

IATI Feasibility Study

International Federation of Red Cross and Red Crescent Societies



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Executive Summary

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As part of the World Humanitarian Summit Grand Bargain, the IFRC joined the ICRC in committing “to invest in examining the feasibility of using the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) to publish timely, transparent, harmonized and open high-quality data”. This paper provides the first stage of that examination: exploring the feasibility of IFRC publishing IATI data covering its own programmes and appeals.

It finds that publication to a level comparable to other agencies is feasible, particularly for **emergency appeals**, for which substantial information is already in the public domain. It sets out a number of options for IFRC, along with implications for data representation, data collection systems and processes and quality control of published data. It proposes a phased approach, that, in a second phase, would support publication of **development programmes** and more detailed humanitarian-related data for appeals.

This summary is provided alongside a full report and appendices and includes the following sections.

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IATI: An overview

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) was launched in 2008 alongside the [Accra Agenda for Action](#), to deliver commitments on disclosure of aid volume, allocation and results. IATI provides a structured data standard for publishing information on organisations (with an emphasis on where they operate, forward looking budgets, and country-level expenditure), and, more importantly, their projects and programmes (referred to in IATI as ‘activities’). Data is published on an organisation’s own website in XML format, and then a link to the data is recorded in the central IATI Registry so that third-party systems and tools can discover and use the data.

Table 1 below provides an overview map of the concepts the IATI standard covers. These concepts are represented in an IATI file using a combination of around 190 different individual data elements, with a number providing recommended codelists to which data should be mapped.

Key questions		Core concepts		
What?	Who owns this data?	Reporting Organisation	Activity Identifier	Humanitarian Flag
	What’s it about?	Title	Description	Contact Info
	What’s the focus?	Sector	Policy Marker	Humanitarian Scope
When?	When is it taking place?	Activity Date	Status	
Who?	Who’s involved?	Participating Organisation		
Where?	Where is it?	Country / Region	Activity Scope	Location
How much?	How much money?	Budget	Planned Disbursement	Transaction
How?	Why is it taking place?	Document Link		
	How does it operate?	Modality	Condition	Related Activity
	What impact is there?	Result	Indicator	Document Link

Table 1: Key questions for the IATI data users

The IATI standard is maintained by a secretariat consisting of UNDP, Ministry of Finance of Ghana, the Swedish Ministry of Foreign Affairs, UNOPS and Development Initiatives. The

standard is governed by the IATI Members Assembly, supported by an open Technical Advisory Group (TAG).

Over 600 organizations, ranging from donor governments and multilaterals to small NGOs, use IATI to publish structured information about their activities. The Grand Bargain specifically references IATI as a mechanism to support greater transparency, and IATI has also been seen as a tool to monitor implementation of the localisation commitments.

The IATI standard is ultimately a format for the exchange of data. Whilst the standard itself includes few requirements for the data that must be provided or how often it must be updated, a set of publishing requirements can be inferred from the guidelines of donors, the draft methodology for monitoring the Grand Bargain transparency commitment, and by benchmarking a number of IFRC peers who currently use IATI.

Publishing requirements

We have assessed the feasibility of IFRC publishing the required and recommended concepts, based inferred requirements noted above, as indicated in Table 2 below:

User questions		Inferred IATI requirement		
What?	Who owns this data?	Reporting Organisation	Activity Identifier	Humanitarian Flag
	What's it about?	Title	Description	Contact Info
	What's the focus?	Sector	Policy Marker	Humanitarian Scope
When?	When is it taking place?	Activity Date	Status	
Who?	Who's involved?	Participating Organisation		
Where?	Where is it?	Country / Region	Activity Scope	Location
How much?	How much money?	Budget	Planned Disbursement	Transaction
How?	Why is it taking place?	Document Link		
	How does it operate?	Modality	Condition	Related Activity
	What impact is there?	Result	Indicator	Document Link

Key	Required for all activities	Recommended, where applicable	Optional
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Table 2: Inferred IATI requirements

In summary:

Data elements	There are 40 data elements in the inferred requirements and 6 recommended data elements.
Data conditions	Relevant codelists should be used.
Publishing characteristics	Data should be published monthly, with one month time lag. An organisation should publish those activities it can confidently and adequately share. Data should be published under an appropriate licence.

IFRC capacity to publish

We carried out a full mapping between IFRC systems and the set of inferred IATI publication requirements. Through interviews with key stakeholders, we identified key policy, process and technical considerations with a bearing on IFRC capacity to use IATI.

Policy and process considerations

IFRC uses a hierarchical approach to manage data on both its **development plan** activities and **emergency appeals**, with 'Appeal' as the top-level category, broken down into projects, and then activities or outputs. Appeal is the highest level of the hierarchy, with management structures, data capture and reporting all existing at this level.

Publishing with **appeal** as the primary 'unit of aid' (the IATI activity) is feasible with current IFRC data structures. Information maintained at **project level** and **activity / output level** could be aggregated upwards to add detail to **appeal level** iati-activities. Quality assured financial information becomes available on a monthly basis, providing the option to update IATI data on the same timescale.

