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Evaluating aid transparency

Full Report

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Executive Summary

AVAILABILITY OF AID DATA

Aid allocation data is much more transparent. Aid transparency's greatest advances have been with these data. Information on what donors are spending and where is now much more available, with most donor agencies publishing to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard. This is an important piece in the aid transparency puzzle and has been the overwhelming focus of aid transparency efforts over the last 10 years.

The scope of transparent data is gradually increasing.
The humanitarian sector has been slower than 'development' aid in moving on transparency, but this has begun to change. Development finance institutions (DFIs), which specialise in blending private finance with public finance, have tended to perform worse on transparency than other agencies, but are also now beginning to engage more fully. Despite high hopes, there has been little significant movement on transparency by non-Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD) bilaterals since the aid transparency movement began, or on private aid flows.

Timeliness is better but still not good enough. The evaluation found differences of opinion regarding the timeliness of IATI data. Some interviewees were positive, for example praising the fact that information on COVID-19 allocations was quickly available on IATI, while others highlighted delays in data availability that diminished its relevance.

Data quality is not bad, but not good enough. This challenge is much discussed by aid recipients and is recognised by the IATI Secretariat as causing distrust in the database overall. The good news is that when data accuracy problems are raised with donors, they rarely recur.

Predictability is not improving. Forward expenditure plans are a critical part of aid transparency but progress on annual predictability has been marginal over the last decade.

There is poor information on results. Hardly any useful information is being published linking investments to their impacts. According to one interviewee, the allocation information is 'not that helpful without information about its performance'.

Traceability and tracking are non-existent. One hope at the beginning of the aid transparency movement was that aid would become traceable as it moved from agencies to implementers to subgrantees or subcontractors. This was considered a likely outcome of publishing more aid data, but it remains a critical gap, in part because major donors are not cooperating well on this.

USE AND IMPACT OF TRANSPARENT AID DATA

The aid transparency movement has made a powerful political impact. Aid transparency has received much attention and is reflected in indexes, rankings, analyses, individual donors' policy frameworks, and the collective doctrine on development effectiveness. IATI has forced up standards of transparency.

Transparent aid data is somewhat useful to donors. Donors are finding in-house value in the standardisation of aid data. On the other hand, donor representatives lack awareness of the information demands in recipient countries and seem to regard the 'public back home' as the primary group interested in receiving information on aid spending, making donors the main clients of their own work.

Stakeholders in recipient countries hardly use these newly transparent aid data. Overall, few stakeholders use international aid data and even fewer use IATI data—though this was theorised to be one of the key uses of transparent aid to improve aid effectiveness. IATI is known only to a select group, mostly in Ministries of Finance (MOFs) and a few civil society organisations (CSOs). Having said this, there are many ways data use for decision making has increased, and the greater availability of aid data (often through sources that are IATI-compliant but not from IATI specifically) has helped this. Aid data seem to be used more often to check other sources of data than to push for behaviour change.

Donors tend not to inform stakeholders in recipient countries. Even among the agencies scoring in the top 10 in the Aid Transparency Index (ATI), there is a lack of a consistent, systematic, institutionalised focus on informing and facilitating stakeholder engagement around aid data with country stakeholders. Even when the information in some form is disclosed, the search process requires substantial effort and significant technical knowledge to investigate.

An unfair question? There are some who think it is unfair to focus on 'results' from aid transparency, which is an insufficient but necessary condition for improved aid effectiveness and will only be realised in the long term. A number of interviewees emphasised reasons of principle, good stewardship, and long-term objectives that defy attempts to detect impact in the short and medium term.

Unintended/negative impacts. Increased scrutiny (resulting from transparency) may be one of a number of factors pushing budget holders to plump for fewer risky investments, less piloting, and more large-scale projects as part of a wider focus on results. At recipient country level, there is some evidence that transparency policies in partner countries can worsen the relationship between CSOs and government.

A CHANGING CONTEXT

Donors are confused about transparency, but have not de-prioritised it. The context in traditional donor countries is significantly different to 10–15 years ago. There is a different set of global leaders in the north, where recession or slow growth since 2008 (just when the aid transparency movement was getting going) is one of the reasons the 'results agenda' has gained ground. Economic pressures in the north mean the idea of budget support, which was big 10–15 years ago, is now harder to defend. Decision makers in the aid sector are no longer focusing on aid effectiveness or aid transparency per se. Some think it has not demonstrated its usefulness in terms of achieving impact. Others say that transparency has been successfully integrated and requires less emphasis. The arrival of China on the development scene has affected things, with OECD donors levelling down on some aid effectiveness principles, including transparency. All this means that aid agencies are doing enough to 'tick the box' on aid transparency, without always putting in the effort necessary to see that the data are used by recipient countries to improve aid effectiveness.

Recipients are less dependent on aid. Important changes have also taken place in many aid-recipient countries. Aid dependency has reduced significantly in most countries, as statistics from Ghana and Tanzania demonstrate. Overseas development assistance (ODA) as a percentage of gross national income (GNI) has plummeted from 10%–15% at the turn of century to 2%–5% now. Another development in many recipient countries is an evolving relationship between civil society and governments, namely the threat to civic space and scrutiny.

COVID-19. The pressure on development spending is mounting as the impact of COVID-19 and the associated economic crisis takes hold, potentially reducing the availability of resources and increasing the demand for results. Transparency on public expenditure is an important part of the response needed to engage and maintain public support for aid.

RETHINKING THE THEORY OF CHANGE

The implicit Theory of Change on aid transparency serves the interests of donors more than beneficiaries, as the latter are less able to utilise the information that is being shared. The basic assumption that publishing information on an online platform will trigger its use, and thereby ensure optimal use and accounting for international aid, is not borne out. The hope that citizens, the media, and civil society will monitor aid to ensure it is put to better use has not been met. Without any conscious effort to build capacity and awareness with CSOs and beneficiaries of aid, the impact of aid transparency on aid effectiveness will continue to be less than expected. If you do not know about it, cannot access it, and do not understand it, or if the detail in the data is not what you were looking for, then how helpful is 'transparency'?

Governments need detailed project-level (not country-level or programme-level) data; data on projected spend (not just committed); more timely creditor reporting system (CRS) data; sub-national data; and results data in a linked and digestible format to make decisions about what to prioritise. In order to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable, data transparency needs to meet the needs of civil society. This is a combination of two strands of work—the data have to be available and civil society actors have to be engaged and empowered to know how to get them and use them. For the Theory of Change to work, the right kinds of information need to get into the right hands.

These issues have been raised repeatedly in analyses and evaluations over the past 10 years. Ten years on, progress remains stagnant at the users' end of the Theory of Change. This realisation must impact decisions about future investment: i.e. how likely is it that things that have failed to shift for 10 years will shift now?

The various objectives of aid transparency

Can we piece together a coherent Theory of Change, linking specific activities to outcomes and impacts? This will not be easy, which is one of the reasons why there has been less progress than anticipated. Many organisations and individuals involved in the aid transparency ecosystem have emphasised different objectives and strategies, and these have evolved over the years. The table below presents the main reasons given for prioritising aid transparency (and to some extent support for IATI as a specific intervention).

Objectives of aid transparency

Effectiveness: It is argued that the effectiveness of aid (the value for money; the quality of results) will improve because newly available data will be used by various parties—most importantly, recipient governments and citizens themselves—to improve decision making.
Empowerment: Strongly related to the first reason, this argument makes the case that newly available data will be used by civil society to scrutinise decisions and hold decision makers and budget holders accountable.

Efficiency: If effectiveness is about better impacts, efficiency is about reducing costs. It has been argued that, following an initial outlay (mainly by donor governments), an established aid transparency infrastructure could save money throughout the aid ecosystem.
Principle: While aid often has to be justified in terms of the impact it has had on intended beneficiaries, some have argued it is unfair to judge the aid transparency movement simply on results. They argue it is unconscionable that the general public should not know about such important expenditures, in donor as well as in recipient countries.

Building trust: While not a concrete impact for recipients, building (or maintaining) trusting relationships throughout the aid ecosystem is seen as critical. Recipient governments need to demonstrate openness and accountability if they are to keep aid flowing, while donor governments need to be open to maintaining public support for aid. Non-governmental organisations also need to be transparent about their activities.

Building the state: Development is not just about delivering immediate results—it is also a slow process of strengthening the state and other social institutions to be more accountable and effective. This is an outcome in itself, not just a means to an end, and improving budget processes is seen as a crucial part of this.

The first three reasons (effectiveness, empowerment, efficiency) are the most commonly used justifications for aid transparency; 'principle' is also important. Less mentioned in the early days, but increasingly recognised over the years, are 'building trust' and 'building the state'. These arguments for aid transparency are related but have different time horizons and routes to their achievement. One of the problems we have seen in aid transparency work is lack of clarity linking specific activities to anticipated impacts via concrete inputs and outputs.

POSSIBLE FUTURES

1. An IATI with impact

IATI has played a crucial role in aid transparency so far. It now has to balance three objectives: to consolidate, expand, and engage.

Consolidate. Focus on strengthening data quality and timeliness and improving accessibility for potential users of the data, especially as more data streams come into play. A further area of consolidation relates to data on performance and results, although there are mixed views on whether IATI is the appropriate platform for this.

Expand. While consolidation looks to be necessary, it is unclear whether IATI should continue to expand in scope. It is true that other flows should be more transparent, but if IATI is struggling to deliver against its current scope, might it be better to focus on core functions as they stand?

Engage. Engagement is considered the missing link in the IATI Theory of Change. It would mean working with recipient country partners to ensure effective use of the data, which may include capacity building, systems support, etc. It may also mean working with government on fiscal planning. At present, this is carried out to greater or lesser extent in receiving countries through ad hoc and piecemeal efforts, and is generally Ministry of Finance led.

2. Alternative approaches to aid transparency

The IATI focus has narrowed the utility of transparency to the technical sharing of data, primarily data on aid allocation. The vision of transparency as a condition for increasing accountability has been lost. By itself, transparency does not deliver improved accountability and improved aid spending. Other factors are also needed, including broader governance reforms and strengthening the demand side.

Beyond the technical: data as dialogue. The point of publishing data is not the data themselves but the dialogue they prompt: i.e. it is the interaction that matters. Donor offices in-country have to be willing to review and approve funding levels in a system that is designed to do that, as well as to prioritise and incentivise regular meetings with government and civil society on decision making around priorities, including a willingness to let governments take the driver's seat.

Revisiting the data journey. The process of collecting and managing data is as important as the end product. At the moment, aid data are published internationally and recipient countries are then trained to access them. This approach has some positive aspects, including potential technological avenues to automatically integrate in-country Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS), and a putative summation of all or the great majority of donor flows to the country. However, it forces the dialogue and learning to take place between donor/IATI and, separately, recipient/IATI, rather than directly between donor/recipient. At a time when mutual accountability requires more prioritisation, this is problematic. Could a different data journey be envisaged—one that prioritises recipient country ownership of the process and end result?

3. Transparency beyond aid

Another aspect is to expand beyond a focus on aid transparency towards a larger transparency, accountability, and openness agenda. This reflects the changing global context in which aid is becoming gradually less important, but transparency certainly is not. In this approach, aid transparency is situated in a broader push for open government and accountable decision making—valuable not so much for its own sake, but as part of government and public accountability, for donor countries and for those receiving donor funding.

List of abbreviations

AIMS	Aid Information Management Systems
AMP	Aid Management Platform
ATI	Aid Transparency Index
CRS	Creditor Reporting System
CSO	Civil Society Organisation
DAC	Development Assistance Committee
DFI	Development Finance Institution
FCDO	UK Foreign, Commonwealth & Development Office
GNI	Gross National Income
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation
HDX	Humanitarian Data Exchange
HIPC	Heavily Indebted Poor Country
IATA	International Aid Transparency Initiative
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
MBDC	Media-Based Data Collection
MOF	Ministry of Finance
NBS	National Bureau of Statistics
NGO	Non-Governmental Organisation
ODA	Overseas Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development
OGP	Open Government Partnership
PWYF	Publish What You Fund
QuODA	Quality of Official Development Assistance
TAI	Transparency and Accountability Initiative
TUFF	Tracking Underreported Financial Flows
UNDP	United Nations Development Programme
USAID	United States Agency for International Development

Contents

1. Introduction

Objectives of the evaluation

This evaluation is intended to inform Hewlett's grant making decisions in the sector. It has two main objectives.

- Objective 1: Assess the current and possible future directions of the aid transparency movement, focusing on current Hewlett Foundation grantees and their partners (**INVESTIGATIVE**).

- Objective 2: Understand how aid data are used by governments and civil society in recipient countries (**EVALUATIVE**).

The first objective and the subset of related questions may be conceived as more general research, with investigative questions focused on taking stock of key players and current trends in the aid transparency field. Questions that relate to the second objective—such as the use of transparently produced and shared information—are more evaluative in nature, looking at whether and how publicly disclosed aid data are being used and what effects this has. For the sake of building a clearer narrative, this report takes the objectives in reverse order.

Technical note

Core research methods

Key informant interviews. The team interviewed global and country (Ghana and Tanzania) respondents. Global respondents were most often data providers, such as governments and multilaterals; Hewlett-supported aid transparency implementers (such as IATI); and external scrutinising organisations (such as international NGOs (INGOs)) and civil society). For country case studies, we spoke with knowledgeable government respondents, such as planners and other data users, and scrutinisers or users, such as CSOs. We used 'snowball' sampling to identify further relevant interviewees. Not all proposed interviewees were available or disposed to participate—we received four direct rejections. Still, we redirected and prioritised interviewees that would ensure a broad representation of views and stakeholders and those likely to fill critical evidence gaps. There were 57 interviews overall (see Table 1).

