

THREE YEAR STRATEGY

October 2021 – September 2024

Summary

Our vision: We envisage a world where aid and development information is **transparent, available** and **used** for effective and inclusive decision-making, public accountability and lasting change for all citizens.

Our mission: To promote aid and development finance information that is transparent, available and usable.

Our strategic pillars:

- 1) Engaging with data:** Collaborating to ensure that actors engage around development data and that this data is used to contribute to improved outcomes and achievement of local, national and global development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

Goal: By the end of 2024, aid and development data will have been used in a number of settings and countries where we have encouraged publishers to engage with data users, especially local actors, to support greater accountability and more informed and inclusive decision-making for better development outcomes and achieving the SDGs.
- 2) Full transparency:** Making all aid and development finance data transparent, available and usable.

Goal: By the end of 2024, beyond traditional bilateral aid and humanitarian spending, we will have worked with and encouraged donors in at least three new areas/aid and development funding vehicles to make their aid and development information more transparent.
- 3) More quality data:** Strengthening and extending our research, advocacy and technical expertise to improve the quality and usability of aid and development finance information.

Goal: By the end of 2024, we will have measurably driven improvements in the quality and usability of aid and development information provided by donors and other financing vehicles.

Introduction

Since our establishment in 2008, Publish What You Fund has successfully driven increased transparency among aid donors and development agencies. As a small evidenced-based advocacy non-governmental organisation, we have been able to effectively influence some of the largest aid donors in the world to ‘publish more and publish better’.

We have used the Aid Transparency Index – our public comparative ranking of donor agencies – to galvanise major donors to progressively increase and improve the aid and development information they make available. **By 2020 over half of the 47 assessed organisations were ranked as ‘good’ or ‘very good’ in the Index. By comparison, only one organisation published to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) at the time of our first Index in 2011.**

Our approach is underpinned by:

- An evidenced-based advocacy strategy that has built constructive relationships with donors and other stakeholders to continue to push for quality and accessible aid and development information.
- Robust research, which is open to public scrutiny.
- A collaborative approach, with a strong and growing range of networks and partnerships at international and national level.
- Technical expertise and detailed understanding of aid and development data platforms and standards.

Since the publication of our 2018 strategy, we have continued to widen our project portfolio. We have expanded our focus on aid agencies to examine the transparency of development finance institutions (DFIs); we have researched the data needs of local and national humanitarian actors in Iraq and Bangladesh; we have analysed the gender financing flows in Guatemala, Kenya and Nepal and used our findings to help gender equality funders to increase their transparency and we have initiated work to understand and improve the transparency of funding for women’s economic empowerment.

These recent projects have informed our understanding of the needs of those producing and using aid and development data. They have also caused us to redefine the way we think about transparency. As an organisation, we are starting to move towards a definition of transparency which includes not just publication but engagement and accountability. This encompasses the building of transparent relationships between data publishers and stakeholders, consultation, participation and inclusive decision-making. This will inform our work and our aims over the coming years.

At Publish What You Fund, we have also reflected on our own position and power as the aid sector has grappled with unequal power dynamics and the decolonisation of aid has entered mainstream discourse. We recognise that we function in a sector where decisions, control and resources are held by a small number of donors and international non-governmental organisations (INGOs). As such, our presence, the way in which we legitimise our work and represent the perspectives of other actors needs careful consideration to ensure that we fight the right battles, do so in a way that addresses root causes, and support and invest in networks of actors in the places where these issues are most salient.

Background

THE AID AND DEVELOPMENT FINANCE TRANSPARENCY MOVEMENT

Aid and development finance has evolved significantly over the past two decades. Before 2005, information about this valuable resource was not readily available or accessible by donors, recipients or civil society organisations.

The absence of transparent, usable and timely information was problematic. As a result, donors were unable to harmonise their operations and partner governments could not allocate their own budgets effectively. Likewise, civil society organisations (CSOs) and government decision makers in donor and recipient countries could not be sure that promised funds were spent well or as intended, to support those most in need.

The Paris Declaration in 2005 saw over 100 countries sign up to commitments to improve the quality and effectiveness of aid. However, it soon became clear that this would require more and better-quality information about aid.

