**ROBIN:**   Welcome to the Development Policy Centre podcast. I'm Robin Davies. Today I'm speaking with Rupert Simons and Elise Dufief from the organisation Publish What You Fund. Rupert is the organisation's CEO and Elise is its research and monitoring manager.

Publish What You Fund, which is also known as the Global Campaign for Aid Transparency, was intimately involved in the development of the International Aid Transparency Initiative back in 2008. These days, much of its work is about monitoring the performance of development agencies in meeting their transparency commitments. A key tool that it uses for doing that is the Aid Transparency Index, which has been updated a few times since 2010.

Today's discussion was sparked by two developments. The first is that Rupert will be visiting Australia in February 2017 to speak at the Development Policy Centre's annual conference in Canberra. The second is that Publish What You Fund has launched a review of the methodology that it uses for the aid transparency index and is seeking public submissions.

Rupert, could you begin by just providing some very brief background on your organisation, Publish What You Fund, and particularly on its best-known product, the Aid Transparency Index?

**RUPERT:**   Thank you, Robin. Publish What You Fund was set up in 2008 at the Accra conference on aid effectiveness, and was really part of the aid effectiveness movement at the start. It was based on the premise that more transparent aid is better aid because it shows people what works and allows local people to hold donors and governments to account for how aid money is used.

The initial push came in the period between Accra in 2008 and the Busan Declaration in 2011, when there was a lot of interest in the aid community on transparency and a commitment to transparency at a political level but no consensus on how to make aid transparent technically.

So, at the time Publish What You Fund worked on two things. First, making the case for transparency with a public campaign, and second, helping to develop a reporting standard, which is the International Aid Transparency Initiative, which allows all aid and development finance to be reported and recorded in real time, which had not been done until that point.

Since the Busan Declaration in 2011, when the established aid community committed to using this standard, the focus of Publish What You Fund's work has shifted from just making the case for transparency to also monitoring donors' adherence to their transparency pledges.

And that's where the Aid Transparency Index comes in. We published the first index in 2011, and have subsequently done an index between once a year and every 18 months. The index is a monitoring tool which assesses the visibility and the quality of donors' data on foreign aid and development finance, and we use that to promote a race to the top among donors, which has been quite effective at getting them to publish what they fund.

**ROBIN:**      And can you just say a little bit about where your organisation gets its support—funding, other forms of support?

**RUPERT:**     Most of Publish What You Fund's income comes from foundations, particularly in the US, and the Hewlett Foundation has been our number one supporter, going back to 2008. We've also received generous grants from the Open Society Foundation and the Omidyar Network, and we are increasingly looking to get funding from public donors as well because they are now committed to transparency and our index is a service that we're providing to those donors, so we're asking some of them to contribute to the cost of that index.

**ROBIN:**      I was interested to know what your thinking was on support from donors themselves. Obviously, it does raise some conflict of interest issues. How would you manage that?

**RUPERT:**     First, we'd manage it by disclosing who our donors are, and you can see the full list in our annual reports, which are published online. Second, we would never take money from just one public donor, because of the perception that creates that donors are seeking to influence the index.

So, we would only take money from a group of donors who've pooled their money and are comfortable with the way in which we operate the index, which is to use a peer review panel of independent experts to keep our promise on the methodology and make sure that it isn't favouring any particular donor.

**ROBIN:**      Elise, can I turn to you? I'm interested in the relationship between the Aid Transparency Index and the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI). Now Rupert has talked about the close relationship between Publish What You Fund and IATI in the genesis of that initiative and that standard, but is Publish What You Fund obsessed with IATI, or are you taking into account performance against other standards or other types of aid transparency as you put together your assessments?

**ELISE:**      Thank you. Just to say a few more words on the Aid Transparency Index that Rupert mentioned earlier, it's really the only independent measure of transparency among the world's leading aid organisations. And what we do with it is that we look at

commitments made by these organisations and the data that they publish on their organisation planning as well as most of it is around individual activities and projects led by these organisations.

We really encourage the publication of timely, comprehensive and forward-looking data, and very specifically in an open format. That's where the relationship with IATI comes, because IATI is both a political initiative—donors voluntarily committed to making their aid transparent, initially by December 2015—but it's also a standard of publication, so that it would allow data to be compared across organisations, and as I mentioned it's the only open standard for development activities, which means that you can use it, and re-use it for different purposes.

