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Bridging data systems for better decisions: the strategic value of interoperability for IATI and its members

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Summary

Interoperability is central to IATI's value in a changing development finance system. FFD4 and the Sevilla Platform for Action have created a clear political mandate to make development finance data more coherent, accessible and reusable, while the DAC Review has reinforced the need for a modern data ecosystem that is more efficient and responsive to partner countries. For IATI, this means strengthening the links between IATI, TOSSD, the CRS and FTS so that information can be connected, compared and reused more effectively across systems, while preserving their distinct purposes and governance. Where practical, interoperability can also enable organisations to reuse information across reporting, statistical and transparency processes, reducing duplication and improving consistency.

The work is already moving from ambition to implementation. With the International Forum on TOSSD, an IATI-to-TOSSD conversion approach has been developed and tested across several providers, demonstrating that existing IATI data can form the basis of a preliminary TOSSD return. With the OECD, project-level links between IATI activities and CRS records have been established where shared identifiers are available, and several providers have begun reporting the IATI activity identifier in the CRS. Together, these workstreams show how IATI's timely and detailed information can complement the statistical validation and comparability of TOSSD and the CRS, reducing duplication, strengthening data quality and making development finance information more useful to providers, partner countries and other users.

The next phase should turn these early results into repeatable ways of working. For TOSSD, the priority is to refine and document the conversion process, extend testing to additional providers and establish a reliable validation and feedback cycle. For the CRS, the priority is to expand the use of shared identifiers and test how linked IATI information can enrich statistical analysis. Across both workstreams, success will depend on transparent mappings, clear institutional responsibilities, provider validation and feedback that enables improvements to be made at source. The indicative milestones in this note provide a pathway from technical feasibility in 2026 towards more routine interoperability by 2030.

Interoperability also requires proportionate safeguards. Participation should remain voluntary, providers should retain control and responsibility for their data, and each system should retain authority over its standards, methodology and published outputs. The main risks, including

incorrect links, false equivalence, double counting and the creation of additional processes, can be managed through shared identifiers, transparent rules, phased implementation and oversight by the relevant governing bodies.

The Secretariat therefore seeks endorsement of the strategic direction, the proposed pathway and milestones, and the governance principles set out in this note, together with support to advance the two priority workstreams with TOSSD and the CRS under the wider Sevilla Platform for Action initiative.

1. Interoperability: a strategic imperative

The Fourth International Conference on Financing for Development (FFD4) has given renewed political impetus to making development finance data more accessible, coherent and usable. The *Compromiso de Sevilla*[1] calls for improved availability of data on international development co-operation and for greater interoperability across data platforms and standards, including to address the challenges developing countries face in accessing and reporting data on development support. This builds on the longstanding commitment in the Addis Ababa Action Agenda to make data standards interoperable so that information from different sources can be more easily compared and used.

IATI is already helping to translate this commitment into action. The Secretariat co-leads the Sevilla Platform for Action initiative, "Bridging Data Systems for Financing for Development,"[2] with the International Forum on TOSSD and the UN CEB Secretariat. Endorsed by the European Union, Guatemala, Mexico, Norway, Nigeria and Spain, the initiative aims to strengthen interoperability between development finance data systems, reduce duplicative reporting and improve data quality and usability. Its agreed activities provide a pathway from building the evidence base and testing practical approaches to presenting proposals to the relevant governing bodies and, where appropriate, implementing changes to participating data systems. Wider political endorsement, active institutional support and sustained resourcing will now be important to move this work from commitment to implementation.

This global momentum is reinforced by reform within the development co-operation system. Against a backdrop of declining ODA and growing pressure to make the system more efficient, inclusive and responsive to partner countries, the DAC Review is considering how development finance data systems can be modernised. At the OECD Development Finance Data Forum in October 2026, interoperability between the CRS, IATI and other systems was framed as a strategic priority. Interoperability does not mean replacing systems that have distinct purposes and governance arrangements. It means connecting them more effectively, clarifying how their data relate, reducing unnecessary duplication and enabling common information to move more efficiently across the ecosystem.

