Industries Transparency Initiative).<sup>1</sup>

They have been reinforced by processes such as the Sustainable Development Goals and Open Government Partnership, and regional agreements such as the African Union’s Agenda 2063 and the European Consensus for Development. All recognise the potential of transparency and open data to support development outcomes.<sup>2</sup> As a result of these initiatives, there is an unprecedented amount of open data theoretically available to support decision-making, monitor progress and hold development actors to account.

However, much of it is still produced in silos and remains difficult to turn into actionable information. While global goals and principles have been agreed, the audience for the use of this data as well as its impact on development outcomes remain largely unidentified. So what happens once the data is published? Who could use the data, how and what for? As most of the efforts to date focus on the *publication* of open development data, there remains little, often anecdotal evidence to answer questions related to its *use*.

There is now a need to look beyond international commitments and investigate how transparency for development effectiveness and accountability is implemented – or not – in partner countries.<sup>3</sup> The links between transparency, open data and accountability cannot simply be assumed: they need to be demonstrated. Publish What You Fund, among other organisations, has argued that the disclosure of information in the public domain is an essential and necessary step to increase aid effectiveness.<sup>4</sup> However, it is

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<sup>1</sup> See Annex 1 and 2 for more details of these initiatives.

<sup>2</sup> See more details on the OGP <https://www.opengovpartnership.org/>, the SDGs <http://www.un.org/sustainabledevelopment/sustainable-development-goals/> and the Agenda 2063 <http://www.un.org/en/africa/osaa/pdf/au/agenda2063.pdf>

<sup>3</sup> For working definitions of these concepts, see Annex 2.

<sup>4</sup> See <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/why-transparency-matters/>

also clear that improved transparency alone is not sufficient. Based on fieldwork conducted in Benin and Tanzania, this paper will argue that if open data is to be used to improve development effectiveness and accountability for local actors, publishers need to assume their responsibility to make the data accessible and provide space for active engagement and feedback.

## Objectives

There is little evidence on how the growing volume of open data on aid and development finance is being used. This paper makes a contribution to filling that gap. The main objective is to explore what it will take to move from transparency to accountability, using the findings of preliminary qualitative comparative research in Benin and Tanzania. It identifies barriers to using open data to make aid and development finance more effective and accountable. It concludes with suggestions for how the barriers might be overcome, and invites further contributions to the debate to encourage progress in this field.

## Methodology

Fieldwork was conducted in Cotonou, Benin and Dar es Salaam, Tanzania for a total of ten days during February and March 2017. Publish What You Fund's Research and Monitoring Manager conducted semi-structured interviews in English and French with 24 participants ranging from development agencies to partner country governments and civil society organisations (CSOs). Additionally, a roundtable with seven local CSOs was held in Tanzania at the D-Lab in March 2017, following the IATI Technical Assistance Group meeting.<sup>5</sup>

## Scope and limitations

This paper presents the findings of research conducted in Benin and Tanzania and formulates suggestions for discussion on the principles needed for open data to be used for accountability. Beyond the scope of this discussion paper is a comprehensive and detailed mapping of needs, uses and users. Further work is needed to better understand the political, institutional and legal contexts of Benin and Tanzania as well as to test some of the suggestions, including at sub-national levels, to identify what works and what does not.

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<sup>5</sup> List of interviewees available in Annex 3

## Structure

The paper proceeds in four parts. Part one reviews existing work on the use of aid and development finance open data and proposes a new framework to use it for accountability. Part two provides background information on Benin and Tanzania. Part three presents the research findings and part four provides suggestions for the way forward.



# 1.0 Moving the transparency agenda forward: establishing a framework to use open data for accountability

This section reviews existing approaches to using open data on aid and development finance. It proposes a new framework that moves beyond the publication of information to better equip actors in government and civil society to hold decision makers to account.

## 1.1 Existing approaches towards open data use

With more open data available from multiple sources, there is increasing interest and debate around what the actual impact is of greater transparency in development. For practitioners, it is often argued that using open development data is the key to establishing a much-needed connection between the twin goals of accountability and effectiveness. Governments, donors, civil society and technology-focused organisations have started unpacking who might be interested in using this data and what for. So far data use in this field has been largely approached in two distinct but related ways:

### 1. Binary and linear approaches from publication to use

Initiatives such as IATI have encouraged major international donors to publish more data on their aid and development activities. This has led to the creation of multiple open data portals, gathering individual donors' information in one place waiting for users to access it.<sup>6</sup> As a result, donors have been defined as 'the supply side' and understood to be the primary producers and publishers of development data. 'Users' by contrast supposedly represent a distinct 'demand side' and are mostly imagined to be government staff, civil society organisations and citizens mainly based in partner countries. They are in theory expected to be using the data and thus demonstrate its usefulness, following a simplified binary and linear trajectory from data collection, to publication and use. In the absence of strong evidence to suggest any systematic and general use of this data, or active efforts to encourage such use in situations where open data can be part of the solution, the problem has been understood in terms of an effective 'demand problem'.<sup>7</sup> The

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<sup>6</sup> See <http://ati.publishwhatyoufund.org/2014/finding/open-data-platforms-the-beginnings-of-the-aid-data-revolution/>

<sup>7</sup> See for example Ntawiha and Zellman, 'Findings on IATI data use and efforts to support it', March 2017; Custer and Sethi (Eds), 'Avoiding Data Graveyards: Insights from data producers and users in three countries', AidData, 2017; Weaver, 'Making Open Data Work', Nairobi Presentation, 2017; Young Innovation, 'Data availability and Usage - Observation from Nepal', 2017; USAID aid

solution given is to stimulate potential users in partner countries through improved tools. This approach does not necessarily account for the variety of actors (including non-governmental ones), practices and contexts of usage. These limitations also include data producers whose efforts, as will be demonstrated in the next sections, do not always match in-country needs.

## 2. Technology-centric approach

In addition to policy-level work, technical solutions to improve development transparency have also been provided. Data on aid and development activities from donors is published according to structured open data standards and in machine-readable formats that allow for faster and more efficient processing of the information. As a result, a number of initiatives have emerged to provide technical support - mostly to partner country governments - to capture as much information as possible on planning, financing, implementation and impact. The increasing number of Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS) and similar platforms being built across the world is a manifestation of this approach.<sup>8</sup> This focus on statistics and technological solutions has also given rise to some more specialist work on the availability of results data for improved development management.<sup>9</sup> This tends to be associated with a logic that emphasises the technological aspects of open data and transparency and is not systematically connected to a thorough consideration of how this relates to more accountable development.

