THE STORY

In Rakhine State in Myanmar, inter-communal tensions continue and 139,310 people remain displaced as a result of the violence that erupted in 2012. Among them are this mother and child in Thea Chaung camp on the outskirts of Sittwe. In 2013, Myanmar received its highest levels of humanitarian assistance since cyclone Nargis hit in 2008. As international humanitarian assistance to Myanmar continues at scale, alongside other international financing flows such as official development assistance, access to information will play a critical role in ensuring accountability to both donors and the local population. Myanmar's government recently established Mohinga, an aid transparency portal on aid coming into Myanmar. Mohinga allows users to track international assistance and provides access to further resources.

CREDIT

9
CHAPTER

BETTER INFORMATION

For better response

People at risk of or affected by crises may access and require many different types of resources: local, national and international; public and private. Accurate, timely and comprehensive information on these flows is critical to inform decision-making in specific crises as well as the priorities set through global processes. Information also has a crucial part to play in ensuring accountability to crisis-affected people and donors.

Knowing exactly who and where people in need are, what resources are reaching them, and with what results, is a challenge across development and environmental as well as humanitarian communities. This has prompted the call for a 'data revolution in sustainable development'.[1] In crisis-affected contexts there are particular information imperatives, and data needs to meet the '3 Ts' for transparent information flows:

- **totality**: reflecting all resources beyond humanitarian assistance
- **traceability**: being able to follow assistance beyond the first-level recipient, through the transaction chain from donor to the crisis-affected person (see Chapter 5)
- **timeliness**: providing real-time data on available resources in fast-moving humanitarian settings (see Chapter 7).

A number of promising innovations and solutions are emerging. The Information Management and Analysis Support (IMAS) toolkit in Lebanon offers an example of a local initiative to track information on all resources. Data reported to the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) standard demonstrates the potential of full traceability of humanitarian funding, as well as timely and forward-looking data on actual and planned expenditure.

As the data revolution evolves, new technology and innovations in the availability and use of data are transforming the mapping of humanitarian needs and the delivery of response (see Chapters 5 and 6). Methods to gather, store and publish data are becoming more sophisticated, such as the Humanitarian Data Exchange. These innovations also have the potential to transform humanitarian financing, and now is the time to build on them.

Totality: tracking wider resources in crises

International humanitarian assistance is just one of the resources available to people in crisis. As Chapter 8 shows, in many cases it represents a small fraction of the actual and potential mix. To best meet needs and most effectively direct humanitarian assistance, all those involved in both giving and spending need to know what other resources are at work and where. This is not the case just in preparedness and transitional contexts but also in acute crises.

The responses to Typhoon Haiyan, the Ebola virus disease outbreak and the Syria refugee crises have required and attracted resources at a scale beyond those provided by international humanitarian donors. The Ebola crisis required investments in infrastructure and basic services from development and private actors as well as domestic response (see Chapter 3); the Regional Refugee and Resilience Plan (3RP) for Syria takes national capacity as its starting point and calls for development investments. Yet humanitarian tracking systems currently allow us to see only the international humanitarian assistance component of this and not the wider, often more substantial, funding allocations and gaps. This meant that when the Ebola crisis struck West Africa it was not possible for decision-makers or stakeholders to get a comprehensive picture of the response.

To address this problem, country-based initiatives in Lebanon[2] and Myanmar[3] are developing ways of tracking humanitarian assistance in the context of other critical resource flows. They provide models which could be replicated in other crises, as well as at a global level. A single system for tracking resources to address crisis and vulnerability would provide the missing evidence base for a complementary and effective response that meets people's interconnected needs. IATI (see page 129) offers one such way of providing this evidence, and Development Initiatives' recently launched Development Data Hub (see page 155) is an example of bringing information on multiple resource flows together in one place, in an easily accessible and usable format.

OPEN INFORMATION ABOUT INTERNATIONAL ASSISTANCE TO MYANMAR: MOHINGA

Mohinga is an aid transparency portal for tracking all forms of international assistance to Myanmar, including development and humanitarian funding. It was established and is managed by the government of Myanmar's Foreign Economic Relations Department and the Development Partners Working Committee, which is made up of a range of government and multilateral donors including the Asian Development Bank, Australia, the EU, Japan, the UK Department for International Development (DFID), the UN, the US Agency for International Development (USAID) and the World Bank.

