



## IATI Reflection - Current state

This paper is one of two prepared to support the strategic planning process foreseen as part of the 2018 Institutional Review of IATI<sup>1</sup>, which identified the lack of a formalized 3-5 year strategic plan as one of the constraints to ‘core technical, networking and relationship-building, communications and other functions and tasks from performing and progressing to their potential’. In accepting the recommendations of the Governing Board and its associated working group, members requested the Board to work with the Secretariat to develop a new strategic plan for endorsement at the 2019 Members’ Assembly. The analysis and questions presented here form part of the initial consultation, and responses will inform the development of a Strategic Directions Paper.

A companion paper, **Scanning the Horizon: Future Directions for Development Cooperation Data Transparency & Partnerships in the Context of the 2030 Agenda for Sustainable Development**, takes a global look at the development environment and open data ecosystem in which IATI operates, leading to wider questions around whether IATI is well positioned to contribute in this environment, both now and in the future.

Input is welcomed from a broad set of stakeholders, not limited to the immediate IATI community.

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<sup>1</sup><https://iatistandard.org/media/documents/archive/2018/06/F1.-IATI-Insitutional-Review-Final-Report-18-June-2018.pdf>

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## A. IATI's original intent and current objectives

The [initial aims of IATI](#)<sup>2</sup> were determined at the Third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra in 2008, and this ten year anniversary is an opportune moment to reflect on what IATI has achieved; whether further work is needed to achieve its current vision and mission; and given the progress made, to consider whether the scope of work remains the most effective to deliver the support needed in the context of the 2030 Agenda. This question should be considered in the context of an evolving development financing and partnership landscape that increasingly moves beyond ODA.

In 2016, members agreed to the following vision and mission for IATI:

Vision

*“Transparent, good quality information on development resources and results is available and used by all stakeholder groups to help achieve sustainable development outcomes.”*

Mission

*“The IATI community works together to 1) ensure transparency of data on development resources and results; 2) ensure the quality of IATI data is continually improved and responds to the needs of all stakeholders and 3) facilitate access to effective tools and support so that IATI data contributes to the achievement of sustainable development outcomes.”*

During the same Assembly, members agreed to the recommendations of the Governing Board on five key strategic objectives for the 2016-18 period, namely **1. Promoting Data Use; 2. Improving IATI data quality, breadth and depth; 3. Maintaining and improving the IATI Standard; 4. Communication and Outreach; and 5. Institutional Arrangements.** An annual plan and budget were developed around these objectives over the next two years.

## B. Improving IATI data quality, breadth and depth

Publisher numbers and volume of data have both increased significantly, with organisations collectively sharing detailed information on more than 1.1 million humanitarian and development activities. Analysis from the 2017 Annual Report showed a figure of \$145 billion of disbursements reported in 2017, and an increase of 26% in the number of publishing organisations to 600 (rising in 2018 by a further 50% to over 900). This growth was due in part to the influence of donors such as the foreign ministries of the

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<sup>2</sup> We, representatives of developed countries responsible for promoting development and Heads of multilateral and bilateral development institutions, and representatives of philanthropic foundations, meeting in Accra on 4 September 2008: Welcome the commitments in the draft Accra Agenda for Action by all donors 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”, “support information systems for managing aid”; and “provide full and timely information on annual commitments and actual disbursements”

Netherlands and Belgium, which joined the UK in imposing requirements for implementing organisations to publish in 2015 and 2017 respectively.

Quality of published data continues to vary widely, though the overall trend among major donors is positive with more and better data openly available and refreshed on a more frequent basis. Annual reports have shown year upon year improvements in the timeliness, comprehensiveness and forward-looking information published.

IATI has taken a number of actions to support publishers to improve the quality of their data, offering dedicated support to targeted publishers, and introducing tools such as the [IATI Dashboard](#)<sup>3</sup>. A new datastore is currently under development and a validation service is being commissioned, and both are expected to be available during the early part of 2019. Through the Data Use Fund, a project is underway to look at introducing direct feedback mechanisms between data user and data publisher, in recognition of the fact that data use and data quality go hand in hand. However, the ultimate responsibility remains with publishers themselves to take corrective actions to improve their data and address the challenges around data quality when these present a barrier to use.

### C. Promoting data use

Members agreed in 2016 on the importance of putting measures in place to promote and increase data use, particularly at country level, and approved the Data Use Strategy 2017-19<sup>4</sup>. Members agreed to five key objectives, including the establishment of a \$250,000 fund, and set up a Data Use Task Force (DUTF) under the leadership of the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) Chair bringing together experienced practitioners from across the community to identify and fund projects to raise awareness, improve tools and strengthen the integration of IATI data into partner country government internal systems. Integration with national Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS) and further work through Development Partner Forums were also identified as priorities. The Strategy recognised the unique opportunities and capacities of different groups within the IATI community, and assigned responsibilities for taking certain actions to deliver the Strategy.

