Session 1a : Transparency and Development

The session was chaired by Mr Bert Koenders, Minister for Development Cooperation in the Netherlands. He said that transparency was one of the most important issues, and that everyone should be able to see how much aid is provided, what it is spent on and what it aims to achieve. Transparency is necessary to promote accountability and effectiveness, and tracing the money is key to this. He noted the impact of the financial crisis on the predictability of aid, acknowledging that because the Dutch aid budget is a fixed percentage of ODA to GNI, there would be a cut of 601m euro this year. This emphasized the need for cooperation between donors, and explaining decisions to partner countries, who are also feeling the negative impact of the financial crisis. IATI needs to move from commitment to implementation, in particular agreeing what information should be published, and a code of conduct for monitoring donor compliance. It is vital that it does so in ways that support rather than replace existing national and international systems. Finally, he called for a change of culture on transparency from a reactive to a proactive model, making public information that is often already available.

Mr John Rwangombwa, ( Permanent Secretary to the Treasury, Ministry of Finance, Rwanda) outlined the challenges and opportunities for strengthening ownership, accountability and aid effectiveness through better information. Because Rwanda is highly aid dependent (with ODA accounting for half of the national budget), there is a clear need for a single, transparency channel for reporting on ODA to support national processes, including PFM, budget preparation, aid planning and management and macroeconomic monitoring. Current challenges include securing information on project aid (as opposed to GBS), multiple reporting, predictability, the negative impact of macroeconomic projections when information is unavailable/incorrect, off-budget aid and the fact that different sources have different information on ODA to Rwanda, pointing to the need for a harmonized reporting system.

HE Mr Milan Rocen, Minister of Foreign Affairs, Montenegro noted that Montenegro was the first partner country in his region to endorse IATI, and agreed with its core principles. He reported that the regional partner country consultation held in Montenegro identified a number of problems for partner countries, and this underlined the importance of transparency as a prerequisite for better decision-making. Donors and partner countries needed to cooperate together, and Montenegro would be a constructive partner.

Hon Dr Minendra Rijal, Minister for Federal Affairs, Nepal, said that the meeting was important as it would help to create a system for delivering on aid effectiveness. Data must be accessible, and IATI will help to hold donors to account and improve national planning. He identified the current gaps as being timely, complete, accurate and consistent data, saying that there was a lack of information on who was
funding what, where the money is going and how it is delivered. It is difficult to include data in the planning process – even now, when 75% aid goes through the budget, it is difficult to track disbursements. Poverty reduction depends on partner countries coordinating the entire effort, and for that, IATI needs to include non-DAC donors, plus data on aid channeled through NGOs.

He emphasized that taxpayers in donor countries wanted to see where their money was going – IATI would provide added value by building on existing systems, not creating a new database. He spoke about Nepal’s experience of emerging from conflict, noting impressive gains in reducing poverty even during the insurgency, but emphasizing the need for coordinated, inclusive policies. He noted that institutional capacity could be weakened during conflict, and aid could become donor-driven – when donors try to micro-manage, they can hurt, rather than help.

Questions:

Issues raised at the end of this session included the importance of building the capacity of CSOs to improve accountability; recognizing funding of CSOs as being complementary to government funding; the need for CSOs themselves to be accountable; and for the system to capture all aid flows.

Session 1b: Transparency and aid effectiveness

Koos Richelle, DG of EuropeAid and co-chair of the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness, opened this session and said its objective was to situate transparency within the wider aid effectiveness agenda. As we approach the MDG deadline, and the next HLF in Seoul, he emphasized the need to move to implementation phase on the whole agenda, including transparency, and said he would be looking for 5-10 partner countries to pilot this.

Ingrid-Gabriela Hoven, Director General of BMZ spoke about the contribution that IATI could make to implementing the Accra agenda. She raised three issues – what was the added value of IATI? What responsibilities did it place on partner countries? And what was its relationship with WP-EFF Cluster C on transparency and predictability? She said IATI had the potential to contribute to delivery on all aspects of the Paris and Accra agendas, as it was essential to ownership, management for results, alignment, harmonization and mutual accountability. A key ambition of the AAA was to strengthen country systems – if they did not have sufficient information, aid would be donor-driven. To manage aid, partner countries need the full picture. While making this information available was largely a donor responsibility, partner countries should also make a contribution, for example providing results data, and data on national procurement and geo-locations of projects. Cluster C of the WP-EFF has a task team looking at transparency and predictability, led by the World Bank and Rwanda. They will focus on what information is available from donors; leverage a predictability indicator by 2011; compile a best practice guide; and standardize formats. She saw this as complementary to IATI, which was more ambitious and would work more on the specifics.
Mr Jeff Gutman, Vice President and Head of Network Operations Policy and Country services, World Bank, spoke about the Bank’s experience of transparency. He said Accra marked a turning point, with a clear voice from partner countries, and IATI represents a substantial response to this. The World Bank tries to stay at the cutting edge with regard to transparency and disclosure, and has recently undertaken a major consultation. This has led to paradigm shift from having a list of documents that are published to having a presumption of full disclosure, with limited exemptions. Many documents are already published, though not data on current projects – this will happen in future (June 2010). He stressed the importance of accessibility, not just disclosure – information had to be digestible. Consistency and definitions are important, as is timeliness. Moving to a mode where information is disseminated at local level in a way it reaches everyone is a key but presents challenges – skills, IT, political will – this needs to happen as the basis of this is that with information, we empower those who manage aid.