The portal uses a mix of IATI and other data sources to visualise assistance from bilateral and multilateral donors at national and provincial level. Aimed primarily at development cooperation partners (non-governmental organisations (NGOs) and partner governments) and citizens, it provides access to shared resources beyond information on financial assistance. This includes donor and domestic government strategies, as well as information on coordination structures and global development effectiveness agreements. Mohinga aims to improve the transparency and accountability of aid to Myanmar stating that: "Access to better quality aid information...supports the equitable allocation of resources, both sectorally and geographically, ensuring that all Myanmar people can benefit."

http://mohinga.info/en/

In focus: A joined-up approach to crisis response

UNDP's Information Management and Analysis Support (IMAS) toolkit, Lebanon

Before 2011, Lebanon had a population of around 4 million; by 2014 it was host to over 1.1 million refugees,[4] over 90% of whom have fled ongoing violence in neighbouring Syria. Lebanon now has the highest per capita ratio of refugees in the world and refugee numbers are predicted to increase almost ten-fold from 180,000 people in December 2012 to 1.5 billion people in December 2015. The speed and scale at which Lebanon has been affected by the crisis in Syria has meant that basic public services and infrastructure have been unable to cope.

In 2013, at the request of the Lebanese government, the World Bank (in collaboration with the UN, the European Union (EU), and the International Monetary Fund (IMF)) undertook a rapid Economic and Social Impact Assessment,[5] which aimed to quantify the impact of the crisis and stabilisation needs of the country. It predicted that between 2012 and 2014 the crisis would cut growth in gross domestic product (GDP), double unemployment, and push more people into poverty. Its predictions of fiscal impact (see also Chapter 7) were realised across the board and the total cost of the impact of the Syrian conflict in Lebanon to date is thought to be somewhere in the region of US$7.5 billion.

The assessment prompted a paradigm shift in the crisis response in the context of the 3RP (see Chapter 7). This broadened the focus from being solely toward refugee needs with marginal host-community support to a more holistic picture of the macro-impact on neighbouring host countries nationally, in which every sector of society and/or the economy was affected.

Given the demand for development investments as well as humanitarian assistance, the Lebanese government has been working with the United Nations Development Programme (UNDP) to build an information management system. This aims to enable consistent sharing of data and information in order to better understand needs and track financial contributions and resources (domestic and international, private and public, humanitarian and development), as well as activities being delivered, across the country.

The IMAS toolkit was conceived as a means of facilitating this joint approach to crisis response, allowing the domestic government to work alongside international actors to plan and coordinate the response to the refugee crisis as part of wider work to maintain basic public services across the country. It consists of four main components, all integrated into an online package with a common mapping system. The components are: a Who, What, Where, When (4Ws) tracking and mapping tool; municipal risk and problem mapping; a non-humanitarian financial tracking tool for the UN Resident Coordinator's Office; and a digital atlas that underpins the whole toolkit.

The financial tracking tool allows the domestic government to consolidate all additional resources not currently tracked by any international system, including private contributions. As well as data from the UN Office for the Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs Financial Tracking Service (FTS), IMAS contains data from the Lebanese Ministry of Economics, the Council for Development and Reconstruction, and international government donors. It also contains information on the activities being delivered by domestic and international actors, as well as data on population stress, risks and health service availability.

Lebanon now has the highest per capita ratio of refugees in the world and refugee numbers are predicted to increase almost ten-fold from 180,000 people in December 2012 to 1.5 billion people in December 2015.

Traceability: following humanitarian assistance to the recipient

All assistance, humanitarian and other, needs to reach the people for whom it is intended as efficiently, appropriately and cost-effectively as possible. As shown in Chapter 5, transaction chains are complex and currently it is possible to trace funding only to the first-level recipient. Systematic traceability is essential to understand and improve effectiveness and underpin accountability to both donors and recipients. Page 128 shows how full reporting to IATI would enable this. Until this happens, case studies to 'follow the money' can give snapshots of what happens to resources in specific contexts.

