



A GLOBAL NGO NETWORK
FOR PRINCIPLED AND EFFECTIVE
HUMANITARIAN ACTION

PUBLISH ONCE, USE OFTEN: REALISING THE PROMISE OF DATA IN HUMANITARIAN WORK

Findings and Recommendations

May 2025



About ICVA

ICVA is a global network of over 160 non-governmental organisations whose mission is to make humanitarian action more principled and effective by working collectively and independently to influence policy and practice.

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1. Executive Summary

Overview

Transparency in humanitarian and development financing remains a persistent challenge. While international non-governmental organisations (INGOs) publish data, they do so primarily to meet donor compliance requirements rather than as a strategic tool for accountability or coordination. The result is a fragmented information system where data is published inconsistently, often in inaccessible formats, and rarely used by those who need it most.

“Data transparency is simply a way of sharing information, which is a crucial foundation of any effective decision-making”

Local and national actors (LNAs), who are central to delivering aid and development programs, remain largely excluded from these reporting processes. Many lack access to INGO-published data, making it difficult for them to track funding flows, engage in decision-making, or advocate for resources. At the same time, their own activities remain largely invisible, as existing reporting platforms and processes are designed for larger organisations with greater technical capacity.

As discussions around localisation and equitable partnerships continue, the **need for a more inclusive, accessible, and meaningful data-sharing ecosystem is becoming increasingly urgent**. The current global uncertainty and turbulence – with a marked political and financial shift away from international solidarity – reaffirms the importance of making the most effective and efficient use of scarce resources. Data transparency, in the end, is simply a way of sharing information, which is a crucial foundation of any effective decision-making.

Purpose

The paper seeks to develop an approach to improving the transparency of funding transferred by ICVA members to humanitarian actors, in particular local and national NGOs. It has two main objectives:

1. To analyse the key challenges to data reporting experienced by first line funding recipients and outline proposed solutions to inform an action plan for uptake by key stakeholders.
2. To review the feasibility of wide-scale reporting by local and national NGOs on their international humanitarian funding in consultation with data reporting systems (FTS, IATI and NGO Networks).

Key findings

The findings reflect common patterns and systemic barriers that INGOs and LNAs face in publishing and using data. They also highlight opportunities for improving data-sharing practices, ensuring that transparency efforts go beyond compliance and become a tool for accountability, coordination, and impact.

The findings of this report **highlight a data ecosystem that is highly fragmented, compliance-driven, and inaccessible to many of the actors who need it most**; but there is also enthusiasm and a strong latent demand for this data.

The findings of this report highlight a data ecosystem that is highly fragmented, compliance-driven, and inaccessible to many of the actors who need it most.

- ❑ **Many INGOs struggle with publishing data**, and those that do publish often fail to see its value beyond meeting donor requirements.
- ❑ There is a **largely unrealised potential to use published data** for allocation, coordination or decision-making.

- ❑ **Data publication remains highly manual** for most INGOs, preventing scalability and efficiency. However, a few INGOs have successfully automated their reporting through financial and project management systems, demonstrating that **streamlined reporting is possible**.
- ❑ **Local and national actors urgently need access to INGO data** to engage effectively in development processes, track funding flows, and hold INGOs, governments, and development partners accountable. However, data accessibility remains a major barrier, with reporting platforms often being too complex and available only in dominant global languages.
- ❑ **Governments need better data to coordinate humanitarian and development efforts**, yet data-sharing between INGOs, donors, and national governments remains inconsistent.

Recommendations

For data transparency to move beyond compliance and become a tool for meaningful engagement, INGOs must automate their reporting, donors must incentivise full disclosure, and local and national actors must be supported with the tools and training needed to both access and publish their own data.

The following actionable recommendations for INGOs, LNAs, donors, and the IATI Secretariat will help drive forward a more inclusive, accessible, and effective data-sharing system:

1. **Improve data quality among INGOs:** INGOs should publish a broader range of activities, taking advantage of functionality which automates publication in an increasing number of project and financial management systems.
2. **Integrate IATI and FTS:** Take forward the work of IATI and FTS to allow INGOs to “Publish Once, Use Often”, fulfilling their FTS reporting through their IATI publication without additional effort.
3. **Reward publication:** Donors should shift from compliance to incentives, encouraging INGOs to publish substantially all activities, and not only those with direct contractual requirements.
4. **Support Local and National Actors in data publication:** The IATI Secretariat should improve the accessibility and language of IATI tools, particularly by ensuring that IATI Publisher prioritises and meets the needs of local and national actors.
5. **Make data useful:** Support country-level actors with capacity building, and develop specific tools that increase the use of data by donors, INGOs and local and national actors to strengthen allocation, effectiveness and accountability.
6. **Sustain engagement and build a community:** Improve the accessibility of IATI community platforms and engage more proactively with regional and national NGO umbrella bodies.

2. Introduction

In recent years, a range of humanitarian and development actors have made significant progress towards sharing more information about their activities, particularly through IATI. Of the over 1,700 organisations which have published data to the IATI Registry so far, 64% (1,075) are NGOs.¹

Over one third of the NGOs which have published to IATI so far are from the global majority world.

Nevertheless, there are significant challenges in NGOs' data transparency, especially relating to the funding they provide to their partners. As shown by analysis by Development Initiatives' analysis,² there is **little data publicly available on who receives humanitarian funding beyond the first-level recipient**.

There is also a **limited understanding of data quality**; some NGOs may have published data to IATI once several years ago, rather than continuing to update their data, as IATI intends.

There is a strong geographic concentration in the data available: So far, 43% of the NGOs that have published their data to IATI are based in Belgium, the Netherlands, and the UK—three countries where donors have mandated that their NGO implementing partners publish data to IATI. Previous work by Development Initiatives identified challenges for local and national actors in publishing data.³ However, it is noteworthy that over a third of the NGOs which have published to IATI so far are from the Global South.