For IATI, this is also a direct strategic commitment. The Strategic Plan calls for data that are "interoperable across the development data ecosystem" and commits to enabling publishers to "publish once, and use the same data in many places." Interoperability is therefore not a peripheral technical exercise. It is central to IATI's contribution to the FFD4 agenda, to the wider reform of development co-operation data, and to reducing reporting burdens while improving the quality and usefulness of development finance information.

[1] FFD4 Outcome Document: Sevilla Commitment (Compromiso de Sevilla) Adopted (un.org)
[2] IATI Sevilla Platform for Action Initiatives (iatistandard.org)

2. The value of interoperability.

Interoperability offers IATI a strategic opportunity to make development finance reporting simpler, data more useful and the wider data ecosystem more coherent. The emerging evidence from the OECD's work on CRS-IATI linkages and the International Forum on TOSSD's analysis of IATI-TOSSD interoperability shows that these systems are complementary rather than competing. Each has a distinct purpose, but much of the underlying information is shared. Connecting them more effectively would allow the same information to serve multiple reporting and transparency needs, while preserving the mandates and strengths of each system.

Less repeated reporting, more reuse: at the provider level, the most immediate benefit is a shift from repeated reporting towards greater reuse. IATI's infrastructure already allows organisations to publish detailed and frequently updated information from their own systems. If common information can then flow into TOSSD, the CRS and, where relevant, FTS, publishers would be able to invest more in the quality of information at source rather than reproducing similar data for multiple systems. The IATI-to-TOSSD work demonstrates that this is increasingly practical: IATI is recognised as a source for TOSSD reporting, and existing IATI data can already be transformed into a preliminary TOSSD return for provider review.

A reinforcing cycle of better data: the gain is not only efficiency. Interoperability can create a reinforcing cycle of better data. IATI contributes timeliness and granular activity-level information, including information on locations, documents, results and forward-looking budgets. Statistical systems contribute validated classifications, comparability and quality assurance. When these strengths are connected, discrepancies can be identified once, corrections can be made closer to source, and improvements can flow across systems rather than remaining confined to one dataset. The 2026 TOSSD-IATI analysis illustrates both the potential for close alignment and the value of using differences between datasets to identify gaps in coverage, classification and publishing practice.

More useful data for partner countries: this would also make development finance data more useful to partner countries. The objective is not simply to connect systems for the benefit of reporters, but to make the combined information easier to access, interpret and use for national planning, budgeting, accountability and dialogue with development partners. This responds directly to the direction of the DAC Review, which calls for development finance data that are more timely, accessible, coherent and responsive to partner-country needs, and to the Development Finance Data Forum's emphasis on interoperability as a strategic priority across the development finance data ecosystem.

Greater value and reach for IATI: for IATI, the opportunity is equally significant. Stronger interoperability would increase the value of publishing to IATI by making its data reusable across a wider range of international reporting and statistical processes. It could also create incentives for organisations that report to the CRS or TOSSD but do not yet publish to IATI to join, extending IATI's coverage and reach. Many of the building blocks are already in place: IATI has supported consistent organisation identifiers for 15 years, alongside globally unique activity identifiers, codelists shared with the CRS, fields that carry CRS and FTS identifiers, and links between funders' and implementers' activities that allow resources to be traced along the delivery chain. In this model, IATI is not another reporting destination alongside other systems. It

becomes part of the shared infrastructure through which timely, detailed and reusable development finance information can move across the ecosystem.

What it will take to deliver: realising this potential will require more than technical mappings. Shared identifiers, transparent and maintained mappings between standards, maintaining mappings and crosswalks between systems, clear institutional responsibilities and a functioning feedback loop are all essential if improvements in one system are to strengthen the others. The next phase should therefore move from bilateral pilots towards a more systematic model of interoperability, backed by the strategic endorsement and resources needed to make data reuse routine rather than exceptional.The priority is therefore not to create this infrastructure from scratch, but to increase its uptake and ensure its continued stewardship.

3. From commitment to implementation: Early progress

The interoperability agenda is beginning to move from strategic commitment to practical implementation. Work with both the International Forum on TOSSD and the OECD around the Creditor Reporting System (CRS) has progressed beyond broad comparisons of standards. It is now testing the practical mechanisms that allow the same underlying information to move between systems, while preserving their distinct purposes. With TOSSD, the focus has been on reusing IATI publications to generate preliminary statistical returns and on creating a two-way quality feedback loop. With the CRS, the focus has been on reliably linking records at project level so that the CRS can draw on IATI's more detailed and forward-looking information without changing either system's methodology.