Mr Jorge Sobrinho, Minister of State, Head of the Office of the Comptroller General, (CGU) Brazil, gave a presentation on the Brazilian Transparency Portal, which was part of an overall strategy for auditing and preventing corruption. The portal is based on the maxim that “sunlight is the best disinfectant” and its goals are to increase transparency of public money using language that people understand, on a single website; to provide information for internal audit and anti-corruption purposes; and to empower NGOs and citizens to oversee public spending. It is free to use, and 100% web-based. Building it required a computer-based budget system and financial operations through the banking sector. The contents of the portal are resource allocations, direct spending, a transparency network (links to other websites), a list of ineligible firms and other tools for social accountability (eg training for citizens in using the information). It covers all aspects of government spending – purchase of goods and services, salaries, pensions, expenses etc. It covers the allocation of resources to states and municipalities, NGOs and individual citizens. In total, it covers $US 3 trillion and 856, 877,566 files. The results are that it has reduced irregularities eg in social security payments, it is a double-check tool for the quality of data in government databases and provides information for the press. It has been commended both nationally and internationally.

Questions

Issues raised at the end of this session including what is the cost-benefit analysis of IATI ? What exemptions are there in the Brazilian model eg President’s office, Defence spending? (Mr Sobrinho said that these were exceptions.) Would the World Bank work closely with partner countries on disclosure policy? (Jeff Gutman said that it had done, for example in India.) Does the Brazilian portal capture south-south cooperation? (Mr Sobrinho said not at present, it only covered budget.) What are the implications for recipient governments – transparency is necessary but not sufficient? (Ms Hoven said it was important to focus on impact on the ground – donors have a lot to do to deliver on Paris/Accra – if not, they will lose credibility.)

Session 2: The demand for aid information: what do users need?
The session was chaired by H.E. Ms. Suhair Al-Ali, Minister of Planning and International Cooperation of Jordan. In her opening remarks, Ms. Al-Ali re-affirmed Jordan’s commitment to the accountability and transparency of aid. The country hosted the IATI regional partner country consultation for the Arab States. She informed participants of the ongoing dialogue between the government and development partners through the establishment of working groups in sectors, such as water, energy, gender, and social services. Ms. Al-Ali stressed the importance of national ownership and leadership, which require that the government has a clear vision and a solid development plan. She emphasized the importance of domestic transparency. To this end, Jordan will soon launch an aid information management system (AIMs), which it hoped would serve as a model in the region.

Mr. Augustus Kwasi Adu, Head of the UN System Unit, Ministry of Finance and Economic Planning of Ghana pointed out that IATI was a direct response to the concerns voiced by partner countries and CSOs at the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra regarding the lack of timely and adequate aid information. The IATI regional partner country consultations, organized by UNDP in Bangkok and co-hosted by UNDP and the governments of the Dominican Republic, Ghana, Jordan, Montenegro and Rwanda, served as a platform for more than 70 partner countries to come together and identify the challenges they face in meeting their aid information needs and the opportunities for addressing them through IATI and national AIMs. The opinions of partner countries were converging on the set of aid information they require for planning, budgeting and M&E purposes (more detailed information on where, when, how, for what and by whom aid is spent), the need for more timely provision of the information in accordance with national planning/budgeting cycles, and last, but not least the critical importance of having more detailed information on future aid flows. There was a broad agreement that one-size-fits-all approach is not desirable and that the standards should be flexible and take into account national requirements. Partner countries would like to know what capacity development support IATI would be able to provide and participants in one of the regions had suggested the establishment of a global fund. Partner countries were also concerned with the number of donor signatories to IATI and the fact that some key donors were not yet on board the initiative. As regards the IATI Code of Conduct, partner countries should play an important role in the future monitoring mechanisms. Participants in Accra, Amman and Santo Domingo had suggested the establishment of regional platforms to facilitate coordination and peer learning among governments on AIMs and the aid effectiveness agenda with the support of UNDP and other partners.

Mr. Tony Tujan, Chairperson of the Reality of Aid Network and Programme Director of the IBON Foundation provided the key findings and recommendations emerging from the regional consultations of CSOs on the implementation of the Accra Agenda of Action, which included a segment on the availability and accessibility of aid information and how CSOs publish and disseminate information about their own activities. More than 193 participants took part in the 5 regional meetings with another two planned in West Africa and in the Middle East and North Africa. CSOs concurred that they need access to timely and detailed aid information. For example, CSOs called for a full disclosure of contract-related information (conditionalities), availability of project documentation throughout the project lifecycle, more information on donor commitments and the impact of aid. The barriers to accessing aid data revolved around restrictive policies and laws, which often had too broad definitions of exceptions, lack
of mechanisms for implementing transparency regulations and for dissemination of information in local languages. CSOs maintained websites, published policy briefs, reports, etc. on their own activities, however, they often were hampered by low capacity and resources to access, manage and use aid information and further disseminate it in local languages. It was also important to examine the role of participatory governance in creating a culture of transparency and what place it has in the development effectiveness agenda. Concerning the transparency and accountability commitments of CSOs as actors in their own right, these should be determined within the framework of the Open Forum over the next two years. In some countries, CSOs are disfranchised after disclosing information and such situations have to be taken into account when developing the transparency standards for CSOs.

