

THREE YEAR STRATEGY

October 2018 – September 2021

Summary

Our vision: 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.

Our mission: To promote aid and development finance information that is transparent, available and usable.

Our strategic pillars:

- 1) **Fulfilling the promise:** Collaborating to ensure that data is used to contribute to improved development outcomes and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).
- 2) **Opening up new frontiers:** Making all aid and development finance data transparent and available.
- 3) **Raising the bar:** Strengthening and extending our research, advocacy and technical expertise to improve the usability of aid and development finance information.

Background

THE AID AND DEVELOPMENT FINANCE TRANSPARENCY MOVEMENT

Aid and development finance is a scarce and precious resource. However, prior to the early 2000s, information about how this resource was used was not readily available. Data was patchy at best and presented in formats that were difficult to share widely or use.

The absence of transparent, usable and timely information was problematic. Without it, donors were unable to harmonise their operations, recipient governments could not allocate their own budgets effectively and civil society organisations (CSOs) and government decision makers in both donor and recipient countries could not be sure that promised funds were spent well or as intended to support those most in need.

The aid transparency movement emerged in response to this. It clamoured for the right information, in the right formats to be made available at the right time to meet the needs of actors who could make good use of it. The movement's demands signalled a transformation in international aid and development.

PUBLISH WHAT YOU FUND

Publish What You Fund emerged from this movement and has been central to it ever since.

2008-2011: Setting the Standard

Publish What You Fund was created in 2008 as a global campaign, primarily to encourage major bilateral aid and development donors to share timely and accessible information about how, where and what they spent their money on. The same year, the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) – a voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiative seeking to improve the transparency of aid and development resources to better tackle poverty – was established. Initially, Publish What You Fund focused on encouraging donors to both join this multi-stakeholder initiative and publish to IATI, thus sharing aid information in a timely, comprehensive and accessible way. In Busan in 2011, donors committed to use the IATI Standard and make their aid transparent by December 2015.¹

2011-2016: Introducing the Index

To support and encourage donors to publish more and better aid and development information, Publish What You Fund developed a methodology to independently assess 'what good transparency looks like'. On the back of this, our Aid Transparency Index was first piloted in 2011. By 2016, ten donors accounting for 25% of total aid met the Busan commitment to aid transparency by achieving 'very good' in our Index of that year.²

2016-2018: Improving transparency

Publish What You Fund has always prioritised publishing high-quality information that is detailed, open, timely and comparable.³ Otherwise, it simply cannot be used by partner governments, parliaments, civil society, or even donors to make the delivery of aid and development more effective and accountable.

To ensure our Index was measuring the most relevant data, in 2016 we reviewed the Index methodology.⁴ For example, after consulting data users, we learned that details about project performance, such as reviews and evaluations, and the locations of activities were considered the most valuable. In response, we modified the methodology to encourage donors to provide more data in these areas. At the same time, we fully recognise that the methodology review, and indeed the Index itself, can only ever achieve so much in terms of advancing aid transparency and so we continue to investigate new approaches and tools.

However, despite our efforts, data use has remained low, particularly in complex, diverse development settings. To help address this, we have:

- Investigated key obstacles to using data in development settings in [Benin and Tanzania](#).⁵
- Looked at data use in a specific sector ([agriculture](#)).⁶ Working with key partners, we identified what information donors working in agriculture needed to make their aid work more effectively. We also produced open-source technical tools to enable donors to share their information more efficiently and promote easier access.
- Used and applied data to a specific issue. For example, we examined the United States' (US) foreign assistance data as the basis for research into the potential impacts of proposed cuts to [US foreign assistance](#) and used the findings to inform relevant budgetary debates. We also made recommendations to the relevant US agencies about improving the presentation of this information, based on this experience of using their data.⁷
- Explored ways of [linking different sources and types of data](#) together to help generate the fullest picture possible on development processes.⁸

To date, there is simply not the critical mass of quality IATI aid and development data to make a persuasive case for its use. Our research, however, has given us a good understanding of what can be done to get this important information more widely used to inform better development outcomes.

Strategy October 2018 – September 2021

Here we set out what Publish What You Fund aims to achieve by the end of 2021, why these goals are necessary and what we will do to deliver them.

Our vision

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.

Our mission

To promote aid and development finance information that is transparent, available and usable.