Objectives

The paper seeks to develop an approach to improving the transparency of funding transferred by ICVA members to humanitarian actors, in particular local and national NGOs. It has two main objectives:

1. To analyse the key challenges to data reporting experienced by first line funding recipients and outline proposed solutions to inform an action plan for uptake by key stakeholders.
2. To review the feasibility of wide-scale reporting by local and national NGOs on their international humanitarian funding in consultation with data reporting systems (FTS, IATI and NGO Networks).

Overview of the report

Following an overview of the methodology used, this report introduces the key humanitarian financial reporting systems – the FTS and IATI - highlighting the potential of greater efficiencies and integration between them. Drawing from available data on these systems, it then explores how ICVA members are currently reporting, examining the volume, frequency, and quality of their data. This is followed by insights from stakeholder consultations, which shed light on the motivations, challenges, and opportunities related to data publication and use. The report concludes with a set of practical recommendations aimed at improving the quality, accessibility, and impact of financial transparency across the humanitarian sector.

3. Methodology

This report combines **quantitative data analysis** with **qualitative insights** to assess the transparency practices of ICVA members and the broader challenges and opportunities surrounding humanitarian data publication.

The quantitative component of the research focused on assessing the extent, consistency, and quality of data publication by ICVA member organisations through two major transparency platforms: the **International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)** and the **OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS)**.

- **IATI data** was retrieved from the IATI Dashboard and Registry. Data was analysed by publisher, with ICVA members identified through a mapping process using organisation names, aliases, and known affiliates.⁴
- **FTS data** was accessed via the FTS Flows API, reviewing reporting between 2020 and 2023. ICVA members were matched using official names and FTS-registered aliases.⁵
- **Comparative analysis** was conducted based on ICVA members' organisation size (large, medium, small), with attention to reporting coverage (number of flows or activities reported), frequency of reporting, and consistency across years.

This data analysis aimed to establish a baseline understanding of how ICVA members currently engage with data publication and to identify patterns in reporting behaviour.

Stakeholder Consultations

To complement the data analysis, structured **interviews were conducted with 21 organisations**, including both international and local or national non-governmental organisations (INGOs and LNAs). These consultations aimed to explore the motivations, challenges, and perceived value of data publication from the perspective of those directly involved.

The conversation included the following areas (adapted depending on the background of the counterpart):

Publication of data: what are the experiences and challenges of data sharing?

- ▣ **Awareness** – of IATI and FTS, and the extent of an organisation's data publication,
- ▣ **Motivations** – for sharing data (current and potential),
- ▣ **Challenges** – policy and technical challenges in sharing data,
- ▣ **Visibility of implementers** – perspectives on sharing the names of implementers (balancing visibility with sensitivity).

Use of data: what are the opportunities of data sharing?

- ▣ **Fundraising**: being made aware of new funding opportunities to receive funding from development partners,
- ▣ **Coordination**: ensuring support to affected communities is well aligned between different organisations,
- ▣ **Advocacy**: advocating for development partners and/or government to allocate more funding to particular areas,
- ▣ **Accountability**: ensuring that funds are spent correctly, and according to the needs of affected communities.

Interviewees were identified by promoting the study among ICVA members, reaching out to local and national actors who were IATI publishers, otherwise engaged with ICVA, or through personal contacts. While a fully representative sample of interviewees would be well beyond the scope of this study, we aimed to capture a broad cross-section of organisations, with organisations from a mix of sizes, regions, and from both INGOs and local and national actors:

Table 1: Country of interviewees

Africa		Asia	Europe & North America	
Burundi	Nigeria	Bangladesh Jordan	Denmark	Switzerland
Kenya	Somalia		Ireland	UK
Malawi	Uganda		Netherlands	USA

Limitations

This report does not aim to provide a statistically representative sample but rather to capture key trends, illustrative examples, and informed perspectives. Nonetheless, the combination of data analysis and practitioner insight provides a well-rounded picture of current practices, barriers, and opportunities in humanitarian data transparency.

The qualitative insights reflect the views of those interviewed and may not encompass the full range of experience across the sector.

4. An overview of humanitarian financial reporting systems

Existing reporting systems

OCHA's **Financial Tracking Service (FTS)** and the **International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)** are two different but complementary approaches to sharing information on humanitarian activities and financing. They have several similarities: they are frequently updated, contain information on a range of humanitarian activities, and reporting to them is (for the most part) voluntary.

However, FTS and IATI have different objectives, which account for their differences in both their approach and reporting. These differences are summarised in **Table 2**, below.

Table 2. Comparison of FTS and IATI

	<u>OCHA Financial Tracking Service (FTS)</u> ⁶	<u>The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)</u> ⁷
Managed by	UN OCHA	IATI Secretariat
Objective	Monitor fund mobilisation progress for humanitarian operations, humanitarian response plans, and appeals.	Improve aid effectiveness and accountability
Focus	Humanitarian aid only. Tied closely to humanitarian appeals	Development and humanitarian aid
What it is	A curated, centralised database on humanitarian funding flows	A decentralised, raw data on humanitarian and development activities
Reporting	NGOs report to FTS by filling out an online template provided by OCHA.	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> NGOs can publish data directly from their financial or project management systems and upload the data to their website in a standard international format Most (particularly smaller) NGOs fill out details about their projects in an online platform such as AidStream or IATI Publisher. This then generates the required data on the organisation's behalf.

