

Overview

Despite the vast quantities of publicly available information on official development assistance (ODA), there is wide agreement that this information needs to be more accessible. Many development partners publish information on their activities via their own websites or through numerous ad-hoc initiatives related to specific thematic or geographic areas. However, to make detailed aid information truly accessible requires that these partners make use of common definitions and formats. Such “standards” would allow all partners to speak the same language. The Aid



Effectiveness Steering Committee of the Development Gateway (DG) has made significant progress in developing and promoting one such standard known as the International Development Markup Language (IDML)¹.

Concept

Several components of the aid coordination agenda rely on having better access to reliable information on development activities at the country level. However, a wide range of aid information needs exist, making it problematic for any single system to satisfy all the various actors. As a result, a myriad of systems track aid-related information (e.g. Aid Information Management Systems (AIMS), Integrated Financial Management Information Systems (IFMIS), Debt Management Systems, and Monitoring and Evaluation Systems). All of these systems capture related information but lack a common format to exchange such information in a timely and consistent manner.

In response to these challenges, in 2001 the Aid Effectiveness Steering Committee of the Development Gateway (DG) lent significant support to the IDML Initiative to explore the possibility of making this activity information standard for the international development community a functional reality. The Steering Committee, whose members include the DG, OECD (Chair), UNDP, and the World Bank, leveraged the wealth of experience each has in the area of standards building to augment and enhance an initial framework for aid activity information exchange.

Objectives

The IDML Initiative intends to "define and implement an Internet markup language specific to the development community which will facilitate transparency, learning and coordination of action." Longer term objectives involve the creation of a framework process within which the development community can establish universal standards on sharing a variety of information types.

This initiative creates a framework within which multiple actors, and groups of actors, can interact with one another to establish their own standards, while still adhering to a single overall

¹ IDML was initially discussed in 1998 by the following organizations: Bellanet, CGNet, CIDA, IDRC, IDS (University of Sussex), IISD, NGO-Net, PlaNet Bank, UN Center for Human Settlements (UNCHS), UNESCO, UNICEF, Wageningen University, and World Bank.

process. These sub-standards will directly serve the needs of those who create them, while ensuring a basic level of compatibility with the larger universe of development information.

The IDML framework forms the basis for the consolidation of aid activities in the DG's Accessible Information on Development Activities ([AiDA](#)) website. AiDA is an extensive online global directory that provides a common public access point to information about development activities. It aims to provide an overview of who is doing what, where, when, and with what funds. Through collaboration with the DG, several development partners provide aid information to AiDA in IDML format on a regular basis, including traditional stakeholders such as the DAC (CRS), DFID, IDB, and the World Bank. Non-traditional donors such as the Gates Foundation, OPEC, and the Soros Foundation are included as well. In addition, DG's [Aid Management Platform \(AMP\)](#), an AIMS installed within partner country governments, provides country-specific aid information in IDML format to speed local aid coordination. This directly supports specific Paris Declaration objectives related to donor reliance on country systems.

More specifically, IDML information includes 'content related information' (project/program descriptions) and 'process information' (project activity information, organizational information, individual contact information and project oriented lessons learned). This enhances complementary initiatives such as the Statistical Data and Metadata Exchange (SDMX), which pairs quantitative statistical data with qualitative aid information. Similarly, at the direction of the Steering Committee, IDML adheres to the latest developments within the OECD Development Assistance Committee (DAC) working parties.

About the Development Gateway

The Development Gateway provides Web-based tools to make aid and development efforts more effective. It offers innovative solutions that increase access to critical information, building local capacity and bringing partners together for positive change. The Development Gateway is a nonprofit organization with activities around the world.

*For more information on the Development Gateway and AiDA,
please visit aida.developmentgateway.org.*