Annex 5
Aid transparency

Review of impact and effectiveness
of transparency and accountability initiatives

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Contents

Introduction

Background and methodology

Aid transparency differs from other priority areas explored in this Review in certain respects. In comparison with our other priority areas of public service delivery, budget processes, freedom of information (although perhaps not natural resource governance), the area does not have as much of a published or grey literature associated with it. The relative recent genesis of many aid transparency initiatives means that not much study or analysis of their impact has occurred yet (Martin 2009:3, 19; Martin 2010; Christensen *et al* 2010: 5).

These differences are relevant to how this part of the review has been conducted. Considerable scoping was needed at the outset, via reading and discussing with informed participants in and observers of aid transparency, in particular in respect of the emphasis to place on three fairly separate strands of activity within the field – long-standing NGO accountability work, the more recent official aid accountability agenda, and the new aid transparency movement - and the connections (or lack thereof) between them. Since the initial literature review uncovered little literature, the research strategy also included identifying key initiatives and organisations in this field and seeking interviews with key respondents from as representative a cross-section of these as time and availability allowed. A total of nine interviews and meetings were held with key respondents[1] in which their perspectives were elicited on the five core questions of the Review, in relation to both specific initiatives and the broader field. The findings presented in this chapter are distilled from interview and meeting notes and web-based information about initiatives and organisations, as well as from literature.

While the scarcity of literature may reflect the recent genesis of aid transparency as a field, it may also or alternatively reflect an inherent characteristic. At least in the last three years, this field has proliferated via new technology use and global networking. These forms are quite distinct from those historically taken by development interventions (e.g. health service delivery programmes; food security projects; civil society budget monitoring projects), and fall outside the comfort zone in which development academics tend to research, analyse and evaluate impact and effectiveness. I refer to this as the new wave or movement of aid transparency initiatives, to distinguish it from the older aid accountability discourse and practices that evolved in the NGO sphere (see for example Jordan and van Tuijl 2006).

Scoping the field: 'aid transparency'/'aid accountability'

Important dimensions in establishing the scope of this review are the relationship of aid transparency to aid accountability; the range of motivations behind different initiatives; and the range of sources of aid.

On the transparency / accountability dimension, the general consensus that transparency is a necessary but insufficient condition for accountability (Fox 2007: 665) is invoked by aid accountability and transparency advocates and practitioners (interview notes). Aid transparency initiatives constitute a sub-set of aid accountability which is a broader and longer-standing field. Martin (2009) points out how '[t]he profile of transparency has risen dramatically since 2007, with global campaigns and multiple initiatives [m]any of these [...] having been launched at or since the Accra High-Level Forum in 2008' (3).

Many aid transparency initiatives stop short of claiming to deliver accountability. Some stress the value of transparency per se and the fact that certain actors are better positioned and qualified to simply enhance aid transparency while others are better able to use it in various ways to deliver accountability. Others purport to contribute directly or indirectly to more accountable aid. Many aid accountability initiatives include transparency measures as one specific means to their end. While the field of 'aid accountability', particularly NGO accountability, is too long-lasting, wide and diverse to be fully dealt with in a review of this scope, published knowledge about its impact is limited, allowing some generalisations and broad inferences to be drawn from it.

NGO aid accountability is one of three rather weakly-connected strands of work within the field of aid transparency and accountability initiatives (hereafter T/A Initiatives), alongside official aid accountability and the new aid transparency movement. Among big international development NGOs, particularly those that work in partnership with local organisations, concerns over accountability date from the early nineties. They have not traditionally been framed as 'aid accountability' but as on the one hand upwards financial accountability to public and private funders, and on the other as downwards accountability to partners in the global South, grassroots supporters in the global North, and, more recently, to the poor and marginalised Southern people aid purports to benefit. With respect to their funders, agreements and

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contracts ascribe these upward accountability relationships with formal enforceability, whereas these downwards accountabilities are more about answerability. Two new departures stand out in NGO aid accountability. First, tensions between multiple accountabilities, especially between long-established upwards enforceabilities and more recently recognised downwards answerabilities, have become increasingly visible and problematised, with efforts to monitor the latter becoming integrated into monitoring and evaluation frameworks and even taken as the cornerstone of radically fresh approaches to accountability such as ActionAid's Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS – see David *et al* 2006) or Keystone Accountability and Concern's 'Listen First' (see Jacobs & Wilford 2010). Secondly, since the mid-nineties and starting in the humanitarian sector, big international NGOs have started working collectively rather than internally on accountability issues, initiating a range of self-regulatory frameworks including the HAP certification, INGO Accountability Charter and One World Trust's Global Accountability Report.[2]

Aid T/A Initiatives arise from a wide range of motivations. At one end of the spectrum is the straightforward 'right to information' case for aid transparency: northern citizens have a right to know how and where public funding is being spent and what it has achieved; close to that is the 'empowerment' or 'equal partnership' aspiration underpinning the 'partnership case' for aid accountability. At the other end is the 'Paris Declaration' case, in which the central preoccupation is with meeting internationally agreed aid effectiveness targets, and with rapidly increasing the availability and accessibility of aid information to permit the tracking of these targets and ultimately attainment of their objectives.

Qualitatively different, these motivations are championed by differently-placed actors, and these differences are relevant to debates on impact and effectiveness. There are almost as many and diverse aid transparency agents as there are aid-giving or -receiving actors: official donor institutions (bilateral, multilateral, members of the DAC and non-members); private foundations; non-governmental organisations that disburse a medley of restricted and less restricted public funding and unrestricted private donations. Each type of agent brings its own transparency impulses, imperatives or pressures. For example, the Paris Declaration on Aid Effectiveness and its progress indicators apply only to official donors, whose motivation to introduce aid transparency measures is the need to track their own and fellow DAC donors' progress towards these. Non-governmental organisations, for which partnership with southern organisations is often a keystone, inherently value and strive for accountability to these partners in a way quite distinct from the newer official donors' discourse of 'mutual accountability to aid partners' born of the Rome – Monterrey – Paris process. Official donor agencies spend public funds, so are bound by public accountability and transparency imperatives that do not apply to non-governmental aid-givers. On the other hand, development NGOs' financial survival in a competitive fundraising context depends on their being perceived as appropriately accountable and transparent by the giving public as well as by their official funding sources or private foundations.

Aid presents unusual accountability conundrums, since many of the likely transparency- or accountability-seekers are not those who are affected by aid or who can vouch for its transparent or accountable use or ultimate effectiveness. Christensen *et al* (2010) articulate this challenge:

"[v]oters in donor countries do not receive the benefits of foreign aid directly and thus cannot monitor government policy in the same way, for example, they might notice the quality of their nearby roads, schools, or hospitals. Instead, monitoring foreign aid can only happen at great distances, and the primary beneficiaries cannot directly influence the incentives of their benefactors. And this likely reduces the interest and effectiveness of voters in monitoring foreign aid outcomes" (7).

A distinction needs to be drawn between aid transparency and accountability as aid-funded activities (i.e. as the content of aid programmes, as for example in a bilateral donor's Governance programme), Vs transparent and accountable processes for the planning, delivery and use of aid. Also, as highlighted by the 'New Frontiers in Transparency and Accountability: Donor/aid funding' project within the Transparency and Accountability Initiative (Mulley 2010), the ultimate goal of aid transparency can be either more transparent and accountable aid-recipient governments or institutions, or more transparent and accountable aid-givers, with different strategic and impact implications in each case.

