

Not Available! Not Accessible!
Aid Transparency Monitoring Report

October 2009

About this Report

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About Access Info

Access Info Europe is an international human rights organisation, based in Madrid, which works to promote a strong and functioning right of access to information in Europe and globally.

Access Info's goal is for the right of access to information to serve as a tool for defending civil liberties and human rights, for facilitating public participation in decision-making, and for holding governments accountable.



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Executive Summary

Monitoring Aid Transparency: Not Available! Not Accessible!

Every year the world's richest countries spend millions of taxpayer's money to help people in the world's poorest countries get out of poverty. This international aid money is spent on food, on schools and hospitals, on reforming systems of government. The goal is to fight poverty and promote sustainable development. There is much debate over how effectively this money is spent. Without full transparency, it is impossible for members of the public to judge. Without donor transparency corruption will continue to plague the spending of aid funds. Without information it's impossible for people living in developing countries to have a say in how their and their children's futures are being decided.

Access Info Europe, a human rights group specialising in the right of access to information, went in search of information about how aid funds are distributed. We started in the most obvious place to start looking: the websites of the aid agencies of some of the world's largest donor countries: Canada, France, Norway, Spain, and the UK. We tried to trace their spending in five recipient countries: Afghanistan, Kosovo, Mozambique, Peru and Sierra Leone. This monitoring report summarises what was found, the difficulties encountered trying to understand how aid funding works in practice, and presents recommendations on how to increase transparency of international aid flows.

Access to information is a prerequisite for stakeholder empowerment which in turn is essential for sustainable development. It is therefore high time that the aid sector come under the focus of the access to information movement. There is also an urgent need to develop sector-specific transparency norms in the same way as has been done for other key sectors of government activity, such as activity which impacts on the environment. Transparency of aid is one of the commitments made under various inter-governmental declarations, most recently the Accra Agenda for Action adopted in September 2008, in which donor governments pledged:

"We will make aid more transparent."¹

The information which donors gathered in Accra committed to make available to the public includes "regular, detailed and timely information on volume, allocation and, when available, results of development expenditure to enable more accurate budget, accounting and audit by developing countries."²

In this study, Access Info researched current levels of access to information about aid in five major donor countries in order to have a benchmark against which progress on improving aid transparency could be measured.

Access Info has been engaged since 2007 in promoting application of the right to know to aid information. In the run up to Accra, Access Info was part of a team which defined and promoted principles on aid transparency, the "Aid Transparency Principles" (see Annex C of this report³). The monitoring process was designed to test current levels of

¹ See the Accra Agenda for Action, point 24(a) to be found at:
<http://www.oecd.org/dataoecd/58/16/41202012.pdf>

² See the Accra Agenda for Action, point 24(a).

³ These principles were developed in cooperation with aid and integrity-reform organisations and were initially published as the Publish What You Fund Principles; a broader consultation on the principles is planned after which they will be opened for signature by civil society and individuals who wish to support the call for greater aid transparency.

transparency against both the Accra Agenda for Action commitments and the levels of openness, accessibility, comparability and being called for by the Aid Transparency Principles.

The findings of this report will be presented to the donors participating in the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), a multi-stakeholder initiative set up in 2008 to increase the availability and accessibility of information about aid.⁴ The IATI currently has 17 donor signatories and has been endorsed by 11 developing countries.

In defining the information which would be the subject of this pilot monitoring, however, Access Info took a decision to **set the transparency bar low**: we searched for macro-level classes of information such as the “strategy” or “financial report” or “contracts”. Even in the more detailed searching for information about aid funds channelled to specific recipient countries, the project researchers looked for the publication of at least some basic information and, in case of doubt, the benefit of the doubt was given to the aid agency.

The monitoring was conducted by reviewing the websites of five national aid agencies: the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA), the French Development Agency (*Agence Française de Développement*, AFD), the Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad), the Spanish Agency for Cooperation and International Development (*Agencia Española de Cooperación Internacional para el Desarrollo*, AECID) and the UK’s Department for International Development (DFID).⁵ Not all of these bodies handle the same percentage of the respective country’s aid. They are nevertheless often the public face of each country’s aid efforts, and were therefore chosen as representative subjects for this first benchmarking of the transparency of donor aid.

The countries chosen are some of the world’s major donor nations yet all except Norway fall short of meeting the millennium development goal target of donating at least 0.7% of their GDP to Overseas Development Aid (ODA). Nevertheless, these countries’ aid budgets represent a significant contribution by the taxpayers to achieving development in recipient countries.

Table 1. Ranking of the donor countries included in the survey on size of aid

Country	World ranking for net ODA (US million \$)	World ranking for GNI %ODA (% GNI as ODA)
Canada	9 th (4,080)	16 th (0,26)
France	3 rd (9,884)	10 th (0,38)
Norway	11 th (3,728)	1 st (0,95)
Spain	7 th (5,140)	12 th (0,37)
UK	4 th (9,849)	14 th (0,36)

Figures are for 2007⁶

⁴ See IATI website for more details: www.aidtransparency.net

⁵ The respective websites are: CIDA at www.cida.ca; AFD at www.afd.fr; Norad www.norad.no; AECID www.aecid.es; DFID at www.dfid.gov.uk

⁶ Figures taken from Table 01e of the OECD Statistical Annex of the 2009 Development Co-operation Report, available at: www.oecd.org/dac/stats/dac/dcrannex.

In addition to the **availability** of information about aid, the research also assessed issues of **accessibility** (how easy it was to find the information on their websites as well as clarity of its presentation) and timeliness (for example, up to date financial information up to date or list of recently awarded contracts).

Researchers also made an approximate assessment of the quality of the information: where information was presented very briefly (for example, only in a press release) or in more depth (such as in a detailed report). This assessment did not amount to an evaluation of accuracy as this would have required significant amounts of independently gathered information and additional research. In a couple of cases, however, monitors noted where figures seemed to differ significantly (such as in the case of Norway where a press release and a report give different numbers for annual aid spending). Similarly, there was no attempt to measure the comparability of information but the report does note where the very different formats used by aid agencies for presenting information would make it hard for the average, non specialist user to make meaningful comparisons between countries.

Key Findings and Overall Recommendations

Key Finding One: Not Available, Not Accessible!

The monitoring study found a very low level of availability and accessibility of information. Much information was either missing or presented with a minimum of detail. Areas where information was particularly sparse included information on budgets, contracts, consultations and anti-corruption mechanisms.

Accessibility was also an issue: websites were poorly structured and hard to navigate, often being organised according to the logic of the internal functioning of the agency rather than the needs of the user. This meant that even when information had been published and was on the websites, it was hard to find and therefore failed on the accessibility indicators.

Access Info identified consistent trends in the publication and accessibility of information. The UK's DFID generally provided more and better quality information, which was easier to find on its website. The opposite was true for Norway's Norad.

In the case of all the aid agencies monitored, however, there was an alarming lack of transparency in some areas.

The final scores achieved by each aid agency based on 22 indicators for openness used in this study which could give a possible total score of 132 were as follows:

Table 2. Findings for Overall Transparency of Aid Agencies

Total Score	Canada	France	Norway	Spain	UK
132	77	62	40	59	90
	58%	54%	30%	52%	68%

These mediocre scores were achieved against the low standard we set for this Monitoring. Overall, the level of proactive publication of information about aid activities and funding is far below the Accra Agenda for Action commitments. No agency begins to meet the standards of proactive publication called for by the Aid Transparency Principles. The current levels of transparency are not sufficient for holding the aid agencies accountable or guaranteeing participation in decision-making by affected stakeholders in recipient countries.

One problem revealed by this survey is the lack of agency-specific policies that aspire to fulfil the Accra commitment to aid transparency. The study found that aid agencies have levels of transparency which mirror, but do not go above and beyond, the national transparency context. For instance, CIDA publishes contracts above a certain value because a non-aid specific Canadian law requires it; the UK has a “publication scheme” which is required by law. Apart from this, only AFD (France) informs the public that it has its own transparency policy, mirroring the norms of France’s 1978 Law on Access to Administrative Documents which does not apply to the AFD.

⇒ **Recommendation One**

In order to achieve genuine transparency of aid in line with the commitments made in Accra, much more of the information held by aid agencies should be made available to the public:

- At a minimum, aid agencies should ensure that all the information in the classes of information identified in Principle 1 of the Aid Transparency Principles is published in full. Specific transparency policies should be adopted by each aid agency;
- This proactive publication of information should apply to any and all information which would normally be available under a national access to information law;
- Databases should be designed with on-line, real-time public access in mind;
- Where some information contained in a document or database might be excluded from publication because it falls under a legitimate exception, then this information should be severed from the remainder which should be published.
- Systems should be set in place to ensure, wherever possible, automatic publication of the non-exempted information.⁷

Key Finding Two: Detail Not Available

The researchers often found that even where information was available it was incomplete and lacking in so much detail as to be almost worthless for any stakeholder. An entirely different level of detail would be needed for those interested in real-time monitoring of aid flows.

As Figure 1 below illustrates, the more detailed the information we were looking for, the harder it was to find: macro-level information from the donors was generally more readily available and accessible than information about aid to individual countries. In other words, the information most relevant to aid recipients and stakeholders was the hardest to find, because it either was not available or was difficult to locate. By failing to

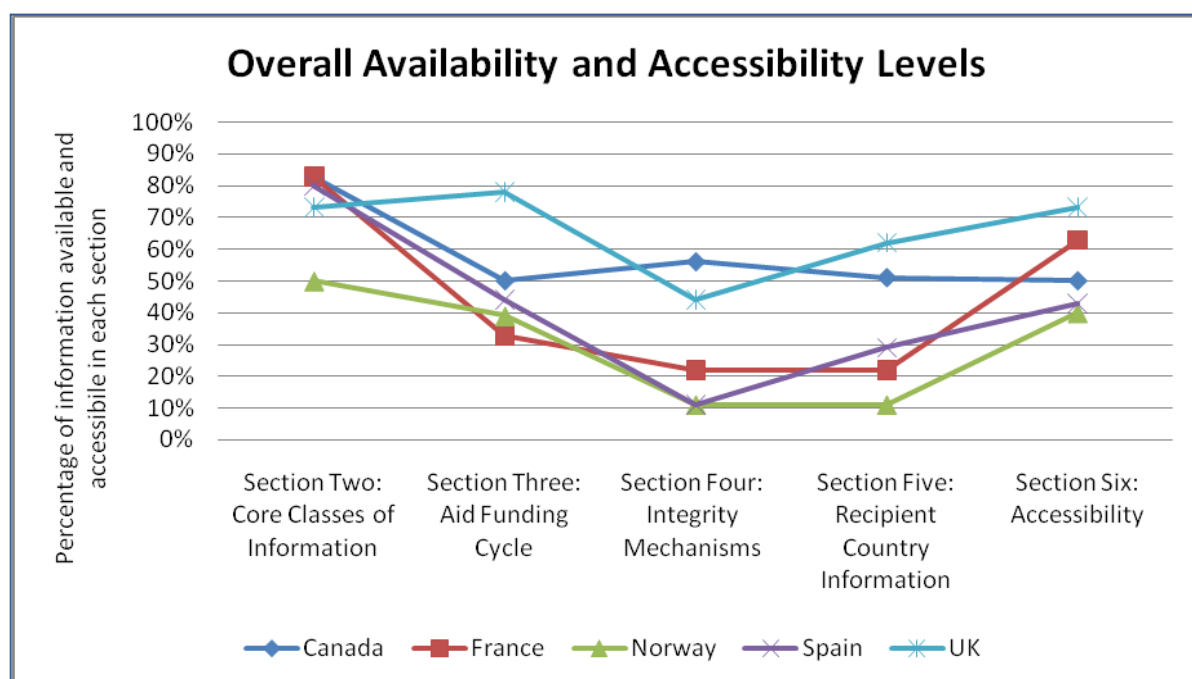
⁷ For those who are interested, Access Info can provide more information about and examples of how this can be achieved in practice.

make detailed information available, much of the information on websites comes across as window-dressing seeming more like public relations exercises than information designed to promote genuine accountability. The study found an overly-heavy reliance on press releases, some of which appeared to be inaccurate when compared with other information that was available.

A particularly concerning finding is that it is not possible for the public to make any connection between current budgets on the one hand and ongoing activities on the other hand. There was a widespread failure to make an explicit connection between budgets and activities in the reports available on the websites of the aid agencies. Furthermore, in some cases there were significant discrepancies between the numbers contained in documents about planned spending for a particular recipient country, what press releases from the aid agency claimed, and the detail in the country sections of the website.

Similarly, information about contracts and grants, where it is made available, is not linked to budget figures, so there is no transparency about how budgets were actually spent. There was even less information about disbursements to recipient countries where aid spending is on budget. The public is left with a strong impression that much aid is about projects, and yet this does not correlate to the budget numbers. More seriously, the public is almost inevitably left with a nagging doubt about the completeness and veracity of the information they have found.

Figure 1: Overall Availability and Accessibility Levels



There was a systematic failure to link general descriptive information to original documents and a similar failure to link to other sources which hold more details such as the DAC CRS database or the AiDA database run by Development Gateway. There was also a failure to link to the donor's own in-country websites and to websites about spending aid run by recipient governments or by multi-donor trust funds.

⇒ Recommendation Two

In order to ensure that information is available in sufficient detail and is complete, aid agencies should:

- Ensure that information, particularly core classes of information identified in Principle 1 of the Aid Transparency Principles, is published in full detail as well as, where appropriate, with user-friendly summaries being made available;
- Link to relevant information that is available on line in other locations, on databases or on other websites – this requires adopting an active policy of *"if it's out there somewhere, link to it!"* This recommendation applies in particular when an external database or dedicated website has been built;
- Ensure that financial Information is presented both in a user-friendly manner and is given in full detail, with information fully disaggregated including disaggregated by recipient country and/or sector, by modality (including on and off-budget, programme and project aid) and by channel (indicating whether the funds will be delivered direct to the recipient countries or via multilateral institutions or other means).

Key Finding Three: Systematic Organisation Promotes Availability

This study found a positive correlation between the existence of dedicated country sections or "portals" on aid agency websites and high scores on the monitoring indicators. The nation state is still a logical unit for organising information. Where aid agencies had created country profiles or portals which pulled together all information about relevant recipient countries, researchers were able to find more and higher quality, information.

Researchers did find some problems, however, where a number of different agencies from the same country are engaged in one recipient country and a common portal is created. One case in point is Canada, where all activity in Afghanistan including aid and military activities was gathered in the same portal, making it impossible to track aid budgets through to activities and expenditure. The website was loaded with user-friendly descriptions but failed to contain many documents, such as contracts and budget information, from the government departments whose activities it covered. This turned what could have been a well-intentioned attempt at greater transparency about Canada's role in Afghanistan into what seemed to be a superficial marketing exercise. Another problem we identified was what that of "tokenistic transparency" where a lot of information is provided about one recipient country (Mozambique for example) and then far less about other recipient countries. In terms of the right of access to information, the same information should be provided about all recipient countries, whether the level of funding is large or more modest.

