Lessons learnt from tracking and using COVID-19 IATI data

OCHA Centre for Humanitarian Data

Steven Flower, IATI VCE2, 12 October 2021
Outline for today

Project overview
What we did

Our team
Our IATI experience

Issues we encountered
Top 5

User feedback
Making sense with IATI

High-level findings
Common themes

Recommendations
Next steps
What we did

Project Overview
Transactions from 13,882 activities by all publishing organizations

Filter:
- By Publishing Organization
- By Recipient Country or Region
- By Sector


Outgoing Commitments and Spending Ranking

By Recipient Country or Region

Total Outgoing Commitments (USD)
- India: $8,169,012,263
- Philippines: $8,400,717,143
- Morocco: $9,596,3,266,555
- Indonesia: $4,935,116,302
- Developing countries: $4,862,945,997
- Pakistan: $4,172,121,602
- Egypt: $3,567,056,658
- Bangladesh: $3,316,218,851

Total Spending (USD)
- Developing countries: $8,321,913,882
- Philippines: $5,185,581,068
- India: $5,159,030,459
- Pakistan: $2,785,946,025
- Kenya: $2,680,565,849
- Morocco: $2,555,279,547
- Indonesia: $2,440,648,772
- Colombia: $2,090,342,846

Oct 11, 2021 | IATI
IATI COVID-19 Data Story

Commitments Over Time by Organization Type

Spending by Sector

Commitments and Spending Gaps by Country
Our challenge: Holding a mirror up to IATI data
Methodology

**Extract**
Data from d-portal

**Transform**
Data as summary flows

**Load**
Daily refresh

```python
class CovidChecks:
    @staticmethod
    def has_desired_scope(scopes):
        """Check if the COVID-19 GLIDE number or HRP code is present""
        for scope in scopes:
            if (scope.type == "1"
                and scope.vocabulary == "1-2"
                and scope.code.upper() == "EP-2020-000012-001"):
                return True
            elif (scope.type == "2"
                  and scope.vocabulary == "2-1"
                  and scope.code.upper() == "HCOVD20"
                ):
                return True
        return False

    @staticmethod
    def has_desired_tag(tags):
        """Check if the COVID-19 tag is present""
        for tag in tags:
            if tag.vocabulary == "99" and tag.code.upper() == "COVID-19":
                return True
        return False
```
The Centre for Humanitarian Data team

Our IATI experience
Centre Project Team

Steven
IATI Specialist

David
Standards expert

Yumi
Design

Sarah
Centre Lead

Manu
Data Scientist

Erika
Frontend Developer

Kareem
Project Manager

Mike
Data Systems Engineer
IATI experience...

Yumi
Design

Erika
Front & Back End

Manu
Data Scientist

Mike
Data systems

Sarah
Centre Coordinator

Kareem
Project Manager

David
Standards expert

Steven
IATI specialist

Years

0

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Top five

Issues we encountered
1. False-positives

- The COVID-19 IATI guidance contained many options for publishers

- Most popular: Freetext *just* in titles and/or descriptions

- Could lead to whole activities being falsely classed

This initiative aims to increase diaspora investments and savings in member states, by providing countries with knowledge products, technical assistance and increased access to diaspora finance. The first ‘research, analysis and scoping’ phase provides evidence of the opportunities to scale-up diaspora finance. This research will inform the second phase focused on ‘Commonwealth direct action’ to directly support low- and middle-income countries and small states to access diaspora investments and savings. The direct action will involve exploring diaspora finance mechanisms to support countries combat the impact of COVID-19.

3. Improved access to disaster finance.
2. Inconsistent commitments

- Commitment transactions essential to our method
- Sometimes missing or wrongly coded (incoming <> outgoing)
- Could lead to skewed data
3. Processing large activities

- Activities with multiple countries & sectors
- These were often coded at the activity level
- We had to *split* transactions into many smaller units - often to strange results
4. Lack of precision

- COVID-19 sector code added in October 2020
- Sometimes used as a flag. Can replace more granular sectors.
- Difficult to see specific trends in vaccination programmes (for example)
5. Organisation not identified

- Little harmonisation of *established* references across IATI
- Organisations often named differently (UNHCR; U.N.H.C.R)
- This made it difficult for us to consider any flow visualisation *across* IATI publishers
Making sense with IATI
1. At-a-glance IATI is a key demand
2. Trend data is valuable
3. Comparison data is engaging
Higher-level

Findings
1. Barriers to data use

- We spent a lot of time and effort doing basic things
- Data was consistently inconsistent
- The standard is complicated to understand
2. Few feedback loops

- Data users are unclear how to engage with publishers
- It is not clear where to take recommendations about the standard
- We want to help, but are unsure as to how
3. Where are the collective insights?

- Organisations seem most concerned with their own data
- Focused on compliance
- The collective insight we can gain is lacking
What next?

Recommendations
IATI publishing recommendations

- Use transaction-level data more
- Use commitment transactions
- Identify partners more consistently
- Use extensions to add more data
- Avoid freetext as markers
Strategic recommendations

- Improve IATI governance and involve more data users
- Include a range of best practices in all guidance
- Focus on the systematic and collective use of IATI (rather than individual publishers)
The international aid community has just begun to tap the potential of IATI as a data source...
...but improvements are needed to the IATI standard, guidance and governance in order to reach the goal of aid transparency.
Thank you

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