Some global interviews had more than one representative answering questions and providing insights, often with different roles across the responding organisation. As a result, there were 34 total individuals among the global interviews, of whom 18 were women and 16 were men. Notably, nearly all national interviewees were male, apparently showing that the gender of government and NGO staff in the sector tends to be male. When engaging with stakeholders, we had to respect the constraints of the COVID-19 crisis. This meant using telephone and videoconference calls to conduct interviews. While we preferred the latter for greater rapport and candour, this was not always possible, particularly with the national interviews, where bandwidth sometimes prohibited the use of video. Still, at times we at least introduced ourselves via video to 'put a name to the face'. We also reminded respondents of the confidentiality of the data when, during the course of a given interview, we deemed it wise—such as when dealing with sensitive topics. Many global interviewees took advantage of our promise to speak 'on background' so we could understand a situation in more depth, though they asked us to refrain from reporting any of their statements directly.

Literature and document review. We structured our review of academic and grey literature around the evaluation questions to contribute to answering each question. This included both global and country-level readings around the issue of transparency as an aid imperative, the links to effectiveness, future directions, and examples of the use of aid data. Internal documents were also reviewed to complement key informant interviews based on the needs of the analysis. The list of documents reviewed and the literature bibliography are presented in a separate annex.

Table 1: Interviews held

	Global	Ghana	Tanzania	Total
Global: Governments and multilaterals that publish aid data	4	3	5	12
Implementers of Hewlett-funded data transparency initiatives	7	N/A	N/A	7
Externals who scrutinise, analyse, and use transparent aid data (INGOs; national CSOs; etc.)	12	6	7	25
Others (consultants; other users)	4	N/A	N/A	4
Total	27	9	12	48

Additional research methods

We also utilised the following research techniques, drawn from our initial understanding of data availability and utility. Some of these methods were successful, while for others we found data were not available and/or useful for our purposes, as described below.

Funding tracker. We proposed to analyse how the top 10 funders of aid transparency have changed over time to help understand the key players in the sector. We found estimates of broad funding in the transparency sector in interviews and literature, but closer analysis of donor funds specifically dedicated to aid transparency were not available. This was primarily because major donors have taken on aid transparency costs as 'part of doing business', much as they would with accounting services, for example. Given that those donors already had systems for reporting their expenditures within their national systems, the additional costs to format in the IATI Standard were generally small, and any significant cost was expended several years ago. Once those costs were sunk, the costs for continuing to publish according to the IATI Standard were reported to be minimal and part of expected administrative costs. As a result, tracking funding would not have added materially to what we are able to report about the sector and its prospects.

Trends analysis. We also intended to quantitatively analyse trends in publicly disclosed aid data (such as number of IATI publishers, disclosure volumes, and changes in ATI performance). However, the data in this case are rather simple and available online through IATI and Publish What You Fund (PWYF). The indicators, as cited in the parenthetic reference above from our design document, are not particularly helpful for analysing use cases for the data—which became a much more vital line of inquiry as the evaluation progressed.

Quantitative analysis of traffic and use data. We sought data in each case study country and globally: hits, visitors, and downloads of aid data. These data, where kept, are limited and not available to the general public. GDPR and other privacy implications seem to have impacted how much data the funders themselves have kept, as reported by our respondents. Users are few and far between, owing to the difficulties in interfaces for access as described in the body of this report. As a result, these data were not analysed for this evaluation; however, the low level of use is an important part of our conclusions.

Comparative review of IATI and other data systems. Data from among the main 'aid transparency' databases include those data collected and stored, and in some cases made publicly available, by IATI, OECD–DAC, and the World Bank. The degree to which these datasets are 'comparable' is limited. A description of each dataset is included as part of our analysis in the main body of the report, but the uses are so different among these that comparison is minimal. Interface comparisons, in particular, are invalidated by the lack of interface availability with IATI—purportedly the key provider of timely data on commitments and expenditures.

Automated media tracking. Media tracking was used to automatically track references to aid transparency and aid data in news sources, in case study countries as well as internationally. We applied this method to track the evolution in news reporting on aid transparency in recent years. The analysis was done using Media Cloud, a machine learning-powered open source platform for studying media ecosystems[1].

Evidence uptake analysis. Evidence uptake analysis was to be used help answer evaluation questions about data use at the recipient country level. This technique looks at whether and why data are being used. Given the findings of low use of globally collected aid data through Hewlett-funded and other initiatives, this analysis was not undertaken. However, our analysis examines target groups' access to aid transparency data (through Hewlett-funded and other initiatives), contextual and structural challenges, capacity for analysis, and willingness and political space to use aid data (and for what purposes).

Outcome harvesting. Outcome harvesting was to be used in a light-touch fashion to trace and understand outcomes of IATI data in both case study countries. As the research found so few cases of use of IATI and other data facilitated by Hewlett-funded aid transparency work, there were no outcomes to track. We realised the level of use was so low only after engaging in a range of interviews across the sector.

Country case studies. We undertook two country case studies through team members in Ghana and Tanzania with useful connections in the aid sector. We began the focus here on the evaluation's second objective: data use. While these do not constitute a representative sample of aid receiving countries or countries with Hewlett Foundation grantees, and therefore do not provide generalisable findings, they allowed for a detailed, information-rich investigation of the drivers, obstacles, and incentives influencing whether and how publicly disclosed aid data are used.

The case studies were designed to rely heavily on outcome harvesting. Because the use of data through IATI was found to be so limited, outcome harvesting around Hewlett-funded aid transparency efforts was not possible. Nevertheless we did discuss the use of similar data, particularly that provided by in-country donor offices, in government decision making. The parallel finding, that IATI data contradicts these locally-accessed data sets in many cases, is reflected in the main body of the report.

We also found that the utility of aid data are highly specialised for different audiences and that the IATI Standard is not likely to provide the most helpful data for civil society and journalistic use cases—two use cases that are of particular interest. On the one hand, the data at the IATI level are not sufficiently granular geographically (or, in some cases, sectorally) to be useful in tracking spending at local levels. On the other hand, the IATI Standard data are also at times incomplete: commitment figures are most often available, but not always expenditure data, to see what was actually spent. Importantly, results data—what was achieved with what was spent—are scarcely available through IATI. Donors (particularly major bilateral donors) do publish some results data, such as the achievement of

[1] Media Cloud allows us to search collections of online news sources for different countries, as well as globally. For most collections, we were able to go back to at least 2008, though some (such as the Europe Media Monitor Collection) only go back to 2012.

outcome indicators and evaluations. However, the goal of increasing aid effectiveness through a centralised repository of comparable information—around results—is as yet unmet. Our team included questions about outcomes related to publicly disclosed aid data in our national-level interviews, but these were almost never fruitful. We sought to find examples in our global interviews as well, where they could point to our case study countries or, later, to any countries where these outcomes had been seen. While a handful of cases were gleaned in this manner, snowball-sample interviews were largely unsuccessful in identifying what could be called an 'outcome' from the aid transparency movement. We spoke with practitioners with extensive experience in supporting national governments on their AIMS and learned that even government users were scarce because of problems interfacing with the IATI data.

We scanned CSOs in different sectors, and some that were cross-sector, reaching out to relevant actors for whom transparent aid data could be postulated to be useful, but we found no instances of IATI data usage. Our team checked to ensure we had covered areas where aid data use was most likely to be found. We ruled out two use cases where the use of aid data predated Hewlett funding to IATI, though we also looked for the use of non-IATI transparent aid data, including CRS and World Bank data. These were not found among our respondents either.

We remained conscious of potential positive bias, particularly from vested respondents at the global level. We worked to build a rapport with respondents, setting the stage and minimising fears to encourage candour by offering confidentiality and earning respondents' trust. Fortunately, we were able to hear about the challenges in great measure from among database (AIMS) consultants, government interlocutors, and some global respondents, who made clear what factors were missing from the panorama so that they could use transparent aid data more effectively.

Brief descriptions of databases

This box compares some key features of the most widely used international aid databases. The list includes DAC's CRS (the oldest aid database), IATI, AidData, the humanitarian data exchange (HDX), and the national-level AIMS.

IATI publishers include donor governments, multilateral organisations, and private sector organisations such as philanthropic groups. The publishers provide detailed information on specific projects, primarily financial but including documents as well. The data is supposed to include incoming funds, disbursements and expenditures and any funds they plan to provide or expect to receive. The data are updated frequently, as much as monthly, with the goal of supporting real-time decision-making. IATI data are limited by the lack of interfaces for key use cases, such as receiving governments, CSOs and other potential public interest users. Other limitations include challenges around language, exchange rates, inconsistency with data provided by donor country offices, insufficiently granular data, quality concerns, insufficient forecast spending data, incomplete data on commitments versus actual expenditures, and lack of sufficient and linked results information. Spending data also do not make transparent how much funding ultimately returns to donor country actors.

CRS provides financial information on commitments made by DAC members, non-members, and multilateral organisations, as well as market-based and philanthropic private financial flows. It includes bilateral and multilateral ODA figures, in addition to Other Official Flows and private flows. **DAC** allows comparison of flows between member countries, but this excludes new donors such as Brazil, Russia, India, China, and the South–South Cooperation for which OECD provides occasional studies and estimates. The data are insufficiently granular for many in-country applications, and CRS does not provide results information which is key to measuring aid effectiveness. The extensive checks on CRS data quality and infrequency of data updates throughout the year affect timeliness.

AidData sources data primarily from CRS, but also gathers information from other databases using web scraping to compile and publish information, such as TUFF methodology and its MBDC methodology. The various methodologies (Tracking Underreported Financial Flows (TUFF); Media-Based Data Collection (MBDC)) adapted by AidData to gather aid data from untapped sources such as media sources have embedded challenges, such as language selection and politically sensitive media.

HDX includes more than 250 humanitarian actors reporting on the United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs reports for a specific location or crisis; vertical 3W reports from a single humanitarian cluster, association, or organisation; costed projects associated with humanitarian appeals; and self-reported activity funding from organisations participating in IATI. HDX data are limited by their incomparable range of sources and standards.

AIMS contain aid information that is more specific and limited to the donors operating in a given host country, who provide data on development activities and the related aid flows directly to government. For receiving countries, the process of requesting, receiving, and manually inputting multiple donors' data into the AIMS results in issues of timeliness and inconsistency; further, where a donor has no office in a given country, it is less likely that the government can access the data they need through this channel.

2. Availability of aid data

Aid allocation has improved hugely

Allocation is the key progress area for aid transparency. Information on what donors are spending where is much more available, with most donor agencies publishing to IATI Standard. This is an important piece in the aid transparency puzzle and has been the overwhelming focus of aid transparency efforts over the last 10 years. The fact that these efforts have been so successful bodes well for future advocacy efforts, which may turn to other aspects of the puzzle with more force. The latest ATI (2020) indicates that progress is continuing. Inevitably, there are star agencies (e.g. the UK Foreign, Commonwealth and Development Office and the Millennium Challenge Corporation) and slower movers (e.g. the Japan International Cooperation Agency and the Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation).

'[There is] significant improvement in donors' overall transparency compared to 2018. Eleven donors moved into the "very good" category, an increase of four from 2018. The number in "good" increased by two, to 15. This means that over half of the 47 donors that we assessed are now in the "good" or "very good" categories.' — ATI (2020)

The scope of transparent data is gradually increasing

The humanitarian sector has also been slower than 'development' aid in moving on transparency, in part because less advocacy has been targeted at the sector and in part because it is harder to share information on humanitarian aid, which tends to be mobilised much more urgently. This is beginning to change, with the Grand Bargain[2] setting out the importance of transparency for the sector. DFIs, which specialise in blending private finance with public finance, tend to perform worse on transparency than other agencies. Despite high hopes, particularly coming out of the Busan meeting on aid effectiveness in 2011, where China and other non-OECD countries made somewhat positive noises, there has been no significant movement on transparency by non-OECD bilaterals since the aid transparency movement began. A recent report by Development Reimagined (2020) outlines how hard it is to get hold of data on Chinese aid, either at country or global level. The same is true for most other South–South Cooperation providers.

'Overall, while recipient countries appreciate China's support, the majority also find that managing China's complex loan and grants procedures, simply for recording and budget purposes, let alone for results monitoring and evaluation, is a huge challenge.' — Development Reimagined (2020)

Timeliness is better, but still not good enough

There were differences of opinion regarding the timeliness of IATI data. Some interviewees praised the fact that information about the COVID-19 response is available on IATI, for example. But others questioned this. Clearly it is significantly more timely than CRS data, which comes out after a year or so of rigorous checking—but the question remains whether it is good enough to be useful.

'IATI cannot tell you how much money has gone to COVID. … IATI couldn't do the Nepal earthquake, the tsunami, Ebola. … At what point do we admit IATI is not a real-time data system? It captures only 25% of the resource flows.' — Interviewee

The IATI Standard provides a set of rules and guidance for what data should be published and in what format. Organisations publish links to their datafiles on the IATI Registry and it is the centralised location where data can be accessed and pulled into data access tools, such as the IATI Datastore. The IATI Registry allows for datafiles to be updated monthly, weekly, or even daily, and organisations are encouraged to update changes in their spending at least every quarter.

OECD collects data using a questionnaire, with two main data updates each year. In April, aggregate figures are published on total aid given by donor countries for the previous calendar year. In December, these figures are updated with details at the individual project level. Additional,

2 The Grand Bargain, launched during the World Humanitarian Summit in Istanbul in May 2016, is an agreement between donors and humanitarian organisations who have committed to improve the effectiveness and efficiency of humanitarian action: https://interagencystandingcommittee.org/grand-bargain.

partial updates occur twice a year. When the OECD publishes its yearly data, it is released with a two-year lag and a set of complete data across all years with corrections made to past records.

AidData imports project-level data from OECD CRS on an annual basis, but only imports that year's data instead of all the data from past years, resulting in different reporting of OECD data. The AidData portal is updated monthly with information from multiple other sources as well.

HDX is relatively more fluid, allowing datasets to be of different formats and containing different variables, unlike the other standards where data are constrained within certain guidelines. HDX also uses hashtags to merge datasets and can be updated anytime.