Hon. Dr. Shirin Sharmin Chaudhury, State Minister, Ministry of Women and Children Affairs of Bangladesh commended IATI as a concrete initiative to implement the international transparency commitments. The government of Bangladesh was committed to the efficient use of aid, having endorsed the Paris Declaration in 2005 and to furthering the cause of the MDGs. The empowerment of women and children was at the core of the Poverty Reduction Strategy Paper, while the Bangladesh Harmonization and Coordination Plan strived to reduce project transaction costs, the fragmentation of aid and avoid overlapping of activities. Aid information was essential in this regard. It also played an important role in the formulation of the national budget and effective parliamentary oversight, allowing parliamentarians to ask questions on the allocation of resources and the progress made in reaching the national development priorities. Recently, the Parliament had passed a law on the right to information. Furthermore, the government was taking steps to improve its aid management and service delivery capacity.

Mr. Gabriel Ferrero, Deputy Director, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of Spain stated that IATI is one of the most promising endeavors following up on the Accra Agenda for Action. Transparency is key for development and has to be people-centered. It is a necessary condition for mutual and domestic accountability, ensuring that governments are accountable to their parliaments and citizens. Local democracy and inclusive ownership of the development process should be strengthened. IATI should foster greater transparency at the country level, advancing participatory planning and budgeting. It should be a bottom-up and country-focused initiative. However, progress at the country level cannot be made without positive changes in transparency and accountability at the global level and move towards policy coherence among donors. These are first steps in redressing the unequal power relations among donors and recipient countries, which undermine national ownership. In the future, we could envisage IATI as a global umbrella for improving transparency in other areas of international cooperation, such as financing for development and climate change. Spain is committed to meeting the UN target of 0.7 % ODA/GNI and to being accountable to its citizens as well as to governments and citizens in partner countries on the aid it provides.

Dasa Silovic, Senior Policy Advisor, Capacity Development Group, Bureau for Development Policy, UNDP congratulated the colleagues who have been involved in the organization of the broad consultations around IATI and for the work on parts 1 and 4 of the IATI standards. She stressed that the focus should be on development effectiveness in using public resources and on tracking and monitoring progress towards the MDGs and development results. In the current economic environment aid should
be as catalytic as possible. It is also important to bring on board the growing number of new actors in development. The UN is not a classical donor, however it tracks the resources it receives and monitors results. The UN Secretary-General has issued a comprehensive report on the financing of the operational activities for development of the UN system for 2008, which included data for 27 entities compared to 7 in the 2007 report. UNDP provides public access to its programmes and projects, administrative, financial, and human resources regulations, as well as to the decisions of its Executive Board, which can be accessed on UNDP’s website¹. IATI is an important follow up to 2008 Accra High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness and the UN conference on financing for development, which outcome document in its art. 46 calls upon all actors to improve mutual accountability and transparency. It is important to view IATI as a partnership and to build the capacity of partner countries and other actors to deliver on this agenda. UNDP is working in supporting partner countries and donors to track ODA through aid information management systems at the country level. These systems have to be sustainable and there are two key factors, which contribute to this. The first one is genuine ownership by the partner governments themselves and the second one is the willingness of donors to provide information on a timely basis. In this sense, the IATI standards should be an incentive to cooperation and behavior change on the donors’ side. UNDP is satisfied with the IATI partner country regional consultations and fostering peer learning. The organization will also bring the key outcomes of the IATI Conference in the preparatory meeting for the UN Development Cooperation Forum in mid-November 2009 in Vienna.

Questions and answers:

In the subsequent discussion, the following questions and comments were made by participants:

- It was important to support the capacity of CSOs to use aid information. There were already good examples from the South of how CSOs through citizens’ observatories are able to use and direct the information to citizens.
- It was noted that CSOs need to work more to make their activities more transparent. A representative from a CSO in Colombia noted that there is a network of CSOs on transparency and it is engaged in a dialogue with the government on how CSOs report on the funds they receive. Tony Tujan re-affirmed that CSOs will work within the Open Forum on minimum standards and have a common system for CSO accountability and transparency.
- From the perspective of CSOs, the Code of Conduct was an important instrument to hold officials to account.
- A comment was made that often contracts and agreements were signed by governments in partner countries without full understanding of the conditions attached and their implications, which undermined national ownership.
- In Montenegro, IATI has stimulated and enhanced the dialogue between the government and development partners, as well as among the latter. As aid resources are tight in the current context, a number of MOUs are being negotiated, for example in the areas of climate change

¹ UNDP Executive Board website: http://www.undp.org/execbrd/.
and energy efficiency, for better use and redistribution of resources among development partners.

Session 3: Review and Closing of Day 1

The session was chaired by H. E. Mr. Maarten Brouwer, Ambassador for Development Cooperation, Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands. He noted that a number of interventions throughout the day focused on the relationship between aid transparency and accountability and on the role of transparency and IATI in the broader aid effectiveness agenda. The chair invited participants to focus on these two issues during the plenary debate. The following suggestions were made by participants:

- Transparency should not be linked to accountability in a causal way. Accountability occurs only when the responsible actors decide to act on the information they have. Accountability is outside of IATI’s scope. With regard to the second issue, it was important to develop the IATI standards with a system of coding that is comparable to the budget coding and classification system in countries and that can be compared across countries.

- IATI should focus on transparency at the country level. Technical assistance and capacity development are two areas where more transparency is needed in order to have better value for money, ownership by partner countries and for these types of assistance to better correspond to partner country needs.

