Partos & IATI Results

Report back on the IATI Results Learning Workshop on April 11, 2017.

May 15, 2017

Context

In February, Partos and Data4Development started a project on working with results in IATI, with three components:

- a consultation of several Partos members[1], to gather experiences in working with results in IATI, and a possible joint position with respect to its further development;
- input in the global IATI Technical Advisory Group meeting[2], in the form of a presentation about "Dutch experiences" and participation in the Standard Day discussions;
- a learning and sharing workshop for Partos members, aimed at organisations with experience in publishing results in IATI, mostly as part of the Strategic Partnerships on Dialogue and Dissent, funded by the Dutch Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

As part of the process, we also joined a consultation organised by WaterAid and Bond in London[3], to exchange views with organisations present there.

The consultations and the observations from the workshop are relevant for the developments within the IATI community worldwide around results. This is the first large-scale adoption of using IATI to exchange information on progress on results, and can offer important input for the further development of the Standard and its guidelines.

Summary

A bit over 50 participants from just over 40 organisations joined the workshop. For a large part, these organisations are publishing IATI data, and already or nearly including results and indicators. Some organisations came to learn more about IATI.

The discussions covered many aspects, and concentrated on a few areas:

- Choice of indicators: using internal indicators, alliance indicators, donor indicators; making indicators mandatory versus ownership.
- Combining different indicators over different periods; dealing with qualitative data, outcome harvesting, most significant change methods.
- Standardisation already happens in certain sectors or thematic areas, across the whole delivery chain: that makes it easier to also introduce those standard indicators for the purpose of publishing IATI data.
- More standardisation on output indicators, more room for context-specific (organisation, country, thematic area) outcome indicators?
- Limitations of information systems and work processes in organisations: it is not possible to add indicators, not possible to separate one set of indicators from others.

1 The consultation took place at the Partos office on February 15, 2017, with 15 participants.
2 The TAG took place in Dar Es Salaam on March 6-9, 2017.
3 The UK consultation took place at the WaterAid office on February 22, 2017.

Learning workshop

The agenda of the learning workshop aimed to look at the experiences of organisations, from a few different angles.

- How do you select the right result indicators?
- How do you coordinate working with the same indicators in a partnership?
- How can you use your own results with other data sources?
- How can you aggregate or combine different result indicators?
- How do the combined results help report outcomes and impacts on a national level?

The workshop started with brief presentations on each topic, then provided a “showroom” with more examples how these questions were addressed, and did a round of “world café” discussions to exchange experiences on these topics, centred around three questions:

- What works?
- What should change?
- What are risks or blockages?

We will summarise main points brought forward in the presentations and the report back from the discussions.

Presentations

How do you select the right result indicators?

Leo Stolk from Oxfam Novib sketched their goal in using of the result element: to show intended outcomes, and to be accountable on progress against planning. The choice of which outcomes to focus on relates to the party to which you are accountable:

Outcomes taken from:	To account to:
SDG's	UN stakeholders
Corporate plan	Your public stakeholders
Confederation plan	Your peers
Donors corporate plan	Your donor's stakeholders
Project plan	Your projects stakeholders
Partners plan	Partners stakeholders
Host government development plan	Host government stakeholders

Humanitarian response plan	Humanitarian response stakeholders

Oxfam Novib has chosen to focus on the the outcomes that are the “closest”, their corporate plan. Main recommendations: structure the results well for aggregation and analysis, link them with other data, and above all: focus and avoid “result chaos” with too many indicators.

How do you coordinate working with the same indicators in a partnership?

Karin van den Belt from Terre des Hommes showed the efforts made in the Girls Advocacy Alliance (GAA) to jointly publish the results of their work as an alliance.