The aid transparency movement soon emerged and the movement's demands signalled a transformation in international aid and development that continues today.

PUBLISH WHAT YOU FUND MILESTONES

Publish What You Fund emerged from the aid transparency movement in 2008 and has played a central role ever since.

2008–2011: Setting the Standard

Publish What You Fund was established the same year as the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), a voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiative to create an open and shared data standard for development aid. Initially, Publish What You Fund focused on encouraging donors to publish to IATI, thus sharing comprehensive aid information in a timely and accessible way. In Busan in 2011, donors committed to use the IATI Standard and make their aid transparent by December 2015, signalling a critical milestone for aid and development transparency.¹

2011–2016: The first Aid Transparency Index

To support and encourage donors to publish more and better aid and development information, Publish What You Fund developed a methodology to independently assess 'what good transparency looks like'. On the back of this, our Aid Transparency Index was first piloted in 2011. By 2016, ten donors i.e. 25% of total aid had met the Busan commitment to aid transparency and achieved a high standard 'very good' in our Index of that year.²

2016–2018: Improving transparency

In 2016, Publish What You Fund undertook a review of the Index methodology. Following consultations we modified the methodology to encourage donors to provide more data on key areas such as reviews, evaluations and activity locations.

¹ Busan Partnership Agreement, article 23c, The Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness, 2011.
² <http://www.publishwhatyoufund.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/12/2016-Aid-Transparency-Index.pdf>

Despite our efforts, data use remained low. To help address this we:

- Investigated key obstacles to using data in development settings in [Benin and Tanzania](#).
- Looked at data use in a specific sector ([agriculture](#)). Working with key partners, we identified what information donors working in agriculture needed to make their aid work more effective. We also produced open-source technical tools to enable donors to share their information more efficiently and promote easier access.
- Used and applied data to a specific issue. For example, we examined United States (US) foreign assistance data as the basis for research into the potential impacts of proposed cuts to US foreign assistance and used the findings to inform relevant budgetary debates. We also made recommendations to the relevant US agencies about improving the presentation of this information, based on this experience of using their data.
- Explored ways of linking different sources and types of data together to help generate the fullest picture possible on development processes.

Our research gave us a good understanding of what could be done to get important aid and development information more widely used to inform better development outcomes. Subsequently, we initiated projects to build on this understanding.

2018-2021: Making transparency real

With the introduction of a new strategy in 2018 we shifted and conceptualised our efforts around three core pillars:

1. **Fulfilling the promise.** *Collaborating to ensure that data is used to contribute to improved development outcomes and achievement of the Sustainable Development Goals.*

Under pillar 1 we conceptualised, designed and delivered aid transparency programmes focusing on specific issues such as gender equality. For example our recently completed [Gender Financing Project](#) and our ongoing [Women's Economic Empowerment](#) project offer strategic evidence to increase and better target investments that economically empower women. This is helping us to develop a much greater understanding of the nuanced needs of data users working on some of the planet's most fundamental development issues.

2. **Opening up new frontiers.** *Making all aid and development finance data transparent and available.*

Under pillar 2 we undertook the [Humanitarian Transparency Project](#) evaluating the user needs of on the ground humanitarian actors, particularly local and national responders. We launched the ongoing [DFI Transparency Initiative](#) working collaboratively with development finance institutions and other stakeholders to increase the transparency of DFIs. We also undertook the [UK Aid Transparency Review](#) reviewing the transparency of ten aid-spending departments and two cross government funds using our Aid Transparency Index methodology.

3. **Raising the bar.** Strengthening and extending our research, advocacy and technical expertise to improve the usability of aid and development finance information.

Under Pillar 3 we produced the [2020 Aid Transparency Index](#), which continued to drive behaviour towards greater transparency and openness among donor agencies. Once again, we undertook a methodology review ahead of the 2022 Index, consulting widely with stakeholders, publishers and data users to ensure that the Index remains accurate, legitimate and that it evolves with changing practise. We also continued to engage with and support IATI and its members through the development of tools, contributions to technical discussions and involvement in working groups and committees.

