HUMANITARIAN REPORT

BETTER INFORMATION FOR A BETTER RESPONSE

The basics of humanitarian transparency

Photo: EU/ECHO/Pierre Prakash

AUTHOR:
Chloe Parrish

DATE:
May 2016

Global Humanitarian Assistance

Development Initiatives

Executive summary

The World Humanitarian Summit provides an unprecedented opportunity for increased political momentum on the issue of transparency. Calls for improvements in the quality, availability and use of data on financing for crisis prevention and response have run through the consultations and are reflected in the key recommendations of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing in its report to the United Nations (UN) Secretary-General, and the report of the UN Secretary-General himself.[1] Both of these call for all agencies to publish data on their humanitarian activities to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard to meet key transparency-related requirements and, in doing so, contribute to improving the operational effectiveness and accountability of humanitarian assistance.

This is not just a top-down or technical issue: recent crises including the Ebola virus disease outbreak highlight the consequences of inadequate information. Demand for financial transparency and traceability is also gaining momentum at a local level. A growing number of new citizen- and non-governmental organisation (NGO)-led initiatives aim to improve visibility of funding in crisis-affected countries, such as the Earthquake Response Transparency Portal in Nepal, and the Charter4Change initiative, which aims to increase and track funding to local actors in emergencies to enable a more locally led response.[2]

Key recommendations

The '3Ts' of humanitarian transparency are the core requirements of data on the resources available and employed for humanitarian action to meet the wide-ranging information needs of global and local actors. They are:

- **Traceability:** being able to 'follow the money' through the transaction chain from donor to crises-affected people
- **Totality:** reflecting all relevant resource flows including and beyond humanitarian assistance, bridging the humanitarian and development reporting divide
- **Timeliness:** real-time data on available resources to ensure an up-to-date picture in fast-moving humanitarian settings.

Publishing full and comprehensive data to the IATI Standard could support some of the improvements necessary to meet the 3Ts, particularly in relation to information on financing. However, the information available from IATI data is only as good as the quality and comprehensiveness of the data published, so publishers need to ensure their data is published on a timely basis and is comprehensive enough to enable meaningful analysis.

Significant improvements are needed in the number of IATI publishers and the quality of data published for the resulting information to have any significant impact; both will take time and effort. International actors need to invest in building greater transparency at all levels, by building awareness and capacity among local, national and other international actors.

While the comprehensive and timely publication of IATI-Standard humanitarian data would provide much of the required information highlighted by the High-Level Panel and the UN Secretary-General on financial resources, as well as improving the availability of data that meets the 3Ts of humanitarian transparency, publishing to IATI is not the 'silver bullet' to improving the effectiveness of humanitarian assistance. Critically, IATI is not designed to address outstanding data gaps on risk and needs; substantial further investment is still needed to improve the availability of such information in order to plan and deliver an appropriate response.

In relation to financial resources, while IATI publishers represent a wide range of actors, its focus on international development cooperation means data is not published for other important and sizable resource flows operating in crisis contexts, such as domestic government financing or remittances. However, it does provide the basis for vastly improved information availability on international flows and, combined with separate improvements in data compatibility and open budget standards, the foundations are being laid to improve future comparability with these wider resource flows.

Furthermore, the widespread availability of high-quality, timely data will not in itself improve decision-making, operational effectiveness or accountability. Alongside investing in improving the availability of comprehensive data on humanitarian assistance, investments must also be made to encourage and support its practical use, both locally in crisis-affected countries and by decision-makers operating at the international level.

This includes support for domestically led platforms that promote accountability and present data in an open, accessible and user-friendly format for a local audience, such as the Earthquake Response Transparency Portal in Nepal. National and local authorities as well as independent organisations should be encouraged to present data to a local audience on incoming resources, which can be used to hold those acting on their behalf to account. With the right investment, the benefits in terms of both operational effectiveness and accountability to affected people would be substantial.

Donors can demonstrate and support the widespread use of IATI data by using it in place of existing reporting requirements. This would reduce the reporting burden currently faced by agencies receiving funding from multiple donors, while providing an incentive to publish good quality data.

Finally, the humanitarian resource landscape is changing radically and rapidly, with new mechanisms being developed to provide assistance that often bypass elements of the more traditional international aid architecture, including direct online giving and crowd funding. To ensure the resource picture is accurate, any publishing standard or reporting platform that aims to capture or present data on a wide range of resource flows must be flexible enough to adapt to and reflect these new mechanisms and relationships between donors and recipients.

GLOSSARY

This paper uses the following definitions for the terms listed:

- **Data fields:** A physical structure in a form, file or database that holds data. A collection of fields makes up a data record
- **Data standard:** Documented agreements on the representation, format, definition, structuring, tagging, transmission, manipulation, use and management of data. Data standards provide frameworks for data publication that enable consistent meaning. They may encompass a technical standard, a standard set of semantics, and a standard format for publication (eg frequency of publication, how data is published)
- **Infomediary:** People or organisations who derive new information (in this context, from data), and communicate this information to an audience
- **International Aid Transparency Initiative/ IATI:** A voluntary, multi-stakeholder transparency initiative, centred around an agreed standard for publishing open, accessible data on resources for development cooperation and humanitarian assistance. See Annex
- **IATI Registry:** The website that provides links to all raw data published by organisations using the IATI Standard
- **IATI Standard:** The technical publishing standard or framework that allows data on development cooperation and humanitarian assistance to be compared
- **Platform:** Software that houses data from various sources in a comparable format, and enables access to and analysis of that data
- **Resources:** Financial or in-kind support made available to provide humanitarian or development assistance
- **Transparency:** The minimum degree of disclosure to which agreements, dealings, practices, and transactions are open to all for verification

Introduction

Transparent reporting of assistance is not just an accounting issue – it has real-world implications for crisis response. In the aftermath of the April 2015 earthquake in Nepal, local communities found they had no access to reliable information on the resources coming into their country and how they were being used, thus compromising the accountability of both the international and locally led response. During the Ebola virus disease outbreak, donors, governments and responding agencies did not have an overview of all the resources being made available and so could not plan accordingly, because humanitarian and development contributions were being reported in different ways, to different platforms and on very different timeframes. Both of these crises show how better data on financial and in-kind flows is important for better operational efficiency, accountability and effectiveness.