So really, the index monitors donors' commitment to publishing to the IATI registry and publishing data in the IATI standards. So, we're looking at publication against the standards. That's really the main focus of the index. Now when that information is not made available through IATI, we also look at other sources, either the websites of these organisations, different documents that could be found even on embassies websites and any other public sources.

And increasingly, we're also looking at two things. One is how data can be more usable and joined up, as you mentioned, with other data standards as well, which have emerged in the past few years. So, at Publish What You Fund we have actually a specific project that we call "JUDS", Joined-Up Data Standards, that specifically looks at how different standards can be joined up so, for example, IATA data be linked to open contracting, for example. So, that's what we are increasingly looking into.

**ROBIN:** So, let's say you had a donor or a development agency that was in some sense incredibly transparent. It made all of its financial information and all of its documentation freely available but it completely ignored the IATI standard. How would that fare in your assessment?

**ELISE:** They wouldn't fare well because the methodology encourages publication, as I mentioned at the beginning, of data that can be compared, and that is published in an open format. So, publication of data to the IATI registry is rewarded. To be in the Very Good category, you have to publish all of your information to IATI.

**ROBIN:** Putting the same question the other way around, let's say you have a development agency which is publishing lots of information according to the IATI standard, but it's mostly just financial information; they're not including links to, say, project documentation. Do they get perhaps a slight unfair advantage because they're using the standard but they're not actually publishing really in-depth information?

**ELISE:** Right. So, they would be rewarded for using the standard on these specific types of information. But financial and budgetary data is only one component of six other components of aid transparency. So, that would only be one section of—you couldn't get a really good score if you published only financial data.

We also require data on performance, so documents such as evaluations or results data, objectives, and also what we call local-level monitoring data. So, for example, being able to identify where the project is being implemented using sub-national location and geo-coding as well as specifying what sector the project is implemented, and that kind of information.

So really, it's a combination of financial and budgetary data along with performance, joining up local-level monitoring and commitments, and organisation-level data as well.

**ROBIN:** Rupert, turning back to you, you obviously spend a lot of your life talking about progress on aid transparency, especially over about the last five years or so since the Busan Declaration. I want to ask you to do that again, but just to say I'm particularly interested in where you think the big gaps are, not in terms of individual donors but looking across the donor community generally.

I'm also interested, I guess, in who were maybe a couple of the standout performers. I don't want you to talk about the laggards, but I'd be interested in who you see as the really standout performers, particularly in terms of improvements over time.

**RUPERT:** There has been a lot of progress on aid transparency in the last five years, and that becomes apparent when you look at our aid transparency index, and review the quality and quantity of data that's being published now compared with five years ago. But let me illustrate this with some personal experience.

In 2009, I went to work in Papua New Guinea as a consultant advising the government on climate change—and one of my first tasks was to find out what all the other organisations in the country—donors, NGOs—were doing about climate change.

This was a priority at the time. It was quite controversial and so there had been a lot of public debate about it, both in PNG and in the Australian media. And yet it was really hard to find out what projects were happening in PNG that had a climate component, even a forestry or a rural development component.

And really, the only way to find out was to get in a minivan and drive around Port Moresby, talking to all of the donors in turn, and the bigger conservation and

development NGOs, and try and build a picture through legwork. Now fast forward six or seven years, it's just not like that anymore.

So, now whenever I visit a country on Publish What You Fund business, I can go online and take a look at the data on the IATI registry as to who is doing what and where, and in some cases, you can also see the results. And this will tell you some quite interesting things.

For instance, about four months ago, I travelled to Tanzania for a government workshop on using data to monitor implementation of the Sustainable Development Goals, and all of the presentations that we gave and saw were based on data. People broadly knew what donors were active in Tanzania, which parts of the country they were active in, and what they were doing.

So, whilst there has been slower progress than we would like, it has nevertheless changed the life of government officials in finance and planning ministries, and the official donor community, because they can go online and find out what other people are doing.

Where I think it's really fallen short is with civil society using the data for accountability. So, in PNG that's relatively easy once you're in Port Moresby because it's a small town and most people know each other. But it becomes very hard when you get out into the rural areas, and it's hard in Tanzania, which is a huge country and has a very large number of small NGOs, many of whom are working on divergent projects.

Some are interested in accountability, but don't generally know that there is this IATI data, or indeed government data that they can use to monitor aid programs, even to find out what's going on in their district. So, just from talking to people, that is where we see the biggest gap.

