

Aid Transparency Index changes overview

A summary of changes to the Index assessment method since 2013

Publish What You Fund first published an Aid Transparency Assessment in 2010, looking at three sets of indicators: the transparency of aid to partner country governments, transparency of aid to civil society organisations, and commitments to transparency. This initial assessment was followed by a pilot Aid Transparency Index in 2011 and a full Index in 2012. The pilot Index collected data from 49 organisations, working with civil society organisations to survey each agency or organisation. The 2012 Index repeated this exercise for 72 organisations.

The first data was published in the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard in 2011. However, the Index methodology did not differentiate between different data formats until 2013. In 2013 Publish What You Fund built and implemented automated data tests via its Aid Transparency [Tracker tool](#). With the use of the Tracker it was possible to test all relevant IATI data across the selected publishers. Prior to this, organisations selected for the Index were surveyed manually for their data through a questionnaire.

There have been two comprehensive methodology reviews as well as regular consultations since the launch of the Aid Transparency Index in 2011. These were: the 2021 & 2016 methodology reviews and regular consultation prior to every Index which focused on the indicator tests. In 2014 these consultations were moved onto the Github developer platform.¹

This document provides an overview of the proposed changes and the final proposals taken forward since 2013.

2013 consultation

In late 2012, Publish What You Fund consulted with donors, civil society organisations and peer reviewers on how to revise the methodology to reflect the growing quantity of data published in the IATI Standard and to effectively monitor the Busan Commitment. The revised methodology was introduced for the 2013 Index.

There were two major innovations in this methodology. One was the **Aid Transparency Tracker**, an automated tool for assessing data published in the IATI Standard. The other was a **'scoring format' for 22 indicators**, in which data published in more useful formats scored more points. The graduated scoring rewarded publication in standardised, machine-readable and/or open formats like XLSX, CSV and IATI XML, as these permit different levels of analysis, comparability and visualisation in contrast to text documents. The methodology allows for organisations' performance to be compared among the 2013 and onwards Indices and reviews, but not before.

In addition, in 2011 and 2012, a full three years of forward visibility was required in order to score on the total organisation budget and disaggregated budget indicators. This was amended in 2013 and is now a graduated score based on the number of years (up to three years) for which organisations are publishing budget information. This allows some credit to organisations that publish some forward budget information, albeit not for the full three years.

¹ 2022 Github: <https://github.com/pwyf/2022-Index-indicator-definitions>

2018 Github: <https://github.com/pwyf/2018-index-indicator-definitions>

2016 Github: <https://github.com/pwyf/2016-index-data-quality-tests>

2014 Github: <https://github.com/pwyf/2014-technical-consultation>

Other proposals considered

1. Representative nature of an organisation

The Index covers lead agencies of different donor countries or groups. We received feedback from some donors that we should not be considering agencies separately, but should rather consider that donor as a whole. We opted to maintain the disaggregation of agencies in 2013. As a result, the Index reflects the transparency of only those organisations that have been assessed.

2014 Consultation

A public consultation opened in January 2014 to gather feedback from publishers, partners and our peer reviewers on data quality in the Index.

2014 updates

- **IATI XML** data needs to be available via the IATI Registry for it to be counted as being published in the most accessible and comparable format. XML data that is not on the Registry will be scored the same as other machine-readable data.
- **Sampling:** All indicators with documents will be sampled and checked more closely in 2014 to verify that they contain the information outlined in the indicator guidelines. Data on results, conditions and sub-national location published to the IATI Registry will also be sampled and manually checked. Errors will now be communicated to publishers. The sample size is set to 10 and pass rate at 50% and a criterion for sampling was developed.
- **Frequency of publication** will be further broken down, differentiating slightly between monthly, quarterly and less than quarterly publication. In 2014, publishing monthly allows an organisation to achieve the maximum score of 100 points; publishing quarterly up to 95 points; and publishing less than quarterly up to 75 points. In 2013, frequency was broken down only between quarterly and less than quarterly.
- **The Budget Indicator** is more rigorously measured in 2014 for IATI publishers (information published to IATI is scored higher than information published in other formats). Providing annual forward budgets will allow an IATI publisher to score up to half the total available data quality points, while a quarterly breakdown for the first year ahead will enable them to score the remaining half.
- **Test:** Some of the data quality tests have been tightened up to improve the quality of the automated assessment of IATI data.

2016 Methodology review

This review started in October 2016 and lasted until February 2017 with an extension on several proposed areas until May 2017.

Proposed changes

1. Updating the categories

It was proposed to update the Index categories. Categories previously were organised around the levels of data publication 'activity level/organisations level/ commitments' which reflected the way the data is structured in the IATI Standard. These are technical jargon which, for non-IATI specialists, are not always helpful for understanding. The proposal here was to reconsider these categories to make them relevant to a non-specialist audience, more inclusive, and potentially more useful for advocacy purposes.