A note-worthy development during this time was the ‘coming of age’ of IATI data. With so many major agencies now publishing data and improved tools providing easier access to the data, for the first time we saw large scale analysis of IATI data being used to inform policy discussions. Two examples include Development Initiative’s [analysis](#) of funding trends before and during COVID, and Save the Children’s [analysis](#) of the impending cuts to UK aid. Over the last decade Publish What You Fund drove the publication of more and better data thanks to our Index process. The availability of quality data for policy analysis and discussions illustrates the progress that has been achieved.

Strategy 2021 – 2024

The strategy below sets out what we aim to achieve by the end of 2024, why these goals are necessary and what we will do to deliver them.

This strategy builds directly on our 2018–2021 strategy with aid transparency at the core. The vision and mission and three pillar structure of our objectives remains consistent. Our previous strategy structure gave us sufficient direction and adequate flexibility to pursue initiatives which have driven greater aid transparency and have also enabled the growth of Publish What You Fund. Strategy 2021–2024 has been developed to build on that success. Despite the similarity, it is important to note where our thinking has evolved in the past three years and how we have sought to reflect these changes in our strategy. Specifically, there are three key areas that we've been focusing on: engagement, language and power.

Our previous research 'With publication comes responsibility' highlighted the need for engagement and more understanding of the gaps between publishers and data users. This was carried further in our 2020 Index and launch event which highlighted the need for more engagement around data to drive change in development outcomes. This strategy 2021–2024 marks the beginning of a journey for Publish What You Fund towards understanding, defining and measuring the concept of engagement. Our working definition is that data engagement is the process whereby data publishers actively engage with data users with a recognition that data users should be active partners in the process from inception. Engagement should help build trust, increase the use of data and increase local ownership. Data engagement is a recognition of the various stakeholders, especially local actors, and the need for their voices to be heard. This strategy will offer us a roadmap towards a better understanding of Publish What You Fund's methodology for engagement.

Across all of our work we've been reviewing how we communicate and specifically the words we use. We are cognisant of the power of language and the need to use words and phrases that portray the reality of aid and development rather than those which perpetuate outdated tropes or exacerbate unfair power dynamics. We regularly revisit and update our communications guidelines and strive to use language that is clear, inclusive, truthful and consistent. As ever, this work continues.

At Publish What You Fund, we have reflected on our own position and power and recognise that we function in a sector where decisions, control and resources are held by a small number of donors and INGOs, mostly based in the global North.

Power is a topic that we are still exploring as an organisation and we are only at the beginning of our journey of learning and trying new ways of working to contribute to a shift in dynamics. We value the importance of this exercise, given that we are an organisation headquartered in the global north, with staff predominantly based in the UK. We believe transparency and access are tools that can tackle unfair power structures and hope to be a leader and supporter by sharing information held by those in power.

So far, our work, in particular the Aid Transparency Index, has seen us working more with development agencies, donors and technocrats, than with data users or policy makers in countries where this aid is spent. Equally, our theory of change has very much focussed at the global level, largely due to our organisational definition of transparency, which until recently, focused on data publication, open data and information disclosure.

However, our approach to transparency is evolving. Transparency must include not just publication but engagement, building transparent relationships with partners, consultation, participation, inclusive decision-making with civil society and local actors, and accountability.

Recent Gender Financing and Women's Economic Empowerment projects have focused research and advocacy efforts at country level as well as a global level, looking at Guatemala, Bangladesh, Pakistan, Kenya, Nigeria, Nepal, Uganda and Ethiopia. This has involved engaging with civil society within these countries as well as national governments. This enables Publish What You Fund to help move the needle in line with agendas and issues prioritised by local actors. As our projects have taken on a country-focus approach we have also needed staff who work within and are familiar with those country contexts. To that end Publish What You Fund now has colleagues based in four countries including the UK.

Our vision

We envisage a world where aid and development information is **transparent, available** and **used** for effective and inclusive decision-making, public accountability and lasting change for all citizens.

Our mission

To promote aid and development finance information that is transparent, available and usable.