Now if we come back to our index and look at the figures, we estimate that something like 25 per cent of global aid now meets the highest transparency standards, and that's up from zero five or six years ago, at the time of the Busan Declaration.

So, that is an impressive achievement. And over 90 per cent of aid and development finance is published in some form. So, our challenge now is really about getting the quality up rather than the quantity.

You asked me about some of the standout performers. What I like about this list is that it's not dominated by any one type of organisation. So, you've got big, multilateral development banks on there, like the World Bank, or at least the public

financial arm of the World Bank, the IDA (the International Development Association). You've got the regional development banks like the Asian Development Bank.

You've got bilateral donors, like the UK's Department for International Development, or Swedish SIDA (Swedish International Development Agency). And you've got UN agencies, like UNDP (the UN Development Programme) and UNICEF (the UN Children's Fund), all doing well. So, what do all of those organisations have in common? It's that they took a decision a number of years ago, to make transparency an integral part of how they do business.

The technical fixes require to publish what you fund really work best if there is an organisation-wide commitment to transparency, and we find that has to be driven at quite a senior political level. So, in the UK, Secretary of State Andrew Mitchell was instrumental in pushing the transparency agenda through DFID, and that agenda's now been extended to the rest of the UK government.

At the UNDP, administrator Helen Clark was really influential in making this happen, driven in part by UNDP having been stung by the criticism of many of its bilateral funders that it wasn't making effective use of its cash, and she was determined to both change that and to use the data to show that had changed.

Where are some of the laggards? I would say that it is either in bilateral agencies that have not made transparency a priority, either because they think it's too difficult technically or they're afraid of adverse consequences from showing up what they do.

And in some cases, you also have parts of the multilateral system who are struggling even to generate data for internal management purposes on what the rest of their organisation is up to. And for them, we would recommend transparency as a way not just of being more accountable to the public but also helping manage the organisation more effectively.

**ROBIN:** You would assume that at least some of the organisations that are performing well are doing so because they have internalised the IATI standard, that it's not just something extra that they do on top of their OECD reporting and their internal management reporting, that they actually use it for internal purposes. Is that correct?

**RUPERT:** Yes, the way that you get a good score on the aid transparency index and produce good data for the OECD, or for that matter, for your own finance ministry or parliamentary public accounts committee is by having, in the first place, good

management data, and second, systems in place that automate the publication of that management data.

So, the data that goes out into the public domain through IATI is based on what the people inside the organisation see. And a number of organisations, such as the Netherlands foreign ministry, and also the UK, have done that. So, their own data systems are publishing IATI data automatically.

You mentioned the OECD's Creditor Reporting System. So, that is an annual statistical record of aid allocations and uses, and if IATI data is produced and automated on a monthly or quarterly basis, that also simplifies the process of reporting to the OECD DAC (Development Assistance Committee), because the OECD reports can essentially be derived by looking at the monthly or quarterly IATA data.

*ROBIN:*    Rupert, you were recently in Nairobi for the second ministerial meeting of the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation, and there was a lot of discussion around the margins of that meeting on aid transparency. So, did you come away from that with a sense that the momentum from Accra and Busan is being maintained, or is it actually flagging these days?

*RUPERT:*    Before the Nairobi meeting there were a number of colleagues in the think tank and campaign world who said, "The aid effectiveness agenda is dead. Let's move on." And I wrote a piece saying aid effectiveness is not dead. It's on life support. The Nairobi conference at the end of November, confirmed that assessment in my mind. You described this as a high-level ministerial meeting, but the truth is there were very few ministers present.

President Kenyatta opened the conference, but the only other ministers in the room were people who were either leading the Global Partnership for Effective Development Cooperation now or hoping to do so in the future. And that is a very big change from the Busan conference in 2011, where Hillary Clinton, then Secretary of State, was one of the keynote speakers.

And there were a number of others involved who were actually head of state or finance ministry level. So, this agenda has gone off the boil internationally. I think there are two reasons for that. One is that it is really hard to do, and so understandably, it has been pushed increasingly to technical levels of government departments.

And from our point of view, that's fine. Most people accept the case for transparency at the political level. The challenge is to make it happen. The second reason is less benign, and that's something that we're very familiar with here in Europe, and is I think increasingly apparent in the Asia-Pacific as well, which is a loss of trust in

multilateral processes, both for development and for global governance more generally.

