

IATI North American CSO Consultation
September 14, 2009
Washington DC

Overview

The IATI North American CSO consultation brought together 21 individuals representing 17 different NGOs from the United States (15) and Canada (2). Participants received a short presentation on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) and the importance of aid transparency at the beginning of the meeting, and then broke into three small groups to discuss their key aid information needs, the availability and accessibility of aid information, and the IATI code of conduct. The consultation also included a plenary session on how to further the aid transparency agenda in the United States.

**See Annex 1 for the consultation's agenda and Annex 2 for the participant list.*

Session 1: Key Aid Information Needs

Participants generally felt that all the information types listed (*see Annex 3*) were important. Certain types of information, however – such as information on integrity procedures and access to information policies – were less mentioned. Participants' comments on the other types of aid information are below.

- **Aid policies, procedures and strategies**
 - Should be able to link information on these to a particular project or transaction.
 - Particularly important to have information on aid strategies at the country and HQ level.
- **Aid flows**
 - Comprehensive information on aid flows, from amount disbursed to the ultimate recipient of aid, is clearly a key information need for many organizations. Want to know who is giving what, for what, to whom and over what period of time. Data should be comparable.
 - All three groups agreed that more-up-to date information and information on future aid flows is needed. Predictability is particularly important to facilitate both donor coordination and planning by partner country governments.
 - Traceability also considered important, as this will help with the identification of who is implementing aid and help avoid double-counting. Also want to know how much is ultimately spent in-country vs in the donor country (especially an issue for technical assistance and food aid).
 - Importance of getting project-level detail will vary by donor (suggested that this might be less of an issue in Canada).
- **Broader donor coverage**
 - Transparency standards agreed should work for non-development actors as well, such as spending by the U.S. Department of Defense or companies' corporate social responsibility (CSR) activities.
 - Need broad donor coverage because it is problematic to do analysis without good information on the activities of multiple actors. Need more information on smaller donors.
- **Terms of aid**
 - Knowing the terms of aid, particularly conditions, important to both Northern and Southern CSOs.
 - Very important to know terms of aid for aid provided as sector or budget support.
 - Information on whether aid was provided as a loan or a grant should also be available.

- **Procurement**
 - Described as the “elephant in the room”; agreement that this type of information is contentious and complex.
 - Link to technical assistance; key around corruption.
 - People want to be able to know how much information is spent in-country, and how much aid is tied.
- **Expected outcomes & assessments of aid and aid effectiveness**
 - Want to be able to map disbursements to outcomes.
 - There are risks regarding realism of data and issue of attribution.
 - Likely to improve the level of evaluation, and spending on evaluation.
- **Public participation**
 - Would be good to know what public participation was like in-country.

Session 2: Availability and Accessibility of Aid Information

In this session, the groups were asked to discuss how they currently access aid information; the availability and accessibility of their key aid information needs (rated on a scale of 1 to 4, with 1 being very available or accessible and 4 being not available or totally inaccessible); the key barriers they face in accessing information; and any recommendations they might have for IATI (*see Annex 4*).

Accessing Information

In one group, participants agreed that it is much easier to access information on aid flows at the country level, and that this is generally more timely. Information is mostly accessed through donor country officers and occasionally from recipient governments and UN country offices.

Other sources of aid information include: donor websites, the OECD-DAC, the World Bank, and appropriations bills. There was wide agreement that mapping different data sources to one another is very problematic (e.g. reconciling information on donor websites with budget documents and AIMS).

Availability and Accessibility of Aid Information

Not all groups were able to rate the availability and accessibility of their key aid information needs. The ratings that were provided are below. In general, however, most participants felt that aid information is not very available or accessible. One group noted that availability and accessibility vary greatly between donors and recipient countries, and that within the U.S., some agencies are more transparent than others (such as the Millennium Challenge Corporation). The World Bank’s project database was also mentioned as a good example of a more donor transparency.

Information needs	Group 1		Group 3	
	Availability	Accessibility	Availability	Accessibility
Aid strategies	3	3		
Aid flows			1-2	2
<i>Present</i>	3-4	3-4		
<i>Future</i>	4	3		
Donor coverage			3	3
<i>International level</i>	4	4		
<i>Country level</i>	3	3		
Procurement			1	2
Outcomes	3-4	3	3	3-4
Public participation			4	

Key Barriers

Among the barriers mentioned were:

- The DAC's CRS database is too difficult to use; don't trust the information you find
- Donors lack the capacity to provide quality information
- There are also technical (in a definitional sense) and political barriers to accessing aid information

Challenges & Recommendations for IATI

In terms of challenges in using existing sources of aid information, participants mentioned the time delay in getting donor data, issues with comparability, poor coverage, and lack of detail.

