TRANSPARENCY &
ACCOUNTABILITY
INITIAT.IVE

Semi-Annual Report
January to June 2017

Introduction

In the first half of 2017, the rebooted Transparency & Accountability Initiative (TAI) transitioned from collaborative strategy development to implementation, progressing towards the ambitious objectives laid out in our strategy.[1] This document provides an overview of progress during this six-month period, flags challenges and proposed adaptations from the initial work plan,[2] and concludes with what the TAI team is looking forward to in the second half of 2017. Our annual report will be available in early 2018.

Progress Review

Taxation & tax governance

Our focus for the past six months has been development of a joint sub-strategy on tax and tax governance among the full TAI member donors. This effort is designed to serve as a platform for future commitments towards more aligned grant making. Building on an in-depth meeting with member tax leads, TAI staff and consultants have developed:

- a *"tax ecosystem" map*, identifying the sub-fields that are a part of the financial transparency and tax sectors
- an articulation and visualization of each donor's *pathway to change*, which the TAI team then aggregated into a collective visualization
- a *database of the twenty "core" TAI grantees,* which highlights each grantee's mission and how both the donors and grantees perceive the organization's contributions to the tax justice agenda and TAI's collective pathway to change on this agenda.
- a *gap analysis* between current portfolio and desired outcomes

Alongside this internal process, TAI has represented its members in relevant forums to help pinpoint opportunities for collective investment. These include participation in the meeting of tax justice groups in Berlin in May and the first Addis Tax Initiative conference in June, as well as conversations with individuals and organizations ranging from Gabriel Zucman to Tax Justice Network Africa to PricewaterhouseCoopers. These components are building blocks to a strategy session planned for August aimed at finalizing TAI members' collective approach to this workstream.

Data use for accountability

The data for accountability collective workstream has featured prominently in TAI member discussions. One of the deep dive themes at the TAI retreat in April, it has also been a regular subject exchange

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[1] TAI 2017-2019 Strategy
[2] TAI 2017 Work Plan

among members, ranging from discussions on the implications of OSF's commissioned work on extractives data uptake and ON's emerging shift to a more comprehensive data strategy. As data issues are relevant and complimentary to other TAI workstreams and across portfolios, engagement of TAI members is extending to information and cybersecurity work at OSF, Ford, Hewlett, and MacArthur. TAI has tracked developments and connected members with grantees to share lessons learned and solicit input on projects, such as the ON-sponsored extractives data deep dives managed by DataKind, and the Open Data for Tax Justice working group conversations.

Seeking to clarify the intersection between open data and the transparency, accountability, and participation (TAP) field , TAI partnered with the Open Data Charter to create a draft framework on harnessing Data for Accountability. This prompted five different groups (including TAI member grantees) to reach out with requests to further test the framework and share insights from data programming.

To deepen our understanding of the open data field and how it can be a platform to strengthen accountability efforts, TAI partnered with leading open data centers of expertise (Open Data Initiative, Open Knowledge International, MySociety, Web Foundation, GovLab) to hold quarterly calls to share updates and strategies, and draft a joint narrative of each other's comparative advantages and collective field needs for both donors and practitioners. TAI, AidData, and the Governance Data Alliance have also committed to convening a global workshop to identify components of data-savvy governance programming.[3]

A priority in the next six months is initiating a dialogue on data governance concerns for the transparency and accountability community. A concept note[4] to test data for accountability approaches at the country level provides an overall framing, and country and subtheme priorities are now being set with one data pilot anticipated in the second half of 2017.

Strengthening of civic space

The phenomenon of shrinking civic space has sparked worldwide interest; numerous research initiatives, funder collaboratives, and programs have sprung up in response. After featuring this theme at our April retreat, TAI members clarified how the collective will help build a better understanding of the challenges TAP grantees face, and explore the role that constituency-building can play in bolstering the resilience of TAP grantees. The TAI team continues to track the myriad of conversations around this issue with an eye to building innovative partnerships, such as with the US Institute of Peace on governance-related grassroots movements.

Research on TAP arguments to close civic space: Consultant Hans Gutbrod authored a report on how governments have justified restricting civic space under the banner of "increasing transparency," offering recommendations for how grantees and donors alike can respond. The insights from this piece will feed into future TAI activities in this work stream, such as prospective country-level collaboration.

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[3] An initial workshop has been postponed until the fall. This will be one input to curating points for donor consideration in reviewing grantee proposals that have are data focused or have a data related component.