The new categories proposed and taken forward were: Project Attributes; Finance & budgets; Joined-up development data; Organisation planning & commitments data and Performance data.

2. Weightings

Whilst commitments and organisation planning data (which had higher score weightings in the 2016 Index) matter to provide a complete picture of the level of transparency of an organisation, there are others areas where more transparency at the activity level could drive greater impact and improved effectiveness.

Publish What You Fund put forward three models which placed greater emphasis on other components through the weighting structure of the Index. The objective was to highlight where greater efforts for publication are required and to inform the distribution of weightings for an updated index methodology. We modelled the weightings changes and gauged the impact on existing organisations' scores.

Following a survey of Index partners and other stakeholders it was found that there was a need for more and better data on certain indicators such as sub-national locations, project objectives and results. To address this concern, the 2018 Index put more emphasis on these pieces of information over others by changing the weighting of the Index.

3. Simplifying the indicators

A review of the indicators was made. This was to ensure the relevance of each indicator in an evolving context and to avoid redundant indicators/ simplify the methodology where possible.

- *Remove the 'Implementation schedule' indicator*

The 'Implementation Schedule' indicator measured an organisation's commitment to implementing the IATI component of the common standard as part of the Busan commitments. This was measured in the 2013 and 2016 indexes. The indicator was dropped following the 2016 review.

- *Remove Collaboration Type – this is already tested with the 'implementer' indicator*

The 'Collaboration Type' indicator was removed as this was already measured as part of the implementer' indicator.

- *Group Descriptions indicator under one indicator with 'Titles' and two tests 'Titles & Description'.*
- *Group Contracts indicator under one indicator with Procurement indicator and two tests 'Procurement & Contracts'*
- *Group Project level budgets and Budget documents indicators into one indicator with two tests*

Feedback from consultations were that grouping indicators made the Index more complex to understand for users so the only grouping taken forward was the combination of the Contracts & Procurement indicators.

4. Adjustments to sampling

Following consultation, Publish What You Fund received feedback that some information published on the IATI Registry did not always correspond to the document or data item one might expect, or provided the correct level of detail. For example, this may relate to a document being incorrectly coded as an evaluation organisation strategy document when it is not, or for sub-national location data to in fact just indicate the overall country. To ensure consistently high-quality information published to IATI, we proposed to extend the number of indicators sampled as well as the number of activities required to pass

sampling. This would include the basic yet critical contextual information of titles and descriptions in the list of indicators sampled as well.

The number of indicators sampled was increased to include sampling of titles and descriptions as well as all indicators which have a document code.

5. Consideration of data use in the Index

Measuring data use/engagement was considered as a replacement for the Implementation Schedule Indicator. The proposal was to look at a given organisations commitment to transparency beyond just publishing to IATI, to demonstrate its level of engagement and to encourage IATI publishers to look beyond aid and connect with other transparency initiatives where possible. This could include looking at:

- whether data use is mentioned in the overall strategy of the organisation and how extensive it is (internal use by org. and its country offices and use by partner countries through AIMS for example). This includes use of IATI data and any other standards that are relevant to a given organisation.
- whether organisations have put in place a formal mechanism to engage with civil society organisations and score accordingly
- adding an independent peer review stage to data collection process where reviewers based in major recipient countries of a given organisation provide additional feedback on the survey
- Look at the broader open data and transparency commitment of a given organisation: IATI and OGP membership, OpenContracting, etc.

There was a lot of misunderstanding about how to robustly quantify civil society engagement. Research findings were that, where they exist, commitments in strategy documents were easy enough to find. However, it would be difficult to know where to draw the line in terms of the differing degrees of commitment. For example, some organisations have a civil society strategy, others have sections in other policy documents. What is more difficult to make a judgement on, is where civil society engagement is a consistent theme throughout these documents but not covered exclusively (e.g. an organisation could easily point to sentences or paragraphs where they speak about civil society).

It was also extremely difficult to find evidence of implementation of civil society engagement at the country or local level to test the implementation of these commitments. Evidence of this is rarely published and extremely subjective. It is difficult to assume that these meetings have been worthwhile. It's also not possible to make a judgement on the extent to which isolated example are common practice or the actions of individual or specific country offices.

The feedback from data publishers and users suggested that it would not make sense to include data use in a measure of publication. Publish What You Fund at this point committed to conduct separate work on data use.