This finding does not argue against having single donor portals for all relations with the recipient country, but warns that care should be taken that portals do not defeat the principle objective of proactively publishing information about aid. Our researchers found that portals could be very useful instruments in informing the public exactly how their taxes are being used in each developing country to promote development, to create mechanisms for participation in decision-making, and to ensure full accountability.

⇒ *Recommendation Three*

In order to facilitate user access, aid agencies along with other institutions in donor countries should consider the creation of country portals that collate all donor government activity for each recipient country. Care should be taken to ensure that these portals are built in such a way that they preserve – rather than obliterate – the details of spending on aid and in other areas such as trade and military activities, thereby ensuring full transparency of the flow funds.

Key Finding Four: Not Accessible

The research also found that information was not easily accessible, buried deep inside government websites or databases. The organisation of information is not structured for non-expert users such as citizens and recipient country stakeholders. Website design was sometimes poor. These difficulties were found on many occasions:

- text running over the footer section of the web pages;
- jumping menus which confuse the user;
- search functions that failed to locate information known to be on the websites;
- search functions that failed to work at all.

Accessibility was also hindered by complex terminology in some documents or, conversely, over-simplification in others. There was a widespread absence of multi-lingual information. Good practice exceptions to this included the different languages of the country portals developed by AFD (France) which increase the possibility that citizens of the recipient countries will be able to find out about what the agency is doing in their country.

⇒ *Recommendation Four*

In order to make information about aid fully accessible to the public, aid agencies should take a step back and review the organisation and presentation of information on their websites to ensure that:

- The logical structure of the websites fits with the public's need for information;⁸
- Core information is presented both in user-friendly formats and in original documents for those who need more in-depth information
- Functioning links are made between the two formats of presentation;
- Key information is translated into the main languages of potential information-seekers (this is particularly for country-level information).

Key Finding Four: Missing Integrity Mechanisms

Very little information was found on the aid agency websites about anti-corruption mechanisms and measures taken by agencies to promote integrity in the disbursement of aid funds. Our researchers were so frustrated in their search for anti-corruption

⁸ Access Info can recommend as a model here work conducted in other contexts to consult with citizens on their information needs. A particularly good example is that of the construction of thematic citizen-oriented web portals in Mexico City the development of which included focus group consultations with members of the public.

information as selected in the indicators developed for this monitoring (which are based in part on the UN Convention against Corruption) that a point was awarded for any remotely relevant information that was published, such as travel expenses of public officials in Canada.

We also searched in vain for significant information about how the aid agencies assess the corruption risks in recipient countries (where the donors are either providing funds directly to governments or spending money via other actors). Nor did we find any evaluation of how the corruption risks feeds into decision-making on how money is going to be spent. Significantly, there were no stated criteria on how corruption risk assessments had impacted on decisions on whether or not to engage at all in a particular country or sector or project. It would be reasonable to assume that such criteria exist and that evaluations are made, but the public is left in the dark as to whether or not this is the case.

There was minimal information on how to raise concerns or make complaints. Nor was there information on the number of complaints received or on the outcome of investigations. This is a surprising and concerning finding given the widespread concerns about corruption related to aid spending and numerous scandals over recent years, and given that many donors are promoting anti-corruption policies and practices in recipient countries.

The Accra Agenda for Action includes a specific commitment by donors to fight corruption:

Effective and efficient use of development financing requires both donors and partner countries to do their utmost to fight corruption. Donors and developing countries will respect the principles to which they have agreed, including those under the UN Convention against Corruption. ... Donors will take steps in their own countries to combat corruption by individuals or corporations and to track, freeze, and recover illegally acquired assets.⁹

Proactive publication is a key mechanism for both preventing and exposing corruption, but is not in itself sufficient. There are numerous other mechanisms which, as noted in the commitment made in Accra, include the mechanisms established under the UN Convention against Corruption. The public should be informed of the extent to which these mechanisms have been instated by donors and the impact which they are having.

⇒ **Recommendation Five**

In order to guard against and root out corruption and malpractice in the disbursement of aid funds, aid agencies should:

- Publish full information about existing anti-corruption mechanisms along with evaluations of the impact they are having;
- Publish data on the number of complaints and allegations of corruption and malpractice received and the outcomes of related investigations;
- Establish adequate mechanisms for members of the public to complain, as well as for internal whistleblowers to raise concerns, and for both to be afforded appropriate levels of anonymity and other necessary protections.

⁹ See the Accra Agenda for Action, point 24(d).

Section One. Introduction

In this introduction we set out the approach that was taken to the monitoring and the scoring methodology used. In sections 2-5 of the report we present the findings grouped according to the core classes of information, the transparency of the aid funding cycle, the transparency of integrity or anti-corruption mechanism, and the transparency of aid flows to recipient countries. In section 6 we present the findings on accessibility of the information.

This report presents the findings of a pilot monitoring exercise conducted by Access Info to evaluate a core aspect of transparency of public (government) funding of aid:

→ *to what degree is information about aid available and accessible?*

To achieve this, the monitoring aimed to test the availability or “proactive publication” of seventeen (17) classes of information about the activities and spending of five donor countries (Canada, France, Norway, Spain, and the UK). To focus the monitoring, researchers examined the levels of transparency of the principal aid agency of each of these donor countries.

Researchers also tested levels of information from these five donors about aid flows to five recipient countries (Afghanistan, Kosovo, Mozambique, Peru, and Sierra Leone).

The study further evaluated whether this information was “accessible”, meaning the degree to which information could be found reasonably easy by an average internet user.

The study only evaluated the availability of information on the main websites of the relevant bodies and so the Access Info team reviewed the most straightforward and easily accessible means of publication. The approach was to see whether the average user – for example a taxpayer in a donor country or a citizen in a recipient country – could find answers to general questions such as “How much is France spending in Kosovo and what is that money being spent on?” Hence the study only assesses a starting point for aid transparency and does not look at either all forms of publication (printed reports, bulletin boards, etc.) nor does it look at the availability of all the raw data on aid flows held by donors – such research and analysis should be the focus of future studies to test for the full transparency of aid.

1.1 Selection of the Donor Countries for Monitoring

The five countries selected for this pilot monitoring are among the world’s largest per-capita aid donors, operating in a large geographical spread of recipient countries, and having overlapping recipients for purposes of comparison. This group was also selected because it includes countries which had committed to the International Aid Transparency Initiative¹⁰ at the time of the monitoring (Norway, Spain, UK) and those which had not (Canada, France).

These countries all, with the exception of Spain, have an access to information law which has consolidated existing traditions of open government. Norway’s law dates from 1970,

¹⁰ This governmental initiative was launched in September 2008, more information can be found at www.aidtransparency.net

France's from 1978, and Canada's from 1985, whereas the UK law only came into force on 1 January 2005 and Spain does not yet have a full access to information law (it does, however, have administrative provisions dating from 1992). None of these access to information regimes specifies that information about aid should be published proactively, although either the access to information laws or other legislation does provide for publication of core classes of information about government functions.¹¹

To further anchor the study, the monitoring focused on the aid agencies of the five donor countries. Aid agencies are – or are perceived by the public to be – the principal bodies dealing with the allocation, dispersal and evaluation of government aid. In cases where aid agency websites directed us to other sites, documents or bodies, these sources also fell under the remit of the monitoring.

Donor Agencies for Monitoring

Canada	Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA)
France	Agence France de Développement (AFD)
Norway	Norwegian Agency for Development Cooperation (Norad)
Spain	Agencia Española de Cooperación (AECID)
UK	Department for International Development (DFID)

In order to test the availability of information relating to donor activity in recipient countries, Access Info searched for information about these five donors' activities in five sample recipient countries (Afghanistan, Kosovo, Mozambique, Peru, and Sierra Leone) which gave a good geographic spread of recipients in different contexts and at different stages of development. Access Info did not monitor for information published by the recipient governments but only by the donors on their websites or on other websites to which we were explicitly directed by the donors. Hence the monitoring focused on **donor transparency only**.

1.2 Available: Monitoring minimum compliance with the Aid Transparency Principles

The Aid Transparency Principles – developed in 2008 after examination of the international aid architecture by access to information experts in consultation with aid policy specialists – call for information about aid to be published. Principle 1 defines the classes of information which are typically held by aid agencies because they are normally generated during aid funding cycles and which should be made available proactively by bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid.

This monitoring study was based on the Aid Transparency Principles and the background research that went into developing them. From these, Access Info Europe identified seventeen classes of information plus five accessibility indicators grouped as follows:

¹¹ For more information on the legal framework for these countries, see the Access Info Europe website: www.access-info.org

Table 3: Indicators for Aid Transparency Monitoring

Report Section	Classes of Information	Max Score
Aid Agency - Core Institutional Classes of Information (Section 2)	1. Organisational Structure	6
	2. Main Aid Strategy	6
	3. Aid Budget	6
	4. Annual Report	6
	5. Financial Report	6
The Funding Cycle: Main Operational Classes of Information (Section 3)	1. Consultations	3
	2. Public Procurement procedure and tenders	3
	3. Current Contracts	3
	4. Grant Application Policy and Procedures	3
	5. Current Grants	3
	6. Evaluation Information	3
Integrity Mechanisms (Section 4)	1. Corruption Risk Assessment	3
	2. Gifts / Assets Declarations (both for individuals and institutions)	3
	3. Accountability Mechanisms: Complaints/ Whistle-blowers	3
Aid activities in recipient countries (Section 5)	1. Country Programmes: Strategy	15 ¹²
	2. Country Programmes: Projects Information	15
	3. Country Programmes: Information on aid via channel	15
Accessibility Indicators (Section 6)	1. Ease of Navigation	6
	2. Search Function	6
	3. User Guidance	6
	4. Languages	6
	5. Access to Information Guidance	6

A fuller description of each class of information can be found in Annex A and a full breakdown of assessment, scoring and references for our assessments can be found in Annex B.

We note that the classes of information do not dictate the name, design or format of particular documents, but represent the content of the information to be expected. For example, a common class of information generated by donors is the “strategy” information. Within this class, some document types are common, for example “three-year strategic plan” or “sectoral strategy”.

¹² A maximum score of 3 was given in the case of each of the 5 developing country case studies, Kosovo, Mozambique, Peru, Afghanistan and Sierra Leone.

Hence, in this monitoring, researchers looked for any documents which contained information about the strategy of the aid agency. Sometimes the name of the document is very different: in the UK, DFID's strategy document is called "*Eliminating world poverty; making governance work for the poor: a White Paper on International Development*".¹³ The main criterion for the researchers was that the information contained in the documents we found corresponded to the description of that class of information. In this way this study **monitored information not documents**.

In the preliminary phases of this monitoring, it soon became apparent that the level of detail of much information proactively published fell significantly short of the detail needed to carry out real monitoring of aid flows and independent evaluation of the effectiveness of aid. Access Info therefore chose to start with **a basic benchmark** of publication of simple information about the activities of the donor bodies, as well as macro-level strategy and budget information. Even by setting the bar relatively low, significant differences were found in the availability, accessibility and quality of information, with examples of both good and poor practice among the bodies monitored. Hence, even for better performers in this monitoring study, the level of openness achieved is far from that being demanded by the Aid Transparency Principles.

This study was based exclusively on the **publication of information on-line**, on the websites of the government agencies monitored and other websites to which there were explicit links. It is highly recommended that information be published in other forms and locations, such as on local notice boards or in leaflets, as this is imperative to ensure access by a wide range of stakeholders. This study therefore does not represent comprehensive investigation into all forms of proactive publication but offers an indication of the accessibility of information available through one of the most important means of publication and one that simultaneously affects the accessibility of information to citizens from donor and recipient countries alike.

1.3 Relevant, Accessible, Timely, Accurate, Comparable

The Aid Transparency Principles call on information to be relevant, accessible, timely, accurate, and comparable.¹⁴

The only one of these indicators which Access Info monitored systematically was that of **accessibility** as described below. The **relevance** of the classes of information is assumed in that the preparation of the principles defined the classes of information that are needed by the public for participating in decision-making about aid and for holding governments accountable for their aid spending.

In terms of the **timeliness** of the information, Access Info did not conduct a rigorous evaluation of the timeliness of the proactive publication of information on the websites monitored. We do however report on some instances where information was very

¹³ The term "White Paper" is one that not many people from outside of UK will immediately associate with a strategy document; even people in the UK who haven't had much contact with government and the political process might have only a hazy idea of what a white paper is. It was possible to locate this document on the relevant page of DFID website, although a little more clarity that this was the strategy document might have been helpful for the novice user.

¹⁴ The Aid Transparency Principles were developed during 2008 which were identified after examination of the international aid architecture by access to information experts in consultation with aid policy specialists. They are appended in Annex C of this Report.

obviously out of date. The study found that there is often very little information on government websites about when documents were uploaded or about when they will be updated (such as when the next annual report or strategy document will be uploaded).

Access Info specifically did not conduct any assessment of the **accuracy** of the information although in this report we highlight one case which caught our attention, namely discrepancies in the total amounts of Norwegian aid funding.

Similarly, although there was no extensive study of the **comparability** of information, the report notes where there seem to be significant differences in level of detail and means of presentation of information as well as of terminology. These differences make it hard to compare like-with-like when tracking aid spending in a particular country or sector or using a particular aid modality.

1.4 Accessibility: What was our approach?

Available information is not always the same as accessible information. Information about aid is sometimes difficult to find and identify. Sometimes, it is also hard to understand. At other times, information about particular activities is presented in such clear and simple language that details and facts get lost: this was the case with a number of websites monitored in this study.

The question of the **accessibility of information** published on government websites was built into the monitoring methodology in three ways:

- Our approach was to replicate the experience of the non-specialist user, with little prior knowledge of the aid world or of the activities of the particular aid agency. Ideally, researchers wanted to understand the experience of information-hungry stakeholders such as taxpayers from donor countries or citizens from recipient countries. (In fact, our team of university-educated researchers with civil society experience were particularly internet savvy but nevertheless often found the information-searching process frustrating).
- For every class of information Access Info assessed both whether the information was published, or **available**, and also whether it was relatively easy to find, or **accessible**. Where information was published but buried deep inside a website (more than three steps inside and/or not accessible via the search function) the score allocated was lowered by one point.
- Five indicators were developed which specifically assess the accessibility of information published on aid agency websites. These indicators rank overall navigability of websites, the languages in which information is published, existence of user guidance, a well-working search function, and information on the right of access to information and/or how to file requests for further information.