The scope of this work extends to the transparency and accountability of aid-givers rather than aid-recipients, and to issues of process rather than content, although there is a tendency towards official donors using aid funds (rather than civil service administrative budgets) to fund initiatives that directly enhance their own and their peers' accountability or transparency (which counts as content in the distinction drawn above). Within this, we focus on the transparency and accountability of donors to stakeholders in both their own countries and the countries where they work. Donors here include non-official donors such as private foundations and non-governmental organisations, but the most readily researchable and relevant aid transparency initiatives identified relate more to official donors, and the most interesting models of aid accountability are to be found in the NGO sector. Having said this, all the strands that make up the field are interwoven and not entirely separable for the purposes of our review. I use *effectiveness* and *impact* consistently with the definitions adopted in the broader Review of which this is one background paper:

*"By **effectiveness**, we mean the extent to which initiatives are effective in achieving stated goals (e.g. whether freedom of information initiatives are well-implemented and make information more readily available). By **impact**, we mean the degree to which the initiative attains its further-reaching or 'second-order' goals (e.g. does the institution of a complaints mechanism about a public service lead to more*

effective service delivery, or a citizen monitoring initiative to greater state/donor responsiveness? Do they contribute to broader development aims?)" *(Gaventa & McGee, this volume).*

I deal with the new aid transparency movement, official aid 'mutual accountability' activities, and NGO accountability rather separately in the paper. This is because the review reveals them to function largely in isolation from each other. To a degree the 'silos' correspond to different, and differently-motivated, actor groups involved, although a few NGO actors have crossed over into official aid transparency work (these tend to be from INGO advocacy units rather than frontline programme roles involved in accountability to partners) and vice versa. The silos also correspond to very different accountability 'principals' (to use the formal accountability language). But in general the silos reflect the fragmentation of what should be a chain logically connecting transparency to accountability within the aid field, and connecting T&A work in the aid field to that in other relevant fields such as budget processes and freedom of information. We return to this point later in the paper.

Approach taken in the chapter

Section 1, in the course of broadly discussing aims, claims, expected outcomes and assumptions underlying aid transparency and accountability activities, also maps out the range and diversity of these and associates them with particular accountability approaches and agents. Sections 2-4 cases in turn the evidence found, methods used and factors identified in attempts to explore impact in this field. Given the scarcity of impact literature and evidence, they draw on seven key documents that, while focussed to different degrees on our key questions of interest, reflect the breadth of aid T/A Initiatives:[3]

- Collins *et al*'s (2009) analysis of the costs and benefits of the implementation of IATI standards. An advocacy paper produced by a civil society research and advocacy programme which works as virtually a 'critical partner' to the multi-official donor initiative IATI, this is aimed at actual and potential IATI members, and is a rare example of a systematic attempt to quantify the impact of continued non-transparency of aid. That is, it discusses the likely impact of aid transparency on 'development effectiveness' as defined by official donors.

- Christensen *et al* (2010), a research paper presented in March 2010 at a conference organised by AidData. They study the relationship between aid transparency

and aid-recipient corruption levels – an example of the sort of analysis by 'info-mediaries' made possible by the disclosure prompted by the new wave of aid transparency initiatives related to the Paris process.

- Martin (2010), a background study for the United Nations Development Cooperation Forum commissioned by the UN Economic and Social Council. This explores how to enhance the Paris principle of mutual accountability in official aid, and make development cooperation more transparent. It contains one of few attempts to date to explore the effectiveness and emerging impacts of the new wave of aid transparency initiatives.[4]

- African Development Bank (2009), an institutional publication which reports on policy-focussed research conducted by African Development Bank (AfDB) staffers and high-level African government officials into the use of debt relief in relation to social spending. This covers aid transparency and accountability as factors influencing the effectiveness of official aid and debt relief.

- Clark *et al*'s (2003)'s review of the effectiveness of the World Bank Inspection Panel, as one example of aid accountability introduced in an international financial institution as a result of civil society advocacy efforts, and monitored by these. It assesses how this highly focussed civil-society-instigated accountability mechanism has performed over its ten-year history, by reference to a diverse range of impacts.

- David *et al*'s (2006) situated and critically reflective account of one INGO's approach to improving its own accountability and transparency, ActionAid's Accountability, Learning and Planning System (ALPS), authored by some of its architects.

- Jacobs and Wilford's (2010) article presenting and discussing 'Listen First', a framework for systematic management of downwards accountability in NGOs. Listen First's design is informed by a review of existing NGO downwards accountability approaches. This article does not explicitly assess any of these but incorporates lessons learnt from them.

Section 5 concludes by briefly listing gaps identified either by authors reviewed and actors interviewed, or by me in the conduct of the research.

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[3] Abstracts of all seven are provided. At the time of this research, Publish What You Fund was compiling an 'Aid transparency research matrix' via which, directly or indirectly, I identified several of my key sources. This lists the general arguments and cases for transparency and specific ones for aid transparency, and, in relation to each, identifies evidence as well as which member of the global aid transparency movement can be considered the 'lead' and the 'key partners' for PWYF. The evidence cited includes published and unpublished academic work, published and grey policy- or advocacy-oriented research

papers and web-based databassess, produced by government agencies, academics, policy research organisations, international NGOs. Not all are relevant to this review as not all contain insights into impact, being selected, rather, for the insights they contain on the arguments or cases for aid transparency.
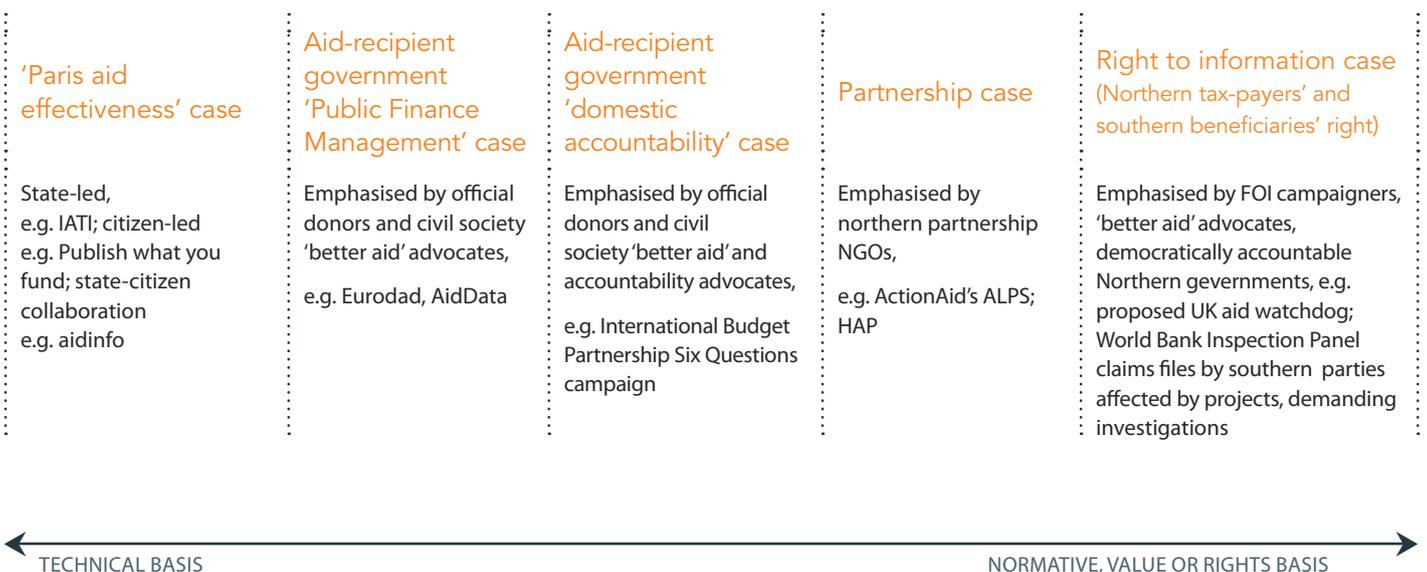
[4] A recent evaluation of aidinfo by Richard Manning, as yet unpublished, is another early contribution to knowledge on the likely impact of aid transparency initiatives.

