

# Annual Members' Assembly

1-2 December 2020, (Virtual)

*Minutes of the meetings (FINAL)*

## Reference documents

- [IATI Members' Assembly Agenda](#)
- [Overview of papers and presentations](#)
- [List of participants](#) (with contacts of those who have given consent to share)

## Opening

1. IATI members and Observers met virtually over two days, 1-2 December 2020. This virtual format replaced the customary annual face to face gathering of members in light of travel restrictions related to the global Covid-19 pandemic. In his opening remarks IATI Governing Board Chair Theo van de Sande noted that sessions were necessarily limited in duration given the nature of the online interaction and participation across broad timezones. He explained that this year's MA would focus on the primary requirements of accountability to members, and the more community-focused aspects from earlier years would be taken forward in different ways including through the new community platform IATI Connect.
2. The Chair referred to Governing Board elections that had taken place in April, noting with thanks the members who had stepped down at that time from Bond (Sarah Johns), Madagascar (Zefania Romalahy), Bangladesh (Rezaul Bashar Siddique), and the former position of TAG Chair (Steven Flower). He introduced the new Board members from Nepal (Shreekrishna Nepal, supported by Narayan Dhakal), Nigeria (Sanjo Faniran supported by Henry Asor), the Association of Freelance Journalists (Winnie Kamau) and Sida in the Board's technical role (Melinda Cuzner, Sida), joining the Netherlands (Theo van de Sande, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, remaining as Chair), UNICEF (Joseph Barnes) and Oxfam Novib (Leo Stolk) for a second term.
3. He welcomed new IATI members International Labour Organization ILO (officially joining on 1 January 2021), the Swiss Agency for Development and Cooperation SDC, and The Directorate for Development Cooperation and Humanitarian Affairs of the Grand Duchy of Luxembourg, as well as Ajah and Solidar Suisse from the CSO constituency.
4. The Chair referred to minutes from the 2019 MA and confirmed that a number of suggestions had been taken forward from that meeting to enable new members and focal points to have all the information they need to participate. Changes have been made to the IATI website to gather and signpost all of this information, and a dedicated webinar covering technical and governance aspects was offered to new members once the 2020 agenda was available.

## Consolidating the Standard and the Technical Core

5. Technical progress from 2020 and plans for 2021 were shared in a presentation by the Secretariat Technical Lead moderated by Board focal points. Key in 2020 was the conduct of an in-depth stocktake of the IATI Technical Estate in June, and the launch of the new IATI Datastore and Validator in September. Members raised performance issues with the Datastore and heard that these were under review with the supplier with a view to finding an immediate as well as a sustainable long term solution that would meet expectations for performance.
6. Giving a general overview of progress the Technical Lead noted that the Validator is now hosted in-house and is now working efficiently as a tool for supporting publishers in improving data quality. d-portal has seen some enhancements in 2020 and use has increased by 54%. The IATI Help desk has seen a sharp increase in requests not only from publishers but also data users, indicating more use of data. The Secretariat Technical Team is now fully staffed with developers and the Business and Data Analyst Team has expanded from three to four to support additional demand and significantly more work on data quality.
7. The technical vision and 15-month roadmap developed following the stocktake were shared, and the steps planned for 2021 outlined, with the Technical Lead explaining how work such as creating a new API gateway and clearly defining non-functional requirements would strengthen infrastructure and in turn tools and services going forward. In 2021, options for publisher tools would be examined, and User Experience (UX) work will begin on improving how to provide easy access and visualisation of data for non-technical users (the new 'semantic data layer'). Information on the API Gateway and the technical roadmap will be published through a web post during the coming weeks, along with implementation plans for the next to 12-18 months.
8. Regarding the process of guidance development, there was a suggestion (Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs) that the process for developing guidance should be more inclusive and formal and become part of the Standard upgrade process. In terms of a future major upgrade, the Board is currently looking at this work for 2023, and the need for this would be based on clear user evidence and user stories as to why an update is necessary given that it would have backward compatibility impacts. From FCDO (formerly DfID) there was a request for clear guidance on any changes to the process of contributing to Standard management using IATI Connect (clarification provided in a later session)

