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reaching the potential of IATI data

report

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Executive summary

Development and humanitarian actors of all types have traditionally faced challenges accessing quality, timely, forward-looking and comprehensive data on resource inputs and results. In 2008, the [International Aid Transparency Initiative](#) (IATI) was launched as a voluntary multi-stakeholder initiative to improve the transparency of aid, development, and humanitarian resources. In particular, IATI aims to provide partner country governments with the information that they need on resources coming into their countries. This remains a critical aspect of ensuring effective use of all resources in tackling poverty.

IATI has come a long way in a short period of time. More than 500 organisations are now publishing data on their activities in a common open data standard. This is a significant success, dramatically increasing the availability of comparable data on resources from a critical number of bilateral and multilateral donors, development finance institutions, foundations, non-governmental organisations and businesses. While it is recognised that the quality and scope requires continuous improvement, there is now significant potential for increased use of this growing wealth of data for decision-making and accountability at country level. Indeed, realising this potential is seen by many as the next important step in IATI's evolution and success.

This review seeks to bring together the available evidence on existing use cases for IATI data. It explores which barriers need to be overcome to grow the use of IATI data and how actors across the IATI community can collaborate in doing so. The focus of the analysis is the use of data within aid recipient countries.

The potential opportunities and benefits presented by IATI are widely seen to include:

- **increased effectiveness** – through the use of more timely, forward-looking and comprehensive data on aid and development resources to inform planning and decision-making
- **increased efficiency** – through access to a wealth of data on many actors in one standard, which, especially if joined up with national information systems, will reduce the transaction costs of data collection and free up time for data analysis and its use
- **increased accountability** – through the use of data on donors' and implementing agencies' commitments and investments by parliament, civil society organisations, the media and citizens.

High-quality, timely and disaggregated data on needs and financial resources is critical to achieving and monitoring progress on national development plans, regional and global progress commitments. Indeed, a data revolution is widely acknowledged to be an essential component of delivering the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs). In this context, IATI data has significant potential to help decision-makers and those holding them to account achieve the priorities they set at country level.

However, there are few situations in which their information needs will be met by a single type or source of data. Information on international financial resources will be most useful where it can be joined up to data on domestic resources. Even greater potential lies in the ability to join up data on all resources, needs and results. In the first place, the use of data on development cooperation needs to be understood in the context of the systems and processes that underpin public financial management, planning and monitoring at country level. Beyond this, the collection and use of development cooperation data takes place in a wider national statistical system of official and non-official data producers and users.

In our review, we find that to date there are relatively few examples of systematic use of IATI data, but those there are demonstrate significant potential:

- Currently, the most prevalent use of IATI data is to enhance donors' and development partners' communications at headquarters level, making an important contribution to increased transparency and accessibility of information.
- In a growing number of instances, partner countries are demonstrating leadership by bringing IATI into their resource planning processes, and beginning to derive clear value from integrating IATI data into national aid information management systems (AIMS).
- Nationally and internationally, there are still few examples of IATI data use for research, analysis or in accountability efforts, and still few examples of ongoing use of IATI data by non-government stakeholders.

The key barriers that need to be overcome to increase IATI data use include:

- **A lack of awareness of IATI and its potential at national level** among all key audiences including government, development partners and civil society, with notable exceptions in some IATI partner countries.
- **The need for demonstration of clear added value of IATI data** in the context of established systems and processes through which country-level users access and use data and information on development cooperation.
- **The inconsistency in quality and scope of some publishers' data**, and the need to improve publishing of data elements, which are particularly relevant at national level.
- **The limited capacity, resources and tools** available to support data use in country.

Given the potential value of IATI data, there is a need to nurture a virtuous circle of engagement and feedback between data producers, users and intermediaries. Across the IATI community, all stakeholders have important roles to play in this, with clear leadership from partner countries being of particular importance.

We offer the following recommendations in this regard:

- Partner governments, donors, civil society, AIMS providers and intermediaries should intensify collaboration to increase awareness, share skills and provide mutual support for data use, in particular at country level.

- Partner countries, with support from the IATI community, should prioritise IATI data exchange with national aid and public financial management information systems.
- IATI's donor champions should redouble efforts to ensure proactive engagement on IATI data use by their country offices, particularly through, but not limited to, development partner coordination fora.
- The IATI Secretariat, working with the wider IATI community, should increase its efforts to raise awareness and understanding of IATI beyond the current community and particularly at national level, and invest in key infrastructure tools for data use.
- The IATI community, and in particular infomediaries, should develop stronger partnerships with decision-makers and accountability actors at the country level, and work to demonstrate the value of IATI data, to develop tools and to provide capacity support grounded in the information needs and local context.
- Finally, publishers need to continue improving data quality to ensure its usability, encouraging and responding to feedback in particular from in-country users.

Introduction

Development and humanitarian actors of all types have traditionally faced challenges accessing quality, timely, forward-looking and comprehensive data on financial resources and results. As part of a wider movement aimed at increasing effectiveness of development aid and at a stronger orientation towards partnership and mutual accountability in its delivery,¹ the [International Aid Transparency Initiative](#) (IATI) was launched in 2008.

IATI has since grown as a voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiative focused on improving the transparency of aid, development and humanitarian resources in order to increase their effectiveness in tackling poverty. A central aim of IATI is to provide partner country governments with timely and comprehensive information on resources coming into their countries, to empower them to improve planning and implementation of development efforts.