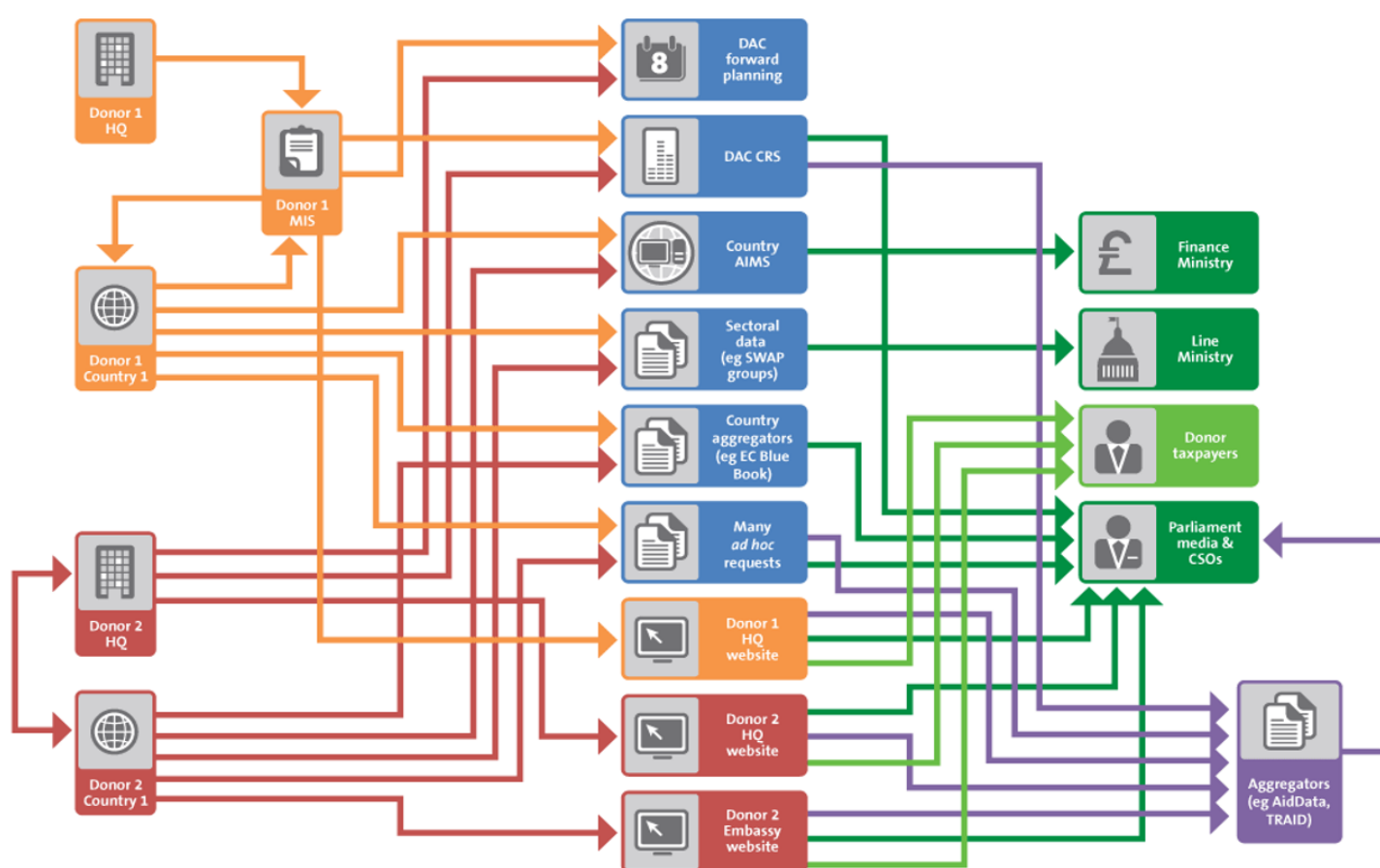
How IATI and FTS can work together: The "Publish Once, Use Often" principle

IATI complements FTS by supporting consistent access to structured data for independent use and analysis. While the FTS provides curated, centralised reporting, IATI enables organisations to reuse the same dataset as an input to multiple platforms and purposes. This is the core of IATI's principle: **"Publish Once, Use Often."**

Instead of preparing separate reports for each donor, platform, or coordination mechanism, organisations can publish detailed, structured data once in the IATI format. That same data can then be drawn into a range of other systems and tools. Examples so far include country-level aid information management systems¹, emergency-specific dashboards², donor-specific platforms³, a prototype visualisation of local actors in Somalia⁴ and analytics and data quality tools⁵. This reduces duplication, increases efficiency, and opens the door to real-time use of data in decision-making.

While the principle of “publish once, use often” has been widely demonstrated, in practice, the IATI-FTS integration remains largely aspirational. Most organisations still prepare data separately for IATI and FTS, creating parallel processes that waste time and limit consistency. This duplication of efforts is demonstrated in the visual mapping of **Figure 1** below:

Figure 1: Current approach: Publish many times, use rarely



Maximising reporting efficiencies

Wider adoption of the IATI “publish once, use often” principle could significantly reduce the burden on INGOs while also improving the completeness and timeliness of FTS data, as demonstrated in **Figure 2** below. As mentioned above, the principle calls on organisations providing data to do so in a single,

¹ Such as the Liberia Project Dashboard: <https://liberiaprojects.org/>.

² Such as OCHA's IATI COVID-19 Funding Dashboard: <https://data.humdata.org/viz-iati-c19-dashboard/>.

³ Such as USAID's ForeignAssistance.gov Development Cooperation Landscape: <https://foreignassistance.gov/donor>.

