

aid information for the people

A Summary Report of Civil Society Consultations on the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)

The availability and accessibility of information on aid to a broader range of stakeholders allows for a more efficient and effective management of aid, as such, increases the development impact of aid.

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) aims to deliver a step shift in public availability and accessibility of information on aid flows and activities, globally. IATI brings together donors, partner countries, civil society organisations (CSOs) and other users of aid information to agree, by end of 2009, a set of common information standards applicable to all aid flows.

A key component of the initiative is the conduct of CSO consultations to define their aid information needs, the barriers to their access to aid information, and recommendations to address these barriers. An updated, reliable and useful aid information ensures CSOs' distinct role in development cooperation providing service for poverty reduction and human rights and acting as effective interlocutors towards the reform of the aid regime



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Basic Information on the CSO Consultation Workshops

Five regional CSO consultation workshops were held for East and Southeast Asia (11 March 2009), Eastern Africa (5 August 2009), Latin America (20 August 2009), Southern Africa (23 September 2009), and Western Africa (7 October) covering 54 countries and participated by 156 regional and national CSOs and 13 International NGOs.

The workshops followed a standard design which included a presentation on IATI (history, principles, goals, objectives and timetable and targets), interactive discussions on the need for CSO consultations, and guided exercises of responding to the (i) availability and accessibility of aid Information for CSOs; (ii) barriers/issues and recommendations on availability and accessibility of aid

An updated, reliable and useful aid information ensures CSOs' distinct role in development cooperation providing service for poverty reduction and human rights, and acting as effective interlocutors towards the reform of the aid regime

Workshop Schedules

East and Southeast Asia
Manila, Philippines
11 March 2009

Eastern Africa
Nairobi, Kenya
5 August 2009

Latin America
Medellin, Colombia
20 August 2009

Southern Africa
Pretoria, South Africa
23 September 2009

Western Africa
Dakar, Senegal
7 October 2009

information for CSOs; and (iii) publishing/disseminating aid information by CSOs.

The methodology used had the participants in breakout groups to identify their aid information needs and rank these based on importance. The needs were then classified in terms of levels of availability (a – publicly available and proactively disseminated by government, donors or other bodies; b – publicly available but not proactively disseminated; c – available on request; and d – not available) and accessibility (VA – very accessible, FA – fairly accessible, FI – fairly inaccessible, and TI – totally inaccessible).

The next exercise was to identify barriers to adequate and appropriate aid information and present three most important recommendations to address these barriers. The last exercise was for the CSOs to identify which among those previously prioritized were being disseminated or published by the CSOs themselves, the mode of dissemination, for whom, and the barriers to having these information disseminated or published.

The workshops served as venues for CSOs to share issues on aid information transparency, accessibility and availability, and for them to identify and recommend measures to address these issues.

Regional, national and community-based CSOs were invited to participate in the workshops. To further ensure a broad range of CSOs, the following classifications were used to guide in the list of invitees:

- ✓ national platforms on aid and development advocacy
- ✓ think-tanks/policy research organizations
- ✓ people's movements with broad grassroots constituencies (i.e. labor groups, women's organizations, etc.)

Types & Number of Participating Organisations

Types of Organisations	Number of participating organizations				
	East and Southeast Asia	Eastern Africa	Latin America	Southern Africa	Western Africa
National Networks	23	36	35	11	24
Regional Networks	3	11	2	7	4
INGOS	1	3	5	2	2
	27	50	42	20	30

Key Findings from the CSO Consultations

Aid Information Needs

For CSOs to substantially engage donors, governments and other stakeholders in the advancement of aid effectiveness and development effectiveness reform, available and accessible quality aid data is needed. This has been repeatedly emphasized in the five IATI CSO consultations held in 2009. Among the top information needs identified by CSOs across the five regions include conditionality, aid commitments and actual disbursements, project impact, and complete project documentation.

Conditionality

Conditions are attached in different forms to loans and grants, which impose financial pressure to compel certain actions by recipient countries. Often only the donors and the recipient governments know these conditions. CSOs demand full disclosure of conditions attached to aid and the political, socioeconomic implications of these conditions to the recipient countries and their peoples. In the Colombian workshop for Latin America, participating CSOs were explicit in wanting to have these conditions and other aid-related information written in the language of the recipient country to allow even grassroots CSOs to analyse and understand the implications of the conditions.

CSOs expressed their dismay over the continued practice of imposing conditions to aid as these reflect the lack of trust and confidence of donors in the commitment or the capacity of the recipient.



Workshop participants came from the following countries:

East and Southeast Asia

Cambodia, Peoples Republic of China, Fiji, Indonesia, Hong Kong, Japan, Mongolia, Philippines, New Zealand, South Korea, Timor Leste, Thailand, Viet Nam, Bangladesh, Nepal and Sri Lanka

Eastern Africa

Kenya, Tanzania, Zambia, Uganda, Ethiopia, Sudan, Somalia and Djibouti

Latin America

Argentina, Bolivia, Brasil, Colombia, Chile, Ecuador, Guatemala, Honduras, Paraguay, Peru and Uruguay

Southern Africa

Botswana, Lesotho, Malawi, Mozambique, South Africa and Zimbabwe

Western Africa

Benin, Burkina Faso, Cote d'Ivoire, Ghana, Guinea, Mali, Mauritania, Niger, Nigeria, Sierra Leone, Togo, Senegal and Gambia.