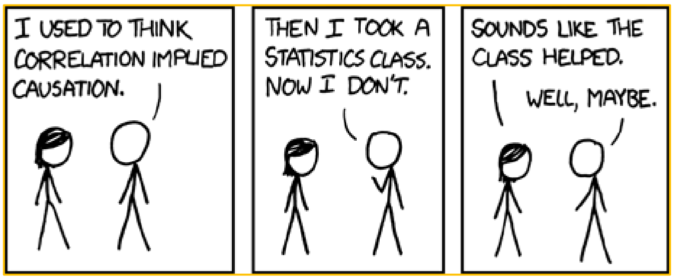
The GAA consists of three organisations, and is composed of 10 country programmes, 2 regional programmes, 1 Dutch programme and 1 international programme. This has led to a single “mother Theory of Change” (ToC), and 14 “sub ToCs”. The M&E for each sub-ToC is done with outcome harvesting. This leads to one outcome report for each sub-ToC as well as an overall joint outcome report. The finance and output results are then published by each alliance member.

Terre des Hommes faced a challenge in producing the results data: the GAA funding is flowing into several of its own programmes to combine lobby and advocacy with service delivery work. It is not possible to report separately on joint GAA outcomes in the system.

In contrast, the other alliance members, Plan Netherlands and DCI-Ecpat, run their GAA as a separate programme, and are able to provide separate reports for their GAA work.

The GAA plans to solve this by letting Plan publish the joint overall outcome report linked to the “mother ToC”, and letting Terre des Hommes and DCI-Ecpat link to that as “related-document”.

XKCD, https://xkcd.com/552/



How can you use your own results with other data sources?

Eva Roos presented work of the Aidsfonds together with Zimmerman & Zimmerman, to create the Zoom platform that combines IATI data with other data sources, such as on HIV/Aids prevalence.

This can provide more granular views on where the organisation works in relation to indicators about the work context, and help explore how increases or decreases in funding may have an effect on the outcomes and impacts of projects. It is a step towards making the data more accessible and usable, although it is important to be cautious too, for instance to not confuse correlation with causation.

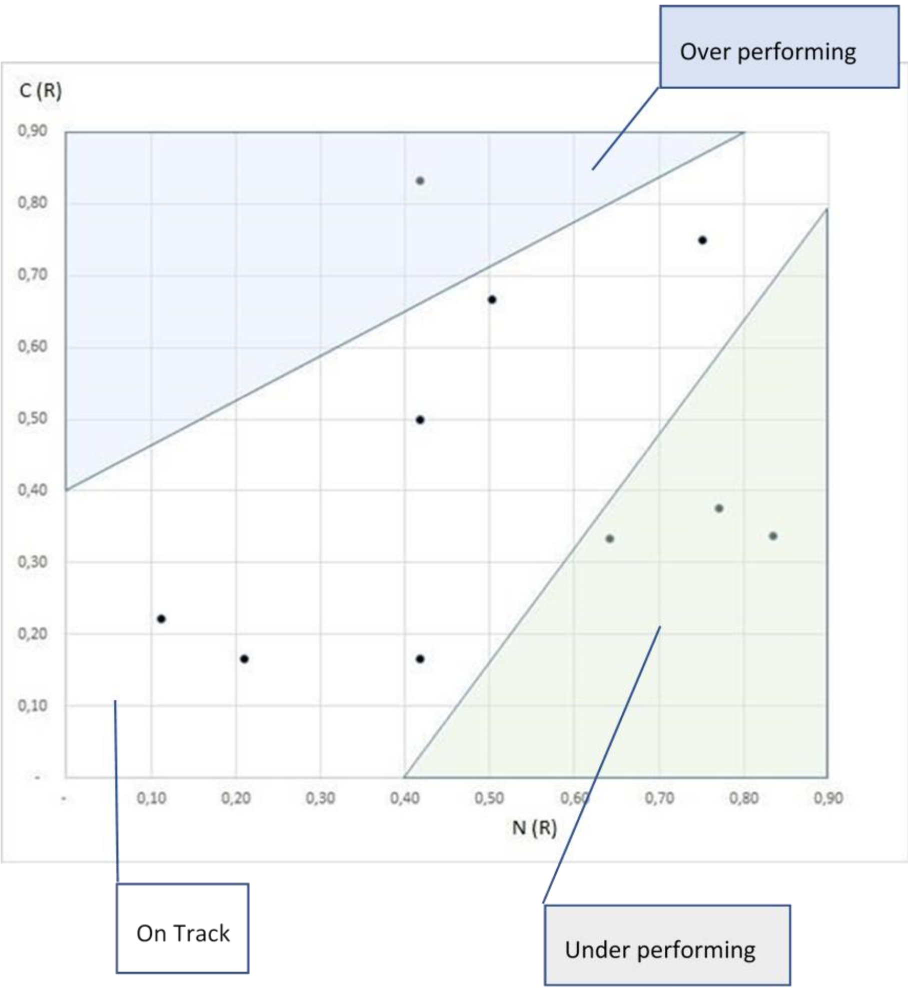
How can you aggregate or combine different result indicators?