Our strategic pillars

To realise our vision and mission, our strategic pillars underpin the aims of the wider aid transparency movement to make the delivery of high-quality, timely, accessible and usable aid and development finance data a reality. Only then can data be truly transformative and used as an essential tool to effect lasting and significant positive development outcomes, as well as make a vital contribution to achieving the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

1. FULFILLING THE PROMISE:

Collaborating to ensure that data is used to contribute to improved development outcomes and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The challenge: Impressive gains have been made in improving aid transparency to date, but information needs to be more comprehensive, timely and usable still. Above all, it must be used to fulfil its potential to support better development outcomes and achieving the SDGs.

We will:

- Collaborate with key actors (donors, partner governments, civil society) to use relevant data to support their aims in specific aid and development sectors or themes, such as health or agriculture.
- Draw on this growing evidence-base of concrete, real-life examples to provide targeted feedback to donors to improve their transparency and inform our wider engagement with donors and relevant multilateral fora.

Our goal: By end 2021, data will be used in multiple settings and countries, enabling greater accountability and informed decision-making for better development outcomes and achieving the SDGs.

2. OPENING UP NEW FRONTIERS:

Making all aid and development finance data transparent and available.

The challenge: The donor landscape is changing. More aid is spent through development finance institutions (DFIs), the private sector and so-called 'pooled' or 'trust' funds to name a few. Commitments have been made to make humanitarian funding more transparent too. These present fresh opportunities for channelling aid and development finance, but they tend to be less open to scrutiny.

We will build on our advocacy, research and technical expertise, as well as our experience of exploring a number of these areas already, to:

- Make the case for diverse aid and development spending organisations to open up their information to key audiences.
- Work with DFIs, humanitarian actors and others to identify ways that they can each become more transparent.

Our goal: By end 2021, at least three new aid and development spending vehicles or key actors in these new areas will make their aid and development information more transparent.

3. RAISING THE BAR:

Strengthening and extending our research, advocacy and technical expertise to improve the usability of aid and development finance information.

The challenge: Improving the usability of aid and development information remains critical to driving transparency.

We will:

- Continue to encourage more usable aid and development information, notably through the Aid Transparency Index process and informed by examples of using the information directly.
- Share our expertise to amplify and extend the benefits of aid and development transparency. We will promote customised 'Index-style' reviews and offer workshops and training for key stakeholders.
- Continue to engage with transparency-related initiatives, including the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), to support progress and highlight areas for improvement.

Our goal: By end 2021, the usability of donors' aid information will continue to improve, including that produced by a greater variety of aid and development financing organisations and informed by evidence of using the data ourselves.

1. Fulfilling the promise

COLLABORATING TO ENSURE THAT DATA IS USED TO CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVED DEVELOPMENT OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENT OF THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS

The challenge: Although the gains made by the aid and development transparency movement over a relatively short period of time have been impressive, the results of our 2018 Index report remind us that overall the quality of published data still needs to be more transparent, comprehensive and timely.

Moreover, transparency is, of course, a necessary foundation for better development outcomes, but is not sufficient in itself for this to happen. Until aid and development information is put to use by donors, government representatives and CSOs to make aid more effective and accountable, the original promise of the aid and development transparency movement will remain unfulfilled. Without greater accessibility and more support, however, it is unlikely that most actors will make use of the data they need to achieve better development outcomes and the SDGs.

Goal: By the end of 2021, Publish What You Fund will have used aid and development data in a number of settings and countries, thereby contributing to greater accountability and more informed decision-making for better development outcomes and achieving the SDGs.

We will achieve this by:

1) Working with local actors: 'Data use' is a term that is too broad to usefully encompass the varied and complex range of needs and possibilities that characterise aid and development. There are no short cuts to gaining a fuller understanding of it or how to promote it for better development outcomes and achieving the SDGs.

We will look in greater detail at particular aid and development sectors, themes or examples, where aid data can be used to achieve better development outcomes through the SDGs. These could include, for example, using aid information to improve health services or access to food and nutrition to help end poverty and hunger.

In close collaboration with others, we will:

- Work directly with local actors such as government ministries, CSOs, journalists, international non-governmental organisation (INGO) country offices and other key stakeholders to help them access tools and aid and development information to support their advocacy campaigns to improve outcomes on the issues they care about, and to make relevant partner governments and donor agencies more accountable.
- Seek opportunities to support partner country governments to use information to plan, manage and coordinate their aid more effectively.
- As a result, we will also increase the number and range of actors aware of, and interested in, aid and development transparency beyond traditional open-data communities. Actors working with us will also learn how to access and use data themselves, making such activities sustainable beyond the completion of any project.