- Domestic transparency will ensure better aid transparency. We should aim to capture all aid going to the country, regardless of its source (bilateral and multilateral donors, or CSOs). CSOs have to be transparent about their assistance.

- IATI should encourage donors to provide general budget support, as well as for partner countries to reinforce budgetary oversight. Other aid modalities are less efficient and more difficult to capture.

- Mr. Maarten Brouwer noted that the concept of trust was implicit in the discussion. One has to consider whether it is possible to build trust in national systems if they are not being used. In discussion, it was suggested that it was possible to build trust when, for example, parliaments adequately represent the needs of local communities. Information is meaningless if we don’t diffuse it to the citizens in a language that they can understand. It is important to build the capacity of parliamentarians to access and analyze the information and then to communicate it to the local population. In many cases, information does not filter to the national assemblies. For example, new development cooperation agreements should go to Parliament before being signed as these could commit the government to development priorities which are not aligned with the national ones.
• IATI should focus on identifying the basic minimum information to be conveyed to all stakeholders in the aid system and the standards should be extended to the way we package the information for use by different stakeholders. The IATI Code of Conduct would then commit donors to pro-actively provide the information. The risk for reinventing the wheel should be avoided.

• IATI could be useful both for improving the predictability of aid and for tracking the use of national systems. In Moldova, the government undertook reforms to bring its procurement system in line with international standards. Yet, only 30% of donors use the government system to procure goods or services. It was therefore, important for donors not only to support national systems, but also to commit to using them.

• IATI is at the core of the agenda. National ownership is impossible without predictability of aid flows to countries. Harmonization of donor reporting to governments on how money has been used and sharing of information on results are important aspects of how IATI would contribute to the aid effectiveness agenda.

• IATI’s scope is on improving transparency of ODA flows. In partner countries, it is important to measure not only the effectiveness of one source of money, but of all public resources. Aid transparency should serve as a catalyst for transparency of national systems, and IATI and national aid information management systems will indirectly contribute to this objective.

• IATI should not be overburdened with all problems of development cooperation and one should distinguish between the political will of participating in IATI and the technical side of the standards. In this regard, it is essential that more donors sign up to the initiative and that an adequate response is provided to the aid information needs of partner countries. The findings from the IATI pilots are instructive.

In closing the session, the chair Mr. Maarten Brouwer concluded that IATI should be viewed as facilitating accountability and participants should focus on aid as one of the sources of development that has to be used in a catalytic manner. It is also imperative that donors and other actors provide information to the AIMs put in place by partner countries.

Session 4: Improving transparency: What does IATI have to build on?

The session was chaired by Smita Singh from the William and Flora Hewlett Foundation, who emphasised that IATI was about increasing the transparency of the aid that donors give – while it touched on other aspects, such as budget transparency and CSO transparency, it was not about them.

Mr Owen Barder, Director of aidinfo, spoke about the benefits of transparency in reducing poverty. He said the outcome of IATI consultations and aidinfo’s work on use cases pointed to diverse uses of aid information, but common needs, eg for information that was more timely, forward looking, detailed,
disaggregated and traceable through the system. Transparency alone was not enough – information had to be accessible too. He said a one-size-fits-all data base was not the solution – instead, donors needed to recognise diverse needs, and provide the information users wanted in a common international format, with single, consistent reporting. Information intermediaries could help in disseminating data. He invited comments on aidinfo’s draft cost benefit analysis of IATI, which estimated that the costs to current signatories of implementing IATI would be in the range of $4-8m, with efficiency gains of an estimated $4-10m year and effectiveness gains of at least $1.8-5.8bn a year, resulting in a net benefit of at least $1.6bn a year – the equivalent of a permanent increase in ODA of around 1.3% pa.

Ms Mandalo Nyambose, Assistant Director, Debt and Aid Division, Ministry of Finance, Malawi spoke about her country’s experience of tracking aid. She noted that prior to 2005, there were no aid data, only data on debt. The Ministry of Finance consulted users and providers of information to design a format in excel. Data were initially used for macroeconomic planning, to help provide a basis for project monitoring and improve budget comprehensiveness. As data collection and analysis improved, the system grew and they used it for annual reports on aid inflows, quarterly project monitoring and calculating indicators of aid effectiveness and dependence. Malawi adopted an AMP with support from UNDP in 2008, in order to improve impact on poverty through improved aid effectiveness. Again, donors and providers were consulted on the format. All support is recorded, including through NGOs, and self-administered aid. They use donor score cards as an incentive to encourage donors to report on time. Some challenges remain eg some donors are reluctant to provide information regularly and quality assurance of data is hard. Their vision for the future is improved process and outcomes for tracking aid, more donors to input directly into the AMP, and IATI to support their efforts to get data from non-DACs and NGOs.