It is commonly understood that a lack of reliable, timely data on who is providing what, where and when impairs the planning, coordination and delivery of assistance. However, much of the data currently available is incomplete, inaccurate, inconsistent or inaccessible. Current reporting platforms provide important sources of data but create system-wide inefficiencies, by requiring multiple reporting to different standards and platforms, manual reporting by agencies and significant investigation and curation at the other end. Data from different sources is also all too often not compatible, limiting the ability to join up and compare data to build a richer and more detailed information picture.

There is much current discussion on improving transparency in humanitarian financing. This paper summarises the existing requirements, initiatives and proposals identified through the high-level processes associated with the World Humanitarian Summit. Looking at the '3Ts' of transparency – traceability, totality and timeliness – and taking the examples of the Nepal and Ebola responses, it uses real experiences to explore potential ways of improving financial data and transparency, including through the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI).

Global processes: where does transparency fit in?

The role of resource transparency in humanitarian assistance is not a new issue – data on humanitarian financing has been published by members of the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee (DAC) and a number of voluntary reporters since the 1970s. Likewise, the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) was set up by UN OCHA in 1992 to track funding to humanitarian appeals, with most international government donors, UN agencies and international NGOs now reporting to the FTS on a regular basis.

At the same time, the issue of open data in development financing has been gathering pace for a number of years. The 2008 Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and subsequent 2008 Accra Agenda for Action recognised aid transparency as essential for development results. In the same year, IATI was launched at the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra and has been gaining scope and support since. Transparency has become a central principle of the Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, with progress monitored under the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation since 2012. More broadly, global calls for transparent governance have also gained momentum in recent years and, alongside an explosion in the availability and use of open and big data, this has led to a more detailed understanding of the potential role of data in aid effectiveness. Under the banner of the data revolution, the issue of transparency for development financing is reflected in the Sustainable Development Goals – most notably through Goal 16, which features an explicit commitment to 'develop effective, accountable and transparent institutions at all levels'. It is also seen in ongoing processes concerning the role of data in the UN-led Financing For Development (FFD) initiative – which recognises that 'high-quality disaggregated data is an essential input for smart and transparent decision-making...and can improve policy-making at all levels.'

The humanitarian open data movement of course goes beyond financial data and includes data on populations, risks and resources. It also recognises the need for data to be joined up and speak a common language, so the resulting data is compatible, enabling users to join up data from different sources. The Humanitarian Exchange Language (HXL) is one initiative that provides a common language for operational humanitarian data, while initiatives such as the Joined-Up Data Standards project and the Frictionless Data Initiative are working towards identifying ways in which all open data can be made compatible. In the context of all of these initiatives, the reports of the High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing and the UN Secretary-General's report for the World Humanitarian Summit both recognise the need for a holistic response that brings together humanitarian and development financing, makes the connections between resource flows and is supported by better data for a shared understanding and response.

World Humanitarian Summit

Transparency has emerged as a key foundational theme in consultations leading up to the World Humanitarian Summit. The UN Secretary-General's report for the Summit, *One humanity: shared responsibility*, sets out the 'Agenda for Humanity',[3] asking global leaders to commit to five core responsibilities. The report calls for more investment in data and risk analysis to move from a supply- to a needs-driven approach; and increased transparency and visibility of how a response is costed and resourced. Core responsibility 5, 'Invest in humanity', specifically highlights the need for improvements in the transparency of reporting on disbursements and expenditures, and includes a commitment for all humanitarian actors to subscribe to the IATI Standard.

> Without reliable data, we cannot know who is in need, what challenges they face, what support can assist them and whether interventions are making a difference.
>
> *One humanity: shared responsibility*, **UN Secretary-General**, January 2016

High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing

In May 2015, UN Secretary-General Ban Ki-Moon appointed a High-Level Panel of experts to work on finding concrete and actionable solutions to the widening humanitarian funding gap. The panel identified a set of actionable recommendations, outlined in its recent report, *Too important to fail: Addressing the humanitarian financing gap*.[4] These included the recommendation that all donors and humanitarian aid agencies publish their data to the IATI Standard to improve transparency of humanitarian assistance and the availability of critical information to help allocate resources and plan the response.

A number of other transparency-related recommendations and initiatives have already emerged from both the High-Level Panel and the UN Secretary-General, as well as from other actors and movements before the Summit. These include the following:

> "Transparent and useable data is a prerequisite for increasing efficiency and effectiveness. The more we know about how money is channelled through the global humanitarian system, the better equipped we are to allocate resources effectively and measure results. For donors to provide more flexible and predictable funding they need reliable, real-time, prioritised, comparable and open data on the needs that they are being asked to finance and the results produced by their funding."
>
> *Too important to fail: Addressing the humanitarian financing gap*, **High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing**, January 2016

The 'single global platform'

The High-Level Panel and UN Secretary-General's reports both identify the need for a single global data platform 'with IATI data at its core' that provides open and transparent data, to help reduce transaction costs and increase effectiveness. The High-Level Panel also introduced the idea of a 'generosity tracker'. The ownership, scope and mechanics of these two ideas were not yet clear at the time of writing, nor were the proposed relationships between them and other existing platforms, such as the FTS and OECD DAC's Creditor Reporting System (CRS). However, it is clear that all platforms need to be powered by and to provide good quality, comparable data.

IATI data is the core source on which the single global platform can be built, and can provide the raw material to feed both existing and new systems and platforms.

The 'Grand Bargain'

Based on recommendations by the High-Level Panel and the UN Secretary-General, a group of donors and humanitarian implementing agencies have been working together to agree on a 'Grand Bargain' on efficiency: more predictable, flexible and transparent humanitarian financing from donors; matched by more efficient, needs-based and visible spending from UN agencies and other recipient organisations. Transparency-related commitments in the Grand Bargain are likely to call on both donors and agencies to publish timely, high-quality data on humanitarian funding, and to recommend use of the IATI Standard as a common basis.

As part of the Grand Bargain agreement, agencies are being asked to reduce and harmonise their overhead costs and direct an increased proportion of humanitarian funding to crisis-affected populations. Other commitments include more multi-year funding from donors and increased levels of support for local and national first-responders. Greater transparency is needed to track progress towards all of these areas.

Localisation, the 'Charter for Change' and 'following the money'

The UN Secretary-General's report recognises that local actors are usually best placed to respond to the needs and priorities of communities affected by crisis, and calls for donors and international aid actors to develop concrete targets to increase funding to local partners. Charter4Change is an initiative led by both national and international NGOs to practically implement changes to the way the humanitarian system operates to enable a more locally led response. It calls for increased direct funding to southern-based NGOs for humanitarian action and a commitment to increase transparency around resource transfers to southern-based national and local NGOs.

