

TOSSD



Total Official Support for
Sustainable Development



International Forum on TOSSD

First Meeting of the General Assembly of the International Forum on TOSSD (IFT)

21-22 May 2024, Oslo, Norway

This document presents the main conclusions and action points from the first meeting of the General Assembly of the International Forum on TOSSD (IFT), held in Oslo, from 21 to 22 May, 2024.

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MAIN CONCLUSIONS AND ACTION POINTS

This note presents the main conclusions and action points from the IFT General Assembly meeting, as recorded by the Co-Chairs and the Secretariat. In short:

Item 1. The General Assembly approved the membership of Switzerland and appointed members of the Steering Group. The Co-Chairs of the IFT Interim Governing body were appointed as Co-Chairs of the IFT, Mr Risenga Maluleke (South Africa) for one year and Mr Laurent Sarazin (European Union) for two years. The IFT should establish objective criteria for distinguishing between dual provider/recipients and recipients as this could affect the composition of the Steering Group in future.

Item 2. Following presentations by the Secretariat, the CSO representatives and Burkina Faso, General Assembly participants proposed and commented on actions to foster TOSSD data use, including capacity building seminars, data visualisation for the TOSSD provider perspective, metadata to facilitate the interpretation of trends, and potential use of TOSSD data for future monitoring of climate finance. The Co-Chairs encouraged all participants to further promote TOSSD data use.

Item 3. Based on the document detailing the TOSSD reporting for 2022 activities, the General Assembly discussed proposals to refine the Reporting Instructions to better accommodate the needs of TOSSD reporters.

The General Assembly agreed to present, as proposals for approval by the Steering Group, the following changes to the Reporting Instructions:

- Inclusion of the keyword #Biodiversity.
- Addition of a new field “Other partner entities/organisations”.

It was also agreed that, for a subsequent meeting of the Steering Group, the Secretariat would:

- Prepare a presentation on the use of artificial intelligence (AI).
- Explore revising the language on the ‘pivotal partner’ of triangular co-operation.
- Further analyse the use of the SSC code by multilateral institutions and propose an alternative for them.
- Assess the pros and cons of a data visualisation tool for the provider perspective, noting that the aim should not be to compare or rank providers, and that the main point of measurement of TOSSD is the recipient perspective.

Item 4. In a peer learning session for TOSSD data reporters, Qatar, Mexico and the World Health Organisation respectively shared their experiences in reporting pillar II activities, South-South co-operation and multilateral activities.

SUMMARY

Opening

Ms. Katrine Heggedal from the host entity, the Norwegian Agency for Development Co-operation (Norad), welcomed participants to the First Meeting of the General Assembly of the International Forum on TOSSD (IFT).

She introduced Norway's State Secretary for International Development, Ms. Bjørg Sandkjær, who delivered the opening remarks, followed by Ms. Julia Benn, Head of the IFT Secretariat, and the representatives of the four countries that had signed the Memorandum of Understanding regarding the hosting by the OECD of the IFT Secretariat by the OECD:

- Mr. Maher Mamhikoff, Director, Development Finance Statistics, Global Affairs Canada.
- Ms. Clarisse Senaya, Head of the Official Development Assistance Unit, Treasury, France.
- Mr. Javier Gomez, Technical Counsellor, General Directorate of Sustainable Development Policies, Ministry of Foreign Affairs, European Union and Co-operation, Spain.
- Ms. Joan Atherton, Senior Policy Advisor, Bureau for Planning, Learning, and Resource Management, U.S. Agency for International Development (USAID), United States.

Finally, Ms. Heggedal invited opening remarks from the two Co-Chairs of the IFT Interim Governing Body, Mr. Risenga Maluleke, Statistician-General of South Africa, and Mr. Laurent Sarazin, Head of Unit, Finance and Contracts, Directorate-General of International Partnerships, European Commission.

Item 1. Appointment of the IFT Steering Group

The Head of Secretariat, Ms. Julia Benn, informed the meeting that, as of 20 May 2024, 23 countries and organisations had confirmed their Membership (18) or Observership (5) in the IFT, and that confirmation was pending from seven members and observers of the IFT Interim Governing Body. She welcomed the participation of many TOSSD data reporters, both in-person and online, at the 1st meeting of the IFT General Assembly, and briefly presented the General Assembly's role and mandate.