Mapping the current IFRC financial modalities to the IATI transaction categories is more challenging, due to the difficulty of identifying from IFRC systems the recipient organisation for transactions, and due to the appearance of Working Advance as direct expenditure by IFRC. There are a number of options available for IFRC over the short-term, for example modelling all outgoing transactions as disbursements or expenditure, or restricting publication to budget and funding information, until reforms to financial modalities and updates to finance systems through the ongoing ERP implementation are complete.

Once published, IATI data should be open data: public and accessible for re-use. For **emergency appeals**, the majority of the information needed to meet IATI requirements is already published on the IFRC public website, although not necessarily in structured forms. For **development plans**, although classified as public information, very limited information is currently published on the IFRC public website.

Some data that could be used in IATI publication exists in IFRC systems, but is not included in published information. In these cases, steps will need to be taken to evaluate whether it can be classified as public information. It should also be noted that data published using IATI may be seen by new audiences, or outside the context for which it was prepared. This raises questions about current quality assurance processes for data in IFRC systems and reports, as spot-checks identified differences between titles, dates and budget values in published reports and internal systems. IFRC may also wish to review processes with partners to clarify when information will be public: for example, updating the Cash Pledge form to clarify to donors that information regarding their pledge may be disclosed in reports and IATI data.

A number of data elements covered by the inferred requirements are not currently available in IFRC systems, and so new data collection would be required, potentially through additional requirements being included in the ERP implementation. These fields include: humanitarian scope (coding appeals against the Glide emergency identifier number), participating organisations (including identifiers for national societies and appeal donors), and narrative appeal descriptions (currently only available in documents, and not as structured data).

For the harmonization of data, the IFRC will need to map some of its existing data to standard IATI codelists. Where exact alignment is not possible, compromises may need to be made that may affect the extent to which data accurately represents IFRC's activities. The IFRC will need to decide if the required compromises are acceptable and whether there are opportunities for the IFRC to move towards using IATI codelists as standard or incorporating additional IATI data elements into IFRC's data systems directly. There may be an ongoing resource requirement to ensure continued alignment to IATI codelists as changes are made over time and new codelists introduced.

Technology considerations

Information that could be used as part of IATI publication primarily exists in three places: **APPLE (APpeal PLEdge)**; **CODA**; and **ADORE (APPLE DOcument REpository)**. Data from the three main systems is synchronised to a **data warehouse**, which can be queried from a SAP Business Objects instance.

Automated report generation could be configured using the data warehouse and reporting tools to populate IATI data. To produce publication-ready IATI data this would rely on any critical data quality and classification issues being addressed in the source systems. A process with manual curation of data could offer an interim publication approach, minimising the need for upstream

business process change, but this is less sustainable in the long-run, and makes producing timely data more challenging.

IFRC is planning to start the implementation of a new Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system in 2018. This is intended to unify the features of APPLE, CODA, and ADORE, as well as integrating Human Resource functions, logistics and contract management, and Planning, Monitoring, Evaluation and Reporting. The ERP process offers an opportunity to address data quality workflows, but IATI support may not be available in the first release of the ERP (although some systems may have built-in IATI support).

Publication options

Based on the analysis above, we judge that it is feasible for IFRC to publish some level of IATI data with limited resource implications. There are, however, a range of options in terms of **how** publication could take place, and the **coverage** of activities and fields that could be published. These options shape the resource implications of IATI publication.

Basic publication would draw upon data from existing systems, without adaptation. Within this:

- **Option A** is to focus on **emergency appeal** data only, and only data already public on the IFRC website, with no structured expenditure data.
- **Option B** adds content from published documents, including extracting readily available information from those documents. This would remain restricted to **emergency appeals** only, but would include expenditure data in structured form. This option may require more technical work to extract data from documents.
- **Option C** would expand to also cover (i) **development plans**, (ii) results, or (iii) **development plans and results** - increasing the depth and breadth of available data. This option is likely to require additional quality assurance processes and improvements to the data held in internal systems, and may require business process changes around the management of results data.

Table 3 below indicates the estimated number of activities and coverage of inferred requirements under each option.

Basic Publication impact analysis	A	B	C		
			i	ii	iii
Indicative number of activities	191	191	301	191	301
% of inferred publication standard data elements	63%	85%	85%	89%	89%

populated					
Indicative coverage metric ¹	Fair	Fair	Good	Fair	Good

Table 3: Basic publication impact analysis

For these **basic publication** options, there is a choice between time invested in setting up an automated process, vs. adopting a *temporary* manual process of data preparation. We recommend developing an automated approach.

Extended publication is possible over the longer-term by integrating IATI requirements more fully into IFRC systems and processes, either through the adaptation of existing systems or processes or by integrating requirements into the design of the new ERP system. This offers the opportunity to better represent IFRC financial modalities; to include humanitarian scope elements; to include more detailed and structured results data; and to align IFRC and IATI codelists.

Other organisations' experience

We examined the current IATI publication by the nine agencies listed in Table 4 below. Other organisations relevant to IFRC have not been included here, as they do not currently publish data in the IATI format. These include the International Committee of the Red Cross (ICRC) and United Nations High Commissioner for Refugees (UNHCR), who are currently undertaking feasibility studies on IATI.