Ms Hedwig Riegler, Chair, WP-STAT and Head of Statistics, Austrian Development Agency said that aid reporters faced unmanageable requests for information that diverted effort and led to quality issues and reporting fatigue. Her group were sceptical about the how of IATI, not about the vision. Writing down definitions isn’t enough - you need a common understanding, and that is hard and takes time. A common standard should build on what is there already, especially the DAC standard – it does not fulfill all needs, eg aid management at local level, but it should be the starting point. Automatic data exchange is impossible, and this causes problems, eg with double entry of donor outflows and country inflows. IATI presents the solution of a common standard - we’re told it’s not an all-in-one system, but that is difficult to believe when you see the papers – a common electronic format and a long list of items is a system, however you describe it, and it is parallel to other existing systems – will they go away? A better option would be for IATI to play an important facilitating role in strengthening existing systems and making them better. Systems should be communications vessels, and IATI should allow them to move at their own speed, acknowledging that there is a limit to timeliness in the interests of preserving data quality. Better predictability is not just about future data, it has to overcome existing obstacles, eg Austria’s budget legislation. She felt there was too much detail, and traceability was too difficult, and shouldn’t be in the common standard. IATI should talk to WP-STAT as a standard setting body – the key is common understanding.
Mr Richard Carey, Director, Development Co-operation Directorate (DCD), OECD-DAC – said he brought the perspective of those who have been monitoring aid for 30 years. He noted the importance of helping aid recipients manage their own countries, acknowledging that coordinating this information, and working with national systems was hard. Better information was key to all Paris Principles but there is a distinction between aid reporters (who are interested in backward looking data) and aid planners and managers, who need forward-looking data. He noted radical commitments on transparency and predictability in the AAA – the DAC was tackling the latter through the DAC survey, giving 3-5 year predictions on aid. He said aid agencies hadn’t been operating with aid information as a management tool – it was now, and it had to be seen as a benefit, not a cost. He warned of chaos if the means of monitoring climate change information was different from that used for aid – he said aid reporting should provide the basis for reporting on climate change information – there must be consultation on this, and the DAC had a proposal.

Jean-Louis Sarbib, CEO of Development Gateway reported the findings from the two IATI pilot studies. He said most donors had adequate HQ systems in place but these lacked forward looking and impact data, plus what you see at HQ and local levels sometimes varies. Information on off-budget aid is a priority for partner countries. Forward-looking data are not readily available, and timeliness, quality and comprehensiveness vary. Alignment between financial years is needed. The transaction costs of reporting are high, with many formats, and lack of common definitions and interpretations. IATI could help with standard terminology, a code of conduct for funders and CSOs to promote transparency and consistency, and a standard format to reduce transaction costs. More pilots were needed, donors needed to alter their information systems at local level, and focus on forward-looking and impact data, stakeholders needed to give priority and resources to this, and a tool for aggregation and utilization was required. In summary, the demand for timely, consistent, transparent information was high, and IATI had to add value in two ways: at partner country level, reducing transaction costs, empowering governments to manage their aid more effectively and enhancing coordination, and at global level, being able to aggregate IATI compliant data, improving timeliness and complementing the DAC with information from non-DAC donors, foundations and NGOs, and aligning with financial years. This would promote accountability and make meaningful analysis quicker and easier.

Questions

The financial benefits of aid transparency were disputed – it was suggested that some might decide that no size fitted them, and that costs would go up, not down. The need to include information on mitigation as well as adaptation in relation to climate change information was noted. The importance of tracking the humanitarian envelope was emphasized. The need for capacity building for CSOs to use this aid information was raised. It was suggested that the analysis wasn’t difficult in academic terms – people wanted better information for different purposes, the solution was a common standard so that information could be traded – this should not be hard, but people were offering alibis for not acting.

Owen Barder agreed with the last speaker and said that rather than building more and better databases, we needed to liberate the data so that others could do smart things with them. He said that all academic studies pointed to the positive benefits of transparency and he was happy to share statistics on this. Ms
Nyambose said the AMP was quite user friendly, and people could teach themselves to use it. Mr Sarbib emphasized the role of technology in sorting the problem of systems not talking to each other – we can do this. Richard Carey agreed technology was changing and enabling. Partner countries should have help in developing national systems, and information from donor systems should be better too. He agreed on the need to address mitigation costs though was not sure on how this would be done yet. He said the return on investing in transparency was high.

Session 5: Improving transparency: what role for IATI?

The session was chaired by Mr. Christian Poortman, Director of Global Programmes of Transparency International.

Mr. Brian Hammond, Chair of the IATI Technical Advisory Group (TAG) informed that the proposals on the set of aid information to be published by donors and on the draft Code of Conduct were developed by the experts of the TAG, which now count over 100 among representatives of donors, partner countries, CSOs, aid information experts, etc. They drew on the consultations with partner countries and CSOs, donor-fact finding missions and the two IATI pilot studies. Most of the data were in donor systems already, but were not being published. The plan was to begin work on the definitions and common data exchange format in 2010. The adoption of Freedom of Information acts in a number of countries has changed the transparency discourse towards proactive disclosure. It was suggested that countries which have adopted such legislation should exchange on their experiences and lessons learnt in order to inform the work on the standards. In the course of 2010, the TAG hopes to do more pilots in partner countries.

In presenting the proposal on part 1 of the IATI standards (set of aid information to be published), Mr. Hammond informed that IATI’s focus is on responding to the needs of partner countries for more detailed, quality and timely information. IATI adopts a phased approach and full use of existing standards and systems, such as the ones developed within the OECD/DAC and in support of country AIDs and classifications. The IATI standards should be flexible (eg customizable to country budgets) and be updated over time. The intention is to focus on larger aid flows by using thresholds to balance the costs and benefits of reporting. IATI strives to be practical and not to replace the reporting formats that donors have, but rather to standardize the data within them in order to make it easily accessible and comparable. The IATI information should be available in the main official language used between the partner country and its development partners. In terms of the phases, the intention is to begin with the implementation of phase 1 at end of 2010, while the timeline for phases 2 and 3 is to be negotiated. Aid information covered in phase 1 is largely already available in donor systems and the OECD/DAC Creditor Reporting System.