The Data Use Fund supported activities as diverse as the training of groups of young journalists in Ghana to use IATI data routinely in their enquiries, and the publication of an online catalogue mapping existing data use tools and guidance on using them. Data Use Fund activities were very well received and met with some measure of success locally and within the open data community. Member organisations such as UNDP, DfID, Bond, USAID and others have delivered workshops and other awareness-raising activities which have found some success for its direct participants, although the results were limited in range.

As part of a series of steps towards strengthening IATI's technical infrastructure, the Governing Board commissioned the development of a **new IATI Datastore** in 2018 to replace the existing datastore, an

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<sup>3</sup> <http://dashboard.iatistandard.org/index.html>

<sup>4</sup> <https://iatistandard.org/en/news/iatis-new-data-use-strategy/>

online service that holds all activity data published to IATI in a single queryable database. This is therefore a core product for IATI and once available (anticipated by April - June 2019) the new Datastore will provide a more robust, timely and comprehensive data service that can be used by developers and data scientists to produce information products tailored to their specific needs. With this key infrastructure building block in place IATI will have the potential to scale up the number of publishers and data exponentially in the future, and stay ahead of demand.

Despite the fact that more and better data is available, it is not yet systematically used by partner country governments for policy-setting, as originally foreseen. **D-portal.org** is counted among the key tools for accessing and using data, rather than the systematic import of data into country systems as originally foreseen. Providers of Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS) have carried out pilot projects in countries such as Senegal, Rwanda, Chad, Cote d'Ivoire, Myanmar and Madagascar but it is not clear that these pilots have yet led to the systematic import of IATI data into national financial systems.

## **D. Maintaining and improving the IATI Standard**

The IATI Standard has evolved and seen both major (eg Version 1.x → Version 2.x) and minor (eg Version x.1 → Version x.2) upgrades since it was agreed in 2011, to ensure it remains fit for purpose and useful to increasing numbers of publishing organisations and stakeholder groups.

The humanitarian community saw potential benefits to using IATI's established Standard by agreeing to the Grand Bargain at the World Humanitarian Summit for humanitarian actors to *"publish timely, transparent, harmonised and open high-quality data on humanitarian funding within two years, with IATI considered as providing a basis for the purpose of a common standard"*. IATI responded by adding fields in Version 2.02 that were drawn up in close consultation with the humanitarian community, to meet its specific needs. 2.02 also added elements to support publication of data on the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) at goal, target or indicator levels.

These additions show that IATI remains a flexible standard, that offers more and more stakeholder groups the opportunity to use it for their purposes than the original intended beneficiaries. Interoperability with other standards is also an essential aspect to maintain.

The IATI community agreed at its most recent Technical Advisory Group meeting to deprecate Version 1 of the Standard in June 2019, and will continue to make recommendations to members as necessary to ensure rigour in the maintenance of the Standard to ensure it remains fit for purpose.

## **E. Outreach and communications**

### Outreach

IATI's primary goal for outreach efforts in the early years was to **generate political support** for the Standard and to **increase the numbers of publishers and partnerships** until the volume of data reached

critical mass. Simultaneously, work was undertaken to increase the numbers of partner country governments having potential use for the data, and to welcome their representatives as members in order to ensure **national perspectives** continued to be reflected in the Standard. When the financial model based on membership contributions was introduced in 2013, outreach efforts also included some larger providers of development cooperation who had not yet joined as members.

IATI has frequently been present at key global events at the UN and the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, among others, to establish key partnerships and remain at the **forefront of discourse around transparency and open data**. Members have led and participated in a range of side events and taken part in thematic discussions, and IATI has been represented in different fora including at the OECD-DAC Working Party for Statistics, the Standing Committee on Finance of the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change and most recently the UN Forum on Forests, taking an opportunistic approach to advocate for IATI with new communities when possible. During the past two years, targeted outreach efforts have focused increasingly on **promoting data use**.

## Communications

In 2017, members recommitted to **retaining the same acronym and name for IATI**, and approved the development and promotion of a **new brand and logo** (2017) and the building of a **new website** (2018). The website now provides a one-stop shop for all IATI news, technical guidance, tools, products and archives; promotional materials such as short videos and a stronger presence on social media have helped to promote the initiative. Further improvements have also been made to **D-portal**, which has become a key tool for users to have visibility over financial flows to countries and one of the most familiar and well-used tools for many demonstrations of IATI data.