Both approaches have helped in a number of ways not least by pushing major donors to publish more and better data on their development activities. They also help to reduce the burden of manually inputting and collecting the data for analysis. These examples also serve to highlight limitations in the process and call for complementary work that further investigates data use from an impact and accountability perspective.<sup>10</sup>

## 1.2 Using open data for accountability?

The diagram below builds on the framework for understanding the open data for accountability field suggested by Liz Carolan.<sup>11</sup> This framework helps move beyond the

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transparency country pilot assessments. For similar arguments see, D. Booth, 'Development as a collective action Problem. Addressing the real challenges of African governance', ODI, 2012.

<sup>8</sup> For a comprehensive list, see: [https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11-Di5-CSL7uxq0IWCxOgQuv-L5\\_Aum9f3akGWxslLzl/edit#gid=2053551143](https://docs.google.com/spreadsheets/d/11-Di5-CSL7uxq0IWCxOgQuv-L5_Aum9f3akGWxslLzl/edit#gid=2053551143) compiled by L. Mitchell (<https://medium.com/@leighmitchell/tracking-the-tracking-systems-ddd3d6578fef>)

<sup>9</sup> See <http://www.developmentgateway.org/expertise/results>

<sup>10</sup> Specifically building on some suggestions outlined in the studies referenced in footnote 5

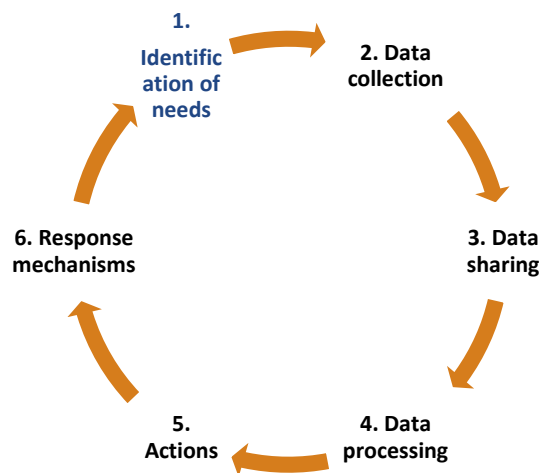
<sup>11</sup> L. Carolan, 'Mapping open data for accountability', Transparency and Accountability Initiative and The Open Data Charter, May 2017.

restrictive and binary relation whereby one is either a publisher or a user, existing either on the supply or demand side. It provides a more nuanced and detailed approach to the stages and dynamics at stake in the process to move from transparency to accountability.

Two additions to Carolan's framework are suggested here:

1. **An additional first step to identify existing needs and interests.** This would in turn shape the data production and use stages in specific contexts. The second part of this paper will provide insights into some of these varied needs and potential uses as well as the need for more targeted publications to generate use and impact.
2. **Creating a circular model of open data for accountability.** In this process, a feedback loop is created from data publication to actions and response mechanisms, which in turn leads to changes in the actions of others and the data they produce. This paper will share insights on how development actors, from donors to partner country governments and civil society organisations (CSOs), highlighted the need for these collective and connected efforts that go beyond the mere publication of data to achieve lasting change.

**Fig. 1 Using open data to move from transparency to accountability**



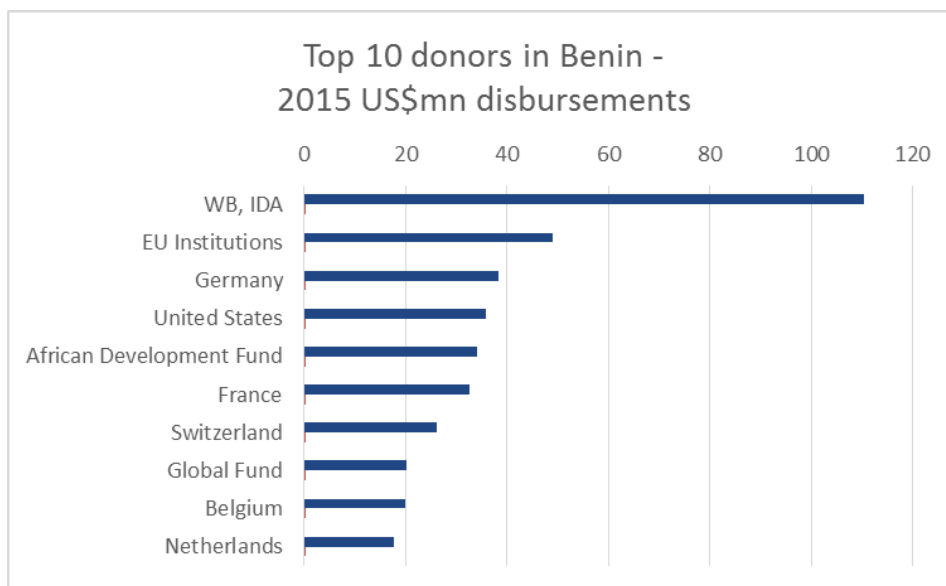
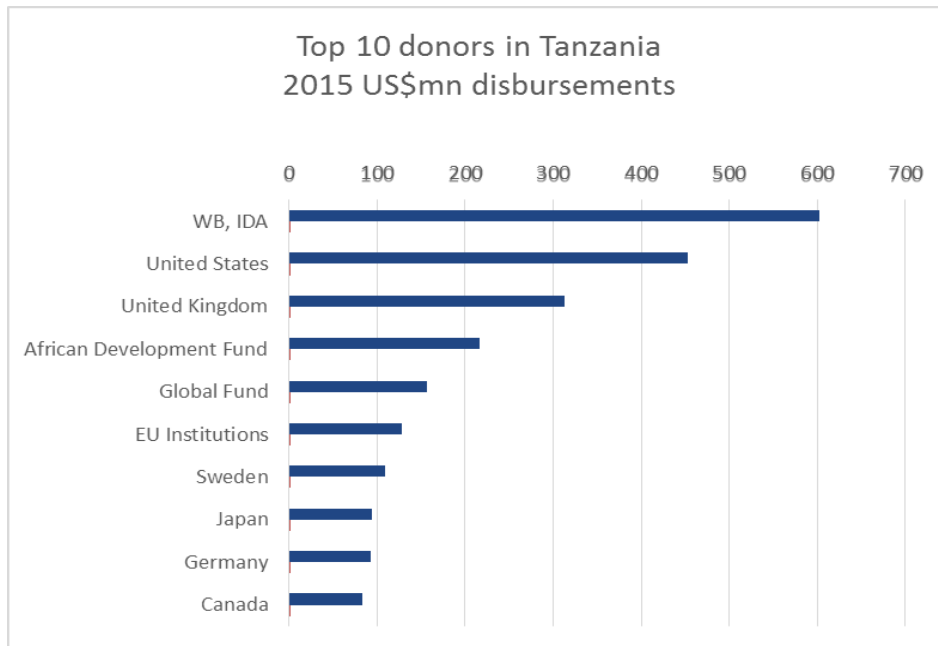
## 2.0 Background information on Benin and Tanzania