2) Further improving the quality of aid and development information: By collaborating with national and local actors in developing countries, including governments and civil society, we will be uniquely placed to build a bridge between them and the major donor community. By working with the information ourselves, we will gain a detailed understanding of different groups of users' needs and identify data gaps in specific use cases. We can take these examples and provide targeted feedback to donors too, helping them to improve the transparency of their data in these areas.

By piloting this approach in a number of sectors, we will be able to draw wider conclusions about best practices in publishing and sharing information. We will also be able to note areas where improvement is required. We will use this evidence alongside our work in Pillar Three to inform our wider engagement and interactions with both donors and relevant multilateral fora, including IATI.

There are no quick fixes here. But, cumulatively, with direct experience and real-life examples, we will build a rich picture of a variety of user needs so that transparency can truly improve development outcomes and support the SDGs.

2. Opening up new frontiers

MAKING ALL AID AND DEVELOPMENT FINANCE DATA TRANSPARENT AND AVAILABLE

The challenge: The donor landscape is changing dramatically, and we must adapt accordingly. Today's aid and development finance vista is characterised by an increasingly diverse array of spending vehicles: including, development finance institutions (DFIs); private finance; cross-departmental and pooled or trust funds; or the increasing disbursement of Official Development Assistance (ODA) through non-traditional aid spending departments - to name a few.

In addition, the call for transparency in humanitarian funding has come under increasing scrutiny. The Grand Bargain, made by leading humanitarian donors and actors in 2016, aimed to get 'more means into the hands of people in need.' This led to several commitments, including to make humanitarian aid more transparent.

These different flows and settings present fresh opportunities for channelling aid and development funding where resources are scarce, but they also come with different priorities and approaches. A number, for example, note commercial contractual constraints or security sensitivities to justify concealing large portions of their information. In some cases, this may be essential, but the need for these exclusions is not always clear. As alternative spending modalities grow in popularity, so does the risk that increasing swathes of aid information will remain hidden, further exacerbating cooperation and leveraging of different funding flows.

Goal: By the end of 2021, Publish What You Fund will have worked with and encouraged donors in at least three of these new areas/aid and development funding vehicles to make their aid and development information more transparent.

We will achieve this by:

- 1) **Working with DFIs:** Publish What You Fund will build on existing relationships with a number of DFIs, successfully achieved to date primarily through the Aid Transparency Index engagement process. In fact, a number of DFIs have already shown notable progress in their transparency levels over time, particularly the Asian Development Bank which topped the 2018 Index. Their success suggests that a combination of constructive engagement, political will from the very top, dedicated resources and technical work across teams can produce good results, even within these alternative aid and development donor models.
- 2) **Working with humanitarian actors:** In close collaboration with humanitarian actors and agencies specialising in conducting research in humanitarian settings, Publish What You Fund will investigate the user needs of humanitarian actors on the ground in particular. In this way we will identify how greater transparency can help to meet the challenges identified, and in what form, to promote better outcomes. We will combine this new evidence base with our advocacy expertise to help improve humanitarian aid delivery, as well as its effectiveness and accountability.
- 3) **Working with another spending vehicle:** We will look into at least one additional area of aid and development funding, such as pooled or trust funds or ODA through non-traditional aid spending departments.

3. Raising the bar

STRENGTHENING AND EXTENDING OUR RESEARCH, ADVOCACY AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE TO IMPROVE THE USABILITY OF AID AND DEVELOPMENT FINANCE INFORMATION

The challenge: Improving the quality and usability of aid and development information remains critical to driving transparency for greater effectiveness and accountability in aid and development spending. We cannot fulfil the promise to understand and promote increased and better targeted use of aid information or promote transparency among the increasing array of aid and development spending vehicles without it.

Goal: By the end of 2021, the usability of aid information provided by donors will continue to improve, including that produced by a greater variety of aid and development financing vehicles and informed by evidence gleaned from wider data use.