Our strategic pillars

To realise our vision and mission, our strategic pillars underpin the aims of the wider aid transparency movement to make the delivery of high-quality, timely, accessible and usable aid and development finance data a reality. Only then can data be truly transformative and used as an essential tool to effect lasting and significant positive development outcomes, as well as make a vital contribution to achieving national and local goals as well as the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) by 2030.

1. ENGAGING WITH DATA:

Collaborating to ensure that actors engage around development data and that this data is used to contribute to improved outcomes and achievement of local, national and global development goals, including the Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs).

The challenge: As well as improving the transparency, comprehensiveness, and timeliness of published data, for better development outcomes work is still needed to overcome the barriers that prevent people from accessing and using aid and development data. More publishers need to actively engage with potential data users to understand their needs, to build trust and local ownership.

We will:

- Work with local actors to access aid and development information and tools that support their advocacy, and to make partner governments and donor agencies more accountable.
- Support partner governments to use aid information to plan, manage and coordinate more effectively.
- Collaborate with national and local actors in partner countries to build a bridge between them and the donor community.
- Engage more widely with donors and multilateral fora.
- Advocate for donors and governments to engage with civil society.

Our goal: By the end of 2024, aid and development data will have been used in a number of settings and countries where we have encouraged publishers to engage with data users, especially local actors, to support greater accountability and more informed and inclusive decision-making for better development outcomes and achieving the SDGs.

2. FULL TRANSPARENCY:

Making all aid and development finance data transparent, available and usable.

The challenge: The donor landscape is changing dramatically and we must adapt accordingly. Today's aid and development finance vista is characterised by an increasingly diverse array of spending vehicles, presenting fresh opportunities for channelling aid and development funding where resources are scarce. However, as alternative spending modalities grow in popularity, so does the risk that increasing swathes of aid and development information will remain hidden.

We will:

- Deliver meaningful change in the disclosure practises of major development finance institutions (DFIs), engaging with technocrats and policy makers through our DFI Transparency Initiative.
- Monitor aid where it is disbursed through multiple agencies.
- Work with another spending vehicle on transparency improvement.

Our goal: By the end of 2024, beyond traditional bilateral aid and humanitarian spending, we will have worked with and encouraged donors in at least three new areas/aid and development funding vehicles to make their aid and development information more transparent.

3. MORE QUALITY DATA:

Strengthening and extending our research, advocacy and technical expertise to improve the quality and usability of aid and development finance information.

The challenge: Improving the quality and usability of aid and development information remains critical to driving transparency for greater effectiveness and accountability in aid and development spending. We cannot fulfil the promise to understand and promote the increased use of aid information or promote transparency among the increasing array of aid and development spending vehicles without it.

We will:

- Promote better quality aid and development information through our engagement with donors during the Aid Transparency Index process, and our wider research, advocacy and work with multilateral fora.
- Share our expertise more widely by promoting other customised 'Index-style' reviews based on our methodology and offering workshops and training for key stakeholders.
- Support and engage with the transparency community, to encourage and support progress.

Our goal: By the end of 2024, we will have measurably driven improvements in the quality and usability of aid and development information provided by donors and other financing vehicles.

1. Engaging with data

COLLABORATING TO ENSURE THAT ACTORS ENGAGE AROUND DEVELOPMENT DATA AND THAT THIS DATA IS USED TO CONTRIBUTE TO IMPROVED OUTCOMES AND ACHIEVEMENT OF LOCAL, NATIONAL AND GLOBAL DEVELOPMENT GOALS, INCLUDING THE SUSTAINABLE DEVELOPMENT GOALS (SDGs)

The challenge: Although the gains made by the aid and development transparency movement over a relatively short time have been impressive, the results of the 2020 Index remind us that overall the quality of published data still needs to be more transparent, accessible, comprehensive and timely. We found that only a minority of donors are publishing project results with fewer still publishing project reviews and evaluations, limiting the ability of stakeholders to gauge the effectiveness and value of aid and development spending.