In its report, the High-Level Panel also points out that it is currently not possible to 'follow the money' from donor through to recipient, and that increased transparency is needed to achieve this. Likewise, humanitarian reporting also needs to enable funds to be followed through the system, from the donor to the ultimate beneficiary, to deliver on and track progress against localisation commitments.

Accountability

Accountability in humanitarian assistance is complex, and can cover a range of different but related issues.[5] The question of accountability towards people affected by crises has been prominent in discussions around improving the delivery of assistance throughout the World Humanitarian Summit process.[6] However, these discussions have largely not referenced the importance of resource-related accountability. Where accountability has been discussed in relation to resources, it has focused on accountability between agencies and their donors, including in the context of value-for-money and counter-terrorism imperatives, and not on accountability towards affected people in the form of access to information on what's been pledged, funded and delivered in their name.

Clearly, donors have a right to know how their funds have been used. However, people affected by crises also have a right to know – and ultimately to influence – what resources have been made available by whom to help them, as well as what assistance has ultimately been delivered, where, when, how, and by and for whom.

Achieving the 3Ts of transparency

Throughout the various discussions around transparency running through recent processes and the ongoing experience of resourcing humanitarian response, three critical dimensions of humanitarian transparency emerge. There is a demand for: **traceability** – the ability to follow the money through the complex financial system to the recipient, rather than simply counting the inputs; understanding humanitarian assistance in its wider context within the **totality** of available resources, including, but not limited to, development financing; and **timeliness** to inform rapid decision-making.

The following three sections explore the role of each of the 3Ts, and how they might be achieved.

Traceability

When assessing the efficiency and effectiveness of resources for humanitarian action, the two most important questions are: 1) Are people affected by crises receiving what they need, when they need it? And 2) Is assistance reaching them in the most direct and cost-effective way? Both are obvious questions to ask, but hard to answer as current reporting only allows us to measure what goes into the system. Having access to data that can provide answers to both of these questions depends on traceable reporting that enables visibility of the assistance ultimately delivered, not just how much money was initially provided. The question of how much has been put into the system is irrelevant if assistance is delivered through comparatively wasteful or time-consuming mechanisms, and less funding spent more efficiently could ultimately do more to meet the needs of crisis-affected people.

Where resources are scarce, efficiency in how they are used is vital. However, traceable reporting on how resources are used would also help to improve the planning, coordination and delivery of assistance – knowing what is being delivered, where, when and by whom can help to avoid duplication and ensure resources are being appropriately targeted to areas of highest need.

Aside from its role in ensuring greater efficiency and effectiveness, traceability – the ability to track funding through the system, from donor through to the ultimate point of delivery – is critical if humanitarian assistance is to be fully accountable to both its donors and its recipients. As previously mentioned, the High-Level Panel report highlights the need for improved transparency from implementing organisations to make it possible to 'follow the money'. In the context of the Grand Bargain, the question of traceability is presented as a critical element in increasing the accountability of agencies to their donors, by enabling funders to see how efficiently their contributions are being spent; and accountably of all partners to provide more visible support to national and local NGOs.

Accountability towards donors is no doubt important, but of equal importance is accountability at the other end of the delivery chain – to aid-receiving communities and, where appropriate, to the authorities of affected states. Demand for information on how incoming resources are used is growing among communities receiving humanitarian assistance, yet the availability of accessible data and information to shed light on these questions is scarce and, in some cases, non-existent under current reporting practices.

> "We need greater transparency from implementing organisations so that everyone can 'follow the money' on its journey from donor to recipient."
>
> *Too important to fail: Addressing the humanitarian financing gap*, **High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing**, January 2016.

Case study: Nepal Earthquake Response Transparency Portal

After the devastating earthquake that hit Nepal in April 2015, international governments, multilateral agencies and private donors responded with pledges of support totalling over US$4 billion.[7] But Nepali citizens and agencies acting on their behalf needed to know more than how much was given; they needed to know how money was spent – where, when, on what and for whom – to coordinate and deliver an effective response. This information was generally not available, making it impossible to 'follow the money' from donor to recipient and compromising the effectiveness of the response, as well as accountability to those providing funding and the people it was intended to help. Local, national and international media all highlighted the lack of information on how and where funds were used, and the potential impact on the overall response.[8]

In response to the demand for information on the assistance being provided, Kathmandu-based technology organisation Young Innovations established the Earthquake Response Transparency Portal, populating it with data from the FTS, media announcements and data published to the IATI Standard.

However, reporting by international donors and agencies only provides information on the 'first-level' recipient – the first link in the transaction chain. In reality, funds pass through various intermediaries before ultimately being used to provide assistance by organisations active locally. Young Innovations and Development Initiatives therefore conducted a traceability study to gather better information on the assistance delivered. A number of donors and agencies voluntarily provided IATI-compliant data on their activities and those of their implementing partners, including critical fields that enable funds to be traced from donor through to the point of delivery. The resulting information bridges a gap in answering many of the questions raised about the lack of available information, by shedding light on the assistance ultimately provided.

Figures 1 and 2 give an overview of the results of the traceability study. Figure 1 shows the flow of funds from donor to delivery, for organisations receiving funding from Irish Aid, and Figure 2 shows what was delivered, where, when and by whom for all the organisations that took part in the study,[9] where the data can be disaggregated down to a single district. Full data can be found on the Earthquake Response Transparency Portal and on d-portal.org.

IATI and traceability

Other studies attempting to follow the money in Nepal and other environments have also found that the required level of information is generally not available.[10] As well as supporting local efforts to improve accountability, the traceability study provided an opportunity to test the potential of the IATI Standard to meet the global need for improved humanitarian reporting. The results demonstrate how traceable data can be used to inform and improve the efficiency, effectiveness, coordination and accountability of the response. They show that, when publishing data to the IATI Standard, if all actors – including donors, UN agencies, international and national NGOs and other local implementing partners – provide good quality, timely data on their humanitarian activities, and complete the 'activity ID' and 'provider activity ID' fields accurately, then systematic traceability of funds through the delivery chain is possible. Where local organisations are not in a position to publish such data themselves, international agencies can offer technical support and, in exceptional circumstances, can even publish to IATI on their behalf as a secondary publisher – though this necessitates systematic access to the required data.

But just publishing data to IATI is not enough – data quality is also critical. While gathering data to populate the Earthquake Response Transparency Portal, Young Innovations found that the vast majority of IATI data was not of sufficient quality to provide useful information. Many important data fields were not completed, and much of the data published was not up to date or was incomplete.