### *Action points*

- *The Secretariat will publish a roadmap and implementation plans for 2021/22 technical work.*

## Improving Data Quality

9. The Nepalese Board member introduced a presentation on a data quality implementation plan 2020-21 outlining a number of activities including use of the IATI

Data Validator to engage with publishers to fix their data, setting up feedback mechanisms identified through a Data Use Fund project in 2020, and defining a new methodology for measuring data quality together with a new Data Quality Index. Bringing the partner country perspective, he called upon all publishers to increase focus on the quality of their data. He further called upon all members to use the data, and not to be shy in highlighting data quality challenges, providing vital feedback to inform future data quality work and ensuring IATI reaches its full potential.

10. The Secretariat updated members on the guidance developed in 2020, starting with Covid-19 guidance, followed by results and Conditions guidance, and finally humanitarian guidance, and the consultations, training materials and webinars offered to publishers in applying the guidance.
11. OpenWorks commented on the need for a more inclusive process of data quality work going beyond including the 'known' voices in the resulting guidance. The representative added that the current Validator doesn't yet include the richness of use cases that might support improving data quality (such as a check on the validity of identifiers). On the question of guidance, the Secretariat was asked to publish a consultation schedule giving good notice for participation. A further question was received seeking clarity on the process through which COP discussions would formally contribute to IATI guidance, and this was addressed in a later Community session. UNEP appreciated the strong engagement from the Secretariat in improving its own data quality, and emphasised the value of creating spaces for peer learning. More interaction and feedback from data users would provoke more investment in data quality, and IATI Connect is seen as a good forum for these efforts.

#### *Action points*

- *The Secretariat will publish a schedule for guidance consultations taking place on IATI Connect in 2021.*

## Strengthening Data Use

12. The Board representative from Nigeria opened a presentation on data use, bringing the perspective of the Nigerian government in accessing and using IATI data for its Development Cooperation Report, and other work with governments to meet their specific needs. More data use support requests were received this year than previously, for example seeking support in analysing data committed or spent on Covid-19 activities or gender commitments. Highlights of work in 2020 included a series of Partner Country virtual meetings (replacing planned regional face to face meetings) and the development of a new Excel-based solution to simplify access to specific subsets of data needed by partner country governments, as well as extensive desk research to understand barriers to data use at country level.
13. Data Use Working Group Chair (USAID) gave a reminder of the purpose of the group and the associated Data Use Fund, with the Data Use Strategy setting out five main aims: raising awareness of IATI data, improving data quality, tools, guidance, training and support, and promoting integration of IATI data into partner country aid systems and

processes. The Chair referred to projects undertaken in 2020 (Traceability research; Feedback mechanism research; and Inventory of data use guidance materials and gap analysis; and others postponed to 2021 (user guidance video series for the IATI Query Builder; Datastore guidance and use cases). A CSO training course on IATI data use has also been planned but is not yet contracted. The Chair outlined plans for 2021, indicating the desire for closer alignment with the broader Secretariat workplan, with the DUWG strengthening its advisory role. No Fund replenishment is requested this year (as approximately \$100,000 USD remains unprogrammed).

14. The Netherlands Enterprise Agency encouraged more work in 2021 to learn who IATI's data users are, to better understand what kinds of visualisations are needed and to confirm that the investment made in IATI by publishers is well spent, a sentiment echoing that of UNEP from the previous session. The Secretariat responded with an acknowledgement of this need which is included in the Strategic Plan, as well as a plea for members to share their stories of data use so as to move beyond anecdotal, to evidenced data use.

## Covid-19 Publishing Guidance and Support

15. Members were reminded of the actions taken to support publishers to publish IATI data on Covid-19-related activities, and analysis undertaken on the published data. Some of the challenges for publishers were shared (internal system changes, differentiating development and humanitarian activities, and how to reflect repurposed funding) and this feedback was used to refine the guidance further. Close to 6000 activities were published by 128 organisations, with incremental improvements in the transaction descriptions since June.
16. USAID applauded the speed of action undertaken by the Secretariat to prepare and release publishing guidance and enquired whether the lessons learned on the process could be captured for use in a future situation needing such rapid publishing guidance. IATI Connect would be a good forum for such resources, allowing publishers to also share their experience.