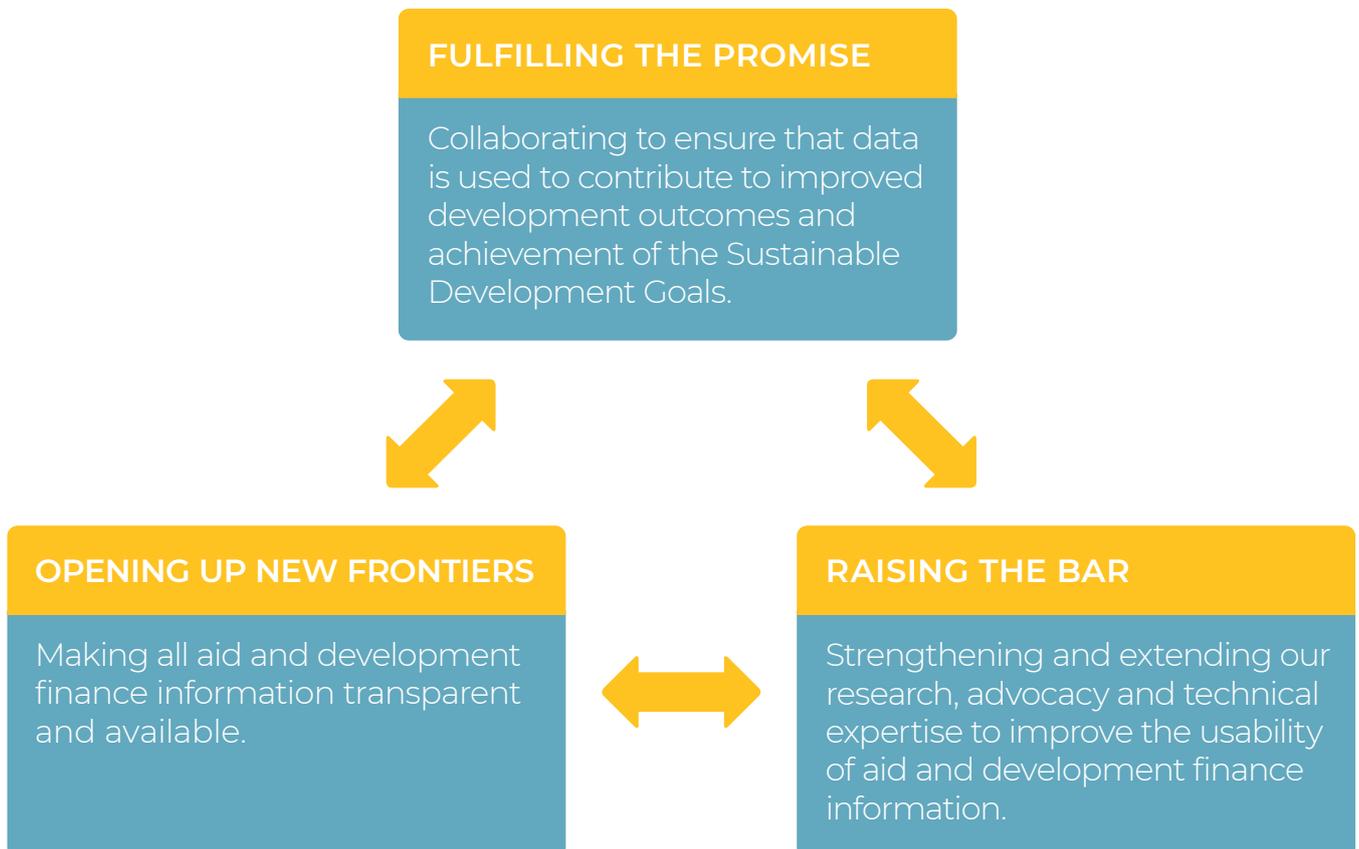
We will achieve this by:

- 1) **Promoting better quality aid information:** Since 2011, Publish What You Fund has built up a wealth of expertise, combining effective research, advocacy and technical knowhow, to improve the quality and usefulness of the data that donors share. We will continue to engage with donors through the Index data collection process, our wider research and advocacy efforts and relevant multilateral fora to encourage donors to provide more timely, comprehensive and accessible data. This will be further informed by our growing body of evidence from working directly on a variety of examples of using the data, as noted in Pillar One.
- 2) **Sharing our expertise more widely:** We will further amplify and extend the benefits of aid transparency for better development outcomes and achieving the SDGs by expanding our reach. For example, by promoting other customised 'Index-style' reviews based on our methodology, and offering workshops and training for key stakeholders. We will also strengthen our existing capacity by investing in staff to manage the various aspects of this process and in technical tools to help us do this.