		Tanzania	Benin		
Political and economic overview	President		John Magufuli, elected in 2015	Patrice Talon, elected in 2016	
	Electoral system		Presidential elections and national assembly election	Presidential elections and national assembly election (proportional representation)	
	GDP real growth (2016)		7.20%	4.60%	
	GDP sectoral composition (2016)	Agriculture		25.10%	22.90%
		Industry		27.60%	24.90%
		Services		47.30%	52.20%
GDP per capita (2016)		US\$879.19	US\$789.44		
Population living below the national poverty line (2011)		46.60%	53.10%		
Development assistance (2015)	ODF		US\$2.8bn	US\$469.6	
	Composed of	Grants	63%	65%	
		Loans	36%	34%	
		Equity	1%	1%	
Sectoral distribution	Health	27%	20%		
	Transport & storage	10%	15%		
	Gov't & civil society	9%	10%		
Development finance transparency and open data		2017	Reported to have pulled out of the OGP process		
		2016	3rd NAP (under draft)		
		2014-16	2nd NAP		
		2015		Joins IATI	
		2015		Considers applying for OGP membership	
		2012-13	1st NAP		
		2012	Joins IATI		
		2011	Joins OGP		
		2008	Installation of AMP		
Open data available on government portals in both countries.					

(Sources: CIA World Factbook, WorldBank, OECD CRS 2015)

Tanzania has been a heavily aid dependant country, with dependency ratios - the net Overseas Development Assistance received as a percentage of Gross National Income - fluctuating between 20 and 30 percent in the 1990's. This stood at 5.8% in 2015 as its economy grew.

For Benin, aid dependency peaked in 1989 with a ratio of 18.3% but this level has only exceeded 10% in three of the last 45 years. In 2015 the ratio was 5.2%.



(Sources - 2015 OECD CRS)

## 3.0 General findings on using open data for accountability in Benin and Tanzania

### 3.1 There is a clear and repeated need for more high quality information on aid and development finance

The demand to get access to a comprehensive source of information with material on – but not limited to – aid and development finance was constantly mentioned during the interviews in both Benin and Tanzania. These needs are not limited to partner country governments. More context appropriate information was also a request from donor country offices and civil society organisations.

Most donors from country offices and embassies want information to gain a better understanding of the operations of their own organisation as well as those of others. For example, most found that an updated list of existing projects, even with basic information on sectors, budgets and locations would be helpful. They were interested in knowing how their organisation's activities fit within the broader development landscape in that country or region. This would also include, for example, donors that operate in a country but do not have in-country presence in the form of a country office. This is demonstrated by a donor agency employee in Benin:

*“In the health sector, to take an example, one of our projects took a long time to be fully delivered, and it's not over yet. We're not very satisfied. We looked at what did not work. Governance in the sector, for example. So we know that we do not need to build another hospital. We can look at what others have done and if they came up against the same issues to build on this and adjust. [...] So on top of contextual information, we also need to know what lessons have been learned by us and others, what others are doing, where and when. All that put together will help us defining our next interventions”.*<sup>12</sup>

The governments in Benin and Tanzania, including the ministries of finance and those responsible for aid coordination, are primarily interested in having access to financial and budgetary information for the purposes of budget planning and impact assessment. They want to ensure they capture all incoming international funds going to national and local institutions and organisations.

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<sup>12</sup> Interview 10, Economist, Donor office, Cotonou, February 2017.

*“Some local institutions in Benin receive direct funding from donors and that is not always included in the national budget. There is limited awareness of what these funds are for and what they have achieved. However, local authorities are part of the broader national government apparatus and we should be able to share information and allocate accordingly”,* stated a representative of a sub-national government institution in Benin.<sup>13</sup>

CSOs in both countries mostly expressed interest in two elements. One, they want to be able to secure funding, which often comes from international partners. Having access to detailed information on funds and ways to access them is crucial. Second, they want to be able to play a watchdog role, working to hold the government to account and where possible work directly with the government to make suggestions and move the agenda forward.

*“We cannot play our watchdog role if we do not know what the objectives are, what results are expected. We have asked, for example, the European Union to share their log frame with us right at the beginning of their projects. That way, we have a roadmap we can follow”,* explained the director of an NGO platform in Cotonou.<sup>14</sup>

More work is needed to better understand and comprehensively map these needs and interests but the information gleaned from these interviews already sheds light on the need to unpack the multiple uses and users that exist at country-level. These also confirm that the existence of online platforms containing open and comparable data on development, such as the IATI Registry and other national government portals, would be in a position to respond to some of these needs. Critically they would need to contain the required level of detail and quality to be able to do this.

### **3.2 International donor-led initiatives are not yet meeting country-level needs**

While transparency and open data receive increasing attention at the international level and within policy circles, there is limited evidence to suggest that efforts to date are

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<sup>13</sup> Interview 13, Representative, Subnational government institution – Benin. Cotonou, 29 Feb 2017.

<sup>14</sup> Interview 14, Director, NGO Platform. Cotonou, 01 Mar 2017

meeting the needs at country-level. Preliminary insights from Benin and Tanzania suggest two possible explanations for this.