The IATI Standard offers a format and structure for providing useful, usable data, but the actual usability and usefulness of IATI data depends on the quality of the data published. Data quality is improving all the time, with some publishers already providing high-quality data. But there is still a long way to go. Publishers need to ensure their data is up to date and contains enough detail to enable meaningful analysis. For the data to provide valuable and useful information, improvements in data quality and accessibility are needed.

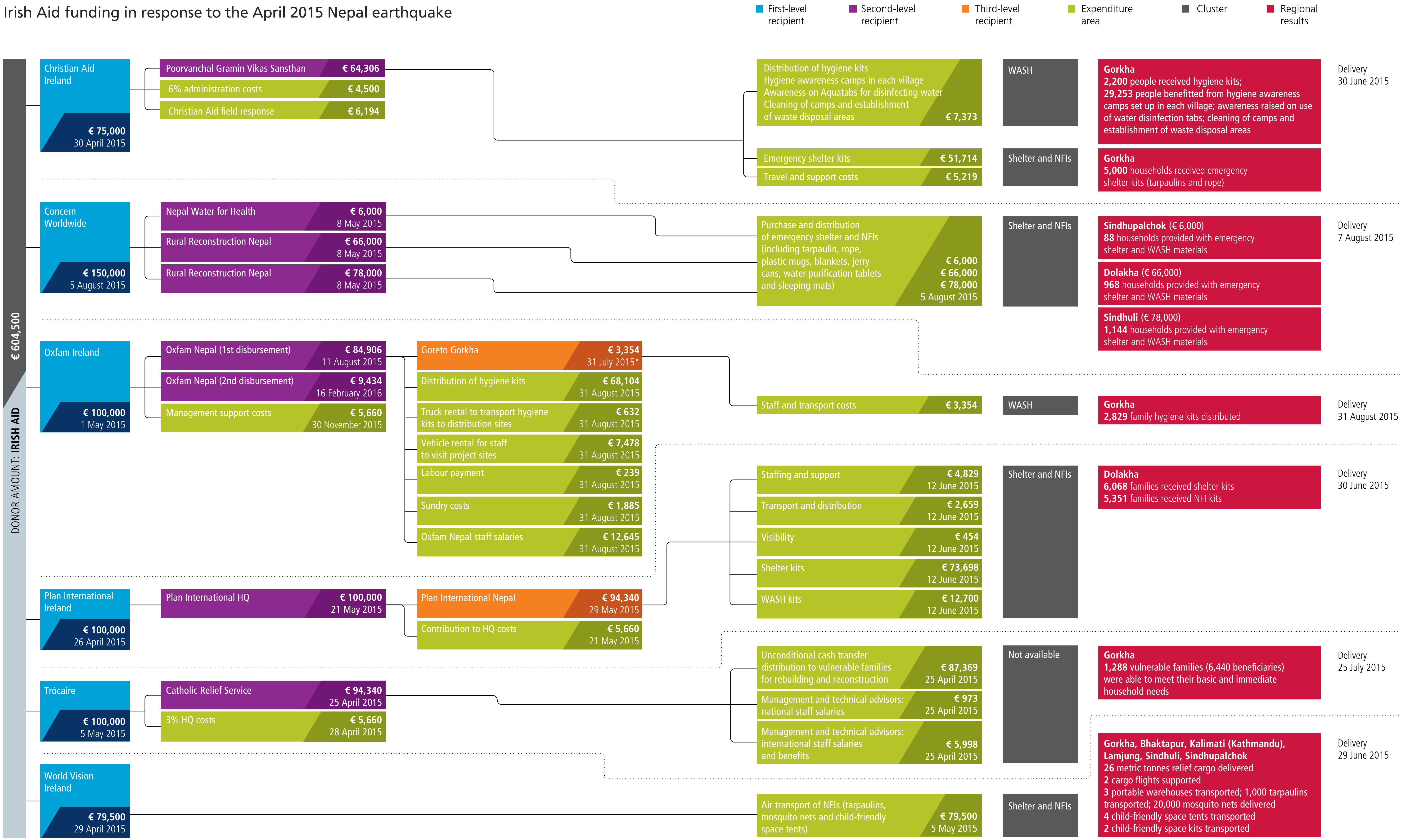
Necessary quality improvements include, wherever possible, publishing data on all of the publisher's activities (greater coverage), and completing all of the recommended fields (greater comprehensiveness).[11] Data accessibility is also critical. Making the data available is the first step, but significant progress still needs to be made to ensure it is accessible by all potential users through developing platforms and analysis tools. This requires a greater collective understanding of how data is used, and by whom, to ensure that it is well targeted and accessible. An active community of data users and 'infomediaries', whose role it is to turn data into information and communicate the findings, is also necessary.

The IATI Registry provides a single point of access for all IATI data. However, civil society organisations, researchers, journalists and interested citizens locally active in a crisis-affected country need access to a range of tools and platforms that use raw data from the Registry and translate it into accessible information, relevant to their needs. National platforms such as the Earthquake Response Transparency Portal established by Young Innovations in Nepal, or the Foreign Aid Transparency Hub (FAiTH) set up by the Government of the Philippines following typhoon Haiyan,[12] are examples of how data can be made relevant and accessible to a local audience. If all actors were to publish comparable and high-quality data to a single standard, these platforms could be fed by existing data, reducing the need to gather it manually from multiple sources and demonstrating the 'publish once, use often' principle of IATI.

By providing good quality data on their activities in an open, accessible and comparable format, such as through publishing to the IATI Standard, international actors can support the development of local platforms promoting local accountability. Investments also need to be made to increase data use, both at a local level and internationally. With the right investment, the benefits in accountability to affected people would be substantial.