Mr. Henri Valot, Policy Advisor, CIVICUS and Mr. Alex Gerbrandij, Aid Effectiveness Advisor, European Commission made a joint presentation on the proposed Code of Conduct (part 4 of the IATI standards), which was developed by the experts of the TAG. The Code of Conduct is not about implementing the
accountability agenda, nor is it a legally binding instrument. It commits donors to voluntarily publish and report aid information on their official development finance in line with the transparency commitments in the Accra Agenda for Action. It is not about duplicating DAC or country systems, but offering complementarity; not a central database, but about putting aid information in the public domain; not technical, but political - about access to information. There are no validation or compliance procedures and mechanisms unlike with the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative. It is expected that the signatories to IATI would become signatories to the Code of Conduct. At present, there are 18 signatories and hopefully more donors would join. The approval process for the Code of Conduct needs to be discussed (e.g. one option would be to go through the WP-EFF and in the case of the EU this would have to be a separate process as some EU Member States are not members of the OECD/DAC). While working with the WP-EFF, Mr. Hammond suggested that those signatories to IATI which would like to go with a quicker process of approval and implementation of the IATI standards should be allowed do so. The reporting practice of donors at the country level suggests that this is possible.

Following the presentations, participants formed 5 break-out groups as follows:

- **Group 1: Review of proposal on what information will be published**
- **Group 2: Review of proposal on the Code of Conduct**
- **Group 3: How will information be published? Discussion on emerging thinking**
- **Group 4: How can IATI best support partner country aid information management systems?**
- **Group 5: How do we ensure IATI information is accessible to all stakeholders?**

**Group 1: Review of proposal on what information will be published**

Approx 20+ people attended this break-out group chaired by Kevin Colgan of Irish Aid. Everyone present stated their support for IATI and their commitment to increasing transparency. Several donors (including Norway, Austria, Australia and Switzerland) were concerned that the list of what is to be published is too detailed and lengthy. They were concerned that this would not enable them to quality assure the data, resulting in wrong data being disseminated through IATI. It could put too much burden on statisticians and country staff to provide and quality assure the information. Particular concerns were raised about results information (need clarity on what IATI wants); that data under 02 of the standard will be laborious to prepare for publication eg tranche release documents will need extracted to be from other documents; and that documents from preparatory stages of projects are usually internal, subject to change and often not in English. Monthly reporting was too ambitious.

They advocated a slower and more phased approach to allow data integrity. They preferred to start with a shorter list of what is to be published, based on partner country needs. It was better to start small and do it properly. Further information to be published could be added later, in a more phased approach.
A number of partner country representatives (mostly civil society) stressed the importance of publishing information, highlighting issues such as the need to see the relation between donor projects and national plans/results; to provide information early to governments so they can include it in their databases and inform the public of donor projects, and to include information about gender. One civil society representative expressed some disappointment at what had been said at the break out group, given that those involved in IATI are understood to be the leading and most progressive voices on aid transparency. DFID said that their experience echoed that of Brazil – publishing data about their projects had created a big incentive to get the data right and ensure that decisions were strongly evidence-based. In their experience, aid transparency had the potential to drastically improve the effectiveness of aid.

The TAG Chair indicated that the phasing and thresholds shown in the list were intended to start with readily available data and progress to information that is not already published in later phases. The scope of the information proposed reflected the partner and country consultations and priorities. There would be a facility to distinguish data that had received final quality assurance and data that had not. He encouraged participants to use the extended consultation period to make specific comments on items that should not be in the standard or be in later phases. He encouraged donors who have proactive disclosure policies in place, such as DFID and the World Bank, and those countries with Freedom of Information Acts, to share their experiences.

**Group 2: The Code of Conduct**

Members of the group raised a number of concerns about the process to date, such as who had drafted the document, and who had been consulted. Most members of the group felt that the process needed to be strengthened in future and include more of the relevant stakeholders at an earlier stage.

The main comments on the substance of the draft Code were:

- Several speakers felt the code should place obligations on partner countries too (in the interests of mutual accountability, and because results reporting needs to involve partner countries too);
- Participants suggested that the code should focus more on guiding principles, rather than technical detail.
- There were questions about whether IATI, with only 18 signatories, has sufficient critical mass. The WP-EFF process was suggested as an alternative approach to IATI, as it includes all 23 DAC members including large donors such as the US and Japan. However, others felt that IATI was at the vanguard, seeking to make tangible progress more quickly.
- There was a general feeling that attempting to agree the code of conduct by the end of 2009 was premature, and that the code should instead be the last part of the IATI standards to be agreed.
• Some concerns were raised that this could be a parallel process, and that monitoring should instead be based on existing mechanisms.

• Several donors questioned how, in practice, they could push transparency down through the implementation chain given that partners such as NGOs and most UN agencies have not signed up to IATI, and asked why they should have responsibility for this;

• IATI was asked to clarify its exit strategy, as there were some concerns about whether IATI is becoming an organization rather than remaining an initiative with a limited lifespan.

**Group 3 - How will information be published? Discussion on emerging thinking**

The session started off with a presentation from Owen Barder. He explained that this work was just starting, so this was to be a discussion on some of the emerging thinking. The presentation used weather data to highlight how decentralized publication of data in common formats allows others to access it to build their own websites and databases. This can improve the dissemination and accessibility of data by promoting the proliferation of diverse applications, which was demonstrated by a niche application for runners that merged data from a watch, mapping software and weather data.