Moreover, transparency is a necessary foundation for better development outcomes, but is not sufficient for this to happen. Until aid and development information is used by donors, government representatives, CSOs, local actors, journalists and researchers to make aid more effective and accountable, the original promise of the aid and development transparency movement will remain unfulfilled.

Work is still needed to overcome the barriers that prevent people from accessing and using aid and development data. More publishers need to actively engage with potential data users to understand their needs, to build trust and local ownership. A greater focus on accessibility and resources is needed to support data capacity.

Goal: By the end of 2024, aid and development data will have been used in a number of settings and countries where we have encouraged publishers to engage with data users, especially local actors, to support greater accountability and more informed and inclusive decision-making for better development outcomes and achieving the SDGs.

We will achieve this by:

1) Working with local actors: Data use is successful when it is applied to the issues that impact people locally. We will examine particular aid and development sectors or themes where aid data can be used to achieve better development outcomes. This will build on work we've already started in the gender and women's economic empowerment fields but may well include new areas such as climate finance transparency.

In close collaboration with others, we will:

- Work with local actors such as government ministries, national and local CSOs, journalists and INGO country offices, to access aid and development information and tools that support their advocacy to improve outcomes on the issues they care about, and to make relevant partner governments and donor agencies more accountable.
- Support partner governments to use aid information to plan, manage and coordinate more effectively.
- As a result, we will also increase the number and range of actors aware of, and interested in, aid and development transparency beyond traditional open-data communities. Actors working with us will also learn how to access and use data themselves, making such activities sustainable beyond the completion of any project.

2) Further improving the quality of aid and development information: By collaborating with national and local actors in partner countries, including governments and civil society, we will seek to build a bridge between them and the major donor community. By working with the information ourselves, we will gain a detailed understanding of different groups of users' needs and identify data gaps in specific use cases. We can take these examples and provide targeted feedback to donors too, helping them to improve the transparency of their data in these areas.

By piloting this approach in a number of sectors, we will be able to draw wider conclusions about best practices in publishing and sharing information. We will also be able to note areas where improvement is required. We will use this evidence alongside our work in Pillar Three to inform our wider engagement and interactions with both donors and relevant multilateral fora, including IATI.

There are no quick fixes here. But cumulatively, with direct experience and real-life examples, we will build a rich picture of a variety of user needs so that transparency can truly improve development outcomes and support the SDGs.

3) Advocate for donors and governments to engage with civil society: Using our networks, power and position within the development space, we will advocate for donors to actively engage with civil society and local actors using consultations, workshops, inclusive decision-making and participation. Publish What You Fund will hold donors and governments to account to ensure that data is not just published but that these actors engage with civil society to bridge the gap between data availability and data use. We will do this by using our power to incentivise donors to engage.

2. Full transparency

MAKING ALL AID AND DEVELOPMENT FINANCE DATA TRANSPARENT, AVAILABLE AND USABLE

The challenge: The donor landscape is changing dramatically and we must adapt accordingly. Today's aid and development finance vista is characterised by an increasingly diverse array of spending vehicles including: DFIs, private finance, cross-departmental and pooled or trust funds and the increasing disbursement of Official Development Assistance (ODA) through non-traditional aid spending departments.

These different flows present fresh opportunities for channelling aid and development funding where resources are scarce, but they also come with different priorities and approaches. A number, for example, use commercial contractual constraints or security sensitivities to justify concealing large portions of their information. In some cases, this may be essential but the need for these exclusions is not always clear. As alternative spending modalities grow in popularity, so does the risk that increasing swathes of aid and development information will remain hidden, further reducing the scope for cooperation and leveraging of different funding flows.

Goal: By the end of 2024, beyond traditional bilateral aid and humanitarian spending, we will have worked with and encouraged donors in at least three new areas/aid and development funding vehicles to make their aid and development information more transparent.