1.5 Accessible in what language?

This monitoring worked from the assumption that those seeking information about aid are not only nationals of donor countries but come from a wide range of countries around the world and cannot be expected to speak the languages of all the donor countries, particularly when those languages are little-spoken outside that country, such as Norwegian.

Given that English is today's accepted international language, including in the aid world, it seemed reasonable to search for information published in English. This was the language we selected for reviewing the websites of Canada and the UK, as well as Norway which presents its website in English and Norwegian (on some occasions we were able to identify that more information was available in Norwegian although often it did not seem that there was a significant difference in content). For France an initial review of the AFD website revealed that much information, particularly in the upper levels of the website, is available in English so the monitoring was conducted in English, but also in parallel in French as we had French-speaking researchers. Overall, France scored highly on languages, having a variety of languages available on its website, tailored to recipient countries, and having made the greatest effort of any of the countries we monitored to ensure multi-lingual content.

For the website of Spain's AECID we found that very little information was available in English and so the monitoring was conducted in Spanish. If we had conducted the monitoring in English, AECID would have scored extremely low with minimal information being available in English. It may be reasonable that the AECID website is available mainly in Spanish as Latin America is the primary target for Spain's aid activities. However, when researching for information about aid to Afghanistan, Kosovo, Mozambique and Sierra Leone, it would have been reasonable for this information to be in English or another language (as per the French website) which was not the case.

1.6 Scoring

The scoring system applied during this project was to give points when we found some information that fitted into the respective class of information. The maximum score is set out in Table 2 above and with more details on the scoring system in Annex A.

As stated, this monitoring tests against a minimum. When in doubt, researchers gave the benefit of the doubt to the aid agency.

Given the importance of the Core Classes of Institutional Information (Section 2) and the Accessibility Indicators (Section 6), these have been weighted with between 1 and 6 points in the scoring system, while for the other classes of information scores of between 1 and 3 were allocated (Sections 2, 4 and 5 of this report).

1.7 The monitoring process

The research was conducted between September 2008 and February 2009. In searching for information corresponding to these classes of information, the relevant website pages and the posted documents were visited at least twice - and sometimes as many as 10 times – during this period.

Some of the aid agency websites were changed and documents updated during the course of our monitoring. For this reason, findings were checked in the last month of this project and the scoring and reflections, unless otherwise mentioned, reflect the information available and accessible towards the end of the monitoring period. Specific explanations about the information on which the scoring is based for each indicator and on what dates it was accessed can be found in Annex B of this report.

One case in which we undertook rigorous checking was the website of Spain's AECID which underwent a major overhaul of changes in January 2009 just as the monitoring was nearing completion. We have nevertheless retained some comments about the problems with the old website as it illustrated the problems caused by ill-thought-through approaches to ensuring the availability of and access to information, combined with poor web-design, which can result in significant frustrations for the user. In most cases, however, the findings represent the level of availability throughout the research period.

Subsequent to the completion of this monitoring, Norad (Norway) revamped its website. It was not possible to redo the entire monitoring based on these changes, but we did carry out spot checks related to our main findings. These revealed that many of the problems identified with the old Norad website are still valid. Even where improvements have been made, the problems we found are typical of problems with other aid agencies not included in our monitoring, and for that reason we have retained the findings based on the initial research in order to provide examples which support the recommendations. We have, however, noted in the body of this report where specific concerns seem to have been addressed by the new website and any updates to, or reorganisation of, the information posted on it. If we were to redo the monitoring, Norway's score would undoubtedly change, although it is not clear from our limited review of the new site that the score would improve significantly as many of the previously identified problems remain.

Since February 2009 we can expect information on the websites of all the aid agencies to have been updated. For example there has been restructuring of the presentation of project information on the DFID website. Some of the comments in this report may therefore reflect problems which have since been resolved. Nevertheless, the clear patterns found in this monitoring and the common problems identified support our findings which indicate long term deficiencies in proactive publication by donor governments and a severe lack of transparency of international aid.

Section Two: Aid Agencies - Core Institutional Classes of Information

In this part of the monitoring Access Info checked for the availability of core information about the structure and functioning of each aid agency. This was the highest scoring part of the monitoring, with most of the aid agencies performing well (four out of five had over 70% of the information we were looking for available, at least in a basic format).

Table 4: Findings for Core Institutional Classes of Information

Total Score	Canada	France	Norway	Spain	UK
30	25	25	15	24	22
	83%	83%	50%	80%	73%

Anyone setting out to understand aid strategies and aid flows of a donor government will need some core information about the aid agencies and how they function; what they do and how much money they spend doing it. These are macro-level classes of information which should give members of the public a clear picture of the main lines of activity of the agency's work; detailed information on a sectoral or country level is also needed and this set of classes of information and findings is presented in section four of this report (a full breakdown of assessments and references can also be found in Annex B).

Table 5: Five Core Classes of Information Monitored

Core Classes of Information	Max Score
1. Information on organisational structure	6
2. Strategy: the agency's overarching strategy and the strategy for the financial year ahead (planned activity)	6
3. Aid budget: the planned/projected spending on aid for the current or upcoming financial year	6
4. Annual reporting on activities for previous year ("what we actually did" – narrative)	6
5. Financial reporting for previous financial year ("what we spent" - quantitative)	6

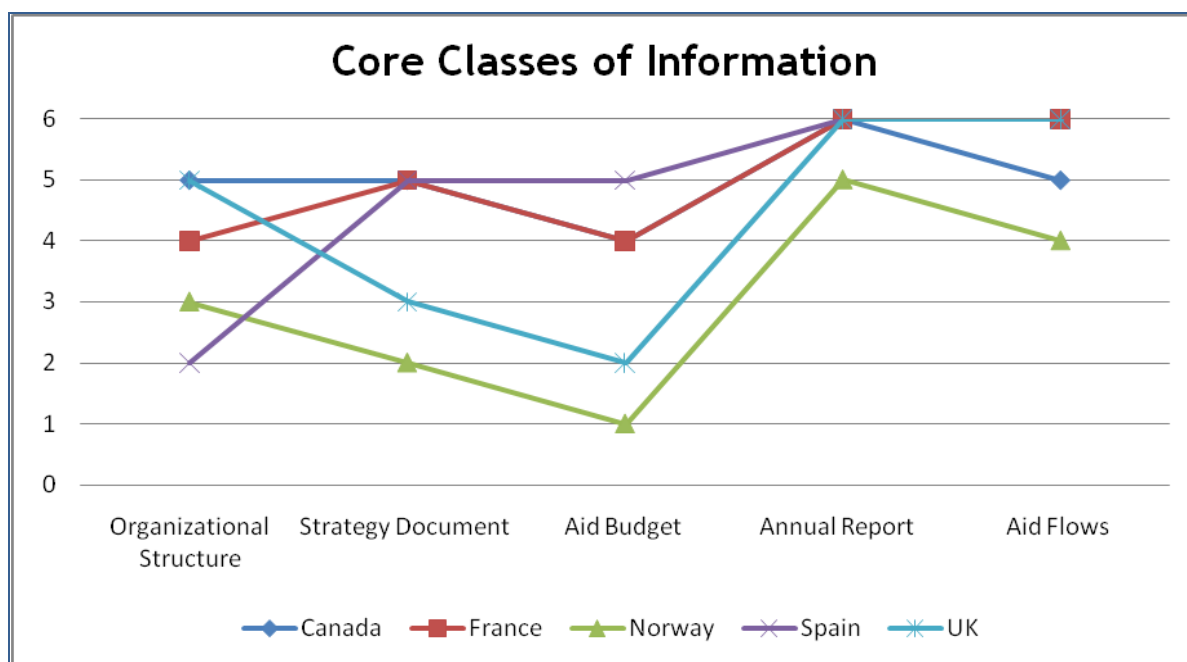
In many cases these classes of information map directly onto single documents (such as the "annual report" of the agency). In other instances, however, two or more documents would need to be read hand-in-hand to understand, for example, the strategy. This is the case in AFD (France) which has both a long-term Strategic Plan 2007-2011 and Business Plan for 2008 on its website.

When searching for this information, researchers took into account variations in terminology among different countries and to search as thoroughly as possible for the information on the monitored websites. So for example, documents that contain the planned budget for the coming year had different names, being "Report on Plans and

Priorities: Estimates 2008-2009” with the budget being found in Part III in Canada, “Business Plan 2008” in France, “National Budget 2008” in Norway, “Annual Plan for International Cooperation 2008” in Spain, and “DFID Annual Report 2008”. The different terminology is legitimate given the different administrative traditions and different languages of the countries monitored but can nevertheless be frustrating for someone searching for the budget information from a number of donor countries, such as an interested person in a recipient country.

The scores for each of the monitored countries are illustrated in the following graph and can be found with more detail in Annex B.

Figure 2: Availability of Core Classes of Information



2.1 Information on Organisational Structure:

For this indicator Access Info evaluated whether or not information on the website about the organisational structure of the aid agency was presented in a clear and thorough manner. We scored 2 points for a list of departments with descriptions of their functions, 2 points for an organogram (organisational chart) or an alternative clear presentation of the structure and roles of different parts of the organisation and 2 points for a reasonably comprehensive staff directory.

CIDA (Canada) had reasonable levels of transparency of staff structure with an organogram of the organisation and descriptions of the roles of the various departments. There was also a staff directory. On the downside, CIDA did not make completely clear the role of the aid agency in relation to other government bodies.

Examples of **poor practice** were the Norad (Norway) and AECID (Spain) websites where information about the organisation, structure and decision-making procedures is particularly unclear to information seekers.

2.2 Strategy Document

Aid agencies have a variety of approaches to publishing their overall strategy. The approach taken by AFD (France) and AECID (Spain) is relatively clear providing an overarching three or four year strategy complemented by an annual plan. Norad (Norway) has a very general strategy document ("Strategy towards 2010") but fails to provide detailed information.

The examples of DFID (UK) and CIDA (Canada) are confused with a lack of self-identified overall strategy. The UK's main strategy document (*Eliminating world poverty; making governance work for the poor: a White Paper on International Development*) was launched in July 2006 and presents a general strategy (without mentioning any specific time frame) and would be a good model document if it were complemented by an annual plan and budget. Canada's strategy is spread over a number of documents one of which is referred to interchangeably as either 'Estimates' or 'Plans and Priorities' leading to some confusion for anyone searching for the main strategy document.

2.3 Aid Budget

This study revealed a particular deficit of information about budgets and the forward-planning of aid spending. The finding raises serious concerns because forward planning information is essential for various key actors in the aid chain. Recipient governments need this information to be able to plan and to use aid funds effectively. Of course, it may be that this information has been provided directly to recipients from donors. But others, including other governmental, intergovernmental, and non-governmental donors as well as civil society organisations which are planning their activities need to get a full picture of the incoming aid flows to any particular country. Businesses who are considering bidding for contracts need to plan ahead and know what funds will be available in their sector. Transparency of aid flows helps guard against duplication of efforts and permits more effective cooperation. This information is also essential for ordinary people in recipient countries who want to know about incoming aid funds, either to engage in planning their futures or to monitor the spending of aid funds.

A publication of a budget for the strategy period and/or on an annual basis is required to score points for this class of information. Higher scores were awarded to those agencies having a detailed budget with more than just the macro-level figures (up to 2 points) and holding details of planned aid flows by sector, funding channel and broken down by country (up to 4 points).

DFID (UK) demonstrated particularly **poor practice** for this key indicator. DFID's reporting and evaluation of past activities is exceptional in its detail. So much so that its budget and plans for the future (in particular the following year) have been subsumed into this over-emphasis on what has already been achieved. DFID's budget is buried in Annex B on page 241 of the annual report. Furthermore it is unclear whether these plans are approved or not. The DFID budget gives significantly less detail on what it plans to do than on what it has already done.

AECID (Spain) provided the best case study with good detail on the planned activities and the budget in its Annual Cooperation Plan 2008. This plan gives a clear projected budget for the upcoming year with breakdown by sector, channel, modality and country. However some country information is not grouped together in an approachable way for users. AFD (France) also publishes a good level of detail on projects and programmes; it specifies funding by region, sector and modality however not by country.

2.4 Annual Report

Reporting on the previous year is a strong point for all the agencies monitored. A typical example was the Spanish “Review of the Annual Plan of International Cooperation 2008” which contains extensive information about activities from the previous year broken down by country, sector, channel and modality. There is evaluation and narrative reporting on funds disbursed.

Norad, which directs users to a report by Norway’s Ministry of Foreign Affairs, would have scored well on the annual report but lost a point because the most recent report was dated from 2006. The search for Norway’s annual report not only highlighted the importance of timeliness of key documents, but further alerted our researchers to the problem that aid agencies often fail to signal when the next editions of key documents are due to be published and can be expected to be available on-line.

2.5 Financial Report

In general, there was a reasonable level of information accessible on actual spending from the previous year. In most cases spending information was found in the same document as qualitative reporting on projects and programmes (the annual report).

Good Practice: Norway’s reporting of budget spending, although out of date, provided good detail on funding by channel, sector, modality and country. Norway had a particularly clear publication of aid by country and by channel alongside qualitative evaluations in an annual report by the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

Figure 3: Excerpt from Norwegian Financial Report

Extract from Norway’s report:		
Bilateral assistance (excl. chapter item 167)¹⁾ to Mozambique, by channel, 2006 (NOK 1000)¹⁵		
Channel	Total	Percentage of total
Government-to-government, etc. ²⁾	326 860	79,3 %
Norwegian NGOs	43 612	10,6 %
Local NGOs	9 572	2,3 %
International NGOs	2 460	0,6 %
Multi-bilateral assistance ³⁾	29 633	7,2 %
Total	412 137	100,0 %

1) Chapter item 167 “Refugee projects in Norway, approved as development assistance”,
2) Including public institutions, ministries, consultants, private sector, etc.
3) Earmarked assistance channelled through multilateral organisation

¹⁵ Norwegian Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Annual Report on Norwegian Bilateral Development Cooperation: 2006, November 2007, available from, http://www.regjeringen.no/upload/UD/Vedlegg/Utvikling/bilrapportI_engelsk.pdf, last accessed 09/02/2009, p.12

Recommendations from Section Two

- Aid agencies should ensure that all core information about their activities and functioning is proactively published. To this end, if the access to information or other legislation does not specifically require such publication, the agencies should develop their own internal publication schemes, which at a minimum should include the following information:
 - Institutional information including information on the organisational structure;
 - Strategy information including the overarching strategy and the strategy/planned activity for the financial year ahead;
 - Aid budget: the planned/projected spending on aid for the current or upcoming financial year;
 - Annual reporting on activities for the previous year;
 - Financial reporting for the previous financial year.
- All countries monitored should make significant efforts to increase the levels of financial transparency. This should include much more detail on current and planned budgets, and reporting on ongoing spending. The Aid Transparency Principles call for there to be full transparency of aid flows, defined as follows:

*“**Aid flows** (including financial flows, in-kind aid and administrative costs), including data on aid planned, pledged, committed and disbursed, disaggregated according to internationally agreed schema by region, country, geographic area, sector, disbursement/delivery modality and spending agency.”*
- With regards to periodically updated information, websites should make clear both the date of publication of the current version of information on the website and any planned updates (e.g. the month and, if possible, the day on which the next annual report is due to be published).
- In order to ensure timely access to information by the public, aid agencies should institute a policy that as soon as key documents such as strategies, budgets, detailed spending plans, annual reports and evaluation reports have been adopted, they are immediately posted on the website.
- Aid agencies should consider agreeing common terminology for core classes of information so that the information is more comparable among countries.