6. Visibility of data

Many people who responded to the 2016 consultation expressed an interest in knowing what proportion of an organisation's portfolio is published in the IATI Standard. Publish What You Fund investigated options for measuring this, but implementation was problematic due in part to differences in budget cycles, unpredictable funding of some organisations and lack of consistent data quality. In previous rounds of the Index, for IATI data to be considered, it needed to be current and include 20% or more of the

organisation's country programmable aid budget, based on OECD CRS figures. This needs to be updated as last iterations of the Index demonstrated it was too low.

The 2016 methodology review considered factoring in coverage of IATI publication (what % of an organisation's portfolio is being published to IATI) in the methodology and awarding higher points for greater coverage. This was not taken forward due to the issue of finding a suitable baseline figure.

Proposals taken forward

Following the consultation, the major changes being made to the methodology in 2016 were as follows:

- The **weighting of the indicator scores** has been changed to incorporate important feedback we received during the consultation. This includes information on how a project performed (such as a review or evaluation document) and some specific indicators such as sub-national location data and the sector of work.
- Some **indicators** have been combined or eliminated, reducing the total number from 39 to 35.
- Changes are being made to **sampling for indicators** that require additional verification, including an increase in the sample size. We are also incorporating titles and descriptions to the list of indicators sampled, where in previous years they have not been.

2021 Methodology Review

In November 2020 PWYF [opened](#) its second methodology review. Publish What You Fund produced a set of proposals which were then shared with groups of stakeholders for feedback. Consultations included a data user survey, an open call for input and proposals and a series of consultation workshops. Public consultation opened in February 2021 for written comments before final changes were [announced](#) in May 2021.

Proposed changes

PWYF [drafted several proposals](#) which stakeholders provided feedback on. These proposals are outlined below (in no particular order):

7. IATI format scoring approach

We proposed to change the scoring structure for IATI data to range from 25-100 points instead of 50-100.

- This preserves the incentive to *start* publishing IATI data.
- IATI data would start to score more than other formats upon reaching a threshold of data publication comprehensiveness and frequency.
- Publishing data for all activities in another format can score higher than publishing data for a few activities in IATI.
- Continues to award the highest scores for IATI data - full points can only be scored for an indicator by publishing IATI data.

This proposal was implemented and the final change made was to adjust the automatic IATI format score to start at 33.33 in order to continue to incentivize the IATI format.

8. Measuring engagement

Since the addition of data use as a strategy pillar for Publish What You Fund, the 2021 review again explored the inclusion of a measure for data engagement in the Index. This

reflects our approach to go beyond aid transparency and to assess how organisations share information and engage with stakeholders, to build trust and facilitate use of data.

We proposed to measure pro-active sharing of data. We could do this by reviewing or sampling country-level communications carried out by organisations and assess whether these include links to and/or presentations of aid transparency data. This could include email newsletters, press releases, social media feeds and local country websites. Research into the prevalence of data sources and possible measurement approaches concluded that this was not possible at this stage.

This proposal was not taken forward due to issues with identifying a standardised measurement.

9. Conditions indicator

We looked at dropping the Conditions indicator. This indicator was originally intended to check for aid conditionality terms, however, the use of the IATI element and indicator definition now includes the terms and conditions of a project. Since these are generally included in contracts, this indicator overlaps significantly with the Procurement: Contracts indicator and removing it would eliminate this duplication.

Feedback from data users concluded that this was a useful data point that is important for accountability purposes so we kept the indicator and tightened up the definition.

10. Contact details

We looked at enhancing the Contact details indicator. Contact details are important for stakeholders and data users to communicate with organisations, as an avenue to find out additional information and to hold organisations to account for their activities. In line with our approach to recognise efforts to engage with stakeholders in the Index scoring, we will look at ways to assess how useful contact details are. This could include checking whether contact details included in activity data are country or project specific, or if they are generic details.

Feedback from stakeholders pointed out that a well-resourced single point of contact can be just as good or better than individual project points of contact if these are not responsive. Since there is no clear normativity it is not possible to assess and score different forms of contact details.

11. Pre-project impact appraisals

We assessed the feasibility of adapting the Pre-project impact appraisals indicator for different project types. Environmental and social impact assessments are standard documents produced for projects with significant environmental and social footprints, such as infrastructure or extraction projects. For other development projects different types of pre-project assessment may be more suitable and we sought to further define what could be expected as sufficient documentation for this indicator.

Following the consultations, we tightened up the language in the definition to clarify which documents can be accepted for which organisations types.

12. Gender indicator

We explored the potential to introduce a gender indicator into the Index scoring approach. At present, the principal way to identify organisation spending on gender projects is through the use of gender policy markers (used in OECD DAC CRS and IATI reporting). An Index indicator could be implemented with a test that scores IATI data on the frequency of use of the gender marker for relevant activities. Since activities can be

marked with a policy significance code of 0, 1 or 2, corresponding to “not targeted”, “significant objective” and “principal objective”, all eventualities are included and all relevant activities could be marked with a relevant code.