Multilateral agencies	Government
United Nations children's Fund (UNICEF)	UK Department for International Development (DFID)
World Food Programme (WFP)	Netherlands Ministry for Foreign Affairs (MFA)
United Nations Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA)	Red Cross:
World Health Organisation (WHO)	British Red Cross (BRC)
United Nations Development Programme (UNDP)	Netherlands Red Cross (NLRC)

Table 4: Peer publishers

Table 5 below provides a summary of publication frequency, first publication and coverage (a measure of how much of the organisation's operational spend is matched by IATI activities)

Publisher	1st published	Activities	IATI version	Frequency	Time lag	Coverage
UNICEF	Jun 2013	11469	2.01	Monthly	A quarter	100%

¹ A number of assumptions have been made in the likely calculation of this IATI metric particularly in relation to the likely reference spend figure to be applied by IATI. "Fair" equates to between 40-60% of an organisation's total output. "Good" equates to between 60-80% of an organisation's total output.

WFP	Jun 2013	842	2.02	Monthly	One month	100%
OCHA	Jul 2017	396	2.02	Quarterly	One month	20%
BRC	Aug 2012	175	2.01	Quarterly	One month	40%
NLRC	Apr 2016	398	2.02	Quarterly	One month	20%
WHO	Jun 2017	6541	2.02	Annual	One month	20%
UNDP	Jun 2011	14578	2.02	Monthly	One month	100%
DFID	Jan 2011	17161	2.02	Monthly	One month	100%
MFA	Sep 2011	6885	2.01	Monthly	One month	100%

Key	In line with inferred requirements (timeliness)
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Table 5: Peer publishers: publishing characteristics

From this analysis of comparison agencies, we find widespread coverage of the inferred requirements for IATI publication, with increasing adoption of humanitarian data elements, and monthly publication common.

These organisations generally produce their IATI data in-house with custom-build solutions, with the process managed by one or more staff members with an IATI responsibility, supported by multi-disciplinary teams drawing from IT, policy, communications, finance and monitoring and evaluation. Alongside *publishing* IATI data in the compliant XML format, five of the agencies also provide and maintain a dedicated platform to access, visualise and use their publications.

<p>UNICEF http://open.unicef.org/ WHO http://open.who.int/ UNDP http://open.undp.org/ DFID https://devtracker.dfid.gov.uk/ MFA http://www.openaid.nl/</p>	<p>All these websites and platforms use the IATI data published by the organisation, and in some cases by others. They provide maps, charts and calculations, alongside aggregations that mix in other data (country and sector profiles, for example)</p>
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Conclusions and recommendations

It is feasible for IFRC to publish some level of IATI data, using an automated approach from existing systems. A phased approach to publish and improve is in-line with the practice of peers, and the norms common amongst IATI publishers.

IFRC IATI data should be published under a license that meets the Open Aid Information (OAI) Licensing Standard. This OAI Licensing Standard excludes the use of non-commercial licensing terms. The specific license to be used will need to be confirmed with the involvement of legal

counsel. Some elements of the current information access policy, and the quality control processes for structured data in project systems, would benefit from review to ensure the quality of published data, and would clarify retention processes for open information. Cash pledge forms and other agreements should make clear to donors that information on their funding to IFRC may be published in IATI. IFRC should develop an Open Information Policy as part of preparing to publish, explaining the information it publishes to IATI and addressing frequently asked questions.

A phased approach

Overall, we recommend a phased approach, starting with a first phase of **basic publication** (option B) to provide information that is already public on **emergency appeals** as structured data, publishing monthly. This can be achieved using the existing data warehouse platform.

In this first phase, we recommend disclosing all outgoing funds as IFRC expenditure. The rationale for this approach is that IATI defined disbursements and IATI defined expenditure are both recognised as IFRC operating expenditure in its audited financial statements prepared under International Financial Reporting Standards (IFRS). Default narrative text in an IATI transaction element can explain caveats on interpretation of these, although over the longer-term it will be important to try and align the representation of transactions to the way they are understood by National Societies.

On this basis, and in order to achieve greater breadth and depth of publication, IFRC should look at a second phase to expand basic publication (Option Ci) to include **development plans** and to extend publication by adding elements to existing or new systems to capture humanitarian scope, and to address financial modalities and the identification of partners. This second stage will depend upon both business priorities and the opportunities presented by the ERP system.

Impacts and resource implications

Table 6 below shows the relative levels of publication that can be achieved in each phase.

Impacts	Phase 1	Phase 2
% of inferred minimum required data elements populated	85%	96%
Number of activities covered	191	301
Indicative coverage metric	Fair	Good
Indicative timeliness metric (out of 100)	100	100

Table 6: Phase 1 and 2 impact

The likely resource implications of implementing phase 1 are:

IFRC Business analyst	2 to 10 days
IATI Expert support	3 to 5 days
Developer time	4 to 10 days
IFRC staff - Establishing processes for data preview and review	5 to 10 days

The resource requirements of phase 2 depend on wider planning around the ERP implementation and the move to new financial modalities.