Expected impacts and assumptions

There is less literature and discussion of the expected impacts of aid transparency work, than cases and claims made for it and evidence of the negative consequences of the lack of it. Within these lie certain assumptions, often buried and in some cases explicit. Claims made at a general level for aid transparency and accountability derive from general claims made for transparency in democratic political systems. They refer to transparency's scope for solving the principal-agent problem and reducing information asymmetry so that stakeholders can ensure processes deliver outcomes closer to their preferences (Christensen *et al* 2010; Eyben 2010). However, aid transparency presents the particular conundrum outlined above, deriving from the providers and putative beneficiaries being different and distant from each other. This is seen to leave 'feedback loops' that aid transparency initiatives aim to close (see e.g. aidinfo 2008).

The diagram below attempts to capture in simplified form the range of impulses or 'cases' invoked for aid transparency and accountability initiatives operating at different levels and advanced by different agents. It loosely labels these cases 'technical' at one extreme and 'normative', 'values-' or 'rights-' based at the other, and attempts to locate them, in very broad terms, on a spectrum of desired outcomes ranging from the 'developmental' to the 'democratic' and 'empowering'. Developmental aims related to more effective aid, progress towards the Millennium Development Goals or greater poverty reduction tend to be at the fore – explicitly or implicitly – in the technical cases for aid accountability or transparency championed by state actors or civil society campaigners lobbying states. Democratic impacts such as rights fulfilment or the adjustment of unequal power relations in the aid system tend to predominate in relation to the normative and value-based cases. This distinction does not translate into a watertight distinction between the motivations of state actors versus non-government, civil society or citizen actors, however. For example, many INGOs explicitly seek to enhance their aid delivery's developmental impact by strengthening and deepening their partnerships with southern NGOs; and some Northern governments' publication of aid data is intended to satisfy their citizens' rights to information – an intended democratic outcome – at the same time as helping make aid more effective.

FIGURE 1. THE CASES FOR AID ACCOUNTABILITY AND TRANSPARENCY

'Paris aid effectiveness' case	Aid-recipient government 'Public Finance Management' case	Aid-recipient government 'domestic accountability' case	Partnership case	Right to information case (Northern tax-payers' and southern beneficiaries' right)
State-led, e.g. IATI; citizen-led e.g. Publish what you fund; state-citizen collaboration e.g. aidinfo	Emphasised by official donors and civil society 'better aid' advocates, e.g. Eurodad, AidData	Emphasised by official donors and civil society 'better aid' and accountability advocates, e.g. International Budget Partnership Six Questions campaign	Emphasised by northern partnership NGOs, e.g. ActionAid's ALPS; HAP	Emphasised by FOI campaigners, 'better aid' advocates, democratically accountable Northern gevernments, e.g. proposed UK aid watchdog; World Bank Inspection Panel claims files by southern parties affected by projects, demanding investigations

TECHNICAL BASIS ← → NORMATIVE, VALUE OR RIGHTS BASIS

At the far left of the diagram lies the 'Paris aid effectiveness' case, advanced by some state-led (or supply-side) initiatives such as the International Aid Transparency Initiative IATI, some citizen-led (demand-side) initiatives such as Publish What You Fund, and some state-citizen collaborative initiatives such as aidinfo. These aim principally at enhancing development effectiveness via changes in how aid is delivered: 'aid effectiveness', in the OECD DAC lexicon. The idea is that fulfilment of Paris Declaration commitments will make official donor aid more effective and hence more poverty-reducing, and, by extrapolation, more accountable to poor people in aid-recipient countries as well as Northern tax-payers. Volatile and unpredictable aid, as well as confounding donor coordination, imposes costs on the broader aid architecture which constitute inefficiencies (Carlson *et al* 2009). The expected impacts consist of increases in aid transparency of several kinds. The relationship between these and changes in lives of poor people in Southern countries – i.e. development or poverty-reducing impacts - are assumed rather than made explicit; these are complex to prove, but well-theorised and partially substantiated in the aid literature, and intuitively clear.

One Paris commitment is to 'mutual accountability' between donors and their 'aid partners', capturing the commitments of all Paris signatories to 'enhance mutual accountability and transparency in the use of development resources [which] helps strengthen public support for national policies and development asistance' (OECD DAC 2005/8: 8). Few actors single this out as worthy of attention in isolation from other Paris principles (an exception is Martin 2009) and generally speaking it has lower profile than the other four principles. Reflecting the overall Paris concern with making aid more effective, this aspect of aid accountability elides into a series of other 'cases' and assumptions relating to how more transparent and accountable aid will:

- (i) support better public finance management in recipient countries by making financial flows more predictable and budgets more accurate, given the imposibility of budget management for aid-dependent governments in the absence of donor predictability and transparency (Oxfam International 2010: 23), and/or
- (ii) foster reduced corruption and greater accountability of aid-recipient governments to their citizenry, either by feeding social accountability initiatives of civil society organisations, or by putting information into the hands of Parliaments, audit institutions and the media.

These cases for aid transparency/accountability invoke both developmental and democratic arguments. Technical improvements in public finance management in recipient countries constitute a developmental step forward, unlocking several other potential benefits of effective aid including upwards accountability to donors, and democratic accountability to domestic constituencies. Greater domestic accountability in southern countries is variously viewed as a route to pro-poor policies and budgets and thus enhanced poverty reduction; as an aspect of state responsiveness and good governance that empowers the poor; and as the ultimate goal of aid and development cooperation.

The partnership case for aid accountability and transparency, championed by many major international NGOs, is placed centre-right, related as it is to values and rights and to a concern with unequal power relations within the aid system and more broadly the global system. Downward accountability of international development NGOs to their southern CSO partners – at least rhetorically - seeks to redres the unequal power relationships that are NGO partnerships, but also to serve the 'deep downward accountability' function of answerability to, and empowerment of, poor and marginalised people affected by their and their partners' actions.

At the far right of the diagram, normative arguments for aid transparency come from a 'right to information' perspective (Christensen *et al* 2010; Publish What You Fund n.d.). They are found in some unlikely quarters including new technology users and promoters with a normative interested in the promotion of open-access information of all kinds. This 'case' is generally seen as advancing self-evident public goods and needing no substantiation via claims as to any other likely impacts. Actors such as Publish What You Fund, which monitor state-led initiatives like IATI that focus on technical aid effectiveness goals, also champion the public's right to information about aid, in North and South. This 'rights' case is not invoked only by civil society organisations. The official multi-donor IATI stresses 'respect for the principle of disclosure' (Development Initiatives Poverty Research 2009), and recent moves in Sweden and the UK to establish aid watchdog or transparency mechanisms invoke the public's right to know.[5]

On balance, whichever end of the spectrum, the 'theories of change' behind the various cases made for aid accountability and transparency have tended not to be very explicit.[6] The – different – positive impacts expected by the technical proponents and the partnership- and rights-driven proponents alike are often treated as too self-evident to require articulation. The absence of articulated expected outcomes becomes problematic in attempts to track or demonstrate impacts, since it is unclear what to track against. However, among the new wave of aid transparency initiatives ushered in by the Paris-Accra process and asociated developments in the aid world, there appears to be a tendency, if not to universally spell out robust theories of change, at least to demonstrate the costs – financial (Collins et al 2009) and otherwise (Moon 2010; Moon & Williamson 2010; Publish What You Fund n.d.; IATI n.d.; Eurodad 2008) of non-transparent or unaccountable aid, which permits deductions about expected benefits and allows for some monitoring of progress.

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[5] The UK aid watchdog has been proposed during the life of this project. There is no published information on it yet except media articles. Given its relevance to this chapter, I requested an interview with a Government advisor on the watchdog. This was turned down, on the grounds that impact-related questions about it could not be answered at this early stage except at the level of idle speculation.

[6] Aidinfo, and the Open Budget Initiative of the International Budget Partnership which looks into aid transparency issues via its 'Six Questions Campaign', constitute known exceptions, in having clearly defined theories of change – there may be others. Both receive support from the Hewlett Foundation, which currently seems to lead the donor field in the sense of requiring partners to articulate theories of change (other donors require some aspects of these articulated in other forms, such as log-frames).