In the relatively short space of time since its launch, IATI has come a long way. 2011 saw the first organisations publishing their data to IATI, starting with the UK Department for International Development (DFID). At the start of 2017, more than 500 organisations, including the major bilateral, multilateral and private providers of development finance, local and international non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and others are publishing data on the funding and activities according to the [open IATI data standard](#). The initiative is now governed by a [Board](#) and the [Members' Assembly](#), with a [Secretariat](#)² providing technical, communications and outreach support to IATI's stakeholders.

As IATI's – now widely established – relevance as a leading open data initiative enabling greater transparency of international development resources continues to grow,³ there is clear consensus within the IATI community that emphasis now needs to be placed on the quality and use of the wealth of data that is becoming available.⁴ Demonstrating how the use of IATI data in decision-making and accountability can help inform and improve development outcomes, especially at the country level, is the real test of the initiative's potential. It is also critical to maintaining and deepening the commitment of publishers to making timely, high-quality and comprehensive data available.

Meeting the information needs of planners, implementers and advocates will typically require more than a single type or source of data, however. Data on international financial resources will be most useful where it can be joined up to data on domestic resources. Even greater potential lies in the ability to join up data on all resources, needs and results. In the first place, the use of data on development cooperation needs to be understood in the context of the systems and processes that underpin public financial management, planning and monitoring at country level. Beyond this, the collection and use of development cooperation data takes place in a wider national statistical system of official and non-official data producers and users.

It is in this context that Development Initiatives (DI) developed this report. Starting from a strong commitment to IATI's success, it seeks to critically evaluate how and by whom IATI data has been used to date, what efforts have been undertaken to support IATI data use and what challenges need to be overcome to increase the uptake of IATI data. The analysis and recommendations developed here will, we hope, be a useful contribution as the IATI community works to support data use. For our part, we will use them to help inform DI's own contribution towards this goal as part of the wider community.

In this report, we aim to provide a synthesis of the available evidence produced by many colleagues across the IATI community and to add further insight in key areas. To this end, we reviewed the available practitioner literature and available tools, and conducted a series of interviews during the second half of 2016.⁵ The study was primarily carried out as a desk review supplemented by remote interviews. This places clear limitations on our findings, and we highlight these where particularly relevant in the text. While we hope to have developed a fair assessment of the state of IATI data use, we have no doubt omitted examples and perspectives that would have further enriched the analysis. We look forward to hearing about these from the IATI community, and to collaborating further to build our understanding of data user needs, challenges and approaches to addressing these.

IATI data use in the literature

Since the launch of the initiative, a small body of evidence has emerged on the demand for, use of and support for use of IATI data. For the most part, this documentation has been developed as part of IATI's own work and that of various practitioners from across the wider IATI community. Early studies include DI's 2009 scoping report,⁶ the materials from the first IATI country pilots⁷ and a wealth of documents concerning the development of the IATI standard including meeting proceedings, case studies and communications materials, all available on [IATI's website](#). Important recent documents include Integrity Action's literature review on IATI in the wider context of aid information use,⁸ USAID's 2015 study on demand for and use of aid information at country level,⁹ and valuable materials on the integration of IATI data in country AIMS, notably the two reports from 2016 by Brough and Geddes¹⁰ and Development Gateway.¹¹ In addition, multiple online resources, blogs and tools have provided useful insights for this review.

The early materials in particular tend to identify a wide range of potential users for IATI data, including partner country governments, especially finance ministries and central banks; civil society organisations (CSOs) and NGOs working on advocacy and service delivery from the global to the local level; parliamentarians; academics, researchers and journalists; donor institutions; and citizens.¹²

All of these audiences are described as standing to benefit from more comprehensive, timely and open data on development cooperation. The use cases described across the literature fall across three related categories:

- **Increasing transparency**, through application of a common and open reporting standard that enables a wide range of stakeholders to access and use comprehensive, comparable, timely and forward-looking data on financial resource flows for development.
- **Increasing efficiency and effectiveness**, through the use of IATI data in planning, coordinating and mobilising resources for development interventions. Also, IATI data was expected to inform analysis and advocacy that would contribute to greater efficiency and effectiveness.
- **Increasing accountability**, through the use of IATI data by a range of official and non-official accountability actors to monitor delivery and results, detect corruption and other problems, and advocate for improvements.

From IATI's beginnings, the focus was on how the initiative would add value to decision-making and accountability on development in partner countries. Starting with the initial scoping,¹³ early consultations with partner countries,¹⁴ the first country pilots¹⁵ through to

recent in-country research,¹⁶ the relevance of the initial use cases and IATI's ability *in principle* to address these have repeatedly been confirmed.

Table 1: Potential use cases for IATI data described across the literature

Actor	Transparency	Efficiency and effectiveness	Accountability
National Ministry of Finance	Increasing access to information	Planning, budgeting	Monitoring
National Planning Authority		Planning, budgeting	Monitoring
National line ministries		Planning, budgeting	Monitoring
Parliament and other accountability institutions		Planning, budgeting	Monitoring, anti-corruption
Donors and other development partners		Planning, budgeting	Monitoring
Donors and other development partners (in-country)		Planning, budgeting, coordinating	Monitoring
NGOs and CSOs		Planning, implementation, advocacy, fundraising	Monitoring, advocacy
Local government		Informing, planning, budgeting	Monitoring, advocacy
Local CSOs		Informing, advocacy	Informing, Monitoring, advocacy
Media		Informing	Informing
Private sector		Planning, business development	–
Academia and think tanks		Analysis	Analysis

Likewise from early on, the importance of linking aid to domestic resource data and the need for IATI to connect with in-country aid management and public financial management systems and processes was highlighted.¹⁷ Key benefits expected from IATI then and now include increased availability of more timely, forward-looking and comparable data; greater visibility of off-budget resources; and contributions of donors without a country presence as well as private actors' such as foundations and NGOs.