[4] TAI Data Use Concept Note

Donor response to closing space for grantees: As a compliment to this longer-term view, TAI has researched existing short-term donor responses to shrinking civic space and is collating findings into a user-friendly resource for donors, identifying how to match grantee challenges with existing resources and toolkits. This tool will be accompanied by a brief overview of the state of knowledge on the topic of closing civic space and gaps in our collective understanding of solutions.

Learning for improved grant making

Grant-making practices / grantee learning & impact

Results stories: Senior Learning Officer Alison Miranda and communications specialist and consultant Jed Miller conducted 20 interviews with representatives from grant-making organizations, grantees, and communications and storytelling experts. They will document and disseminate their scoping findings during the next period.

Learning infrastructure

Learning network: TAI convened a February 2017 co-design workshop with 21 practitioners and researchers who have championed actionable and adaptive learning. Joined by representatives from four TAI members and facilitator Dave Algoso, the group developed a common framing for the principles and practices around adaptive learning and an emerging model for future collaboration. Through a series of virtual meetings, a participant drafting committee solicited feedback from the other participants and developed a concept note. TAI members provided feedback in late June, indicating a need for greater clarity around the problems to be addressed and the purpose of the network. TAI will host a design workshop with an expanded drafting committee and present a proposal for TAI member funding consideration in August.

TAP field evidence: Building on the TAI-commissioned TAP evidence scan (2010) and literature reviews (2015), Lily Tsai (GovLab) and Varja Lipovsek (Twaweza) are working with TAI on three new evidence reviews around questions related to TAI members' theories of change. The third and final evidence review, exploring the question of (when) does information improve accountability, will join completed reviews on tax and accountability and the role of international norms and standards on accountability actors' behavior later this year. TAI will work with the co-authors to package and disseminate this work to facilitate use by TAI members and the broader TAP field.

Collaboration among members

TAI weekly updates: TAI curates and distributes a weekly digest, *In Case You Missed It*, to TAI member staff intended to share TAP-relevant news, information, and research, to highlight ongoing TAI staff conversations with relevant actors, and to inspire new conversations within and across member organizations. Weekly news stories are also featured on the TAI website. Members continue to provide positive feedback on the content and utility of the digest.

TAI retreat: Staff, SC members, and program officers contributed to the April retreat, TAI's first since completing the 2017-2019 strategy.[5] TAI circulated a summary of the events and key discussion points, including the Learning Day discussions around TAI themes of collaboration, open government and data use, and civic space and social movements. Retreat discussions yielded preliminary frameworks for member collaboration around data use and civic space themes.

Towards country-level collaboration: Following the April retreat, TAI drafted two concept notes[6] and incorporated member feedback to refine these notes. Each note includes goals that will guide members' emerging country-level collaboration for data use and strengthening civic space. While the goals present a longer-term, multi-year agenda, TAI and its members will identify specific actions to iteratively build knowledge and apply learning to shape subsequent phases of work and progress towards shared goals and learning questions.

Extractives governance: TAI has evolved into a useful channel for members to align their efforts around increasing transparency in extractive industries; the sector touches on each of TAI's focus areas, and consequently, is of high priority to all members. TAI is providing light-touch support (e.g. organizing quarterly calls with program officers), laying the foundation for more proactive strategizing and information sharing in the future.

TAI Operations

Staffing: Alison Miranda, TAI's Senior Learning Officer, joined the team in March 2017 and is leading the learning for improved grant-making workstream. TAI instituted paid Student Fellowships to local undergraduate and graduate students, who provide general support to staff. Ava Danlog, an Atlas Corps Fellow from the Philippines, is scheduled to join TAI in July as a Communications Fellow and will focus on consolidating the gains of the recent brand refresh and growing TAI's social media presence. A decision on a senior program officer hire to lead on at least one work stream was delayed until prioritized needs are clearer later in 2017.

Website: TAI worked with Elefint Designs to refresh our brand and develop a more user-friendly website built to reflect the new strategy and better show case donor member thinking and programming (including original blog content). After the spring launch, we observed a 97% increase in visitors to the site,[7] marking an exciting opportunity for TAI to engage the public. Many expressed positive feedback both on the strategy, approach and new website. TAI will continue to monitor user activity and work with our Communications Fellow, Ava, to maximize this platform.

