

Response to the Open Data Consultation and proposed next steps for the UK's Open Government Partnership country plan

N.B. This response covers the first two strands of the UK's Open Government Partnership plan, with particular attention paid to the transparency and accessibility of aid information.

Publish What You Fund welcomes the Government's consultation on Open Data and its desire to establish a culture of openness and transparency in public services. DFID has shown admirable leadership and investment in increasing the transparency of its aid information, both domestically and on an international level, particularly through the OECD-led process of the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness and the development of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard.

The UK is a signatory of IATI and DFID was the first donor to publish aid information to the IATI standard earlier this year. The Government should now move to improve the quality of the information it publishes and should prepare to publish all aid information, encompassing all UK departments that spend official development assistance (ODA) and any development-related flows, such as climate finance funds. The next step for DFID specifically is to improve and complete the information released to the IATI Registry.

1) Commitments proposed as part of the Open Data Consultation

a) Setting standards

The UK Government has committed to the following:

- *For standardised data co-ordinated across government, set the definitions of the data to be provided and their context.*

b) Collecting and publishing the right data

The UK Government has committed to the following:

- *Developing data.gov.uk and identifying other digital channels to support users in finding and accessing relevant high quality data and easy to use tools and applications.*

Policy Challenge Questions:

1. An enhanced right to data:

The Government can establish stronger rights for all stakeholders through legislation, particularly the use of secondary legislation. Official guidance for government departments, agencies and public service providers would help to improve disclosure (both quality and quantity), especially in arms-length bodies and remote offices, such as DFID country offices, where central initiatives are not always well understood or implemented.

2. Setting transparency standards:

A UK-endorsed international transparency standard for aid information – the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard – was agreed in February 2011. The Government should work through IATI with other governments to develop the standard so that is fully applicable to the full range of aid and development related flows.

3. Corporate and personal responsibility:

Extending aid transparency to contracting relationships with companies and organisations is an important process in achieving fully open and transparent data on UK aid. DFID's engagement with NGOs is already underway, especially through organisations such as Bond, and agreement

has been reached. The following elements will help to complete this process and demonstrate best practice:

- support and advice for NGOs to implement IATI efficiently, including software development;
- work with NGOs to create linkages back to DFID-funded projects, in order to generate traceability;
- adding IATI to contracts with companies undertaking aid;
- improving and expanding the UK Aid Transparency Guarantee accordingly.

5. Government sets the example:

Data.gov.uk is an important step in delivering Open Data. All aid information that is published should be linked to IATI and compatible with the agreed common standard for aid information. Aid information published on the [IATI Registry](#) should be comprehensive, timely, comparable and accessible extending to all government departments administering ODA and non-ODA development flows.

6. Innovation with Open Data:

The Government should provide funding to data wranglers and innovators to enable processing, analysis and visualisation of the data produced by Government. This will foster the translation of open data into accessible data and will help to increase the ability of all stakeholders – including business, civil society and watchdogs – to hold public service providers to account.

2) Overseas development aid: transparency and accountability

“The UK Government will include the OGP eligibility criteria and related datasets in our overall assessment processes which determine the readiness of partner governments for UK budget support.

This will further strengthen our approach which is based on robust assessments of partner governments' commitment to improving public financial management; strengthening human rights; increasing domestic accountability and reducing poverty. We will also use our commitment to spend up to 5% of budget support (as additional funds) on strengthening local accountability to support progress against related OGP goals.

We will publish aid information from all government departments who spend overseas development assistance (ODA) in line with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standards, extending coverage to other departments in addition to the Department for International Development. Within 12 months, we will have agreed a clear timetable for publication of aid information with relevant departments.”

We welcome the Government's inclusion of aid transparency in the OGP plan. Below are suggested next steps and improvements to ensure the plan delivers significant improvements to the Government's aid transparency agenda:

1. The specified **timetable for publication** should include all government departments who spend overseas development assistance, including:

- CDC Group plc, the Government's development finance institution – detailed, disaggregated information regarding both the capital it commits to equity funds and the investments those funds make in businesses in the developing world.
 - Export Credit Guarantee Department – publication via the IATI Registry of the ECGD's disbursements of official debt relief on export credit debts.
 - Foreign and Commonwealth Office – the FCO provides ODA via a variety of channels, including the British Council, Chevening Scholarships and peacekeeping.
 - Department for Energy and Climate Change – publishing in line with the IATI standard DECC's contribution to the Environment Transformation Fund and other ODA spending.
 - Ministry of Defence and the Conflict Pools – this includes expenditure on "hearts and minds" components of stabilisation operation.
 - Other government agencies and bodies that provide aid and related flows, including the Scottish Government, the UK Border Agency and HM Treasury (primarily Gift Aid and EC Administration).
2. **IATI's optional components should then be implemented** across all UK ODA and non-ODA development flows and all Government Departments. These components include the publication of:
- current and forward-looking data;
 - geo-coding;
 - specifying where exemptions to publication are being made, why they are made and what the appeal mechanism is;
 - information on results and conditions;
 - activity-level budgets.
3. **DFID's aid information publication and data quality in the IATI registry**
- As discussed above, the next step is for DFID to improve and complete the information released to the IATI registry by addressing the following elements:
- **Bringing disbursement information up to date –**
 - IATI data is currently not up to date. For example, DFID's data on 2010 disbursements is only around a third of commitments.
 - publishing the reason for non-disclosure. For example, disbursement data for Afghanistan is not published, though commitment data is. If this information cannot be disclosed then the reasons for non-disclosure can be published, on a case-by-case basis. It is unclear why commitment information is disclosed but disbursement information would not be.
 - **Project documents** – publication of all project documents.
 - **Linking project data with procurement and contracting** – both sets of information are already published (the latter on "Contractfinder") but cannot currently be mapped.
 - **Clear and consistent identification of contracting/implementing agencies** – providing full names for every company or organisation to avoid confusion (and start collecting the Companies House Registration numbers or equivalent unique ID).
 - **Functional systems for enquiries** – DFID's practice of having a single enquiry point is not in itself problematic. However, an underlying system for sending enquiries to the correct staff is essential.