AIMS, though similar, are bespoke for each country and therefore have distinct requirements. Data are often requested on a quarterly basis from the individual donor in-country offices, resulting in a range of formats, quality, recency, and coincidence with data reported to IATI by home offices.

To an increasing degree, these systems incorporate forward-looking data to enable recipient governments to plan annual development spending. The IATI Standard allows data on spending plans up to three years in advance; DAC conducts a Forward Spending Survey; and AIMS has the potential to forecast future aid assistance. The HDX Centre has developed a model to conduct predictive analytics. IATI, AidData, and AIMS can produce geocoded datasets, where the data exist.

Data quality is not bad, but not good enough

There are problems with the accuracy of aid allocation data. This challenge is much discussed by aid recipients, and is recognised by the IATI Secretariat as causing distrust of the data overall. This is a critical issue. The good news is that when data accuracy problems are addressed with donors, they rarely recur.

'If a potential user experiences poor quality information once, they are unlikely to return to the database.' — Interviewee (Tanzania)

There remains a critical gap especially when it comes to the timely and accessible disclosure of information during project implementation. This is recognised as a crucial component of aid transparency and has been one of IATI's selling points compared to, for example, the OECD's CRS database, which publishes data at least a year after the spend has occurred. Access to timely data could theoretically mean better planning and real-time scrutiny, meaning more empowerment, efficiency, and effectiveness. According to the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC)'s latest analysis (2019), timely reporting to IATI improved in the years immediately prior to 2018, but worsened to CRS and the DAC's Forward Spending Survey.

For example, during this pandemic, tracking COVID-19 expenditures in real time has been important, but these expenditures have nevertheless been described as 'kind of under the radar'. In the United States, the State Department is in charge of COVID-19 spending rather than the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), even though the former is recognised as being less transparent. To some diplomats, transparency is still a threat to be managed away rather than embraced. Similarly, information on humanitarian exchange and refugee funds is not successfully shared.

With IATI, each publisher is responsible for its data quality by following the guidelines of the IATI Standard. However, uploaded data are neither audited nor verified by IATI. "In a 2019 UNDP study, it was reported that 58% of publishers have no mechanism in place for "seeking or receiving feedback from users"[3], and IATI's Data Use Fund has commissioned research on how to improve communication on data issues between users and publishers. IATI website users are directed to publishers' email addresses to contest data published to the IATI standard. Another persistent problem with IATI data is double counting: i.e. both a donor agency and an implementing organisation may report the same money.

3 Brough, Mark (2020) "Strengthening IATI data quality: towards a comprehensive user feedback system," IATI blog post, 14 April 2020, at: https://iatistandard.org/en/news/strengthening-iati-data-quality-towards-comprehensive-user-feedback-system/

The DAC Secretariat assesses the quality of CRS data by checking both the coverage and the consistency of donor reporting. Users are advised to examine the 'coverage ratios' that measure the comprehensiveness of aid activity data and also indicate the extent to which the data can be exploited in analytical work. When the OECD publishes its yearly data, it also releases a set of complete data across all years with corrections made to previous records. The process results in a two-year lag, but the published data are generally considered more accurate.

AidData standardises and verifies data and also discloses its Data Management Documents with detailed information on data collection, standardisation, and publishing procedures for all standard data products in an effort to provide users with quality assurance.

HDX manually reviews every new dataset for relevance, timeliness, interpretability and comparability, and contacts data providers with concerns or suggestions for improvement to ensure compliance with the HDX Terms of Service. Data may not include personal data, and quality criteria include completeness of metadata, the relevance of the data to humanitarian action, and the integrity of the data files.

AIMS incorporate data that are typically shared between the local donor office and government counterparts, allowing engagement and easier verification. Governments have expressed concerns that the data supplied to IATI from global offices do not match the data supplied by country offices.

'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.' — Analysis of the impact of aid transparency in Benin and Tanzania by PWYF (2017)

But predictability is going backwards

Forward expenditure plans are a critical part of aid transparency but, according to the GPEDC survey (2019), progress on annual predictability 'has been marginal over the eight-year period since 2011.' In 2011, 85% of aid was predictable on an annual basis. By 2016 this had fallen to 83%, but during the two years prior to 2018 it improved to 87%.

The availability of forward expenditure plans and the share of development cooperation on budget follow the same trend: some improvement between 2011–14, stable between 2014–16, then a significant decline between 2016–18. The reduction in data being recorded on national budgets may be due to more money being delivered to NGOs as well as to the worsening trend in forward data.

'Data from the 2018 Monitoring Round show that, on average, partner country governments had forward visibility and could start medium-term planning on only 56% of the development co-operation funding they expected to receive from their development partners three years ahead (in 2021). This decline is mirrored in the fall of the share of development co-operation finance recorded on partner countries' budgets subject to parliamentary scrutiny—from 66% in 2016 to 61% in 2018—undermining domestic accountability over these resources. Together, this trend puts at risk the ability of partner countries to effectively plan and budget for their development efforts, and limits accountability over national development efforts maintained through parliamentary oversight.' — GPEDC (2019)

There is poor information on results

While many donors are doing well on allocation data, hardly anyone is publishing anything useful on the impact/results of their investments. According to one expert interviewee, the allocation information is 'not that helpful without information about its performance.'

'Gaps in publication of performance information persist. While more donors published project objectives, only a small minority published the results of their projects. Fewer still published project reviews and evaluations. Without this information, stakeholders monitoring donor

projects have no way to gauge the effectiveness and value of aid spending, to assess the impact of projects, or to extract learning from successful and unsuccessful projects.' — ATI (2020)

Traceability and tracking is non-existent

One hope at the beginning of the aid transparency movement was that aid would become traceable. This was considered a likely outcome of publishing more aid data, but it remains a critical gap, in part because major donors are not cooperating well on this.

'There are ways to fix the double counting properly in the data—assigning a specific project ID to track things down the chain. But lots of organisations are not using these traceability markers, including the big ones who most need to.' — Interviewee (Global)

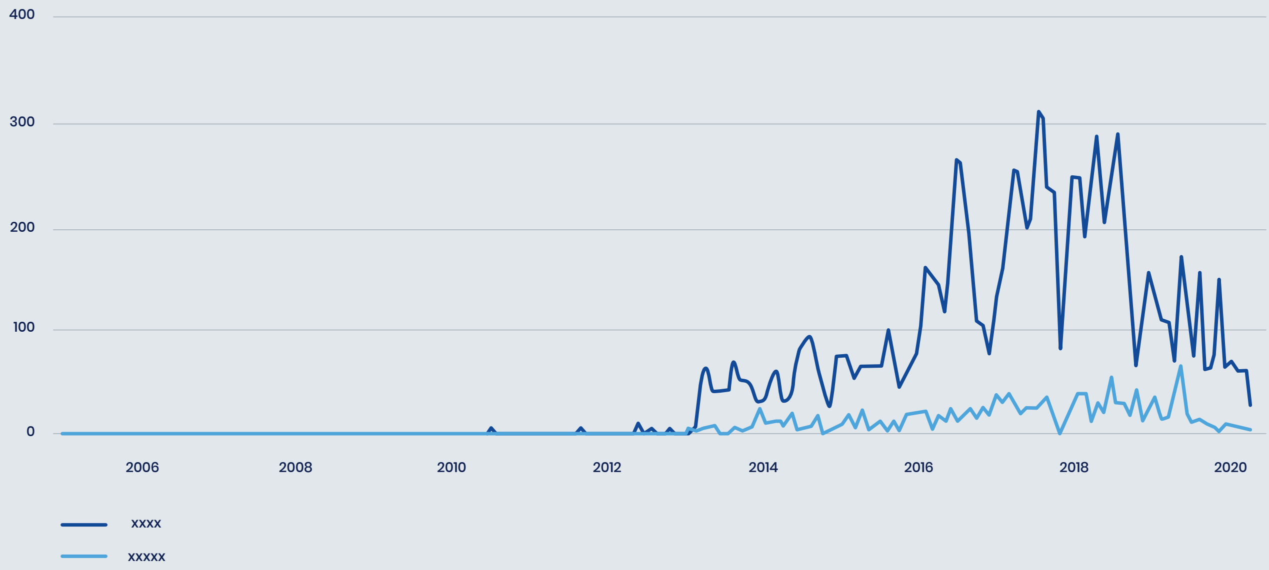
3. Use and impact of transparent aid data

The movement has made a powerful political impact

Aid transparency has received much attention and is reflected in indexes (e.g. ATI), rankings (e.g. Quality of Official Development Assistance (QuODA)), analyses (e.g. GPEDC), individual donors' policy frameworks, and the collective doctrine on development effectiveness embodied in the Busan outcome document and subsequent statements.

Several interviewees credited IATI with forcing up standards of transparency, even if it is not used much itself. Even if implementation of the vision has been flawed, transparency and openness now firmly feature as part of every conversation. Tracking media interest shows that transparency has risen up agendas swiftly thanks to the pressure of aid transparency advocates, both globally and in our case study countries (Figure 1). It is worth noting that the PWYF ranking process, which releases preliminary findings privately then gives organisations a chance to improve, before releasing final findings. The average score in the

Figure 1: Media tracking since 2006



ATI 2020 based on the first set of collected data was 54.4, which increased to 63.4 in the final data collection round four months later.

'IATI has been successful in putting aid transparency on the international agenda and it has supported appropriately its members in making progress towards meeting Accra objectives and Busan commitments.' — Evaluation of IATI (2015)

Transparent aid data are somewhat useful to donors

Donors, on the other hand, are finding in-house value in the standardisation of aid data. PWYF has explicitly updated its Theory of Change to make clear that this is where impact is to be expected, as the chain through to impact at recipient level is much longer and requires more engagement. For instance, a cornerstone of World Vision UK's 'It Takes a World...' campaign was analysis by Development Initiatives using IATI data to compare United Kingdom spending to Sweden's, forming the basis of a public pressure on the issue of ending violence against children[4]. Donor representatives lack awareness of the information demands in their respective host-countries and seem to regard the 'public back home' as the primary group interested in receiving information on aid spending. So donors are the main clients of their own work, and this is a strong incentive to keep publishing: i.e. donor country parliaments like to have a handle on what is being spent and how.

'Effects has been seen more at the top of the chain, i.e. in donor agencies, rather than in recipient countries.' — Interviewee (Global)

'At the donor level, it seems to work for them in terms of aligning aid in various sectors.' — Interviewee (Ghana)

'We kind of screwed ourselves. We had not really thought through what to do with the data. Even [major player in aid transparency] doesn't use the IATI data as much as other sources.' — Interviewee (Global)

Stakeholders in recipient countries hardly use aid data

There are many ways in which data use for decision making has increased, and the greater availability of aid data (often through sources that are IATI-compliant but not from IATI specifically) has helped this. Aid data seem to be used more often to check other sources of data than to push for behaviour

4 Outram, Verity and Daniel Stevens, Development Initiatives (2020) 'The power of transparency: Data is key to an effective crisis response', Development Initiatives blog, London, 28 April 2020, at: https://devinit.org/blog/power-transparency-data-key-effective-crisis-response/

change. Overall, however, few stakeholders use international aid data, and even fewer use IATI data. IATI is known only to a select group, mostly in government, generally the small group working on AIMS. Users include a handful of favourable governments and a few CSOs. There is also some media use, as evidenced in part by the increased mentions in media (see Figure 1).

'IATI as a potential source of aid data is largely unknown, and where stakeholders are aware of it, they perceive it as an international effort with limited relevance at the national level.' — Data for Development in Nepal (2018)

IATI infrastructure is lacking to make data available in user-friendly ways. IATI has a limited audience; other sources (including FCDO's DevTracker, United States Agency for International Development (USAID) sites, and material provided by the World Bank and CRS/OECD) seem to be more widely used, possibly because they are significantly more user-friendly. IATI is premised on the assumption that third parties or reporting organisations themselves will build decent data portals. However, few have obliged. For instance, while Australia's Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade seems to be improving its IATI reporting performance (at least with respect to quantitative information), it has constructed no portal to allow access to the data, assess their quality, and make use of them. Any changes resulting from IATI use are far removed from the most vulnerable.

'The IATI Registry is just that: a registry, not a database, let alone a database that can easily be queried and drawn upon to produce digestible information.' — Interviewee (Global)

Of course, there are examples of IATI and other aid transparency data being used. But we were warned by one IATI sceptic in an early interview that there is a tendency to 'cling to a few successful examples' of use rather than to accept the broad and possibly intractable problem.

'We heard a number of instances where data had been used by government to inform policy, or by civil society to hold donor projects to account.' — Report of a recent PWYF visit to Nigeria

During our interviews, including in-depth case study interviews, we found it hard to find examples of use and impact. That does not mean they do not exist—but the fact they were hard to find tells an important story, i.e. they are few at best. At the recipient country level, use is neither comprehensive nor systematic. Links between IATI and AIMS are generally manual, where they exist. Use appears to be related to partner recipient country government openness, with great variation. Any changes creditable to aid transparency are likely far removed from the beneficiary communities, because it is being integrated at the national government decision making level.

'I have heard over the years about schizophrenia over what IATI is. Is it a database or is it a set of standards? Actually, the database is less important than the fact that we agree on how data gets entered and used.' — Interviewee (Global)

'The current situation is therefore that the government of Rwanda and its providers all have interests to make best use of available IATI data to decrease transaction costs and improve accuracy and timeliness of aid data. However, the government is not yet convinced of the value of the available data and is currently reluctant to invest further financially and staff-wise into more sophisticated processing or import modalities.' — IATI note on Rwanda (c.2017)

'Use cases are vanishingly small. That's not a problem with the IATI Standard—it's the logistics of IATI.' — Interviewee (Global)

Donors tend not to inform stakeholders in recipient countries

International organisations do not effectively inform relevant stakeholders in recipient countries about the data they publish. Even among the agencies scoring in the top 10 in the ATI, there is a lack of a consistent, systematic, institutionalised focus on providing sufficient information that would facilitate stakeholder engagement during project implementation. Even when the information in some form is disclosed, the search process requires substantial effort and significant technical knowledge to be able to investigate.