René Schoenmakers of PAX presented an approach to the question “how to solve the problem: aggregation of indicator values, irrespective their unit of measurement”.

Indicators differ not only in their measurement (units, percentages, scales), but also in their perspective and the underlying approach or ToC. An extra complication is that the periods over which project and programmes are executed can differ.

With a generic look at each indicator, it is possible to determine its relative progress, combining the baseline, target, and actual value, and the point in time with the start and the end of the period.

This then enables to plot different activities with the same indicator in one chart, to show relative progress:



René has written a brief paper explaining the idea in more detail (see links below). As with the previous Zoom example of Aidsfonds, it makes the available data more accessible for exploration.

How does result information help us to report and manage for results on a national level?

Ellen Tijkotte of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs gave insight into the discussions at the Ministry around standardisation of indicators. Within the Ministry, BIS as the staff office is responsible for the results-based management and results report (https://www.dutchdevelopmentresults.nl) as well as the annual report to Parliament, the multi-annual strategic plans and IATI. The thematic departments focus on different areas: DDE (PSD), IGG (Climate, Water, Food and Nutrition Security), DSO (SRHR, CS), DSH (Humanitarian Aid, Migration, Security and Rule of Law), TFGW (Women's Rigths and Gender Equality).

The Ministry needs results information for several reaons:

- Internal ambitions: to show what we do together, to agree on what we want to achieve.
- Accountability to parliament: setting targets, and showing progress and results.

- Thematic management: to learn from what works and what doesn't.
- Results-based management of programmes by the Ministry.

To get an impression of results achieved and lessons learned, information is collected on indicators (partially standardized), context, assumptions, stakeholders, unplanned/unforeseen effects, etc. Both quantitative and qualitative. (IATI) data provides part of the facts and evidence, which is analysed and summarised to make it meaningful.

Feedback from the world café sessions

Standardizing indicators

- There are different interpretations on what to standardise on: your own corporate/organisational focus, programmes), and whether the standardisation is for all activities within one organisation, or within a inter-organisational programme of activities.
- It is important not to impose indicators: organisations have partners, who have many other donors as well to take into account. Every funding comes with its own requirements, and also standardises and imposes indicators, which is not always beneficial.
- Bottlenecks: how do you come to a meaningful standardized indicator? Number of people trained, or number of products? Does it say anything about the progress you're making?
- It should capture qualitative info, that is a challenge. It is hard to include other measures and ways of data collection, such as outcome harvesting. Different types of ToCs, pathways.
- When there is room to still define results and indicators, find a common scale above the lower indicators in relation to the ToC, and let people define the lower indicators tailored to their specific contexts.

Working with results and indicators

- Start from concrete, existing information needs. Work with a limited core set of indicators, with freedom at lower levels to interpret these indicators, but keep the number of indicators limited.
- Make it possible in IATI to tag or otherwise link indicators, to be able to roll them up to a higher level (with appropriate aggregation where possible).
- Only aggregate output results if explicitly required, keep the context of separate projects. Start discussing in partnerships how to relate outputs to outcome indicators.
- IATI is not telling the whole story, only part of the story. The results and indicators data needs to be put in context.
- There currently is no guidance on how to capture unintended results.
- Organisations start to use d-portal.org for visualisations in reports or on websites. IATI Studio can offer visualisations too.