The most tangible advance with TOSSD is the development by the International Forum on TOSSD Secretariat of an IATI-to-TOSSD extraction and conversion tool. It draws information from IATI's relational tables, consolidates activity- and transaction-level records, maps relevant fields and transaction types to the TOSSD reporting structure, and produces a preliminary TOSSD return for provider review. TOSSD already recognises IATI as an eligible data source, and some providers have based their reporting on IATI files. This demonstrates that 'publish once, use many times' is technically feasible: providers can review and complete a partially generated return rather than reproduce the same information in a separate reporting process.

The provider analysis undertaken in 2026 shows that this approach has practical potential at scale. The joint TOSSD-IATI work examined the European Commission, ICRC, IFAD, the Asian Development Bank and UNESCO. For the European Commission, comparable 2024 flows were closely aligned, with EUR 15.8 billion recorded through IATI across four Directorates-General and EUR 16.1 billion in TOSSD. IFAD and the Asian Development Bank similarly show close or near-exact alignment for many major recipients, while the differences identified across the cases provide a concrete basis for resolving issues of coverage, classification, timing and publishing practice. Work is also under way with the ICRC, which has indicated openness to using its existing IATI data as the basis for TOSSD reporting.

The IATI-CRS work has reached a similarly important proof point. The 2026 OECD-IATI analysis shows that the technical challenge is not to link two systems or create new classifications. The CRS and IATI already share much of the DAC statistical vocabulary. The critical step is to

establish reliably that a CRS record and an IATI activity describe the same project. Where a shared identifier is published, this can already be done at a meaningful scale. Across the institutions of providers that both report to the CRS and publish IATI data, 32% of IATI activities in the OECD analysis could be linked to a specific CRS record. Where providers systematically publish a common project reference, linkage rates are substantially higher, reaching more than 80% for Germany and the Netherlands. Conversely, extensive IATI publication alone does not create interoperability: the United States has IATI publishers corresponding to 21 of its 23 CRS agencies, yet no activities linked in the analysis because a shared identifier is not recorded.

This finding has translated into a clear implementation pathway. Reporting the globally unique IATI activity identifier in the CRS would make the relationship between records direct and remove much of the need for agency reconciliation or probabilistic matching. Take-up has already begun: the United Kingdom carried the IATI identifier for 892 activities in its 2024 CRS data, and Australia, Canada, Denmark, the Netherlands, Norway and Sweden included it in their 2025 CRS submissions available when the OECD paper was prepared. These are early but concrete examples that the identifier can be carried within the CRS reporting process and provide a baseline for wider adoption.

Once the records are linked, interoperability becomes more than a matching exercise. The CRS provides the comprehensive, centrally validated statistical record of official flows. IATI can complement this with information that the CRS does not normally hold, including linked documents, sub-national locations, results frameworks, complete transaction histories and forward budgets. The OECD-IATI work therefore proposes to extend linkage analysis as identifiers become available and to test with interested members how these additional IATI fields can support WP-STAT and DAC analytical work. This starts to demonstrate the practical value of interoperability for users, not simply the technical feasibility of connecting records.

Taken together, the TOSSD and CRS work points towards a common operating model. IATI can provide timely and granular information that is reused in statistical reporting and enriches statistical records. TOSSD and the CRS contribute validated classifications, comparability and quality assurance. Where feedback from those processes is corrected in providers' source systems, the improvements can flow back into IATI and subsequently into every system that reuses the data. Interoperability can therefore shift the emphasis from repeatedly reconciling similar information downstream to improving it once, closer to source.

The next phase is to turn these early proofs into routine practice. For TOSSD, this means refining and documenting the conversion and mapping logic, testing it with additional providers, establishing common validation and feedback arrangements, and extending the work to partner-country use cases. For the CRS, it means increasing reporting of the IATI identifier, maintaining a transparent CRS agency-IATI publisher crosswalk, extending analysis to further providers as identifiers become available, and testing the analytical value of IATI enrichment fields. Across both strands, shared identifiers, published mappings and a functioning feedback loop are the essential infrastructure. With sustained institutional support, these steps can move interoperability from bilateral pilots towards a repeatable model across the development finance data ecosystem.