'While innovation in open data has been a top priority of many development agencies at the headquarters level, these innovations often fail to appeal to country office staff, limiting impact and implementation at local levels. For example, while publishing and using IATI has been a top priority of many agencies, country staff are often unaware of IATI and are occasionally resistant to its use, creating inconsistencies between data published locally and that published internationally.' — 'Open Data, Development Assistance, and Humanitarian Action' in The State of Open Data: Histories and Horizons (2018)

Aid data are submitted to IATI by donors more as a requirement than with the objective of being utilised. Major donors still work through country offices on ad hoc discussions with country governments on data provided manually. USAID and FCDO have publicised their respective websites and these are used to an extent. There is no incentive to involve CSOs or other non-state actors about IATI-published data, because donors do not want the added burden of explaining and working through it with other groups.

Where, as in Ghana, open budgets are on the government agenda, this may be happening to a small degree—but impelled by government interest, not that of the donors. Arguably, it is not IATI's core business to get users to use the data, but it is surely part of its business to make data accessible to users.

'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.' — Study of Benin and Tanzania, PWYF (2017)

'The whole point was to service recipients—but it is serving donors. Donors are the main voice at IATI board. CSOs are the others. Other stakeholders are missing in action.'
— Interviewee (Global)

IATI has been useful in shaping what actually counts as aid, and provides up-to-date data that can be the basis of dialogue with partner countries. When different data are provided at national and global level, IATI data shed light on the discrepancy, enabling partners to demand more action and accountability. But IATI has also undermined national efforts: after Accra many countries set up national-level collection platforms, but few used these platforms, preferring IATI.

'They talked about country systems but didn't use national aid management systems.'
— Interviewee (Global)

Factors inhibiting the use of aid data

- **Lack of functional, user-friendly, consistent, automated infrastructure at IATI so that partner country government users can rely on having comprehensive data in a timely fashion.**
- **Lack of public interface that is user-friendly to facilitate non-specialist use.**
- **Lack of the necessary awareness among non-specialist audiences (especially civil society) about the existence and utility of these data.**
- **Lack of government capacity and incentives to take advantage of existing AIMS.**
- **Lack of advocates pushing for this in government.**
- **Lack of donor priority and incentive around data use.**
- **Lack of regularity in donor engagement with governments on these issues.**
- **Lack of donor country office capacity.**
- **Lack of civil society awareness and, ultimately, capacity to utilise the data nominally on offer.**

An unfair question?

There are some who think over-focusing on 'results' and 'impact' is unfair and unwise for an issue about long-term change. Remembering the objectives set out above, there are reasons of principle and long-term objectives that defy attempts to count impact in the short term. Michener worries that a focus on direct, quantifiable metrics leads scholars to undervalue the benefits that transparency policies bring, even in situations of lacklustre implementation, such as when these policies help foster bureaucratic competency or coordination in the medium term (Pozen, 2019).

'Methodological approaches to measuring impact frequently make for a poor fit with the indirect, diffuse, and gradual impacts generated by most transparency policies. It is of little surprise, then, that reviews of transparency's impact have found inconclusive evidence surrounding causality and causal mechanisms.' — Michener (2019)

'The results agenda is harming transparency's Theory of Change. How do you measure the results of the input? How do you talk about contribution of more transparency to the work of advocacy organisations changing things? It is not about symptoms and counting off beneficiaries.' — Interviewee (Global)

Unintended/negative impacts

Barder (2009) was one of a number of analysts who anticipated negative consequences of scrutiny of aid. More information about a system where 'diversion' was well-known would surely feed detracting media coverage, and so it has proved. Related to this, there is some self-censoring due to the need to publish everything. More worryingly, increased scrutiny may be one of a number of factors pushing budget holders to plump for less risky investments, less piloting, and larger-scale projects, as part of a wider focus on results.

At the recipient country level, there is some evidence that transparency policies in partner countries can worsen the relationship between CSOs and the government. In parallel, and due to other factors in addition to this relationship souring, civil society space is shrinking as governments 'feel threatened'. Transparency can be used as a stick to beat problematic organisations, such as national NGOs criticising the government. However, civil society is pushing for transparency, both in their sector and in private and government sectors.

Overall, however, these costs are considered worthwhile. The alternative—keeping spending decisions and information about diversion covered up—is not seriously contemplated by people who support the aid project.

Qualitative research (on the United States administrative state for instance) suggests that transparency policies can lead, over time, to the hollowing out of bureaucratic capacity when transparency is weaponised by political opponents and regulated parties or enlisted repeatedly as a substitute for stronger regulation (Pozen, 2019).

4. A changing context

Donors are confused about transparency, but have not deprioritised it

The context in traditional donor countries is significantly different to what it was 10–15 years ago. There is a different set of global leaders in the north, where recession or slow growth since 2008 (just when the aid transparency movement was getting going) is one of the reasons the 'results agenda' has gained ground. Economic pressures in the north mean the idea of budget support, which was big 10–15 years ago, is now harder to defend. This was one of the reasons for the transparency push—i.e. if countries are going to receive significant budget support, they need to communicate better about how it is spent.

'Aid commitments and engagements are more bilateral now and occasionally sector-wide.' — Interviewee (Tanzania)

'The fundamental hypothesis that you can't get to effectiveness without transparency still stands. A central comparable data format is still the way to go.' — Interviewee (Global)

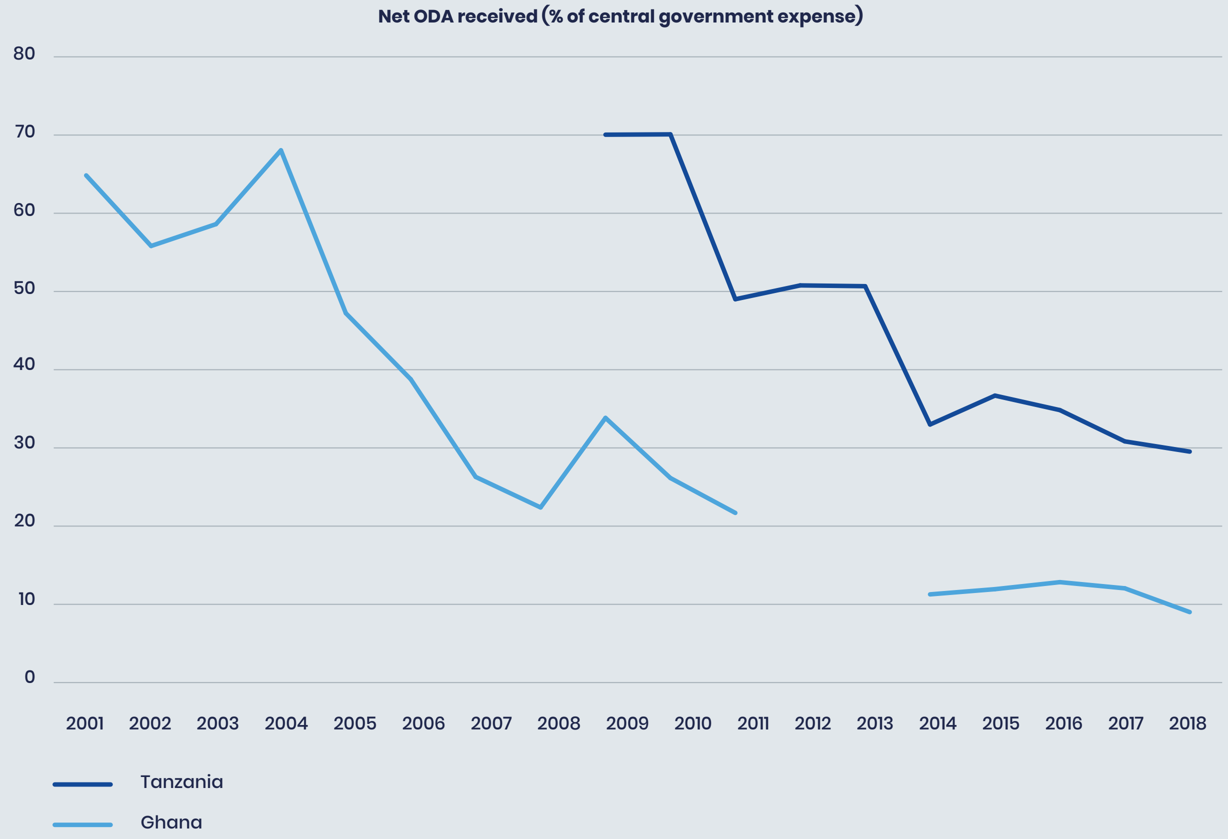
Decision makers in the aid sector are no longer focusing on aid effectiveness or aid transparency per se. Some think it has not demonstrated its usefulness in terms of achieving impact; others think it has been successfully integrated and requires less emphasis. Other issues have come to dominate the aid sector, namely a focus on results and impact, which leaves less time for process issues. Others suggest that the arrival of China on the development scene has affected things, with OECD donors possibly levelling down on some aid effectiveness principles, including transparency. All this means that aid agencies are doing enough to 'tick the box' on aid transparency, without putting in extra effort. They see it as the recipient countries' responsibility to take the data and use them. Other aspects of the aid effectiveness agenda also weakened, including the use of country-owned results frameworks and planning tools by development partners.

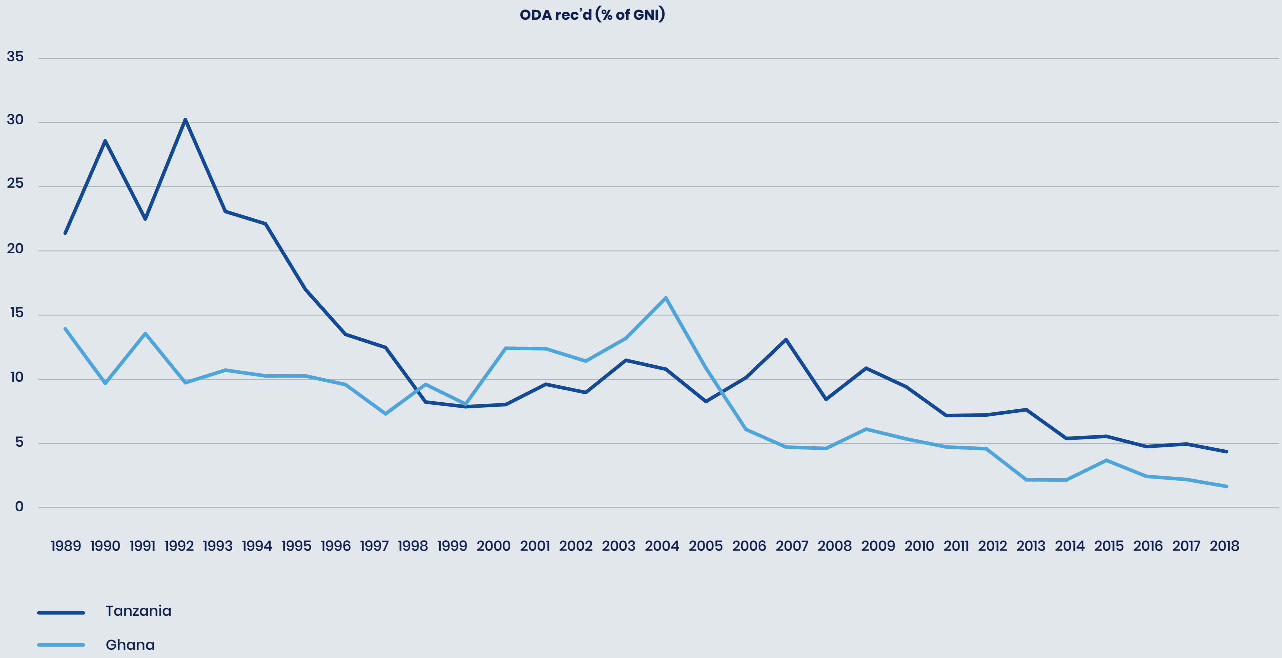
'The Paris Agreement on Aid Harmonisation is not followed anymore, so CSOs find it difficult to know what donors are paying, especially to local institutions and their commitments.' — Interviewee (Tanzania)

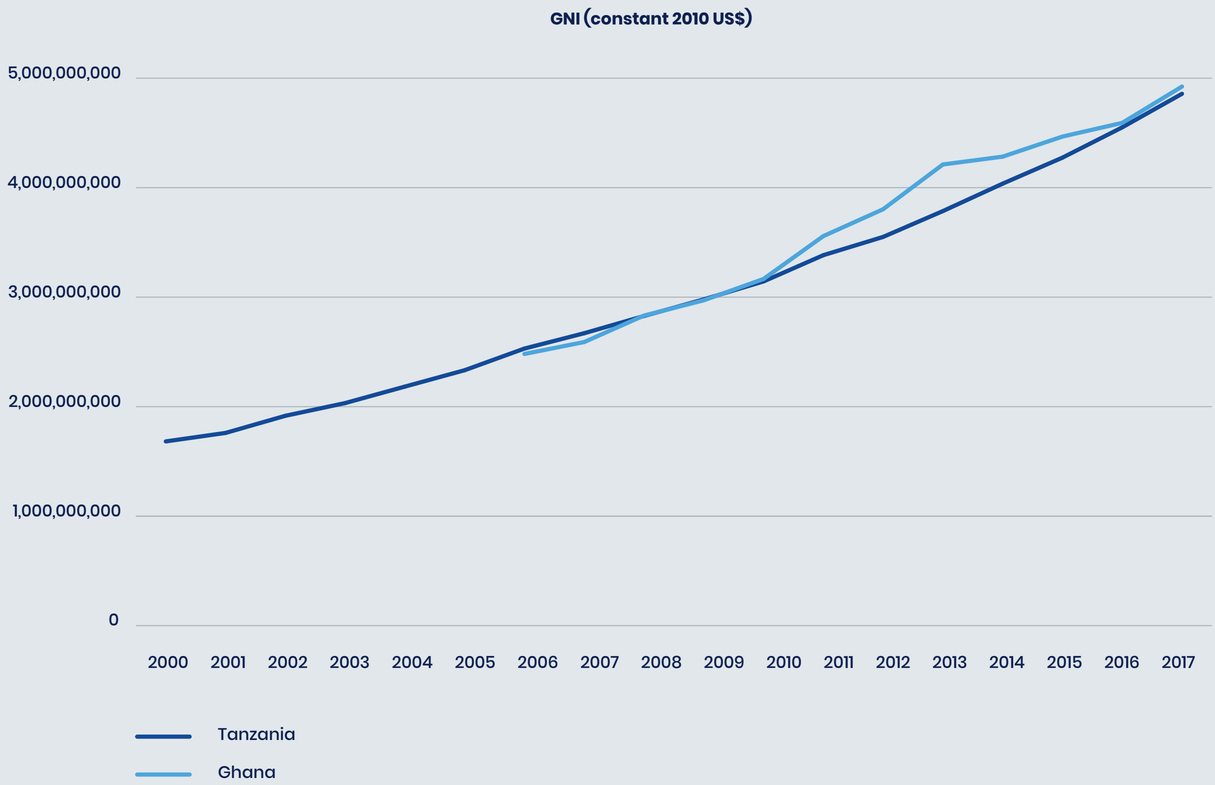
'Most donor directors see a good score on the ATI index as very important. But they also see it as kind of a waste of time.' — Interviewee (Global)