The example in figure 9.1, which follows a single transaction through from donor to delivery, shows what traceable data could look like. Combined with a complete and timely picture of all other resources available in a particular context, this would be a powerful tool in enabling complete complementarity in the use and distribution of assistance, while also increasing accountability to those people affected by crises and those providing assistance.

Start Fund response to flooding in Sri Lanka

Launched in April 2014 with contributions from DFID and Irish Aid, the Start Fund – based on the Consortium of British Humanitarian Agencies' Emergency Response Fund – is a UK-based pooled fund that provides emergency funding to its 19 members and their implementing partners. The fund, managed by its members, is designed to provide a rapid funding response following a step-change or escalation in humanitarian needs. It focuses on responding to small- to medium-scale crises that do not receive sufficient funding or attention from other existing mechanisms. It provides an early funding response to slow-onset crises, and a fast response to both rapid-onset crises and spikes in chronic crises, where agencies already active on the ground need to respond quickly.

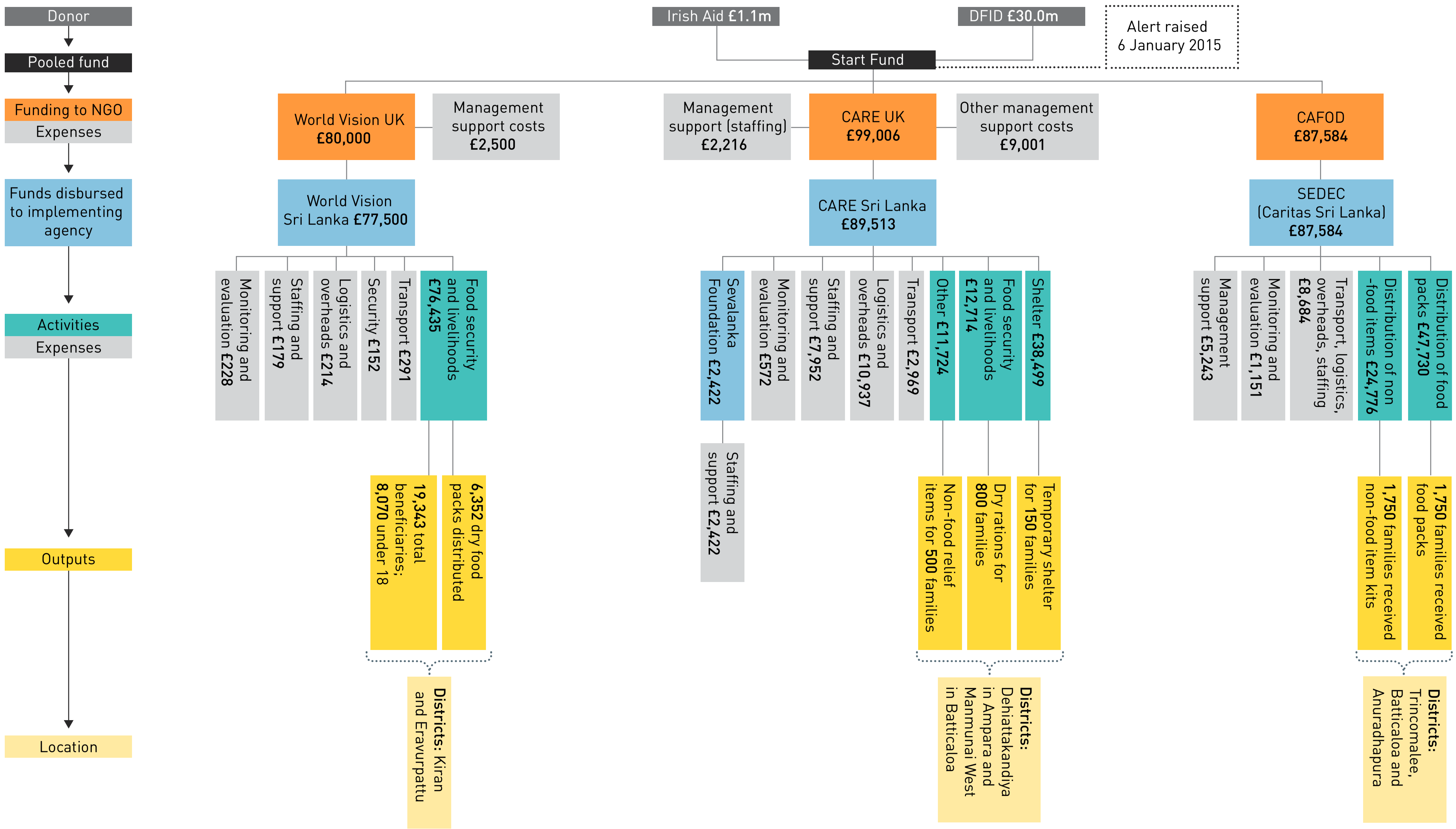
The fund is triggered by a member agency raising an alert. All members active in the affected area then complete a survey to assess the need for rapid funding . The allocation committee then meets within 24 hours of an alert being raised to assess the survey responses and make a decision on whether and how much to allocate. If the fund is activated, agencies submit applications and funding is awarded within a further 48 hours. The aim is for funding to reach affected communities within four days of an alert being raised. Between 1 April and 31 December 2014, the Start Fund was alerted 20 times, with funds totalling GBP£2.1 million (US$3.5 million) allocated to 30 projects across 13 emergencies.[6]