With a now significant publisher base and a desire in the IATI community to demonstrate the benefits of the growing body of data, it is time to assess which of the expected uses and benefits have materialised so far.

Findings on IATI data use and efforts to support it

In this section, we provide an overview of the evidence for different uses of IATI data in practice and an analysis of efforts to promote use IATI data by different actors.

IATI data use in practice

In less than 10 years, IATI has developed into a leading open data initiative through which more than 500 major providers of development cooperation, humanitarian assistance and other types of development-related finance publish their efforts in a common data standard. This is a major achievement. While it is clear that use of this data to improve development outcomes is the real test of success, it is equally clear that use depends first and foremost on the availability of a critical amount of data. This important hurdle has arguably been cleared, with a significant and growing number of publishers committed to IATI as an initiative as well as to continuous improvement of data. On this basis, a critical evaluation of data use can inform the setting of ambitious goals to increase use, while not underestimating the importance of the achievements so far.

In our review, we find that to date use of IATI data remains limited in purpose and location. Overall, the most prevalent use of IATI data is by donors and development partners to provide more accessible information to their home constituencies. However, there are important emerging examples of other uses – including at country level – indicating the relevance of and future direction for increased efforts to promote use.

Increasing transparency

By far the most evident current use case for IATI data in practice is in information portals set up by donors and development partners. Principally, these aim to make information about resource providers' efforts more accessible to interested audiences. Due to their focus on (mostly) individual providers, these efforts primarily serve to demonstrate transparency and accountability to a home country or international audience.

There are at least 12 such portals currently operating, spanning major bilateral aid providers as well as multilateral actors (see Table 2).

Table 2: Examples of IATI-driven information platforms by major donors and development partners

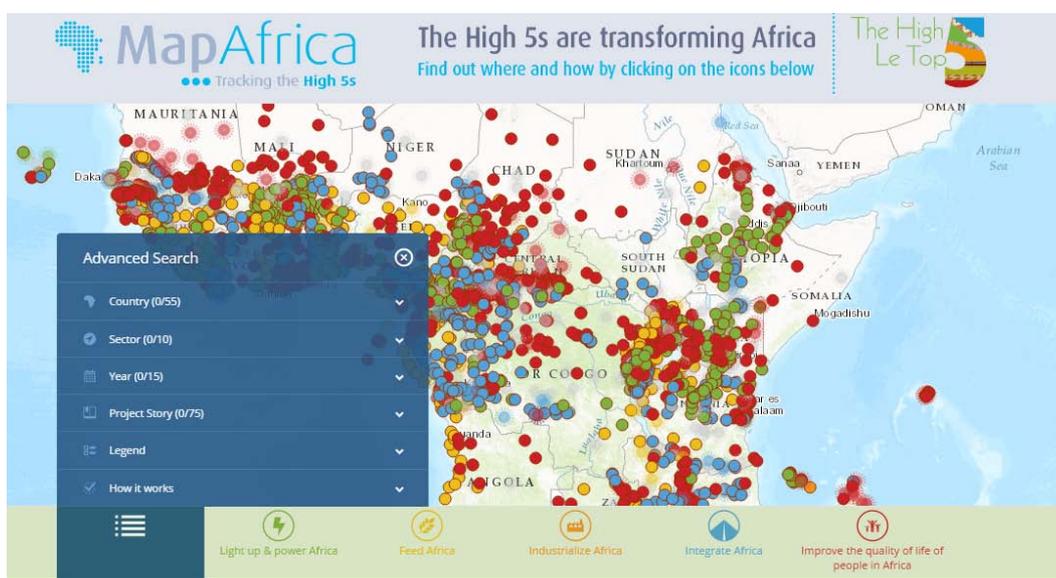
Donor / development partner	Link to transparency portal
African Development Bank (AfDB)	http://mapafrica.afdb.org/index.html#/?_k=jxpu9p
Canada (Global Affairs)	http://w05.international.gc.ca/projectbrowser-banqueprojets/?lang=eng
Denmark (Danida)	http://openaid.um.dk/en
Netherlands (MoFA)	https://www.openaid.nl/
Netherlands (NEA)	https://aiddata.rvo.nl/
Sweden	http://openaid.se
UN HABITAT	http://open.unhabitat.org/
UNDP	http://open.undp.org
UNESCO	http://opendata.unesco.org/
UNICEF	http://open.unicef.org/
UK (DFID)	https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/
United States (multiple)	http://beta.foreignassistance.gov

To varying extents, these sites enable the user to view mappings, visualisations and lists of development resource allocations, to embed these into their own portals and to download IATI raw data sets (see Figure 1 for AfDB's platform as an example). A number of other donors make IATI XML data available for download on their websites¹⁸ or use IATI data among other sources in their public portals.¹⁹

A notable example of IATI data use as part of a national data portal is Myanmar's [Mohinga](#) platform (see Figure 2), which increases accessibility of information about multiple aid providers for national audiences.

Among non-governmental stakeholders, Oxfam Novib²⁰ and Cordaid²¹ stand out as leading users of IATI data to inform their constituencies about their resources and activities.

Figure 1: AfDB's [MapAfrica](#) platform



Source: AfDB

Increasing efficiency and effectiveness

More limited evidence is available for cases in which IATI data is used to help increase efficiency and effectiveness of development interventions, through better planning, budgeting and coordination of efforts.

There is some indication that among national governments, Madagascar²² and Rwanda²³ have been regularly using IATI data to check and/or complement data available to them through domestic aid information systems. In Liberia, the Ministry of Finance and Development Planning reports use of IATI data to monitor external resources in the context of the Ebola crisis, and to verify locally available information in the preparation of official development assistance (ODA) information for official uses.²⁴

'The use we find most relevant is identifying donors that we do not have in our aid management platform (AMP). Donors contributing to Madagascar through their headquarters do not provide data locally. IATI is the main source for such data.'