First, open data on development appears to be largely disclosed with no precise uses or specific users identified. As a result, interviewees questioned the relevance of data released onto portals to their needs and interests. Tanzania, under its OGP commitments and the open data agenda, has invested in an Aid Management Platform (AMP) run within the Ministry of Finance's (MoF) Aid Coordination Unit (ACU).<sup>15</sup> This AMP, purchased from an international development organisation based in the United States, is designed to enable various partner country governments to monitor and forecast development finance flows entering the country in order to improve fiscal planning and resource allocation.<sup>16</sup>

Such platforms perform automatically, therefore saving time and effort to partner country government's staff, who would normally do this exercise using a combination of emails, Excel spreadsheets and in-person visits for a period of three to six months. As a standardised platform, it is limited in its applicability for individual country contexts. For example, the original system did not meet all of the data collection requirements of the ACU and more detailed fields had to be added. Additionally, officials in the federal Ministry of Finance were unable to differentiate between resources allocated to the semi-autonomous region of Zanzibar and the mainland.<sup>17</sup>

Although the organisation that provided the AMP made appropriate updates, a standard top-down approach risks obscuring national and sub-national specificities. This in turn makes it more difficult to turn the available data into actionable information and encourage greater use. Furthermore, this appears to be creating relationships of dependency between recipient country governments – as consumers of software and technical solutions – and commercial entities operating in the development sector.

Second, a closer look at the national transparency initiatives' processes highlights the extent of involvement by international actors in promoting and funding this agenda. In Tanzania, for example, the Open Data Initiative is funded by the World Bank and the United Kingdom's Department for International Development (DfID).<sup>18</sup> The OGP National Action Plan (NAP) was largely drafted by Twaweza, an initiative in East Africa that is fully

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<sup>15</sup> See <http://www.tzdpq.or.tz/dpq-website/dpq-tanzania.html>

<sup>16</sup> For a selected list, see <http://www.developmentgateway.org/reach>

<sup>17</sup> Interview 5, Officers, Ministry of Finance – Tanzania, 4 March 2017.

<sup>18</sup> See: <http://opendata.go.tz/>



funded by a consortium of five donors.<sup>19</sup> Similarly, the d-Lab is jointly funded by the Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) and the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR).<sup>20</sup> International funding for the Tanzanian Open Data Initiative expires in December 2017, after which the Ministry of Good Governance committed itself to taking over.<sup>21</sup> The d-Lab team is exploring the potential of running open data training for the Ministry, so that it can sustain activities.<sup>22</sup> Having charted a course into open data, the government and CSOs now face the prospect of having to become self-sufficient from international funding, a potential challenge for resource-scarce organisations. For partner country actors to make it a priority, a stronger case for how open data can improve national development outcomes needs to be made.

More recently, the current presidents of both Benin and Tanzania appear to have demonstrated, albeit in different ways, a willingness to take greater ownership of the development agenda. This implies a redefinition of the transparency and open data objectives along the lines of their own national strategic goals.

Magufuli, Tanzania's current president, appears to be giving less consideration to international concerns and instead focussing on how transparency efforts relate to the government's capacity to deliver on its development agenda.<sup>23</sup> The discussions around the government potentially pulling out of the OGP process confirms the concerns voiced around these externally driven initiatives as well as the will from the President and his administration to reassess national impact of such processes.<sup>24</sup> Instead, a new focus is put on the government's priority sectors as outlined in the Five Year Development Plan<sup>25</sup> and presenting open data as a tool for modernising government processes and greater effectiveness rather than for transparency and accountability.<sup>26</sup>

Elected on a strong anti-corruption platform, the Beninese President, Patrice Talon has not shown any intent yet to pursue the OGP application set in motion by the previous administration in partnership with CSOs and donors. This contains plans for the government to improve openness and transparency across departments in line with

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<sup>19</sup> Interview 7, Senior Governance Specialist, Donor office. Dar es Salaam, 14 March 2017. See also <http://www.twaweza.org/go/about-us>

<sup>20</sup> See <https://www.dlab.or.tz/>

<sup>21</sup> Interview 8, senior official in Ministry of Finance, Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, March 2017.

<sup>22</sup> D-Lab round table, Dar es Salaam, 10 Mar 2017

<sup>23</sup> Interview 7, *ibid.* Also interview 4, Senior Public Sector Specialist - Good Governance, Donor office. Dar es Salaam, March 2017

<sup>24</sup> See <http://www.thecitizen.co.tz/News/Govt-abandons-JK-championed-plan/1840340-4103700-642mhm/index.html>

<sup>25</sup> The full plan is available at [http://www.mof.go.tz/mofdocs/msemaji/Five%202016\\_17\\_2020\\_21.pdf](http://www.mof.go.tz/mofdocs/msemaji/Five%202016_17_2020_21.pdf)

<sup>26</sup> Interview 8, Senior official in Ministry of Finance, Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, March 2017

international standards.<sup>27</sup> Instead, it enacted structural reforms of the administration in response to previous corruption scandals on the use of development funds and started establishing a clear roadmap for national development.<sup>28</sup> 45 projects across nine priority sectors have been identified and budgeted for, providing the basis for engagement between the new administration and major international actors, from both the public and private sector. It is expected, therefore, that international actors will share more and better information on their development activities so that the President can demonstrate results on the government's agenda.<sup>29</sup>

These suggest an inversion of the transparency and open data agenda led by the international development community, towards a greater consideration of what information is needed to meet national development objectives as defined by partner country governments. As already highlighted, open data and transparency initiatives need to be adjusted to identify in-country needs and respond to them accordingly. Additionally, more attention needs to be paid to the national contexts in which data is being disclosed and can be used. This is taken up in the next section.

### **3.3 Both the development and data landscapes are fragmented and this is increasing**

*“Transparency is multifaceted. It is about data AND governance”* Head of Cooperation, donor organisation. Cotonou, 02 March 2017.

The challenges facing development actors in Tanzania and Benin are complex and the relationship between those producing and using data is far more intricate than has been assumed at the outset of transparency initiatives. As will be discussed in this section, the increasing complexity of actors and financial flows in development is replicated in how data is governed and the architecture within which it is produced.

#### **Donors and data**

In Benin and Tanzania, data is collected from an array of sources, including country offices and implementing partners, departments and systems. Many donors have established data collection processes that primarily respond to requests from their

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<sup>27</sup> Interview 11, Executive Director, NGO platform. Cotonou, 27 Feb 2017 and interview 12, Ministry of Finance – Benin. Cotonou, 27 Feb 2017.