Section Three: Transparency of the Aid Funding Cycle

This section deals with those classes of information that are essential for donors to assert that there is full transparency of aid. These are the classes of information which relate to the operations of aid agencies in planning, delivering and evaluating aid. Access Info's monitoring of key classes of information that are generated in a typical aid funding cycle found lamentably low levels of information available, even when scored against the very basic indicators being used in this study. Only the UK scored above 50% on this group of six classes of information which includes information about consultations, contracts, grants, and evaluations. This is an area in which the International Aid Transparency Initiative is expected to advance standards on the information to be made available and the formats to be used to ensure comparability across donors. The findings of this monitoring study underline the urgent need for standard-setting and for greater proactive publication of information in this area.

Table 6: Findings for Transparency of the Aid Funding Cycle

Total Score	Canada	France	Norway	Spain	UK
18	9	6	7	8	14
	50%	33%	39%	44%	78%

This section deals with those classes of information which must be in the public domain if donors are to assert that there is full transparency of aid: information about the planning, delivery and evaluation of aid.

This operational information enables the public to engage with the aid agency at the planning, implementation and evaluation stages. Consultations are necessary for local communities and stakeholders to engage in the debate about whether funds are meeting their needs – such information and participation underpins ownership of development by affected communities.

Table 7: Six Classes of Information Monitored for the Aid Funding Cycle

Aid Funding Cycle Classes of Information	Max Score
1. Consultations	3
2. Public Procurement procedure and tenders	3
3. Current Contracts	3
4. Grant Application Policy and Procedures	3
5. Current Grants	3
6. Evaluation Information	3

3.1 Consultation

Information on consultations should show whose perspectives have been taken into consideration in developing aid strategies and specific spending plans. Where aid

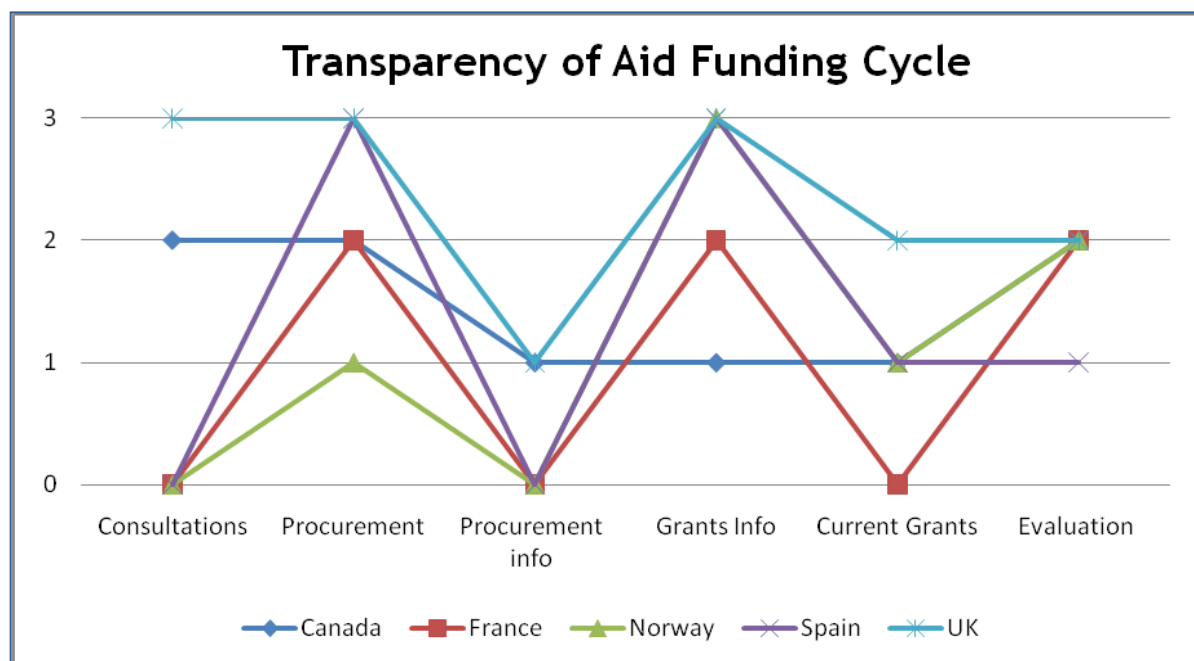
programmes have been developed as the result of a participatory poverty assessment¹⁶, after stakeholder consultations, or even only after consultations with NGOs and businesses in the donor country, there should be reports on these stages of programme and policy development. Within this class of information researchers looked for evidence of aid agency consultations with any stakeholders.

DFID (UK) stood out as a **good practice exception**. It has a clearly marked section on consultation that can be reached from the home page of their website. Reports on consultation processes are found sporadically at country level on inner pages of the DFID website.

Another finding was that, overall, very little information was available about consultations. **In most cases no information on consultations was available.** Users could assume from this finding that Aid Agencies do not consult with civil society and parliamentarians in donor countries, let alone with key stakeholders in recipient countries. While it is possible that this is not the case, our findings demonstrate a severe lack of transparency about the relationships between aid agencies and other actors.

It should be noted that the scoring for this class of information was, as with many of the other indicators in this monitoring, set against minimum standards for proactive publication. A much higher level of transparency and detail about consultations could be expected as consultations are essential to empower local communities and achieve ownership of development.

Figure 4: Transparency of Aid Funding Cycle



¹⁶ A Participatory Poverty Assessment (PPA) is a tool for direct consultation and participation of the poor in developing countries. PPAs are used by international institutions, NGOs and developing country governments to involve entire communities in policy making, evaluation and the shaping of strategies. See, for example, FAO, PPA, http://www.fao.org/Participation/ft_more.jsp?ID=2163 last accessed 09/07/2009.

3.2 Public Procurement: procedures and tenders

In all the aid agencies monitored, information about procurement and grant-making conformed to a similar pattern: there is information about money that is available but now how it has been spent. This trend can be clearly seen in the graph above which shows information is available on the procurement and grants processes but not on contracts and grants awarded.

A general finding was that aid agencies provided much more information about current open tenders than about closed tenders. However, there were still particular difficulties in accessing information about procurement as even current tenders were located in external websites. These websites (national portals on government procurement) are often designed with the business user in mind. For example, in the case of Canada's Merx database¹⁷ which can be accessed by a link from the CIDA website, it is possible to search for all open tenders relating to the aid agency, but no more sophisticated search is possible. It therefore becomes very difficult to analyse the relationship between tenders and particular strategy elements, programmes or projects.

Some **good practice** was noted in the cases of the DFID (UK) and CIDA (Canada), both of which make clear opportunities for small businesses. On the other hand, Norad showed **poor practice** as details published were so minimal that they served as basic announcements rather than as guarantees of transparency. Open tenders and information on how to apply was published but no information was found on the policy and procedures for awards.¹⁸

CIDA's good practice includes informing users when the next round of contract information will be published. This is because Canadian law requires that contracts to be published on a quarterly basis. Access Info believes this practice is positive because it improves predictability and encourages regular updating of the information. However, it is not clear why this information could not be uploaded to websites immediately and automatically, rather than on a quarterly basis, particularly in a developed country such as Canada where the information technology solutions for doing this are available (See recommendations in Section 2 on timeliness of information).

A general observation is that procurement information and databases are structured in a way which makes sense for businesses looking for opportunities (for example, by only having information on open tenders) but not for civil society to track aid funds. The information on the aid agency websites therefore needs to be restructured not only taking into consideration commercial interests but also to facilitate genuine accountability.

3.3 Current Contracts

The study identified a severe lack of information about current contracts as demonstrated by the very sharp dip in the scores for this indicator showing in Figure 4 above.

¹⁷ See www.merx.com

¹⁸ The new Norad website still provides no information about the grounds on which contracts will be awarded. See the Support and Tender section of the website at <http://norad.no/en/Support+and+tender/Tenders>, last accessed 14/07/2009

To evaluate this indicator, we looked for reporting on contracts, availability of actual contract documents and information on subcontracting (policies, lists of subcontractors involved, projects likely to be subcontracted and other relevant information).

Websites presented very little contract information. There were almost no cross-references linking contract information to the strategy, budget or country information. For example, if a construction project is undertaken in a recipient country it is not unreasonable to expect to find information about the contract as well as a copy of the contract itself located both in a public procurement section of the website and in the relevant country section of the website. Modern information technologies allow automatic cross-linking of information, without having to upload it more than once onto the website.

There was also an acute lack of information on **subcontracting** to be found on the monitored websites. For there to be true transparency of public procurement, information about subcontracting should also be published, as this is an area where there have been widespread allegations of diversion and misspending of public funds. Therefore, if the different elements of a contract are going to be subcontracted, this should be made clear and relevant documentation provided. For example, in a construction project, civil engineering, materials, financial management and labour might all be subcontracted, or even sub-subcontracted. It should be possible for example to see whether the project costs are sufficient to provide a living wage to subcontracted workers and it should be possible to evaluate whether the terms of the published contract were met by subcontractors. Only with this basic level of transparency can there be accountability regarding other human rights and whether contractors are complying with legal obligations and ethical responsibilities.

A **minimal standard** of public procurement transparency is demonstrated by CIDA and DFID both of which report on basic contract details. CIDA's has **better practice**, as it provides in-depth information and guidance on contract and procurement policies. CIDA also publishes limited information on sub-contracting and on both policies for dealing with contracts below and above 10,000 Canadian dollars, by law the latter must be published.

In all other cases information was of too low a standard to be awarded points. Norway for example had a database of contracts but the **latest was for a contract awarded in 2003**.¹⁹ Spain's approach to contracts is particularly confusing as tenders and contracts are put on a central government website for which there is no search function so it is almost impossible to find information about contracts and tenders.

3.4 Grant Application Policy and Procedures

This information class included policies, application details and criteria for awarding grants. On the whole, aid agencies publish relatively clear information about grants, as illustrated by the sharp peak in Figure 4.

Best practice was by Norad website which provides accessible information on policy and grant-making to Norwegian and international NGOs. Information includes time frames and decision making. By contrast, CIDA (Canada) had the lowest score on this indicator

¹⁹ This part of the Norad website no longer exists and no current contracts are published. See the Support and Tender section of the website: <http://norad.no/en/Support+and+tender/Tenders>, last accessed 14/07/2009

because users were referred to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and it was not clear what funds were available or the application process.

Unclear application processes can discourage suitable applicants and lead to reliance on internal contacts to access information about available funds.

3.5 Current Grants

This class of information includes publication of grant details, terms and conditions and evaluation of current and recent grants. Most agencies published some record of grants made and in general more information than was provided for by current contracts. DFID (UK) came closest to **good practice** by publishing much information about its larger funding commitments to NGOs including the downloadable document of agreements between individual NGOs and DFID.

On the other hand, the AFD (France) which provided no information on current grants (in spite of the fact that the NGO shows that there is a division for partnership with NGOs so it can be assumed that there is some funding provided but this is not made clear).

Norad was not the worst performer for this class of information but it is worth noting that while it publishes very basic information on what it grants to international NGOs, it does not publish even the same minimal information about grants to Norwegian NGOs.²⁰

3.6 Evaluation

This class of information had two indicators: evidence of systematic evaluation in whatever form that might take, and evidence of input into evaluations from recipient countries and partners such as NGOs.

While most of those monitored had varying but significant mechanisms in place for evaluation, there were rare examples of these evaluation processes representing more than the internal voice of the agency. It is often easy to find specific and exemplary internal evaluations of projects, but overall guidance and information on evaluation systems, policies and trends is difficult to locate on donor agency websites.

AECID (Spain) can be viewed as a particular example of **poor practice**. Evaluation is only mentioned two steps into the website and, cannot be found in the sitemap. Information on evaluation could only be found following a link outside the website to the Ministry of Foreign Affairs and Cooperation, where the full set of evaluation documents is held. **Better practice** was found in the case of DFID which publishes an analytical overview of all evaluation reports published each year.

There was very little evidence available of **public participation in the evaluation process**. A **better practice** exception to this broad trend was Norad (Norway). A database of evaluation documents can be found in the 'Civil Society' section of the Norad website which allows users to search for evaluations and reports submitted by

²⁰ On the new Norad website, information about grants to Norwegian and to International NGOs is no longer separated and the website states that "Norad finances, cooperates with and is a source of information about Norwegian and international organisations" but the only information on the website in English seems to be about funding to international NGOs. See <http://norad.no/en/Support+and+tender/Support>, last accessed 14/07/2009.

organisations that have received funding from Norad.²¹ The degree to which these submissions represent good practice varies. Some are compiled by external evaluators and others are the result of broad project-wide participatory evaluation.²² One limitation that stops this from representing overall good practice is the fact that these are submissions made by local NGOs in the recipient countries where a Norwegian partner NGO is also present but there is no evidence that the same standard of reporting also applies to national funding where there is no international partner. The publication of these reports on Norad's website does, however, allow the information-seeker to form a more complete understanding of some of the activities undertaken using public funds than they would be able to gain from figures alone.

General poor practice: No examples were found of systematic input into evaluations from recipient country stakeholders such as the public, civil society representatives, parliamentarians or governments. Either this means that there are no such inputs or that there is a marked lack of transparency about them.

Point of Note: Lack of Cross-Referencing of Information

A concern which became apparent to the researchers during the course of this study, particularly when they moved on to the country-level information described in Section 5, was the lack of cross-referencing between information falling into one information class and information in another. For example, we did not find any example of a system which allowed the public to understand which part of a budget a particular contract related to. It is normal administrative practice that spending of funds is related to specific budget lines in order for this spending to be approved. These connections are not at all available to the public. So while it might be possible to assume that the planned budget for Country X or for Sector Y relates to grants or contracts which seem to be for work in that sector, this is not made explicit. As for information about actual funds transferred to recipient country governments, this was also not available: it is interesting to note that contracts above a fixed amount often have to be published but not other payments which may well be significantly above that amount.