Recommendations/Other comments:

- More up to date information must be part of the IATI standard.
- Take an incremental approach – it is important that the initiative gets something agreed. This was mentioned by at least two of the groups.
- IATI needs to find a way of reducing “first mover” disadvantages. Those donors who take first steps to sharing more information risk becoming the target of criticism (as has happened in some cases to the MCC), so an effort should be made to get donors to move on this together.
- IATI could learn from the Charity Navigator measures.
- One question that was raised whether IATI or donors should insist on transparency by recipient governments, or whether it should be up to them to make information on aid public.

Session 3: IATI Code of Conduct

To maximize the time for discussion, the small groups only focused on seven of the twelve questions related to the IATI code of conduct (*see Annex 5*). Comments on the questions are below.

1. *Should IATI phase implementation?*

- Yes. This will make it easier to get donor buy-in.
- Phases should be kept simple, and build on each other (i.e. phase 2 is phase 1, plus 2).
- Donors could come up with an implementation plan with targets and information on how they intend to comply with the standards. This would serve as an early deliverable.
- No more than 3 years out, and by this time there should be mechanisms for compliance in country.
- Donors should not be rewarded for disclosure of existing information.

2. *Should there be mandatory and voluntary elements of the IATI standards?*

- One group felt that if implementation is phased, then there is no reason to establish both mandatory and voluntary elements – everything should be mandatory, and compliance with all elements of the standard the ultimate phase donors aspire to.
- Another felt that it should all be voluntary, and that IATI could “rule” on whether someone is complying with the standard or not.

3. *How should donors be held accountable for compliance?*

- One group suggested peer review, with spot checking.
- Another group favored donor rankings, though it felt that donors with less initial capacity to disclose aid information should not be penalized for entering at a lower level. The group felt that donors and others who needed it should be provided with technical assistance. There were also questions about how often the donor ranking should be done, and what factors would determine the rankings.

4. *How should transparency standards be pushed through the granting/contracting chain – including to NGOs/CSOs?*

- One group felt that transparency standards could be pushed down through the aid chain, though it noted several caveats. One would be to do this depending on the capacity of actors, or to establish a threshold over which the standards would be pushed down. Another suggestion was to have some voluntary elements further down the chain (rather than make everything mandatory for all actors).

5. *How should users expect to access information, and what process should there be if they cannot?*

6. *How should information be made available?*

(Questions discussed as one)

- Information should be made available through the donors' websites, but there should be links to intermediaries who have links to other sources of aid information. IATI could potentially serve as the repository of all of these links.
- Not clear who users would follow up with if information wasn't available – IATI?
- Support could also be provided to intermediaries who would aggregate different data sets to facilitate the dissemination of information.

Annex 1



AGENDA

International Aid Transparency Initiative North American Civil Society Consultation & Advocacy Meeting

9:00 – 5:00 pm • September 14, 2009
Center for Global Development, 1800 Massachusetts Ave. NW

Aim: to consult North American civil society on the International Aid Transparency Initiative and its potential relevance to aid reform discussions in the United States and Canada

9:00 Welcome & Introductions

9:30 Overview

- Introduction to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)
Speaker: Claire Moran, on behalf of the IATI Secretariat in DFID
- The importance of aid transparency and emerging solutions
Speaker: Owen Barder, aidinfo (member of the IATI Technical Advisory Group)
- Plenary: Questions & Discussion

10:45 Tea/Coffee Break

11:00 Session 1: Key Aid Information Needs

- Group discussions and prioritization of the types of aid information organizations need

11:45 Session 2: Availability & Accessibility of Aid Information

- Group discussions on the types, availability and accessibility of aid information organizations are currently using
- Plenary report back on Sessions 1 & 2

1:00 Lunch

2:00 Session 3: IATI Code of Conduct

- Group discussions on the IATI code of conduct on how donors will publish aid information
- Plenary report back on session 3

3:00 Tea/Coffee Break

3:15 Advocating for US aid transparency

- Quick update:
 - The challenge and opportunity (*Oxfam*)
 - Update on current state of debate (*Publish What you Fund*)
- Situation analysis and ideas about next steps:
 - Brainstorming on targets/messages – group work
 - Action Planning – group work

4:30 Conclusion/Wrap-up

Annex 2

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Participant List

Name	Organization	Email
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Annex 3

SESSION 1: KEY AID INFORMATION NEEDS

**Thinking of your and your colleagues' work, how do you or would you like to use aid information?
What kind(s) of information do you need most? Why?**

Please identify your top 3 to 5 information needs. The list below is only intended as a starting point for reflection and discussion, so feel free to propose other categories of information.