And so, it does not come as a surprise to us, speaking from a country that just voted for Brexit, that European governments are less committed to development effectiveness through multilateral channels than they were five years ago. However, let's also remember in this, the stimulating power of competition.

We see this with the Aid Transparency Index. There's a number of agencies who are actively competing for the top spot, and that produces very healthy dynamics in encouraging people to publish what they fund. But there is also, for a growing number of developing countries, a sense that the traditional Western donors are no longer the only game in town.

And if you're not satisfied with the terms available on a World Bank loan, or a bilateral grant from (Australia's) DFAT (Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade) or another bilateral agency, then the regional development banks, or indeed state-owned enterprises from China, India or Brazil, are ready to offer deals.

Or you can go to the Eurobond market and try to raise some money yourself. And whereas at Busan, we felt there was an attempt to bring those organisations into the multilateral system by making them commit to the Busan principles, it was apparent at Nairobi that that agenda has broadly failed. And that the way to bring new players up to international standards of transparency will be through pressure put on them through their partners at country level.

And we are aware of examples, both in Africa and in the Asia-Pacific, in which the emerging donors, including the Chinese government or the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, were a lot more responsive to partner country demands at the local level than they would appear to be at the international level.

**ROBIN:** Can I just ask you a quick question about the case of Australia? So, Australia has been assessed as performing "fairly"—I think that is the term used in the Aid Transparency Index. It's received that assessment, I think, the last two or three times, without any huge change. What's your sense of how Australia is doing? What's it doing reasonably well and what could it do better?

**RUPERT:** The first thing to say on Australia is that Australia has been an IATI publisher for a long time, over five years. So, Australia was one of the first countries whose aid agency, AusAID at the time, published an IATI data file, and that was very good. What seems to have happened in the past three years, since the integration of AusAID into the Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, is that transparency seems to be a lower priority politically.

And the result is that the progress made in the early years has not been sustained, and the performance is only marginally better in our 2016 index than it was in our 2013 index, which used essentially the same methodology. We don't think it would take too much effort on the part of DFAT to fix that.

It essentially means being more open about details of the organisation. So, publishing forward-looking budgets, for instance. It means publishing more details on aid activities on a monthly basis, which can be done by automating the export of data from DFAT's management systems to the IATI registry.

And we also recommend that DFAT should be more open about what it's doing, also, with the Australian public. So, we would recommend developing some form of aid portal or website that allows Australians and other interested parties in the region to see where the money's going. This, we think, will help boost confidence of Australian taxpayers in DFAT's work and will also help educate people in the countries where DFAT is working as to what it's doing and hold it to account.

**ROBIN:**     Okay, and just for a bit of balance, what about the case of some of the larger emerging donors? Has there been any indication that any of these countries are likely to report at least some proportion of their activities in line with the IATI standard?

**RUPERT:**     The answer to that depends on what you mean by emerging. So, countries that have recently emerged, such as Korea, are very much interested in transparency. And the government of Korea joined the International Aid Transparency Initiative last year and has been publishing data in that format.

We also see encouraging signs from the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank, not IATI publication yet, but their initial public access to information policy was published online. Comments were invited, and we'd encourage your listeners to submit comments to the AIIB, again, in January this year as they're reviewing their access to information policy.

The government of China is a different story. We see in the 2016 aid transparency index that the bottom positions in the index are held by China and by the United Arab Emirates, both of which are major donors in their own right, although they are not traditional donors in the sense that a lot of their aid and development finance takes the form of soft loans, often commodity-linked loans rather than just grants. Part of the problem is that we can't say exactly how much is grants and how much is loans, so we don't know how big the elephant in the room is, but we know the elephant is there.

I think the key to moving on this would-be pressure at the partner country level. From what we've heard and from researchers who we've spoken to, individual Chinese embassies and commercial attachés, they are much more open about their activities with partner country government officials than they would be with a Northern-based NGO such as Publish What You Fund.

And from my personal experience working with the government of Liberia, for example, that government had a very good sense of what Chinese government banks and state-owned enterprises were doing in Liberia. But the management of that was held by the President's office and by the Ministry of Finance. It wasn't managed through the donor committee that all of the other bilateral donors were part of.

*ROBIN:*   Elise, I wanted to ask you about the review that's currently underway, of the methodology that's used for the aid transparency index. I know you've sought input from various stakeholders, so you wouldn't want to pre-empt the findings of the review, but can you just say a bit about why it was considered necessary to undertake this review and what some of the more likely changes might be?