One of these was in January 2015, when the Start Fund was activated to respond to flooding in Sri Lanka. Three NGO Start members were awarded a combined total of £266,590 in funding: CAFOD, Care and World Vision. Each of these international NGOs worked with their country offices and local partners in Sri Lanka to assist in the delivery of assistance provided through Start funding. Using detailed IATI-compliant data reported by the Start Fund itself, its NGO members and their local delivery partners (in some cases reported by a Start-member NGO on their behalf), it is possible to trace the money through the system, from when it left the donor right through to the activities delivered on the ground. The data shows how much assistance was delivered and in what form, the activities or resources that were provided with it, who benefitted, where and when.

Traceability would be a powerful tool in enabling complete complementarity in the use and distribution of assistance, while also increasing accountability to those people affected by crises as well as to those providing assistance.

FIGURE 9.1

Start funding for flooding in Sri Lanka, January 2015



Source: Development Initiatives based on IATI-standard data and data provided by Start Fund, World Vision UK, World Vision Sri Lanka, CAFOD, SEDEC (Caritas Sri Lanka), CARE UK, CARE Sri Lanka, Sevalanka Foundation.
Note: All funding is expressed in GBP£. CARE Sri Lanka underspent by £1,725, which was returned to CARE UK and assigned to management costs (staffing and support). NFIs: non-food items.

Timeliness

A crisis can evolve rapidly, as can the funding picture, particularly in the immediate aftermath of a rapid-onset crisis. Yet, even for rapidly disbursed humanitarian assistance, there is often a time-lag before it is reported – for development assistance in humanitarian settings, such as the Ebola response, this can be longer.

Up-to-date information on the resources available in a rapidly changing crisis situation is critical to identify gaps, improve coordination and ensure the response meets the needs on the ground at any given time. Timely publishing to the IATI standard (see page 129) and/or to UN OCHA FTS could support this.

