

Implementing the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) Standard by CSOs: A Protocol¹

Developed under the auspices of the IATI CSO Working Group²

Presented to the IATI Steering Committee, November 2012

Preamble

Building upon the 2005 *Paris Declaration*, the 2008 *Accra Agenda for Action* and the 2011 *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*, the international development community, including civil society organizations (CSOs), has been working to improve transparent, timely and comprehensive information on aid. In Busan, development partners agreed to implement a common, open standard, including the *IATI Standard*, for aid transparency as a necessary condition for making all forms of aid more effective and assuring development impact. The adoption of the *IATI Standard* and the publishing of aid data by different stakeholders is a tangible realization that transparency and accountability are the foundation of effective partnerships.

1. To this end, as independent actors in development and humanitarian assistance, CSOs have reiterated their obligation to improved transparency as a whole as an essential condition for their greater accountability and effectiveness. This has been expressed variously through:

- CSO participation in the *Busan Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation*, which commits all development actors to “implement a common, open standard for electronic publication of timely, comprehensive and forward-looking information on resources provided through development co-operation” (§23).
- Endorsement by CSOs from more than 70 countries of the *Istanbul Principles for CSO Development Effectiveness* (and the *International Framework* that guides the principles’ implementation).³ Prioritising accountability to affected populations is of particular concern to CSOs in their transparency and accountability, given its importance for development effectiveness.
- CSO action as organizations and networks to strengthen their transparency and accountability, through global, regional, country and organizational level initiatives. CSOs in many different contexts have adopted open information policies, and are promoting transparency through commitments, codes of conduct and self-regulatory initiatives such as the *International NGO Charter of Accountability*.

2. To date, CSO initiatives for improved transparency have advanced in parallel and a complementary manner with the development of the *IATI Standard*. These initiatives should be recognized as legitimate expressions of the CSO commitment to transparency and accountability.

3. The *IATI Standard* fills an essential gap by providing a common format for publishing with open data to improve transparency of aid flows and development effectiveness by all development and

humanitarian actors. It offers unique opportunities for the users of data by making it possible to compare and aggregate data and to track and visualize aid spending and results. It will contribute to improved cooperation and coordination among development actors, and consequently to improved aid effectiveness.

4. It is therefore an important standard for CSOs to improve transparency and closer alignment of CSO in publishing information about their activities with the *IATI Standard* is strongly encouraged.

5. This *Protocol* is addressed to all donors, governments and non-state actors implementing the *Busan common standard*.⁴ It establishes principles to guide CSO implementation of the *IATI Standard*, the enabling conditions for CSOs to implement this *Standard*, and outlines the parameters for the engagement of CSOs in jointly promoting the implementation of the *IATI Standard* with other aid actors.

Principles to Guide CSO Implementation of IATI

6. In the context of CSOs' commitment to transparency and accountability, CSOs have identified and will actively promote the following principles to guide CSO implementation of the *IATI Standard*.

Principles of publishing and exchange

7. CSOs are encouraged to align their open information policies and maximize their data publication practices with the *IATI Standard* on a voluntarily basis. They do so based on an understanding of the benefits of having information that is accurate, comparable, comprehensive and timely for promoting greater transparency, accountability and humanitarian and development effectiveness

8. CSOs who commit to implementation of the *IATI Standard* determine for themselves:

- Which parts of the *IATI Standard* are most relevant to their stakeholders, activities and operations, including a transparent policy providing reasons for exclusions;
- What is an appropriate timeframe for implementation given their scale of operations, capacities and outstanding commitments; and
- What resources (financial, technical and human) can be allocated to ensure that publication of data can take place on a sustainable and regular basis.

9. CSOs publishing data to the *IATI Standard* will:

- Implement the *Standard* in a manner consistent with international human rights law and standards and humanitarian principles;
- Take into account the particular political and sectoral realities in which CSOs work as development and humanitarian actors, ensuring that no information published compromises the safety, security or privacy concerns of affected populations, field staff or partners; and

- Seek to ensure that their IATI publication is accurate, timely, functional and user-friendly, responding to the needs of the different stakeholders and end-users (from government to community).

10. CSOs will iteratively build upon lessons learned from the experiences of implementing the *IATI Standard* and will create tools and resources that are not only appropriate for CSOs, but useful for their partners in their combined roles in development and humanitarian assistance.

Principles of engagement

11. In keeping with the *Istanbul Principle* of equitable partnerships, CSOs implementing the *IATI Standard* should engage in meaningful dialogue with their partners. This dialogue should discuss and take into account issues of “ownership” and safeguarding in the publication of partner information and data, both recognizing and addressing unequal North/South civil society power dynamics.

12. CSOs are to create appropriate incentives within organizations and among CSO partner networks that ensure a mutual commitment to transparency among all development actors (government, private sector, foundations, other CSOs).

Enabling Conditions for CSO Implementation of IATI Standard

13. CSO implementation of the *IATI Standard* should be solely voluntary, based on an understanding of the benefits and opportunities of having information that is accurate, comparable, comprehensive and timely to promote greater transparency, accountability and development and humanitarian effectiveness, rather than for reasons of conditionality to receive or attract funding. CSOs will apply this approach in their own funding of development partners.