Evidence of impact and effectiveness of aid T/A Initiatives

It is noteworthy that in the humanitarian aid sector, to which NGO accountability owes its origins, a detailed and thorough annual publication by the leading actor in this important sub-field (HAP 2009) makes no reference to the impact of humanitarian accountability - the **raison d'etre** of the entire organisation and annual survey - until the penultimate paragraph. The reference is a clear call for further exploration of impact and effectiveness questions:

"A recurring lesson among those highlighted by [HAP] members is that implementation of the HAP Principles or the Standard leads to an improved relationship between the agency and the community and increases the likelihood that the programme will be effective and achieve its objective. Whilst these experiences do not provide the 'proof' that improved accountability leads to improved programme quality and outcomes, the fact that they are so frequently reported by HAP members does point o the existence of some sort of 'virtuous relationship. […] HAP's Research Programme will contribute to revealing the nature of this relationship and the conditions under which is produces the optimum benefits' (124).

Collin *et al* (2009) prospectively estimate the costs and benefits of IATI. They estimate that:

"[...] increases in effectiveness from increased aid transparency by IATI signatories might lead to improvements in aid effectiveness which are approximately equivalent to a permanent increase in global aid of 1.3%. If the IATI standard were implemented by all DAC donors [they] estimate that this would enable improvements equivalent to a permanent increase of 2.3% in global aid, or $2.8 billion a year. These increasess in aid effectiveness would produce benefits in less than a single day that exceed the estimated costs of implementing IATI. At a time when aid budgets are under pressure, these would be significant increasess in poverty reduction without adding to aid spending" (2).

As well as the efficiency and effectiveness savings that they attempt to quantify, the authors identify less tangible possible costs and benefits, not readily quantified. These include improved aid allocation, more and better quality research on aid; increased public willingness to support higher aid budgets; and conversely, in the accompanying document by Barder (2009), the 'risk to donors that greater transparency will result in bad publicity' (4) (reputational costs) and the 'accountability costs' posibly generated by greater transparency spurring more appetite for information about aid programme content (8).

The anticipation of benefits from IATI is based on expected reductions in donors' administration costs of aid reporting and responses to information requests; savings for data-gathering organisations; reduced corruption; macroeconomic benefits deriving from greater aid predictability; avoidance of 'aid coordination failures'; improved inter-donor aid allocation increasing the poverty-reducing impact; better research into development and aid programmes; and more public support for aid-giving. Collin et al's findings rest on a number of assumptions and estimates, given that this is a pioneering attempt in an area with few substantive or methodological precedents. The fundamental assumption is that the savings accruing to aid bureaucracies arising from IATI membership will be reasigned to effective development work in developing countries.

Academic 'info-mediaries' Christensen *et al* (2010) establish a causal relationship between donor transparency and aid-recipient government corruption. Their findings suggest that as donor transparency increases, recipient government corruption will fall, and substantially. These findings rest on a number of estimates and assumptions, as yet relatively untested, in this new research area that is only just opening up as a result of greater availability of useable aid data. The argument behind their work is that as the share of aid a given recipient gets from transparent donors increases, more is known about aid projects in that country, enabling interested parties (media, non-governmental watchdogs, ordinary citizens) to track projects, verify expenditure, raise alarms and require elected representatives to account for anomalies (6).

Martin (2010) reviews donor and recipient governments' experience to date in operationalising the 'mutual accountability' principle of the Paris Declaration. This notes some progress to date but a continued absence of clarity about 'what mutual accountability on [official] aid means, how to measure it and how much progress has been made' (3). Weakness noted are lack of identified good practice to emulate, scant attention to gendered impacts of aid, low participation in official aid accountability activities by Parliaments and civil society actors, and poor systems for national-level transparency on aid information, in particular the lack of attention to how transparency of aid information could better nurture accountability.

The study also includes an early survey of the new wave of aid transparency initiatives and covers some data bases, some 'info-mediary' ventures, some civil society campaigning organisations and some official and multilateral donor systems. While unable to assess impact so early in this new movement, it does identify many characteristics and developments which have implications for impact and effectiveness in the longer term. The eight initiatives surveyed plus two more taken into account (IATI and Publish What You Fund) are found to be strong on aid

input tracking, collectively cover a good spread of aid data, offer relatively comprehensive coverage of aid delivery processes, and are weaker on aid effectiveness and related indicators (and, one might asume, therefore offer little or no insights into the actual development outcomes of aid transparency). Martin also notes that this set of initiatives has already addressed several areas identified six months earlier as needing improvement (in his earlier study, (Martin 2009)), regarding coordination between themselves, data compatibility parameters, the progressive extension of aid transparency frontiers to incorporate non-DAC, multilateral and global funds (work in progress), and efforts to enhance transparent budgeting and use of aid by recipient governments and oversight by their Parliaments.

The main negative findings are an over-emphasis on donor provision of aid data at the cost of attention to southern and citizen (potential) users' information and accountability needs; and a preoccupation with data at the expense of (i) qualitative aid transparency about policies, conditions and procedures, and (ii) changes in recipient as well as donor behaviour, crucial for the ultimate achievement of the Paris Declaration's mutual accountability principle.

Clark *et al* (2003) find that the World Bank Inspection Panel (WBIP), as a case-by-case mechanism for enhancing the World Bank's accountability for its loans and performance, has had varied degrees and types of positive impact in respect of different claims filed for investigation by the Panel. These include significant policy reforms (direct impacts), including some that set precedents potentially extending beyond the range of the WBIP; withdrawals of Bank funding for projects with potentially devastating effects; minimal mitigation or no impact at all; and changes in whose voices count and who listens, at least in the nine cases analysed. Beyond the general positive impacts of improved accountability systems and lessons learnt about the concept and practice of accountability, the WBIP has often stopped short of systematically converting improved systems into greater accountability. It has also generated some perverse effects. Backlashes against claimants and the Panel itself have tended to inhibit transformation and reduce accountability; perceptions of Panel investigations damaging reputations and careers has spurred a growing risk aversion in Bank lending; and there has been a tendency to guarantee 'accountability' via 'lowering the bar' - watering down crucial social and environmental safeguard policies so as to make compliance less onerous. This study is valuable in its careful documentation of the negative and perverse effects as well as the positive.

According to African Development Bank (2009), one of the variables with most positive effect on the developmental outcomes of debt relief and other aid is 'high accountability'. Here this means aid transparency and predictability but also a range of conditions and mechanisms for holding donors and aid-recipient governments to account. This study, focussed on the extent and ways in which debt relief and development aid are connected to progress towards the MDGs, offers insights into how aid transparency and accountability can help secure these connections. It records the obstacles to recipients' budget and aid

management that results from poor donor transparency and aid predictability, and highlights the remarkable improvements in aid and debt relief delivery achieved through a public information campaign launched by the Uganda government in response to evidence from Public Expenditure Tracking Surveys (PETS).[7] Unpacking the mention of 'high accountability' in its headline finding, the study concludes that:

"The most effective means of accountability seems to have been accountability to local beneficiary agencies, communities, and poor citizens. This can occur through official provision of information and through monitoring and reporting channels for the poor (as in the response to PETS). However, it can also be promoted by involving civil society representatives in the design of poverty reduction strategies and annual budgets, allowing them to gain greater understanding of intended results from the beginning [and] the widespread diffusion in the media of details of expected results of spending at the most disaggregated level possible, supported by training of the media in how to interpret and check the results of such spending. Yet these methods were not widely used by governments or even sponsored by donors" (55).

David *et al* (2006), telling the story of ActionAid's attempt to become accountable to its espoused principles and to the poor people it exists to support , identifies three areas of progress attributable to this 'Accountability, Learning and Planning System' (ALPS):

- a strong internalisation of ALPS and what it stands for, particularly the principles, attitudes and behaviours underpinning it;

- recognition and sharing of power within the organisation and all its relationships, especially between it and partners (to which it is a donor) and communities;

- provision of space within ActionAid country programmes for learning and working with others to improve the quality of development work.