These advances have contributed to the rapid expansion of publisher numbers over the past 12-18 months and better quality of data being published, with the availability of improved technical guidance an important factor. However, challenges remain in raising awareness IATI to a wider audience, both on the supply and demand sides. Retaining the word 'Aid' in its name presents a barrier to some potential partners who perceive IATI as less relevant outside of the development and humanitarian sectors. South South and Triangular Cooperation providers for example are not inclined to engage with IATI or publish their data in IATI, seeing the initiative as overly focused on aid and finance, and not an appropriate way of publishing relevant data on their non-financial contributions. Partnering with some key SSC providers would be an opportunity to clarify what IATI can offer and make any enhancements so that it could be used as a transparency platform for blended finance.

Data users in different sectors are not aware of the vast store of data that is already available in IATI. If they are aware of it, they see it as simply a transparency requirement as opposed to a rich seam of data available to be used in their own sectors. As an example, the UN Forum on Forests searching for data on forest financing for its planned new Clearing House was surprised to learn that IATI already has the majority of the data they need for this work, but the group only became aware of IATI and the potential for partnership by chance.

These examples are a reminder of the need for clear, systematic and targeted communications to underpin the strategic outreach goals members set for the initiative over the next 3-5 years, and a detailed communications plan and a separate marketing plan will need to be developed based on the direction chosen.

## F. Governance and institutional arrangements

Institutional arrangements have undergone significant modifications since an independent evaluation<sup>56</sup> undertaken in 2015, bringing broad benefits to the initiative. The former Steering Committee was replaced by a **Members' Assembly**, and a representative **Governing board** was formed in 2016 which has continued to gain strength, providing strategic advice to members and guiding the work of the Secretariat between annual MA meetings. The Board meets on a quarterly basis and has worked to put in place stronger **accountability frameworks and monitoring arrangements**, and is undertaking measures to further improve transparency within the work of the Secretariat and the Technical Team.

Following the 2018 Institutional Review, members endorsed the Board's recommendations for the initiative to remain hosted within a UN environment for a further three years up to December 2022. Further work is already underway and will continue during this period to strengthen accountability across the initiative and improve its overall effectiveness. The Governing Board and its working groups and task forces will continue to review the need for adjustments throughout its structures to ensure IATI is well positioned to achieve continued expansion. Among these reviews the Board will make recommendations to members for their consideration in the areas of governance, hosting, membership, legal entity, resource mobilisation, outreach, communications and core technical functions.

## G. Technical considerations

In August 2018, a [technical audit](https://iatistandard.org/documents/421/IATI_Evaluation_2015-Report-1-IATI-as-a-Political-Initiative.pdf)<sup>7</sup> was undertaken to consider how to handle the 'technical debt' that had built up through the organic growth of the IATI infrastructure, to determine which of IATI's multiple tools and products should be prioritised as core tools, and to agree which should be developed in-house, and which should be outsourced. The key focus was to identify ways to strengthen the core of IATI to cope with the expansion of publisher numbers and increasing amounts of data now and in the future.

The Board accepted audit recommendations which included focusing the work of the technical team on **core data products** and prioritising the **management of the outsourced development of a new Datastore and Validator** since so many other products rely on these functioning reliably. In regard to tools for using

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<sup>5</sup> [https://iatistandard.org/documents/421/IATI\\_Evaluation\\_2015-Report-1-IATI-as-a-Political-Initiative.pdf](https://iatistandard.org/documents/421/IATI_Evaluation_2015-Report-1-IATI-as-a-Political-Initiative.pdf)

<sup>6</sup> [https://iatistandard.org/documents/422/IATI\\_Evaluation\\_2015-Report-2-Synthesis-Report.pdf](https://iatistandard.org/documents/422/IATI_Evaluation_2015-Report-2-Synthesis-Report.pdf)

<sup>7</sup> [https://iatistandard.org/documents/665/IATI\\_Technical\\_Audit\\_team\\_report.pdf](https://iatistandard.org/documents/665/IATI_Technical_Audit_team_report.pdf)

data, the audit agreed that management and **maintenance of d-portal** should remain a priority until it is redesigned to work with the new Datastore, once available.

The audit also made some observations on the governance side, noting that the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) meetings had grown to a point at which they had become a learning and networking opportunity to enable increasing numbers of new members to learn about IATI for the first time, and that the forum was no longer meeting its primary objective of convening experts to provide technical advice around the evolution of the Standard. This was even more apparent during the 2018 TAG in Kathmandu, Nepal which drew greater numbers of new attendees than ever before.

While the learning and networking aspects of such gatherings are important and should be addressed, there are those among the community who feel that the TAG no longer meets its primary purpose of convening technical experts, and this key function is not therefore systematically dealt with in any forum. The audit recommended further and more detailed review of the possible mechanisms that could be introduced to ensure that the technical community continues to engage at the most appropriate entry points, and that the future of the Standard continues to be stewarded in a consultative manner.

*This paper is one of two shared to support initial consultations around the IATI Strategic Planning exercise. The following is a reminder of the process to be followed.*

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**Annex: Strategic Plan outline process map**