Similarly information on consultations and evaluations was rarely linked to the relevant country or sector pages, and certainly there was no systematic cross-referencing of, say, evaluations, to specific line items of the budget for the budget years during which those projects or programmes were carried out. It may be that current information systems are not designed to make such direct linkages, but if the public is to be able to hold the government accountable for spending of public funds and to know how that spending was evaluated, this information has to be made public and the data sets should be organised in such a way as to permit this.

²¹ These reports are still available although no longer presented in a database. It is not clear if there exist reports from all NGOs who have received funding from Norad or if it is up to date. See the Tools and Publications section of the website, button on Publications and then button on Reviews from Organisations:

<http://norad.no/en/Tools+and+publications/Publications/Reviews+from+Organisations>, last accessed, 14/07/09.

²² See the following examples: BHim, R., and Keshab, P., Final Evaluation of CCWB and DCWBS Strengthening Program (September 2005 - December 2007), June 2008: Kathmandu, Nepal, and Rosset, P., Participatory Evaluation of La Via Campesina, December 2005: Chipas, Mexico.

Recommendations from Section Three

- Information about upcoming consultations should be published along with all relevant documentation in sufficient time to enable all stakeholders to engage in the consultation.
- Aid agencies should publish the outcomes of consultations and should make clear precisely who was consulted and how, as well as how their inputs were taken into consideration.
- A clear and searchable overview of all open and closed tenders and calls for proposals should be made available, as well as information on contracts and grants concluded. Actual contract documents, grants and other agreements between donor agencies and other bodies should be available. Particularly sensitive information affecting commercial or other interests as well as information which may infringe on protection of privacy and of personal data can be severed or blacked out where strictly necessary. In other words, the information published proactively should meet the same standard as the information which could be obtained under a standard access to information regime.
- Aid agencies should publish full information about the policies and methodologies for, and outcomes of, all evaluations. This information should include the policies on who will input into evaluations and how stakeholders can provide such inputs.
- Aid agencies should make clear the policy for commissioning external evaluations and how these criteria were applied to select which funding and activities will be subject to external evaluations. They should publish the outcomes of these evaluations.
- There should be a systematic and transparent linking of all budget lines to detailed reporting on spending and to evaluations in order to permit the public to scrutinise fully how and how well public funds were spent.

Section Four. Transparency of Integrity Mechanisms

Table 8: Findings for Transparency of Integrity Mechanisms

Total Score	Canada	France	Norway	Spain	UK
9	5	2	1	1	4
	56%	22%	11%	11%	44%

Expenditure of government money is never exempt from risks of diversion or misappropriation of those funds. It is therefore essential that public institutions establish mechanisms for preventing corruption. There should also be clear systems for reporting corruption as well as for evaluating allegations and investigating any credible concerns raised. Such mechanisms can help promote honesty or “integrity” within government.²³

The need to prevent corruption is particularly important in the world of international aid. Strong evidence suggests that this is an area prone to corruption, particularly when funds are being spent in societies with high levels of endemic corruption. Taking all possible steps to guard against misappropriation of funds is part of the work that needs to be done to ensure that aid funds are spent effectively.

In spite of the clear need for strong integrity mechanisms, this monitoring study found very little information which would convince members of the public that real steps had been taken to root out corruption in the spending of aid. Only Canada scored more than 50% in this section of the monitoring and even the points that were awarded in this section were for minimal slices of information none of which amounted to comprehensive integrity mechanisms.

For the purposes of this monitoring, Access Info selected a number of common anti-corruption mechanisms drawn from those proposed by international treaties (such as the UN Convention Against Corruption) and from comparative national law and practice. These included: corruption risk assessments; gifts and assets declarations; and mechanism for raising complaints or “blowing the whistle” on bad practices (accountability mechanisms).

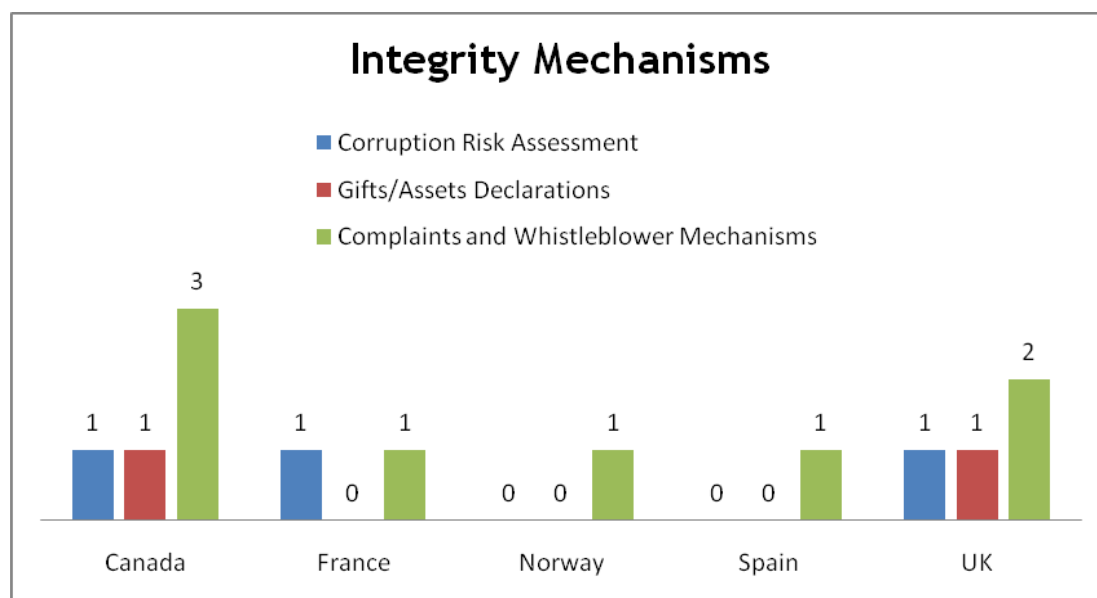
Table 9: Three Classes of Information for Integrity Mechanisms

Transparency of Integrity Mechanisms	Max Score
1. Corruption Risk Assessment	3
2. Gifts / Assets Declarations for individuals and institutions	3
3. Accountability Mechanisms: Complaints/ Whistle-blowers	3

²³ The dictionary definition of “integrity” given by Merriam Webster online is “firm adherence to a code of especially moral or artistic values: incorruptibility”. See <http://www.merriam-webster.com/dictionary/integrity>

The monitors tested the availability of information about these mechanisms which, it can reasonably be assumed, would exist in one form or another in each aid agency. Our findings related to these classes of information showed very low levels of transparency.

Figure 5: Integrity Mechanisms



This does not mean that aid agencies or other government supervisory bodies do not have such mechanisms. That said, we note that CIDA's website reported that it was in the process of developing an anti-corruption strategy; not provided with much information about this but it indicates the absence of a policy to date.

This is a serious failing on the part of aid agencies when the taxpayers of those countries are almost certain to have come across media reports of some scandal or other related to aid spending and would at least be reassured if it were demonstrated that mechanisms are in place to prevent and to investigate corrupt practices.

4.1 Corruption Risk Assessment

Our overall finding was that there is alarmingly little information about how aid agencies evaluate the risks of corruption related to the spending of aid funds in any particular country or sector.

Researchers looked for general information about policies and practices to prevent corruption. Points were available for specific assessments of risks encountered in the agencies' day to day work. Essentially, this indicator aimed simply to know if aid agencies had evaluated potential corruption risks and if they had set up any policies to address them, particularly in those recipient countries where it has been demonstrated that there is a high incidence of diversion and misappropriation of funds.

No agency was able to demonstrate good practice for our corruption risk assessment indicator although the monitoring did reveal some **useful related information**: CIDA states that they are currently developing an anti-corruption strategy, DFID has an anti-fraud corruption policy (buried deep in its website) and the AFD has social and environmental risk assessments for some projects which demonstrate the type of assessment that would be needed to address corruption risks institutionally and in

some country-based project and programme situations. We allocated one point where we found some references to fighting against corruption or promoting good practices and integrity in a broader sense.

4.2 Gifts and Assets Declarations

Having registers of gifts received by public officials and requiring public officials to declare their assets on entering office and at regular intervals (for example every year) are standard anti-corruption tools regularly promoted in and even required of recipient countries by national and multilateral donors.

Access Info therefore looked for records of gifts received and assets declarations by, at least, senior public officials. No examples of registers of gifts received by those working on behalf of the agency were found, nor were assets declarations of key individuals such as ministers found.²⁴

CIDA demonstrated **good practice** through clear and detailed publication of travel and other expenses on its website, and we awarded points for this even though it was not strictly the focus of this class of information.

4.3 Complaints and Whistleblower Protection

If public bodies are to encourage their staff to raise the alert when something irregular occurs in the spending of funds, it is essential to have mechanisms for internal complaints and to provide protection to those who “blow the whistle”. It is also essential to create channels for external actors, such as civil society organisations and members of the public to make complaints and to report problems in the spending of aid funds.

In spite of this, very little information could be found about such complaints mechanisms. AFD, Norad and AECID showed a minimum and **poor practice** for reporting complaints by only having a simple ‘contact us’ or ‘complaints’ section on their website.

CIDA was the only aid agency with **good practice**. Their website presents the mechanisms for dealing with internal disclosure. DFID demonstrated one aspect of **better practice** in the accessibility of a thorough guide on policy and procedures for complaints linked to the ‘contact us’ page.

²⁴ We did find occasional examples of information about the assets held by the institutions themselves which could be useful information when examining the financial management practices of a public institution but should not be confused with individual asset declarations.

Recommendations from Section Four

- All aid agencies monitored should explain to the public the main anti-corruption mechanisms required by law, how they apply to the aid agency, and whether they are implemented by that agency or based on reporting to an oversight body. This will enable the public to understand the minimum measures that are legal required to prevent corruption.
- All aid agencies should also publish any information about additional, agency-specific corruption risk assessments and all policies or procedures designed to reduce the risks of corruption. This should include information about how spending of aid funds is handled in-country and what the oversight mechanisms are. There should also be an explanation of the relationship with recipient governments' anti-corruption procedures, particularly in countries with a high incidence of corruption.
- Aid agencies should ensure that where mechanisms such as gifts registers and assets declarations are instituted and that this information is fully disclosed. Other classes of information which should be made public include public officials' expense claims. There should be full reports of all spending on contracts and grants (See Section 3 above) as well as details of the review mechanisms for auditing such spending.
- Aid agencies should make transparent to the public their internal complaints processes and how they guarantee an appropriate protection of whistleblowers. At the same time, the public should be informed of the procedure for reporting concerns about improper conduct and the mechanism by which they will be protected from any possible adverse consequences in making such reports. It is particularly important that there are protections in place when complaints are received from an individual from an aid recipient country who is reporting on, for example, a corrupt local official who might attempt reprisals if the identity of the informant were revealed.
- Every year each aid agency should publish a report containing detailed information about how anti-corruption systems are applied in practice together with relevant statistics such as the numbers of complaints received, the nature of the complaints, and the outcomes of investigations.

Section Five.

Recipient Country Information: Strategies, Projects and Aid by Channel

Members of the public, both from donor and recipient countries, are likely to be interested in following the aid that flows to a particular recipient country. Members of the public are likely to want to understand how the strategy for a particular recipient country is developed as well as what agreements have been signed with public bodies. Alongside needing to know about the criteria for delivering or withholding funds, those in recipient countries also have a legitimate interest in knowing what has actually happened to money disbursed.

In this monitoring Access Info looked only for basic information about the strategies for each of five recipient countries and the main information about how the money was being spent. The findings were mixed but on the whole not enough information was available to provide a complete picture of the aid activities of any donor in any recipient country. There was never enough information available to conduct a detailed analysis of the aid flows to that country.

Table 10: Findings for Recipient Country Information

Total Score	Canada	France	Norway	Spain	UK
45	23	10	5	13	28
	51%	22%	11%	29%	62%

The final part of this monitoring was to conduct a preliminary mapping of the transparency of aid flows to particular countries. The five recipient countries – **Afghanistan, Kosovo, Mozambique, Peru, and Sierra Leone** – were chosen for their geographical, political, and development-level diversity.

Researchers looked for information relating to donor activity in those countries, monitoring just three representative classes of information: 1) strategies, 2) information on projects and programmes, and 3) information on aid by channel between our five donor aid agencies and the five recipient countries (bi-lateral, multi-lateral, etc.).

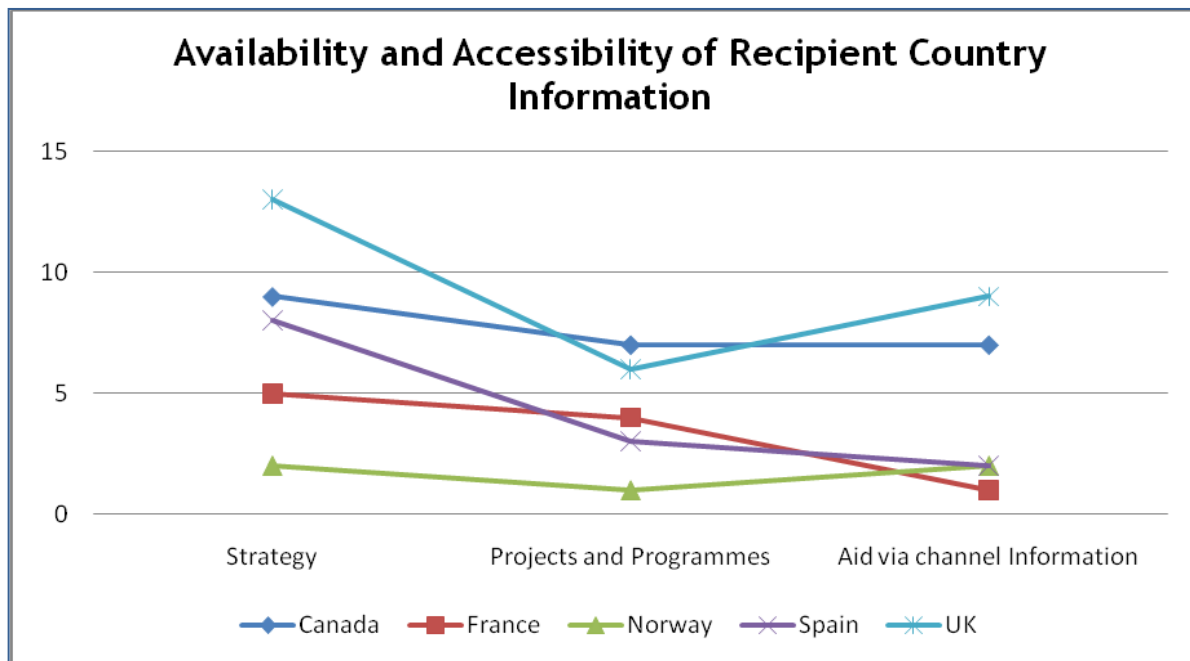
The findings reveal significant variations in the level of detail given about in-country activities:

Table 11: Three Classes of Information Monitored for Recipient Country Information

Activities in Recipient Countries Classes of Information	Max Score
1. Country Programmes: Strategy	15 ²⁵
2. Country Programmes: Projects Information	15
3. Country Programmes: Information on aid via channel	15

²⁵ A maximum score of 3 was given in the case of each of the 5 developing country case studies, Kosovo, Mozambique, Peru, Afghanistan and Sierra Leone.