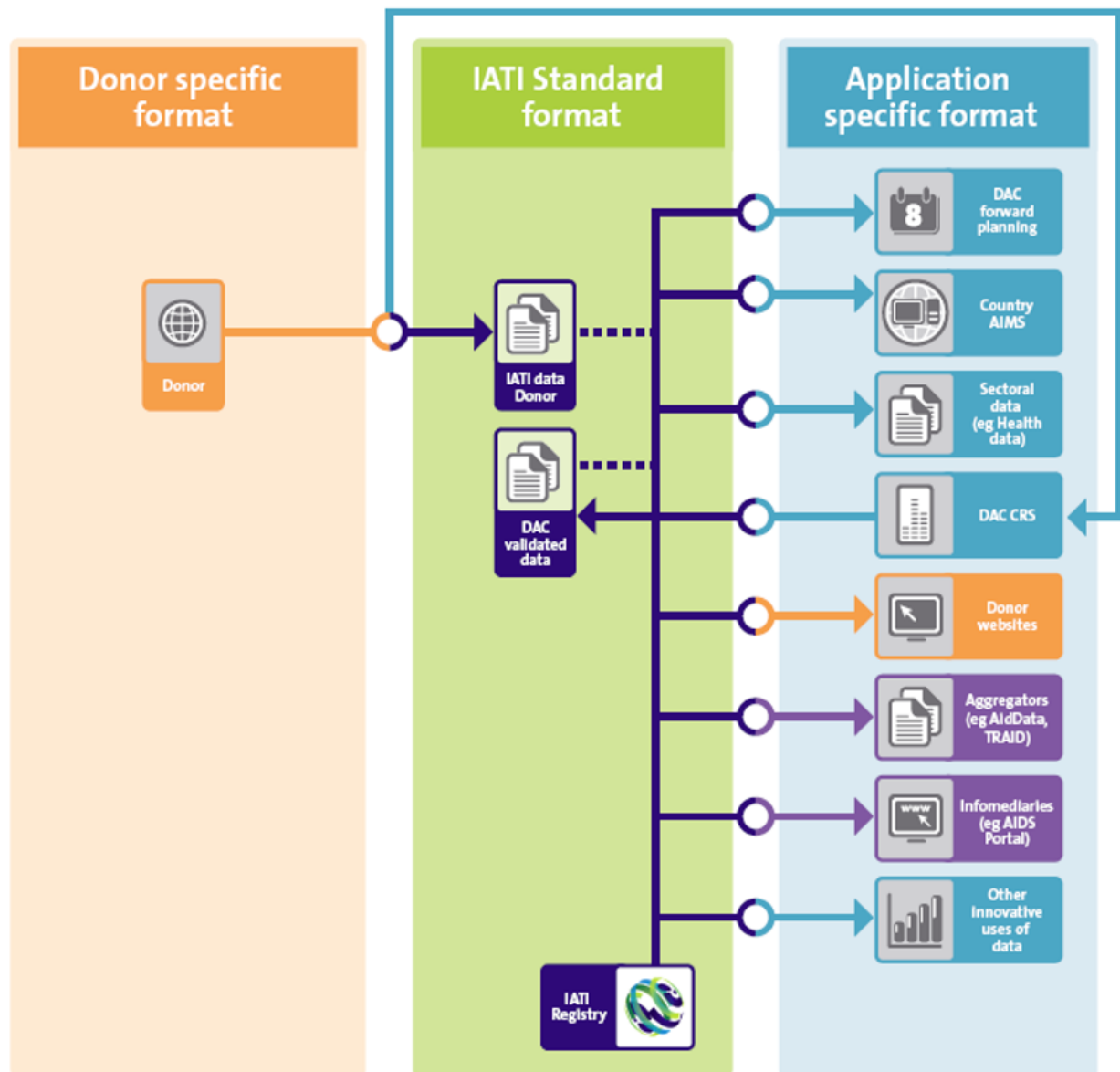
⁴ Somalia Local Activity Explorer: <https://iati-3w.humportal.org/>.

⁵ Such as the Humportal Guidance Notes which contain summary statistics which are updated daily, e.g. on Localisation: <https://humportal.org/guidance/localisation>.

detailed and comparable format – the IATI Standard – and then re-use that single dataset for meeting the needs of different systems and users.

While IATI and FTS successfully piloted the import of IATI data to FTS, the import process has still to move beyond the pilot stage.⁸ There is still potential and interest to do so: in January 2025, the IATI Secretariat shared an update of work to convert Denmark’s IATI data to the format required for FTS, demonstrating once again the practicality of this approach.⁹

Figure 2: Publish once, use often



5. ICVA member reporting: FTS & IATI data analysis

To identify ICVA member reporting practices, the information reported to FTS and published to IATI was reviewed as described in the Methodology section. The findings are summarised below.

Summary of key findings:

1. **27% of ICVA members publish data to IATI and 24% to FTS**
2. **Larger members have significantly higher reporting rates than medium or smaller ones, but even they often only publish partial or aggregated data.**
3. **Data sharing is often limited by focusing on donor-driven reporting rather than effectiveness and accountability.**

5.1 Current status of data publication practices by ICVA members

Of 168 ICVA members, 27% of members are publishing data to IATI and 24% of members are reporting data to FTS, as presented in [Table 3](#) below. Large members are much more likely to publish data to IATI and report data to FTS than medium-sized and small members.

Table 3: ICVA Members reporting to FTS or publishing to IATI, by size of organisation

ICVA Member Classification	Revenue (CHF)	IATI publication	FTS Reporting	Both IATI & FTS	No reporting
Large	Over 30 million	68%	68%	57%	21%
Medium	5-30 million	11%	7%	7%	75%
Small	5 million or less	6%	3%	2%	88%
Unweighted Average		27%	24%	18%	67%

While these results are positive at a first glance, data provided to FTS and IATI varies in quality. Most organisations are only publishing a subset of their activities. Many members report data to FTS inconsistently, and a minority of members update their IATI data frequently.

5.2 Reporting Coverage: How Much Data Is Being Shared?

Coverage” reflects whether organisations are reporting only a limited subset of their work or providing a more comprehensive view of their operations.

Larger organisations would generally be expected to report higher volumes of data, given the scale and scope of their activities. However, in practice, many report only a fraction of their total operations or the data reported is highly aggregated. This is often due to selective reporting based on donor requirements,

rather than systematic or organisation-wide publication. **Table 4** summarises the average number of flows and activities reported by ICVA members, disaggregated by organisational size.

Table 4. Average number of flows and activities reported to FTS and IATI by ICVA members

Size of ICVA member	FTS flows (average reported by member)	Number of ICVA members reporting	IATI activities (average reported by member)	Number of ICVA members reporting
Large	89	32	1,377	32
Medium	1	4	51 (5)	5
Small	37	5	20 (8)	8

The number of flows and activities varies significantly by organisation. It is difficult to quickly and easily identify the “correct” number of flows or activities, because it will require contextual information about that specific organisation. However, it is striking that the number of activities varies from 32,159 for the International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies and 3,812 for Oxfam GB, to only 9 for Norwegian People’s Aid and 4 for the War Child Alliance.

In the latter cases, the organisations may be publishing only those activities they are required to as part of their contracts with funders or they may have aggregated their activities.

