

Opening up Australian aid

by Mark Brough

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Australia gathers pace on aid transparency, but should be more ambitious.

It's great news that the Australian Government has accepted the [Independent Review of Aid Effectiveness](#)' recommendation to set up a "Transparency Charter" by the end of the year, which will "promote a 'warts and all' approach to reporting".

But the format information is provided in has a very strong bearing on what you can do with that information. If your budget data is locked away in a PDF, putting that online is roughly as good as providing it in a printed format. What you really want to be able to do is to take that information and analyse it in different ways – and probably from a different angle to the way it was originally presented.

As one of the founding signatories to the [International Aid Transparency Initiative](#) (IATI), Australia has demonstrated its commitment to providing more and better information about its aid activities, in a way that will be useful not only for Australians, but also citizens and governments in partner countries.

Here at [Publish What You Fund](#), we're very pleased that Australia will follow through on its commitment to publish to IATI this year. This month, it will [publish](#) documents, and in October we will start to see the first basic project data published. This will place Australia among the most transparent aid agencies in the world. And because it will be in a standard and comparable format, AUD 50 billion of annual aid expenditure from 12 aid donors by the end of the year can be seen all together, in an accessible way.

To monitor and encourage improvements in the levels of aid transparency in the run up to the Fourth High Level Forum at the end of the year, Publish What You Fund and its partners across the world, including colleagues at the ANU's Development Policy Centre, have been developing an Aid Transparency Tracker. The Tracker

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looks at whether donors publish specific pieces of information about their aid activities, for none, some, or all of their current projects. The pieces of information are those that we feel are necessary for donors to make their aid transparent, and to meet the commitments they made in Accra in 2008. The data is still being collected, and we'll publish the results in September.

Still, we know that – through IATI – Australia is going to be publishing a lot of data in the coming months:

- The Government has committed to publish all ODA spent by AusAID, representing 87% of all Australian ODA in 2010-11.
- Data will be published every 6 months, with a 3 month gap between collection and publication. We encourage Australia to publish even more frequently: the UK's Department for International Development is publishing its latest data to IATI every month.
- All approved projects, including the title, implementing organisation, activity dates and expenditures will be published. We encourage Australia to provide as detailed (granular) data as possible. This will significantly increase the value of the data, both to AusAID, its partners and to other donors, so they can make more informed decisions in allocating resources and trace projects down to the ground.
- We encourage AusAID to publish commitments and not just expenditures, and to publish details of planned activities in the pipeline or identification stage. This will help Australia to coordinate better with other donors in the initial design of projects, ensuring that aid is properly targeted and has greater impact.

So, what can you do to make sure this happens? In partnership with 75 civil society organisations, Publish What You Fund recently launched the Make Aid Transparent campaign (see animation above). You can join the more than 5000 people from 115 countries who have already signed, [here](#).

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