'Aid remains important. Never underestimate the potential backsliding on transparency—e.g. the new British Foreign, Commonwealth, and Development Office can definitely become less transparent. They are already pushing to shift on this. There should be no question about transparency in the aid sector.' — Interviewee (Global)

Figure 2 | Aid dependency in Ghana and Tanzania




ODA rec'd (% of GNI)
35
30
25
20
15
10
5
0
1989 1990 1991 1992 1993 1994 1995 1996 1997 1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017 2018
Tanzania
Ghana


GNI (constant 2010 US$)
5,000,000,000
4,000,000,000
3,000,000,000
2,000,000,000
1,000,000,000
0
2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015 2016 2017
Tanzania
Ghana

***'While IATI is responsible for aid transparency, DFID doesn't have to be. They can offload it.'
— Interviewee (Global)***

***'When direct budget support is no longer funded, transparency is no longer an issue.'
— Interviewee (Global)***

Recipients are less dependent on aid

Important changes have also taken place in many aid recipient countries. First, aid dependency has significantly reduced in most countries, as statistics from Ghana and Tanzania demonstrate. ODA as a percentage of GNI has plummeted from 10%–15% at turn of century to nearer 2%–5% now. The trend is even starker when you look at ODA as a percentage of total government expenditures, down from 60%–70% to 10% in Ghana and to 30% in Tanzania. This is not due to less aid money coming in—both countries receive as much in real terms as they did 15 years ago—but to the increased size of the domestic economy, which has doubled in both countries since 2005.

Concerns about diminishing civil space

For CSOs, the debate is much more about engagement with national budget processes and accountability of government spending, rather than aid per se. This was a key driver of transparency when budget support was prevalent—if you are going to transfer money directly to a foreign government's account, you want to be clear that it is being used well.

Another development in many recipient countries is an evolving relationship between civil society and governments, namely the threat to civic space and scrutiny. Gaventa and McGee (2013) find that political context
is crucial if transparency and accountability initiatives (TAIs) are to have an impact. It is therefore relevant that this context is shifting.

'[There is] little evidence of impact of TAIs in non-democratic settings. … A political environment that favours a balanced supply- and demand-side approach to accountability is critical to TAI's success. … Citizen participation and pressure are needed to get from political won't to political will.' — Gaventa and McGee (2013)

Tanzanian interviewees related a general reluctance to discuss data issues due to the recent enforcement of data laws. A number of laws in Tanzania now criminalise public use and publishing of data, except by the National Bureau of Statistics (NBS). Government officials requested a permit form from the NBS to discuss this theme further (involving a lengthy application with a fee). The traditional demand side for aid accountability has therefore shifted. Of course, this makes the push for transparency (not just aid) more important than ever.

'One of the ways in which governments have sought to stifle dissent has been through the introduction of new non-governmental organization (NGO) laws that include stringent disclosure and financial transparency requirements for civil society organisations (CSOs).' — PWYF (2020)

***'10 years ago you had a sophisticated conversation, now you can't; there has been a growth of populism. Aid transparency feels like a luxury.'
— Interviewee (Global)***

'We are losing the transparency battle. We were arrogant. We didn't understand what was happening. If you look at strong data, it got worse around 2007/08. … The growth of authoritarianism was a big deal. … We need to get smart about where geopolitics is on transparency.' — Interviewee (Global)

'In some countries civil society space is shrinking. … Governments are saying they want to know where money is coming from and where it is going. … So this is being used to rein in civil society, to remove critical voices on e.g. governance issues. … The agenda has been hijacked to beat up civil society.

5 UN World Food Program (2019) 'COVID-19 will double number of people facing food crises unless swift action is taken', 21 April, available at: www.wfp.org/news/covid-19-will-double-number-people-facing-food-crises-unless-swift-action-taken.
6 UNDP (2020) 'Coronavirus versus inequality', available at: https://feature.undp.org/coronavirus-vs-inequality/?utm_source=social&utm_medium=undp&utm_campaign=covid19-inequality.
7 UNCTAD (2014) 'World Investment Report', available at: http://unctad.org/en/PublicationsLibrary/wir2014_en.pdf.
8 OECD (2020) 'The impact of the coronavirus (COVID-19) crisis on development finance', 24 June, available at: www.oecd.org/coronavirus/policy-responses/the-impact-of-the-coronavirus-covid-19-crisis-on-development-finance-9de00b3b/.
9 www.publishwhatyoufund.org/wp-content/uploads/2017/01/Briefing-Paper-fWhy-Aid-Transparency-Matters.pdf.

… So we need to speak to CSOs about what transparency is required for them, thinking about their own needs.' — Interviewee (Global)

COVID-19

The COVID-19 pandemic has caused hardship around the world. The United Nations estimates that an additional 420 million people could fall into extreme poverty, while 265 million may face malnutrition.[5] The United Nations has warned that the COVID-19 crisis may reverse human development for the first time in 30 years.[6] The COVID-19 crisis has further worsened an estimated US $2.5–US $3 trillion annual financing gap for developing countries, especially from private sources;[7] external private finance inflows to developing economies could drop by US $700 billion in 2020 compared to levels seen the previous year, exceeding the impact of the 2008 Global Financial Crisis by 60%.[8]

With fiscal space severely constrained across the developing world, in part due to elevated debt levels, how development finance actors respond to the crisis will be critical in supporting the world's most vulnerable countries to counter this disaster in the short term, as well as 'build back better' over the medium to long term.

The pressure on development spending is mounting as the impact of the economic crisis takes hold, potentially reducing the availability of resources and increasing the demand for results from the public in donor countries with respect to public expenditure. Transparency on public expenditure is an important part of the response needed to engage and maintain public support for aid. [9]

5. Rethinking the Theory of Change

Whether individuals and organisations use aid data depends on capacity, language, infrastructure, and the interests of those actors. The implicit Theory of Change in use in the formal aid transparency sector serves the interests of donors better than those of beneficiaries, as the latter do not have the same level of capacity to utilise information.

The basic assumption that publishing information on an online platform will trigger its use, thereby ensuring optimal use and accounting for international aid, appears not to be borne out. The hope that citizens will monitor aid to ensure it is put to better use has not been met. Without any conscious effort to build capacity and awareness with CSOs and beneficiaries of aid, the impact of aid transparency on aid effectiveness will continue to be less than expected. The key issue is to whom the data are now transparent, and the same question was asked in myriad papers 10 years ago. If you do not know about it, cannot access it, and do not understand it, or if the detail in the data is not what you were looking for, then how helpful is 'transparency'?

In a recent paper, IATI acknowledges the flawed notion that 'if we build it, they will come':

'In common with other open data initiatives, IATI's original theory of change assumed that once data was published openly, the users would come, and on this basis central investment in promoting data use was not considered to be essential. Instead, efforts focused on the supply side of the equation, working to encourage publishers to provide good quality data.'

Governments need detailed project-level (not country-level or programme-level) data; data on projected spend (not just committed); more timely CRS data; sub-national data; and results data in a linked and digestible format to make decisions about what to prioritise. In order to improve outcomes for the most vulnerable via empowerment, transparent data need to meet the needs of civil society. This is a combination of two strains of work—the data have to be available (supply-side) and civil society has to be engaged and empowered to know how to get them and use them.

'A challenge at IATI is that the Theory of Change was only developed in 2016. There were aims and objectives, but nothing so explicit.'
— Interviewee (Global)

Problems foretold

A paper by Sarah Mulley for the Institute for Public Policy Research in 2010 anticipated the problems that appear to have come about: 'The vision and promise of transparent and accountable aid set out above is intuitive, and attractive (even in more modest versions). However, there is relatively little evidence about the likely impacts of increased transparency and accountability on development outcomes. There are two good reasons for this. The first is that transparency and accountability of aid are a relatively new focus for donors, researchers and civil society—there are few longstanding initiatives whose impacts can be analysed. The second is that the chains of causality between aid transparency and accountability and development outcomes are fairly long. Even in the most ambitious visions of transparency and accountability, transparent and accountable aid is necessary but not sufficient to deliver results, and must be accompanied by a range of other supporting measures. Put these two factors together, and it becomes clear why there is much more evidence about the problems caused by opaque and unaccountable aid than there is about the positive impacts of transparent and accountable aid. It is very hard to see how this evidence gap can be filled, except by taking action and building in monitoring and evaluation from an early stage.'

In an essay in 2011, Owen Barder (one of the leading proponents for aid transparency) differentiates between transparency over aid allocation and aid execution. He insists that the focus should be on bottom-up information and accountability to citizens. He insists that the objective of aid transparency is to provide data to people in recipient countries because the OECD channels were serving donors: 'There are important differences between the information requirements of people in donor countries and people in developing countries. Current systems for aid transparency focus mainly on transparency of aid allocation, because that is what donor country stakeholders are largely interested in, and not enough on transparency of spending execution, which is of primary interest to people in developing countries.'

The 2015 evaluation of IATI restated the problem: 'While IATI has done well overall in increasing the supply side, i.e. the number and breadth of publishers, the demand side, i.e. use of IATI data, particularly from partner countries, has been given less priority until now. The evaluation finds that a strong consensus has now emerged that the use of IATI data must now become IATI's most important programmatic priority.'
The IATI evaluation goes on in more detail to list almost precisely what we are finding in this evaluation five years later:

- There is general consensus among IATI members and publishers that a significant increase in use of IATI data, particularly by partner countries, is critical to the growth and sustainability of IATI.

- A recurring message from users is that the IATI public-facing websites, including the registry, are not sufficiently user-friendly and are difficult to access, navigate, and understand.

- For many intended users of IATI data, in particular partner countries, the quality of the data that are published requires significant improvement as there are often important discrepancies between IATI data and those obtained directly from donor country offices.

- Partner countries that use IATI data do so primarily to cross-check data entered on their AIMS as part of their planning and budgeting processes. A major obstacle to using IATI data is that they often do not meet the needs of potential users. Intended users also express the need for more guidance on how to use the data.

Another evaluation in the same year, by USAID, drew similar conclusions: 'The main findings are that there is a lack of awareness [of both IATI and

www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/AidTransparencyCountryPilotAssessment.pdf.

of foreignassistance.gov], need for more and higher quality data, lack of accessibility to aid information, and need of support for use of data.

… Conclusion: Host-country stakeholders' demand for aid information is low because of a lack of awareness of available information. Compounding this is the fact that available information is not very accessible and difficult to understand. This lack of awareness was common among all stakeholders: government counterparts in partner countries; potential information intermediaries like the media, and CSOs and advocacy organizations; private companies; academia; … and even USG staff and key stakeholders. … The Ghanaian Open Data Initiative team had only a vague notion of IATI and efforts by donors to provide more and higher quality data on aid flows. In Ghana, only one unit of the MOF was familiar with IATI and uses its data.'[10]

In summary, it is important not just to ensure aid transparency as a general principle, but also that the right kind of information gets into the right hands for the Theory of Change to work. Ten years on, progress remains slow. This realisation must impact decisions about future investment: i.e. how likely is it that things that have failed to shift for 10 years will shift now?

The various objectives of aid transparency

Can we piece together a coherent Theory of Change, linking specific activities to outcomes and impacts? This will not be easy, which is one of the reasons there has been less progress than anticipated, as we shall see. Many organisations and individuals involved in the aid transparency ecosystem have emphasised different objectives and strategies, and these have evolved over the years.

We present here the main reasons given for prioritising aid transparency (and to some extent for support for IATI as a specific intervention). As in most taxonomies, there is a degree of overlap between the various sections. The first three reasons (effectiveness, empowerment, efficiency) are the most commonly used justifications for aid transparency; 'principle' is also important. Less mentioned in the early days, but increasingly recognised over the years, are 'building trust' and 'building the state'.

'The argument for open transparent government is as strong as ever. … The larger goal is redistributing power, we want to put power in other people's hands.' — Interviewee (Global)

'First build the system, and then we will build demand. We assumed demand would come. You can imagine a more demand-led process, more iterative. What information do you need as a parliamentarian in Ghana? We didn't lead from that; we led from northern CSOs saying more info needed.' — Interviewee (Global)

These arguments for aid transparency are related but have different time horizons and routes to their achievement. One of the problems we have seen in aid transparency work is lack of clarity linking specific activities to anticipated impacts via concrete inputs and outputs.