<sup>28</sup> See <https://www.presidence.bj/benin-revele/download/>

<sup>29</sup> Interview 12, Ministry of Finance – Benin. Cotonou, 27 Feb 2017; interview 15, Public Finance Reform Management Unit, Ministry of the Economy – Benin. Cotonou, 01 Mar 2017; interview 18, Ministry of Planning and Development – Benin. Cotonou, 02 Mar 2017

headquarters. These do not always address gaps remaining at country-level. Instead, some interviewees explained they use personal relations with those based in Benin to gather the information needed.<sup>30</sup> Some also highlighted their limited understanding of what other organisations are doing in the country or across the region. In Benin for example, for some donors, not all development funds are channelled through central government. Development assistance can be provided directly through NGOs or local institutions, through technical assistance or even through regional programmes managed by other offices. This complex set up makes it particularly difficult for donor country offices themselves to have access to a comprehensive overview of the work their respective organisation delivers.<sup>31</sup>

To address these issues, some have taken the initiative to coordinate through established working groups and have made transparency part of these discussions. In 2015, a group of leading donors attempted to gather and share information on their respective activities within Benin by publishing timely data on a website that would provide a holistic view of their development interventions – thus replicating at a national level the model of d-Portal, the platform populated with IATI data. However, despite interest in the initiative, it did not materialise. A lack of awareness and/or trust in alternative external sources (such as IATI and donor portals) needed to complete this exercise meant the idea was abandoned.<sup>32</sup>

Despite a strong interest, collecting detailed, comprehensive and timely data for all development partners remains challenging. Maintaining and updating this information is just as difficult. Faced with these challenges, country office staff tend to revert back to more familiar mechanisms such as spreadsheets, emails, phone calls or office visits. In the absence of a structured or systematic coordination between donors through reliable shared databases or systems, data sharing occurs through personal relationships and networks. This is time consuming and tends to favour people who are already well connected.

### **Data sharing between donors and the government**

Data sharing between the government and its development partners appears to operate on a similar fairly ad hoc basis with limited consistency. In Tanzania, the Aid Coordination Unit (ACU), within the Ministry of Finance is responsible for collecting data pertaining to

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<sup>30</sup> Interview 23, Programme Manager, Donor Office, Cotonou, March 2017.

<sup>31</sup> Interview 17, Head of cooperation, Donor office, Cotonou, March 2017.

<sup>32</sup> Interview 10 *ibid*; Interview 17, *ibid*; Interview 19, Head of cooperation, Cotonou, March 2017, Interview 21, Programme Officer, Donor office, Cotonou, March 2017; Interview 22, Programme coordinator, Donor office, Cotonou, March 2017.

development assistance by DAC donors. The ACU periodically sends matrices for donors to populate, especially in preparation for budgets and drafting resource allocation.<sup>33</sup>

However, collecting information remains a challenge. Even with the electronic AMP, staff members are responsible for maintaining personal relationships with donors to ensure that they collect the most comprehensive and accurate information available. This often results in extensive manual data entry and at times chasing donors up to collect adequate information. Some donor organisations do not provide comprehensive and/or accurate information, particularly financial data such as commitments or disbursements for a project, which requires further clarification.<sup>34</sup>

In Benin, this issue is of particular importance in the absence of both a structured and harmonised approach to data collection as well as a centralised method of data management. Representatives from the ministries responsible for data collection revert back to more familiar mechanisms and share information through personal networks. This process generates confusion and tension as development agencies can receive multiple requests for the same data and information by different ministries.<sup>35</sup>

#### **Partner country governments and data**

Within the governments of Benin and Tanzania themselves, aid and development finance data is thought of as just one component of a diverse array of resource flows into the country that need to be budgeted. Data collection is complicated and fragmented by the different kinds of data being collected by different ministries.

Under the Open Data Initiative in Tanzania, the individual line ministries covered by the OGP NAP commitment to publish open data - currently the Ministries of Health, Water, and Education and possibly shortly the Ministries of Agriculture and Transport - are responsible for publishing their own data to the open data portal, updating it and ensuring its quality. The ACU also collects data from these ministries as well as from donor organisations and publishes it through the AMP.<sup>36</sup> In addition, Local Government Authorities (LGAs) collect administrative data from within their regions and reports it up the chain to relevant ministries under the President's Office Regional Administration and Local Government (PORLAG).

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<sup>33</sup> Interview 5, Officers, Ministry of Finance - Tanzania, 4 March 2017

<sup>34</sup> *Ibid*

<sup>35</sup> *Ibid*. Further confirmed by interview 10, 17 and 19.

<sup>36</sup> Interview 5, Officers, Ministry of Finance - Tanzania, 4 March 2017

However, these various data collection exercises remain largely isolated – and sometimes competing – processes. As these forms of data collection and sharing are not always on the official record, a ministry may begin a data collection exercise for data that already exists somewhere else. Historical or existing political rivalries prevent data sharing and cooperation. Additionally, in Tanzania, an interviewee who provides open data training to government staff reported that the majority of staff within many line ministries are not fully aware of the open data portal as a potential source.<sup>37</sup> Moreover, some of this data does not appear to be integrated with other sources of data such as aid and development finance. Without effective oversight and coordination of data collection by different ministries, such perverse incentives are allowed to prevail at the expense of cooperation and comprehensive data collection.

### **Civil society organisations and data**

Finally, while not always included in official processes but essential to the realisation of greater accountability, CSOs have also taken it upon themselves to collect data. In Benin, a local NGO platform attempted to create a Word document of all major investors in the country and mapped their respective role, sectors of operation and conditions for funding. In the process, important gaps and inconsistencies were highlighted but the representative of the organisation asked, “If the government cannot have access to accurate data and information, how can we?”<sup>38</sup>

Most of the data management systems examined previously appear to be closed systems where access is restricted to government officials and staff from donor organisations. This inherently constrains the role CSOs can play and the extent to which they could use information to influence decision makers in the absence of comprehensive, timely and detailed publicly available information. Additionally, gaining personal access to either governments or donor organisations sometimes proves more challenging for actors who usually operate outside of these spheres.

In the absence of a clear ownership structure, data is collected and managed in a fragmented way, which has further detrimental impacts upon its management and use. As suggested, this fragmentation raises questions as to the validity of data collected and can result in incomplete, inaccurate and sometimes contradictory information.

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<sup>37</sup> Interview 8, senior official in Ministry of Finance, Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, March 2017.

<sup>38</sup> Interview 14, Director, NGO Platform. Cotonou, 01 Mar 2017

### 3.4 A lack of trust in open data and its applications impedes its use as an accountability tool

While more data is being made available, technical tools developed and awareness raised, evidence suggests that a lack of trust in the data by potential users and concerns by governments over its potential uses are critical impediments to any form of data use.