Categories of Aid Information

1. **Aid policies and procedures** including clear criteria for the allocation of aid;
2. **Aid strategies** at the regional, country and local; and programmatic, sectoral and project levels;
3. **Aid flows** (including financial flows, in-kind aid and administrative costs), by agency or agencies, including:
 - a) data on aid planned, pledged, committed and disbursed
 - b) disaggregated according to internationally agreed schema by region, country, geographic area, and sector
 - c) [disbursement/delivery] modality
 - d) more up-to-date information on aid flows
 - e) project level data
 - f) information on *future* aid flows
 - g) aid spending mapped against commonly agreed policy markers such as gender or climate change, and against Paris Declaration targets
 - h) aid mapped to recipient countries own policies and spending
 - i) How far along the granting/contracting chain should aid be traced?
4. **Donor coverage:** information from a wider range of donors, including non-DAC donors, multilateral agencies, NGOs, foundations and private donors;
5. **Terms of aid**, including aid agreements, contracts and related documents, for example, information on all conditions, prior and agreed actions, benchmarks, triggers, and interim evaluation criteria; and details of any decisions to suspend, withdraw or reallocate aid resources;
6. **Procurement** procedures, criteria, tenders and decisions, contracts, and reporting on contracts, including information about and from contractors and sub-contracting agents;
7. **Expected outcomes & assessments of aid and aid effectiveness** including monitoring, evaluation, financial, audit and annual reporting;
8. **Integrity procedures**, including corruption risk assessments, declarations of gifts and assets, complaint policies and mechanisms and protection of whistleblowers;
9. **Public participation:** opportunities for public engagement in decision-making and evaluation, consultative/draft documentation, copies of submissions to the consultation processes, and reports on how inputs were taken into account;
10. **Access to information:** organisational structure, contact information and disclosure mechanisms and policies

Annex 4

SESSION 2: AVAILABILITY & ACCESSIBILITY OF AID INFORMATION

1. How do you currently access information on aid flows?

Examples: Government budget documents, donor websites or annual reports, country aid information management systems, national NGOs or NGO networks, the OECD-DAC, etc.

2. How **available** is information on your top 3 to 5 information needs?

- 1 - Proactively disseminated by the government, donors or other actors
- 2 - Publicly available but not proactively disseminated - e.g. available on websites or in budget documents
- 3 - Available on request (from the donor or government)
- 4 - Not available

How **accessible** is this information?

- 1 - Very accessible – information is clear, easy to use and understand
- 2 - Fairly accessible – information can be understood with time and effort
- 3 - Fairly inaccessible – information can only be understood with the help of experts or through repeated questioning and clarification
- 4 - Totally inaccessible – very hard to make sense of the information

Priority Information Needs	Availability	Accessibility
1.		
2.		
3.		
4.		
5.		

3. What are the key barriers you face to accessing information? (*e.g. technological, technical, complexity, diversity, etc*)

4. What are the key challenges you face in using existing sources of aid information, and how might your experiences translate into recommendations for the development of the IATI standard?

Annex 5

SESSION 3: IATI CODE OF CONDUCT

The aim of the Code of Conduct is to set out what, when, how and where information should be published, how users can expect to access it, and how donors will be held accountable.

Questions

1. Should IATI phase implementation? *e.g. 3 or 4 levels of compliance based on donors' existing level of aid transparency*
 2. Should there be mandatory and voluntary elements of the IATI standards?
 3. How should donors be held accountable for compliance? *e.g. independent monitoring or peer review, donor rankings, etc.*
 4. How should transparency standards be pushed through the granting/contracting chain – including to NGOs/CSOs?
 5. How should users expect to access information, and what process should there be if they cannot?
 6. How should information be made available? *e.g. through the donors' own websites*
 7. Are there any other issues that should be considered when developing the IATI Code of Conduct?
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8. Should IATI include all development assistance, including private flows? *Should be designed so it can be used by them but Code of Conduct applies to signatories only*
 9. Should retrospective information be included? *No, more interested in the future*
 10. Should unvalidated information be published – and if so, how should they be distinguished? *Yes, degrees of validation/certainty to be defined in technical standard*
 11. Should there be a minimum threshold over which the standards apply? *Yes, but the threshold will depend on the type of information and the donor (i.e. will need to be specific)*
 12. Should there be any valid exemptions, e.g. for staff security reasons? *Follow FOIA-type exemption, not define whole new set?*