### *Action points*

- *Secretariat to establish a space for resources on lessons learned in IATI Connect*

## Communications and Outreach as cross-cutting action areas of the Strategic Plan

17. The President of the Association of Freelance Journalists (AFJ) member of the Governing Board presented some of the extensive work undertaken in 2020 such as developing a new social media strategy, and reminded members of the key messages that would guide our work in 2021 (available on the website). She set out the aims for outreach in 2021 including reinvigorating IATI's community and building partner country engagement to feed into data quality work. She also flagged some of the opportunities

and priorities to be taken up, ensuring that IATI was represented in fora such as the next Financing for Development Forum in 2021.

18. Members appreciated the work delivered by the Communications team noting that it was a small team to deliver an increasingly heavy lift, and recommended that it be strengthened in 2021. There were calls for the new Speakers Kit to be made available publicly through the website, alongside the continuing offer to personalise it for those requesting. UNEP was an early user of the customised Speakers Kit and spoke to its value in building awareness and demystifying different aspects of IATI for different users. The UNEP participant encouraged the team to exploit its particular niche in this period when so much activity has shifted to virtual.
19. Concern was raised by the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs about the importance of eliminating the barriers to entry to the IATI Community, referring specifically to the COP charter discussions on IATI Connect which were found to be burdensome. There was a keen interest in expanding the membership to many smaller CSOs who currently only see IATI as a task, not an opportunity, and the charters raise the barrier to entry.

### *Action points*

- *The Secretariat was requested to publish the Speakers Kit on the website, taking care to keep it updated and maintaining the offer to create personalised materials upon request.*
- *Secretariat to share the new animated membership package as a step towards increasing engagement and awareness.*
- *Board to examine expansion of the capacity of the communications team in the context of 2021 work planning, in view of the increasing demands.*

## Invigorating the IATI Community

20. The Oxfam Novib representative of the Board introduced the session, referring to changes since the IATI TAG was replaced by Working Groups and Communities of Practice. He clarified the difference between Working Groups (time-bound, mandated by the Board or MA, and providing advisory support on specific issues) and Communities of Practice (ongoing, demand-driven by the community, and focused on knowledge-sharing, generating feedback and peer learning). Following the launch of IATI's new digital platform, IATI Connect, the previous day, the Secretariat gave a brief guided tour of the new platform and initial COPs approved by the Governing Board (Data Users, Data Publishing and Technical), highlighting some key features such as the multilingual capability, collaborative drafting within the platform, and the shift of IATI Discuss content into IATI Connect. The Secretariat COP manager is responsible for ensuring cross-posting and avoiding siloed discussion. Charters are intended as very flexible documents which set out the themes and focus of each COP and are developed by the community itself.
21. Information was given on the pilot annual community event postponed from 2020 during travel restriction, and now slated for Q4 2021, potentially in person - pandemic permitting. This would incorporate MA and former TAG elements. Parallel planning will be undertaken in view of the continuing uncertainty of travel / large meetings. A Working

Group has been formed to shape the substantive agenda for the event. A series of virtual community exchanges leading up to the pilot Community Event in 2021 will also be held in Q1 and Q3.

22. Responding from questions of members, it was emphasised that links between the different communities and discussions would be encouraged, and the Secretariat would help to make those connections to ensure diversity and richness of exchange. Regarding the Working Group on Data Use, this will be the only WG that is not time bound and is hybrid in nature. The language feature in IATI Connect was appreciated, and would be valuable also in the new data portal (something to consider in the UX research).
23. In closing, the Board Chair encouraged members to take the initiative to start discussions in COPs and not wait for the Board to take the lead, nor wait for the discussion to take place elsewhere. He further invited members to interact with the Board regularly without waiting for the annual MA.

