Accessing aid information: Data sources

Module 2

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Introduction

This module introduces the various sources of information on aid data and provides basic guidance on how to use them. It highlights the strengths and weaknesses of each source and points of consideration for users. This module is intended to serve either as an introduction to those new to this area of work or as a refresher for those who have some knowledge of aid data.

The second in a series of six, this module was developed using content created by Development Initiatives, Integrity Action, the International Budget Partnership and Publish What You Fund. The module aims to develop and strengthen the skills, capacities and strategic visions of civil society organisations working in the areas of aid and budget analysis, monitoring and advocacy.

Expanded versions of these materials have previously been used in pilot workshops in Nepal and Kenya. Participants engaged in practical, experiential learning activities, which encouraged collaboration and peer learning. This module includes lessons from these pilot workshops.

Sources of aid information

There are many different sources of aid information, generated both at international and national levels. Different sources can be useful for different purposes, as they all provide slightly differing perspectives on aid flows. At the pilot workshop in Kenya, participants identified reports published by donors or international non-governmental organisations (NGOs), information from personal contacts and internet databases as potential sources of aid information. This highlights the range of tools, skills and connections required by individuals and organisations to access aid information from these various sources.

National sources

The availability, quality and comprehensiveness of aid data at the national level vary according to country. In some countries detailed national reports of project-level data on bilateral and multilateral aid to the government are produced. The Government of Nepal also includes information on NGO projects in their annual report, the *Statement of Technical and Other Assistance* (access the 2013 version here). Alongside reports, an aid information management system, or AIMS, represents a comprehensive source of information (if a country has one).

Aid information management systems

These are web-based systems, generally owned by governments and populated by donors, who enter data on the aid they are giving to that country. Primarily, they were designed to help

developing countries better manage their aid flows, but they can also be a rich source of data for organisations and individuals wanting to track resources for greater accountability.

It is important to note that not all AIMS are publically accessible, with use being restricted only to the government and donors. Others have a selection of the whole data set available for use by the public. The Nepal AIMS was made public in 2013. Civil society can play a role in asking governments and donors to make AIMS data available to the public.

Within AIMS you can find aid commitments, disbursements and activities. Information is made available project by project (project-level) and can be broken down or aggregated either by sector (e.g., health or infrastructure) or geographic area (province, region or county). When working with AIMS, you should remember that the type and quality of data varies depending on the country and the donor that is reporting.

The two most common types of AIMS are:

1. *Development Assistance Database (DAD)*
    Used in over 30 countries, the DAD can be used to collect information, track funds, and plan and analyse. You can explore DADs for Afghanistan, Kenya and Sierra Leone, among others, by visiting the websites and "entering as a public user".

2. *Aid Management Platform (AMP)*
    The AMP is used in over 20 countries and is designed to enable users to track and monitor development programs and projects. As well as accessing information in its raw form, its users can access charts, graphs and maps to support analysis in some of the public AMPs. DRC and Malawi are just two of the countries with publically accessible AMPs.

International sources
International sources are most commonly produced by donor organisations and intermediary organisations (who bring together information from other sources to make them more accessible). Some prominent sources include:

1. *UNOCHA FTS (UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs, Financial Tracking Service) –* fts.unocha.org
    UNOCHA FTS is a global, real-time database that records all reported humanitarian assistance. Reporting assistance is voluntary. It includes aid that comes from NGOs, the Red Cross and Red Crescent Movements, UN Agencies bilateral donors, private donations, and in-kind aid.

2. *AidData (a project of Brigham Young University, the College of William and Mary, and Development Gateway) – Aiddata.org*
    AidData collects project-level data from donors and donor agencies, including multilateral organisations and non-DAC bilateral donors (*see Glossary*). It aims to give a more complete picture of development finance flows. Data can be accessed through specific datasets and a dashboard that enables users to create charts, tables and maps. AidData has created an additional database with the Center for Global Development, Aiddatachina.org, which tracks development finance from China to Africa.

Donor databases can be very useful sources of aid data at the international level. They include information on projects or programs that donors fund around the world. Some sector-specific databases are also available, for example Climate Funds Update, which comprises a list of funds from different organisations going to climate change mitigation and adaptation activities.

