



## Inspiration module: how is aid data used in the media?

<http://schoolofdata.org/courses/inspiration-module-how-is-aid-data-used-in-the-media/>

### Module Objectives:

- Learn about how aid data is currently used in the media through a couple of case studies
- Understand how to ‘reverse engineer’ these figures, to fact-check them from the source.
- Understand why lots of these figures often deserve a second look, rather than being taken at face value

### Prerequisites/before you get started:

- Complete ‘An introduction to aid data; what is it, where is it’
- Read the two articles in the case studies – [Why is Afghanistan sending aid to Gaza](#) and [British aid money is funding corruption overseas](#)

### Table of Contents:

- Introduction
- Case study #1
- Case study #2
- Exercise
- Conclusion

## Introduction

It’s all very well learning where aid data is, what it is, and how to find it – but most often, we come across the data already packaged up as ‘information’. In this module, we’ll try to ‘reverse engineer’ some of the figures that we come across in a couple of media outlets – this can give us a hint of where journalists might find their data, and it also helps us to fact check the information that is presented to the public.

## Content

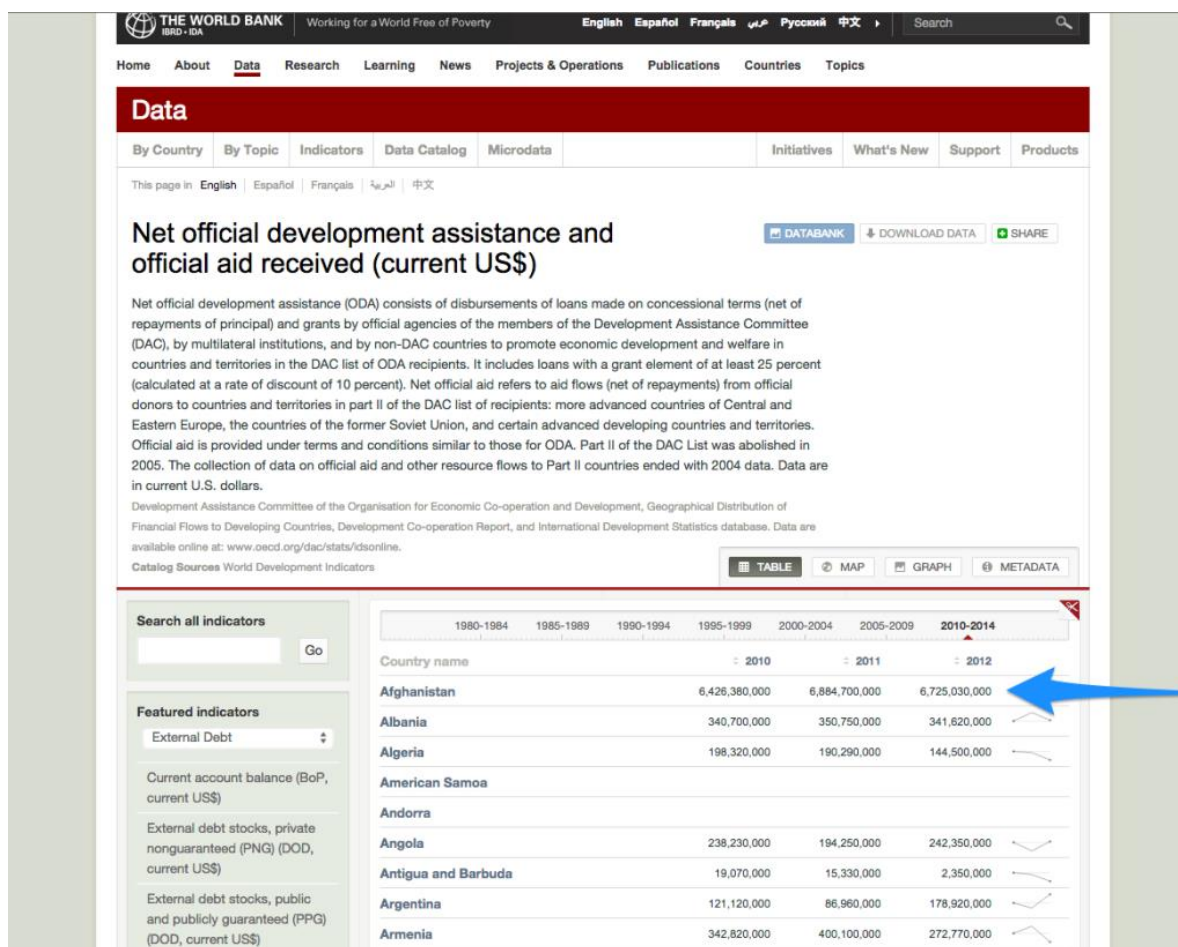
### Case study 1: [Why Is Afghanistan Sending Aid to Gaza?](#)

Let’s start with this story: Afghanistan – a low-income country which receives Official Development Assistance from other, richer countries – is, apparently, sending aid to Gaza.