FIGURE 1

Irish Aid funding in response to the April 2015 Nepal earthquake

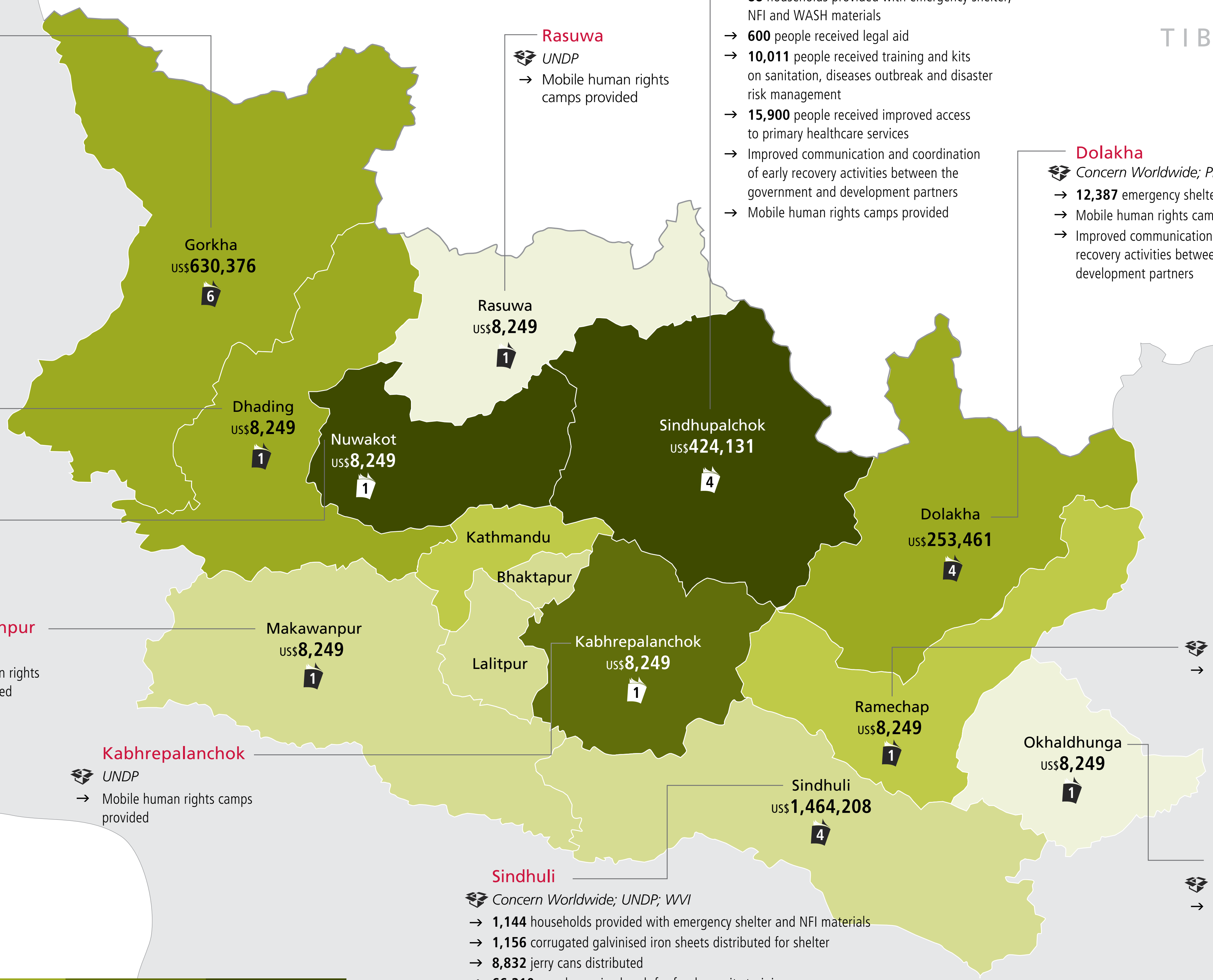


Source: Development Initiatives based on IATI Standard data and data provided by Irish Aid, Christian Aid Ireland, Concern Worldwide, Oxfam Ireland, Plan International Ireland, Trócaire and World Vision Ireland

Notes: HQ: head quarters; NFI: non-food items; WASH: water, sanitation, shelter and hygiene. *Funds released to Goreto Gorkha by Oxfam Nepal before funding was received from Oxfam Ireland; results and clusters disaggregated by district where possible

FIGURE 2

Numbers of people affected by Nepal earthquake by district, and number, value and results of projects delivered by traceability study participants



Gorkha

Christian Aid; Oxfam; Trocaire; UNDP; WVI

- **7** village hygiene awareness camps set up and waste disposal areas established
- **4** mobile hospitals established
- **7,338** emergency shelter kits distributed
- **4,264** people fed for a week after the earthquake
- **2,500** further households received ready-to-eat food packages
- **2,829** family hygiene kits distributed
- **8,250** NFI kits distributed
- **1,288** families received unconditional cash transfers to meet basic household needs
- Improved communication and coordination of early recovery activities between the government and development partners
- Mobile human rights camps provided

Rasuwa

UNDP

- Mobile human rights camps provided

Sindhupalchok

Concern Worldwide; UNDP; WVI

- **88** households provided with emergency shelter, NFI and WASH materials
- **600** people received legal aid
- **10,011** people received training and kits on sanitation, diseases outbreak and disaster risk management
- **15,900** people received improved access to primary healthcare services
- Improved communication and coordination of early recovery activities between the government and development partners
- Mobile human rights camps provided

Dolakha

Concern Worldwide; Plan International; UNDP

- **12,387** emergency shelter/NFI kits distributed
- Mobile human rights camps provided
- Improved communication and coordination of early recovery activities between the government and development partners

Dhading

UNDP

- Mobile human rights camps provided

Nuwakot

UNDP

- Mobile human rights camps provided

Makawanpur

UNDP

- Mobile human rights camps provided

Kabhrepalanchok

UNDP

- Mobile human rights camps provided

Ramechap

UNDP

- Mobile human rights camps provided

Okhaldhunga

UNDP

- Mobile human rights camps provided

Sindhuli

Concern Worldwide; UNDP; WVI

- **1,144** households provided with emergency shelter and NFI materials
- **1,156** corrugated galvinised iron sheets distributed for shelter
- **8,832** jerry cans distributed
- **66,210** people received cash for food security training
- Mobile human rights camps provided

KEY

Delivery organisations

US$ Value of projects included in study data

Number of projects

People affected by housing damage

0 | 50,000 | 100,000 | 150,000 | 200,000 | 250,000 | 300,000

Source: Data on number of people affected taken from MapAction, 2015 (see: http://www.mapaction.org/?option=com_mapcat&view=mapdetail&id=4005). All other data provided by organisations participating in the study (Christian Aid Ireland, Concern Worldwide, Irish Aid, Oxfam Ireland, Plan International Ireland, Trócaire, World Vision International, World Vision Ireland, UNDP, UNICEF)

Note: This figure contains only data for projects where expenditure and results are disaggregable to district level. It is therefore not necessarily representative of the distribution of all response and recovery activities across the earthquake affected region, but demonstrates the level of information that could be available with more widespread publication of detailed data. The full data provided by the traceability study participants can be found and explored on the Earthquake Response Transparency Portal (website) and on d-portal.org. WVI: World Vision International; UNDP: United Nations Development Programme.