Key sources of international information

Multilateral sources	Bilateral sources	Foundation sources
- World Bank http://www.worldbank.org/projects - African Development Bank http://www.afdb.org/en/projects-and-operations/project-portfolio/ - UN Development Programme (UNDP) Open Data Portal https://data.undp.org/	- UK Department for International Development (DFID) Development Tracker http://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/ - Japan International Cooperation Agency (JICA) ODA Loan Projects Data http://www2.jica.go.jp/en/yen_loan/index.php - USAID Greenbook (complete historical record of US aid) http://gbk.eads.usaidallnet.gov/	- The MacArthur Foundation http://www.macfound.org/ - The Gates Foundation http://www.gatesfoundation.org/How-We-Work/Quick-Links/Grants-Database - The Ford Foundation http://www.fordfoundation.org/grants/search

Aid data from the Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development's Development Assistance Committee (OECD DAC) database provides data on aid and other development resources to developing countries from the members of the DAC (*see Glossary*), multilateral organisations and other donors. Information is reported in two different ways:

1. **DAC annual aggregates** on official development assistance (ODA), other official flows (OOFs) and private flows (*see Glossary*). These include information on the type of aid, geographical distribution, sectors and the tying status (tied aid must be spent in the donor country; untied aid can be spent in any country – *see Glossary*). The data here are useful for building a bigger picture of aid from donors.

2. **The Creditor Reporting System (CRS)** contains detailed data on individual projects and programmes, both in a quantitative and descriptive format. The data in the CRS can be used to analyse sectoral and geographical breakdowns of aid data for selected years and donors. It enables more granular analysis, which enables users to examine specific policy objectives (e.g., gender equality, aid for trade, etc) or donor compliance with international agreements.

DAC data covers all developing countries and is validated through a peer review process. To make it easier to compare data between donors, there are standard definitions and criteria for the data that are reported. The data is available to download and through a user interface on the DAC website.

OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)

The OECD DAC is an international forum of some of the largest providers of aid. There are currently 29 DAC members. The mandate of the group is to "promote development co-operation and other policies so as to contribute to sustainable development, including pro-poor economic growth, poverty reduction, improvement of living standards in developing countries, and a future in which no country will depend on aid" (http://www.oecd.org/dac/developmentassistancecommitteedac.htm). All members are required to report their provision of resources that support sustainable development.

There are two ways to access DAC annual aggregates and CRS data:

1. *OECD.STAT* (stats.oecd.org) – a browser which is suitable for those more familiar with DAC and CRS data

2. *Query Wizard for International Development Statistics (QWIDS)* http://stats.oecd.org/qwids/ – a more intuitive interface for users less familiar with the structure and content of DAC and CRS databases.

DAC data can be really useful if you are monitoring donor performance on specific targets (e.g., the commitment to give ODA equivalent to 0.7% of GDP) or looking at volumes of different kinds of aid (e.g., loans vs grants or development vs. humanitarian aid). When working with DAC data, the following should be noted:

- Many international resources for development cooperation aren't included in this data (e.g., remittances, non-ODA funds from governments and voluntary public giving)

- There is a time-lag before data is made available, with a preliminary publication of data in April from the preceding year, but full datasets not published until December.

- Discrepancies in data quality and consistency exist, because some donors are better than others at reporting descriptive information.

Consequently, the DAC data may not be the most useful source of information if you are looking to compare aid resource inputs with outcomes (e.g., spending on education compared to student performance) or to track aid resources beyond the recipient government level.

The strengths and weaknesses of aid information

When working with aid data from any source, it is essential to be aware of the strengths and weaknesses that might impact your work. Good levels of disaggregated data can let you drill down to find more detail. Tools to export data as a CSV file[1] can allow users to carry out more specific analysis, as highlighted by the participants at the pilot training in Kenya. The group also highlighted the weakness of some sources in the way they segment or break down the data. Other participants highlighted technical issues in using interfaces that often timed-out before there was time to carry out full analysis. These shared experiences highlight the need to build a good understanding of the data sources you work with, and to structure your analysis in a way that reduces the impact of the weaknesses and makes the most of the strengths.

Other considerations when working with aid databases are as follows:

- Databases are better at storing structured, quantitative data rather than qualitative data. Often qualitative information can be incomplete or of lower quality.

- The fields published are determined by the owners or providers of the data, and may not meet the specific needs of all users.

- Names and definitions of data will reflect a particular perspective: a donor's view of their aid might be different from the view of the governments that receive it.

- Data in a database is only as good as the data that is entered and the purpose for entering data may not be the same as the purpose of those using it. A lot of aid data is entered by donor project officers who report for their finance systems, rather than for others to use for monitoring and accountability purposes.