14. CSO implementation of *IATI Standard* will be enabled in a context where donor and partner countries promote an enabling environment for civil society, meeting their commitments set out in the *Accra Agenda for Action* and the *Busan Partnership*. All development partners, particularly in the South, must work together to strengthen the enabling environment for civil society to fulfill their role as development actors, consistent with human rights standards and commitments to transparency.

15. Donors and CSOs are strongly encouraged to engage in an ongoing dialogue about the benefits and issues and opportunities in publishing and accessing data in the *IATI Standard*, embarking collaboratively on aid transparency efforts with the understanding that transparency and the implementation of the *IATI Standard* are multi-step, iterative and learning processes, which requires the elaboration of appropriate tools and resources for this purpose.

16. Donors are invited to consider providing specific support (technical and financial) for CSOs outreach within civil society to increase awareness of IATI among their constituencies and to

strengthen CSO capacities to publish and analyze IATI data. This may best be done in partnership with regional and/or national CSO platforms.

17. Donors should seek to avoid adding to the reporting burden on their partner organizations. To the extent possible, IATI should not be implemented parallel to existing reporting requirements, but rather built into or replace these requirements. Donors and CSOs should work towards harmonization of these requirements based on IATI.

18. Donors and CSOs together have a responsibility to encourage use of the aid data collected through IATI. This may require establishing and supporting data intermediaries and champions, including at the local level (e.g. journalists, researchers, ICT developers). Building this capacity at the local level will be crucial if communities and local organizations are to benefit from the disclosed information, use it to improve policy-making processes and provide feedback on development effectiveness.

Forward Directions for CSO Engagement with the IATI Process

19. CSOs are equal members of the IATI Steering Committee. CSO members of the Steering Committee are nominated by CSOs and will work to ensure representation of the diversity of CSOs involved in transparency and accountability initiatives, including the implementation of the *IATI Standard*. CSOs implementing and supporting IATI will also work to mobilize broader support for the implementation of aid transparency both nationally and globally.

20. CSOs will work with the Technical Advisory Group (TAG) to ensure that the *IATI Standard* meets the needs and aspirations of CSOs as development and humanitarian actors, including proposals for new areas in the *Standard* appropriate for CSOs, and contribute to periodic review of the *Standard* according to lessons learned. CSOs implementing IATI will explore appropriate ways to sustain a common platform for information exchange on the *Standard* and to interact with the IATI TAG and the IATI Secretariat on CSO progress in implementing the *Standard*.

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Endnotes

¹ This *Protocol* has been developed by a working group made up of Civil Society Organization (CSO) representatives (referred to as the “IATI CSO Working Group”). Members of the Working Group include Brian Tomlinson (Chairperson, Open Forum for CSO Development Effectiveness (brian.t.tomlinson@gmail.com)), Beris Gwynne (World Vision International & the International NGO Charter of Accountability Company), Simon Miller, World Vision International, USA, Don Marut, INFID, Indonesia, Rosa Ines Ospina, Rendir Cuentos, Argentina (Regional Network), Joni Hillman, Bond, UK, Anne Marie Heemskerk, Partos, Netherlands, Laia Grino, Interaction, USA, Liz Steele, Publish What You Fund, UK, Craig Fagan, Transparency International, Germany, Henri Valot, Civicus, South Africa, Rolf Kleef, Open for Change, Netherlands, Michael Roberts and David Megginson, Acclar Open Aid Data, Canada, Jeff Falkenstein, Global Giving, Dinesh Venkateswaran, Techsoup Global, and DEVINIT (Secretariat for IATI), UK as an Observer.

² The IATI CSO Working Group, under the auspices of the IATI Technical Advisory Group, has been examining issues relating to the implementation of the IATI Standard by CSOs, taking into account the distinctive characteristics of CSOs as development and humanitarian assistance actors in their own right. At the core of this work was the shared belief that transparency must be promoted by civil society in their internal and external activities.

A Background Paper, “Civil Society Organizations and International NGOs: Ways forward in implementation of the IATI Standard for Aid Transparency”, was prepared by the Working Group as background to this Protocol. It is accessible at <http://support.iatistandard.org/entries/21607477-background-paper-civil-society-organisations-and-international-ngos-ways-forward-in-implementation-o>. Further information on the IATI CSO Working Group can be found in the Annex to this Background Paper.

³ The *Istanbul Principles* and the *International Framework* for their implementation can be found at <http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/-8-istanbul-development.067-.html>.

⁴ The framework for the *Busan common standard* was agreed in the final meeting of the Working Party on Aid Effectiveness in June 2012. It sets out good practice in reporting and publishing data. The common standard combines three complementary systems and processes: the DAC Creditor Reporting System (CRS), the Forward Spending Survey (FSS) – two reporting instruments within the OECD DAC – plus the International Aid Transparency Initiative as a self-publishing system by aid providers with notification to a common registry. See the endorsed proposal at http://www.cso-effectiveness.org/IMG/pdf/meeting_the_busan_commitments_on_transparency_1.pdf.