

Summary of online “huddle” discussions and submissions received from CSO partners

From 20th of August to 17th September an open-access, online discussion was held to consult on different options for implementing the UK Aid Transparency Guarantee (ATG). 78 participants joined the “Huddle”. The discussion was part of wider consultation that included a consultation with 18 different civil society organisations on the 15th of September.

Participants raised the following **summary points**:

1. Transparency is recognised as a **powerful force for change**. Concerns about the level of interest (appetite) and the need for the right kind of information (accessibility) are negated by the fact that if even a small proportion of the UK’s/ international population have access, their aggregate number is large, meaning that this can still be a politically powerful force. However, it was raised in a number of discussions that we have **limited hard evidence** of what kind of information causes change, in what kind of context, in what kind of way.
2. In terms of type of information/ data, DFID’s priority focus needs to be on **raw data**. We should work to maximise levels of access and utilisation through open sourcing and ensuring the material is downloadable and processable. Clear forecasts, decision criteria, clear information at local levels and information on DFID’s joint workings were amongst the priorities identified.
3. Donors are not the best locus for intermediating information. This is best done by others, “**infomediaries**”. Donors’ role should be to make it possible, cheap and easy for other organisations to play this role. Support to other stakeholders such as **parliaments and local governments** and supporting **cross-country learning** also critical. However, such work should be done with careful attention to context – pushing too vigorously may at best cause valuable capacity to be shifted away from ongoing reforms and at worst destabilise the political equilibrium.
4. Transparency of recipient governments to their citizens is an important element of development. However, several commentators were strongly against imposing transparency – using **conditionality**. As:
 - a. the accountability relationship between a government and its own citizens is primarily a matter for them
 - b. conditionality does not work and this approach is not consistent with country ownership
 - c. some commentators noted that conditionality can work under certain conditions, however, the conditionality generally has to be in the interests of the partner government – i.e. a condition that they want anyway
5. In working with partners, DFID needs to **lead by example** and should be as transparent as possible in order to have **credible discussions** with partner governments and other partners. DFID should work on bilateral influencing and ensuring that that partners it funds (CSOs and multilaterals) work towards the same levels of transparency that it upholds. There are clear potential gains for CSOs such as streamlining reporting requirements. Some concerns were raised on the **trade offs** on concentrating on transparency in terms of

staff time and resources, and even whether transparency may disincentivise some types of good practice (long-term, rights based, capacity building) that has less obvious tangible benefits. The agenda needs to be fully integrated into the lead up to HLF4.

Summaries of main discussion topics follow below:

General discussion

- Transparency is recognised as a **powerful force for change**. Concerns about the level of interest (appetite) and the need for the right kind of information (accessibility) are negated by the fact that if even a small proportion of the UK's/ international population have access, their aggregate number is large, meaning that this can still be a politically powerful force.
- The Guardian [Katine Project](#) is a useful example of how deep transparency about a project can go.
- Strengthening and encouraging ICT in developing countries is critical in improving transparency

What kind of information to publish:

- Clear 3-5 year forecasts (can be indicative) of what the UK is planning to disburse to facilitate planning and budgeting.
- Information on decision making processes – policies, guidance notes etc.
- Detailed current and future plans, information at local levels is critical geocoding important.
- Clear information on conditionalities
- Joint projects with other donors
- Unique identifiers should be provided to ensure traceability of information
- Role of DFID enabling, fostering and supporting accessibility of aid information
- Maximise levels of access and utilisation through open-sourcing and ensuring the material is downloadable and processable

UK leadership of Global Transparency Agenda

- DFID should start from the premise of leading by example
- DFID can be more effective in countries with larger aid programmes (US, Japan), countries with whom DFID has strong bilateral relationships (eg. The IBSA), and countries/ institutions that have a poor record of reporting to partner country budgets
- Concentrate on those organisations where DFID is a heavy funder (World Bank, EC)
- Capitalise on the US's increasing interest in transparency
- MDG summit, negotiations on IDA-16 replenishment and the European Foreign Affairs Council are all possible loci for influencing
- The agenda needs to be fully integrated into the lead up to HLF4

Transparency in NGOs/ CSOs

- NGOs attach great significance to transparency and are taking a number of efforts to address this:
 - Open Forum on CSO Development Effectiveness
 - International NGO Accountability Charter
 - Global Reporting Initiatives attempt to develop sector specific guidelines for NGOs
 - Oxfam GB released details of expenditure on 1017 projects in 2009-10

- Where NGOs are in direct receipt of DFID funds, it is entirely reasonable to expect them to adhere to the same standards of transparency for this expenditure
- There are potential gains for NGOs if the adoption of common standards for the publication of their aid information could be combined with the development of a common reporting format
- There is a real demand for better information about NGO aid from partner country governments
- International NGOs are already coming under pressure from freedom of information campaigners for their relative lack of transparency
- DFID should establish a mechanism with CSOs to draw in the corporate governance, Monitoring and Evaluation and reporting elements of organisations, perhaps at the January IATI TAG meeting on NGO transparency. Could DFID and NGOs produce some form of joint Accountability and Transparency report?
- Like official donors, NGOs need to make standardised, comparable, electronically readable information available

Concerns

- Transparency can impose costs in terms of staff time and money
- DFID should consider whether NGO compliance with IATI would enable them to lighten the regulatory load of reporting by NGOs
- Will transparency disincentivise some types of good practice (long-term, rights based, capacity building) that has less obvious tangible benefits?

Partner Country Transparency

- Transparency of recipient governments to their citizens is an important element of development. Pursuing this approach may help to address the governance deficit that undermines the efficacy of so much aid. We should therefore be ambitious.
- Several commentators were strongly against imposing transparency – using **conditionality**. As:
 - the accountability relationship between a government and its own citizens is primarily a matter for them
 - conditionality does not work and this approach is not consistent with country ownership
 - some commentators noted that conditionality can work under certain conditions, however, the conditionality generally has to be in the interests of the partner government – i.e. a condition that they want anyway
- DFID must first itself be transparent to have the basis of a credible conversation with partners. DFID must also avoid going it alone.
- Several solutions were suggested:
 - Support to international and national CSOs working on transparency i.e. international transparency scorecards, parliaments and local governments.
 - NB The domestic demand for accountability can be very weak. Direct support to foster demand for accountability may run counter the underlying political and legitimisation processes, and will therefore be a high-risk return on investment for DFID – if pursued too vigorously they might destabilise the political equilibrium and result in political instability.

- Cross-country learning and experience sharing (whilst being aware that in-country capacity is limited and too much concentration on one issue may mean that less attention is given to other reforms)
- Fundamental to ensuring UK aid transparency is ensuring that aid information can be integrated into recipient country systems. Ensuring aid information is fully integrated in to recipients' budgets is a prerequisite for the development of meaningful parliamentary oversight and audit functions
- The links between transparency and change/ results is complex and we need to gather hard evidence on what works and why

Transparency in the context of information on results

- Evaluations frequently vanish from public view, placing them on public display will likely have a much greater impact
- A transparency movement that transforms development will have to be about much more than just making numbers and documents available. And it will have to be contextually aware.
- If decisions about aid are made public in real time, the people affected/benefited by said aid have a chance at least of responding in some way to those decisions.

Feedback

- The evidence base of the costs and benefits of getting feedback is weak.
- Good practice principles for feedback systems include:
 - Adapting systems to context
 - Develop assessment criteria with respondents
 - Generate quantified feedback data
 - Report and publish comparable data
 - Confidentiality
 - Discuss findings together
- Incentives for feedback are not automatic and need to be encouraged
- Feedback processes can be used to build capacity

DFID
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