Isaora Zefania Romalahy, Head of the Aid Coordination Permanent Secretariat, Office of the Prime Minister, Madagascar

Operating a national aid management platform that incorporates the IATI standard, Myanmar perhaps stands out as the most advanced example for national level use. Here, IATI data feeds directly into day-to-day aid management and government engagement with development partners, complementing locally available aid data.²⁵

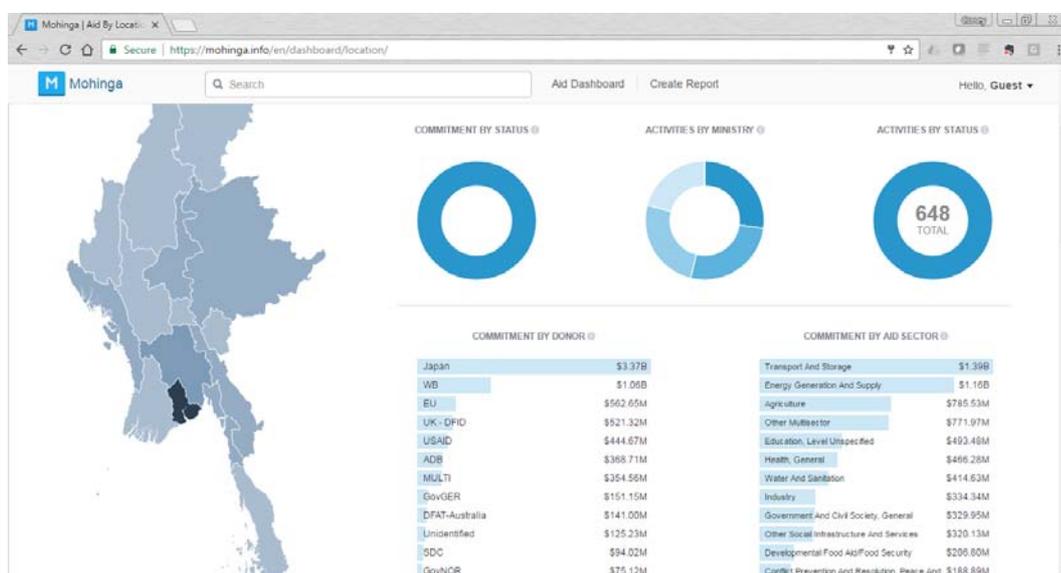
Where governments are using IATI at national level, important benefits include the identification of donors not present in country and/or not making data on their activities available through local systems.²⁶ In Myanmar, the use of IATI played an important role in creating a wider sense of mutual accountability and transparency between government and development partners.²⁷

'IATI data is used to complement and complete my locally collected data. It is very helpful because it provides a realistic picture of most, if not all external resources available to Liberia. After downloading IATI data we align it with our development strategy and follow up with in-country office donors for validation and confirmation. With this verified data we are able to publish our official quarterly and annual ODA reports, which we share with many important stakeholders.'

Frederick Krahe, Director of the Aid Management and Coordination Unit, Ministry of Finance and Development Planning, Liberia²⁸

As these examples demonstrate, use of IATI data within country decision-making processes depends crucially on the level of integration of IATI with local aid management systems and procedures. This area – further explored in the sub-section on efforts to support data use – is one where a number of partner countries such as Bangladesh²⁹ are leading the way.

Figure 2: Myanmar's Mohinga aid management platform



Source: Government of Myanmar

A previous assessment noted that there is very little evidence of IATI data use for the purposes of decision-making by donors.³⁰ While it is important to note that we were not able to systematically interview donor representatives in country ourselves for this review, a number of our interviewees spoke of limited awareness of IATI among donor country

offices and a preference for using previously established ways of sharing information with each other and their government counterparts.³¹ At global level among donors, there is some indication that the Netherlands may be furthest along in terms of driving a number of processes, including incoming and outgoing reporting as well as planning with IATI data.³²

'IATI stems from a key principle of the Paris declaration - donor coordination. However, there is limited evidence that donors are using each others' IATI data for coordination [...] If donors aren't even using their own information, nobody should be expecting anybody else to use it yet. [...] My first recommendation is to get the country offices to use IATI data.'

David Hall-Matthews

Among NGOs, Oxfam Novib and Cordaid report the use of IATI based information, integrated with internal data, to share knowledge across the partner network,³³ and as a framework for management, reporting, communications and fundraising.³⁴

'One of the biggest beneficiaries of using IATI and open data in general has been Cordaid itself. IATI has provided us with a project documentation framework which we use for communications, fundraising and programming. We have embedded the use of IATI within the organisation and it has become the standard framework in which we share project information and project knowledge.'³⁵

Roderick Besseling, Digital Strategist, Cordaid

One area that could contribute to more use of IATI-based information in government and donor decision-making processes is the analysis of available data to answer concrete policy questions. There is currently very limited evidence for the use of IATI data by aid analysts. However, the value of more effort in this area is demonstrated by DI's comparison of DFID data from the Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) Development Assistance Committee's (DAC) Creditor Reporting System (CRS) and IATI, demonstrating significantly greater granularity and (most likely) accuracy of spending in Bangladesh³⁶ and Nigeria,³⁷ and on malaria.³⁸

Increasing accountability

Of the use cases originally envisaged, evidence for use of IATI-based information to hold development resource providers and implementers to account is perhaps most limited to date.