Figure 6: Recipient Country Information



5.1 Strategy Information

Of the three country programme indicators, findings clearly show that donors perform best on strategy although the strategy information presented on their websites was far below the level of detail demanded in the Aid Transparency Principles. This class of information includes basic strategy documents and evidence of incorporation of recipient country or stakeholder perspectives into that strategy along with information on the aid modality used.

Best practice was found in our sampling of information from DFID and the AFD. The DFID Country Assistance Plan to Mozambique was exemplary in providing a clear framework for other projects for which there was information. DFID's treatment of strategy information was also clear in more complicated cases such as Kosovo where important contextual information related to the UK's position on the recognition of Kosovo was made very clear in addition to presentation of project details. This disclosure of relevant information demonstrates a more comprehensive approach to proactive publication, providing stakeholders with useful context information. It would, however, be ideal if the same proactive disclosure policies were applied in the case of all recipient countries and not only in cases where it might be motivated by the political sensitivities of engagement in that country or region.

Worst practice for this indicator was undoubtedly Norad with a general lack of detailed country strategy information or other detail. For instance, we found a document reporting that in 2007 Peru was the 5th largest recipient of Norwegian aid. Yet the only information we were able to find about activities in or a strategy for Peru was one sentence stating that these funds were for investments in hydroelectric plants.

Poor Practice Point of Note: Press Release

One common **bad practice** is the over-use of press releases. It was common to find that the only information available about a project or programme was contained in a single press release. Often press releases did not link to any other relevant information at all. AECID's old website was a classic example of this but also was also symptomatic of a more general trend among the agencies monitored to rely heavily on use of press releases as a means of imparting information.

Where a press release does not supplement more complete information but instead substitutes for it, this may raise serious concerns. An example revealed by this study was in the case of **Norway where press releases about 2009 aid commitments did not match 2009 budget proposals. It is not clear to the user (or our researchers) why there is a discrepancy of 430 million Euros between the press release and overview budget.**²⁶ It is possible that differences in the definition of aid explain this discrepancy in the budget summary and press release but this is a typical example of the kind of misinformation that can result from a reliance on press releases.

5.2 Programmes and Projects

The Access Info research team looked extensively for information about donor to recipient aid flows, making it one of the most time-consuming parts of the monitoring exercise. The information we searched for included any documents about programme and project activities in each of the five recipient countries.

The findings in this section are the result of reviewing a larger volume of information on donor websites than for any other classes of information; however this information is far from accessible or comprehensive. The main finding is that where aid agencies have made the effort to create dedicated country profiles or have allocated sections of an agency website organised into country-based information (portals), these were the most effective tool for ensuring provision of more complete and easily accessible information on bilateral aid flows.

²⁶ See, Ministry of Finance, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Press Centre, News, *Finally 1% of GNI to International Development*, available from, http://www.regjeringen.no/en/dep/ud/press/News/2008/b_development.html?id=531086, last accessed 09/02/2009 and Norwegian Ministry of Finance, Budget 2009: Key Figures for the Norwegian Economy, available from, http://www.statsbudsjettet.dep.no/upload/Statsbudsjett_2009/dokumenter/pdf/budget_2009.pdf, last accessed 15/03/2009, p.5. We found a difference of 3.8 billion NOK between the amount of 26.2 billion NOK of Norwegian aid for 2009 stated in the press release referenced, and 22.4 billion NOK in the budget summary.

Point of Note: Profiles and Portals

There is a clear correlation between aid agencies that scored highly on the indicators for country information and those who organise information on their websites on a country-by-country basis. Such an organisation system clearly helps the aid agency structure the presentation of information and motivates them to upload more complete data. The existence of dedicated web pages or entire portals significantly increases the ease with which users can locate relevant information.

We found, however, a number of problems common to aid agency systems for country-based organisation of information and have therefore expanded this point of note to detail three main problems:

- *Country portals and profiles can lead to lack of clarity where they are not comprehensive and only provide information for those countries in which donors have major programmes.* When searching for information on the AFD's work in Sierra Leone, Access Info found that although AFD organises information on activities by country portals, it did not have a portal for Sierra Leone. Users are therefore led to assume that the agency has no activities or involvement in the country. From searching on the AiDA website, however, it appears that AFD does have projects in Sierra Leone. It maybe that the level of activity in Sierra Leone did not justify a dedicated portal, but users who do not know about the AiDA database would be left in the dark. DFID avoided this problem, at least in part, by having overview regional profiles indicating the countries of activity.
- *Summaries do not substitute for detail.* Standardisation can mean limitation and by formatting information to fit a standard structure for dedicated country pages, important detail can be lost. Aid agencies are not using the full potential of their country portals to upload original documents. This was the case, for example, with CIDA's country profiles.
- *Failure to link to external websites which contain significantly more information.* For example, AECID has a local website in Peru with more detailed information than can be found on the main AECID website. There are, however, no clear links between information on the main site and the recipient country site: we only stumbled upon the Peru site following a Google search. There are some other AECID branch websites (for the Western Balkans for example, based in Sarajevo, Bosnia) which also contain additional and useful information. Clear links between the main site and sub-sites and inclusion of this information in country profiles would be a significant improvement in practice in this area.

Table 12: Availability and Accessibility of Information in Country Profiles

Donor	Country Profile or Portal	Country Profiles for countries where there is little to no activity	Clear information in profile about funding	Relevant downloadable documents available
Canada	✓	✓	✓	✗
France	✓	✗	✓	✓
Norway	✗ ²⁷	✗	✗	✗
Spain	✗	✗	✗	✗
UK	✓	✓	✗	✓

5.3 Information on Aid by Channel

Aid flows quickly becomes untraceable where information is not given about the means used to provide funds to recipient countries. If there is no information about whether, for example, funds go via multilateral institutions or bilateral channels, then it is impossible to track funds. It is imperative that country profiles, plans and strategy documents detail the channel through which funds are being directed for different activities. It is also imperative that to have a full reporting system in place on the funds allocated through each channel as well as accompanying evaluation materials.

In general, there was a lack of information on funding by channel. Canada was one of the highest performers on this indicator as it systematically had a country profile page which presented overall funding and at the project level indicated the partners or multi-lateral funding institutions. This system represents a starting point for tracking aid funds, but does not provide a complete data set. It omits, for example, information about funds channelled to recipient countries through NGOs.

²⁷ On Norad's new website related information is tagged and linked to country, or regional 'themes'. Although this represents an improvement, as it is more likely that those looking for country based information will find their way to it, these themes do not constitute country portals or profiles as they include no information in themselves and are no more than a list of links. For example see, norad.no, Latin America, available from, <http://norad.no/en/Themepage?contentType=all&key=110094>, last accessed, 14/07/2009.

Point of Note: Publication levels vary widely by recipient country.

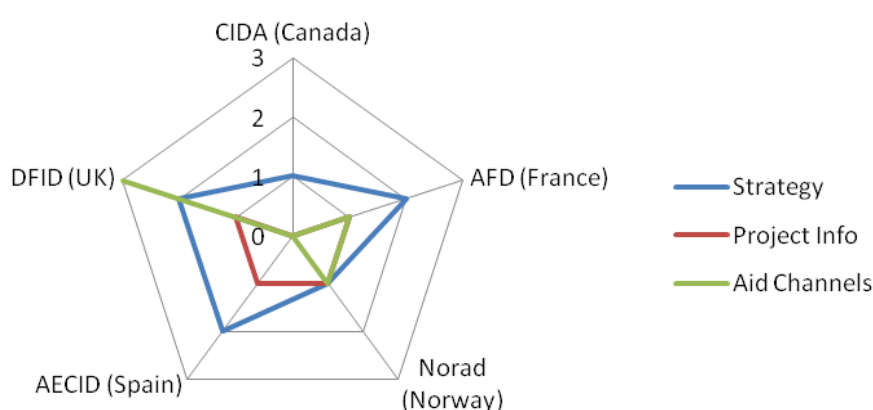
Access Info found that for all the aid agencies monitored, publication levels varied widely depending on the recipient country. In those recipient countries that are often seen as development success stories considerably more information is published and accessible. (These countries are also sometimes known as 'donor darlings', a term coined to describe the relatively high levels of funding and attention they receive in comparison with countries with similar living standards.) This effect can clearly be seen in our monitoring of aid information on activities in Mozambique, a country known to receive significantly more attention from donors than other recipient countries that we monitored.

Figure 7: Information Available from Donor Countries According to Recipient

Below is a series of graphic representations of how donors performed overall in information provision for each recipient country. The figures show that some countries, especially Mozambique but also Afghanistan, have more information available from donors than other countries.

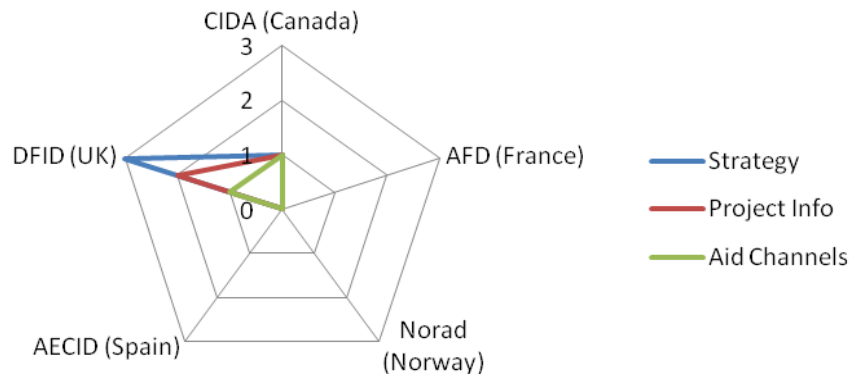
No information was found in the cases of the AFD in Kosovo and Peru and the AECID in Kosovo and Sierra Leone. This has been taken into account in scoring and percentages but should also be taken into account when viewing the above visual representations of scoring.

Afghanistan: Info on aid agency activity



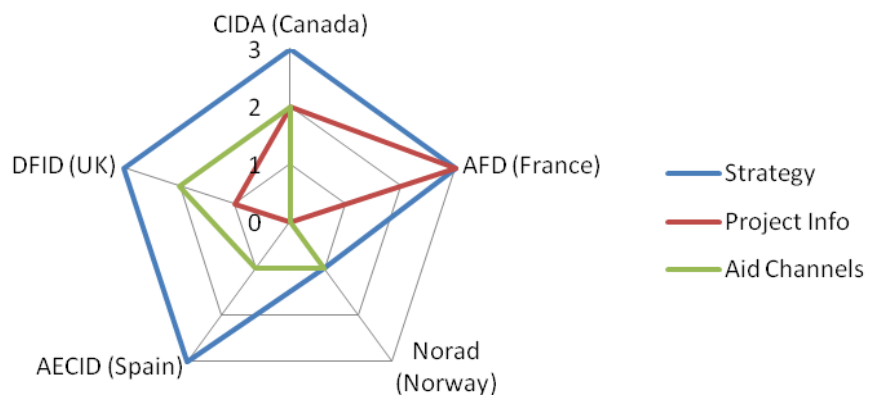
All aid agencies published some information about their aid funding in Afghanistan however information was particularly lacking about aid channels and individual projects.

Kosovo: Info on aid agency activity



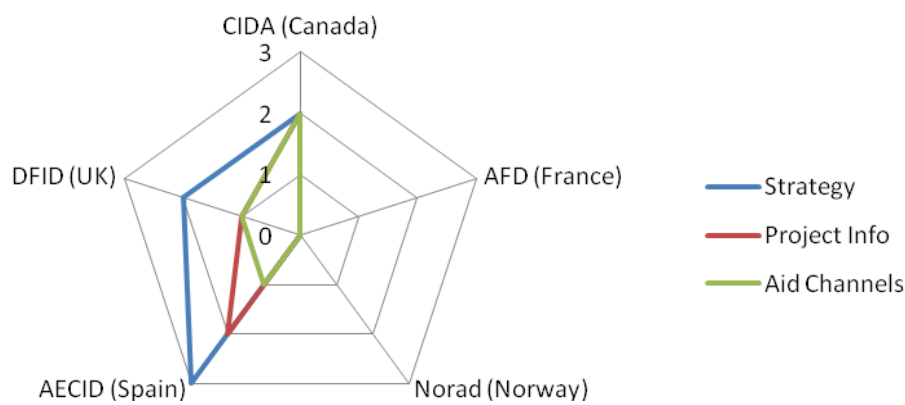
Only DFID and CIDA provided information on their projects in Kosovo; DFID provided more information on the strategy and projects than on the different aid channels.

Mozambique: Info on aid agency activity



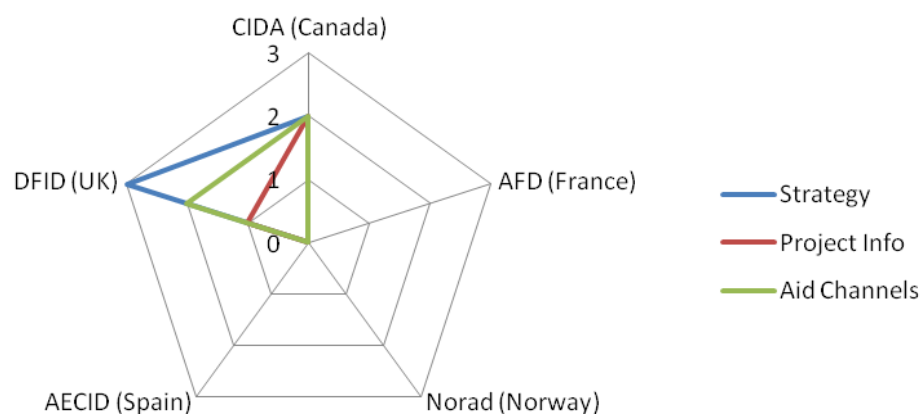
All donor agencies provided information on their funding to Mozambique. There was at least basic information on strategy available in all cases but detail was lacking about aid channels at the project level.