Totality

International humanitarian assistance explicitly and specifically aims to provide life-saving support to people in need. However, other forms of international and domestic financing also play a critical role in crisis prevention and response, and recognition of their role is growing as the world faces increasingly complex and interconnected crises. Humanitarian assistance should then be understood in context of the 'totality' of available resources, notably alongside other forms of development financing and international support. In long-term, complex crises such as in the Sahel and Somalia, and protracted refugee situations including the Syria crisis, non-humanitarian financing for resilience initiatives can play a key part in reducing long-term vulnerability. In the Ebola crisis, non-humanitarian health-related development assistance from governments, foundations and global and regional banks played a significant role in supporting the complex response. Climate adaptation finance can also play a key role in reducing long-term vulnerability to climate-related risks.

The Agenda for Humanity rests on this call for a shared responsibility to act, based on a shared understanding of people's multi-dimensional needs and vulnerabilities. The call is underpinned by the need to bridge the often entrenched humanitarian and development divide, but also involves climate and security actors. Clearly an understanding of all resources contributing to the overall response to a particular crisis must underpin improved resource coordination, reduced duplication and enhanced complementarity.

However, there is currently no single source of data that captures and presents up-to-date information on the full range of international resources contributing to crisis response. The OECD DAC CRS provides verified data on all official financing flows from DAC-member states and a handful of other donors that report to the DAC,[13] including on humanitarian assistance. But it does not capture data on assistance provided by the wide range and large number of significant actors who do not. Data is retrospective: given the extensive verification process, data is published up to two years after funding has been provided. The FTS, while more timely, is a platform designed for specific purpose that provides data only on humanitarian assistance and does not currently capture any wider resource flows.

Case study: European Union funding to the Ebola virus disease outbreak

At the height of the Ebola crisis it was not possible to provide a simple answer to the question of whether sufficient resources were being directed to tackle the virus. This was because donors only reported the humanitarian component of their funding to the FTS in a reasonably systematic and timely way. There was no single platform for funding coming from non-humanitarian sources; in cases where it was reported, it was often done so with a significant delay.

The European Union (EU) institutions did, however, provide a positive example of 'total' reporting, as one of the only reporters publishing comprehensive IATI data on all of their aid flows going to the three most affected countries of Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone at the time of the crisis.

In 2015 the EU stated that it was "already helping to strengthen health systems in the affected countries before the outbreak, as part of its long-term support, and is now redirecting existing programmes towards the Ebola efforts and crisis context."[14] As well as directly funding health activities, the EU provided budget support to all three affected countries to help them deliver urgently needed public services – in particular healthcare – and cushion the economic impact of the epidemic. Development funding was also used to strengthen other important areas like education, water and sanitation.

Using IATI data, Figure 3 shows funding for all EU humanitarian and development projects active in the three countries most severely affected by Ebola at the time of the crisis. The qualitative information above provided by the EU regarding the diversion of non-humanitarian funds to support the response shows that humanitarian assistance was just a fraction of total EU resources contributing to the overall response to the crisis, while the data in Figure 3 shows that humanitarian assistance represented only a small proportion of all EU resources flowing into Ebola-affected countries at the time of the crisis. The latest version of IATI would allow publishers to tag funds to a specific crisis, enabling data users to identify precisely which resources are contributing to a humanitarian response – including both humanitarian and non-humanitarian funding.

Humanitarian assistance no doubt played a crucial role in the Ebola response, but the overall response clearly went much further than would be suggested by humanitarian financing data alone.

IATI and totality

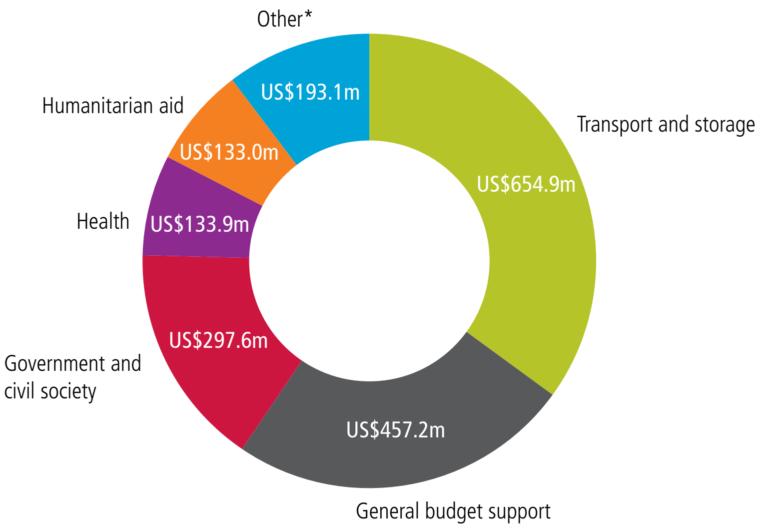
IATI covers international funding flows from a broad range of actors, with over 400 registered publishers at the time of publication including bilateral and multilateral donors, foundations, private sector, academic institutions, and international and national NGOs.[15] Publishing high-quality, timely humanitarian data to the IATI Standard would therefore allow humanitarian assistance – which represented less than 6% of all international financial flows going to the largest humanitarian recipients in 2013[16] – to be considered in the wider resource-related context.

The number and range of donors and mechanisms contributing to humanitarian response is growing. The Nepal earthquake prompted donations from a wide range of donors, including, for example, US$3 million[17] given through the crowd-funding platform and IATI publisher, GlobalGiving. As new technologies develop, online giving grows, and opportunities expand for assistance to be provided in ways that bypass parts of the traditional international aid architecture, any reporting system that aims to capture data on all of these flows needs to be flexible enough to adapt to and meet the needs of these new mechanisms and relationships between donors and recipients. As an open data Standard, IATI relies on the active participation of a community of interested stakeholders, and regular upgrades to the Standard mean that it has flexibility to change in response to changing needs.

Significant progress is still needed to gain a full and detailed picture of all resources contributing to humanitarian response. As well as international resources, for example, domestic assistance provided by the governments of affected states plays a huge role in the response to crises. Domestic governments do not publish data on their budgets or expenditure to IATI, and nor is IATI intended or designed to capture data on domestic flows. However, a number of national and international initiatives, such as the Open Nepal movement, International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Initiative, and the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency,[18] are looking to increase the openness and transparency of government budgets. Combined with initiatives like the Joined-Up Data Standards project,[19] which is working to ensure that all open data standards are comparable and compatible, open government budget and expenditure data could potentially be accessed and used alongside IATI data if it were published to a compatible data standard, to gain a clearer picture of all resources being mobilised in response to crises.