It is recognised that ActionAid still has a long way to go to foster 'a true relationship with its partners where partners can openly and clearly articulate criticism and share vulnerabilities regarding the difficulties of promoting social change' (148). The long road ahead is explained in terms of the intrinsically slow, painstaking and complex nature of organisational change processes as well as a number of external and internal factors that affected the change process's prospects.

Jacobs and Wilford (2010) is a useful source in reflecting learning from past NGO accountability approaches. The framework proposed is an attempt to take the design of these one step further to addres perceived weakness in such approaches to date, in particular their inability to provide quantified performance summaries that meet senior managers' information needs as well as the organisation's downwards accountability commitments. 'Listen First' permits the participatory establishment and tracking of performance standards relating to the provision

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[7] Joshi (this volume) and Carlitz (this volume) also discuss the use of PETS in the context of T/A Initiatives, in relation to service delivery and budget processes, respectively.

of information (transparency) about the NGO's activities to people in communities, their involvement in decision-making (participation), listening, and NGO field staffs' attitudes and behavior. The authors note that despite hundreds of examples existing in practice, their attempt to identify case studies of INGO downward accountability mechanisms was confounded by the paucity of systematised, publicly available material that even described, let alone assessing or evaluating, the initiatives. 'Listen First' being a pilot stage, its impact cannot be assessed, but the article attests to an integrated learning approach in the framework, with revisions continuously made in response to observations from practice; and certain factors enhancing its effectiveness are identified even at this early stage.

As the section illustrates, evidence on the impact and effectiveness of aid accountability and transparency initiatives, as well as scant, is highly diverse. This diversity does not constitute a weakness. It reflects the diversity of the field, of the agents involved, and of the initiatives themselves. What amounts to valid impact information for a profound and slow process of organisational change such as Action Aid's ALPS makes no sense in relation to multi-country statistical analysis of the relationships between internationally recognised governance and transparency indices, and *vice versa*. One basic but vital step towards improving the state of knowledge on the impact of aid accountability and transparency initiatives is therefore the recognition of the breadth of initiatives and approaches comprised here, and the adoption of the principle of 'horses for courses' as a starting point in evaluating, enhancing and expanding the evidence available. The following section on methods reinforces this point.

Which methods are used to assess and evince impact?

Broadly speaking, two methodological approaches are used in the six sources analysed in detail: multi-country statistical analysis, and qualitative, descriptive case studies. A brief description of the methods used in each is given here, followed by some general conclusions about methodological choices in relation to research questions and applications.

Collin *et al* (2009) conduct statistical analysis of actual costs to official donors of current aid information collection and management (i.e. the *status quo* used as a counterfactual), estimated administrative costs of implementing IATI (including systems adaptation, staff time and training, and coordination costs), estimated efficiency savings for donors (due to reduced multiple reporting to different stakeholders), efficiency savings for recipient countries (due to easier access to aid information), and improved aid effectiveness (due to lower risk of diversion, greater predictability, and better coordination (see also Barder 2009). Information-gathering involved fact-finding visits to four donor headquarters for interviews, plus a survey eliciting responses from seven donors in fourteen countries. Methodological challenges related particularly to the difficulty of estimating likely effectiveness savings (compared to the easier task of calculating and estimating efficiency savings), but the authors consider these savings sufficiently well-defined and confidence levels narrow enough, for statements to be made about their order of magnitude (Barder 2009: 14). The methods are designed to demonstrate likely impact, rather than explain how those impacts are attained. The expected ways in which effects could be attained are contemplated in the analysis but as starting assumptions when estimating savings and costs, rather than being elucidated as findings, which would not be possible from this sort of quantitative analysis, nor this early in IATI's history. For example, the premise that aid transparency enables citizens and governments to reduce diversion of resources and keep corruption in check is reflected in estimations as to levels of capture of aid provided by IATI members and non-members, which themselves involve admittedly 'hefty assumptions and caveats' (Barder 2009: 32).

Christensen *et al* (2010)'s exploration of the links between donor transparency and recipient government corruption is based on a statistical regression analysis conducted on a time-series cross-national dataset drawn from aid information provided by AidData. Data used cover ninety-five countries between 1999 and 2004 for a total of 1300 country-years. The time-span was dictated by current data limitations on key explanatory variables. Variables were established using a range of indices and rankings: corruption at national level using a three-year rolling average of countries' scores on the International Country Risk Guide's 6-point scale; donor transparency proxied (simply but admittedly imperfectly) by project-level data from the AidData/PLAID 1.91 database; a variable

capturing aid transparency per recipient-year, derived from number of projects received in a given year and the respective projects' transparency; and a five-year moving average of that median, to allow for the fact that multi-year aid transparency trends might be more important in determining corruption that year-on-year variations. The question that can be answered about relative aid transparency is therefore a 'recipient-level' question rather than a 'donor-level' question, comparing not the transparency of one donor's aid with that of another, but the transparency of the aid received by one recipient to the aid received by another. Selection bias was a major problem to be overcome in research design since various dynamics may result in correlations between high donor transparency and low recipient corruption levels. These problems were overcome using propensity score matching (a technique that facilitates unbiased estimations of treatment effects). Robustness checks were also performed, by matching 'treatment' observations to 'control' counterparts and performing regresion on the matched sample. This analysis thus provides insights into the likely impact of a hypothetical progressive increase in transparency of the total aid received by a given recipient country, and reveals the likely effectiveness of increasing aid transparency via the mechanism of reduced diversion, capture or corrupt use of aid funds, brought about through social and political accountability mechanisms.

Martin (2010) , updating on a study six months earlier (Martin 2009) that reviewed seven major aid transparency initiatives mainly of the 'new wave', was based on a survey of sponsors (key actors, rather than funders) of these, as well as discussions with actual and potential users (Martin, pers. comm.). The survey was conducted via face-to-face and telephone interviews, and deliberately designed to assess the initiatives' responses to suggested norms and recommendations raised in the previous study. This purposive exploration of a purposive sample was not intended to allow ranking or comparison across the different initiatives, but to assess where progress could be detected and where further effort was needed. Reflecting the newness of the initiatives surveyed, these norms and recommendations mainly refer to issues of design and scope. Thus no assessment of impact is made. The paper attempts, rather, to reinforce in the design of these largely incipient initiatives ways to apply existing knowledge or hypotheses about how transparency can influence aid relations and effectiveness, and maximise their impact. It thus sheds more light on effectiveness than on impact.

Clark *et al* (2003) includes nine case studies of key claims made since the WBIP was established, analysed by independent observers and incorporating, among other sources, the perspectives of the claimants. The overview introductory and concluding chapters give an assessment of the strengths and weakness of the panel process as evinced by these cases. The qualitative case study approach matches the nature of the accountability mechanism studied: the Panel investigates claims case by case, and

the fairly open-ended analysis of each process generates particular and context-specific insights. The approach in the book is deliberately critically exploratory, open-ended and not focussed on learning from success: the cases selected include some which manifestly failed or had negative consequences. Taken in aggregate and in the awareness of the specificity of each case, these studies permit broad lessons and conclusions to be drawn about the Panel's various impacts as a mechanism, and about how it has taken, or failed to take, effect.

African Development Bank (2009) was 'inspired by the need to deepen the AfDB's knowledge of whether and how countries benefiting from debt relief have used the proceeds to improve social service delivery to their citizens' (v). It, too, takes an in-depth case study approach, affirming this approach's superiority over other approaches (such as statistical multivariate analysis) for understanding explanatory factors. The selection of four country cases captures heterogeneity along several axes including 'governance quality' (deemed high, medium and low), so that the sample can be considered broadly relevant to the experience of many more African countries. The case studies themselves, led by 'policy insiders' who have played central roles in the processes studied, deployed a suite of qualitative and quantitative methods including retrospective surveys, public finance analysis, interviews, and document and data analysis. A particular strength of the methodology was the contextualisation or 'embedding' of detailed, rich findings from these four cases in a complementary fifteen-country analysis of data and literature, which enables a picture to be presented of comparative results and policy lessons which is more comprehensive and more relevant to Africa as a whole. While the case studies present up-to-date quantitative information relating debt relief and public expenditure to public service delivery outcomes, they focus strongly on the 'why?' questions, in particular through qualitative empirical analysis of institutions and policy processes. It is in response to these that accountability and transparency factors emerge as a strong explanatory factor in the effectiveness of debt relief on poverty reduction and MDG attainment.

