

Aid Transparency External Review Group

Meeting 30 October 2012

Transparency Charter - current status

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Welcome.

In about six weeks, I will celebrate my first year at AusAID. From my perspective, it will be a celebration of the work my team and I have performed in implementing the Transparency Charter.

If you have been following the progressive roll-out of the country, regional and thematic program web pages on AusAID's website, you may have noticed that a concerted effort is being made across the agency to fulfil its transparency commitments.

The details of major initiatives being delivered across 20 country and seven thematic programs have published, which equates to over 1000 related documents that explain how aid is delivered, managed, funded and its effectiveness.

By the end of 2012 AusAID will finalise publication of 35 country, 15 regional and 31 thematic transparency pages as well as summaries in 33 languages for 17 countries.

This is all great work - a project that we are proud to be working on.

Our work with the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) is also ongoing.

AusAID's Statistics section is responsible for collating and submitting the data to the IATI Registry.

To date, financial data for 13 country programs, and all corporate documents published on our website as of end of June 2011 are available through the registry.

Karen MacLennan, will go into more detail on the IATI work after our next presenter - Juliet Clews.

Juliet is going to run through the progress of implementing the Charter and the challenges that have been faced along the way.

One of the challenges that stems from the transparency team casting its net across the agency, is how we manage the collection, storage and delivery of information developed through provision of its aid program.

The foundation of transparency is underpinned by the availability and access to information and data. For AusAID, that means having functional, multi-purpose information management systems.

As the agency scales up its operations in order to manage an increased aid program, it has become evident that there is an increasing need for more efficient ways to manage our information.

To enhance the ability of the agency to manage the data the agency holds, officers at the senior executive level have requested the development of an ‘information portal’.

Coincidentally, because our work is reaching into almost every corner of the agency, we had become aware of various information management projects being implemented or planned.

Many were directly relevant to transparency.

The Integrated Aid Information Project Board (IAIPB) was established in May, and tasked with determining business needs for qualitative and quantitative data within AusAID.

At this point I could be accused of being new to the agency and wanting to make my mark.

But when I put two and two together and saw that embedding transparency as a business as usual function would be easier with a unified approach to information management, it seemed sensible to volunteer my team to take on the work supporting the IAIPB.

Little did I know that my team were about to uncover 54 separate IT projects spread across the agency dealing with some aspect of information management.

To cut a long story short – we are currently organising these projects into similar groupings for the development of specific ICT solutions. I expect the Working Group, through the IAIPB will recommend a number of solutions by the end of 2012.

These solutions will provide the foundation for the next range of products for AusAID to build on its commitment to transparency.

Geocoding of the aid program is an immediate priority but we can see the potential for even greater user experience using the same information and data.

We’ve taken a deep breath, and with a long-term strategic view of the impact that an effective information management system can achieve, we can see that smartphone apps, interactive web pages or more advanced information search functions could all become possible.

These tools support the agency’s transparency agenda and can create an engaging experience for those who are interested in the work that we do.

For AusAID, transparency will be a standard way of working in the future. Along the way, the agency is improving just about every aspect of how it goes about its work.

This also means assessing the risk associated with managing an increased aid budget, and its success, which is dependent on AusAID’s partner systems.

To this end, the agency embarked on developing a Due Diligence Framework. I have been a member of the working group established to scope and develop a framework that assesses the agency’s risks associated to fraud, risk, governance, financial management and social safeguards.

The Due Diligence Framework will assist in articulating AusAID’s expectations of partners and will be an integral part of the AusAID’s risk management framework. Once developed, the Due Diligence

Framework will apply to all partner delivery mechanisms including contractors, NGOs, multilateral organisations, bilateral donors and partner governments.

It will take into account our assessment of our partners systems with relation to key areas including, fiduciary risk, fraud control, child protection, anticorruption, counter terrorism, and transparency.

To inculcate transparency into AusAID's supply chain, new clauses have been added to contracts and agreements that specify our requirements in relation to the Aid Transparency Charter.

Just as significant as these improvements, is the cultural change that is required within AusAID.

We are transitioning from a traditional government culture where information was restricted to those who 'needed to know' – to that of an agency that puts the 'right to know' at the forefront.

Cultural change is occurring. We have made a concerted effort to embed transparency into the mindset of AusAID staff.

We've run an ongoing program of stakeholder engagement, comprising information sessions, briefings at all levels across the agency, and regularly use our internal communication channels to ensure transparency remains as much of the aid management cycle as the planning, implementation and evaluation processes.

We also developed and delivered a training module to this year's intake of 40 graduates and are in the process of developing this module further so that it can be rolled-out to all new AusAID staff.

Our external stakeholders have received correspondence and significant milestones are publicised through AusAID's Engage blog or through the website's hot items news feature.

With the results that my team, and more broadly – the agency – is achieving in implementing the Transparency Charter – I feel confident that by the time *publish what you fund* collects its data for the 2013 Transparency Index, AusAID's ranking will be much closer to the top of the scale.

Thank you.

If you wouldn't mind saving any questions until the panel discussion, we'll move onto our next presenter, Juliet Clews, the website implementation project manager.