

ISTANBUL PRINCIPLES FOR CSO DEVELOPMENT EFFECTIVENESS

5 PRACTICE TRANSPARENCY AND ACCOUNTABILITY

Civil Society Organizations are effective as development actors when they demonstrate a sustained organizational commitment to transparency, multiple accountability, and integrity in their internal operations.



engineers without borders
ingénieurs sans frontières
Canada



Photo: Garrett Schmidt/Engineers Without Borders

International Aid Transparency Initiative: Engineers Without Borders Canada

Engineers Without Borders Canada invests in people and the systemic innovations that they create to accelerate rural African development.

CHALLENGE

Engineers Without Borders Canada (EWB Canada) believes that how aid dollars are spent is just as important as how much funding is given. However, information about how aid is spent is often difficult to access and understand — particularly by the people meant to benefit from aid work.

This is a significant issue because without easily accessible information on aid spending, it is difficult to hold donor and developing country governments accountable to each other, and to their citizens. It is also challenging to show connections between the provision of foreign aid and the achievement of development outcomes; this can create barriers for developing country governments seeking to plan long-term development initiatives and leave donor country citizens wondering how their tax dollars are being spent overseas.

As a result, EWB Canada believes that strengthening aid transparency is a critical step towards increased aid effectiveness: being able to track how aid is being used and what it is achieving better enables everyone involved, from developing country governments to donor country citizens, to work together to help accelerate global development.



RESPONSE

EWB Canada sees the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI) as a cornerstone of transparent and accountable foreign aid. Established in 2008 to help implement the Accra Agenda for Action, IATI is an open, international publishing standard. It was created to make information about foreign aid funding easier to find and use, and to facilitate comparisons.

Starting in 2010, EWB Canada ran a nation-wide campaign to inform and engage Canadians about the importance of transparent aid. This culminated in over 25,000 Canadians from coast to coast calling on the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA) to join IATI, which CIDA did on November 28, 2011.

In 2011, since we also believe it's vital to walk the walk, EWB Canada became the second non-governmental organization (NGO) in the world to publish data in compliance with the IATI Standard.



LESSONS LEARNED & BEST PRACTICES

Signing on to IATI is actually the easy part; the real challenge lies in implementation.

EWB Canada learned this first-hand. Institutionalizing aid transparency hasn't been easy for us.

Putting systems in place to collect, manage, and publish IATI data involves complex technical and organizational changes; we initially faced pessimism about the value of IATI and the complications it would present to field staff. Establishing these systems also requires a significant amount of time and resources to do properly and sustainably, and there is limited support available for organizations going through this process. As a result, we all-too-often found ourselves figuring it out as we went and diverting already limited resources to keep moving forward.

According to aid transparency organizations and other NGOs, these challenges are not unique to our experience. But we believe it's worth the effort, because we believe in the value of truly transparent aid.

Ultimately, we successfully completed our pilot, and we are currently in the process of scaling IATI compliance into all of our African programs.

CIDA is also fast approaching the start of its own IATI implementation processes, and EWB Canada is committed to using our knowledge and experience to continue to support CIDA in this endeavour.



MAINSTREAMING/KNOWLEDGE SHARING



In October 2012, EWB Canada released *Beyond Busan: A Report on Canada's Progress Toward More Transparent Foreign Aid (2nd Edition)*. This report aims to follow-up on our IATI campaign by offering detailed recommendations for organizations to consider as they prepare to follow through on aid transparency commitments. Drawing on best practices and lessons learned from aid transparency organizations and NGOs that are becoming IATI compliant, *Beyond Busan* provides CIDA with an ambitious roadmap towards a far-reaching contribution to aid transparency. The full report and accompanying Technical Addendum is available at <http://ewb.ca/BeyondBusanOct2012>

NEXT STEPS

EWB Canada is working hard to permanently embed reporting to the IATI Standard into all of our African programs. We will keep publishing this data to the IATI Registry and continue improving our internal processes to increase the consistency and comprehensiveness of our publications.

At a national level, CIDA is set to release its IATI implementation schedule in December 2012, which will outline how and when its data will be published to the IATI Standard. EWB Canada will continue to hold Canada and CIDA accountable to their aid transparency commitments and strive to ensure these commitments lead to better development practice and, ultimately, more effective aid.



FURTHER INFORMATION

EWB Canada (October 2012), *Beyond Busan: A Report on Canada's Progress Toward More Transparent Foreign Aid (2nd Edition)*
<http://ewb.ca/BeyondBusanOct2012>

The International Aid Transparency Initiative
<http://www.aidtransparency.net/>

The IATI Registry, which contains all data published in the IATI Standard format
<http://www.iatiregistry.org/>

Go here for more examples of how Canadian civil society is improving its development practice: <http://www.ccic.ca/IP-case-studies.php>