We heard the emerging thinking for IATI was to deploy a registry as a signposting system for IATI data where donors will register details about where their data are published and how to access them. This model would allow donors flexibility to publish their data in a way that suits them - centrally through HQ or through country offices, automatically or manually – as long as they register their location on the registry. If this is done using a common format, access to the data could be manual or automated, as the registry will know where the data are. The following points were raised by the group:

• Timeliness can comprise quality and data needs to be marked as verified or non-verified data
• The cost of exporting data in IATI format should be low, if the data exist
• IATI will use DAC definitions. The DAC data could feed into the registry as verified data.
• IATI does not envisage developing a portal to provide access to data itself, but we would hope that initiatives such as AidData and others will fulfill that role
• Training and support modules will be required for donors.

The users of information (intermediaries) felt that the registry model is a good one for them. They also highlighted some of their main requests for IATI:

• Data should be openly licensed & allow commercial use
• Add value to aid data by linking to other data (e.g. which services resulted from this money)
• Data should be disaggregated, and provided in raw machine readable formats
• CSOs are key development actors and need capacity (& funds) to report and use information
• More info about the process for defining the how and what it means for each stakeholder.

**Group 4: How can IATI best support partner country aid information management systems?**
The session was co-chaired by Ms. Madalo Nyambose, Assistant Director, Debt and Aid Division, Ministry of Finance of Malawi and Ms. Sarah Cooke, Aid Effectiveness and Accountability Department, DFID, UK.

Participants shared their experiences in setting up AIMs. In Malawi’s case, the government had first looked into what information it needed and for what purposes. This had allowed it to communicate clearly with donors and to ensure their support for the system, as well as the commitment of government staff who manage it. For Bangladesh, it was important to link aid and related information to the objectives of poverty reduction and climate change and then to the budget. The Dominican Republic is in the early stages of setting up its AIMs. The system should be part of the dialogue and partnership between the government and donors to keep track of aid and have better aid information. The expectation from IATI is to provide common definitions and standards, so partner countries and donors can speak the same language. It is also important to build the capacity of the staff who work on the AIMs. Burundi stressed that while their AIMs (AMP) has been in place since 2006 and local staff have been trained, the main problem is the provision of timely information by the donors. Donors often said that they do not have enough staff to report to the system. Malawi informed that over time they have reached an agreement with the donors on the reporting schedule and that at the end both the government and donors value the analyses produced by using the system. In Malawi, the gains from the dialogue with donors on budget support have contributed to the success of the AIMs. It was further suggested that methods of peer pressure, such as issuing of scorecards of donors performance in terms of provision of information to the AIMs has proven to be effective. Another incentive for donors to report is how transparent the AIMs is and whether access to the system is available to the public. In the case of Indonesia, it was difficult to introduce one comprehensive system of aid tracking since a number of government agencies have their own systems. IATI would help by setting the standards. In the case of the Democratic Republic of Congo, the AIMs (AMP) was introduced in 2008. The Government has requested donors and line ministries to nominate focal points and has trained them to enter the data. The difficulty is that not all donors have staff to work on this and that a lot of staff in the line ministries do not have access to the internet or to a computer to enter the data. The Government produced an aid map for 2008 and presented it to the June 2009 forum on aid effectiveness in the country. It became evident that the budget only captured 11% of the ODA in 2008.

There was a discussion on the issue of forward spending information and planning processes of partner countries. How transparent should forward spending information be and how it relates to the wider discussion at the country level on transparency of public expenditure planning? It was stressed that the discussion on donors’ forward spending plans should take place during the formulation of PRSPs and sector plans and that donors should commit to the 3-year planning frameworks and not let them fall off the cliff. Another suggestion was for IATI to put domestic accountability on the table. In this regard, the role of parliamentarians is important. For example, the pilots missed an opportunity to discuss aid transparency with parliamentarians.

Recommendations:
• IATI to raise the political pressure for better performance and transparency of donor organizations. Push for a culture change.
• IATI to put in place an incentive structure for donors to comply and provide information. The costs of non-compliance are too low.
• IATI to encourage donors to provide information at the country level to partner country AIMs.
• More evidence is needed from the country level to inform the development of the standards and therefore more IATI pilots should be planned in the months to come.
• Common standards and definitions are very much needed (disciplining effect/common language/alignment in the behavior of donor and partner countries). However, the standards have to be flexible and take into account the different partner country AIMs.
• Put the domestic transparency agenda on the table. Role of parliamentarians.

Recommendations with regard to priority areas for capacity development support to partner countries and what IATI can do:

• IATI to better define its role in the capacity development area.
• IATI to facilitate capacity development support, but not to deliver it. IATI to identify where the capacity development gaps are and what the costs and benefits are to fill the gap.
• Specific areas where partner countries need support: Advice on setting up AIMs. Training of staff on AIMs and how to analyze the data. The best systems won’t make a difference if staff are not able to use them.
• IATI to disseminate best practices on how aid information can be used at the country level.
• Simple IT tools and data in order to avoid major capacity development needs that cannot be met.

Group 5: How do we ensure IATI information is accessible to all stakeholders?

The session addressed three questions:

1. What are the key barriers to stakeholders in donor and recipient countries accessing information about aid?

Participants agreed that there are multiple stakeholders in this process: governments are central, but civil society (in its widest sense), and citizens and their legitimate representatives are crucial to monitor and hold governments to account. Both governments and CSOs have a duty to ensure aid information reaches citizens.