Peru: Info on aid agency activity



DFID, CIDA and AECID provided basic information about their activities in Peru.

Sierra Leone: Info on aid agency activity



DFID and CIDA published reasonable basic levels of information about their activities in Sierra Leone.

Recommendations from Section Five

- Strategies should be published by sector, region and/or country for the donor's aid activities. Where projects are of a smaller nature it should be clear how they fit into the agency's overall strategies.
- Press releases should not substitute for more complete information on aid agency activities and funding. Press releases should be linked to the detailed sector or country sections and to documents which provide more detail. The aid agency websites should make clear when the planned activities or spending presented in press releases differ from what was subsequently realised and should clearly explain any discrepancies.
- Detailed information on activities in all recipient countries should be published not only for countries which receive particularly high levels of aid or attention. When organising information on their activities in recipient countries aid agencies should seek to answer the following question which is likely to be the first question in the mind of any taxpayer from the donor country or any stakeholder from the recipient country: *Does the Aid Agency fund projects or programmes in country X?*
- Users should not be left to assume that an aid agency does not fund activities in a particular country simply because the information is absent. The onus should be on the aid agency to make clear the countries in which it does and does not carry out activities or fund projects, including when this funding only goes via multilateral channels.
- Dedicated country sections of the website can be used to give as clear a picture as possible of the agency's work in the recipient country. At a minimum, country profiles or portals should also include:
 - An index and copies of all documents that relate to the recipient country, including strategies, budgets, agreements, grants to NGOs, and contracts with companies.
 - Other relevant background documents that are held by the aid agency, such as trade agreements, copies of the recipient's development or poverty reduction strategy should also be published or at least included in the index so that it can be requested by members of the public.
 - Details of in-country contacts such as names and addresses of any in-country agency offices or representatives; information in-country websites run by the aid agency's local office or by others such as multilateral bodies or coordinators of multi-donor funds.
 - Details of how members of the public from the donor and recipient country can request further information.
- Where there is not enough information to warrant creation of dedicated country profiles or pages, this activity can be presented as part of regional profiles. It should be possible for a user to verify with certainty whether there is (or has been in recent years) any spending or other activity in a particular sector, region or country and to find all relevant documents related to this activity.
- Where there are dedicated in-country websites for recipient country programmes and offices, this should be made clear to the user of the main aid agency website. Clear links between the main site and sub-sites and inclusion of this information in country profiles would be a significant improvement in practice in this area.

Section Six. Findings on Accessibility

Table 13: Findings on Accessibility

Total Score	Canada	France	Norway	Spain	UK
30	15	19	12	13	22
	50%	63%	40%	43%	73%

The accessibility indicators were developed to evaluate systematically the process of communicating aid information to the non-specialist user.

Access Info selected five indicators against which to measure the accessibility of websites. These indicators look at how easy it is to move around the websites of the aid agencies and find information. They also evaluate whether users are given guidance on finding information, whether information is available in a variety of languages, and whether users are informed of their right to request information.

This evaluation was conducted after completing the rest of the monitoring, when the researchers had accumulated significant experience searching for information on the websites of each of the aid agencies monitored. This permitted the researchers to evaluate and compare the indicators for navigability and the functionality of the search function.

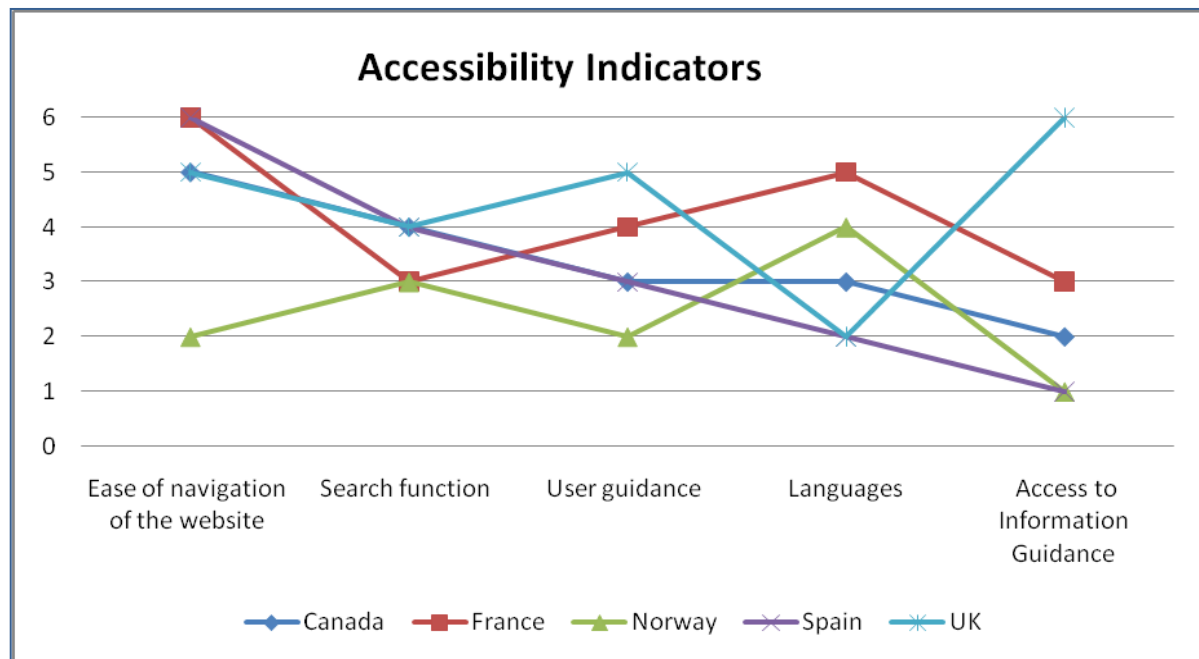
Table 14: Five Accessibility Indicators

Accessibility Indicator	Max Score
1. Ease of Navigation	6
2. Search Function	6
3. User Guidance	6
4. Languages	6
5. Access to Information Guidance	6

6.1 Ease of Navigation

As a general finding of this monitoring, it seems that in many cases websites have not been designed with end-users in mind: information is organised in such a way that for those without prior knowledge of how the aid agency operates internally or in relation to other state actors finding information can be a laborious process. This assessment is reflected in the scores for indicator 1.

Figure 8: Accessibility Indicators



A typical example of the problems encountered is the CIDA (Canada) website which is hard for the non-specialist user to navigate because key information is not found in the relevant sections but only in the documents section. CIDA's website's multiple and changing menus were confusing for the user. Changing menus was also a problem with the AFD (France) site whose logical but somewhat ambitious design has side menus which vary according to level or depth within site, which can be very disorientating.

Good practice included the AFD website which has downloadable documents on the relevant thematic sections of the website, and **best practice** was the DFID (UK) website, which is clearly laid out and easy to navigate with links to documents embedded in the relevant sections as well as in a separate documents section.

On the other hand, the Norad (Norway) website was **poorly designed**, with aesthetic and technical problems such as text running off the bottom of web pages. Norad's website also suffered from a low level of content. There was no guidance as to which information the user might expect to find on the Norad website and which information could be found on other government websites.²⁸

²⁸ The new Norad website has addressed some of these problems however many pages such as the "Strategy" and "Press information" pages at the present date do not contain content and some links do not work. See <http://norad.no/en/About+Norad/Strategy>, last accessed 14/07/2009.

Figure 9: Screenshot from the search for a strategy on the Norad website

The screenshot shows a search results page on the Norad website. On the left is a sidebar with a search bar and navigation links: 'Søke tilskudd', 'Forretningsmuligheter', 'Publikasjoner', 'Linker', 'Resultater', 'Mødre- og barnehelse', and 'Tusenårsmålene'. The main content area displays search results for the query 'strategy'. At the top, it says 'Sorter resultat etter:: Tittel | Utgitt' and 'Antall resultater per side: 10 | 20 | 40 | 80'. Below this, it states '75 treff på 4 sider på strategy:'. The results list includes several documents with titles and dates, such as 'Education Quality Improvement Program : Mid Term Review Mission Aide Memoire' (21.05.2007), 'A Decade of Action in Transport : An Evaluation of World Bank Assistance to the Transport Sector, 1995-2005' (21.05.2007), 'Mid-Term Review of Norway's Support to UNICEF's Education Programme in Madagascar (2005 - 2007) GLO-2108' (24.05.2007), 'Partners in promoting child and maternal health' (20.04.2007), 'Lessons from Evaluations of Women and Gender Equality in Development Cooperation' (21.12.2006), 'Evaluation Policy 2006-2010' (11.10.2006), 'Relevante lenker og bakgrunnsstoff' (02.10.2006), 'Utvikling av eksportrettet kjøttproduksjon i Uganda' (23.08.2006), and 'Norad's strategy towards 2010' (31.05.2006). Each result includes a brief description of the document's content.

The AECID (Spain) website would have scored lower on navigability but at the beginning of February 2009 a new version was launched which was a dramatic improvement on the previous site. Nevertheless, side menus remain complex and users are often taken to other websites without explanation, adding more confusion and frustration to the searching process. For example, when looking for information on contracts concluded by AECID, the user is taken to a website of the Spanish Finance Ministry with a database of thousands of public procurement contracts, many of which do not have anything to do with aid, and which cannot be searched to identify the aid contracts.

In order to ensure that their websites are of value to the public, the aid agencies need to **take a step back** and consider how to organise their information in a way that takes into consideration not the understanding of those already working in, or familiar with, the agency but rather of a wider public.

6.2 Search Function

The search function is a simple tool which is crucial for users wanting to find information on websites and it is imperative that it works well, particularly when websites are multi-layered and menus change at each level into the website (see *Ease of Navigation* above). The search function can also be an obstruction to access such as in the case of the old AECID (Spain) website in which the search function failed to work at all for several months.

Some search functions had serious limitations: Norway's strategy document is entitled "Strategy towards 2010" and can be found immediately if these words are entered into

the search function on the Norad website, but a search using just the word “strategy” only gave this document as the 49th placed search result at the time of testing.²⁹

6.3 User Guidance

This indicator evaluated how clearly the information is organised on the website, the existence and quality of a sitemap, and whether the website gives guidance on both the structure of the website itself and of the functioning of the aid agency. We also looked for the existence of FAQs (Frequently Asked Questions). In the absence of such information the non-specialist user may find it hard to understand the layout of the website or whether it is likely to contain the information they are looking for. For example, Norad (Norway) fails to make clear to the user what information is likely to be found on its website and what is likely to be found on other websites such as that of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs.

DFID’s website is an example of **good practice** as it gives detailed information in the “About DFID” section of the website on how it is structured and had FAQs on DFID itself (along with other general FAQs on its work). The website has a nicely presented site map which can be accessed by a very obvious button at the top of the website (next to the “search” and “contact us” buttons). An additional benefit of the DFID website is that it is relatively well structured. Only occasionally does someone navigating it arrive at a dead end or get thrown out of it to an external link without warning – something that happened more frequently with both the Norad and AECID (Spain) websites.

6.4 Languages

Language options are obvious but fundamental factors in making information accessible to stakeholders. Our basis for assessing this indicator comprises three elements. The first is whether information is published in the official languages of the country (2 points), further whether information is published in at least one other major language (1 point per additional language; up to 2 points), and finally whether at least some relevant information is published in languages of recipients (2 points).

Examples of **good practice** included AFD (France) whose website was available in French, English and Spanish (although the latter two have less information but still significant core information about AFD). In addition, there is information relevant to recipient countries published in the official languages of some of those countries, for example: the Egypt portal is in French and Arabic; the Turkish portal is in French, English, Spanish and Turkish; and the Chinese portal also in French, English, and Chinese. This is significantly more of a commitment to presenting information in a variety of languages than any other of the websites in this study.

²⁹ The search function has improved and this document now comes up as the 9th entry in the same search according to a search conducted on 14/07/2009.

Case Study: Canada, Afghanistan and the need for clarity when reporting on activities carried out in one country by multiple government agencies

Afghanistan is the largest recipient of Canadian development aid but there was minimal transparency on how this money is being spent on because the information was mixed with reporting on Canada's military operations in Afghanistan. When trying to track CIDA's activities in Afghanistan, the first place to start is the country information pages of CIDA. The CIDA Afghan country page has information that says that "For fiscal year 2007–2008, CIDA's assistance to Afghanistan totalled approximately \$280 million". When a member of the public tries to ascertain how these funds were spent, they are taken to a general "Canada's Engagement in Afghanistan" website which also reports on security and military assistance and the role of Canada's armed forces in Afghanistan, making it impossible to discern precisely what CIDA is doing in Afghanistan.

It should be noted that this problem is not inherent to countries in which the donor government is engaged in both aid and military operations: an example of better practice comes from the UK where DFID has reports available on their involvement in conflict regions which identify how collaboration between DFID, the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the Ministry of Defence is structured, how funds are pooled together and the strategy behind this cooperation in achieving conflict prevention. These reports also state the date on which they were ordered for printing by parliament showing a relationship between the ministries involved and parliament. Both measures help keep the links in the aid distribution chain transparent.

6.5 Access to Information Guidance

Under this indicator we checked for information which tells the user about their right of access to information such as under an access to information law if one exists (2 points), whether it tells users *how* to request information (2 points), and whether this information is easy to find (2 points).

Best practice is DFID (UK), which has an "Access to Information" link at the foot of every single page of the website which takes the user to a comprehensive section of the website on the right of access to information under the UK's Freedom of Information Act (2000) including information about their proactive disclosure policy.

AFD (France) has a good "Transparency Policy" section which gives details about how to request information although it doesn't explicitly mention France's Law on Access to Administrative Documents (1978) because this law does not apply to AFD. CIDA only scored 2 points for this indicator as it has a section on proactive disclosure but not on how to request information under Canada's Freedom of Information Act; Norad and AECID (Spain) had no information on how to request information, providing only a "contact us" page with an e-mail address.

Recommendations from Section Six

Aid agencies should take a step back and approach the organisation of their websites from the perspective of those information seekers who are not already familiar with the structure of their organisation. Basic web navigation tools such as search functions should be checked frequently to ensure that they are working properly.

Aid agency websites should make clear to users the exact role and responsibilities of the aid agency and the scope of the information to be found on the site. Explaining in plain language the aid agency's role within the donor government and any key relationships it may have with other bodies or ministries would facilitate this.

If some aid-related information linked to the aid agency's activities is to be found on other websites, this should be clearly indicated, and if a link is made to another website there should be an explanation about where this link is going and why. Ideally such links should open in a new browser window to enable the user to return easily to the main aid agency website.

Core information about an aid agency's functioning and activities should be situated so that it is easy to find. For example, the main aid strategy documents and global budget data, along with criteria for the allocation of aid, reporting and evaluations, should be clearly marked and should be easy to find not more than one or maximum two clicks away from the front page of the website.

