

IATI Board Meeting Minutes

Date: November 20, 2024

Location: Virtual



Attendees:

- Thea Schepers
- Siem Vaessen
- Charlie Ngounou
- Anand Nair
- Motai Ramokoinihi
- Zainab Al-Azzawi
- Yemesrach Workie (UNDP)
- Steven Flower (ODS)
- Annelise Parr (UNDP)
- Cody Wallace (UNDP)
- Adriel Amaral (UNOPS)

Agenda:

1. Opening Remarks
2. Approval of Previous Minutes
3. Work Plan and Budget Discussion
4. Implementation Update Q4
5. Financial Update
6. Other Business

1. Opening Remarks

Thea Schepers opened the meeting by welcoming all attendees and acknowledging the presence of several Secretariat members.

Thea Schepers emphasized the critical juncture at which IATI finds itself. On one hand, there is significant progress in data use cases, which is exciting and promising. However, on the other hand, there are challenges with donor governments due to budget cuts and shifting political priorities. She stressed the importance of keeping donor governments engaged and ensuring they see the value and impact of their data contributions. Transparency in aid remains crucial, especially in times of uncertain support.

She highlighted the financial situation, noting the need to retain current members, attract new sources of income, and cut costs creatively. Thea called for involving members and leveraging their expertise to foster a stronger sense of community. She concluded by stating that 2025 must be a year of significant achievements, even with budget cuts, building on the successes of 2024.

2. Approval of Q3 Meeting Minutes

The minutes from the previous meeting had been reviewed previously and adopted without objections. Yemesrach Workie, IATI Executive Director provided an update on the status of actions and decisions from previous meetings, noting that most actions have been completed, with a few still ongoing. She encouraged board members to visit the tracking page for detailed updates.

3. Work Plan and Budget Discussion

The Chair indicated that the Board considered it fair, ahead of any presentation on the subject, to state that it has decided in discussions ahead of the meeting that it cannot approve the budget in its proposed form. Instead she opened the floor to Board Members to share their initial reactions.

Several Board members spoke on the subject of the proposed budget, indicating the budget could be more clear and that the initiative should spend less money than is proposed. They requested both clarifying information as well as additional time to review the budget and work plan. Among the comments of Board members, Siem Vaessen noted that the budget did not reflect the financial crisis IATI is facing. He emphasized the need for creative thinking and cost-cutting measures, suggesting that the current budget seemed to maintain the status quo rather than addressing the financial challenges head-on. Zainb Al-Azzawi and Anand Nair sought clearer prioritization of the proposed activities and their intended results within the work plan in order to meet the financial challenges. They suggested scenarios for several levels of income for 2025 because income may increase, but can also decline or stay stagnant. Charlie Ngounou added the importance of examining line by line based on a clear view of overall projects so that any cuts requested to the budget did not jeopardise wider projects.

Anand Nair echoed these concerns, highlighting the need for a more radical approach to budgeting. He suggested that the budget did not seem focused on cutting costs but rather on maintaining business as usual. He proposed working closely with the Secretariat to reassess the work plan, prioritize essential activities, and defer non-critical ones. Anand Nair also suggested moving the Members Assembly (MA) to January to allow more time for this reassessment.

Yemesrach Workie responded by thanking the Board for their initial reaction related to the work plan. She referred to the narrative companion document circulated one week earlier to the Board, where it was pointed out that the budget was only modestly increased from 2024, and that in line with previous years, the Secretariat remains fiscally responsible and has ensured that annual expenditures have not exceeded cash availability at any time during its 11-year operation. She provided the justification to the budget, referring to the nature of the IATI secretariat budget in which fixed costs such as personnel and technical services make up a large share of the budget, while limited margin exists for budget adjustments. She emphasized that 2025 is a transition year, with the current strategic plan concluding and a new one beginning. The budget aims to complete unfinished business from the current plan while laying the groundwork for the new strategic plan. Governance activities, including the MA, also represent significant expenses.

Yemesrach Workie highlighted the importance of advocacy, engagement, and resource mobilization in 2025 to secure additional funding and retain membership. She acknowledged the request of the Board for a further detailed review of the budget and work plan, with a focus on prioritizing essential activities and exploring alternative funding sources.

The board members discussed the need for a more granular understanding of the budget and work plan and an insight into vital activities and priorities. It also emphasized the need for creative thinking instead of business as usual. Lastly, Siem Vaessen suggested to also have this conversation with members during the MA. Thea Schepers suggested that the board reconvene during the course of the next two weeks for a more detailed discussion of the budget. She emphasized the importance of understanding the underlying costs and making informed decisions about prioritizing activities.

With no approval of the 2025 work plan, the Board Chair requested to postpone the planned November 27th virtual MA to January, tentatively 16th.

As part of the budget discussion, the Board also discussed the request from Publish What You Fund to fund the Aid Transparency Index as part of its core activities, from 2025 onward. The Board reconfirmed its earlier decision in 2022 not to fund the ATI beyond the one-off funding of the 2024 ATI. It agreed to respond to the request from PWYF in detail in a letter, laying out the reasons for not funding again.