4. The next phase of interoperability work

The next phase should convert the early progress with TOSSD and the CRS into sustained and repeatable ways of working. The objective is not to create a single system or remove the distinct roles of IATI, TOSSD and the CRS. It is to establish practical connections between them so that common information can be reused, quality improvements can flow back to source, and each system can contribute its particular strengths to a more coherent development finance data ecosystem.

The TOSSD workstream should now move from initial provider comparisons and conversion testing towards an operational model for data reuse. This means progressively refining and documenting the IATI-to-TOSSD mapping, testing the approach with a broader range of providers identified above and new volunteers such as the African Development Bank (Afdb), and agreeing a clear process through which converted returns are reviewed, completed and validated. The work should also demonstrate value beyond reporting efficiency, including how the combination of IATI's timely activity-level information and TOSSD's statistical classifications can offer a fuller picture for partner-country planning, financing dialogue and monitoring of sustainable development finance.

The CRS workstream should focus on making project-level links more systematic and using them to improve access to complementary information. Wider reporting of the IATI activity identifier in the CRS is the most direct route to strengthening those links. As coverage grows, the partnership can test how IATI information, including documents, locations, results, transaction histories and forward budgets, can enrich CRS analysis while the CRS remains the authoritative statistical reference for ODA flows. Continued alignment of definitions, mappings and validation processes will be important to ensure that the connection is reliable and useful to both producers and users of the data.

Across both workstreams, the strategic priority is to establish a shared implementation framework rather than pursue disconnected technical exercises. This should set out common principles for identifiers, mappings, data exchange and feedback; clarify institutional responsibilities; and ensure that corrections identified through TOSSD or CRS processes are reflected in providers' source systems and subsequent IATI publications. A small number of well-chosen provider and partner-country pilots can demonstrate the model, identify remaining policy and technical issues, and build confidence before wider adoption.

Progress will depend on sustained collaboration between the IATI Secretariat, the International Forum on TOSSD, the OECD and participating providers, backed by the relevant governing bodies. Over the next phase, success should be measured by whether interoperability becomes routine: more records linked across systems, more reporting generated through reuse, faster feedback to publishers, and more coherent information available to partner countries and other users. This would position IATI as a core part of the shared infrastructure for development finance data and translate the FFD4 commitment into practical, scalable results.

Building on the progress already made, the next phase should move progressively from testing interoperability to making it a routine way of working. The indicative milestones below provide a shared pathway for the two priority workstreams with TOSSD and the CRS. They are intended

to guide collaboration and demonstrate progress, rather than prescribe detailed technical implementation or pre-empt decisions by the relevant governing bodies.

Indicative timing	Milestone	What this would demonstrate
2026, established	**Technical feasibility demonstrated across both workstreams**	The IATI-to-TOSSD conversion approach has been developed and tested across several providers, while the CRS-IATI work has shown that project-level records can be linked reliably where common identifiers are available.
2027	**Move from testing to repeatable interoperability processes**	Refine and document the IATI-TOSSD mapping and conversion process, test it with additional providers and establish a regular validation and feedback process. For the CRS, expand systematic use of the IATI activity identifier and extend project-level linking to additional providers.
2027–2028	**Demonstrate routine reuse and data enrichment**	Increase reuse of IATI data in TOSSD reporting and test how linked IATI-CRS records can enrich statistical analysis with complementary information such as locations, documents, results and forward budgets. Result framework for this work to be developed jointly for each work to demonstrate measurable progress on data use.
2028–2029	**Establish two-way data-quality feedback**	Systematically communicate validation findings and discrepancies from TOSSD and CRS processes back to publishers so that corrections can be made at source and flow into subsequent IATI publications and other systems that reuse the data.
By 2030	**Embed interoperability as a normal way of working**	Establish shared identifiers, maintained mappings, reuse mechanisms and feedback processes sufficiently to reduce duplicate reporting and make complementary IATI, TOSSD and CRS information easier to access and use across the development finance ecosystem. Lessons can inform the 2030 FfD review.