In aid recipient countries, there appear to be two documented examples of attempts to use IATI for monitoring purposes. In Kenya, the National Taxpayers Association together with Integrity Action piloted an effort to monitor implementation of DFID-funded NGO

projects. While the effort itself appears to have had very positive results, it is difficult to ascertain to what extent IATI-based information played a role in bringing these about.³⁹

In another case, Aidspan, a Kenya-based NGO acting as an independent watchdog for the Global Fund to Fight AIDS, Tuberculosis and Malaria, attempted to use IATI data for monitoring purposes. However, this effort was limited – among other data quality issues – by the lack of granular data from implementers and projects supported by the Fund.⁴⁰

At global level, a particular use of IATI data for accountability purposes is Publish What You Fund's ongoing effort to encourage donors and other development partners to increase their transparency. However, its work on the [Aid Transparency Index](#) involves the use of metadata on the scope and quality of data published to IATI, rather than the actual data.⁴¹

Finally, donor requirements for grantees to publish to IATI, such as by DFID and the Netherlands' Ministry of Foreign Affairs are relevant in this context. In particular where these replace other reporting requirements, they increase data availability and can drive the use of data for accountability purposes.⁴²

Efforts to support data use

While in day-to-day practice IATI data use is still incipient, there have been a number of important efforts over recent years to support increased usage.

The IATI community achieved significant success in encouraging publishing to IATI, using the technical support available from specialist providers and the Secretariat, through tools such as [AidStream](#), documentation, training and helpdesks provided by organisations such as Bond in the UK⁴³ and Partos in the Netherlands,⁴⁴ as well as DI's Nairobi Hub.

The challenge now is to replicate this success to increase data use. Experiences to build on include technical support for integrating IATI data in country systems, awareness raising activities, the development of data access tools, trainings and growing donor support for efforts to increase IATI data use. Importantly, there is significant interest, experience and expertise among leading open data specialists in-country – such as [Young Innovations](#) in Nepal – to push this agenda forward.

Supporting integration of IATI and in-country aid management systems

It was clear from early on that the extent to which IATI data could be integrated in national planning and decision-making systems and processes would be an important factor determining its use. Since the original country pilots in Malawi, Democratic Republic of the Congo (DRC), Rwanda and Colombia this issue has been a key focus for the IATI community.⁴⁵ A regular topic of discussion at IATI meetings and for development of supporting documentation,⁴⁶ a number of promising practical advances have been made in this area recently.

In Bangladesh,⁴⁷ Rwanda,⁴⁸ Chad, Côte d'Ivoire, Madagascar, and Senegal⁴⁹ work has been undertaken to import IATI data into native and externally provided AIMS with the tools developed through this work available to the wider IATI community. In Myanmar, the aid management system has been developed to incorporate the IATI standard from an early stage.⁵⁰ While in all cases, important challenges have been documented (see next section), these efforts, led by partner countries with the proactive support of software vendors and donors are a critical area for action. However, beyond integrating IATI in aid management systems as a key step, it is also critical to advance the integration of development cooperation data in systems and processes for public financial management and planning more broadly.⁵¹

Other efforts to support and promote data use

Members of the IATI community have also sought to promote IATI data use through various other means. While arguably too few of these have been resourced or documented well enough to fully assess their results, these have included:

- **Awareness raising efforts** in the global aid effectiveness and open data community, e.g. the participation of the IATI Secretariat and other community members in the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation (GPEDC), Open Government Partnership and International Open Data Conferences.
- **Key data use tools maintained by the IATI Secretariat**, in particular the [Datastore](#) and the [Data Registry](#).
- **Open aid awareness-raising materials, tools, resources and trainings**, e.g. [Open Nepal](#)'s efforts, the [Open Development Toolkit](#) originally developed by DI and Open Knowledge and now being incorporated into the IATI website.
- **Development of information portals** to increase accessibility of IATI data by turning it into information, e.g. [d-portal](#), and other sites showing IATI data for individual countries.⁵²

The tools maintained by the IATI Secretariat were seen as critical to data use by interviewees. In particular the Datastore was repeatedly cited as requiring ongoing investment to ensure user-friendliness and stable functioning.

Overall, data use oriented tools and training efforts to date appear to have had limited scale and sustainability.⁵³ Among the now longer-standing and well-known tools is d-portal, which, with very limited promotion, has had more than 16,000 unique users since 2014.⁵⁴ While various interviewees suggested that d-portal has played an important role in showing what IATI data can deliver, they also highlighted the need for further investment and improvements (to d-portal itself and similar efforts), especially with a view to addressing specific in-country information needs.

Leadership and investment into data use

Over recent years, a number of actors have increased their efforts to encourage and support the use of IATI data, in particular at national level.

In line with its objectives,⁵⁵ IATI has facilitated a workshop focused on data use by partner countries in 2015 in Accra, Ghana⁵⁶ and the topic will feature prominently in [the 2017 TAG meeting](#). IATI is also incorporating d-portal as a key data use tool.

Donors, in addition to the overall support provided to IATI, have begun to increase investment into data use. This includes France's support to IATI integration into AIMS in various Francophone countries,⁵⁷ DFID's support to the same in Bangladesh,⁵⁸ and EU support for Myanmar's Mohinga system.⁵⁹ USAID has supported an important in-depth study on data demand in Ghana, Zambia and Bangladesh.⁶⁰ The Netherlands is playing a leadership role in promoting use in government and Dutch NGOs, and indicates increased support for country-level use.⁶¹

Perhaps most importantly however, various partner governments are committing to supporting increased use of IATI within their own country processes.

User needs and challenges to data use

Given the still limited use of IATI data in practice and the incipient nature of efforts to support increased data use, it is important to understand which challenges need to be overcome going forward.