David *et al* (2006) is an in-depth assessment of one organisational change initiative, using methods of self-critical reflection from a vantage-point that is deliberately not independent and impartial but explicitly values the authors' personal experience as a critical ingredient for organisational learning. Their account is complemented by the viewpoint of an external evaluator of the ALPS initiative, who, while independent, approaches ALPS from the same epistemological perspective. This in-depth reflexive piece makes no attempt to produce findings that can be generalised even to ActionAid's international NGO peers. Given the extent to which each international NGOs' accountability principles and practices are rooted in and derived from the organisational understanding of partnership and its unique relationships with its partners, the only generalisations that make sense are at the level of broad principles, such as the principle of consistency between external rhetoric and internal practice, which is stresed in relation to ALPS in this piece.

The 'Listen First', as noted, does not assess impact in any sense, but Jacobs and Wilford (2010), as an in-depth qualitative case study rich in contextual information about a pilot application of the framework, reveals how very

critical the specificities and nuances of life, relationships and social dynamics- especially power dynamics between the aid-provider and the aid-recipient or ultimate beneficiary – are to the workings of an accountability framework. The main methodological lesson to be extracted from it is the need for highly open-ended frameworks, used in a spirit of creative adaptability and with a deep awareness of the impact of power relations and the determining effect of socio-political and organisational context.

Looking across the six key sources discussed here, few and diverse as they are, some broad 'overview' statements can be made. There are very few sources that attempt to assess impact and not many explore effectiveness of aid transparency and accountability. Those attempting to assess or predict impacts of 'new wave' aid transparency initiatives, of necessity, involve some methodological innovation. This is generally carried out in an explicit spirit of openness to criticism and inputs that could improve their quality, rigour and utility. In terms of the relationship between the objectives of the enquiry and the methods used, my observations are entirely in line with the general methodological principle that research design should flow conceptually and logically from the questions being asked. Cross-country statistical analysis of large data sets is used to determine correlations and test causal relationships between pre-specified theorised or hypothesised impacts. In-depth and often 'insider' qualitative case studies are used for identifying in more empirical, inductive and open-ended ways the effects of accountability and transparency initiatives and exploring how these were attained, including via sensitivity to power dynamics and individual contexts. One case very successfully combines methods by including in the latter approach some quantitative aid (debt relief) data analysis, but strongly emphasises the explanatory powers of the qualitative policy and institutional analysis from the point of view of the research's policy relevance and utility (AfDB 2009). Finally, the methods at work in each of the three aid T/A Initiatives 'silos' identified do not evince any cross-fertilisation. What goes on within them is so different that this may be no surprise – but it is still likely that learning potential is being missed.

I now move on to a more focussed discussion on explanatory factors.

Which factors contribute to impact?

Given the very different emphasis the various sources place on explaining impacts as opposed to detecting or predicting them, in this section I depart from a source-by-source approach and instead addres some specific issues and questions, drawing selectively on the sources as relevant. In discussing factors that determine effectiveness, it is helpful to recall the statement above of the particular challenges posed for accountability and transparency by the distance between many likely aid accountability seekers, on the one hand, and those intended to benefit from aid, on the other.

Actors and roles: Officials, citizens, and the state-citizen interface

In this post-Paris/Accra era most aid transparency and accountability work relates to official donor aid, which in any case accounts for the largest volumes of aid: for example the state-led IATI, the citizen-led aidinfo, AidData and Publish What You Fund. In these new wave initiatives, collaboration between state and government officials and civil society 'info-mediary' and campaigning organisations, if not always painless or harmonious, has been esential to their conception and inception, remains esential to their effectiveness, and will prove esential to their future impact. Citizen-led initiatives cannot access detailed, standardised and useable public spending data without some kind of state-citizen collaboration. State actors cannot well conceive or justify aid transparency efforts in isolation from citizens and civil society accountability-seekers, except in the narrowest of forms which are perhaps more accurately referred to as information-sharing and coordination among donor peers, rather than transparency with its more political and accountability-related connotations. That said, the state-citizen relationships is always a power relationship, and while donors can reduce, withdraw or condition aid relatively easily, there are few examples of any aid recipient enforcing effective sanctions against a donor state for unaccountable behavior.[8]

IATI is donor-led and, many civil society aid experts would argue, heavily driven by donor interests and approaches. But its steering committee was set up to include civil society advocates the Better Aid network, Publish What You Fund, Transparency International and Civicus; civil society aid' info-mediary' and research actors Development Gateway (now AidData) and Development Initiatives for Poverty

Research; and private philanthropic Hewlett Foundation, as well as a sub-set of its bilateral and multilateral official donor members (IATI n.d: 4). From its inception it has drawn extensively on the research and analytical capabilities of civil society allies, in particular aidinfo. In Martin (2010)'s assessment, the existence of ' a strong international civil society-led campaign in Publish What You Fund, 'designed to ensure application of [the IATI] principles as well as a universal right to request and receive information about aid', is key to IATI's relevance and potential impact (20). It is clear from other evidence we have reviewed – e.g. Christensen *et al* (2010); Collin *et al* (2009) – that some of the potential powers of aid transparency initiatives such as IATI or AidData are unlocked by the hands of non-governmental academic and campaigning 'info-mediaries'.

The initiatives focusing on official aid demonstrate the value of state and citizen collaboration. Those initiatives conceived and initiated as 'joint ventures' by a combination of state- and civil society or citizen actors – whether publicly fronted by both or by only one - enjoy greater legitimacy, capacity, outreach, authority and, in all likelihood, impact, than they would if conceived and launched single-handedly. Relatedly, each of the aid transparency and accountability actors interviewed for this review counted their membership of a global aid transparency movement – including mainly citizen-led initiatives but some state-led – a crucial factor in their actual and likely effectiveness, hard though it is to reliably assess this.

Seen thus, what might at first appear 'self-regulatory' aid transparency activities by northern governments with some degree of democratic accountability are rarely so *self*-initiated or *self*-regulating. The state, as the accountability 'agent', is behaving in a way that reflects actual or anticipated accountability demands of the social actors or citizens, as the 'principals'. One civil society interviewee cited ex-US President Harry Truman: 'It is amazing what you can accomplish if you do not care who gets the credit'.

Many aid T/A Initiatives asociated with official donors represent a further ramification of the ideal-type donor version of civil society in aid-recipient countries. According to this, citizens form civil society associations which act as the checks and balances in democratic systems of governance, supplementing the imperfections or inequitable access inherent in political accountability mechanisms with social accountability mechanisms, with the consequence of more effective and socially equitable outcomes to public policy, spending and governance in general – or, for the aid T/A Initiatives case, to aid.

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[8] I have heard anecdotal evidence (from Martin, pers. comm.) of an Indian state once asking a donor to leave. Again at the anecdotal level, but more common, there are certainly cases of communities, local governments and partner organisations 'kicking out' NGOs they consider to be behaving unaccountably. But this hardly counts as effective enforceability because the former recipient is left without the aid.

While there is some evidence from other sources that 'civil society' does operate in this way and to this effect in aid-recipient countries (see for instance Barder 2009: 24), the evidence is piecemeal, and many assumptions remain unproven. The International Budget Partnership's Open Budget Initiative, with its Six Questions Campaign and Open Budget Survey, tests some of these and, as it builds up time-series data, should soon be able to shed interesting light on them in certain heavily aid-dependent southern countries. In respect of northern citizens, the responses of the UK and Swedish publics to forthcoming and recent aid transparency mechanisms remain to be seen: whether UK citizens will be motivated out of their political apathy sufficiently to vote on aid projects and opine about their worthiness online via a UK aid watchdog is a topical question.