*ELISE:*   Yes, sure. We mentioned that the first aid transparency index was published in 2011. And since then, I think Rupert mentioned as well, that we've seen a lot more development-related data being published by an increasing number of organisations as well.

Now the last index also showed that most donors actually failed to meet their commitments, and did not meet the high transparency standards that they'd set for themselves as well. So, what we wanted to do with this review is really to raise the bar. We want to improve the quality of the data that's published and also really make the data published more usable.

So, that's really the first incentive for us to do the methodology review. The second part is really about—so the index itself, the methodology, has remained substantially unchanged since 2013, but the world has moved on, specifically in development, the development landscape as well.

It was originally set around the Busan commitments, so the deadline has passed and we're now talking a lot more about the SDGs (Sustainable Development Goals), for example. And as Rupert just mentioned, there are new and increasing players that we need to take into account as well. So, last year, for example, we included for the first time the United Arab Emirates in the index.

The methodology review is also part of our work trying to ensure that the index remains relevant for all stakeholders and that we are also supporting the

publication of data that's needed for decision-making, for accountability and for monitoring purposes.

**ROBIN:** Okay, so it's, I guess, a general update and renovation. But are there any particular weaknesses that might have been identified or at least alleged by some of the major bilateral donors that you're seeking to address?

**ELISE:** I mean, I will say that's part of the reason why we are doing the consultation, to get feedback on the existing methodologies. We need to take the time to review the responses we get before we can make any sort of comments on this. But the changes that we wanted to propose, and feedback we wanted to receive, was really around the list of indicators, for example, making sure that these were still relevant for all organisations.

We know that for some of them, the relevance of specific indicators depends on the nature of an organisation, because the index assesses not only bilateral donors but also multilaterals, and we have some foundations. We also have humanitarian organisations.

So, we're trying to find a methodology that's relevant for all of these organisations. So, that's why we want to have that constructive discussion with them to make sure that what we're asking them to publish is relevant, based on their organisation, but also talking to people based in partner countries. Because as I mentioned at the beginning, a lot of data has been published. Now we need to clarify where the gaps are and where the needs are so that we can push for the publication of data that's relevant for those people based in partner countries.

So, that's why, getting that feedback, we are also looking at changing the weighting system and the scoring system so that we would drive transparency in areas that are essential for all stakeholders working in these countries. So, with a view really to increase data use where possible.

**ROBIN:** And at this point, we are reasonably close to the end of the consultation period. Have you received substantial feedback from both development agencies and partner countries?

**ELISE:** So yes, the consultation is conducted in three different phases. For the first one, we consulted with more than 30 people, a mix of independent experts, people based in partner countries, from governments, and civil society organisations.

And then the second phase was more inclusive in the sense that we also opened up to donors and other organisations and individuals that are interested in providing

feedback. Our organisation and relationships are very much geared towards working with organisations and donors more directly.

So, it's very easy for us to get their feedback, and also given that they are the ones being assessed, they also are really keen on looking at the changes that we are thinking of implementing and how they would impact their performance. So, we get their interest in that way.

We also have really good relationships with a number of other organisations and experts who are working on a similar topic, either development focused or transparency focused, or on open data more broadly speaking. So, we've had good feedback from them too.

And then partner country governmental and civil society organisations—we managed to get some feedback; we'd like to see a lot more, getting their comments and suggestions a lot more where possible. So, that's really the last push for us, to try to get more people who work in country, from these partner country governments and civil society organisations, to really provide comments and feedback, and make suggestions as to how we can support their work and meet their needs as well.

**ROBIN:** Rupert, I want to ask you about a couple of things that I guess are bees in my own bonnet. You've talked in relation to Australia about the desirability of having a dedicated information portal that allows people to see what's going on. It's one thing for a donor agency to make the data available in a standardised format, and it's quite another thing for them to provide the tools that allow people to actually use the data.

That has always seemed to me a really important point, and not just one about Australia. I think there are only a small number of really useful data portals of that nature around, and at the global level there are some, but they're not extremely user friendly at this point.

I just wanted to get your comment on that situation. Is this a big priority for you to really, I guess, encourage the spread of such tools? And if so, what about the global level? Do you think there's a big gap there at the global level in terms of really making the data that's out there accessible and comparable?