Aid commitments and actual disbursements

Information on aid commitments and actual disbursements were rated from fairly accessible to totally inaccessible depending on the countries' existing laws and policies on information disclosure. The general discussion during the workshops was that aid flows were often unpredictable. There is no information available to CSOs whether aid committed have been disbursed on time or were actually released. CSOs in Somalia for instance noted that aid has not been sustained and would come only after it is most needed.

Project impact

Impact reports on aid are rarely made public. More often, project impact reports are made on controversial projects and done as a result of CSO

Full disclosure would mean creation of mechanisms and processes for CSOs to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes and impact, allowing them to provide their analytical frameworks and viewpoints in the process.

pressure or advocacy for accountability and transparency. CSOs want full disclosures on project impact. But this would go beyond merely accessing available project information from donors and recipient governments. This would mean creation of mechanisms and processes for CSOs to participate in the monitoring and evaluation of project outcomes and impact, allowing them to provide their analytical frameworks and viewpoints in the process. CSOs in the Eastern Africa regional consultation raised doubts on the impact of aid on the sub-region's poverty situation and quality of human development.

Transparency in Accra

'We will be judged by the impacts that our collective efforts have on the lives of poor people. We recognise that greater transparency and accountability for the use of development resources—domestic as well as external—are powerful drivers of progress.'

- § 22, Accra Agenda for Action

Complete project documentation

Information needs along these line include international agreements, discussions and negotiations before contracts are approved and finalized, policy and bidding process/documentation on projects, project rationalization and site selection, information on project consultants, social acceptance process of the project, among others.

Aid negotiations often happen behind closed doors between donors and governments without engaging CSOs in decision-making or monitoring processes. On the other hand, project reports coming from donors and recipient governments are often limited to actual project outputs and financials which do not provide sufficient data for pushing aid effectiveness reforms.

Barriers to Accessing Aid Information

In Accra, donors committed to “*publicly disclose regular, detailed and timely information on volume, allocation and when, available, results of development expenditure to enable more accurate budget, accounting and audit by developing countries.*” More than a year after Accra, CSOs are still hindered by many factors affecting the availability and accessibility of aid information. Among the common barriers shared across the five regional workshops are:

Restrictive policies and laws on information dissemination

CSOs cited laws such as the Official Secrets Act (Kenya), Official Information Act (New Zealand and Thailand) and other related laws in aid-recipient countries that restrict people’s access to aid information. In the absence of laws on information dissemination, confidentiality agreements between donors and recipient governments are used as reasons for denying CSO requests for information. Grassroots organizations whose communities are the loci of aid projects are usually given the runaround when attempting to access even the basic project information.

Lack of mechanisms for transparency and information dissemination

Despite the much-vaunted rhetoric on donors’ recognition of genuine transparency, mechanisms for aid information disclosure are grossly lacking, particularly for community-based organizations that are directly affected by aid projects. Even when information is made available, the format is not accessible to CSOs or employs technical jargon and written in language that is not the language of the country/site where the project is implemented.

CSOs cite the absence of a national information system that would cater to all aid information users. Aid database currently being piloted have been criticized as solely focusing on data coming from donors and have failed to consider/include aid data coming from various ministries of the recipient governments.

Low capacity for CSOs to access, manage and use aid information

CSOs require greater capacity development to be able to make effective use of aid data. CSOs tapped to participate in the five regional consultations were mainly grassroots people’s organizations that would need to beef up their skills on information technology, data generation, management and use. They have also raised the issue of appropriate aid information technology where electricity and internet access are non-existent.

Skilling includes developing and broadening analytical frameworks for aid information analysis within CSO context and perspectives.

Recommendations

Pro-active effort to make publicly available and accessible aid information.

This includes (i) creation of websites and interactive databases that would allow for multi-stakeholder participation; (ii) the creation of an information system that delineates the responsibilities and roles of all actors – government, CSOs, donors; (iii) creation of mechanisms that would make it customary for government officials to make their work publicly accessible; (iv) aid information available in local languages and use of popular terms that will be understood by the public in project documents and reports; (v) community inventory access in order to know people's needs

Enabling environment for effective and efficient access to aid information.

The range of recommendations include : (i) repeal of laws & acts that hinder access to information through the active role of parliament; (ii) passage of laws and regulations ensuring CSO participation in every level of policy making and a mechanism for participatory process rather than simple consultation; (iii) institutionalization of consultative meetings/forums among stakeholders; and promoting equal representation in decision making processes/arenas; and, (iv) establishment of specified bodies on aid effectiveness.

CSO capacity development. Building CSO capacity through civic education that would raise aid effectiveness awareness and improve skills in aid information analysis, data management and use, information technology, and aid policy research. Recommendations also include the use of popular methods for information dissemination that consider local community context.