The needs and barriers documented in previous literature and through the interviews conducted for this review can be grouped broadly into Social, Political/Structural, Economic and Technological factors. Many of these in fact reinforce insights documented since the original IATI partner country consultations, for example on the importance of linking IATI and AIMS, capacity constraints and in-country donor engagement and support.⁶² Likewise, the original assumption that changes in process and culture would prove more challenging than technical ones appears to have been confirmed.⁶³

Social factors: awareness, attitudes and needs

Low awareness of IATI

Limited awareness of IATI among all key stakeholder groups at country level is one of the most important constraints to data use. Different efforts have produced evidence that at national level awareness among key government officials, donors and civil society stakeholders tends to be very low.⁶⁴ According to previous studies and our interviewees, this includes donor country offices of leading IATI publishers, indicating an urgent need for expanded efforts to raise awareness at national level. Ideally, this would extend beyond transparency, planning and budgeting stakeholders to line ministries and other actors at sector level.⁶⁵ Similarly, awareness among potential global stakeholders and data users outside of the IATI community and open data fields is probably very limited.⁶⁶

'We need to find ways of communicating and training staff , internally, on the existence and use of IATI data. Organisations, like ourselves, need to make this a priority.'

Horia Sohir Debbiche, IATI and Aidflows Project Manager, African Development Bank

Use of non-IATI systems by aid data users

There is strong indication that in various cases at country level, regular users of aid data within government and donors agencies continue to use local systems or even informal channels to access aid information in their work. Key reasons cited include established procedures, greater timeliness and comprehensiveness of locally available data but also recurring questions by government officials on the provenance of IATI data.⁶⁷ Also, Limited awareness and enthusiasm by donor country offices may be a contributing factor here,⁶⁸ e.g. as data users are not able to verify donor data with in-country counterparts. Aside from important technical data quality and coverage issues, it needs to be recognised that IATI data use is a behaviour change proposition that will require demonstration of added value of IATI within and above existing systems.

Different data and information needs

Closely related to this, different user groups express different priorities in terms of data needs. Many potential users indeed require information and analysis, rather than raw data in their work. IATI data use therefore has to be understood within a wider context of comparability and interoperability with other data sources, and the use of information in non-electronic forms of communication.

While different users have different priorities⁶⁹ it is likely that the IATI Standard, if implemented fully and at a high level of quality by all publishers can deliver most of the data required by in-country actors.⁷⁰ However, beyond the data, there appears to be a clear demand for more analytical products to demonstrate the value of IATI in specific decision-making and accountability settings.⁷¹ Existing efforts such as d-portal are seen to point in a useful direction, but according to interviewees would require significant enhancement.⁷²

'We know there is a demand for information from recipient countries. But even though they want information they do not all use IATI.'

David Hall-Matthews

Crucially, there is a need for pro-active joining up of IATI data and other data sources. Among these, aid management, domestic budgeting and (open) contracting data and systems are most commonly prioritised.⁷³ Another key aspect is the need to consider users' information habits beyond online access, as local accountability actors, in particular, require relevant information delivered through more traditional means such as local radios, billboards, and community meetings. Bridging this gap is typically seen as a role for intermediaries, but to date limited evidence is available on successful approaches in this area.

Political factors: leadership and structure

Overall, the extent to which data can be used successfully in decision-making and accountability depends on wider factors such as the nature of access to information regimes, the degree of press freedom and freedom of expression, citizen empowerment, as well as the willingness of government, donors and implementers to enable citizen participation and to share information in practice.⁷⁴

In the context of this review, a key challenge relates to IATI stakeholders themselves. IATI was developed to empower in particular partner governments with better aid information. Nonetheless, a number of observers caution that in practice, greater leadership from the national level, by governments and donors will be crucial to increasing data use in planning, decision-making and accountability.⁷⁵

Arguably, leadership by partner governments on data use, as already demonstrated in efforts to integrate IATI and AIMS in a number of countries, also have an important place in emerging national processes to harness the [data revolution for sustainable development](#).

'Firstly, we should move donors to importing data from IATI rather than manually entering it to reduce the burden on both donors and the government. [...] Secondly, we should begin to use IATI data to improve the way decisions are made. This should include outreach to donors, line ministries, sector working groups and civil society, including significant capacity building in using the data. [...] Connecting up with other systems, particularly with budget systems, is a key part of this work and something we have been exploring. This also has important implications for the SDG agenda, as better data should make it easier to track progress by the Government of Bangladesh, donors and civil society.'

Monwar Ahmed, Chief of Development Effectiveness Wing, Economic Relations Division in the Ministry of Finance, Bangladesh⁷⁶

At the same time, ownership over IATI by in-country donor offices will need to increase⁷⁷ significantly to support use by partner governments and civil society. This ranges from important practical needs, such as verification of their data⁷⁸ to support for and participation interventions to increase IATI data use in country. This will require expanded efforts by publishers' head offices to increase interest and capacity for IATI data use in their country delegations.

Economic factors: resources

From this review and our analysis it emerges that although investment into data use across the IATI community is increasing, it has so far been limited. Greater financial and technical resources will need to be mobilised by all stakeholders to increase use of IATI.

While specific technical needs are outlined in the next section, it is worth highlighting in the particular need for further investment into the critical area of integrating IATI into country aid management systems.

A series of pilots in different countries and across native and leading international aid management platforms has shown that IATI import is possible and that it has the potential to create significant value for users. However, upfront, significant human resources are required to verify donor data and cross-check it against data available from existing systems.⁷⁹ This implies a need for additional resources within partner governments and donor agencies, especially at country level. Given the centrality of this issue to in-country data use, governments, donors and software vendors stand to gain from investing in this area.