The way the headline is structured sounds almost indignant – by asking the question, we’re starting at the point of thinking that, in fact, Afghanistan **shouldn’t** be sending any aid. The story explains as much to begin with, and goes on to give some precise figures:

*According to World Bank estimates, Afghanistan received more than \$6.7 billion in foreign [aid](#) in 2012, the [bulk](#) of which came from the US.* Happily, there are links next to both of those claims – let’s follow them.

The first (following the link from ‘aid’ in the quote above) takes us to the World Bank’s databank:



And marked with the arrow, is the figure that is being quoted – that Afghanistan received over \$6.7 billion in ODA in 2012. It’s great that the journalist here has actually linked to the data source, as this makes it much easier to verify the figure!

So, let’s move on to the next link in that sentence, which quotes [where the ‘bulk’ of the aid comes from](#) – this takes us directly to this image:

## Afghanistan

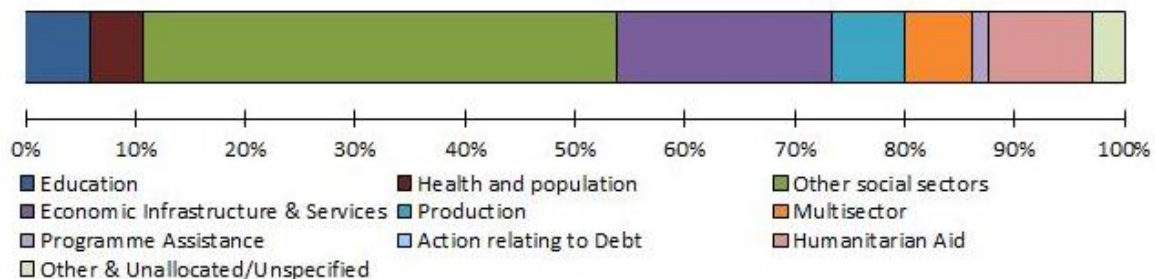
Receipts	2010	2011	2012
Net ODA (USD million)	6 427	6 885	6 725
Bilateral share (gross ODA)	87%	89%	88%
Net ODA / GNI	40.3%	38.2%	..
Net Private flows (USD million)	- 22	7	- 11

For reference	2010	2011	2012
Population (million)	28.4	29.1	29.8
GNI per capita (Atlas USD)	510	570	..

Top Ten Donors of gross ODA (2011-12 average)		(USD m)
1	United States	2 924
2	Japan	812
3	Germany	527
4	United Kingdom	433
5	EU Institutions	310
6	Australia	193
7	AsDB Special Funds	178
8	Canada	164
9	IDA	163
10	Turkey	141

Bilateral ODA by Sector (2011-12)



Sources: OECD - DAC, World Bank; [www.oecd.org/dac/stats](http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats)

The table 'Top Ten Donors of gross ODA' seems to indicate that the US was by far the biggest donor to Afghanistan – although, presenting the information as an **image** is possibly the least useful way that it could be presented, as it is not machine readable and impossible to get the data in a structured way! In case we wanted to follow the trail further, the source of the data is however stated, as [www.oecd.org/dac/stats](http://www.oecd.org/dac/stats) – this time though, we'll leave it there.

We've now traced the source of the two main statistics stated – as you can see, it's made quite simple if the writer links to where they got their information from. Unfortunately, however, that's not always the case...

## Case study 2: [British aid money is funding corruption overseas, damning new report finds](#)

This is something of an unusual case: the entire article is focused around a newly released report about the 'impact' of British Aid, conducted by the [Independent Commission for Aid Impact](#). They carried out an investigation looking into how British aid was spent, and the results are somewhat controversial, hence the media coverage.

Let's look into some figures that are quoted:

Figures earlier this year disclosed that Britain hiked its aid spending by more than any other country in Europe last year. Foreign aid soared by 28 per cent last year, meaning the UK hit its target of spending 0.7 per cent of GDP on overseas development. It left Britain with the second most generous aid budget in the world, outstripped only by the United States.

Where might we go to verify these figures?