Many organisations publish for each member

The publishing approach by different organisations varies, but there are often multiple organisations publishing on behalf of the member. For example:

- ❑ IATI data for ActionAid is covered by 9 publishers: ActionAid International; ActionAid UK; ActionAid Bangladesh; ActionAid Denmark (Mellemfolkeligt Samvirke); ActionAid Rwanda; ActionAid Kenya; ActionAid Ghana; ActionAid International Nepal; Stichting ActionAid. ICVA members can also be covered by multiple organisations reporting to FTS.
- ❑ FTS data for Plan International is reported to by both Plan International and Plan International Bangladesh.

This reflects the fact that many different organisations have different roles in the delivery chain, and that members may be composed of many separate legal entities.

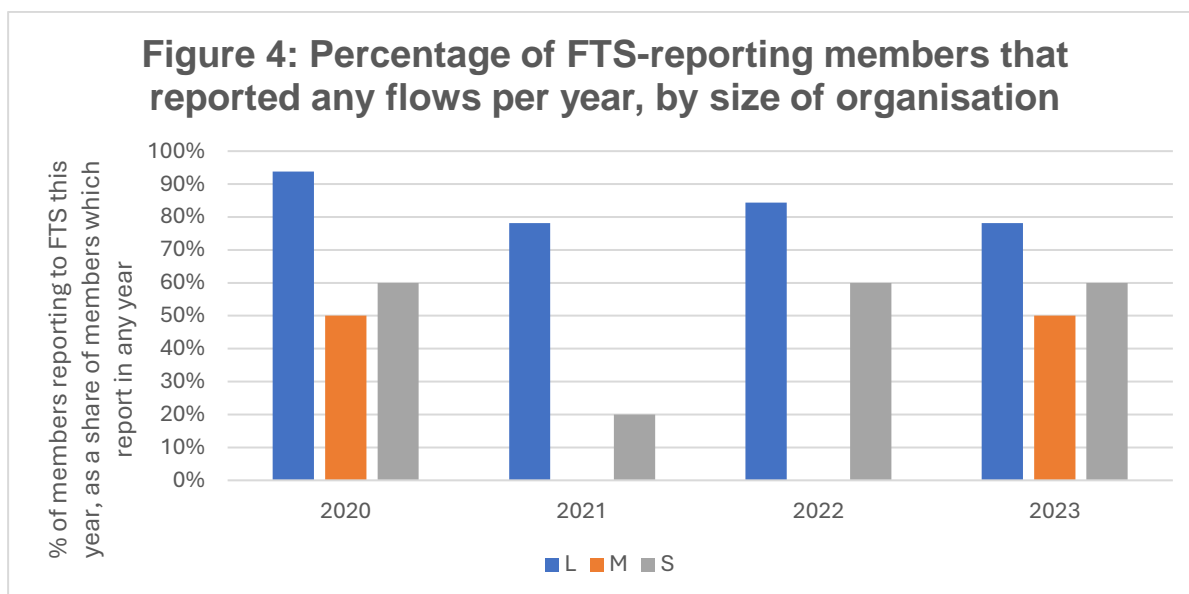
5.3 Consistency and frequency of data reporting

Two dimensions of data quality for FTS and IATI were identified to categorise members into publishers providing “higher quality” data or not:

- ❑ For FTS, the consistency of reporting – whether an organisation reports data to FTS in at least three out of four years (“higher quality”), or less consistently;
- ❑ For IATI, the frequency of publication – whether an organisation updates their data every month or quarter (“higher quality”), or less frequently.

Consistency of FTS reporting

Although organisations may provide data to FTS in one year, it is important that they continue providing data over multiple years, so that the data continues to be useful and relevant. As **Figure 4** shows, reporting to FTS fluctuates from year to year, even just assessed against a very basic standard. Of ICVA members which reported any flows to FTS in 2020-2023, there is a significant difference from year to year. While 85% of this subset of ICVA members reported some data on flows in 2020, this dropped to less than 75% in subsequent years. Medium-sized members did not report any flows in 2021 or 2022.



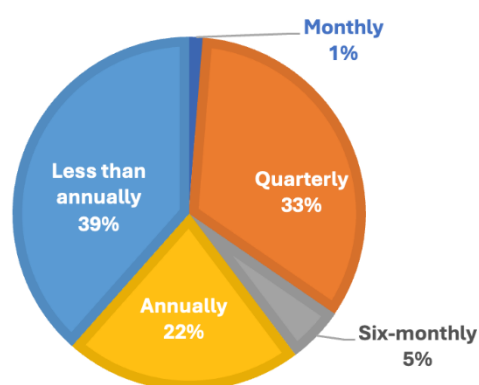
Frequency of IATI reporting

Similarly, many organisations publishing to IATI are publishing infrequently. The less frequently that data is published, the less relevant it becomes. There can be multiple IATI publishers for each ICVA member, and the frequency of publication can vary between publishers.

Figure 5 shows the frequency of publication for IATI publishers which are members of ICVA.

- Of IATI publishers which are members of ICVA, 60% publish data once per year or less frequently. 35% publish data quarterly or more frequently.
- Only one publisher (ActionAid Denmark) publishes data at least monthly.

Figure 5: How often do ICVA members publish on IATI?



6. From data to dialogue: Insights from ICVA members

To complement the above data analysis, structured **interviews were conducted with 21 organisations**, including both international and local or national non-governmental organisations (INGOs and LNAs). These consultations aimed to explore the motivations, challenges, and perceived value of data publication from the perspective of those directly involved. The findings are summarised below:

Summary of key findings:

1. **There is significant demand from local and national actors for INGOs' data, so that they can hold organisations to account, and effectively participate in localisation processes.**
2. **Local and national actors are enthusiastic about sharing their own data.**
3. **INGOs are generally only publishing information on their activities to meet their compliance obligations towards donors, limiting the potential of this data.**
4. **INGOs' publication processes are normally very manual, which constrains the ability to scale publication; but there are good examples of automation and efficiency.**
5. **Data on INGOs' activities is used to a quite limited extent, indicating the significant unrealised potential of this data to improve effectiveness and accountability.**

6.1 Local and national actors need and want INGO data

Local and national actors (LNAs) are eager to access INGO data, but they face significant challenges. Many see this information as essential to both holding INGOs accountable and meaningfully engaging in localisation efforts. However, navigating existing reporting systems is far from simple. Two barriers stand in their way:

- ❑ **Complex, unintuitive platforms:** while an increasing amount of data is now published by INGOs, the IATI platforms to use this data are difficult for local actors to interpret or use. Without streamlined, user-friendly interfaces, accessing this information requires technical expertise that many organisations lack.
- ❑ **Limited awareness and training:** many local organisations do not know where to find INGO data or how to analyse it effectively. The lack of guidance and the complex platforms mean that even when information is available, it remains underutilised.