**RUPERT:** When it comes to portals, there's an old saw in the transparency community that if you just put the data out there, people will find it and use it, and I think we have abundant evidence now that that's not true.

By the way, just publishing data can already change people's behavior. So, transparency on its own is still useful because the very act—the mere act of knowing that what you do is going to be in the public domain changes behavior and makes people address their programs and how they write about them, how they pick their priorities.

So, that's a good thing in itself, but it's nowhere near enough. For full accountability and for open data to bring about the change that we want to see in how the aid and development industry does business, we do need people to use the data, and not just governments.

They typically have quite good data already. We're really talking about local activists, civil society, parliaments in some cases, and supreme audit offices. And they do need easier ways to access data. And I think the biggest challenge there is developing useful portals at country level.

So, creating a portal that shows what DFAT is doing around the world is great for Australians, and is of some interest to people in countries in which Australia is a very major player, like PNG, the Solomons, or Vanuatu. It is of limited interest in most of the Saharan Africa, where Australian contributions to aid in development finance, if present at all, are likely to be less than five percent of the total.

So, what we really need in Kenya, for example, where I was last month, is for the many people in Kenyan civil society who desperately want to know what the donors are doing, what the government's doing with donor money, to be able to see that in open access format. And our frustration here is that the government of Kenya does have a data portal that allows people to see what the government is doing and what donors are doing, but it has two weaknesses.

It doesn't have county level information and a growing share of Kenyan government spending is at county level because of their constitutional reform, which pushes decision making authority and budgeting to the counties. Second, the aid portion of that platform is not open access.

So, the government can control who it gives that access to. We would like to see donors making it an essential condition of all support to building up country portals, information systems, that all of those portals and information systems be freely and publicly accessible to anyone, whatever their intentions.

And that's a real challenge in these days of declining respect for multilateralism and shrinking civic space. Now we do have some evidence that where that data is made available, and where people are helped and encouraged to use it, you see a difference. So, one example is in Nepal, where a local group of tech people and

accountability activists got together through the Open Nepal platform to build a tool to track inflows to Nepal for earthquake related relief and reconstruction when the earthquake hit Nepal last year.

And the result of that was that the government wasn't the only one holding donors to account. Local journalists and activists were able to do so too. And the result was that they were able to challenge the government on how it was using the aid money, but also push back at the donors when their priorities were sometimes a bit skewed.

A lot of urban search and rescue teams were sent into Kathmandu, for example. Actually, there was very limited need for those teams in Kathmandu. There was much greater need for people to go into rural areas to address problems of, for example, water supplies that had been cut, and those did not happen until weeks after the earthquake.

The second example is from Kenya, again, where a local activist group, the Kenyan Taxpayer's Association, conducted some research, together with the UK Department for International Development (DFID), on how DFID funds were being spent at improving water and sanitation in the suburbs of fast-growing Kenyan cities.

And they identified a number of problems. For example, the landowners on whose land the water pumps had been drilled were not providing any form of maintenance and were not providing access to anyone else to maintain. So, the pumps and pipes would stop working and couldn't get fixed.

Now because that DFID data was published, and the Kenyan Taxpayer's Association trained monitors to look at that data and then go into the community and talk to landowners, a bunch of those problems got fixed. Not all of them, but across all of the projects searched, 70-75 per cent of them did get fixed. And that shows that transparency plus accountability, if it's real accountability, does yield results.

**ROBIN:**    So, your first priority is really the construction of portals at the partner country level. But is there still a problem at the central—the global level? Obviously, partner countries are going to need information management systems that are tailored to their own particular needs.

But presumably, it would be easier for those to be built if there were a better functioning global portal, which could be queried for information on what a given donor is doing by sector and country and could be looked at through a country lens or a donor lens. There are a few such things, but as I said earlier, they are somewhat crude and hard to use. Do you think there has been an underinvestment at the global level?

**RUPERT:** There certainly has been an underinvestment. I would just caution that we're never going to get one big portal that will be the answer to everything. If I think about how I interact with government data on a daily basis, I do so in a number of different ways. I do as a researcher at Publish What You Fund, where we're looking at data on how government spends aid money. Then, as a resident of London, I do so primarily looking at it from the point of view of a cyclist using the city roads wanting to know what the pollution levels and traffic levels are.

That's a completely different data set. I go to a completely different portal for that. It would neither be helpful nor necessary to have the foreign aid of the UK on the same portal as local road conditions. And for the same reason, I don't think we will ever end up with one global data set that contains all the information we want to know about aid and development because it is such a vast and diverse industry.