FIGURE 3

Funding from EU institutions to Guinea, Liberia and Sierra Leone published to IATI for projects active between 2014 and 2015



Source: Development Initiatives based on data from the IATI Registry
Notes: *Other includes Population and reproductive health; Agriculture; other multisector; other social infrastructure and services; water and sanitation; forestry and fishing; Environmental protection; education; dev elopement food aid; banking and financial services; business and other services; trade; tourism; energy generation, distribution and efficiency. OECD DAC's average exchange rate for 2014 applied.

Timeliness

In a rapidly changing crisis situation, the timeliness of data and information used to inform decisions is critical. While verified, and therefore reliable, data published to the OECD DAC's CRS is backwards-looking – data can be published up to two years after funding has been provided. The FTS is also strictly curated and aims to provide an up-to-date picture of the resources being pledged, disbursed and expended for a crisis response. However, delays in the availability of data can mean that information is not available at the point at which decisions are made. Automated regular publication and updating of financing data can help to avoid this.

In all humanitarian environments, but particularly in fast-onset and rapidly escalating crises, data that keeps pace with the existing and changing resource landscape is essential. Together with the results of needs assessments and contextual analysis, this information can drive decision-making.

IATI and timeliness

IATI provides a mechanism for the regular, automated updating of data to ensure its timeliness, particularly for humanitarian emergencies, which is advantageous for the real-time management and decision-making purposes necessary in crisis situations. The latest version of the IATI Standard (v2.02) provides a streamlined framework for daily updates of financial and logistical information to be exchanged automatically between donors, implementing agencies and coordination structures, simplifying the process and requirements for timely reporting. This automated updating of IATI data could be used to provide automatically updated data to other reporting platforms such as the FTS or EDRIS, enabling access to rich, timely information from a range of different actors via one data source – 'publish once, use often' in action.

While regular and timely publication to IATI is most beneficial in fast onset and rapidly escalating situations, the majority of humanitarian assistance goes to chronic crises, not rapid onset scenarios. Nevertheless, routine publication of IATI data will make reporting simpler, making regular and timely updates less of a burden. Additionally, there are free online tools and guidance available that are specifically targeted at enabling smaller NGOs to publish IATI data with minimal inconvenience. Ultimately, the data available needs to keep pace, wherever possible, with changes in the financing situation. In order to achieve this, the humanitarian community will need to explore how to strike the balance between maximising the usefulness of very timely reporting to IATI (daily or otherwise), while managing the potential burden this may place on publishers, particularly local implementers.

Conclusions and recommendations

The World Humanitarian Summit offers a unique opportunity to achieve consensus across all actors on the institutional and systematic changes and progress needed to genuinely transform the delivery of assistance so that it is able to better meet the needs of people affected by crises across the world. Political commitments are important, but practical action is ultimately what's needed to make a real difference.

The 3Ts of transparency provide the guiding principles for improving the availability of humanitarian assistance data, so that it can be of real, practical use in improving the efficiency, operational effectiveness and accountability of crisis response. They are important because:

- **Traceable data** allows us to see what comes out of the system, where and when to improve the coordination of response efforts, and accountability to both donors and affected people
- Information on the **totality of resource flows** – including humanitarian, development and other relevant financing – is of growing importance in a world where it is increasingly difficult and irrelevant for humanitarian and development assistance to operate in silos. Access to high-quality, comparable data on all resource flows will better enable them to be used complementarily, improving the links between acute humanitarian response, and longer-term work to reduce vulnerability and support early development opportunities
- In a rapidly changing crisis situation, the **timeliness of data and information** used to inform decisions is critical. In all humanitarian environments, but particularly in fast-onset and rapidly escalating crises, regularly publishing up-to-date data would provide real-time information, which can be used to create an up-to-date picture of the existing and changing resource landscape. Together with the results of needs assessments and contextual analysis, this information can drive decision-making.

Publishing high-quality, timely data to the IATI Standard is one practical step that can be taken to improve the availability of information required by the 3Ts. However, the actual usefulness and value of data published to the Standard depends on a number of factors, as described here.

1. Data should be available for all actors involved in the funding and delivery of humanitarian assistance, to ensure a complete picture of the resource landscape and to enable traceability. This includes bilateral and multilateral donors, the private sector, UN agencies, international and national NGOs, and other local implementing partners. This will require significant investment on the part of all actors but particularly donors and existing IATI publishers, to support and encourage others to begin publishing to the Standard.
2. IATI data should include accurate completion of critical fields, including: the 'activity ID' and 'provider activity ID', other participating agencies (funding, implementing and accountable), sector, actual start and end (where applicable) dates, geo-location and results
3. Organisations should publish data on all their activities in a given context, not just on humanitarian assistance
4. Data should be updated concurrently with changes and developments in the financing situation, ideally daily where appropriate, in rapidly changing contexts
5. IATI data should be used to feed required information to new and existing platforms, as part of the 'Publish once, use often' concept of IATI
6. Again, taking advantage of the efficiency gains of the 'Publish once, use often' IATI model, donors should work together to harmonise their reporting requirements and ensure that the bulk of the information they require from grantees can be accessed through published IATI data, reducing the reporting burden currently faced by humanitarian agencies receiving funding from multiple donors.

Alongside improving the availability of comparable data on risks and needs, if used by all actors involved in the funding and delivery of humanitarian assistance, the IATI Standard provides a good basis for improving operational effectiveness. However, to ensure that publishing to IATI leads to actual improvements in the assistance provided and its overall accountability to both donors and communities affected by crises, investment in data use initiatives are also needed. This should include efforts to foster a culture of data use, and supporting the development of national and international platforms fed by IATI data – which provide information both locally on incoming resources and internationally on the global resourcing picture – to encourage and support widespread access to and use of information for and by everyone.

Annex: The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) – a brief introduction

The High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing and the UN Secretary-General both explicitly recommend that all humanitarian actors publish data on their financing and activities to the IATI Standard. But what is it, how does it work, and why is it relevant?

What is IATI? (And what is it not?)

IATI is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder transparency initiative that seeks to improve the transparency of international development and humanitarian financing to increase its effectiveness. It was launched at the High-Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra in 2008. At the centre of IATI is a data standard, which provides a framework for publishing data on development cooperation and humanitarian assistance in an open, comparable format. The IATI Standard includes a set of data fields, which when completed provide information on organisations, transactions and activities.

IATI is not a platform, or a body that publishers 'report' to.

How does it work?