#### *Action points*

- *The Secretariat should do what is necessary to foster flexibility and not overly formalise the COPs, to maximise interaction between communities. Roles can be adjusted after learning for 6-9 months.*

## Monitoring the Strategic Plan 2020-25; IATI Results Framework

24. The UNICEF Board member reminded members of the progress concluding the draft Results Framework (RF) which was endorsed by members in 2019. He acknowledged a point of process which required sharing of the document much earlier in the year for agreement on a no-objection basis, noting that this was not done as agreed. To remedy this he invited members to flag any red lines to the Secretariat after the MA but stated the Board was moving ahead on the assumption that it would be approved. He pointed to baselines from 2020 and clarified some terms in the RF, such as the proposed Data Quality Index as it related to the Aid Transparency Index (ATI) of Publish What You Fund, and highlighted the ownership of the RF and Strategic Plan generally as a tool for all members, which should be considered flexible and adaptive. Minor editing errors were noted via Zoom chat and these will be addressed.
25. Clarifying a question from Global Affairs Canada on timeliness as an outcome or an output level indicator, UNICEF responded that the intention was to capture and support efforts by all publishers, whereas at outcome level it's the collective effort or achievement that's being captured. Regarding qualitative elements to be measured (UNEP), the survey will be helpful, supported by planned engagements in 2021. Existing resources such as the IATI Dashboard's publisher statistics will be used wherever possible and combined with new data sources to contribute to the new Data Quality Index, rather than create a whole new set of primary data. Finally, there was a reminder that we should not only use datastore to analyse data use, since there are members who

have visualisation websites and we need to capture data use there too. This was well accepted and noted that this is already being explored through the RF's survey mechanism. The session was closed with an acknowledgement that it would be reviewed at the mid-term stage and adjusted as needed.

### *Action points*

- *Members are requested to forward any red lines on the draft RF to the Secretariat by the end of the year after which the Board will consider the RF final.*

## Financial Overview 2020

26. The Board representative from Oxfam Novib gave an outline of the financial oversight activities undertaken regularly by the Board and referred members to Paper 3 with annexes, containing current financial details. He referred to the budget revision undertaken in 2020 reducing the budget in view of activities cancelled or postponed due to externalities related mainly to the pandemic. He drew attention to the contingency reserve and the Secretariat in-kind contribution. Referring to funds carried over, he pointed out that this would enable overdue investment in 2021 to address technical debt<sup>1</sup> and propel the technical estate forward. He pointed to the cautious financial approach followed by the Board, ensuring that current costs would never exceed annual income.
27. USAID expressed strong appreciation for the ability of the Secretariat and Board to pivot and continue to deliver at scale given the circumstances of this particular year. There were questions on parameters for making adjustments in the use of funds in 2021, interest in whether the Board had given thought to long term thinking on the balance between virtual and in-person work, and a query about the proposal (from the 2019 MA) for private sector organisation contribution levels. The Board response referred to a new creative balance using the IATI Connect platform in conjunction with one (planned) in person event, circumstances permitting, and mini virtual events in 2021.
28. The Chair, moderating the discussion, reminded members of the division of responsibility between Board and members when responding to a request for more detailed budget information, indicating that the Board would publish relevant information once it had finalised its own assessment. Members were reminded of the guidelines established in the SOP for using the contingency reserve, which can be found at paragraph 4.6, [Standard Operating Procedures Rev 7](#). A request for more traditional presentation of top level financial information was made by IOM, which would facilitate easier comparison, particularly for new members, year upon year (budget, revision and actuals side by side). Some questions around increasing membership were taken up in the later discussion on the institutional working group.

---

<sup>1</sup> The term "technical debt" is not a financial one and is used here to refer to the need for updating or replacing older technical systems or software with new or better products and innovations over time that better meet IATI's needs.