3) Supporting and engaging with the IATI community: Publish What You Fund will continue to engage with transparency-related initiatives, such as IATI, to support progress as well as to highlight areas in need of improvement. This is so that IATI – and the wider aid and development transparency movement – can realise its full potential.

Three pillars supporting the same vision

TO MAXIMISE THE IMPACT OF EACH OF THESE PILLARS, THEY WILL BE USED TO COMPLEMENT AND REINFORCE EACH OTHER:



WHY PUBLISH WHAT YOU FUND?

Publish What You Fund has earned considerable respect for successfully driving transparency among aid and development finance donors over the years. As a small evidenced-based advocacy NGO, we have been able to effectively influence some of the largest aid donors in the world to ‘publish more and publish better’.

By deploying techniques variously called ‘scorecard diplomacy’ or a ‘race to the top,’ we have, since 2011, used the [Aid Transparency Index](#) – our public comparative ranking of donor agencies – to galvanise major donors to progressively increase and improve the aid information they make available. For example, only three out of the 45 major international donors included in the 2018 Index do not publish open and comparable data on their operations. This is compared with only one donor which published to IATI in 2011. These include all seven DFIs featured in the 2018 Index, which is an increase from only one in March 2011, the World Bank IDA.

Publish What You Fund’s approach is underpinned by:

- **An evidenced-based advocacy strategy** that has built constructive relationships with donors and other stakeholders to continue to push for the publication of more and better information. Publish What You Fund is a trusted source of technical expertise, with an understanding of the intersection of policy and politics along with the ability to take advantage of opportunities to further the transparency agenda.
- **Robust research**, which is open to public scrutiny. We widely consulted with a range of stakeholders for the latest methodology review for the Index in 2016/17. We will continue to monitor the Index’s impact and adapt our methodology and approaches as necessary.
- **Ongoing dialogue** with the donor agencies featured in the Index, not just for the recent methodology review but for each Index data collection process itself. This process enables us to discuss problems directly with donors concerning data publication, as well as identify and suggest further improvements to the information that donors share. We also reinforce messages about the broader importance of transparency.
- **Our technical expertise**, enabling us to develop and apply tools that monitor large amounts of data automatically, in addition to information that we review manually. New data-quality tools are in production. We also have a comprehensive understanding of the technology behind the IATI Standard, enabling us to contribute to fixing bugs, and suggesting new features and upgrades.

We have been able to leverage the long-term relationships that this work has generated to support our wider advocacy and research into new areas, notably in joining up and using data. This support has helped us access wider aid agency networks, including in aid recipient countries and a ready audience for our research findings. For example, we were able to talk to a wide range of stakeholders (donors, partner country officials, implementers and civil society groups) about potential cuts both in the US and the countries under review (Cambodia, Liberia, Nicaragua and Senegal) for our work on the proposed cuts to US Foreign Assistance. We have also formed a strong and growing range of networks and partnerships at international and national level (in donor capitals and in aid recipient countries). As we are small and have a niche area of expertise, we can complement the work of a number of other development and open-data actors. For example, through our collaboration with Development Gateway, InterAction and others on ‘OpenAg’, we identified donor user needs in the agricultural sector and developed tools to help reduce the burden of data entry and information-sharing to make more useful information readily available as a result.

Because we are not reliant on major aid donor funding in the way that most INGOs are and can use our evidence base to inform our Index methodology and wider engagement, we, perhaps, have more freedom to challenge the donor status quo than many other actors in this area.

Notes

- 1 Busan Partnership Agreement, article 23c, fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011.
- 2 <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-Aid-Transparency-Index.pdf>
- 3 To read the Publish What You Fund Aid Transparency Principles in full, see:
<http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/PWYF-Principles.pdf>
- 4 http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/02/2018-Aid-Transparency-Index-technical-paper_updated-180212.pdf
- 5 <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/09/With-Publication-Brings-Responsibility-A-discussion-paper.pdf>
- 6 <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/projects/open-agriculture/>
- 7 <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/projects/us-foreign-assistance/>
- 8 <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/projects/joined-up-data-standards/>

GET IN TOUCH

If you would like to discuss any aspect of our strategy, or the work of Publish What You Fund, please get in touch with us:

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