Implementing aid transparency in Sweden

WHY DO WE CARE ABOUT AID TRANSPARENCY AND IATI?

Building on Sweden's long tradition of transparency and to honor our Busan commitments of aid transparency, Sida is working toward improving both the amount and quality of our IATI data. Aid transparency allows for better coordination of donor spending in order to achieve maximum impact with limited resources and it offers possibilities to increase aid effectiveness, accountability and to improve results. It also makes it easier for recipient governments to better plan and execute their spending and development efforts in settings where multiple actors are active. The aim of this white paper is to share our experiences and inspire more donor agencies to start publishing their data

HOW TO START PUBLISHING AS A BILATERAL DONOR AGENCY

1. **Stocktaking and extraction.** It is important to sort out what data you have available, how you can best extract the data and to choose the appropriate tools to do so. This includes mapping out what the data contains and how it matches with the IATI-standard in terms of document classification and data identifiers.

2. **System check.** Map out which systems you are currently using in order to figure out how they can be integrated to extract the information you want. The interaction between the planning system, financial information and the digital document archive is especially important to assess. In some cases we simply have to wait on overall system upgrade for our organisation that eventually will allow us to comply fully with the standard.

3. **Publishing process.** For security purposes it is vital to figure out whether to have a manual approval process for each project prior to publication or if all data should be published by default. At Sida, we make all of our data available by default, except for any sensitive or classified material that we filter out in line with the rules of public access.

4. **Communication and dialogue.** Establishing a dialogue both externally with key stakeholders and partner organisations as well as internally within Sida has been crucial. Internally it has meant a drive to inform of the value of open data and how it differs from statistics. Externally we have worked to increase general awareness of the values of transparency, open data and data quality through communication and facilitation of reporting and data conversion for the organisations we support.

5. **Licensing and copyright.** Pay attention to appropriate licensing since your data might be without copyright restrictions but still contain material where other copyright laws apply. In our case, our data belongs to the public domain by default due to our government's public access principles, but some restrictions might be applied to classified material or material where copyright is owned by someone else. These documents are made available on Openaid.se but they may not be republished without permission from the original copyright holders.

6. **Making use of tools.** The CSV Converter tool and the AidStream online data entry and management tool are two mechanisms recommended for smaller organisations to convert data into IATI XML files. However, for a larger organisation like Sida, with big amounts of data, a more powerful solution has been required. With the assistance of DFID we have used the SQL-to-IATI conversion tool as a starting point for conversion.

CHALLENGES

1. **Staff culture and privacy.** Despite the fact that Sida's data always has been available to the public by request, the instant and active publishing of our data has exposed privacy concerns amongst the staff. Even though the only real change is that the public can access the data without their knowledge, the staff experience it as an intrusion and they have expressed concern about the availability. We have found it important to communicate the values of transparency and Sida's commitments, ensuring staff buy-in and be responsive to the their concerns. This is achieved through continuous and open dialogue with the

Sweden's ⇅   aid to   the world ⇅   via   all organisations ⇅   for   all sectors ⇅   2014 ⇅

Total aid over time | Add comparative data |

2014
USD 4.2 bn

1998 1999 2000 2001 2002 2003 2004 2005 2006 2007 2008 2009 2010 2011 2012 2013 2014 2015

staff and seminars about what to consider in their daily project management work in terms of privacy, security and awareness about the accessibility of an external public audience.

2. **Data quality.** Data quality. Improving data quality has been a continuous challenge and it involves everyone in the data creation process. Awareness amongst the staff about how to provide sufficient and correct data in the contribution management system is vital.

3. **Usability and usage.** Since Sida first launched Openaid.se in 2011, there has been a change in strategy to attend to both the general public as well as the professional users (such as researchers, development professionals and journalists). In order to improve the user experience our latest version uses an interface that is both simple and intuitive yet precise and sophisticated to appeal to multiple audiences. We are also working to refer to Openaid.se more frequently and integrate the platform in our own communication efforts.

KEYS TO SUCCESS AND THE ROAD AHEAD

1. **Get everyone on board.** Gaining support from managerial and political levels gives the necessary mandate to take appropriate steps towards publishing. In our case, the Swedish government introduced the Transparency Guarantee for all of our international development assistance in 2010, which makes the Openaid initiative a priority. Additionally, in order to realise a project like this, a wide range of competencies is required including statisticians, archivists, IT technicians, communications and program managers (after all, it is data that they have produced that is published). By creating a team that includes the necessary competencies with weekly coordination and strategy meetings, we feel that we have established a solid process that moves us forward. When we launched the Openaid platform we started with an unofficial in-house soft launch and

demonstration of the platform to get feedback and potential concerns from the staff.

2. **Sharing is caring.** Take the opportunity to learn from others and from yourself. In our case, we had the opportunity to learn from DFID as they had already started publishing. Sharing both progress and failures serve as important learning opportunities for others and helps us reach our common goal of a transparent aid community. One of our contributions is the open source Openaid Wordpress theme that is freely available and is easy to adapt to your preferences, saving both time and resources. Making use of the IATI support team and joining the discussions within the IATI Technical Advisory Group (TAG) are great ways of engaging with the global transparency community.

3. **Yes, publish poor quality data!** It can be uncomfortable to publish poor quality data at an early stage, but doing so will drive your work with transparency and data quality forward. Your platform or data might not be perfect, but an early launch will allow you to figure out the appropriate next steps and avoid getting on the wrong path. The Openaid platform has gone through a number of upgrades and improvements entirely based on feedback from our users.

4. **Eat your own dogfood!** Our platform Openaid.se is based on the data we have published to the IATI datastore. As a result, we are using the same data as everyone else, pushing us to maintain high quality. Additionally, the organisations in the top of the Aid Transparency Index all have in common that they use their own data.

We have come a long way since Sida first initiated the project Openaid and started publishing using the IATI standard. However, a lot remains to be done and we look forward to working together with the global transparency community to improve not only our own work, but also lift others so that the international development community benefits.

Sida