Working together

- There are four different models which partnerships currently use:
- Lead organisation publishes outcome level; partners publish outputs.
- Each partner publishes outcomes, using a standardised framework, and the lead organisation aggregates outcomes.
- Lead organisation publishes all the results (rarely used).
- Lead organisation publishes over-arching results; each outcome can have its own “outcome lead” publishing joint results, the others don’t publish values for these indicators.
- There is no “best” or “perfect” model. IATI can support all these models. However, there are no ways to indicate the boundary of a partnership, or to better mark activities as joint activities. This can lead to overlaps and duplications.
- The challenge is to divide responsibilities clearly, and to get all parties to start using and publishing IATI. This needs to include discussions with implementing partners before publishing, because information can be delicate.
- It would help if there is an online tool to share data with partner organisations. It would be helpful if the data can be used in different ways, for instance for cross-cutting views on progress.
- Combining and visualising the data of all activities within a partnership is currently hard.

IATI in organisations

- Many organisations now publishing IATI data still struggle to use that data themselves. There has to be more awareness of opportunities, for instance in results-based management, or with data at a country-level.
- One quote: “I’ve never seen anything beautiful with IATI”.
- Success: IATI helps when combining different types of information, and provides a common terminology and a catalyst for the process of improving internal information management.
- There is an IATI Business Case toolkit, with a long list of benefits, to help organisations understand the strategic opportunities.
- Monitoring & Evaluation in organisations is not so much about progress reporting, and more about learning. But the data currently *is* used mainly for progress reporting. This requires a mind-shift.
- IATI has a steep learning curve, and there are not really any (online) training or course materials to support it.

Tensions

- Standardised indicators versus context- or country-specific indicators.
- Donor needs versus local ownership of data.
- IATI data and publishing process quality management versus staff members ownership.
- Organisational capacity and capability to work with (IATI) data versus information needs (especially with implementing partners).
- Free tools versus investments to build those tools.

Results and IATI

The consensus in the earlier Partos consultation in February was that the current version of the Standard mostly offers sufficient capabilities to start publishing results and explore practical implications and opportunities to work with the data. The challenges in working with the data are at a practical and conceptual level.

Working with results is also gaining momentum in the international IATI community.

- Other donors are looking at introducing requirements for results in IATI as part of progress reporting.
- IATI has become a part of the Grand Bargain in humanitarian aid, introducing use cases for the Standard in relation to progress reporting and strategic plans.
- Bond in the UK has facilitated a process to look at the possibilities to use results in IATI for learning.

At the meeting of the Technical Advisory Group in March, several presentations and discussions were held around working with results. Apart from some minor fixes, there was little consensus on the best way forward, and it was decided to set up a working group to explore in more detail how results could be accommodated best.

How to participate in the IATI discussion?

The IATI Results discussions have an online discussion space at the IATI community forum, https://discuss.iatistandard.org/c/community-zone/results.

The consultation process for the next version of IATI has just started. The timeline is published at http://iatistandard.org/202/upgrades/decimal-upgrade-to-2-03/ and it's possible for anyone to join the discussions online.

May 12 - 26	Submission of proposals and ideas.
May 27 – June 9	Technical team reviews these and makes recommendations which ones should be included in the upgrade.
June 10 – July 7	Consultation with the community to refine and provide more details
July 8 - 28	Technical team elaborates the proposals, minor refinements still possible.
July 29 – September 15	Technical team develops technical change proposals.
September 16 – October 2	Technical team will ensure their tools are compatible with the new version.
October 3	The new version will be released.

How to continue the learning dialogues?

Assignment for each participant: send at least one idea how to continue the discussion.

Links

- Link to the dashboard of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs linking IATI datasets of the Ministry to those of our parnters:
- d-portal to explore country-specific and publisher-specific data, and to search across all IATI activities: http://d-portal.org
- IATI Studio analysis and visualisations: http://iatistudio.com
- Finding out about possible organisation identifiers: http://org-id.guide
- Combining spreadsheets with different parts of information into a single IATI file: http://data4development.nl/2017/05/12/lancering-spreadsheet2iati-convertor
- IATI Business Case Framework: http://akvo.org/blog/mapping-iati-a-business-case-framework/
- Link to slides of the presentations
- Link to think piece by René Schoenmakers (Pax) about aggregation of results in IATI

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