For local actors, this is not just about transparency, but about practical access to funding, better planning, and stronger coordination. Unlike large institutional donors, INGOs often operate at a scale

that aligns with local organisations' capacities. More accessible and comprehensive data could help these actors identify funding opportunities, avoid duplication, and advocate for resources within their communities.

Local and national actors, including in Bangladesh and Nigeria, undertake existing exercises to capture information on INGO and multilateral activities to promote effective coordination. These exercises are manual, costly, and time-consuming, but also essential to create a common basis of understanding. IATI has a practical, and not only theoretical benefit here, to provide a useful input to these data collection exercises.

If INGOs are serious about localisation, data-sharing must improve. Publishing information is a crucial first step, but it is not enough — it must be accessible, understandable, and useful for those on the ground.

LNAs' visibility: The fight to be seen

■ LNAs are the backbone of humanitarian and development work.

They deliver aid, implement projects, and sustain communities long after international attention fades. Yet, in the data published by INGOs and donors, they are often invisible. Their contributions go uncredited, their partnerships unrecognised, their role erased.

■ For LNAs, this isn't just about acknowledgement, it's about survival. Without visibility in donor reports and funding databases, securing direct support is nearly impossible. Many remain trapped in a cycle where INGOs act as gatekeepers, controlling access to funding while failing to name the local organisations delivering much of the work. The system presents INGOs as the sole drivers of impact, while LNAs are left fighting to prove their legitimacy to funders who don't see them.

■ One of the reasons for this is that the handling of downstream partner data is inconsistent. Some INGOs make this information public – for example, ActionAid UK, DRC, and CARE Nederland. Other INGOs don't, though generally reported that doing so would be straightforward if a clear value proposition were presented to senior management. These inconsistencies show a lack of clear internal policies or incentives for more comprehensive transparency.

■ But LNAs want there to be a change. They want INGOs to publish who they work with, disclose funding flows, and ensure that local organisations are visible in reporting platforms. Without this, localisation remains an empty promise.

Without visibility in funding databases, it is nearly impossible for LNAs to secure direct support. INGOs act as gatekeepers, controlling access to funding while failing to name the local organisations delivering much of the work. The system presents INGOs as the sole drivers of impact, while LNAs are left fighting to prove their legitimacy to funders who don't see them.

6.2 Local and national actors want to share their own data

Local organisations want access to INGO data, and they are also eager to share their own. They see data publication as a way to attract funding, gain visibility, and receive recognition for their contributions. Yet, their voices are often drowned out by the dominance of international actors in humanitarian and development spaces.

Despite their enthusiasm, they face two major hurdles:

- ❖ **Difficult reporting systems:** Most data-sharing platforms are built for INGOs and large donors, making them challenging for smaller organisations to navigate. A more streamlined, accessible approach is needed.
- ❖ **Language barriers:** Many platforms operate primarily in English or other dominant languages, limiting accessibility for organisations working in diverse linguistic contexts.

For localisation to be more than just rhetoric, INGOs and donors must invest in making data-sharing truly inclusive. When local actors have the tools to access and contribute data, the aid system becomes more equitable, to one that fully recognises and values local leadership.

Balancing transparency with risk: The fine line of data publication

The sensitivity of data publication was explored with interviewees. In some places, transparency is power. In others, it can create risks. Publishing data on LNAs can open doors to funding, accountability, and recognition. However, certain data can also expose partners to surveillance, political crackdowns, or even violence. Several interviewees discussed these issues and considered how to respond to them:

- ❖ **In Somalia** recipients of cash assistance have been targeted. However, this was not due to data publication, and interviewees were keen to emphasise that they are cautious about identifying and not releasing such sensitive data.
- ❖ **In Nigeria** the non-disclosure of funding flows has fuelled government suspicion, leading to restrictions that ultimately hurt those most in need. Here, LNAs argued that disclosure of basic information about where they are working and what they are working on, can protect them rather than expose them. They emphasised the importance of sharing this information with a broad range of actors, including other INGOs, DPs and government, to ensure that scarce resources are effectively used.

This calls for a nuanced approach. Information on people receiving assistance – and particularly personally identifiable information – should always be handled with care, and particular contexts or sectors can be sensitive. Most of the data that can be published through IATI is not so granular, and a blanket exclusion of publishing information is not consistent with the needs of LNAs.

Local partners overwhelmingly want to be more visible, so the default should be for INGOs to state which LNAs they are working with. Exceptions from publication could be discussed and agreed with LNAs at the contracting stage and then periodically reviewed, so that exceptions can be systematically implemented in systems. This would allow INGOs and LNAs to disclose what strengthens their work and shield what puts them at risk.

6.3 INGOs publish data for compliance, not transparency

- ❑ Most INGOs are not sharing data as a proactive act of transparency but rather as a contractual obligation to donors. Their reporting is generally narrow, dictated by funder requirements rather than by a commitment to transparency, effectiveness or accountability. Instead of serving local actors or fostering accountability, data publication is a bureaucratic exercise that INGOs engage in because they must, not because they see value in it.
- ❑ Most INGOs disclose only the activities they are required to, leaving much of their work undocumented. While a few organisations, publish more comprehensively, these are exceptions rather than the standard practice. The system, as it stands, does not encourage INGOs to go beyond the bare minimum.
- ❑ The constraints are both systemic and practical. INGOs operate within a framework where donors demand transparency yet do little to ensure that published data is useful or accessible. The result

is a cycle in which INGOs see reporting as a burdensome task rather than an opportunity for accountability or collaboration. Without stronger incentives and clearer benefits, meaningful transparency remains out of reach.