Membership, funding and budget: TAI created an associate membership and welcomed MacArthur and DFID in this category. TAI secured the last grant from each of our four core members supporting

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[5] TAI April 2017 Retreat Agenda and Design Brief
[6] See footnote 3 for the data concept note; Civic Space concept note can be found here
[7] According to CPanel's website analytics data, TAI's website launch saw a significant increase in the number of people visiting the website. Between March 1-13 2017, before the redesign, the website had 1,566 visitors, compared to 3,083 visitors - nearly double - on the website between June 1-13 2017, after the new site launched.

activities through the end of 2019. TAI has spent around 40% of its annual budget through June and is on track to stay on budget for the 12-month period.

Fiscal sponsor and hub networks: TAI has benefited from linkages fostered as a sponsored project of Proteus Fund. Connections to several other projects have proven useful, including Solidaire (on grassroots movement building) and International Human Rights Funders Group (on civic space and funder model). In turn, TAI has provided advice to several other current and prospective projects of Proteus. Several organizations have cited the TAI strategy as a model for their own strategizing.[8]

Similarly, TAI has benefited from our location in the OpenGov Hub, working alongside likeminded organizations in the TAP community. TAI Program Officer Lauren Keevill sits on the Hub Collaboration Committee, which works to foster formal and informal collaboration amongst members, and TAI members participate in many of these activities. For example, Alison is part of an Adaptive Learning working group for thought partnership on development of the forthcoming TAI MEL plan.

Learning & Adaptation

How we work - TAI & members: TAI benefits from both the structure of a strategic framework and the flexibility to adapt to emergent learnings and opportunities. This way of working also presents the challenges of keeping pace with shifting priorities and accommodating time demands for TAI staff and members alike.

- TAI action often hinges on member consensus decisions, but SC calls have not occurred on a regular schedule. TAI recognizes the diverse priorities and time constraints faced by our members, and is moving to a standing SC monthly call time from September onwards. The identification of specific SC members and project officers from each member to lead on a workstream will also streamline communication and expedite decision making.
- Consistent feedback loops on TAI progress and performance are still forming – a shift to recurring Executive Director and Co-Chair calls in June should help ensure consistent relevance and timely response to member needs.
- Recognizing that progress will likely be uneven across workstreams, instituting quarterly tracking and status review (per the forthcoming MEL plan) will help ensure that no priority is "left behind." Compared to the initial 2017 workplan there is already some spillover from Q2 to Q3, risking the "bunching" of activities. A status check end at the end of Q3 with members will allow us to determine if any activities need to be dropped from original plan, especially as the country-level pilot planning gets underway.

TAI role: SC feedback has noted appreciation for TAI's facilitative role but has encouraged staff to find opportunities to serve in an advisory, thought-partnership role as well. Moving forward, the TAI team

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[8] One head of a fellow funder group referred to the TAI document as "…the best donor collaborative strategy I've seen," and has urged others to consider it as a template.

will directly share new ideas, opportunities, and insights through direct engagement (such as the upcoming tax strategy meeting) and light-touch channels, such as Slack.

Member country-level collaboration: While drafting concept notes for the proposed country pilots, the TAI team found that the frameworks discussed at the retreat required more specificity to yield actionable field-level collaboration. As we continue this work, the team will embrace an iterative approach breaking the project into smaller pieces, clearly identifying the questions and knowledge gaps at each juncture, including reconciling the distinct grant-making calendars of members.

TAI retreat design: While the TAI team found its pre-retreat design work useful, feedback from retreat participants will help to refine future retreat purpose and design. Moving forward, TAI envisions dedicating additional time for members to provide updates on their portfolios and strategic shifts, members cofacilitating joint ideation sessions, and separating out learning sessions from the retreat.

Communicating the new TAI: One recurring theme during the TAI revised strategy development was the need to clarify what TAI is and does. With our new strategy and website in place, TAI has sought opportunities to be more visible and better articulate our role. TAI has arranged individual conversations with TAI member grantees, webinars (such as for the Global Partnership for Social Accountability) and participated in larger forums, such the *Smart Government* event organized by the Center for Effective Global Action in San Francisco, and the Mo Ibrahim Foundation *Governance Weekend* in Marrakesh. Recognizing confusion persists about TAI's new model, TAI's communications fellow will support further outreach this year.

TAI Staff Voices – What Are We Excited About?

- Alison - developing TAI's own learning, monitoring, and evaluation plan. TAI staff and member contributions will help shape our shared learning agenda.
- Lauren – working closely with grantees to understand the roots of CSO legitimacy, how this influences a CSO's ability to hold powerholders accountable, and finding ways to incorporate lessons of that work stream across the TAI portfolio.
- Michael - convening big-picture data accountability conversations to complement a deep dive in Nigeria and exploring linkages to funders beyond the usual suspects.