We will achieve this by:

- 1) Working with DFIs:** Publish What You Fund will build on its existing DFI Transparency Initiative, successfully delivering meaningful change in the disclosure practises of major DFIs. Using a combination of constructive engagement with technocrats and advocacy with policy makers to ensure political will, we will seek to reward leading practise while highlighting laggards and opportunities for improvement.
- 2) Monitoring aid where it is disbursed through multiple agencies:** Our work on the UK Aid Transparency Review demonstrated the extent to which aid transparency can suffer when aid funds are disbursed through entities which traditionally don't manage such funds or do not have the systems and processes in place to ensure the quality of publication commensurate with the importance and uniqueness of ODA.
- 3) Working with another spending vehicle:** We will look into at least one additional area of aid and development funding, such as pooled or trust funds or new initiatives such as COVAX or the 2X Challenge.

3. More quality data

STRENGTHENING AND EXTENDING OUR RESEARCH, ADVOCACY AND TECHNICAL EXPERTISE TO IMPROVE THE QUALITY AND USABILITY OF AID AND DEVELOPMENT FINANCE INFORMATION

The challenge: Improving the quality and usability of aid and development information remains critical to driving transparency for greater effectiveness and accountability in aid and development spending. We cannot fulfil the promise to understand and promote the increased use of aid information or promote transparency among the increasing array of aid and development spending vehicles without it.

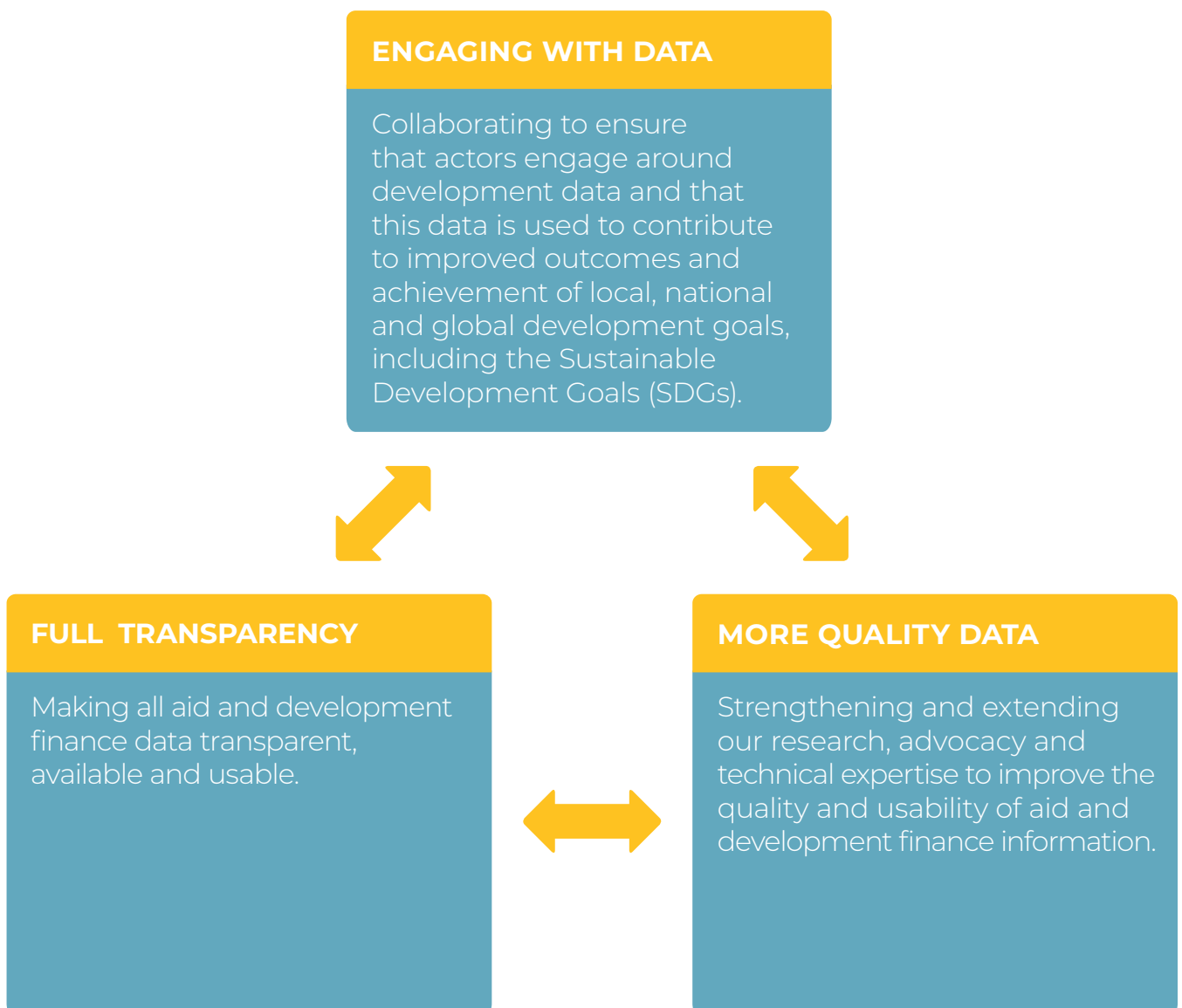
Goal: By the end of 2024, we will have measurably driven improvements in the quality and usability of aid and development information provided by donors and other financing vehicles.