## Action points

- *The Secretariat is requested to present financial statements using a more traditional format in future years.*

## Annual Work Planning (2021)

29. The Secretariat Coordinator referred to paper 4 and presented the process followed to develop the 2021 work plan, drawing from a high level 5 year Strategic Planning framework. Activities deferred from 2020 were carefully mapped into the 2021 plan along with budget, and costs of activities are presented separately from costs of personnel. Clarification was provided to Chat questions that where no project funding was indicated (referring specifically to Data Quality), the work was ongoing and delivered by Secretariat personnel.
30. Responding to questions from the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs on the need for budget and plans for further functionality in the Validator, it was indicated that the Validator was now hosted in-house, and further development work was foreseen using existing personnel, with no requirement for additional activity budget. The Stocktake recommendation on the storing of historical data will be the subject of consultation, and the work plan entry is not intended as a final decision on this approach. FCDO (formerly DfID) echoed strong support for further and increasing investment in the Datastore as well as the Validator, with the long term intention of running its DevTracker from the Datastore. FCDO shared the extensive work they have been doing on internal tools using the new IATI Validator, emphasising the importance of continuing to invest in it, and of going beyond simple maintenance to further developing it, adding functionality year upon year. Technical colleagues added detail on upcoming work on the semantic data layer which would feed into a new d-portal with all the functionality required.
31. A contract is still ongoing with the supplier of the Datastore to resolve performance issues and increase functionality. The Netherlands Enterprise Agency reiterated its call for work on understanding who really is using the data. The Board expressed strong support for increasing work in this area, looking at data use by publishers for visualisation, policy-making, and management and monitoring of projects, and finding statistics and facts that support and encourage publishers to publish more and better quality data. This kind of analysis can be used to strengthen advocacy efforts with existing and potential new members.



## Action points

- *Board is requested to ensure sufficient investment is included in the 2021 work plan for additional functionality in Datastore and Validator on the technical side, and research on user stories on the data use side to inform future communication and advocacy efforts for the initiative.*

## Institutional Working Group

32. The UNICEF Board representative recalled different institutional recommendations from the previous 2018 institutional review and brought members up to date on actions taken to implement these recommendations. Board paper 5 set out a proposal for a new Institutional Working Group to be set up in 2021 to examine future arrangements and support the continued growth and support for IATI. He welcomed inputs from members on the scope of the Terms of Reference for the new WG, referring to some potential areas set out in the paper, with the Chair adding encouragement for members to share their ideas on furthering and fostering of IATI in the long term.
33. USAID recommended looking at increasing and diversifying membership in addition to the list of topics proposed for the WG. In view of the demanding scope and different skill requirements, USAID also recommended considering increasing the number of WG members such as by creating sub-groups under an umbrella working group).
34. In response to a comment from FCDO (formerly DfID), the Board clarified that the new Working Groups are absolutely a formal part of the governance now, so the role formerly played by the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) is now within the remit of formal Working Groups. The FCDO representative further suggested a mapping of member user needs across different constituencies to look at what all members need/expect from their membership, with ample lead time for peer to peer consultation on what future arrangements should look like. An institutional COP may be a good approach to ensure consultations and engagement to gather the views of members. Global Affairs Canada seconded this suggestion, flagging the need to undertake this work in time for a decision at the 2021 MA and to give ample lead time to structure any new hosting arrangements. One practical suggestion to ensure a more manageable scope of work would be to focus on institutional review, membership, value proposition in the proposed WG and take out the Strategic Plan mid-term review to a separate group or process.
35. UNEP encouraged consideration of membership levels and constituencies as a factor that would feed into the determination of the best approach to hosting. The proposed review of external evaluations would be a very good place to start with this work. WHO reiterated the importance of an inclusive and representative Working Group, adding that the link between the value for money for members should be clear and strong. AfDB came back to the importance of clearly setting out the value of IATI for users, also heard in earlier sessions, and that this should be addressed first to guide institutional discussions so that future arrangements underpin the results and impact we are looking for.

### *Action points*

- *Secretariat to develop Terms of Reference for the Working Group, including a clear roadmap and timeframe for the work to be carried out, and separating out the parameters for the mid-term review of the Strategic Plan to a separate process. These will be shared according to the process set out for establishing Working Groups.*