More broadly, our interviews indicate that there is a need for increased investment to support in-country data use efforts to raise awareness and capacity among governments, donors and non-state actors to use IATI data.

Technological factors: standard, data quality, tools and capacity

Our review also confirmed a number of important data and tool-related needs, which if addressed could contribute to increased data use. As many of the detailed technical issues are well-known and documented within the IATI community, we focus here on summarising the key issues highlighted as priorities across the available evidence and interviews.

Standard-related

Overall, most stakeholders appear to consider the IATI standard fit for purpose for most use cases, i.e. challenges tend to relate more to its implementation by publishers.

Nonetheless, a user priority with regard to the IATI standard itself is the ability to correctly identify **pooled funding**, where double-counting and unclear implementation arrangements pose significant challenges for government data use.⁸⁰ Other priority needs are consistent **organisation identifiers**, solutions for **exchange rates** and for publishers to be able to indicate that IATI data represents an **authoritative source** for their data.

Publisher-related

It bears emphasising that data use depends crucially on the amount and quality of information made available by publishers. While use itself can be expected to drive data improvements (especially where effective feedback loops are in place), existing evidence shows that in various cases, in-country use has been held back by the lack of data from some donors, idiosyncratic implementations of the standard, and the quality as well as scope of published data. While on the whole IATI data quality and coverage is improving for the majority of publishers, dimensions critical for use at country level, especially

timeliness, forward-looking data and provision of results information, are relatively weak.⁸¹

Across different user populations, key priorities and value added of IATI include **forward-looking** and **timely data** (updated on a monthly or at least quarterly basis), **comprehensiveness** and **accurate sub-locations**. Of particular importance to government users are **local language** descriptions, as well as data on **off-budget funds** and from **partners not otherwise captured** in their information system, e.g. donors with no country-presence and private actors such as NGOs and foundations.⁸² CSOs require in particular **project-level data**, including on **implementing agencies** and detailed information on **objectives, activities and results**.⁸³ Throughout previous reports as well as our interviews, the need for publishers to improve **feedback options** was highlighted, including by providing local contacts.

Tool-related

Across the IATI ecosystem, a number of different tools have been developed over time. These include publisher support tools, data user tools and information tools. During this review, a key cross-cutting issue repeatedly referenced was the need for fully functional **conversion between XML, CSV and XLS formats** at all stages.

Among the key data user tools, the **IATI Datastore is considered a key public good**, and continued investment into its user-friendliness and operational stability was strongly encouraged by interviewees.

Among the current information tools, **d-portal was seen as important** as well as deserving and in need of continued investment and upgrading. This should include enhanced filtering and search functionality, e.g. by donor, sector, multiple locations and XLS/CSV download functionality. Further, a key expectation from d-portal (or similar tools) would be more detailed project-level and traceability information. As highlighted by our interviewees, this points to a wider need for more investment into analytical information and tools that demonstrate IATI's value for specific use cases, especially at country level.

Capacity-related

It is also clear that IATI's technical complexity continues to daunt many potential users. While its potential is often grasped with relative ease, using IATI data is seen as inherently complex.⁸⁴ Various stakeholders therefore recommend greater investment into country-level use capacity.⁸⁵ However, available evidence suggests that such efforts will require longer-term commitment, as even intensive trainings may not immediately increase user confidence.⁸⁶

'We need to focus our efforts to ensure that we build capacity and train our partner countries on the use of IATI data in their systems.'

An important aspect that needs to be considered in this context is the different roles, skills and expertise that different actors can bring to data use in country. For example, meaningful use of data and information are likely to occur where technical capacity (e.g. of capital-based intermediaries) meets with specific information need, legitimacy and capacity to act (e.g. by local government and/or accountability actors).⁸⁷ In this sense, the question of capacity extends beyond technical data use to the need for development of a wider data use ecosystem.

Interoperability

This finally points to a critical cross-cutting issue. From the perspective of existing and potential data users, IATI data is rarely going to be useful on its own. The true potential for increased use of IATI data therefore lies where it can be joined up with other data to create meaningful information for decision-making and accountability. Existing studies and interviews conducted for this review place a clear priority on ensuring interoperability with domestic financial data and (open) public contracting information. IATI also has a continuing wider need and interest in promoting greater interoperability between all development data standards. As part of the Joined-up Data Alliance alongside other leading open data initiatives, IATI and its users are already well-positioned to contribute to and benefit from emerging solutions in this area.

Conclusions

In this review, we find that while overall usage of IATI data is still limited, there is significant potential for change. The most common use of IATI data at this point is by large donor organisations to demonstrate transparency to home country constituencies. This is to be commended. However, to reach IATI's potential for increased use of resource information by decision-makers and advocates to improve development outcomes, a number of barriers to data use need to be overcome.

Most importantly, awareness of IATI and its potential at country level is too low, requiring a concerted effort to increase awareness and demand for IATI data. Key in-country aid data users need to see the added value of IATI data in the context of existing information systems and procedures. This places particular importance on accelerating the integration of IATI in national AIMS, and with national budgeting, planning and monitoring systems. Overall, a strategic orientation on understanding and addressing in-country information needs is required to increase data use. Some efforts in this direction have already begun, and need to be intensified. This includes more in-depth research on the specific needs, capacities and contexts of decision-makers and accountability actors who can benefit from IATI data. This will contribute to developing appropriate support as well as technical and analytical tools.

To advance this agenda towards increased data use and IATI's continued success, we suggest the following as a framework for action.