We did not go ahead with this proposal due to the difficulty knowing whether the marker should be used. For example, some organisations do not implement gender projects; there are several other policy makers in the IATI schema and we had no compelling case to single out the gender marker.

13. Networked data indicator or Traceability

Traceability - or networked data - is the linking of activities in the IATI Standard. This can help to show who is working with who, the steps in aid delivery chains and allow users to follow delivery up or down the chain.

There are currently a number of ways that activities can be linked in IATI. The most commonly practiced way of linking activities is for a “downstream” partner, such as an implementer, to publish an activity and to link an incoming funds transaction to the organisation funding activity. This is done by coding the funding activity ID in the incoming fund transaction, listed in the implementing activity.

We proposed including an indicator in the Index to assess how often implementing partners are providing uplinks to funding activities. This could be done using the code developed by Andy Lulham, discussed in this blog from 2019:

<https://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/2019/05/traceability-or-not/>

We took developed this proposal and took it forward by including a measure to test for the use of a standardised code for the implementing partner.

14. Visibility / coverage

We continued to look at possible approaches to measuring visibility/coverage of IATI data – the proportion of an organisation’s portfolio for which transparency data is published. The most effective method we have developed so far to assess this is using the amounts of money committed and disbursed and comparing the total amounts published to IATI with a second official source.

We have made this comparison with the amounts published to the OECD DAC CRS. However, this produces varying results, with some results matching closely but others either showing small-scale variations between the data (indicating higher expenditure recorded in IATI data or in DAC CRS data), or variations by orders of magnitude (often with IATI data showing commitments or expenditure as multiples of the amounts recorded in the CRS data).

We continue to carry out a research exercise prior to each index looking into a comparison of total spend (from CRS or other sources) and following up when there are significant discrepancies.

15. IATI sampling

Manual sampling of IATI data for several of the indicators in the Index is an important part of the assessment process and is the only systematic external manual check of documents and narrative data published in the IATI Standard by major donors. We currently carry out two rounds of IATI sampling, near the start of the data collection process after the first data pull, and then at the end of the process after the final data pull. The results of the first round of sampling provide an indication to organisations of their

score at the time but do not contribute to the final Index scores. The results of the final data pull and IATI sampling do count towards the final scores.

IATI sampling is highly labour intensive with tens of thousands of documents and data points being manually checked by Publish What You Fund's research team. In order to reduce this workload, we proposed reducing the number of samples for each indicator from 20 to 12, at least for the first round of data collection.

Following consultation, we took this change forward in our sampling approach for the first round of sampling in order to make efficiencies in the Index process. A sample number of 20 was retained for the second round.

16. Weightings

For the 2022 methodology review we also re-assessed the indicator weightings. We conducted a survey of data users to assess what data is considered most important and useful and used this, alongside Publish What You Fund's other research, to determine whether adjustments should be made to the indicator and component weightings.

For the 2022 Index we increased the weighting of the Description indicator reflecting the increased use of this IATI element in research. Other indicators were re-weighted in order to adjust for this and the new 'Networked data' indicator.

17. Accessibility indicator

Currently IATI data is not readily accessible for users in easily usable bulk download formats. The responsibility for making the data available and accessible lies with the publishers. As such, organisations in the Index should make efforts to make IATI data accessible.

The proposal was to change the criteria for the Accessibility indicator so that it tests whether organisations are making IATI data accessible. This could be through a data portal that visualises and allows download of IATI data, by integrating a third-party portal into their own website or by linking to a third-party portal. Criteria would include considerations of the following:

- Does the portal visualise IATI data directly – is the data replicated on the IATI registry and in the data portal, and how frequently is it updated?
- Does the portal allow bulk downloads of the data, and are these useful/useable?
- How many fields and what information does the portal visualise? Does it visualise all of the indicators we look at for the Index? Does it visualise a core set of "essential" indicators (e.g., basic project information, basic financial transaction data, location, documents)?
- Does it meet the current Accessibility indicator criteria – disaggregation, bulk download and open license?

We did not take this proposal forward due to perverse incentives this may create in proliferating the number of individual data portals rather than providing a single working portal.

Proposals taken forward

The main changes made to the approach for the 2022 Index were:

- A change to the **IATI format scoring** based on accessibility. We updated the automatic points awarded for IATI format from 50-100 to 33.33-100
- The introduction of the **Networked data indicator** (traceability) which also incorporates the Implementer indicator.

- A change to the **IATI data quality sampling** process: we reduced the number of sampled items for the first round of sampling.
- Changes in the **definitions of the Conditions** indicator
- Changes to the **Pre-project impact appraisals** indicator
- Small adjustments to some **indicator weightings** (in order to incorporate the Networked data indicator).