There are both technical barriers – internet access and literacy and linguistic issues – and cultural barriers – how the information is perceived. CSOs and other intermediaries can play a role in overcoming these barriers by re-purposing the data for different stakeholder groups. The use of mobile technologies should be considered to overcome issues with internet access.

Participants also discussed the need for feedback loops to ensure that information flows in both directions.
2. How can IATI help to support these stakeholders in accessing information?

Participants agreed that it was essential that IATI provide support to help users access information. IATI could do this by:

- ensuring there is comparable, consistent information that can be transferred between different systems
- producing detailed and accessible user guides in multiple languages
- supporting intermediaries who can improve accessibility to the data; at the least providing information in a way that is useful to intermediaries

What other initiatives exist to promote greater accessibility of aid information? How can IATI add value to these, and where are the gaps?

Other initiatives to promote greater accessibility to aid information include the Citizens Observatories in Latin America and the various Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS). IATI must ensure that the information produced by IATI can be transferred between these different systems.

Session 6: Plenary discussion on group feedback

Rapporteurs from each group presented the summary findings from their group discussions. This was followed by a question and answer session.

Questions and answers:

A participant from Group 1 pointed out that several donors insist on simplicity in presenting the aid data and that each donor has different needs in terms of data delivery that have to be taken into account. It was also suggested that another Code of Conduct is not needed if donors implement the commitments made in the Paris Declaration or the EU Code of Conduct on division of labor. A participant asked if IATI would actually have a validation process for ensuring the quality of aid data and whether it would become like the ISO. Clarification was sought also on the presentation of how information will be published and whether the registry is a platform. With regard to the last question, the rapporteur of Group 3 responded that the registry will serve as a guide source of where the information resides and will not be a platform.

Session 7: Closing

Mr. Maarten Brouwer, chair of the session informed that the IATI Steering Committee will meet on 30 November 2009 to examine the feedback from the IATI Conference. IATI is a coalition of the willing and a global effort to share better aid information, improve the relationship between donors and partner countries and, ultimately, contribute to poverty reduction. He urged participants to send to the IATI
Secretariat concrete inputs and comments on the proposals. He also sought suggestions as to how the number of signatories to IATI could be increased.

Mr. Martin Dinham, Director-General of the Department for International Development (DFID) of the UK thanked participants for the very rich and rewarding conference, the quality of the debate and level of enthusiasm. He stated that aid works best when it supports national ownership, when it is aligned with national development plans and systems, harmonized, and when donors and partner countries are accountable for the results they have to deliver. Better aid information is essential for meeting these objectives. Broader ownership of the development process by parliaments, CSOs and citizens cannot be envisaged without access to information. The same is true for mutual accountability. Throughout the regional consultations and the conference, the strong demand from partner countries and CSOs for more detailed and timely aid information has been confirmed. But such information would also help donors do their job better. IATI has to build on the work and statistics of the OECD/DAC and the aid information systems at the country level. It is important to have a productive collaboration between IATI and the OECD/DAC and its WP-STAT. Some key issues with regard to aid transparency have emerged from the discussions. First, access to information can catalyze profound change in the development relationship. Second, while political momentum must be maintained, IATI should also listen to the concerns of donors and be flexible in moving forward with the agreements. Third, there is a need for more clarity on the implications of IATI for different actors. Fourth, IATI should not pursue a one-size-fits-all approach. Fifth, there is a need for cultural change in donors to commit to provide more transparent aid information and a need for partner countries to demand and challenge its provision. Lastly, transparency can incentivize results and, in DFID’s own experience, improve donor’s performance.

Mr. Dinham called on all stakeholders to continue to participate and shape the process. It should not be left to the technical experts. IATI has to be a multi-stakeholder initiative. He also stressed the urgency of achieving results in the current context and helping citizens in donor countries understand what aid institutions do. Lastly, Mr. Dinham thanked the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Netherlands for their tireless efforts as advocates of IATI and hosts of the Conference.

Mr. Rameshore P. Khanal, Finance Secretary, Ministry of Finance of Nepal thanked the organizers for the rewarding consultation. He noted that while all actors agree more or less on the problems and solutions in the area of aid effectiveness, more needs to be done in terms of implementation. He called on participants not to forget the goals of fighting poverty and reaching the MDGs. Improving transparency is a crucial step in this direction. During the financial crisis, there is no place for complacency. Donors should use country systems and partner countries should improve their national systems and the transparency and accountability of public spending. In implementing the commitments of the Paris Declaration, partner countries are putting in place systems that support results-based budgeting and monitoring of public resources, MTEFs and aid information management systems. More aid should be on budget. Recipient governments have problems with accessing information on projects.
that are off budget. At the same time, they are not in position to refuse such aid interventions since they contribute to meeting the needs of local populations.

Mr. Khanal called on partner countries to take the opportunity and participate fully in IATI and the development of the standards. Nepal was among the first partner countries to endorse the IATI Accra Statement and is a member of the IATI Steering Committee. He further urged more donors to sign up to IATI, including new donors. Furthermore, Mr. Khanal welcomed the participation of CSOs in IATI and called on them to be transparent actors. Lastly, he encouraged transparency at the country level. Transparency empowers people to ask questions and hold governments to account. Nepal had introduced measures for fiscal disclosure at the local level and the results were impressive. It was time to act and turn transparency into reality. We should not settle for half-measures.
# APPENDIX

## Full list of participants

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