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[1] This type of file allows users to save data in a spreadsheet format, e.g. in Microsoft Excel.

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The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)

Launched in 2008 by a multi-stakeholder group of donors, developing countries and civil society organisations, IATI is an initiative that seeks to make development cooperation data **easier to find, use and compare.** In 2011, members of the initiative agreed on a common, open, international standard for publishing more and better aid information.

IATI has worked in a user-centric way since the beginning, by consulting with key data users (including civil society and government staff) from over 70 different countries. This was done to ensure that data published to the IATI Standard meets the needs of a variety of different users.

IATI provides data that is:

- **Comparable** – data is provided in the same format and using the same data fields, so that users can easily compare it.

- **Easy to find** – all organisations that publish to IATI share a link to their data in one central location, the IATI Registry, so that users know where to find it.

- **Comprehensive** – data published covers different kinds of development assistance from a range of development actors, allowing users a more holistic picture of development cooperation. The 275 organisations who had published data to IATI by September 2014 include multilateral and bilateral donors, regional development banks, philanthropic foundations, national and international NGOs and private sector organisations.

- **Up to date** – publishers are asked to regularly update their information (monthly or quarterly) to ensure that users are getting the most recent information.

Several tools have been created to make IATI data more accessible to users by creating interfaces and dashboards. Two examples of this are:

1. d-portal: An online country-based platform that tracks development flows and seeks to provide civil society, line ministries and parliamentarians in developing countries with information that can assist in the monitoring and planning of development activities. d-portal uses IATI and OECD data to generate maps, graphs, tables and links to the raw data and to support the users' access to the data.

2. The IATI Datastore is a tool that allows users to generate spreadsheets of IATI data that can be easily analysed. It allows users to query and create specific data sets of interest to them by searching for specific donors, sectors, countries and regions.

Glossary

(Aid) commitments	A commitment is the total amount agreed to for a project or program by a donor, over a certain time period.
Bilateral donor	A country or independent institution that provides funds directly to programs, organisations or governments.
OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC)	An international forum of many of the largest providers of aid. DAC members include 28 major donor countries plus the European Union (EU). The 28 member countries are: Australia, Austria, Belgium, Canada, Czech Republic, Denmark, Finland, France, Germany, Greece, Iceland, Ireland, Italy, Japan, Korea, Luxembourg, The Netherlands, New Zealand, Norway, Poland, Portugal, Slovak Republic, Slovenia, Spain, Sweden, Switzerland, the United Kingdom and the United States. The World Bank, International Monetary Fund and UNDP participate as observers.
Development finance institutions (DFIs)	Institutions that provide credit to private sector investments in developing countries to promote development. They are backed by states in developed countries.
(Aid) disbursements	Funds that are actually transferred for a project or program by a donor.
In-kind aid	Flows of goods and services to recipient countries that do not involve the exchange of money or debt instruments (e.g., food aid).
Multilateral donor	An institution created by a group of countries that provides financial and technical assistance for the purpose of development.
Mutual accountability	The process by which two or more development partners agree to be responsible and answerable for the commitments they make.
Non-DAC donors	Those donor countries that are not members of the OECD DAC. These countries include Brazil, China, India, Qatar, South Africa, Turkey and the United Arab Emirates, among a number of others.
Organisation for Economic Cooperation and Development (OECD)	An international organisation of 34 countries with the mission of stimulating economic progress and world trade.
Other official flows (OOFs)	Transactions by the official sector with aid recipient countries that are not directed at development nor contain a grant element of less than 25%. As a result, these transactions are not considered ODA. These include export credits, portfolio investment and debt relief.
Private flows	Consist of aid provided at market terms and financed out of private sector resources and private grants (i.e., grants by NGOs and net of subsidies received from the official sector).
Tying Status	*Tied aid:* bilateral loans that are linked to purchases of goods and services by the recipient country from the donor country.
	Untied aid: aid for which the associated goods and services may be fully and freely procured in substantially all countries.

Further reading

- Development Initiatives – The Creditor Reporting System (CRS) – A Guide – Feb 2011
- Full lists of the different codes and sectors for the DAC data are available here: http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/purposecodessectorclassification.htm
- The OECD Glossary of Statistical Terms http://stats.oecd.org/glossary/about.asp
- Support for the DAC databases is available on the OECD website here: http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats/help.htm