6.4 How INGOs publish data: From manual processes to automation

- For most INGOs, publishing data is a slow, manual process, requiring staff to input information into web-based forms like AidStream or send spreadsheets to third-party providers for formatting. These cumbersome methods make publication time-consuming and difficult to scale. Since INGOs typically only disclose a fraction of their activities, there has been little motivation to invest in automation or system integration.
- However, some organisations are shifting away from this inefficiency. A handful of INGOs have integrated data publication directly into their internal systems, allowing information to be generated and shared automatically, and significantly lowering the marginal cost of publication for additional activities. These cases demonstrate that streamlined reporting is possible, but they remain the exception rather than the rule.
- The challenge is not just technical but cultural. Without a shift in mindset — one that sees data publication as a strategic function rather than an administrative burden — most INGOs will continue with inefficient, fragmented reporting.

Without a shift in mindset — one that sees data publication as a strategic function rather than an administrative burden — most INGOs will continue with inefficient, fragmented reporting.

6.5 There is a significant unrealised potential of INGO data

- Despite the effort INGOs put into publishing data, and the significant potential of this data, it is rarely used by either the INGOs themselves or by external stakeholders. None of the organisations interviewed received meaningful feedback on their data, and none had actively engaged with IATI data from other INGOs to improve coordination or inform funding decisions. In practice, the data exists in a vacuum. Rather than increasing efficiency of data sharing according to the principle of “publish once, use often”, IATI publication remains an additional reporting requirement.
- One partial exception is the Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs, which monitors data published by Dutch INGOs through its METIS dashboard¹⁰. However, INGOs reported that even this engagement is focused on ensuring compliance to reporting requirements rather than maximizing the usefulness of the information, for example to promote synergies across countries, sectors or partners.
- Another unrealised opportunity is to further advance the integration between IATI and FTS, building on the current pilot with Denmark, so that publishing data to IATI allows INGOs to instantly and automatically report to FTS. The analysis in section 3 indicates that the reporting of INGOs to FTS is partial and inconsistent, so the advantages would extend well beyond efficiency.
- The potential for INGOs to leverage shared data remains largely untapped. With better engagement, INGOs could use this information to align efforts, identify gaps, and collaborate more effectively. But this requires a fundamental shift: moving data publication from a check-the-box task to a tool for decision-making, advocacy, and impact assessment.

Conclusion: NGO reporting: Beyond compliance to meaningful use

With 21 in-depth interviews spanning both INGOs and local and national actors, the patterns in NGO data transparency are clear: the focus of NGO transparency has been compliance, not meaningful engagement to improve effectiveness and accountability. However, there is potential for a shift. Some INGOs see opportunities beyond compliance that could make data publication more meaningful and beneficial to their operations.

The humanitarian response to the Türkiye earthquake is a good example of why this shift is necessary. INGOs on the ground saw the consequences of uncoordinated aid flows: essential supplies accumulated in some locations while others went without. The data existed, but it wasn't accessible when and where it was needed. Those who see the potential of open, real-time data understand that transparency is not just about publishing reports, but it's also about making sure resources reach those who need them most.

At the same time, the donor landscape is shifting rapidly. Increasing scepticism towards aid, both from funders and the public, makes it more important than ever to demonstrate that programs are transparent and effective. The broader trend is clear: INGOs that invest in better data systems now will be better positioned to secure future funding.

Beyond meeting donor expectations, better data helps INGOs themselves. Some organisations have started leveraging their own data for internal performance tracking, resource allocation, and advocacy. When data is structured and accessible, it becomes a strategic tool, not just a reporting requirement.

Automation is also proving to be a game-changer. A handful of INGOs have moved away from manual, time-consuming data entry toward integrated systems that allow for seamless publication. These organisations are finding that when data publication is built into financial and project management systems, the burden of reporting decreases while the benefits increase. Improving systems takes time – years rather than months – so it is important that both donors and INGOs establish policies which create clear and long-term market signals.

The potential to improve NGO-government reporting is also emerging. INGOs have played a role in funding national NGO registration and accreditation systems, and there are evolving opportunities for them to use their own published data to meet reporting requirements at the country level. Denmark's recent pilot in converting IATI data into FTS offers a model that, if scaled and generalised, could make reporting more efficient and reduce duplication of effort for INGOs. The vision of "publish once, use often" is not yet realised, but is getting closer than ever before.

7. Recommendations

Recommendation 1: Improve data quality among INGOs

Most large INGOs already have the systems in place to make automated data publication possible, yet many still rely on manual reporting or only publish a fraction of their projects. Engaging directly with the developers of major project management systems could change this by integrating IATI publication seamlessly into existing workflows. The goal should be full automation, covering all projects, not just those required by donor agreements. Without this shift, transparency will remain partial and inconsistent.

- ▣ INGOs should establish a policy of “publication by default”, and work to move away from manual publication of selected activities to automated publication for substantially all activities.
- ▣ The IATI Secretariat should have a strategic policy of shifting large organisations towards automated publication over time and should reduce support to large organisations which continue to publish data through manual processes.
- ▣ INGOs should state the name of their implementing partner, allowing downstream partners to become more visible, unless doing so would cause harm in specific cases; exclusions should generally be determined at the contracting stage and then periodically reviewed.
- ▣ INGOs should engage with their systems providers to request IATI integration, recognising that implementation may take time and only be possible in the context of a larger and infrequent systems upgrade.
- ▣ The IATI Secretariat should compile a list of which systems are used by major INGOs and engage with the most common systems providers to build in IATI integration.

Recommendation 2: Integrate IATI and FTS: “Publish Once, Use Often”

Redundant reporting remains a burden for INGOs. The ability to generate FTS reports automatically from IATI data would streamline the process, reducing duplication of effort and improving consistency. Denmark’s recent pilot proves this is possible. Now, the challenge is scaling it. If INGOs can “publish once and use often,” reporting becomes less of an administrative hurdle and more of a tool for efficiency.

- ▣ The IATI Secretariat and FTS should extend the existing FTS/IATI conversion pilot for Denmark, to a handful of large INGOs with good-quality IATI data and several LNAs.
- ▣ Donors should pilot fulfilling projects’ financial reporting requirements using IATI data.