Uncertainties surrounding the sources of open data and collection methods pose potential barriers to its meaningful use in development processes. During government data collection exercises in Benin, it is not uncommon for information gathered from external partners to be inconsistent with the information held in their own systems. This reduces trust in the data and requires it to be manually validated with the source. The head of a cooperation agency in Benin explained having received training to use the data held on the agency's portal that is also published to the IATI Registry. The provision of disaggregated information on individual projects was of most interest to them. Returning to Benin, the experience was shared more broadly with colleagues. However, a closer look into the data revealed the numbers did not add up, with no apparent explanation for the discrepancy. More details were in fact available in the government's internal database at country-level.<sup>39</sup> Using the data available on the external portal therefore posed serious concerns in terms of credibility for these actors.

In Tanzania, the concerns are twofold: First, the government is reticent to disclose data for fear that it would be exposing itself to criticism from civil society or journalists. Secondly, there are concerns that data, if disclosed in an open process, could be erroneous, allowing for false or misleading interpretations<sup>40</sup> and even the deliberate manipulation of government statistics.

The outcome of these concerns has seen the government restricting the parameters of use for the data they disclose. In March 2015, it passed the Statistics Bill, which established the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS) as the chief custodian of official data. In practice, it means that the NBS determines what data is valid to be published and how it can be legitimately used.<sup>41</sup> In April 2015, the government passed a cybercrime law stating that 'false, deceptive, misleading or inaccurate information or data published by a person is an offense'.<sup>42</sup> This was taken further by the Media Service Act, passed in 2016 to

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<sup>39</sup> Interview 19, Head of cooperation, Cotonou, March 2017

<sup>40</sup> This also includes government staff as seen in this case: <http://www.bbc.co.uk/news/world-africa-39277735>

<sup>41</sup> Government of Tanzania, Statistics Act, 2015.

<sup>42</sup> Government of Tanzania, Cybercrime law, 2015.

prevent the publication of 'seditious content', which allows for the prevention of stories supposedly incriminating the state without justification.<sup>43</sup>

This process of centralising data governance and use in the hands of the government resembles a strategy to resolve trust-related concerns surrounding open data but inherently creates tension when other actors are being kept out of the loop. This is further emphasised by current conversations around the suspension of the Tanzanian Government's involvement in the OGP process. Indeed, the Government's publicly stated objective has been to improve the standard of data published, with inaccuracy being of particular concern. However, the result of these policies may in effect contradict the stated aim of the open data agenda, which is to improve the efficiency and accountability of government through greater openness.

Leaving the government or even just the President to define the parameters of how people should engage with information, as well as to design and enforce the development process, creates the risk of shrinking rather than opening space. One possible resolution to this contradiction, as will be discussed in the next section, would be through the formation of greater inclusive and participatory understanding between governments and potential data users.

### **3.5 With publication comes responsibility**

Transparency and open data are critical to develop more effective and accountable governments. However, the publication of data in itself will not lead to use or accountability. A recurrent theme emerging from the interviews is that further steps need to be taken in order for data to be realised as actionable information and subsequently used to affect positive change. In other words, there is a responsibility upon the producers and publishers of data - beyond publication - to ensure spaces where questions can be asked, concerns addressed, sanctions enforced where applicable and change acted upon.

Problems identified related to the lack of any effective feedback mechanisms where those seeking to use data could raise questions to the publishers. Participants explained how it is often unclear who is in a position to provide clarifications for gaps or inconsistencies in online data. In Benin, the director of an NGO platform explained that the organisation could not be an effective watchdog without access to the relevant information from government and donors. In order to monitor service delivery

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<sup>43</sup> Government of Tanzania, Media Service Act, 2016.

throughout the country, for example, the team had to ask international actors directly for their strategies and log frames in order to monitor what the projects were expected to deliver to local communities.<sup>44</sup>

In Tanzania, civic tech actors, such as those behind the Hatua project, take raw government data like budget figures and translate these into more understandable and engaging platforms for citizens to interact with.<sup>45</sup> The project team has tried to reach out to the government and other international actors with a view to create bridges and feed into policymaking processes. In the absence of pre-existing networks and limited capacity, however, their calls have been left unanswered for now.<sup>46</sup>

Some donors in Benin have started supporting more work towards accountability to citizens. The Belgian and Swiss embassies launched a programme in 2017 that specifically looks at identifying conditions for improving accountability to local communities, as well as identifying individuals within these communities who are in a position to create that change.<sup>47</sup> While these were not originally directly connected to transparency and open data initiatives, such shifts towards local accountability are opportunities for open data on aid and development finance to be used effectively.

The Tanzanian Open Data Initiative offers training in collecting, managing and publishing open government data to staff within those ministries encompassed by the OGP NAP commitments and to a few selected data journalists.<sup>48</sup> The extension of the scope of these trainings for more journalists, NGO's, CSOs, students, researchers, academics and development actors could help raise awareness of the available data, address skills and capacity issues, as well as providing a forum to discuss challenges and attempt to collectively address these.

These examples suggest that the key to this should be more inclusive partnerships between donors, governments and civil society organisations around the publication and use of open data on development. For these concerns to be taken into account, there would not only need to be a physical method for interaction but publishers would need to be responsive to data users and open to more concrete forms of engagement as outlined above, going beyond merely responding to questions.

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<sup>44</sup> Interviews 11 and 14, Directors, NGO platforms, Cotonou, March 2017.

<sup>45</sup> More details available at <http://hatuaproject.org/>

<sup>46</sup> Interview 6, Hatua Project. Dar es Salaam 14 March 2017.

<sup>47</sup> See <http://www.ortb.bj/index.php/info/item/5419-benin-lancement-du-programme-redevabilite-pour-la-promotion-de-la-transparence>

<sup>48</sup> Interview 8, Senior official in Ministry of Finance, Tanzania, Dar es Salaam, March 2017.



## 4.0 The way forward

From these findings a number of conclusions and suggestions have emerged as next steps for all stakeholders in order to complete the move from transparency to effectiveness and accountability.

### 4.1 Implications for the open data movement

Some of the findings presented in this paper have potentially opened a window of opportunity for more in depth work on the role that open and joined-up data on development can play to overcome fragmentation in the sector.