To start with: ‘Foreign aid soared by 28% last year’.

Presumably, this means in 2013. First, let’s have a look at the [OECD Aid Statistics](#)—unfortunately, this seems to only give data for 2012.

How about the [DevTracker](#) portal, which tracks DFID (the agency discussed in the report) spending?

There, we can see various things: aid by sector, aid by location... but what about aid by year? This doesn’t seem to be an option, even by putting the keywords ‘2013’ ‘total’ into the search bar.

So... about a general search? “UK ODA 2013” brings up some reports: this one, entitled [Statistics on International Development, 2013](#) – but although it says 2013 in the title, it means that it was written in 2013, about 2012 data.

What about searching on that same page for [Statistics on International Development, 2014](#)? As it turns out, we’re in luck: a new report was just published on October 30th, 2014, and seems to be an annual publication, with lots of statistics!

Let’s try the first table that comes up, [Excel Tables: Statistics on International Development](#)

If we download this table (just by clicking on it) we see in Excel, or whatever spreadsheet software you are using, that there are a number of different tables provided, in the Index sheet:

Table	Description
Table 1	GNI estimates for 2013 and implied ODA:GNI ratios; current prices, £m
Table 2	Total UK Net ODA: by Delivery Channel (Bilateral, Multilateral) (2009, 2012, 2013)
Table 3	Breakdown of UK Net ODA: by official agency (2009, 2012, 2013)
Table 4	Total UK Net Country-Specific Bilateral ODA: by official agency and Region (2009 - 2013)
Table 5	Top 20 Country Recipients of UK Bilateral ODA (2009, 2012, 2013)
Table 6	Top Five Sectors in Receipt of UK Net Bilateral ODA (2009, 2012, 2013)
Table 7	Top 20 Recipients of UK Net Multilateral ODA (2012, 2013)
Table 8	Breakdown of UK Net ODA: by official agency and delivery channel (2009, 2012, 2013)
Table	Description
Table C1	UK Net ODA: 1970-2013 (£ millions)
Table C2	UK Net ODA 2011-2013
Table C3	Provisional Net ODA from DAC Donors, 2013 (£ millions)
Table C4	Provisional Net ODA:GNI Ratios from DAC Donors, 2013
Table C5	Bilateral and Multilateral ODA from DAC Donors as a Proportion of Provisional Net ODA, 2013
Table C6	Map of Total DAC Members' ODA Spend by Country, 2012

Table 2: Total UK Net ODA sounds like it might be what we're looking for – so, select the tab 'Table 2' along the bottom.

And there, we find the answer! The columns P and Q show 'change since 2012', and in fact the % here given is 30.2%, actually higher than the 28% noted in the article.

Table 2. Total UK Net ODA: by Delivery Channel (Bilateral, Multilateral) <sup>1</sup>										
2009, 2012 and 2013										
	2009		2012		2013		Change since 2009		£ million Change since 2012	
	£m	% total ODA	£m	% total ODA	£m	% total ODA	£m	%	£m	%
Total Bilateral ODA	4,804	65.8%	5,560	63.2%	6,745	58.8%	1,940	40.4%	1,185	21.3%
of which: bilateral through multilateral	1,602	21.9%	1,879	21.3%	2,336	20.4%	734	45.8%	457	24.3%
Total Multilateral ODA	2,497	34.2%	3,242	36.8%	4,717	41.2%	2,220	88.9%	1,475	45.5%
TOTAL ODA	7,301	100.0%	8,802	100.0%	11,462	100.0%	4,161	57.0%	2,660	30.2%

1. Figures may not sum to totals due to roundings.

While we're on this spreadsheet, it might be interesting to have a little look around the data provided – for example, how is that money spent? If we click on Table C10, we can see the 'broad sector' breakdown; are there any surprises?

