

THE AID TRANSPARENCY PRINCIPLES

Preamble

For aid to be effective, accountable and participatory it must be transparent: information must be available to recipient governments, affected communities, and other stakeholders as well as the general public.

Transparency and accountability between donors and recipient governments is fundamental for effective aid and for there to be ownership of aid processes by developing countries. Donors therefore have a special obligation to share information with recipient governments. At the same time, wider transparency is essential to ensure that members of the public, in donor and recipient countries, are able to engage in the debate about the use of aid.

The **Aid Transparency Principles** bring together the need for greater aid effectiveness with the fundamental right of everyone to know how public bodies are using public resources. The right of access to information places an obligation on all public bodies to generate and disseminate information about their activities and functions. In addition, everyone has the right to request and receive information from public bodies, subject to limited exceptions.¹

The Aid Transparency Principles apply to public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid. Public bodies should impose a similar obligation of transparency on third parties which spend aid on their behalf. Other actors such as private foundations, civil society organizations and private contractors are encouraged to adopt and implement the principles on a voluntary basis.²

The Aid Transparency Principles have been developed out of recognition that special efforts are needed to promote the transparency of aid and to ensure that all sectors of society have equal access to information, particularly the communities which aid is designed to benefit.

The organizations and individuals who have endorsed these Principles call for their full implementation by all bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid, across all their aid activities, in order to ensure that aid is effective in alleviating poverty and suffering, and promoting sustainable development.

Not all recipient governments and private organizations will have the infrastructure in place to comply with the Aid Transparency Principles immediately. Respecting the right of access to information usually requires legislative and administrative changes and entails improving information management systems. For this reason we call on recipient governments and private organizations to make a commitment to implementing the Principles along with a proposed timescale for achieving progressive compliance. We call on donors to facilitate such commitments by themselves publishing greater volumes of information proactively and by supporting projects designed to increase administrative transparency in recipient countries.

¹ This right applies to all public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid, including donor governments (all relevant ministries, regional and local government institutions, and aid agencies, as well as private bodies performing public functions), multilateral bodies (including IFIs and the UN), recipient governments and state agencies receiving aid (all relevant central, regional and local governmental bodies).

² This is in addition to any reporting obligations that they may have towards donor agencies.

Principles

1. Information on aid should be published proactively

Public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid, and those who deliver aid on their behalf, should proactively disseminate information on their aid and aid-related activities. They should develop the necessary systems to collect, generate and ensure the automatic and timely disclosure of, at a minimum, information on:

- **Aid policies and procedures** including clear criteria for the allocation of aid;
- **Aid strategies** at the regional, country and local; and programmatic, sectoral and project levels;
- **Aid flows** (including financial flows, in-kind aid and administrative costs), including data on aid planned, pledged, committed and disbursed, disaggregated according to internationally agreed schema by region, country, geographic area, sector, [disbursement/delivery] modality and spending agency;
- **Terms of aid**, including aid agreements, contracts and related documents, for example, information on all conditions, prior and agreed actions, benchmarks, triggers, and interim evaluation criteria; and details of any decisions to suspend, withdraw or reallocate aid resources;
- **Procurement** procedures, criteria, tenders and decisions, contracts, and reporting on contracts, including information about and from contractors and sub-contracting agents;
- **Assessments of aid and aid effectiveness** including monitoring, evaluation, financial, audit and annual reporting;
- **Integrity procedures**, including corruption risk assessments, declarations of gifts and assets, complaint policies and mechanisms and protection of whistleblowers;
- **Public participation**: opportunities for public engagement in decision-making and evaluation, consultative/draft documentation, copies of submissions to the consultation processes, and reports on how inputs were taken into account;
- **Access to information**: organisational structure, contact information and disclosure mechanisms and policies

The only restrictions on the proactive publication of this information should be based on limited exceptions consistent with international law and subject to consideration of the public interest in the disclosure of information.

All public bodies engaged in aid, in donor and recipient countries, should publish an index to the classes of information that they hold, and wherever possible these should be organized so that all the documents linked to a particular country, programme, or project can be identified.

2. Everyone has the right to request and receive information about aid

Public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid should guarantee the right of access to information, both through proactive publication of information and by establishing mechanisms by which everyone can request and receive information.

Public bodies engaged in aid should respect everyone's right to request information without the need to justify the request and without any citizenship or residency requirements. The procedures for requesting information should be simple and free; only actual copying and postage may be charged. Information held by public bodies should be provided to the public within predefined timeframes, subject only to limited exceptions that are consistent with international law. Everyone should be guaranteed a right to appeal refusals to provide information, as well as to appeal any failures to respond or other obstacles to receiving information to an independent body empowered to issue binding decisions.

In international law, the right of access to information only applies to public bodies and to private bodies performing public functions as designated by national law. Given the importance of transparency for accountability and effectiveness in the aid system, all actors engaged in funding and delivering aid should develop appropriate systems to allow the public access to information. Public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid should ensure that third parties who spend aid on their behalf provide information to the public, either directly or through the donors' access to information regimes.

All donor governments and their agencies should meet the standards of their own access to information regimes in all the countries where they operate, regardless of whether the recipient country has similar laws. They should grant access to information by citizens of recipient countries in the same way that they would their own citizens.

3. Information on aid should be timely, accessible and comparable

Information on aid should be of sufficient quality to be meaningful for recipient governments, civil society organizations, other stakeholders, and the public in donor and recipient countries. To this end, information should be managed and published so that it is:

- **Relevant and Accessible:** Information should be presented in plain and readily comprehensible language and formats appropriate for different stakeholders, whilst retaining the detail and disaggregation necessary for analysis, evaluation and participation. Information should be made available in ways appropriate to different audiences. To this end, proactive dissemination of information should not be limited to internet publication and should include use of radio and television, printed material disseminated directly to stakeholders, and, where appropriate, information delivered in person in meetings. Information should be made available in the languages spoken by the affected communities.
- **Timely and Accurate:** Information should be made available in sufficient time to permit analysis and evaluation of aid and engagement in aid processes. This means that information needs to be provided while planning as well as during and after the implementation of aid projects and programmes. Information should be managed so that it is up-to-date, accurate, and complete. It is particularly important that relevant information is provided in line with annual and medium-term planning and budget cycles in recipient countries.
- **Comparable:** Public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid should collect, manage, compile and publish detailed information in formats that permit comparison within and between countries. In particular, donor-held information that relates to a particular recipient country should be made available in a format which can be easily reconciled with the recipient country's detailed budget classifications and planning and budget cycles. Reporting of budget and financial information should be consistent with international accounting standards. Ensuring consistency with the recipient country information needs, public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid should agree and implement a common standard for the classification and publication of statistical and budget information related to aid. This should include aid data published at the transaction level, and consistently classified, including by country, location, sector, recipient, purpose and modality.

4. The right of access to information about aid should be promoted

Donors and recipient governments as well as other actors disbursing aid should assist citizens to exercise their right of access to information on aid. They should inform parliamentarians, journalists, civil society representatives, and the general public, especially communities directly affected by aid, about the right of access to information on aid. Staff of organisations bound by these principles should be trained on their obligation to provide information to the public, both proactively and in response to specific requests.

Where appropriate and proportionate with the nature and scale of the aid programme or project, donors and recipient governments should include a skills-building component in order to build the capacity of stakeholders to locate – and where necessary to file requests for – aid-related information.