Firstly, some of the issues arising from the fragmented and complex landscape of data collection, management and use in Benin and Tanzania pertain to the disconnection between multiple datasets that are being made available by different organisations. For example, government data, aid and development finance data and contracts data tend to be published separately. Some interviewees suggested that joining-up these datasets could be part of the solution and would encourage and facilitate its use. Additionally, efforts to link up disparate datasets stored in silos may compensate for coverage and quality issues by filling gaps. Joining-up would also ultimately help with providing a fuller picture of international and national activities to partner country actors.

Second, even where data collection systems are in place and tend to be increasingly used, the fact that these remain accessible to only a subset of potential data users undermines initial efforts towards greater transparency for accountability. Some interviewees mentioned that it “is sometimes easier to get access to information through public sources than directly asking to donors or governments”.<sup>49</sup> This could imply that more work is needed to explore how and when the publication of open data by default – which allows for its reuse without prior authorisation – by all stakeholders, including government departments, may help to change the playing field at country level. In contexts where information sharing can be challenging for technical and political reasons, could open access play a role in overcoming some of these obstacles?

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<sup>49</sup> Interview 19, Head of cooperation, Cotonou, March 2017

## 4.2 Implications of the findings for donors, governments and third parties

The findings of this paper have offered suggestions for responsibilities to be taken by all development stakeholders in order to encourage greater use of the data and move from transparency to accountability. Figure 1 outlines the different steps stakeholders should take in order to move from transparency to accountability. Discussion of the findings have further outlined where more efforts are needed and for the basis of the suggestions below. Further discussions between stakeholders will help identify next steps responding to country-specific contexts and identify issues where data can be part of the solution.

### Donors are encouraged to be more responsible by exploring:

- **How to best respond to country-level needs and priorities?**

This implies extending the application of global transparency initiatives within country offices and embassies to better connect headquarters with local actors and other donors. It would help provide a more comprehensive, reliable and relevant picture of in-country development activities that can be used for basic coordination. Most importantly, this shift away from the international scene towards accountability to local actors would require a systematic, complete and thorough mapping of needs and potential uses at country-level in partnership with other stakeholders.
- **How to best establish donor- and country-specific feedback loops and response mechanisms?**

This includes identifying opportunities for and taking concrete steps to safeguard civic space for questions to be asked and responded to. Donors could, for example, explore online and in-person feedback loops within clearly established timeframes, providing tools for others to hold them to account. Further consideration should also be given to building partnerships with governments and civil society organisations to address trust issues and other obstacles to greater use of the existing data. This fundamentally implies investing more in the identification of needs (step 1), actions (step 5) and response mechanisms (step 6) as outlined in figure 1.

## Partner country governments are encouraged to be more responsible by exploring:

- **How to best safeguard space for public engagement with the data?**  
The establishment of in-person feedback mechanisms to provide clarifications and fix errors appears to be a way of solving concerns around trust in the data. Additionally, more inclusive and participatory partnerships that go beyond government staff to include donors and CSOs would help ensure relevant and sustainable use of data for accountability.
- **How to integrate various open data sources?**  
Currently government data, donors' data and other sources tend to largely be collected and published in silos. Their integration would help displaying a fuller, less fragmented and more accessible picture of in-country operations.

### Implications for CSOs

The inclusion of CSOs and active local actors in the process towards improved accountability can be achieved via constructive, evidence-based engagement with government and donors. Among others, a key objective would be to channel and raise the voices of local communities in order to ensure that local development needs are addressed. This would require CSOs to consult local communities on their needs and problems that could be addressed in part through access to more information. CSOs would then be in a position to engage with international donors and government representatives through a combination of in-person and remote feedback mechanisms. This would ultimately help translate national policy and development issues to the local context.

## Conclusion

This paper demonstrated that the need for more transparency from major international donors on aid and development finance remains an essential request from partner country actors. While some important steps have been taken to address these needs, it is now essential for international donors to adjust their efforts to better identify and specifically target and respond to in-country needs. In particular, more attention needs to be paid to the context in which data is being published and to people who are in a position to turn this data into actionable information.

Transparency, data and accountability are essentially about people. Evidence provided in this paper suggested a need for more direct interaction and collaboration between all

stakeholders so that lessons can be learned, shared and acted upon. In that sense, international donors have a responsibility to go beyond the mere publication of data to address some of the challenges voiced by in-country actors. This involves taking concrete steps to provide high quality and comprehensive data on their operations as well as to provide the space and support necessary for others to use the information to improve development effectiveness and hold them accountable. In some cases, data and evidence will help inform future decisions but to truly deliver on development objectives and improve accountability to citizens, it must do so through more inclusive and targeted processes.

Publish what You Fund intends to play an active role in this agenda for the years to come in order to fulfil our mission to make aid and development information transparent, available and used for effective decision-making, public accountability and lasting change for all citizens. We will be actively continuing these conversations to identify concrete steps and responsibilities that can be taken by stakeholders for development data to be used for accountability.

# Annex 1 - List of Acronyms

**ACU** - Aid Coordination Unit

**AIMS** - Aid Information Management Systems\*

**AMP** - Aid Management Platform\*

**ANCB** - Association Nationale des Communes du Benin\*

**CSO** - Civil Society Organisation

**DAC** - Donor Assistance Committee\*

**DfID** - Department for International Development (United Kingdom)

**EITI** - Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative\*

**EU** - European Union

**GDP** - Gross Domestic Product

**HQ** - Head Quarters

**IBP** - International Budget Partnership\*

**IDA** - International Development Association (World Bank)

**IATI** - International Aid Transparency Initiative

**LGA** - Local Government Authority

**MCC** - Millennium Challenge Corporation (United States)

**MoF** - Ministry of Finance

**NAP** - National Action Plan (Open Government partnership)\*

**NBS** - National Bureau of Statistics

**NGO** - Non-Governmental Organisation

**NSO** - National Statistics Office

**OBI** - Open Budget Index\*

**ODA** - Overseas Development Assistance\*

**ODF** - Official Development Finance \*

**OECD** - Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development\*

**OGP** - Open Government partnership\*

**PEPFAR** - Presidents Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (United States)

**PORLAG** - Presidents Office Regional Administration and Local Government (Tanzania)

**UK** - United Kingdom

**US** - United States (of America)

**USAID** - United States Agency for International Development

**USD** – United States Dollar

\* Further defined in glossary of terms

## Annex 2 – Glossary of terms

**Accountability** – accountability is defined here as the process whereby actors are obligated to take responsibility for their actions and respond to expressed concerns and identified needs.