There are many types of aid transparency—but which types lead to which outcomes? Gaventa and McGee (2013) analyse the literature and conclude that the Theories of Change in the aid accountability sector are poorly thought out. While there are many good reasons for increased transparency, the means by which certain types of transparency lead to certain types of impact are not spelled out. This is a serious flaw.

As we will see in the next section, significant advance on data availability has not led to significant use of these data, much less clear impacts for intended beneficiaries (whether governments or communities), and this is due to the focus on the wrong kind of data and poor communication and capacity building of the kind that actually can lead to behaviour change.

'Under some conditions, some TAIs create opportunities for citizens and states to interact constructively, contributing to five kinds of outcome: better budget utilisation; improved service delivery; greater state responsiveness to citizens' needs; the creation of spaces for citizen engagement; and the empowerment of local voices.'
— Gaventa and McGee (2013)

Objectives of aid transparency

Effectiveness: The most common reason given for prioritising aid transparency is effectiveness. It is argued that the effectiveness of aid (the value for money; the quality of results) will improve because newly available data will be used by various parties—most importantly, recipient governments themselves—to improve decision making. One estimate (Barder, 2009) suggests savings of up to US $3 billion per year from recipient governments having forward data to help planning and budgeting.

Empowerment: Strongly related to the first reason, this argument makes the case that newly available data will be used by civil society to scrutinise decisions and hold decision makers and budget holders accountable. Owen Barder (2009) suggests that driving out waste and corruption could reduce 'diversion' of aid resources by up to US $5 billion per year. This also responds to the 'do no harm' principle, recognising that aid can have perverse or negative effects, and that shining a light on the way aid is spent is likely to reduce them.

Efficiency: If effectiveness is about better impacts, efficiency is about reducing costs. It has been argued that, following an initial outlay (mainly by donor governments), an established aid transparency infrastructure could save money throughout the aid ecosystem. This links to the overall push to drive down transaction costs for aid recipient governments as part of the Paris Agenda on Aid Effectiveness. As the aid transparency work (and IATI) got underway, most information on aid was collected by recipient governments individually from donors. It was hoped that the IATI system would make life easier and cheaper.

Principle: While aid often has to be justified in terms of the impact it has on intended beneficiaries, some have argued it is unfair to judge the aid transparency movement simply on results. They argue some consequences of aid transparency take time to come good and are hard to measure (see the next two sections). They also argue that it is simply unconscionable that so much money should not be known about by the general public, in donor countries as well as in recipient countries. Seen from this perspective, aid transparency is a key part of good governance, like keeping good accounts. The counterfactual, that aid is untransparent, is not, according to this view, a serious option, even if aid transparency cannot demonstrate 'results' per se.

Building trust: While not a concrete impact for recipients, building (or maintaining) trusting relationships throughout the aid ecosystem is seen as critical. Recipient governments need to demonstrate openness and accountability if they are to keep aid flowing. This was particularly true a few years ago during the push for increased budget support, which depended on donors trusting recipient government systems. Donor governments need to be open to maintaining public support for aid, and NGOs also need to be transparent about their activities.

Building the state: Development is not just about delivering immediate results—it is also a slow process of strengthening the state and other social institutions to be more accountable and effective. This is an outcome in itself, not just a means to an end, and improving budget processes is seen as a crucial part of this. Moon and Williamson (2010) write about how lack of transparency harms budget management (e.g. forward data on planned aid disbursements).

'Here in Ethiopia, donors and NGOs spend more than the government raises in domestic revenues. Yet there is no way for a member of parliament, a journalist, a civil society organization or—heaven forbid!—actual citizens to find out what foreign powers are doing in this country.' — Barder (2011)

'Beyond fulfilling a core public sector responsibility, provision of information also can drive better outcomes, although a fully compelling and evidence-based story is yet to be developed to tell us under what conditions this potential is realized. … Access to information about government resource allocation empowers civil society watchdogs to advocate for governments to live up to rhetorical promises to reduce poverty through growth and improved governance. Access to information about planned capital investments can reduce the space for corrupt practices. Access to information about social service performance can permit parents and patients to hold officials accountable for poor outcomes.' — Ruth Levine, Deputy Assistant Administrator at USAID's Bureau for Policy, Planning, and Learning (2010)[11]

6. Possible futures

I. An IATI with impact

Individuals interviewed for this evaluation highlighted that IATI is not all that it could be, but it is not all bad. Working to set up and gradually improve IATI has dominated aid transparency work for a decade. A key question (perhaps the key question) for the future of aid transparency is what role IATI will play in the coming decade. In 'Reaching the potential of IATI data', Development Initiatives (2017) recognises that not enough use is made of IATI data and makes a series of recommendations to increase use. It will remain necessary to have a centralised database of aid by country and sector—this is both helpful and necessary. Given the investment over the past decade, it will not cost much to maintain this and keep it ticking along. Many donors (including FCDO and USAID) the information is sent automatically.

According to IATI itself (2020), 'IATI data offers advantages to both publishers and users through its timeliness, traceability and comprehensiveness. It provides a basis for the essential integration of data on development and humanitarian finance and activities with budget and expenditure and other data in partner countries. It also strengthens financial management and accountability for how the funding is spent and what it delivers. By ensuring the standard is robust, and tools to publish and use it are simple and accessible, IATI can continue to benefit many more different groups of users across the development community.' This leads to the three-pronged strategy going forward: improving quality, enhancing use, and refining the technical core of the IATI Standard (e.g. which fields to maintain).

The key question is: 'To whom is the aid data now transparent?' If you do not know about it, cannot access it, and do not understand it, or if the detail in the data is not what you were looking for, then how helpful is the transparency? Why pursue perfect quality, bring in other sectors, etc. if no-one is reading or using the data? To quote the 2015 Evaluation of IATI: 'It is not about inclusion of partner countries in IATI but rather it should be about inclusion of IATI in partner countries.' The fact that this needs to be said implies the level of the problem at the heart of the IATI initiative.

Most interviewees recognised the importance of a continued emphasis on aid transparency at a global level, of maintaining a database on aid spending, and of the global 'normative function' that organisations such as IATI provide—focusing on setting standards, providing capacity building support to donors and countries where requested, and managing the quality and availability of the global data. This would confirm a view, likely to be widely held, that there is a continued role for IATI. The question is not whether there is a role for IATI, but what role is and how the work it does can be strengthened.

11 https://2012-2017.usaid.gov/news-information/speeches/remarks-deputy-assistant-administrator-bureau-policy-planning-and-learning

'IATI will only be a success if data quality is improved, and that depends on donors. But IATI has suffered from lack of leadership. It is a subset of the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP), which has never understood what it would take to make it a success. [The] last five years have been [spent] navel-gazing.' —Interviewee (Global)

'IATI will either flourish or die. … This is your chance—either do this properly, or step off.' — Interviewee (Global)

'IATI is policy smart but feels tired politically. It needs a refresh. These things have a shelf life. 13 years now. Perhaps it needs new branding.' — Interviewee (Global)

'The members of IATI are really pushing IATI to improve. But the governance architecture doesn't allow progress. It needs bravery.' — Interviewee (Global)

Consolidate

Those close to IATI say the areas they wish to focus on are strengthening data quality and timeliness and improving accessibility for potential users of the data, especially as more data streams come into play. They noted that one bad piece of data can convince a user that all data from a given source could be faulty.

IATI needs to:

- improve data quality, particularly on the issue of aligning headquarters data with data provided to (and by) donor country offices;
- ensure incentives for these offices to focus on the regular, strategic use of aid data, including capacity building; and
- improve its interface to help communicate its data better.

These are all part of its original mandate and therefore fall under the banner 'consolidate'. IATI will cease to be useful if it remains locked behind a technical wall—it needs to manage its products better for non-technical users, including civil society. Some Tanzanian stakeholders (those few that had an opinion) suggested that IATI strengthen its offer by making data real time, having a helpdesk, presenting options for segregating data by region and other categories relevant to them, and improving visualisations.

'To make it work the standard needs to be totally overhauled; focus on the top 20 fields that are most useful. Focus on quality of top fields, make all else optional. Stop overwhelming people with incomparable data.' — Interviewee (Global)

A further area of consolidation relates to data on performance and results. While many donors are doing well at sharing financial data, few are doing anything to share data on the impact of their investments. This is difficult because of attribution and contribution problems, especially when donor efforts are complementary to government actions (which are nearly always many times greater than the donor-funded effort).

Establishing a new IATI Standard around results could involve country stakeholders in deciding how this is to be done. It is certainly not obvious that IATI is the right organisation or format to manage this, although it could be involved in an assessment of the extent to which donors, recipients, and middle agencies put this information into the public domain. In our interviews, CSO respondents did not talk much about how IATI data could be useful for them—perhaps because, without results data, the financial data are not useful.
'There is some evidence at MOF level that when people have more info on aid and outcomes, they can make rational decisions. But they have to have those two bits of info in tandem.' — Interviewee (Global)

How important is machine-readability and standardisation? IATI is standardised (therefore comparable) and machine-readable, but it needs to be human-readable as well. Information that can be published on an international database in a common format is generally not the most useful for scrutiny. It is possible that there was some naiveté or over-confidence in the idea that a database could be built and operated successfully. In a rapidly evolving data context where the problem has switched from there not being enough data to there being too much data in the space of a decade, perhaps the point of aid transparency is not to have a repository of vast amounts of information but rather to focus on data collection and management as part of the accountability dialogue between stakeholders. Perfecting the data is important, but the process of doing so—which involves building relationships—is even more important.

'IATI is a standard. Not a database. There is a set of pointers to where the data are—but they are stored on the donors own sites. Why are there not tools to access the data? Because the data that donors are publishing is not of a kind or level of detail that makes it worthwhile for someone to bother to do that.' — Interviewee (Global)

'One thing that's relatively easy to solve is infrastructure—which makes it frustrating that it hasn't been solved. IATI has worked to develop the services, but they haven't been maintained well; they often break.' — Interviewee (Global)

'I can see the benefits of standardised data, that can be compared, put together in different ways, looked at, and used. In a certain crisis, what funding is coming in, who is there, etc. [It] makes sense, but only if it actually works.' — Interviewee (Global)

Expand

While consolidation looks to be necessary, how to expand scope is still a question that needs answering. The humanitarian sector has been slower than 'development' aid in moving on transparency, in part because less advocacy has been targeted at that sector and in part because it may be harder to share information on humanitarian aid, which tends to be mobilised more urgently. This is beginning to change, with the Grand Bargain setting out the importance of transparency for the sector. According to the IATI Strategic Plan 2020–25: 'As more humanitarian actors began publishing to IATI since the Grand Bargain agreement at the World Humanitarian Summit in 2015, new challenges have arisen around the sensitivity of some of the data that is expected to be published.'

If IATI is struggling to deliver with its current scope, is expanding scope really the right way forward? Given limited resources, might it be better to focus on core functions as they stand? Another area where expansion is being discussed is to cover non-ODA and even private as well as public flows, with calls for regional development banks and other DFIs to publish financial and performance data on their private sector portfolios. However, this may make an already unwieldy and underused platform even more so.

'There is still a tendency to say in the modern day we need to expand and update to include more, aid is no longer just aid, it is private and foundations etc. My view is that there is a risk that we try to capture everything. Humanitarian assistance also becoming part of IATI. In principle good but the risk is that if IATI tries to build a solution to everything it ends up not solving anything. It gets too complicated.' — Interviewee (Global)

Engage

Both PWYF and IATI emphasise that 'an important part of the picture has been overlooked: the potential of aid transparency alongside engagement to build trust and empower local actors.'

The talk is of 'data engagement' as a new approach. According to this thinking, there are three phases of aid transparency: an initial focus on quantity, i.e. making information available so that partners could use the data; a focus on quality and improving the integrity of the data; and engagement—donors working with partners to ensure effective use of the data, which may include capacity building, systems support, etc.

Engagement involves bringing a wide coalition of non-technical users into the discussion and feeding back on IATI design and products. Ideas have emerged such as piloting an in-country forum to centralise civil society capacity building and use, with a self-sustaining model of training and upskilling, hackathons, university courses, etc. According to the IATI Strategic Plan, 'Funded projects such as hackathons and group training for journalists and CSO networks achieved some small-scale success, although the reach of activities undertaken was often limited and the impact difficult to measure.'

From a public financial management perspective, there is another aspect of engagement that is important: engagement with government on fiscal planning. Donor projects often have recurrent cost implications for government. For example, infrastructure spending on construction of clinics and schools, is useless without corresponding recurrent funding commitments from government for staff, medicines, books, etc. This points towards engagement as part of wider governance initiatives rather than to engagement specifically on aid flows—i.e. it is better to include aid as part of broader engagement across the whole policy cycle, covering aid but also other revenues.

Ghanaian interviewees suggested that the underlying assumptions regarding the Theory of Change should be reviewed, partly to reflect current contextual changes. The basic assumption that publishing information on an online platform will trigger use and thereby improve aid effectiveness needs to be reviewed. The current modus operandi of the aid transparency movement, according to these informants, serves the interests of donors more than beneficiaries, as the latter do not have the same level of capacity and skills to use information (and use depends on capacity and resources). Without any conscious effort to build CSO capacity and awareness with CSOs and other intended beneficiaries, there will be little to no impact of aid transparency.

'The techies don't care about recipients—they have no interest in the outcomes, just the techie stuff. And that has taken away from the political change side—need to rebalance that. … Why has change not happened? Because people are focusing on the quality first, then moving on to use. When do you say the quality is good enough!' — Interviewee (Global)

'We need steady state support for IATI, but they shouldn't be investing money in use. There is a huge community working on this.' — Interviewee (Global)

II. Alternative approaches to aid transparency

According to some interviewees, the IATI focus has narrowed the utility of transparency to the technical sharing of some data; the vision of transparency as a condition for increasing accountability is lost. By itself, transparency does not deliver improved accountability and improved aid spending. Other factors are also needed, including broader governance reforms and strengthening the demand side.