What I think we can do is invest in tools that allow people to aggregate, for research purposes, what aid is going where for what purposes, which the OECD-DAC data does but in a rather outdated and limited fashion, and IATI data can be the basis for that.

But second, to push much harder than we are currently at the construction of country level open data tools that allow people to look at all federal government, state and local government and donor data, and compare both the financial flows and the results.

**ROBIN:** Can I just get, I guess, a brief comment on one other bee in my bonnet? So, as someone who used to work in a bilateral donor agency, when you talk about data you tend to think about numbers. And so, if you're required to be compliant with IATI reporting commitments, you tend to think, "Well, we'll just reformat our financial reporting that we provide to the OECD, and that will get us 90 percent of the way."

Now what that leaves out obviously is what you might call document transparency, transparency around project-related information, appraisal documents, designs, reviews, evaluations, and all of that. And often, that information is of enormous value in terms of public accountability. What's your overall sense of how donors are performing on that front? Is there further to go on document transparency than on financial transparency?

**RUPERT:** There is huge variability in the quality and quantity of documents provided on aid, development and finance. So, our general push is that almost everyone can do better at this. Nevertheless, there are some organisations that are already very good at it by the standards of the rest of the industry.

So, we'd single out the World Bank's public finance arm, the IDA, for good performance in that respect. Now let's take, for example, USAID, the US Agency for International Development. They require extensive reporting of their grantees, typically quarterly reports on progress, which have to be sent to the USAID program officers, and that information is almost never published.

So, USAID itself is very well-informed on what its contractors, grantees and implementing partners are doing, but struggles, for various reasons, to put that data into the public domain. In our assessment, that data would actually be extremely interesting and in many ways a lot more helpful than simply publishing the amount of a contract and reporting quarterly or annual disbursements on that contract.

So, we would say in the first instance, put project documents and regular reports online, and if people want to take it further, then they should use the open contracting data standard to publish details of their contracts as well. And then you can go from looking at an activity in the IATI registry to clicking onto the contract and viewing who got the contract to implement that project, deliver that activity.

And if you want to, you can then look at the owners of that company on public registries of beneficial ownership, which are increasingly being constructed, and see who owns those companies, if there are any politically exposed people in there.

**ROBIN:** Now we're nearly out of time. I just wanted to give each of you an opportunity for a quick final word. So Elise, just for anyone who's listening, could you say just a bit about the timing of the methodology review process and how people can contribute? I know that the—I think the deadline for submissions is around the third of January 2017. It may be that some Australian listeners are hearing this after that deadline. Is there any wriggle room on that timing?

**ELISE:** So yes, you're right, the deadline is until January 3rd to—there's an online form and guidance on our website. So, you can use that. Obviously, once the deadline's passed, we're still available for calls, and we're generally interested in getting feedback on our work, generally speaking. Also, quite keen on hearing from other organisations working with data and development-related data specifically.

So yeah, feel free to contact us on this. Then in terms of the timeline for the methodology review, we will then, at Publish What You Fund, take the time to review the feedback we receive from that consultation process, with a view to finalise the new methodology in the first quarter of 2017, and share plans for the next index at the same time.

**ROBIN:** And when do you expect the next Aid Transparency Index to appear?

**ELISE:**  So, we don't have any specific dates yet, though we are looking at the second half of 2017 at the moment.

**ROBIN:**  Rupert, your final word? I guess I'm interested in really what next for Publish What You Fund? What do you think are the biggest unfinished items of business, or maybe some emerging items in the field of aid transparency?

**RUPERT:**  Our biggest unfinished business at Publish What You Fund is helping people use the data to bring about—to complete the transparency and accountability revolution that we seek. We're making good progress with publication. Our index shows that. But we are still far from seeing the dramatic improvements in the accountability and effectiveness of the big donor agencies and development banks that we believe is possible.

So, we're encouraging people to raise their game on publication, but we also encourage the rest of the community to raise their game on using the data and telling us what's missing so we can work together with everyone who's interested to unravel what remains to drive changes in behavior and to make aid more accountable and more effective.

**ROBIN:**  And that's where we left the discussion. If you are hearing this before February 2017 and you're going to the Development Policy Centre's annual conference, you'll hear Rupert speaking in more detail about progress on aid transparency over the past five years. Thanks for listening.

*[End of transcript]*

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