5. Governing interoperability with confidence

Interoperability must strengthen the development finance data ecosystem without weakening the mandates, accountability or integrity of the systems involved. IATI, TOSSD and the CRS serve different but complementary purposes, and each remains governed by its own rules, methodologies and decision-making bodies. The objective is therefore not to harmonise away these differences, but to create trusted connections through which data can be reused and enriched while each system retains authority over what it accepts, validates and publishes.

Participation should remain voluntary and under the control of the organisations providing the data. Publishing to IATI and reporting to TOSSD or the CRS are separate decisions, and interoperability should not create new obligations by default. Providers should authorise how their data are converted or reused, remain responsible for the information they publish, and be able to determine the services in which they participate. Any exchange must also respect the confidentiality, disclosure and data-protection requirements of the receiving system and of the provider concerned.

Trust will also depend on transparency and clear accountability. Mappings, conversion rules and validation methods should be openly documented so that providers and users can understand

how information moves between systems and how differences are treated. Roles across the IATI Secretariat, the International Forum on TOSSD, the OECD and participating providers should be explicit, including responsibility for operating shared tools, reviewing converted data, resolving discrepancies and maintaining mappings as standards evolve. Changes to any standard or methodology should continue to be made only through that system's established governance process.

Data quality should be managed through a shared feedback loop, with a clear principle that improvements are made as close to source as possible. Validation by TOSSD or the CRS should be communicated back to providers rather than corrected only in downstream datasets. Providers can then review and, where appropriate, update their source systems and subsequent IATI publications. This preserves publisher ownership while enabling one improvement to benefit multiple systems and users. Particular attention will be needed where methodological differences, incomplete identifiers or different eligibility rules mean that records cannot be directly compared or reused without qualification.

The principal risks are manageable, but they need to remain visible as the work scales. Methodological differences between systems can create false equivalence or double counting if data are combined without clear rules; incomplete or inconsistent identifiers can lead to incorrect links; and differences in eligibility, confidentiality and publication practices can affect what can be exchanged or compared. There is also a strategic risk that interoperability could add another layer of process rather than reduce burden if tools, responsibilities and feedback arrangements are developed separately. These risks should be managed through transparent mappings, shared identifiers, provider validation, clear accountability and phased implementation, with expansion based on evidence from the pilots rather than assumed benefits.

Oversight should be proportionate to the stage and risk of the work. Initial pilots can proceed within an agreed framework that defines participation, data handling, responsibilities and escalation arrangements. Expansion beyond pilots should be based on demonstrated value, manageable risks and the approval of the relevant governing bodies. Progress and emerging issues should be reported regularly to IATI's Governing Board and to the governance structures of the partner systems, with a strategic review aligned to the proposed 2028 interoperability stocktake. This approach provides sufficient discipline for accountability while retaining the flexibility needed to learn from implementation.

On this basis, the next step is for the IATI Secretariat to develop the detailed governance arrangements jointly with the International Forum on TOSSD and the OECD. These arrangements should provide a common framework for the two workstreams while allowing for their different institutional and methodological contexts. They should be brought back to the Governing Board before pilots are expanded, ensuring that interoperability advances with clear authority, shared responsibility and the confidence of IATI members and partners.

6. Endorsement sought

The Secretariat seeks endorsement from both the Governing Board and the Members' Assembly, so that IATI's interoperability work carries the full backing of its governance and its membership.

The Governing Board (8 December) is invited to:

- **Endorse** the value case for interoperability, the approach of backing and resourcing the infrastructure IATI already provides, and the path, milestones and measures set out in this note.

The Members' Assembly (10 December) is invited to:

- **Endorse** the value case for interoperability and the direction set out in this note.
- **Endorse and promote** the "Bridging Data Systems for Financing for Development" initiative, including in members' own governing bodies.
- **Participate** as pilot reporting organisations or pilot countries, under the jointly agreed governance arrangements.
- **Support** the 2027–28 work with financial or in-kind resources.

Annex 1. References

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xv. International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI), *Sevilla Platform for Action Initiatives*. IATI Financing for Development.