Recommendation 3: Reward publication: shift from compliance to incentives

Donors have a role to play in driving better data publication. The advice given to them should encourage effective reporting — not just fulfilling contractual obligations but gradually moving toward full transparency across all their activities. Organisations that voluntarily publish all their projects should

receive tangible benefits, such as procurement advantages. But publication alone isn't enough: data must also be used. Donors should integrate published data into their decision-making, engaging with project results and fostering synergies between partners.

- ▣ Donors should consider providing advantages in procurement processes to organisations which proactively publish substantially all their activities.
- ▣ Donors should encourage and support programmatic colleagues to use partners' IATI data in countries, sectors or contracts under their responsibility, to improve allocation decisions, strengthen results, and foster synergies between partners.
- ▣ The IATI Secretariat should provide a badge or certification to organisations which publish data to IATI and update their data at least quarterly.

Recommendation 4: Support local and national actors in data publication

Local and National Actors want to share their data, and many already do, but the barriers remain high. The complexity of IATI publishing tools means they need an understanding of the IATI Standard just to get started. The premium version of AidStream, one of the main tools available, is too expensive for many small organisations, and the free version is too complex.

There is an opportunity for IATI Publisher, the publishing tool maintained by the IATI Secretariat, to fill the niche of providing a simple tool for small organisations. Language accessibility is also an issue, with interfaces and documentation often available only in dominant global languages, excluding many local actors from engaging. If IATI is to be truly inclusive, these structural barriers must be addressed.

- ▣ The IATI Secretariat should further simplify IATI Publisher, sharpening the strategic focus of the tool to ensure that it can be effectively and easily used by smaller organisations, and in particular, local and national actors. It should abstract IATI Publisher away from the IATI Standard, so that users do not need to understand the Standard to publish data. It should also make documentation interfaces available in more of the languages commonly used at country level.

Recommendation 5: Make data useful: Capacity building and accessibility

Publication without usability serves no one. INGOs and local actors need better tools, clearer guidance, and the ability to engage meaningfully with published data to improve coordination, resource allocation and visibility.

- ▣ **Capacity building:** Regional workshops, both online and in-person, could train key actors, creating “trainers of trainers” who can champion data use in their own communities.
- ▣ **Better tools:** IATI tools such as D-Portal, and donor platforms such as METIS, need to be simplified and designed with usability in mind.
- ▣ **Clarity in presentation:** Data should be structured according to real use cases, ensuring different actors can find and interpret the information they need.

- ▣ The **IATI Secretariat** should hold 2-3 regional “trainer of trainers” workshops, to empower actors at the country level. These could be online or remote, depending on resources.
- ▣ The **IATI Secretariat** should further improve IATI tools such as D-Portal so that they can be effectively used by local actors.
- ▣ **Donors, INGOs** and the **ICVA Network** should develop interfaces and tools which support funders to more easily discover local and national actors; which support local and national actors to discover potential funding opportunities; and which promote coordination at the country level.

Recommendation 6: Sustain engagement and build a community

Engagement with IATI should not end at publication – especially given the huge potential and interest in using the data to improve effectiveness and accountability. Organisations that want to participate but don’t need full membership require an accessible entry point, something simpler than IATI Connect, and perhaps a recognised “IATI Community Member” status.

Maintaining long-term engagement also means building continuity, ensuring that when key individuals transition out of roles, organisations do not lose their connection to IATI. Sustained relationships and institutional memory are crucial for keeping data publication meaningful and effective.

- ▣ The IATI Secretariat should significantly improve the usability of IATI Connect so that it becomes a more useful community engagement platform.
- ▣ The IATI Secretariat should engage more proactively with regional NGO umbrella bodies, and encourage them to become IATI members, so that they can both represent the concerns of NGO colleagues and relay information on IATI to their NGO members.

Acronyms & Abbreviations

AIMS	Aid Information Management System
API	Application Programming Interface
DP	Development Partner
FTS	OCHA Financial Tracking Service
IATI	International Aid Transparency Initiative
ICVA	International Council of Voluntary Agencies
INGO	International Non-Governmental Organisation
LNAs	Local and National Actors
METIS	Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs' dashboard to track implementing partners' IATI data
OCHA	Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs
ODA	Official Development Assistance
OECD	Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development

References

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² Development Initiatives – “Falling short? Humanitarian funding and reform: Chapter 2 - Funding to local and national actors”: <https://devinit.github.io/resources/falling-short-humanitarian-funding-reform/funding-local-national-actors/>

³ Development Initiatives – “Including local and national actors in humanitarian open data”: <https://devinit.github.io/blog/including-local-national-actors-humanitarian-open-data/>

⁴ FTS Flows API: <https://api.hpc.tools/v1/public/fts/flow?year=2022>

IATI Dashboard: Publishers: <https://dashboard.iatistandard.org/publishers.html>

IATI Dashboard: Timeliness: <https://publishingstats.iatistandard.org/timeliness.html>

⁵ We automatically compared the names of organisations, and then manually reviewed the results. We found that this approach provides a very high degree of accuracy. However, there may be a handful of false negatives (where we did not match a member to an existing reporting organisation).

⁶ OCHA Financial Tracking Service: What is the Financial Tracking Service (FTS) and How to use it? <https://fts.unocha.org/content/what-financial-tracking-service-fts-and-how-use-it>

⁷ IATI Accra Statement – 4th September 2008: <https://cdn.iatistandard.org/prod-iati-website/documents/archive/2009/06/iati-accra-statement-p1.pdf>

⁸ Development Initiatives – Supporting Grand Bargain signatories in meeting commitments to greater transparency (June 2020): <https://reliefweb.int/report/world/supporting-grand-bargain-signatories-meeting-commitments-greater-transparency-june-2020>

⁹ IATI – Members Assembly, 15 January 2025: <https://iatistandard.org/en/events/members-assembly-2024-virtual/>

¹⁰ Netherlands Ministry of Foreign Affairs – METIS: <https://helpdesk-opensdata-minbuza.nl/dashboards-2/>



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