Action / Decision:

- *Secretariat to provide more granular detail on the 2025 work plan with priorities and set up a meeting for Board members who volunteer to work on this in more detail, within two weeks to discuss it. Finalising the budget will then be done by the full Board.*
- *Secretariat to postpone the planned November 27th virtual MA and send a message to members announcing the new date in January*

4. Implementation Q4 Update

Yemesrach Workie, IATI Executive Director and Steven Flower, Technical lead- ODS presented the following update on implementation to date in Q4. In terms of the progress across the board progress is being made. The Executive Director update focused on aspects related to Governance, accountability, advocacy, communication and financial management while Steven Flower focused on the technical update. In her update, the Executive director informed the Board that in relation to governance, accountability scope, all planned activities are completed with the organization of the MA and few activities related to the strategic planning process underway. Considering its importance, the Director provided detail update on advocacy, engagement and communication as follows:

2. Financing for Development Outcome Document:
 - IATI is advocating to be recognized as the only platform that offers a standard for publishing all international aid transparency data.
 - The team has submitted an element paper and policy brief to the UN, calling for all financial pledges to be published in IATI.
 - Efforts so far include engaging with UN missions and participating in preparatory meetings. A side event is proposed for February in New York to further this agenda.
3. Country Engagement:
 - Senegal has officially joined IATI as a new member.
 - Positive discussions have taken place with Ethiopia, Gambia, Cape Verde, and Kenya about potential membership.
 - Meetings with Peru and CARICOM have been encouraging, with CARICOM considering a partnership.
4. Funding and Support:
 - €200,000 from the EU has been secured and discussion is underway for an additional €150,000 for 2025.
 - These funds will be invested in strengthening data quality, including enhancing the data quality dashboard and organizing quarterly briefings and feedback loops with publishers.
 - A "State of IATI Data Review" report showcasing the positive aspects of IATI data, is planned for 2025.
5. Communication Efforts:
 - Finalized the design of a celebratory report highlighting IATI's work and the unfinished agenda of transparency.

- Five new case studies have been included in the report, which will be shared widely to encourage continued use of IATI data.
- These case studies are also published on the IATI website where they are highlighted on the home page as part of an incremental design and content updates project which is ramping up in early 2025 to significantly improve IATI's visual identity and online presence.

Update on Nairobi Training and Strategic Planning workshops

1. Workshop Overview:
 - The workshop was well-attended by partner country government representatives, civil society, governments, and academia.
 - Focused on data use and understanding stakeholder needs, with hands-on training on IATI data tools.
2. Key Insights and Recommendations:
 - Stakeholders expressed the need for quarterly updated data and forward-looking data for 1-3 years.
 - Only 13% of IATI members currently publish forward-looking data, highlighting the need for improvement.
 - Recommendations include organizing quarterly clinics for users to engage with the IATI secretariat and providing tailored support for specific groups, such as Lusophone countries.
3. Strategic Plan Vision:
 - Participants envision IATI as a one-stop shop for financing information, encompassing data from traditional and non-traditional donors.
 - Emphasis on end-to-end traceability of data and renewed commitment to mutual accountability and the Paris Declaration.
 - Calls for IATI to be innovative, using digital analytical tools, including AI, to provide insights for national dialogues and partnerships.

5. Technical implementation update

Steven Flower, technical lead from ODS added to the implementation update, providing the following updates and insights:

1. Standard Stewardship Working Group:
 - Flower discussed the activities and recommendations of the Standard Stewardship Working Group, which had three meetings attended by 11 community members. The group emphasized the need for updates and upgrades to the IATI standard in 2025, focusing on user impact and thorough analysis before authorizing changes.
 - He highlighted the importance of having a standing item in the governing board agenda to facilitate changes and ensure proper documentation and communication.
2. Design System:
 - Progress was shared on the design system aimed at making all IATI tools look and behave consistently. This includes a common header and footer for tools to reduce user confusion and improve the overall user experience.
3. Single Sign-On and Registration Service:
 - Ongoing work to provide a single sign-on and registration service to simplify user access to IATI services. This involves prototyping services to help with single sign-on.
4. Data Policy Work:

- Update on efforts to ensure that IATI tools process and display data consistently. This includes rationalizing the data pipeline and addressing issues like bot-blocking security software that affects data accessibility.
5. Technical Infrastructure:
 - Updates provided on the new theme and platform for documentation, which aims to standardize and simplify the documentation process. This includes translating documentation into other languages quickly and easily.
 6. Support Desk and Publisher Tool:
 - Highlights shared on the support desk's ongoing work, including assisting new publishers like the Kingdom of Bahrain and Australia. Also discussed were the updates to the IATI Publisher Tool, including documentation improvements and plans for migrating AidStream accounts in 2025.

6. Financial Update

Yemesrach Workie presented a financial update, noting that 73% of the budget had been spent as of November. She provided a breakdown of expenditures by category, highlighting the higher balance of costs associated with personnel and technical services.

In the context of the work plan, the board discussed the need for careful financial management and the importance of securing additional funding sources. They emphasized the need to prioritize essential activities and explore cost-cutting measures to ensure financial sustainability.

7. Other Business

Siem Vaessen raised the issue of IATI's presence on Twitter, suggesting a move to another platform due to his concerns about endorsing Twitter's leadership. The board agreed that this issue could be discussed in the future as part of the communication strategy development process.

Action / Decision

- *Board to draft response letter to PWYF*
- *Secretariat to review social media presence of the initiative, as part of its wider communications strategy review*

Proposed Board Dates for 2025

1. Board Meetings:
 - Q1 GB: 17-20 February, in person (The Hague, NL)
 - Q2 GB: 17 June (Virtual)
 - Q3 GB: 25 September (Virtual)
 - Q4 GB: 2-4 December (in person, back-to-back with the Members' Assembly (MA), depending on the finalized budget.
2. Virtual Board drop-in meetings one week ahead of each GB meeting, tentatively:
 - Q1 - 13 Feb
 - Q2 - 10 June
 - Q3 - 18 September
 - Q4 - N/A; caucus meetings in person

Next Steps:

1. *Yemesrach Workie to share detailed budget documents with the board.*
2. *Board members to review and provide feedback on the budget and work plan.*
3. *Reconvene during the next two weeks for a detailed discussion and finalization of the budget.*
4. *Continue advocacy efforts and engagement with potential new members.*
5. *Plan for the next board meeting and strategic planning workshop in December 2024.*