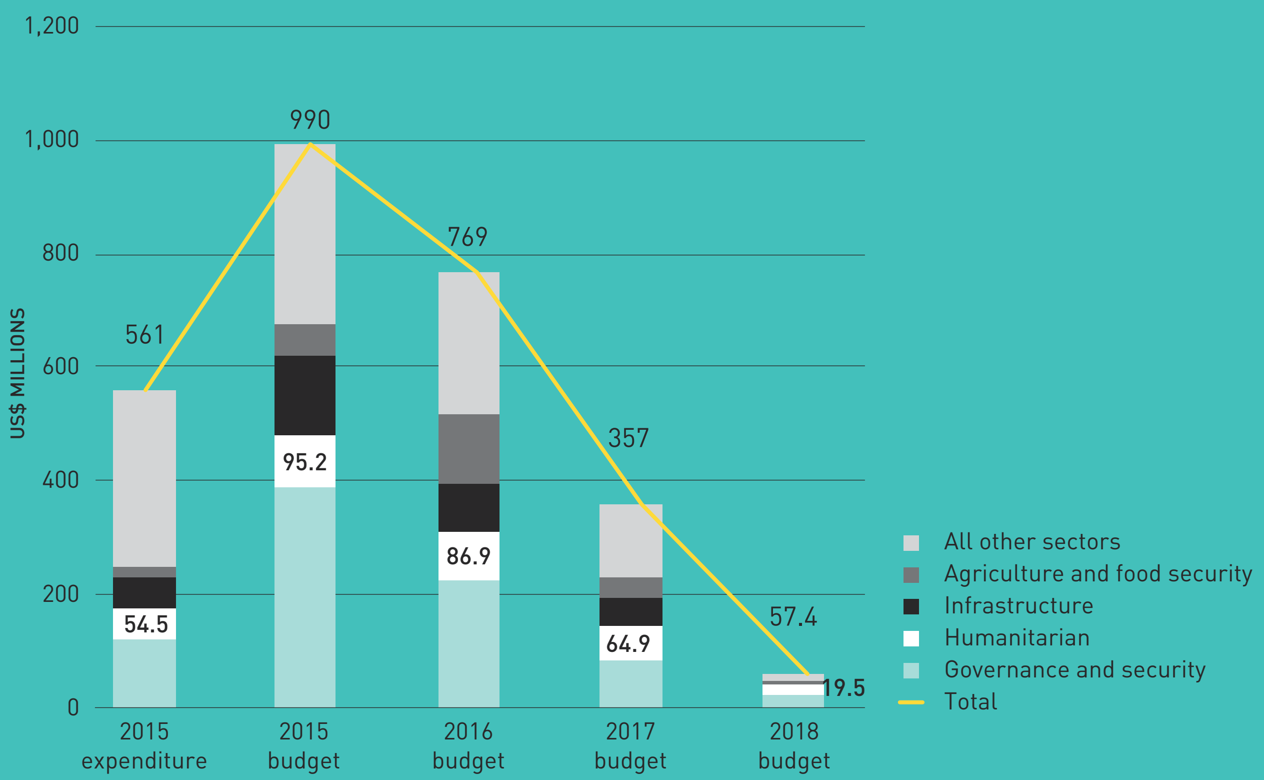
In situations of chronic and long-term humanitarian crisis, where the agencies responding know that they are likely to remain active there for a number of years, a reliable picture of the funding available over that period can enable longer-term programme planning. As Chapter 7 shows, although many donors do provide multi-year funding, this is not currently captured in humanitarian tracking systems. Publishing planned expenditures relating to multi-year funding would help to plan, manage and coordinate appropriate programming.

The IATI standard allows donors to report forward-looking data on expenditure by publishing their aid budgets in an open, accessible and comparable format. Using forward-looking IATI data, it is already possible to begin to build a picture of planned expenditure by donors in a given context over a period of years, rather than months.

Figure 9.2 shows a partial picture of future development and humanitarian funding to Afghanistan, as only a limited number of donors are currently reporting their projected expenditure to the IATI standard. If all aid budgets were reported this way, donors' and implementing agencies' financial preparedness and longer-term planning would be better informed.

FIGURE 9.2

Budgeted aid expenditure in Afghanistan, 2015–2018



Source: Development Initiatives based on IATI data, accessed through d-portal.org.
Notes: Excludes negative value of US$1.6 million from DFID for infrastructure in 2018.

The International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)

In response to the need for a single transparent reporting standard, IATI was launched in 2008. There are now 340 governments and agencies actively publishing to the standard. It offers a solution to many of the issues of totality, traceability and timeliness highlighted in this report, making information about aid spending easier to access, use and understand. On the totality question in particular, IATI has the potential to incorporate many other international funding flows – including funding from development finance institutions, private trusts and foundations and corporate institutions – and thus provide a better picture of the total resources available in a crisis situation (see page 124).