What perhaps demands further analysis are the cases where the T/A Initiatives is expected to benefit, or be useable by, southern citizens or social actors, whether via their representations to their governments, to publically-funded INGOs, or to donors directly. Many aid T/A Initiatives include these actors among their intended users, beneficiaries or stakeholders. Limited but probably significant evidence[9] suggests that for this aspiration to be fully realised, understandings of and approach to these users need to be grounded much more firmly in empirical experience and less in suppositions, from the very conception of the initiative onwards. Simply contemplating the width of the experiential abys that lies between information-age cybernaut 'info-mediaries' based at US universities, and illiterate rural Mozambicans who could turn aid data into citizen-led accountability demands leveled at their local government, reinforces this point.

How to engage the relevant actors in aid T/A Initiatives?

The roles and relationships of different actor groups, and their combination in collaborative efforts, are clearly important. This gives rise to the question of how state-led initiatives can best engage the citizens and citizen-led initiatives best engage the state actors, as needed, to make aid T/A Initiatives effective.

A powerful factor in the recent surge of aid transparency initiatives has been acceptance of the 'public good' quality of transparency overall, and aid transparency by extension. Aidinfo's cost and benefit work suggests that this has contributed to IATI members' acceptance of the costs. Aid T/A Initiatives which invoke universal rights to information, while coming from different philosophical roots, are consistent with it in practical terms. Advancing these arguments, citizen-led initiatives or demands have gained purchase on states. Undoubtedly, the headway made in the form of the new wave of aid transparency initiatives also owes a lot to peer pressure factors. DAC members are persuaded, by each other and by civil society aid advocates, that they risk undermining their own Paris framework if they fail to respond comprehensively to advocates' calls – and in many cases their own felt needs - for enhanced aid transparency.

Christensen *et al* (2010) affirm on the basis of other work of theirs that in more transparent countries, the reporting requirements faced by governments have been driven upwards by concerned voters extracting more information. 'Greater breadth of aid information [...] generally results from more stringent reporting requirements placed by the principals on the aid organisation, be they bilateral or multilateral' (12).

INGOs' downward aid accountability and transparency approaches are played out between the INGO (which occupies the role of 'donor' as well as aspiring to be a 'partner'), southern social actors (e.g. local or national NGO partners, faith-based groups, producers' associations etc), and southern marginalised communities. The isue of how to engage the 'other actors' tends to be framed as an explicit attempt to change the power dynamics between the INGO and these others, bringing the organisation's practice nearer to its stated principles of participation, integral accountability, empowerment and others. The INGO's invitation to these others to take up opportunities to voice opinions and criticisms and shape policy and practice, is not always easily understood or taken up. Key observations made by David *et al* (2006) are the strong default tendency by all these other actors to seek top-down guidance and leadership, and the fact that some country programmes' cultures could not adapt to the intended change in power dynamics. These progammes 'were characterised by a donor-recipient relationship with 'partners', centralised monitoring systems based on endless indicators and procedures, and strong internal hierarchical systems of power. The fundamental relationship with partners and particularly with the poor was one of charitable giving. Political and cultural leaps would be necessary' (140) – and these proved elusive, at least over the first five years.

This point speaks to the link between accountability and participation in aid relationships and dynamics. Where partners are already empowered to participation in decision-making on many 'upstream' aspects of the aid relationship, their involvement in empowering, learning-focussed 'downstream' accountability initiatives will be a natural extension of this role. That sort of empowered engagement cannot be expected from partner organisations or other primary stakeholders which the aid-giver treats mainly as hapless beneficiaries.

Moving past the local partner organisations and looking further down the 'downward accountability chain', it seems self-evident that efforts to engage poor, marginalised people in southern countries in realising the developmental or democratic potentials of aid transparency and accountability, need to start from awareness of these citizens' circumstances and the incentives and disincentives they face to do so. This is so whether the efforts are backed by the local NGO, the Global Fund, the European Commision or the International Finance Corporation, and whether they focus on general budget support or distribution of bednets. However, this awareness is not very visible in the design of most aid T/A Initiatives reviewed. Although likely to be more central to international NGOs' downward accountability

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[9] In Martin (2010) and Martin (pers. comm.), and in the aidinfo Nicaragua case study produced by Centro de Estudios y Análisis Político (2009), which revealed low user awareness or interest about where funds spent locally come from and suggested that recent approaches to enhancing aid transparency needed most better grounding in such local realities in aid-dependent countries.

arrangements with their partners and other stakeholders, the way this awareness is obtained and utilised is not, at present, very visible or accessible to the aid accountability and transparency community at large.

Of particular concern in this regard is the narrow conception of transparency that informs most new-wave aid transparency initiatives. Transparency all too often seems to be understood as availability and accessibility of statistics, albeit timely, comprehensive and comparable statistics. In fact many activists and observers concerned about the uses and effectiveness of aid are not interested in the numbers but the policies and guidelines, or even the politics and relationships. Arguably, until 'aid transparency' initiatives shake off this association with quantified data, aid transparency will remain an area of 'opaque transparency' rather than 'clear transparency', to use Fox's definitions:

"Opaque or fuzzy transparency involves the dissemination of information that does not reveal how institutions actually behave in practice, whether in terms of how they make decisions, or the results of their actions [...]. Clear transparency refers both to information-access politics and to progammes that reveal reliable information about institutional performance, specifying officials' responsibilities as well as where public funds go. Clear transparency sheds light on institutional behavior, which permits interested parties (such as policy makers, opinion makers, and programme participants) to pursue strategies of constructive change". Fox 2007: 667

In advocating and struggling for accountability and transparency, efforts to engage others – whether state officials in 'upward' initiatives or poor villagers in 'downward' initiatives – will be more credible and legitimate if the advocates' own practice is consistent with the demands they make of others. This point highlights a grey area in the contemporary aid accountability scene. In the run-up to the Accra High-Level Forum (2008) international NGO policy advocates and campaigners vociferously demanded better transparency and accountability of official donors, as part of their campaigns to secure more or better aid. Many of these international NGOs could not demonstrate the sort of accountability and transparency to their partners and intended beneficiaries that they were demanding of their governments and multilateral aid agencies. This constitutes a weakness in their advocacy and campaigning strategies on aid accountability and transparency. ActionAid demonstrates this for ALPS in a way that is at least internally valid, if not cutting much ice with DFID, as David *et al* (2006) narrate. Many international NGOs have not attempted to assess concretely enough for external consumption (including detractors, official funders and the general public) what their own accountability and transparency efforts have achieved in terms of better partnerships and, indirectly or directly, more effective programmes. This may be for the good reason that their prime concern is with benefitting these 'downward' stakeholders, not with convincing external consumers; but they are under increasing pressure to do the latter to asure their funding, safeguard their 'brand'. In any case, consistency between their programme work and their aid advocacy demands it. It no doubt poses conceptual and methodological challenges but, while these call for epistemological and methodological clarity and care, they are not insuperable.

Structural questions

Much analysis of accountability within political science, including some by members of this research team, concludes that the most key factors are structural aspects of the states and polities in question. How does this translate or apply in relation to aid accountability and transparency activities, many of which, as we have seen, lie at the interface between political and social accountability?

Because official aid is disbursed from governments to governments, the success of many existing aid T/A Initiatives in downwards accountability to northern and southern citizens relies – theoretically - on the incentives that operate on elected representatives within at least nominally democratic polities (Christensen *et al* 2010; Collin *et al* 2009; Barder 2009) – that is, on political accountability relationships, and therein on political-electoral costs and reputational risks of failing to answer or undergo sanction for the misuse or ineffectiveness of aid (Christensen *et al* 2010; Clark *et al* 2003).