Table C10. Broad Sector Breakdown of UK Bilateral ODA															
2009, 2012 and 2013															
														Ordered by 2013 ODA	
														£ millions	
		2009		2012		2013		Change since 2009		Change since 2012					
		£m	% Bilateral ODA	£m	% Bilateral ODA	£m	% Bilateral ODA	£m	%	£m	%				
Broad Sector															
Health		697	15.2%	1,077	19.7%	1,297	19.5%	600	86.1%	220	20.5%				
Multisector / Cross-Cutting		500	10.9%	743	13.6%	956	14.2%	457	91.4%	214	28.8%				
Education		523	11.4%	621	11.3%	905	13.4%	382	73.0%	285	45.9%				
Government and Civil Society		762	16.6%	787	14.4%	835	12.4%	73	9.6%	48	6.1%				
Humanitarian Aid		484	10.6%	425	7.8%	826	12.2%	341	70.4%	400	94.1%				
Economic Infrastructure and Services		526	11.5%	597	10.9%	467	7.2%	-39	-7.4%	-110	-18.5%				
Administrative Costs of Donors		254	5.6%	333	6.1%	352	5.2%	98	38.6%	19	5.8%				
Other Social Infrastructure and Services		204	4.5%	210	3.8%	316	4.7%	112	55.1%	106	50.5%				
Production Sectors		162	3.5%	191	3.5%	228	3.4%	66	40.6%	37	19.3%				
Commodity and General Programme Assistance		355	7.8%	286	5.2%	227	3.4%	-128	-36.1%	-59	-20.5%				
Water Supply and Sanitation		73	1.6%	107	1.9%	128	1.9%	55	75.4%	22	20.3%				
Action Relating to Debt		27	0.6%	71	1.3%	53	0.8%	26	95.5%	-18	-24.9%				
Refugees in Donor Countries		7	0.2%	28	0.5%	32	0.5%	25	339.5%	4	13.9%				
Total Sector-Specific Bilateral ODA		4,575		5,476		6,644		2,069		1,168					

## Exercise:

\*Have a look at, for example:

- what has changed drastically from 2012 to 2013 (Columns O and P)
- How much money is spent internally (Row 12)
- What has changed a lot from 2009 until 2013? (Columns L and M)\*

But before we get too distracted- wait, why did they say 28%, then?

Maybe it's because they were using older figures than these – at the top of this [Statistics page](#) it also mentions that DFID publishes 'Provisional UK ODA' statistics, which we can [see here](#). Table 1 in this document looks like this:

Table 1: UK Official Development Assistance 2012-2013 £ millions				
	2012	2013	Change over the year	
			£ million	%
Total ODA	8,760	11,437	2,677	30.5%
Bilateral ODA	5,458	6,851	1,393	24.6%
of which: Bilateral Debt Relief	71	36	-35	-49.9%
Multilateral ODA	3,298	4,559	1,319	40.4%
Total ODA excluding Bilateral Debt Relief	8,690	11,401	2,707	31.1%
Total ODA as proportion of GNI (%)	0.56%	0.72%		0.16%

Again – the change from 2012 to 2013 in Total ODA is 30% (actually, 30.5% here, in Cell E5).

So – the figure clearly isn't from here.

Now that we're simply looking for the source of the figure quoted in the original article, how about searching directly for it – "UK ODA 28%". The third result we get is an article from [Development Initiatives](#), which cites a data source at the bottom – [OECD DAC](#) – DAC provisional 2013 ODA release.

Following that link, we get to this press release, [Aid to developing countries rebounds in 2013 to reach an all-time high](#).

Found it!



## Development

> Aid architecture

> Aid effectiveness

> Aid for trade

> Aid statistics

> Conflict and fragility

> Environment and development

> Evaluation of development programmes

> Gender equality and development

> Governance and development

> Peer reviews of DAC members

> Perspectives on global development

> Policy Coherence for Development

> Poverty reduction

> Poverty reduction and social development

> Untied aid

### Aid to developing countries rebounds in 2013 to reach an all-time high

08/04/2014 - Development aid rose by 6.1% in real terms in 2013 to reach the highest level ever recorded, despite continued pressure on budgets in OECD countries since the global economic crisis. Donors provided a total of USD 134.8 billion in net official development assistance (ODA), marking a rebound after two years of falling volumes, as a number of governments stepped up their spending on foreign aid.

An annual survey of donor spending plans by the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) indicated that aid levels could increase again in 2014 and stabilise thereafter. However, a trend of a falling share of aid going to the neediest sub-Saharan African countries looks likely to continue.

"It is heartening to see governments increasing their development aid budgets again, despite the financial constraints they are currently facing," said OECD Secretary-General Angel Gurría. "However, assistance to some of the neediest countries continues to fall, which is a serious concern. We will need to address this issue when the Global Partnership for Effective Development Co-operation meets in Mexico next week, as well as the broader challenge of how to make the most of ODA in a growing pool of resources for development finance."

#### Key aid figures in 2013

In all, 17 of the DAC's 28 member countries increased their ODA in 2013, while 11 reported a decrease. Net ODA from DAC countries stood at 0.3% of gross national income (GNI.) Five countries met a longstanding UN target for an ODA/GNI ratio of 0.7%.