IATI is a voluntary, multi-stakeholder initiative that seeks to improve the transparency of international development and humanitarian financing in order to increase its effectiveness. It is a data standard, so it provides a format and framework for publishing data on development and humanitarian activities. IATI is intended to be used by a range of organisations engaged in the funding and delivery of those activities, from government donors and multilateral agencies to private sector organisations and national and international NGOs.

Publish once; use often

The IATI mantra is 'publish once; use often.' A fundamental strength is that it provides a way for development and humanitarian actors to carry out multi-purpose reporting. Publishing once in the IATI format enables publishers to generate data that can be used both internally and externally, for example in financial reporting, activity monitoring and donor reporting.

However, there is also potential for IATI data to be used to feed data directly into other humanitarian information management systems, such as the UN OCHA FTS and domestic aid management systems, so organisations do not need to fulfil multiple different reporting requirements. This is already in progress – all FTS data is currently published to the IATI standard, and progress is underway to feed the FTS with IATI data. IATI data can also be used to carry out internal monitoring and reporting.

Almost all major government donors have signed up to IATI, and some have made it compulsory for their grant recipients to report to IATI. However, donors also need to start using the IATI data provided by organisations as part of their reporting requirements, in order to demonstrate its worth.

Publishing once in the IATI format enables publishers to generate data that can be used both internally and externally, for example in financial reporting, activity monitoring and donor reporting.

To stimulate this process, IATI is currently looking at a number of different donors' grant reporting forms and requirements to identify what information could be provided by IATI data. Donors tend to request similar information from their grant recipients but in slightly different formats. If they were willing and able to use IATI data in place of current reporting requirements, this would reduce the multiple-reporting burden currently placed on organisations receiving funding from more than one government donor. The umbrella organisation, British Overseas NGOs for Development (BOND), is working with donors on the standardisation of reporting requirements and terminology, including looking at which areas could be fulfilled by IATI data.

What information is published to IATI?

The IATI standard is split into two parts.

THE ORGANISATION STANDARD

Describes the organisations involved in providing international development and humanitarian assistance. It holds information on:

- the organisation's name and identification
- forward-looking budgets
- strategic documents such as country plans, annual reports
- country or regional budgets.

THE ACTIVITY STANDARD

The space where organisations can publish comprehensive details on their projects and activities. This includes:

- basic activity information (project title, description and dates)
- outgoing and incoming funds
- sub-national geographic coding on the project's location
- sectors and classifications
- forward-looking budgets (where relevant)
- conditions attached to activities, and results – outputs and outcomes.

The humanitarian extension

As it was originally designed to meet the needs of development financing, the IATI standard has until now not been fully compatible with the information requirements of humanitarian assistance. For example, available fields were not able to capture some of the specific sectoral detail, and the frequency of updating data was not sufficient for use in a rapidly evolving crisis situation.

Following consultation with a group of stakeholders and experts, an 'extension' is now being added to the IATI standard to address these issues. The flexible, open structure of the standard allows for additional data to be added, without those fields having been formally approved as part of the standard proper (a process that involves lengthy consultation). The FTS has already constructed such an extension to communicate humanitarian-specific categories of data not currently covered by the IATI standard, such as those concerning emergencies, appeals and clusters, which will be available for use by all reporters this year.

The IATI technical team, together with UN OCHA and other humanitarian agencies, is planning to build on the FTS's work to ensure that IATI can deliver timely and comprehensive data for real-time use during emergencies. For example, current best practice for reporting on development activities is for data to be refreshed monthly, a month in arrears, but humanitarian operations may require daily updates. By adding a humanitarian marker, the extension will allow donor and implementing agencies to flag up those activities that need fast-tracking through their publishing cycle.

If all actors involved in the funding and delivery of humanitarian assistance report comprehensive data to the standard once the humanitarian marker is in place, IATI data could provide enough information to fully meet the '3Ts' for transparent information flows on humanitarian assistance.