Perhaps IATI set off on the wrong path and cannot now be expanded or saved. According to this way of thinking, IATI should just keep ticking over, but the focus should shift to new areas of transparency. The role of funders interested in the transparency movement might be to start a broad-based conversation about what kind of data would be useful for different types of audiences and to pilot how to get those data (and their interpretations) into the right hands at the right times, as well as maybe to focus more on in-country reforms.

'Increasingly our work is highlighting the extent to which aid transparency has become too top-down; a northern construct focused on publication of large data sets at HQ level.' — Gary Forster, PWYF (2020)[12]

'The momentum behind why transparency matters is missing. … IATI should not = aid transparency.' — Interviewee (Global)
'For transparency to be real it needs to be local.' — Interviewee (Global)

'The type of info being generated is not the type we now know actually triggers behaviour change—based on rigorous research. When there is enforcement that is when outcomes change. There is a supply side and a demand side to transparency. Donor can put data out there. … But you need to be able to embarrass donors and funders. Things they don't want to disclose. Rote reporting does not really change organisational behaviour. On the flip side, the type of transparency that changes things locally, is not the kind of data managed by IATI.' — Interviewee (Global)

'For funders of the transparency movement, business as usual is not a smart investment.' — Interviewee (Global)

Beyond the technical: data as dialogue

Despite its best intentions, IATI seems to have been built from the top down and its outputs reflect that. A new series of interventions must

12 www.publishwhatyoufund.org/2020/06/why-data-engagement-is-key-to-inclusive-transparent-development/#

be built from the bottom up. It is important to capture how donors see the underlying problem of aid transparency versus how beneficiaries see it. Donors sees aid as giving to achieve an objective of interest, and in most cases tend to neglect the context in which such aid will be implemented. One misfit is implied by the GPEDC (2019) analysis of aid effectiveness. While a majority of development partners (donor countries) 'consider country-level mutual accountability assessments to be effective', in reality, 'less than half of partner [recipient] countries have quality mutual accountability mechanisms in place.' Arguably, the IATI effort has veered into a technical goal set (rather than an accountability goal set) that would better serve the original thinking behind aid transparency.

'An excessively technical approach to accountability relationships and their workings tends to obscure the "accountability politics" (Fox, 2007b) that need to happen for TAIs to have a lasting and transformative impact.' — Gaventa and McGee (2013)

According to some, the point of publishing data is not the data themselves but the dialogue they prompt: i.e. it is the interaction that matters. This is not being achieved using the tools IATI has built, although partner countries are carrying this out manually with limited data and limited donor partners. Donor offices in-country have to be willing to review and approve funding levels in a system that is designed to do that, as well as to prioritise and incentivise regular meetings with government and civil society on decision making around priorities, including a willingness to let governments take the driver's seat. Governments should also be encouraged to ensure that all aid flows are 'on-budget' and part of the regular budgetary review process. Where necessary, capacity building will be essential.

Global donor data need to be improved in quality, particularly in terms of how they align with data held by their own country offices. Donors should be ensuring their own offices use the data and partner country governments should incentivise, or insist upon, better collaboration from their donors.

'IATI largely exists in the form it needs to exist in. The question now is how do we get the standard used. … Now that we have IATI, what is the next thing? We need to bring in the political side.' — Interviewee (Global)

'Those who talk about data quality and technical solutions are off their rockets—that's not what's stopping the utility of aid transparency.' — Interviewee (Global)

'We need to be creating institutions to make it possible for people outside of funding agencies to make requests for useful info, such as appeals bodies with teeth. Usually there is a conflict of interest, so the funders cannot decide if they share or not.' — Interviewee (Global)

'Transparency is not just data. What about processes and decision making?' — Interviewee (Global)

Revisiting the data journey

'Data is not about the data per se, but about the conversations it provokes.' — Interviewee (Global)

The process of collecting and managing data is as important as the end product (which, as any data expert knows, is seldom perfect). At the moment, aid data are published internationally and recipient countries are then trained to access them.

This approach has some positive aspects, including potential technological avenues to automatically integrate in-country AIMS. One senior player in the world of aid transparency, however, referred to the oft-cited example of the Madagascan government using IATI to discover millions of dollars in aid of which it had previously been unaware. This example is usually given as evidence of how the IATI model of aid transparency can work, but in this expert's mind, 'Just stop and think about that Madagascar case study for a second. Is this really how aid and development works these days, that a government has to log onto a portal to "discover" the funding coming into the country?'

The principle that donors publish first internationally but are not required to publish in recipient countries is flawed. It forces the dialogue and learning to take place between the donor and IATI and, separately, between the recipient and IATI, rather than between the donor and the recipient. At a time when mutual accountability requires more prioritisation, this is problematic.

What might a different data journey look like, one that prioritises recipient country ownership of the process and end result? A different interviewee proposed an alternative. Could donors in-country report their spending to the country government as a first step, filling out the AIMS, with those data (perhaps agreed between donor and recipient, and verified by an independent body) being uploaded onto an international database as a second step, not as a first step? So rather than donor–IATI–recipient, the journey for the data would be donor–recipient–IATI.

This would imply a different set of priorities—Priority 1: the recipient government and society should know about foreign money in the most effective and locally sensible way possible; and Priority 2: put this information into an international database. According to one sceptical interviewee, this pathway might be more useful but it would also be fraught with issues of verification and completeness, both within a country's data environment and across the countries for which this issue is pertinent. This is already happening to some extent, but it is ad hoc and manual, and the incentives for the donors to do it are weak—they just respond to government requests.

An alternative feedback loop to improve inconsistencies is proposed by PWYF:
'There is an opportunity to create a feedback loop to overcome these problems by involving donor headquarters, country office staff, and the partner government. When the partner government requests aid data for their database, donor headquarters staff share relevant IATI data with their country office for them to review and compare with their own records. Through dialogue between the donor headquarters and the country office, any systemic reasons for inconsistencies could then be identified leading to continuous and scalable improvement in data quality. Once agreed, the donor would update the data on the IATI Registry and share it with the partner government. Through continual systematic improvement and the building of trust in the data, this process can become automated and donors can use IATI data to directly populate the AIMS database.' — PWYF (2020)

Governments should not have to run around collecting aid data. They should insist donor flows are treated as part of the budget process along with other revenue sources. Most aid data at the country level are captured by the country's own AIMS. The AIMS can theoretically bring IATI data directly to countries on a rolling basis and, in some cases, link these data to country budget and financial management systems. This automated link is not currently operational, except for manual searches undertaken by a handful of governments. There are few automatic downloads going to government AIMS, making the transfer laborious and inconsistent.

'Nearly all partner countries have an information management system in place for development co-operation, and most (83%) development partners report to these systems. However, there is room for improvement regarding consistency and quality of reporting at country level.' — GPEDC (2019)

'To make aid information actionable for local decision makers you have got to go really low-tech. People are not sitting at computers with a dashboard, not at community level. They need paper and maps. These people are not analysts as such—so you need people playing a bridging function between data and decision making. Nine times out of 10 people making decisions are not reading the data and may not be data savvy, so they need to be paired with someone who can analyse the data.

Where are the weak links in the chain between data and decisions?' — Interviewee (Global)

'I think IATI is the right forum. The alternative, which is this working group format with manual data, sort of works, it has the illusion of working. But donor responsiveness varies, it's low on the donor priority list. As a donor, it's the last thing you do—there's no

incentive for you to do it. As a result the manual process doesn't really work.' — Interviewee (Global)

III. Transparency beyond aid

Another option is to expand beyond a focus on aid transparency towards a larger transparency, accountability, and openness agenda. This reflects the changing global context in which aid is becoming gradually less important, but transparency certainly is not. In this approach, aid transparency is situated in a broader push for open government and accountable decision making—valuable not so much for its own sake, but as part of government and public accountability.

Aid transparency data are not yet integrated systematically with other fiscal data for planning and accountability work. The key principle is that all financial flows should be 'on-budget' in-country, and that the budget should be working properly and openly. While it is positive that aid donors are becoming more transparent, it is worrying that many recipient governments are not. This broader, more accountability-focused transparency effort (which, perhaps, would reward partner countries for their own transparency) might foster the kind of open-government goals the original Theory of Change envisioned for transparency. Accountability is happening—but not around aid data. CSOs do not want training in IATI, or even in aid transparency and scrutiny, but in broader accountability and transparency issues. This reflects their concerns that the push for accountability, which once seemed like an open door to be nudged further, is now gradually moving in the opposite direction.

'Members of the media in all three countries agreed that there is great demand for information on the status of projects and where money is being spent for projects implemented in their own district, town or province. However, only very few journalists and CSOs actively search for this information. Another possible reason for the low demand for aid information is that information currently available to citizens is often hard to understand and not available in the proper context or format. … In addition to knowing how much money went to an organization in a particular sector, they wanted to receive more details about project goals and activities, where these activities would be located in-country (at the district or lower level, if possible), results and status of the project, contact information, and other key information essential to transparency. As one media representative put it, citizens want to know,

"Where is the borehole you promised my town?"' — USAID, 2015[13]

It is little wonder that aid transparency is not high on the agenda of government or civil society when there is so much more non-aid money available. Large amounts of money, including to finance ongoing deficits, are equally important to track—capital market transparency is as important as aid transparency. According to ATI (2020), in 2017, private sector development financing stood at US $87 billion globally in annual investments. DFIs have seen their resources and transactions expand over the last 15 years at a rate faster than the increase in Official Development Assistance (ODA). Europe's bilateral DFIs, for example, more than tripled their balance sheets between 2010 and 2015.[14] The newly formed United States Development Finance Corporation will spend twice as much as its predecessor, the Overseas Private Investment Corporation.[15]
Independent evaluations have highlighted a lack of transparency in DFI-financed projects and inconsistencies in how data are reported,

13 www.usaid.gov/sites/default/files/documents/1870/AidTransparencyCountryPilotAssessment.pdf.
14 European DFIs (2020) 'Comparative Analysis 2019', 08 May, internal document, available at: www.edfi.eu/members/meet-our-members/.
15 www.devex.com/news/video-dfis-are-on-the-rise-and-here-s-why-we-can-t-ignore-them-94670
16 See, for example, Independent Commission for Aid Impact (2019), 26 March, available at: https://icai.independent.gov.uk/report/cdc.

which hinders scrutiny and public accountability.[16] Two Tanzanian organisations we spoke to are more concerned with increasing transparency around national planning and budgeting process and the effectiveness of the government's own spending by using the government's own data from MOF. Comparatively, they are more concerned about aid effectiveness than transparency per se.

'IATI seems happiest working in a cupboard. Not working closely enough with other organisations focusing more broadly on openness and transparency. We are currently less than the sum of our parts.' — Interviewee (Global)

'We don't need a repository of much more detailed info. Not possible. We need to be able to capture the depth of organisational commitment to transparency.' — Interviewee (Global)

'Is aid more transparent? Yes. But what is the value of that, if as soon as it enters a country's budget/procurement process it stops being transparent.' — Interviewee (Global)

'Demand for transparency is there—but is there political will from both sides. Not just re-tracking resource flows, but in terms of being accountable for how we do development.' — Interviewee (Global)

'The priority should be strengthening domestic accountability, country platforms, building political awareness (including with donors) so that the national system can produce timely data.' — Interviewee (Global)

Annex 1: Case studies

I. Tanzania

Country context

Aid composition as a percentage of the economy has shrunk from about 33% in the past 20 years to near 7%, mainly due to economic growth. Tanzania has crossed to middle-income country status five years ahead of the projected year (2025). During the time, aid modalities have also changed significantly; previously, General Budget Support was preferred, then basket funds, and more recently there has been a focus on direct project funds. The Magufuli government's preference is to become less dependent on aid, although there are still large fiscal challenges which necessitate external aid, including concessional loans for the government budget and financing for development and investment. The largest aid contributors to Tanzania are the World Bank, the United States, the African Development Bank, the United Kingdom, and the European Union. New players such as China and South Korea are also present. Chinese aid is mainly difficult to trace due to secrecy around it. Tanzania also hosts over a quarter a million refugees from the great lakes region who are solely supported by aid through the United Nations system, normally in protracted relief baskets.

Tanzania introduced an Aid Management Platform (AMP) System in 2007 to strengthen ability of government to capture information on ODA, including planning, tracking, and reporting of the development assistance flows (General/Sector Budget Support, basket funds, and project funds). AMP's objective is to improve the transparency and reliability of aid flow data, providing data on aid to local government, regions, non-state actors, and development partners. In addition, the platform aims to foster linkages between the Medium-Term Expenditure Framework, the Integrated Financial Management System, and Strategic Budget Allocations. AMP is active and a useful resource but it has not been updated for a while.

Over past decades, Tanzania has been very open and was a major interlocutor on the Open Transparency Initiative. However, there has been an increasing shift towards secrecy in the past five years. Data use spaces have shrunk and, with the forthcoming elections, many people are not comfortable discussing data. The Cybercrimes Act 2015 deters or discourages privacy and data protection abuses and violations, which can be widely translated based on circumstances: e.g. it is an offence to access or to cause a computer system to be accessed without permission. The Electronic and Postal Communications Act 2010 with its various regulations also firmly regulate (for example) the licensing of telecommunication companies, internet service providers, and other entities that interact and deal with such companies. The Act defines electronic communication as radio communication or, the communication of information in the form of speech or other sound, data, text or images, by means of guided and unguided electromagnetic energy. Researchers, journalists, and activists can be charged based on publications, SMS messages, WhatsApp, etc. To cut the story short, some interviewees decided to say 'I don't know' whenever they were not happy to respond to our questions. Recent work by donors and CSOs aims to counter the closing of civic and political spaces, to bolster freedom of expression, to improve the advocacy and communication capabilities of local organisations, to promote transparent and accountable systems free from corruption, and to strengthen human rights among vulnerable populations.

Who uses aid data and why?