Some aid T/A Initiatives, again theoretically at this stage, rely to a greater or lesser degree on social accountability demands exerted by civil society groups or citizens who are newly empowered by newly accessible aid information. Intuitively, the feasibility of this happening is greater in the cases where the citizens in question enjoy a right to information in national law (Martin 2010), but is by no means guaranteed by the mere existence of such a right.

Questions of which structural and societal factors enhance the scope for social accountability around aid merge with a larger body of questions, the subject of much ongoing research, around what makes citizens of aid-recipient countries engage on issues of public policy and public budgets, including – or especially – in unresponsive and 'fragile states'.

In relation to the citizens of aid-giving countries, Clark *et al* (2003) is particularly useful on how the transnational quality of aid accountability and transparency requires transnational strategies, engaging differently positioned social actors in north and south. Their WBIP case studies demonstrate how the work of transnational coalitions behind and around the southern claimants has been critical important in many ways, from raising initial awareness of the Panel as a recourse, to providing the necessary technical knowhow to claimants, to tracking the process through the machinery, to providing critique to the Bank on the mechanism itself. The persistence of civil society advocates, through what have proved to be slow processes of incremental change, has been a key factor. Transnational civil society actors' efforts have increased the visibility and legitimacy of the WBIP inside and outside the Bank, thus enhancing its chances of impact. The requirement that claims emanate from directly affected southern parties and their close allies has ensured authenticity and focus and made the Panel a very citizen-led initiative.

Beyond the considerable work on transnational advocacy coalitions and the light it can shed on these issues, there may be a lacuna in knowledge about the factors that make northern citizens engage effectively with aid accountability and transparency initiatives. It is to be hoped that the UK government's current efforts to give form to its idea of a public aid watchdog, in this era of evidence-based policy, might start to fill this.

What gaps exist?

From the above review, several gaps can be identified at a general level. Firstly, there is very limited evidence of impact in the field of aid accountability and transparency. Given how persuasive and intuitively logical the cases made for these activities are, this paucity of evidence is probably not because impact is not being attained but because much of it is not being captured, nor routes to effectiveness being studied in many cases.

Secondly, in terms of effectiveness, there are a limited number of careful, in-depth case studies available that demonstrate how aid accountability and transparency initiative take effect. While obviously not methodologically intended for broad generalisation, these do offer important insights into research designs for tracing effectiveness. No such in-depth case studies have been found of 'new wave'-type aid transparency initiatives. This may simply be a reflection of their newness; but it may also reflect the fact that these aid transparency initiatives tend to work by universally providing or transmitting information, leaving users to take up and use this as they will. The older school of aid accountability approaches, on the other hand, tends to facilitate or construct focussed accountability relationships and dynamics, the contours of which are more possible to isolate and track.

Thirdly, and very specifically, IATI is a key example of a new aid transparency initiative where the benefits of demonstrating impact and understanding effectiveness would extend to very many stakeholders, but where the need to demonstrate impact appears not to have been built in centrally at the design stage. This could be addressed by setting up arrangements to monitor the impact of IATI over the medium and long term in a small sample of aid-recipient countries where lack of aid transparency has caused notorious problems in the past, using a combination of quantitative analysis and in-depth qualitative, inductive research on policy and institutional processes and social accountability dynamics.

Fourthly, one reason why impact and effectiveness are slippery areas is that many aid T/A Initiatives do not spell out their expected impact or their expected pathways to impact. Our review suggests this is due in part to:

- perceptions that making conclusive cases for these initiatives is higher-priority than demonstrating impact, which would in any case come further down the line;
- the fact that many cases for aid accountability appear to be self-evident so requiring minimal justification or demonstration of impact. This self-evidence is in fact called into question by the few, yet significant, potential negative effects identified, such as:
  o the risk that more transparency about aid will lead to bad publicity for donors or reduced public support for aid;
  o the risk that donors pushing aid transparency will dilute or undermine accountability relationships between recipient governments and their citizens, by short-circuiting them in favour of accountability relationships between southern governments and northern donors, or directly between southern citizens and northern donors; and
  o the risk that abundant provision of timely, comprehensive and comparable aid data achieves little or nothing in the way of more accountable aid because, as well-demonstrated in the policy advocacy literature, information does not produce activism nor policy change, and the relationship between better information and policy change is not simple and linear but complex and mitigated by a host of other factors;
- the inherently 'transnational' aspect of aid accountability and transparency, which complicates the usual principal-agent relationship;
- multiple meanings of 'accountability' and motivations for seeking it in the aid sphere; in particular vast divergence in awareness and importance attached to the power dynamics involved, and the fact that as summed up by Fox, in relation to accountability 'where one stands […] depends on where one sits' (Fox 2007: 663);
- the contested and elusive nature of 'development effectiveness', which is the ultimate goal of most such initiatives, although in some cases only very indirectly;

Not surprisingly, it would appear that scope for demonstrating impact and elucidating pathways to impact is enhanced when such considerations are built into the design of the initiative. Despite this, several of the new wave initiatives do not appear to have built it in; examples are IATI and the proposed UK aid watchdog.

Fifth, more critical thinking is needed about the nature of the aid transparency on offer – its 'opacity' or 'clearness', to paraphrase Fox - and its forward linkages to accountable aid. The strands of activity going on in silos within the aid transparency and accountability field do not currently learn from each other, although they are all about the same principles and all operate in the same world of the complex 'gift' relationship that is aid (Eyben 2006), albeit in different parts of that world. Unhelpful compartmentalisation goes on further afield, too. Aid accountability work and budget accountability work are well linked at the international level, as demonstrated by the Overseas Development Institute's considerable work linking the two, and the growing focus on aid within the International Budget Partnership's activities. Yet the links are very weak at the local level in recipient countries. There are some moves afoot to strengthen these local links (for instance the inclusion of aid-related questions in the Open Budget Initiative's 'Ask your Government' campaign on budget transparency), but more deliberate support is needed to thicken the connections. The Freedom of Information and aid transparency fields could make a common project out of their mutual need to understand better how to get from putting information into people's hands to those hands securing rights.

Finally, and crucially, citizens and their organisations in aid-recipient countries, as well as citizens in northern donor countries which are taking steps to make their official aid programmes more transparent, seem not to feature large enough in the conception and implementation of aid T/A Initiatives. 'Take-up' by and involvement of these – crucial – stakeholders seems to be taken as a given although there is at best piecemeal evidence and few compelling *prima facie* reasons for such assumptions. In the survey of aid transparency initiatives conducted by Martin (2010) as part of his study for ECOSOC, complementary data was gathered from actual or potential users, but not presented in the paper. Such user perspectives could shed light on the vital question of how far the impacts of these aid transparency initiatives that are hypothesised to happen via the fostering of demand-side, citizen-led social and political accountability activities in recipient countries (as opposed to those that will happen via supply-side horisontal 'peer' accountability between donors in the North) are likely to actually happen. For aid accountability and transparency initiatives to bear out their potential in terms of either democratic outcomes or developmental outcomes, there is a need to attend more closely to the demands, circumstances and everyday realities of the full range of possible users and stakeholders, and to do so 'upstream' of the delivery of additional aid information or invitations to comment on an aid project completed. This goes to the heart of debates about the relationship between participation, accountability, transparency and government responsiveness, which extend far beyond the specific field under review.

In sum, future attempts to remedy gaps in understanding of impact and effectiveness in the field of aid transparency and accountability need to take full account of the diversity of the field in terms of actors, motivations and approaches; and to work on the methodological principle of 'horses for courses'. There are insights into effectiveness that can be extracted from studies on individual initiatives, and potential relevance in applying lessons from one kind of aid T/A Initiatives to the exploration of quite different kinds - for example applying lessons from INGO downward accountability relationships with partners and communities, to Paris Declaration signatories' efforts to deliver on mutual accountability; or aidinfo's study of community awareness about aid to INGOs' attempts to give voice to poor and marginalised southern people. Perhaps the single most important conclusion from the review is the need to unpack assumptions about the full range of users and stakeholders that underpin the design of these initiatives, with particular attention to citizens and their organisations in north and south.

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