An expansion of publication to multiple languages should be undertaken with particular focus on languages spoken in recipient countries as well as other widely spoken world languages such as English, French and Spanish (the other three UN languages are Russian, Chinese and Arabic).

Users should be provided with explicit guidance on how to go about seeking further information, such as how to file an information request or who to phone or write to if additional information is needed.

In order to facilitate this, the following information should always be published:

- **Lists, Registers, Databases:** Information on the lists, registers and databases held by the public body. Information about whether these lists and registers and databases are available on-line and/or for on-site access by members of the public;
- **Information about Information Held:** An index or register of documents/information held; details of information held in databases;
- **Publications Information:** Information on publications issued, including whether publications are free of charge or the price if they must be purchased;
- **Information about the Right to Information:** Information on the right of access to information and how to request information, including contact information for the responsible person in each public body.

Annex A: Access to Information Indicators, Classes of Information: Scoring system

Classes of Information (Sections 2-5) and Access to Information Indicators (Section 6)	Specifications for Scoring
2.1. Organisational Structure	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on Organisational structure <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - List of departments and full descriptions (2 points) - Organogram or otherwise presented clear explanation of structures and roles of different parts of the organisation. (2 point) - Staff Directory (2 points)
2.2. Main Aid Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Current Main Strategy document <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Description of strategy & planned activities (2 points) - Information on how decisions were taken to arrive at strategy (1 point) - What are criteria for allocating aid within the strategy? (1 point) - Detailed planned activities for the upcoming year by country/sector/modality (2 point)
2.3. Aid Budget	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Budget for the strategy period and/or on an annual basis. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Detailed budget available as opposed to overall figures (2 points) - Does it include details by sector / channel (1 point) - Does it include aid by country? (2 points) - Does the budget include a break-down of aid flows by the kind of aid? Modalities (1 point)
2.4. Annual Report	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Annual Report (year 2007) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Narrative reports on what was done (1 point) - Comprehensive reporting on countries of activity and what done (2 points) - Reporting on sectors / channels / modalities (2 points) - Including evaluations of the effectiveness of aid funds disbursed (1 points)
2.5. Financial Report	<p>Report on previous year's budget spending. Does it include:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Report on expenditure exists (1 point) - Detail to regional spending levels (1 point) - Detail of sectoral spending (1 point) - Detail of modality and channel = programme, project) (1 point) - Detail by country (1 point) - Detail by projects (1 point)
3.1. Consultations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Consultations <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clear link to info on consultations and/or participation. (1 point) - Detail on approach to consultations and on how it will feed into project cycles. (1 point) - Publication of documents from consultation process. (1 point)
3.2. Public Procurement procedure and tenders	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on procurement procedures, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information on policies and procedures for public procurement. (2 points) - Publication of open and closed tenders. (1 point)
3.3. Current Contracts	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on procurement procedures, <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Actual contracts made available (1 point) - Reporting on contracts (1 point) - Information on contractors and sub-contracting agents (1 point)

3.4. Grant Application Policy and Procedures	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on grants (related to project aid and other grants to civil society groups) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Policy on grant-making and the publication of grant details (1 point) - Information on how organisations can apply for grants, including timeframes (1 point) - Criteria for awarding grants and information about how decisions are made. (1 point)
3.5. Current Grants	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on grants <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Reporting on grants (1 point) - Details on current grants made including names and dates (1 point) - Evaluation of current grants made including submissions from recipients (1 point)
3.6. Evaluation Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Evaluation reports <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Evidence of systematic evaluation. (up to 2 points) - Evidence of input or submissions of recipient countries and any relevant programme/project implementing partners (1 point)
4.1. Corruption Risk Assessment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Corruption Risk Assessment: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information on the policies and practices to prevent corruption. (2 points) - Reports on assessment of risks of corruption related to the institution's activities (1 point)
4.2. Gifts / Assets Declarations	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Declarations of individuals (and institutions): <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Assets declarations of key individuals (1 point) - Gifts policies, gifts registers, assets declarations of institutions - and any other expense declarations (2 points)
4.3. Accountability Mechanisms: Complaints/ Whistle-blowers	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Mechanisms and protection in complaints procedures: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information about mechanisms for raising concerns about illegal, fraudulent or corrupt practices (1 point) - Including information on the protection offered to whistleblowers (1 point) - Data on complaints or allegations of corruption received, and whether these complaints came from public employees, NGO, bidders/contractors, or members of the public. Data on investigations carried out and their outcomes. (1 points)
5.1. Country Programmes: Strategy	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Strategy <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Strategy for activities in the country (1 point) - Information on which aid modality(s) being used (1 point) - References to the country's own strategy (1 point)
5.2. Country Programmes: Projects Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information on actual activities in the country and budgets <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information on activities planned (2 points) - Budget for activities in country (1 point)
5.3. Country Programmes: Information on aid via channel	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Information about cooperation with other bi- and multi-lateral donors; <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information on aid flows by channel (2 points) - Information on work alongside other donors and policies for cooperation in this work where applicable (1 point)
6.1. Ease of navigation of the website	Overall ease of navigation of Aid agency website (1 - 6)
6.2. Search Function	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Website search function <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easily accessible and working search function (2 points) - Generation of well prioritised results (2 points) - Advanced search options (2 points)
6.3. User Guidance	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • User guidance <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Clarity of how information is organised on the website (3 points) - Guidance on both the structure of the website and aid agency itself, for example as FAQs, using a sitemap or with clear explanations. (3 points)

6.4. Languages	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Languages in which information is published <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Information published in all official languages of the country (2 points); - Information published in other major language (e.g. English/French/Spanish) (2 points) - Information published in languages of aid recipients (even if only in places) (2 points)
6.5. Access to Information	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Access to Information <ul style="list-style-type: none"> - Easily accessible on website (2 points) - Detail rights under the access to information law to request more information (2 points) - Info on proactive disclosure and right to request information (2 points)

Annex B: Scoring Results, Comments and References

This annex details our assessments and scoring of the availability and accessibility of aid information by class of information and by country. Where references relate to web pages within donor websites we have given the path to the information e.g., ‘home, about, staff directory, so it is possible to see how deep into websites information is published.

This annex can be found in a separate spreadsheet published online alongside this report.

Annex C: The Aid Transparency Principles

THE AID TRANSPARENCY PRINCIPLES

Preamble

For aid to be effective, accountable and participatory it must be transparent: information must be available to recipient governments, affected communities, and other stakeholders as well as the general public.

Transparency and accountability between donors and recipient governments is fundamental for effective aid and for there to be ownership of aid processes by developing countries. Donors therefore have a special obligation to share information with recipient governments. At the same time, wider transparency is essential to ensure that members of the public, in donor and recipient countries, are able to engage in the debate about the use of aid.

The **Aid Transparency Principles** bring together the need for greater aid effectiveness with the fundamental right of everyone to know how public bodies are using public resources. The right of access to information places an obligation on all public bodies to generate and disseminate information about their activities and functions. In addition, everyone has the right to request and receive information from public bodies, subject to limited exceptions.³⁰

The Aid Transparency Principles apply to public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid. Public bodies should impose a similar obligation of transparency on third parties which spend aid on their behalf. Other actors such as private foundations, civil society organisations and private contractors are encouraged to adopt and implement the principles on a voluntary basis.³¹

The Aid Transparency Principles have been developed out of recognition that special efforts are needed to promote the transparency of aid and to ensure that all sectors of society have equal access to information, particularly the communities which aid is designed to benefit.

The organisations and individuals who have endorsed these Principles call for their full implementation by all bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid, across all their aid activities, in order to ensure that aid is effective in alleviating poverty and suffering, and promoting sustainable development.

Not all recipient governments and private organisations will have the infrastructure in place to comply with the Aid Transparency Principles immediately. Respecting the right of access to information usually requires legislative and administrative changes and entails improving information management systems. For this reason, we call on recipient governments and private organisations to make a commitment to implement the Principles and to set a timescale for achieving progressive compliance. We call on donors to facilitate such commitments by themselves publishing greater volumes of information

³⁰ This right applies to all public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid, including donor governments (all relevant ministries, regional and local government institutions, and aid agencies, as well as private bodies performing public functions), multilateral bodies (including IFIs and the UN), recipient governments and state agencies receiving aid (all relevant central, regional and local governmental bodies).

³¹ This is in addition to any reporting obligations that they may have towards donor agencies.

proactively and by supporting projects designed to increase administrative transparency in recipient countries.

Principles

1. Information on aid should be published proactively

Public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid, and those who deliver aid on their behalf, should proactively disseminate information on their aid and aid-related activities. They should develop the necessary systems to collect, generate and ensure the automatic and timely disclosure of, at a minimum, information on:

- **Aid policies and procedures** including clear criteria for the allocation of aid;
- **Aid strategies** at the regional, country and local; and programmatic, sectoral and project levels;
- **Aid flows** (including financial flows, in-kind aid and administrative costs), including data on aid planned, pledged, committed and disbursed, disaggregated according to internationally agreed schema by region, country, geographic area, sector, [disbursement/delivery] modality and spending agency;
- **Terms of aid**, including aid agreements, contracts and related documents, for example, information on all conditions, prior and agreed actions, benchmarks, triggers, and interim evaluation criteria; and details of any decisions to suspend, withdraw or reallocate aid resources;
- **Procurement** procedures, criteria, tenders and decisions, contracts, and reporting on contracts, including information about and from contractors and sub-contracting agents;
- **Assessments of aid and aid effectiveness** including monitoring, evaluation, financial, audit and annual reporting;
- **Integrity procedures**, including corruption risk assessments, declarations of gifts and assets, complaint policies and mechanisms and protection of whistleblowers;
- **Public participation**: opportunities for public engagement in decision-making and evaluation, consultative/draft documentation, copies of submissions to the consultation processes, and reports on how inputs were taken into account;
- **Access to information**: organisational structure, contact information and disclosure mechanisms and policies

The only restrictions on the proactive publication of this information should be based on limited exceptions consistent with international law and subject to consideration of the public interest in the disclosure of information.

All public bodies engaged in aid, in donor and recipient countries, should publish an index to the classes of information that they hold, and wherever possible these should be organised so that all the documents linked to a particular country, programme, or project can be identified.

2. Information on aid should be timely, accessible and comparable

Information on aid should be of sufficient quality to be meaningful for recipient governments, civil society organisations, other stakeholders, and the public in donor and recipient countries. To this end, information should be managed and published so that it is:

- **Relevant and Accessible**: Information should be presented in plain language using formats appropriate for different stakeholders, whilst retaining the detail and disaggregation necessary for analysis, evaluation and participation.

Information should be made available in ways appropriate to different audiences. To this end, proactive dissemination of information should not be limited to internet publication and should include use of radio and television, printed material disseminated directly to stakeholders, and, where appropriate, information delivered in person in meetings. Information should be made available in the languages spoken by the affected communities.

- **Timely and Accurate:** Information should be made available in sufficient time to permit analysis and evaluation of aid and engagement in aid processes. This means that information needs to be provided while planning as well as during and after the implementation of aid projects and programmes. Information should be managed so that it is up-to-date, accurate, and complete. It is particularly important that relevant information is provided in line with annual and medium-term planning and budget cycles in recipient countries.
- **Comparable:** Public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid should collect, manage, compile and publish detailed information in formats that permit comparison within and between countries. In particular, donor-held information that relates to a particular recipient country should be made available in a format which can be easily reconciled with the recipient country's detailed budget classifications and planning and budget cycles. Reporting of budget and financial information should be consistent with international accounting standards. Ensuring consistency with the recipient country information needs, public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid should agree and implement a common standard for the classification and publication of statistical and budget information related to aid. This should include aid data published at the transaction level, and consistently classified, including by country, location, sector, recipient, purpose and modality.

3. Everyone has the right to request and receive information about aid

Public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid should guarantee the right of access to information, both through proactive publication of information and by establishing mechanisms by which everyone can request and receive information.

Public bodies engaged in aid should respect everyone's right to request information without the need to justify the request and without any citizenship or residency requirements. The procedures for requesting information should be simple and free; only actual copying and postage may be charged. Information held by public bodies should be provided to the public within predefined timeframes, subject only to limited exceptions that are consistent with international law. Everyone should be guaranteed a right to appeal refusals to provide information, as well as to appeal any failures to respond or other obstacles to receiving information to an independent body empowered to issue binding decisions.

In international law, the right of access to information only applies to public bodies and to private bodies performing public functions as designated by national law. Given the importance of transparency for accountability and effectiveness in the aid system, all actors engaged in funding and delivering aid should develop appropriate systems to allow the public access to information. Public bodies engaged in funding and delivering aid should ensure that third parties who spend aid on their behalf provide information to the public, either directly or through the donors' access to information regimes.

All donor governments and their agencies should meet the standards of their own access to information regimes in all the countries where they operate, regardless of whether the recipient country has similar laws. They should grant access to information by citizens of recipient countries in the same way that they would their own citizens.

4. The right of access to information about aid should be promoted

Donors and recipient governments as well as other actors disbursing aid should assist citizens to exercise their right of access to information on aid. They should inform parliamentarians, journalists, civil society representatives, and the general public, especially communities directly affected by aid, about the right of access to information on aid. Staff of organisations bound by these principles should be trained on their obligation to provide information to the public, both proactively and in response to specific requests.

Where appropriate and proportionate with the nature and scale of the aid programme or project, donors and recipient governments should include a skills-building component in order to build the capacity of stakeholders to locate – and where necessary to file requests for – aid-related information.

Transparency of International Aid Funding

The right to ask ... the right to know

Every year the world's richest countries spend millions of taxpayer's money to help people in the world's poorest countries get out of poverty. This international aid money is spent on food, on schools and hospitals, on reforming systems of government. The goal is to fight poverty and promote sustainable development. There is much debate over how well this money is spent. Without full transparency, it is impossible for members of the public to judge. And without information it's impossible for people living in developing countries to have a say in how their futures and their children's futures are being decided.

In the interlinked, globalised world in which we live, everyone has a stake in how aid money is used: it is our money and it affects our future. We therefore have a right to know how the strategies, activities, and impact of international development programmes. Access Info Europe, a human rights group specialising in the right of access to information, went in search of information about how aid funds are distributed. We started in the most obvious place to start looking: the websites of the aid agencies of some of the world's largest donor countries: Canada, France, Norway, Spain, and the UK. We tried to trace their spending in five recipient countries Afghanistan, Kosovo, Mozambique, Peru and Sierra Leone. In this monitoring report "Not Available! Not Accessible!" we summarise what we found, the difficulties we encountered trying to understand how aid funding works in practice, and our recommendations on how to increase transparency of international aid flows.