We will achieve this by:

- 1) Promoting better quality aid and development information:** Since 2011, Publish What You Fund has built up a wealth of expertise, combining effective research, advocacy and technical knowhow, to improve the quality and usefulness of the data that donors share. We will continue to engage with donors through the Index data collection process, our wider research and advocacy efforts and relevant multilateral fora to encourage donors to provide more timely, comprehensive and accessible data. This will be further informed by our growing body of evidence from working directly on a variety of examples of using the data, as noted in Pillar One.
- 2) Sharing our expertise more widely:** We will further amplify and extend the benefits of aid transparency for better development outcomes and achieving the SDGs by expanding our reach. For example, by promoting other customised 'Index-style' reviews based on our methodology and offering workshops and training for key stakeholders. We will also strengthen our existing capacity by investing in staff to manage the various aspects of this process and in technical tools to help us do this.
- 3) Supporting and engaging with the transparency community:** Publish What You Fund will continue to engage with open data and transparency-related initiatives, such as IATI and Total Official Support for Sustainable Development (TOSSD), to support progress as well as to highlight areas in need of improvement. This is so that the wider aid and development transparency movement can realise its full potential.

Three pillars supporting the same vision

TO MAXIMISE THE IMPACT OF EACH OF THESE PILLARS, THEY WILL BE USED TO COMPLEMENT AND REINFORCE EACH OTHER:



2021 onwards: Refreshing our approach

We have identified some areas where we believe we can focus to start to challenge unequal power dynamics:

We will continue to move towards a more holistic definition of transparency; using our power and position to advocate, particularly to government and larger donor agencies to focus on engagement, consultation and inclusive decision-making with all stakeholders.

We will take a more mindful and systematic approach to setting up and implementing projects; taking time to conduct a power analysis and consultations before setting up projects, aiming for inclusive co-creation. We will ensure that our projects give voice to and are beneficial to national and local actors. We aim to ensure a 'do no harm' approach.

We will assess how we can use our projects to incentivise donors to engage and bridge the gap between data availability and data use. For our own projects and work, we will aim to build institutional rather than individual relationships with organisations, shifting power towards these organisations to influence our agenda. We will work to build more diverse and inclusive relationships on our project advisory committees by learning from previously successful project committees.

We aim to ensure that our research and advocacy is inclusive and beneficial for participants and partners. We will build relationships early on to help shape our research, advocacy agenda and messaging. Although we will be guided by Publish What You Fund's values, we will take careful consideration of the type of data we use for our research, how we use our research, whose views we are representing and how we present our findings.

Our research and advocacy are interdependent and mutually reinforcing. Our research agenda is set by our advocacy aims and our advocacy is developed and informed by our research findings. Rigorous, credible research is the foundation on which our targeted advocacy and messaging is built. We will ensure that our research stands up to scrutiny by powerful actors who may wish to discredit what we have to say. We will do this by taking an impartial, evidence-based approach and by being transparent with our methods and data. By using open data for our research and making our own data open we will uphold the standards we set.

GET IN TOUCH

If you would like to discuss any aspect of our strategy, or the work of Publish What You Fund, please get in touch with us:

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