Organisations publish raw data on their funding and expenditure in XML format, in line with the Standard, hosting it on their own website. A link is then posted in the IATI Registry so that anyone with internet access can find IATI data all in one place. To publish data, organisations can either use an existing tool such as AidStream or the soon-to-be-launched IATI Studio,[20] or they can develop a download or automatic feed from their internal systems.

Can humanitarian data be published to IATI?

Though originally conceived and designed to provide a single publishing standard for development assistance, IATI has recently been through a period of consultation with humanitarian stakeholders to ensure the Standard is able to meet the specific requirements of humanitarian publishers and data users. Using the latest version of the Standard, organisations can now publish data on their humanitarian activities to IATI. This version includes fields specifically developed for humanitarian assistance, and allows activities to be marked as 'humanitarian' and tagged to specific crises and sectors.

How can IATI data be used?

IATI promotes the concept of 'publish once, use often' – generating good quality data and making it freely available so that it can be used in a variety of ways by different people or platforms, either internally by the publisher itself or by a range of external stakeholders, as a single data set or combined with other data. Good quality, comprehensive and up-to-date IATI data from all actors could provide a single automated data source for existing platforms as well as others, reducing the reporting burden while ensuring the wide-ranging availability of information.

Further details on IATI are available from the IATI website, at www.aidtransparency.net, and an additional Q&A on publishing humanitarian data to IATI is available from the IATI website, at **www.aidtransparency.net**

Notes

1 See earthquake.opennepal.net and charter4change.org, and UN (2015) *One humanity: shared responsibility, report of the UN Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit*, February 2016

2 See http:// earthquake.opennepal.net and http:// charter4change.org

3 UN (2015) *One humanity: shared responsibility, report of the UN Secretary-General for the World Humanitarian Summit*, February 2016

4 High-Level Panel on Humanitarian Financing (2015) *Too important to fail—addressing the humanitarian financing gap*, December 2015

5 See the Core Humanitarian Standard (CHS) on Quality and Accountability (www.corehumanitarianstandard.org) and the CHS Alliance (www.chsalliance.org) for further details and an overview of current discussions around humanitarian accountability

6 Reflected in the Special Session to be held at the Summit entitled *People at the Centre*, which focuses on ensuring affected people know what they can expect from aid providers and are able to express their views and concerns, and that humanitarian responders listen and respond to their feedback and perceptions

7 http://reliefweb.int/report/nepal/donors-pledge-3bn-aid-quake-hit-nepal

8 'Fund collection should be transparent', Kathmandu Post; 'How can we ensure every penny of aid is accounted for in Nepal?', The Guardian

9 The data will be available to explore further at www.d-portal.org, by selecting 'Nepal study' in the donors list. An interactive map of projects is available, as well as further information on each including funding organisation(s), implementing organisation(s), budgets, start and end dates and results

10 See *The transformative effects of information for development*, forthcoming report by Integrity Action

11 In particular the 'activity ID' and 'provider activity ID', other participating agencies (funders, implementers, and accountable agencies), sector, actual start and end (where applicable) dates, geo-location and results

12 www.gov.ph/faith/

13 Non-DAC reporting donors include: Estonia, Hungary, Israel, Kuwait (KFAED), Latvia, Russia, Turkey, United Arab Emirates (MICAD), Bill and Melinda Gates Foundation. Full list of multilateral agencies reporting to the DAC is available at www.oecd.org/dac/stats/dataportals.htm

14 http://europa.eu/rapid/press-release_MEMO-15-4507_en.htm

15 For a full list of publishers, see the IATI Registry at http://iatiregistry.org/publisher

16 Development Initiatives (2015) Global Humanitarian Assistance Report 2015.

17 UN OCHA Financial Tracking Service

18 opennepal.net, internationalbudget.org/opening-budgets/open-budget-initiative, fiscaltransparency.net

19 http:// juds.joinedupdata.org

20 www.aidstream.org and www.iatistudio.com

Acknowledgements

This report was written by Chloe Parrish, Policy and Engagement Advisor at Development Initiatives. The author would like to thank colleagues and stakeholders who provided valuable contributions and comments as the report was developed: Charlotte Lattimer, Daniel Coppard, Carolyn Culey, Joni Hillman, Martin Horwood and Sophia Swithern at Development Initiatives for content and editorial guidance; Simon Murphy and Jen Claydon for editorial and production support; Lylaa Shaikh and Arnaud Galinie for data and analysis assistance; Lisa Doherty and Michael Shanahan at Irish Aid, Niall O'Rourke at Christian Aid, Sheila Garry at World Vision Ireland, Michael O'Riordan at Oxfam Ireland, Orla Duke at Trócaire, Anne-Marie McCarthy at Concern Worldwide, Linda Fuhrmann at Plan International, Abdul Riza at UNDP, Rekiya Adamu-Atta and Sanjana Gaddam from UNICEF, Elie Gasagara at World Vision International, Anton Jensen and Dr Philippe Maughan at the European Commision, and Stephan Mankart at Young Innovations for their support collecting and providing data.

This is an independent report. The analysis presented and views expressed are the responsibility of Development Initiatives and do not necessarily reflect those of the contributors or their organisations.

BETTER INFORMATION FOR A BETTER RESPONSE

The basics of humanitarian transparency

Global **Humanitarian** Assistance

Development Initiatives

Development Initiatives' vision is for a world that invests in humanity and where everyone can share the benefits of opportunity and growth.

To find out more about our work visit:

www.devinit.org

Twitter: @devinitorg @gha_team
Email: info@devinit.org

North Quay House, Quay Side, Temple Back, Bristol BS1 6FL, UK

Typeset by: Broadley Design

Development Initiatives is the trading name of DI International Ltd. Registered in England and Wales No. 05802543.

Development Initiatives Poverty Research is the not-for-profit partner of DI International Ltd. Registered in England and Wales No. 06368740.

Registered office: North Quay House, Quay Side, Temple Back, Bristol, BS1 6FL, UK

UK office

Development Initiatives Ltd
North Quay House, Quay side
Temple Back, Bristol, BS1 6FL, UK
T: +44 (0) 1179 272 505

Kenya Hub

Development Initiatives Ltd
Shelter Afrique Building
4th Floor, Mamlaka Road, Nairobi
PO Box 102802-00101, Kenya
T: +254 (0) 20 272 5346

Uganda Office

c/o Development Research and
Training (DRT), Ggaba Road
Mutesasira Zone, Kansanga
Kampala, PO Box 22459, Uganda
T: +256 (0) 312 - 263629/30