**The United Kingdom increased its ODA by 27.8% to hit the 0.7% target for the first time.** The United Arab Emirates posted the highest ODA/GNI ratio, 1.25%, after providing exceptional support to Egypt.

Aid to developing countries grew steadily from 1997 to a first peak in 2010. It fell in 2011 and 2012 as many governments took austerity measures and trimmed aid budgets. The rebound in aid budgets in 2013 meant that even excluding the five countries that joined the DAC in 2013 (Czech Republic, Iceland, Poland, Slovak Republic and Slovenia), 2013 DAC ODA was still at an all-time high.

Great – so we can make a fairly informed guess as to why 28% is quoted as a figure in the article...but why is it different to the figure given by the UK Government?

The data upon which this press released is based, is linked at the bottom of that page – if you click on ‘See the data behind the tables and charts’, you’ll get another spreadsheet download.

Here, we can see in Table 2 that the % change from 2012 to 2013 for the UK is down as 28%.

F8					At 2012 prices and exchange rates		
	A	B	C	D	E	F	G
2							
3							
4							
5							
6							
7							
8							
9							
10	Australia	4 855	5 515	5 162	-6.4		
11	Austria	1 173	1 113	1 115	0.1		
12	Belgium	2 312	2 359	2 203	-6.6		
13	Canada	4 958	5 703	5 055	-11.4		
14	Czech Republic	212	220	209	-4.7		
15	Denmark	2 959	2 819	2 824	0.2		
16	Finland	1 435	1 326	1 367	3.0		
17	France	12 750	13 557	12 165	-10.3		
18	Germany	16 046	14 570	15 211	4.4		
19	Greece	305	327	302	-7.7		
20	Iceland	35	26	33	27.4		
21	Ireland	822	808	793	-1.9		
22	Italy	3 333	2 837	3 180	12.1		
23	Japan	22 732	18 662	27 939	49.7		
24	Korea	1 809	1 646	1 737	5.5		
25	Luxembourg	434	402	407	1.2		
26	Netherlands	5 613	5 629	5 351	-5.0		
27	New Zealand	461	449	445	-1.0		
28	Norway	5 647	4 849	5 599	15.5		
29	Poland	493	439	475	8.2		
30	Portugal	524	619	500	-19.1		
31	Slovak Republic	85	80	82	2.4		
32	Slovenia	60	58	58	-0.6		
33	Spain	2 458	2 123	2 361	11.2		
34	Sweden	5 838	5 248	5 575	6.2		
35	Switzerland	3 224	3 082	3 187	3.4		
36	United Kingdom	18 386	14 267	18 256	28.0		
37	United States	32 216	31 263	31 741	1.5		

It also states that these figures are “At 2012 prices and exchange rates”.

Underneath this table (on the same sheet) – it also states:

Notes: The data for 2013 are preliminary pending detailed final data to be published in December 2014.

Another point to notice, though we’re concentrating here on the percentage change rather than the actual figures is that the OECD data gives the prices in USD million, and the UK govt. data is in GBP. Though of course, this should not make a difference with regards to percentage change!

Without diving deeper into finding out how the two institutions came up with those figures, it is difficult to understand why the percentage change is actually different here; we did, however, achieve our goal of finding out where that figure came from, in the original story.



## Exercise

Take a look at this article, [Why Israel and other foreign militaries — not the global poor — get the biggest US aid packages](#).

Can you spot any problems with the article? Think especially about the years mentioned, facts that are mentioned as though they are definite, when they might actually not happen...

## Conclusion

As we've seen, it can sometimes take a few tries to find out the 'original' source of data quoted – but, it can definitely be worth it, especially if the claim in a news story sounds a little unlikely to you.

Once you have an idea of what the main sources of aid data are, it won't take long to narrow it down to where you should go to find your answer – and, who knows what you might learn along the way!

## Further resources:

Here are some more articles which mention aid data figures – why not see if you can reverse engineer these ones? If you come across any good ones, post them in the comments!

- [Why Israel and other foreign militaries — not the global poor — get the biggest US aid packages](#)
- [Making Sense of EU Development Aid in Palestine](#)
- [Afghanistan has cost more to rebuild than Europe after Second World War](#)
- [Bangladesh weighs options after World Bank pulls out of Padma bridge project](#)
- [Operating in conflict zones: lessons from a financial institution in Somalia](#)
- [Hasina wants explanation on unused foreign aid](#)
- [Somali money matters – an update on the remittances saga](#)

- See more at: <http://schoolofdata.org/courses/inspiration-module-how-is-aid-data-used-in-the-media/>