Leadership on data use must come from within countries. Open data on international resource flows holds much potential to be harnessed as countries plan, deliver and monitor progress towards the SDGs. As part of efforts to realise the data revolution in support of sustainable development, leadership must be with officials and citizens at country level to articulate their data and information needs, and for other actors to support them appropriately in addressing these. As is already being demonstrated by various partner countries through their leadership on IATI/AIMS integration, concrete progress is achievable in this way.

Commitment and support from publishers, donors and other development partners is critical. The role of publishers is fundamental as the value proposition for data use rests on the availability of high-quality data from all providers of development and humanitarian finance. Donors and other development partners have a particularly important role to play in encouraging and supporting their country offices to use IATI data as well as to provide financial and practical support for efforts to increase data use by others in-country.

The IATI community needs to focus on user needs. IATI has had significant success in increasing the availability of open development resource data. The work supporting

publishers that helped bring this about remains important. Going forward, the diverse talents, expertise and networks of IATI community members need to be increasingly brought to bear to support usage. This means building new partnerships with diverse users, understanding their specific needs and collaborating to help address these with context appropriate tools, analysis and support.

The IATI Secretariat plays a key catalytic role. IATI's continued prioritisation of data use, as well as setting and keeping the focus of the community on ambitious goals will be important. Continuing to push for the publishing of high-quality data remains critical. IATI should also invest in a small set of key data use and information tools and continue to support wider efforts towards development data comparability and interoperability.

For the next three years, we offer the following specific suggestions for action towards realising the potential of IATI through greater data use:

- Partner governments, donors, civil society, AIMS providers and intermediaries should intensify collaboration to increase awareness, share skills and provide mutual support for data use, in particular at country level.
- Partner countries, with support from the IATI community, should prioritise IATI data exchange with national aid and public financial management information systems.
- IATI's donor champions should redouble efforts to ensure proactive engagement on IATI data use by their country offices, particularly through, but not limited to development partner coordination fora.
- The IATI Secretariat, working with the wider IATI community, should increase its efforts to raise awareness and understanding of IATI beyond the current community and particularly at national level, and invest in key infrastructure tools for data use.
- The IATI community, and in particular intermediaries, should seek to develop stronger partnerships with decision-makers and accountability actors at the country level, and work to demonstrate the value of IATI data, to develop tools and to provide capacity support grounded in the information needs and local context.
- Finally, publishers need to continue improving data quality to ensure its usability, encouraging and responding to feedback in particular from in-country users.

Annex: List of interviewees

Name	Organisation	Role
Bibhusan Bista	Young Innovations	CEO
Claudia Schwegmann	Independent	
Danila Boneva	UNDP/Government of Rwanda	System Administrator – Development Assistance Database (DAD)
David Hall-Matthews	Independent	Formerly of Publish What You Fund
David Kocharov	Synergy International Systems Inc.	Director of Business Development
Innocent Mugabe	Ministry of Finance, Rwanda	System Administrator – DAD
Isaora Zefania Romalahy	Madagascar – Office of the Prime Minister	Head of the Aid Coordination Permanent Secretariat
Joshua Powell	Development Gateway	Director of Innovation
Leigh Mitchell	Myanmar government	EU Senior Adviser, Foreign Economic Relations Department, Union Ministry of Planning and Finance
Mark Brough	Independent	Formerly of Publish What You Fund
Roderick Besseling	Cordaid	Digital Strategist
Rupert Simons (and Nicholas Dorward)	Publish What You Fund	CEO
Horia Sohir Debbiche	African Development Bank	IATI and Aidflows Project Manager

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Acronyms

AIMS	Aid information management system
CRS	Creditor Reporting System
CSO	Civil society organisation
CSV	Comma separated values (file format)
DFID	Department for International Development (UK)
DI	Development Initiatives
GPEDC	Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
NGO	Non-governmental organisation
ODA	Official development assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development
SDG	Sustainable Development Goal
USAID	United States Agency for International Development
XLS	Excel spreadsheet (file format)
XML	Extensible Markup Language

Endnotes

- ¹ The Paris Declaration (2005) and Accra Agenda for Action (2008) on Aid Effectiveness were critical milestones in this respect. The 4th High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Busan committed signatories to publish their data to the IATI Standard by the end of 2015.
- ² The multi-stakeholder Secretariat is led by the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) and further comprises the United Nations Office for Project Services (UNOPS), the Governments of Ghana and Sweden, and Development Initiatives (DI).
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- ¹⁷ For a detailed analysis and recommendations on this important aspect see IATI, 2014. *The use of IATI data in country systems*. Available at: <https://sites.google.com/site/useofiatidataincountrysystems/> (accessed 26 February 2017).
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- ¹⁹ For example, the European Commission's EU Aid Explorer: <https://euaidexplorer.ec.europa.eu/> (accessed 24 February 2017).
- ²⁰ Oxfam's Atlas platform: <https://atlas.oxfamnovib.nl/> (accessed 24 February 2017).
- ²¹ Cordaid's Projects platform: <https://www.cordaid.org/en/projects/> (accessed 24 February 2017).
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- ²⁶ Interview with Isaora Zefania Romalahy
- ²⁷ Interview with Leigh Mitchell
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- ⁵⁴ DI, along with Young Innovations, was part of the team that developed d-portal, originally for demonstration purposes during the 2014 GPEDC Summit in Mexico. Figures based on Google Analytics for <http://www.d-portal.org> (obtained 24 February 2017), available from DI and IATI Secretariat. Due to developer time the UK and Nepal are overrepresented in these figures. Overall, users span donor as well as aid recipient countries, with the former accounting for greater numbers of visitors and a number of the latter registering deeper engagement with the site's content.
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