Government access to aid data is limited in that there is no single most trusted source of aid data by the government i.e. a one stop shop. Both IATI and OECD data are used in Tanzania. Those who use OECD data would like a helpdesk and inquiry point to assist with more analysts. Government officials at MOF said they want data in categories that they use most, e.g. in comparison with other regions they belong to (such as East Asian Community states and the South African Development Community) for ease of comparison with other countries.

Government officials also noted that IATI and OECD data are normally obsolete. There is a time lag in updating data. Sometimes the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank load data before the final projections agreed with the Ministry of Finance (MOF) or other similarly important recipient government bodies. The government also uses data from bilateral sources, e.g. High Commissions and writing directly to fellow MOFs, which in turn send Excel spreadsheets.

No definite direction can be deduced on the possible futures of aid transparency, according to the interviewees, as people seem more concerned with aid effectiveness than with transparency, although almost all respondents agreed that aid transparency in the country is important.

How much impact has the aid transparency movement had? This is not clear. Non-state actors and government officials agree that information on aid and openness has increased in the past 10 years. In Tanzania there has been more information in the past five years from AMP and in the Open Government Partnership (OGP) discourses than there is now. Tanzania has since left OGP.

'They don't write to us and we don't write to them. When we want data we go directly to the country.' — Interviewee (Tanzania)

'The AMP in Tanzania does not use IATI or OECD data. I don't know what is there.' — Interviewee (Tanzania, the only interviewee that knew about the AMP)

The main user of data is MOF for planning and comparison purposes. The Tanzania Investment Centre also uses data, especially from IATI, to compare foreign direct investment flows and exports. Sector-specific data, e.g. on agriculture, nutrition, health, etc., are used by respective ministries to compose budgets and monitor their progress, especially in comparison to other countries in the region. Accountability partners—e.g. Policy Forum, a local NGO dealing in budget and policy accountability, and Wajibu, another NGO dealing on budgets and audits—also use data. INGOs and foundations use data for planning and engaging government. Think tanks use data for publishing, policy analysis, and giving development advice to the government.
Apart from perennial problems of connectivity and state-of-the-art facilities, the main problem reported on accessing data that they are not accessible in real time. All respondents said data in the systems are obsolete. IATI and OECD datasets are time-lagged. No CSO reported using OECD or IATI data for holding government to account; rather, they use the government's own data, which are mostly owned by the government. Policy Forum and Wajibu use national budgets and NBS data mainly to enter into dialogue with the government.

II. Ghana

Country context

In 2008, Ghana hosted the third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, where both donor and aid recipient countries discussed ways to enhance aid transparency and thereby effectiveness. Since then, the country has demonstrated its commitment to aid transparency. MOF has played an active role in IATI by conducting outreach and hosting regional workshops for their regional counterparts. In addition, Ghana has participated in the IATI Steering Committee and the IATI Technical Advisory Group in the past.

Aid remains an important revenue source for Ghana's economy, particularly to the health, education, social protection, governance, and agriculture sectors. Despite its significance, the share of aid to GNI has reduced from 16% in 2004 to 1.6% in 2018, which has prompted an overall government strategy on aid. In 2017, the government of Ghana launched its flagship strategy, 'Ghana Beyond Aid'. This sets out plans and strategies to build a gradual capacity to be self-reliant economy with minimal dependence on aid.

The dynamics of aid have also changed overtime. Donor and civil society demand for transparency in aid began in the early 2000s, after Ghana was classified under the International Monetary Fund's debt sustainability programme as a Heavily Indebted Poor Country (HIPC). Although the intended purpose for HIPC was to provide debt relief and achieve poverty reduction, its unintended achievements included the creation of platforms for CSOs to demand more transparency and accountability from both donors and governments. In addition, the composition of donors has evolved due, in particular, to recent involvement by China and Arab countries.

The 2008 Aid Transparency Conference and subsequent workshops catalysed donor interest and coordination in Ghana. At the donor level, it seems to work for them in terms of aligning aid in various sectors despite recent efforts by initiatives such as IATI and AIMS to improve systems for sharing information among stakeholders. The relationships between donors and government have improved in terms of donor level coordination, but data exchanges between government and donors are based on their bilateral relationship. The government believes that information collected directly from donors is more reliable and accurate than sourcing information on other platforms such as IATI. Even with support from donors, MOF has developed a domestic platform for automatic data sharing, which has not been effectively adopted by donors and other ministries.

The public and CSO access to aid information has improved over time, but there remains a significant imbalance in data access. Donors have demonstrated willingness to be transparent on aid to Ghana, but the government has not demonstrated the same level of interest. Sometimes, CSOs struggle to access certain information on aid from the government; hence they tend to rely on their existing relationships and networks with donors in-country.

Who uses aid data and why?

Stakeholders interviewed expressed strong interest in aid data for the purpose of planning, public accountability, as a tool for fighting corruption, as well as business opportunities. Key users of aid data in Ghana include civil society for accountability and public policy participation purposes; the government for budget planning and execution; and the private sector for business purposes. These data needs of the cross-section of stakeholders present an opportunity for platforms such as IATI and CRS to produce accurate and reliable data. However, stakeholders stated that the level of awareness among CSOs on IATI and other aid transparency platforms is almost non-existent. Even the few who are aware have expressed concerns about the need for further disaggregation of data to allow for effective use at the local beneficiary level. Some interviewees confirmed their use of IATI and OECD data. However, they tend to use it to validate already acquired information either from the government or directly from donors.

MOF has developed a domestic aid transparency portal (the Ghana Donor Community Management Information System) with the aim of enhancing information sharing between government and donors. This notwithstanding, the patronage of this platform is very low. Information upload is collected from sources and manually entered on the platform by MOF, defeating the ultimate purpose of the platform. The platform is not open to the public, civil society, or academia, limiting stakeholder access and use. Although interviewees could not provide examples of impacts using IATI or OECD data, there was evidence of how aid data transparency has led to impacts on policy implementation.

'One of the difficulties we had with aid transparency was the inability to track how much data comes to the country and sectors. In terms of my experience in SEND Ghana, the only tangible programme impacted by transparency was in relation to the support that the Dutch government gave to Ghana under the School Feeding Programme. At the beginning a chunk of the support came from the Dutch government but there were so many institutions also supporting. SNV was responsible for the monitoring of the programme. Once the Dutch pulled out, accountability for the programme has become an issue. We knew how much was disbursed to the programme at every point in time.' Interviewee (Ghana)

'There is a need to look at the amount of money announced to the beneficiary to know the actual percentage of that money that ends up here.' — Interviewee (Ghana)

Annex 2: List of interviewees

Name	Position	Organisation
Vitalice Meja	Director	Reality of Aid Africa
Gary Forster	Director	PWYF
Karin Christiansen	Founder	PWYF (ex)
Hetty Kovach	Board	PWYF
Jamie Drummond	Ex director	ONE
Amy Dodd	Former lead	UK Aid Network
Tom Orrell	Director	DataReady
David Kocharov	VP	Synergy
Sally Paxton	US lead	PWYF USA
Mark Brough	Consultant	
Matt Geddes	Consultant	
Owen Barder	Consultant	
Annelise Parr	IATI lead	UNDP
Harpinder Collacott Mariam Ibrahim Carolyn Culey Clarence Edwards	Director; team members	Development Initiatives
Richard Manning	Former head	DAC
Brad Parks	ExDir	AidData
Taryn Davis	Technical team lead	Development Gateway
Sarah McDuff	Technical team	IATI
Rory Scott Michelle Edwards	Dev Tracker	DFID
Jon Lømoy	Director	NORAD
Frank Wissing	Transparency Lead	World Bank
Joan Atherton Andie Vaughn Sarah Scholz	Transparency Lead; team members	USAID
Katherine Tan Annabelle Burgett April McCoy	Policy, advocacy and data team members	Gates Foundation
Mark Smith	Director	DFID
Paul O'Brien	Director	Oxfam America
Noel Gonzalez Segura	Director	AMEXCID

Name	Position	Organisation
GHANA		
Mahamud Mohammed	Hewlett Fund at Oxfam	Oxfam Ghana
Benjamin Boakye	Executive Director	Africa Centre for Energy Policy
Steve Manteaw	Campaign Coordinator	Integrated Social Development Centre (ISODEC)
Agnes Titriku	Programs Manager	Africa Centre for Parliamentary Affairs (ACEPA)
Omar Seidu	Head, Demographic Statistics, SDG Coordinator	Ghana Statistical Service
George Osei Bimpeh	Executive Director	SEND Ghana
Shafiq Mamudu	Senior Officer	Ministry of Finance
TANZANIA		
Mary Maganga	Deputy Permanent Secretary	Treasury (MoF)
Mr. Moses W. Dulle	Director of Planning	Planning Commission (MoF)
Mr. Balandya M. Elikana	Commissioner of Budget	Budget Commission (MoF)
Mr Deusdedit Kaganda	Acting Director Department of Multilateral Cooperation	Ministry of Foreign Affairs
Mr. Mafutah D. Bunini	Director-Research, Planning & Information Systems	Tanzania Investment Centre (TIC)
Semkae Kilonzo	Executive Director	Policy Forum
Ochola Wayoga	Executive Director	Tanzania Education Network (TEN/MET)
Lilian Liundi	Executive Director	Tanzania Gender Networking Programme
Hanna Henga	Executive Director	Legal and Human Rights Center
Mr. Ludovick Utouh	TEITI Chairman	Tanzania Extractives Industries Transparency Initiative
Dr. Charles Kimei	Banking and Financial Services	Tanzania Private Sector Foundation (TSPF)
Godfrey Wanga	Executive Director	Tanzania National Business Council (TNBC)
Donald Mmary	Executive Director	Research on Poverty Alleviation (REPOA)
Hon. Christophe Bazivamo	Deputy Secretary Genenal Productive & Social Sectors	East African Community Secretariat

Annex 3: Methodology

The evaluation team used qualitative and quantitative data collection and analytical methods to answer the evaluation questions. The approach included key informant interviews, and literature review. A set of complementary methods informed our questions and supported the findings.

Core research methods

Key informant interviews. The team interviewed global and country (Ghana and Tanzania) respondents. Global respondents included data providers (governments and multilaterals); Hewlett-supported aid transparency implementers (such as IATI); and external scrutinising organisations (international NGOs and civil society). For country case studies, the team interviewed relevant government data users and civil society organisations. Snowball sampling was used to identify further relevant interviewees. Not all proposed interviewees were available or willing to participate – four direct rejections were received. The team prioritised interviewees that would ensure a broad representation of views and stakeholders, and those likely to fill critical evidence gaps.

When engaging stakeholders, the team respected the constraints of the coronavirus crisis. This meant using telephone and videoconference calls to conduct interviews. Bandwidth sometimes prohibited the use of video. The team assured respondents of the confidentiality of the information being shared.

Literature and document review. Review of academic and grey literature was structured around the evaluation questions. This included both global and country-level literature. Internal documents were also reviewed to complement key informant interviews. The list of documents reviewed is set out in the bibliography.

Additional research methods

Funding tracker. *The study proposed to analyse how the top 10 funders of aid transparency have changed over time, to help understand the key players in the sector*. The team found estimates of broad funding in the transparency sector in interviews and literature, but data on donor funds specifically dedicated to aid transparency were not available. This is primarily because donors treat aid transparency costs as 'part of doing business'. Given that many donors already have systems for reporting expenditures within their national systems, the additional costs of sharing this data in the IATI Standard format are generally small, and any significant cost was expended several years ago.

Trends analysis. *The study also intended to quantitatively analyse trends in publicly disclosed aid data (such as number of IATI publishers, disclosure volumes, changes in aid transparency index performance).* However, the data in this case is rather simple and available online through IATI and Publish What You Fund, for the most part. The indicators, as cited in the parenthetic reference above, are not helpful for analysing use cases for the data – which became a much more vital line of inquiry as the evaluation progressed.

Quantitative analysis of a) traffic and b) use data. *The study sought data in each case study country and globally: hits, visitors, and downloads of aid data.* These data, where kept, are limited and not available to the general public. GDPR and other privacy implications seem to have impacted how much data the funders themselves have kept, as reported by our respondents. Users are few and far between, owing to the difficulties in interfaces for access as described in the body of this report. As a result, these data were not analysed for this evaluation; however, the low level of use is an important part of our conclusions.

Comparative review of IATI and other data systems. Data from among the main 'aid transparency' databases include those data collected and stored, and in some cases made publicly available, by IATI, OECD-DAC, and the World Bank. The degree to which these datasets are comparable is limited. A description of each
dataset is included as part of our analysis in the main body of the report, but the uses are so different among these that comparison is minimal. Interface comparisons, in particular, are invalidated by the lack of interface availability with IATI.

Automated media tracking. Media tracking was used to automatically track references to aid transparency and aid data in news sources in case study countries as well as internationally. We applied this method to track the evolution in news reporting on aid transparency in recent years. The analysis was done using Media Cloud, a machine learning-powered open source platform for studying media ecosystems.[1]

Evidence uptake analysis. Evidence uptake analysis was to be used help answer evaluation questions about data use at the recipient country level. This technique looks at whether and why data is being used. Given the findings of low use of globally collected aid data through Hewlett-funded and other initiatives, this analysis was not undertaken. However, our analysis examined target groups' access to aid transparency data (through Hewlett-funded and other initiatives), contextual and structural challenges, capacity for analysis, and willingness and political space to use aid data, and for which purposes.

Outcome harvesting. Outcome harvesting was to be used in a light touch fashion to trace and understand outcomes of IATI data in both case study countries. As the research found so few cases of use of IATI and other data facilitated by Hewlett-funded aid transparency work, there were no outcomes to track. We realised the level of use was so low only after engaging in a range of interviews across the sector.

Country case studies. The study included two country case studies, Ghana and Tanzania, with a focus on the use of aid transparency data.

1 Media Cloud allows us to search collections of online news sources for different countries as well as globally. For most collections we were able to go back to at least 2008, though some (such as the Europe media Monitor collection) go back only to 2012.

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