About IATI

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) was launched at the Accra High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in September 2008 aiming to develop a set of **common information standards** applicable to all aid flows.

The initiative is governed by a multi-stakeholder Steering Committee which includes four CSO members: Better Aid, Civicus, Publish What You Fund and Transparency International. Its secretariat is composed by the Department for International Development (DfID), United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and the the AidInfo team at Development Initiatives for Poverty Research (DIPR). A technical advisory group (TAG) is in charge of developing the IATI standards.

IATI membership is open to any donor or partner country government and to date, 17 donors have signed up: Australia, Denmark, European Commission, Finland, GAVI, Germany, Hewlett, Ireland, Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, United Kingdom, UNDP, World Bank.

Aid Information Publication/ Dissemination by CSOs

Across the five regions, the most common type of aid information published or disseminated by CSOs included (i) social audit results and analyses of multilateral cooperation; (ii) assessment on the impact of aid and aid policies on different sectors of the population; (iii) position papers on aid (impact, thematic, and sectoral); (iv) researches, conference reports and write-ups that raise awareness on aid. Such information targeted members of CSO networks, community-based organizations, government, policy makers and donors and published in policy briefs, newsletters, organizational magazines, websites and blogs.

Lack of sufficient technical resources and funds were cited as the major constraints in publishing/disseminating aid information.

CSOs raised the concern that IATI demands their own transparency with regards to aid projects they implement. While they welcome the discussion of CSO aid transparency, such discussion should be framed differently from the aid transparency issues of donors and governments. In four of the five consultations held so far, CSOs refused to engage in discussions relating to CSO transparency citing that the IATI consultation was not the appropriate venue.



Better Aid on Transparency

Donors have committed in the AAA to openness and transparency and making aid more predictable (§ 24, 25 and 26). The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) that was launched in Accra by the British government and which has 17 donor signatories has been seeking compliance with these aims

Yet the coordination of IATI with existing processes on aid effectiveness could be problematic, with the risk of transparency standards proliferation if this work is not properly aligned with other government initiatives.

The other half of this work now falls on Southern governments, who must work with elected representatives and citizens' organisations to set out open and transparent policies on how aid is to be sourced, spent, monitored and accounted for. This dialogue must feed into IATI discussions to ensure donors commit to making the right types of information on aid available in the right way and due time in order to allow civil society groups to react and propose alternatives.

In addition, the IATI transparency standards and the results of IATI stakeholder consultations must be fully incorporated into aid effectiveness work being done by the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development, including preparations for the next high level forum in 2011.

- draft Better Aid Policy Paper

Conclusion

The IATI consultations were welcomed by CSOs as venues for airing their issues on aid information. However, many remained skeptical if the goals of IATI are achievable given the cost, political will and the organizational culture of most donors and recipient governments. The CSOs have cited major technical, political and resource constraints to aid information availability and access and wonder how IATI aims to resolve these.

Still the CSOs expressed continued interest on how much of the information and recommendations they have forwarded are being considered or have been considered. Hence feedback of the IATI results is greatly expected.

A key recommendation that is being reiterated is the need to look into other alternative and popular but equally efficient modes of dissemination other than web-based or internet-based to allow the most marginalized stakeholders to actively engage in the aid reform discourse.

For CSOs, development effectiveness should be the operating framework in the discourse on aid transparency since their use of aid information is premised on their advocacies to make aid relevant in reducing poverty, promoting gender equality and intergenerational equity, and environmental sustainability.

Finally, CSO transparency must be viewed in an entirely different framework from donor and government transparency. Except for the one in East/Southeast Asia, the CSOs in the regional workshops asserted that IATI is not the appropriate forum to discuss and resolve the issue. CSO transparency should not be framed within the official development assistance and government projects requirements, but should be even more assiduous in the sense of development effectiveness especially to their constituency

The Reality of Aid

An Independent Review of Poverty Reduction and Development Assistance

The Reality of Aid Network is a pre-eminent Southern-led North/South network on reforming aid policies and practices. It is a member of the Better Aid open platform.

IBON International prepared this report for Reality of Aid (RoA) and currently hosts its secretariat.



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Aid Information Needs of Civil Society

For CSOs to substantially engage donors, governments and other stakeholders in the advancement of aid effectiveness and development effectiveness reform, available and accessible quality aid data is needed. This has been repeatedly emphasized in the five IATI CSO consultations held in 2009. Among the top information needs identified by CSOs across the five regions include conditionality, aid commitments and actual disbursements, project impact, and complete project documentation. *See page 3.*

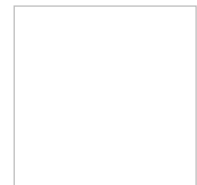
Barriers to Accessing Aid Information

More than a year after Accra, CSOs are still hindered by many factors affecting the availability and accessibility of aid information. Among the common barriers shared across the five regional workshops: restrictive policies and laws on information dissemination; lack of mechanisms for transparency and information dissemination; and, low capacity for CSOs to access, manage and use aid information. *See page 5.*

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