**Aid Information Management Systems (aka Aid Management Platform)** – Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS) allow users to manage and monitor aid activities through the different stages of planning, implementation and evaluation. Their primary use is to support partner country governments and development partner's to gather, access, and monitor information on development interventions.

**Association Nationale des Communes du Benin** – the National Association of Municipalities of Benin is the umbrella structure of Benin's municipalities (Local Government Authorities). It serves as the interface between municipalities and public authorities and between municipalities and external partners.

**Data Standard** – A data standard is a documented agreement on how data is formatted, defined and structured in order to promote the efficient management, sharing and use of data by diverse groups with different needs.

**Donor Assistance Committee** – the Donor Assistance Committee (DAC) is a forum for the discussion and monitoring of aid and development policies and practices.

**Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative** – The [Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative](#) (EITI) is a global standard to promote the open and accountable management of oil, gas and mineral resources. The initiative seeks to strengthen government, company systems, inform public debate, and promote understanding through the disclosure of information on the extractive industries.

**International Aid Transparency Initiative** – [the International Aid Transparency Initiative](#) (IATI) is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiative that seeks to improve the transparency of aid, development, and humanitarian resources in order to increase their effectiveness in tackling poverty' by bringing together multiple together multiple stakeholders in international development.

**IATI Registry** – The [IATI Registry](#) is an online repository that provides access to data published in the IATI Standard.

**IATI Standard** – The [IATI Standard](#) is a technical framework for publishing information on development cooperation activities in an open, timely, comprehensive, forward-looking, and comparable manner.

**International Budget Partnership** – the International Budget Partnership (IBP) is a network of civil society organisation that uses budget analysis and advocacy with the aim of improving governance and reducing corruption around the world.

**National Action Plan** – a National Action Plan (NAP) is a document developed by national government in partnership civil society that articulates joint commitments towards practices of open government and reform around areas of transparency, accountability

and public participation. They constitute the core of a countries participation in the Open Government Partnership.

**Official Development Assistance** – Official Development Assistance (ODA) flows are provided by official agencies such as the state and local governments, development agencies and multilateral organisations where each of the following three criteria are met: the primary objective of the flow is the economic development and social welfare of developing countries; the recipient is a country on the [DAC List of ODA Recipients](#); and the flows are concessional and conveys a grant element of at least 25%.

**Official Development Finance** – Official Development Finance (ODF) is used to measure the total official inflows to a country. It incorporates: bilateral official development assistance (ODA); grants and concessional and non-concessional development lending by multilateral financial institutions; and Other Official Flows (OOF) for development purposes (including refinancing Loans) which have too low a grant element to qualify as ODA.

**Open Budget Index** – The [Open Budget Index](#), compiled by the International Budget Partnership, is an independent measure of central government budget transparency.

**Open Contracting Data Standard** – The Open Contracting Data Standard provides a defined framework for the disclosure of data and documents at all stages of the contracting process.

**Open Contracting Partnership** – A cross sector partnership that aims to open public contracting through the disclosure of contracts and data to the Open Contracting Data standard to increase contracting transparency and allow for analysis of contracting data.

**Open Data** – The [Open Data Institute](#) defines it as ‘data that anyone can access, use or share’.

**Open Government Partnership** – the [Open Government Partnership](#) ‘is a multilateral initiative that aims to secure concrete commitments from government to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.’

**Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development** – the OECD is an intergovernmental economic organisation that seeks to foster economic growth, world trade and socioeconomic development.

**Partner countries** – Partner countries are those that receive development cooperation in a number of forms including, but not limited to, loans, grants, lines of credit, debt relief technical assistance, resource for infrastructure swaps and humanitarian assistance. The term seeks to avoid the negative connotations of other terms such as ‘recipient’, ‘developing’ or ‘under-developed’ countries.

**Transparency** – Transparency is a characteristic of governments and individuals that disclose information, rules, plans, processes and actions on their activities in an open and comparable format.

## Annex 3 – List of interviews

### Tanzania

1. Open Data Consultant, Donor organisation. IATI TAG, 06 March 2017.
2. Senior Official, Ministry of Finance, Zanzibar. IATI TAG, 8 March 2017
3. Programme Officer, Donor organisation. Dar es Salaam, 09 March 2017
4. Senior Public Sector Specialist, Donor organisation. Dar es Salaam, 11 March 2017
5. 4 Officers, Ministry of Finance – Tanzania, 4 March 2017:
6. Civic tech, Hatua Project. Dar es Salaam 14 March 2017.
7. Senior Governance Specialist, Donor organisation. Dar es Salaam, 14 March 2017.
8. Open Data Consultant, Ministry of Finance, Tanzania Open Data Initiative. Dar es Salaam, 16 March 2017.
9. D-Lab round table, Dar es Salaam, 10 Mar 2017:
  - a. Director, Consultancy organisation.
  - b. Manager, Consultancy organisation.
  - c. Project manager and Engagement Advisor, Data Lab
  - d. ICT Manager, Civil Society Organisation
  - e. Legal Officer, Civil Society Organisation
  - f. Communications Officer, Civil Society Organisation
  - g. Deputy Director, Civil Society Organisation
  - h. Executive Director, Data Lab
  - i. Head of Engagement, Data Lab
  - j. M & E Officer, Civil Society Organisation

### Benin

10. Economist, Donor organisation. Cotonou, 27 February 2017.
11. Director, Civil Society Organisation. Cotonou, 27 February 2017.
12. Senior Official, Ministry of Finance – Benin. Cotonou, 27 February 2017.
13. Representative, Association Nationale des Communes du Benin – Benin. Cotonou, 29 February 2017.
14. Director, Civil Society Organisation. Cotonou, 01 March 2017.
15. Unit Coordinator, Ministry of the Economy – Benin. Cotonou, 01 March 2017.
16. Head of Gender and Governance, Donor organisation – Benin. Cotonou 02 March 2017.
17. Head of Cooperation, Donor organisation. Cotonou, 02 March 2017.
18. Senior Officials, Ministry of Planning and Development – Benin. Cotonou, 02 March 2017.
19. Head of Cooperation & Programme Officer, Donor organisation – Benin. Cotonou, 03 March 2017.
20. Programme Manager, Local authority, Cotonou, February 1017.
21. Programme Officer, Donor organisation, Cotonou, February 2017.
22. Programme Coordinator and Programme Manager, donor organisation and Local authority. Cotonou, 03 March 2017.
23. Programme manager and Head of Unit, Donor organisation and Headquarter department. Cotonou, 03 March 2017.