The General Assembly approved Switzerland's application for IFT Membership. The representative of Switzerland, Ms. Miryam Rordorf-Duvaux, expressed their keen interest in TOSSD and noted their commitment to providing a financial contribution for the 2024-25 period (as a traditional provider, level two).

The General Assembly appointed the Co-Chairs of the IFT Interim Governing Body as Co-Chairs of the General Assembly and Steering Group: M. Risenga Maluleke (South Africa) was appointed for one year and Mr. Laurent Sarazin (European Union) was appointed for two years. Ms. Julia Benn noted that these appointments were in line with the IFT Terms of Reference (TORs), which state that for the initial period of two years, one of the Co-Chairs will be appointed for one year and the other for two years, to ensure continuity of work and maintain institutional memory.

The Co-Chairs explained that they had decided to extend the period during which a member of the Interim Governing Body can become a member of the IFT by confirming their approval of the TORs and their wish to join. This decision had been made in the spirit of inclusivity, recognising that some countries and organisations had faced challenges in obtaining formal approval of membership on time (given the consultations required with their legal departments). Moreover, it was noted that this arrangement provides a balanced representation of all stakeholder groups in the first Steering Group. Finally, the Co-Chairs informed that the period for accepting the TORs had been extended until the next Steering Group meeting expected in Q4 2024 (now scheduled for 24-26 September 2024).

The General Assembly then appointed the members of the Steering Group. These were selected from IFT Members and members of the Interim Governing Body for which confirmation of Membership is still pending. The new Steering Group Members are:

- **Seven traditional providers:** Canada, EU, France, Norway, Spain, Switzerland and the US.
- **Seven dual providers/recipients:** Brazil, Chile, Costa Rica, Indonesia, Mexico, Peru and South Africa.
- **Seven recipients:** Bangladesh, Burkina Faso, Egypt, Gabon, Nigeria, Philippines and Senegal.
- **Four multilateral institutions:** Inter-American Development Bank (IADB), Islamic Development Bank (IsDB), Organisation of American States - Executive Secretariat for Integral Development (OAS-SEDI) and the Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC).

The General Assembly then invited the following countries/organisations to attend the Steering Group meeting as Observers, noting that civil society organisations (CSOs) and UNCTAD each have a permanent Observer seat in the Steering Group.

- **Five Observers:** Austria, Romania, Tunisia, the United Kingdom and the UN System Chief Executives Board for Coordination (CEB) Secretariat.

The Secretariat highlighted that some countries and organisations were in the process of preparing their applications for Membership and that applications received between meetings of the General Assembly would be approved via a written procedure.

Following the appointment of the Steering Group, participants made the following comments:

- One participant asked whether the UN Statistical Commission (UNSC) would participate in the governance of TOSSD. The Secretariat explained that the UNSC had acknowledged TOSSD as a data source for SDG indicator 17.3.1. but, as for other SDG indicators, would not be involved in the governance of the framework as such. At present, TOSSD's linkages with the UN were ensured through UNCTAD, which holds a permanent Observer status and serves as the co-custodian of the SDG indicator 17.3.1, and the UN CEB Secretariat, which holds an Observer status and is the institution responsible for maintaining the UN data standard and overseeing UN system-wide internal reporting on expenditures by UN entities. The Secretariat explained that it had worked with the CEB Secretariat over several years to ensure the compatibility of the TOSSD and the UN data standards, and that the UN CEB Secretariat had adopted some CRS-TOSSD data standards. Finally, the Secretariat noted that the IFT Co-Chair Mr. Risenga Maluleke and certain Members, represented in the Forum by their National Statistical Offices (NSOs), were part of the UNSC and could ensure and facilitate the linkages as needed.

- One participant asked whether Steering Group members were appointed as of 2024 or as of 2025, and whether the financial contributions needed to be made upfront. The Secretariat clarified that Steering Group members were appointed as of 2024, and explained that in the early stages of the IFT, there would be flexibility on the financial contributions, with some Members already having contributed, others having made pledges for two or three years, and some starting contributions from 2024, while others from 2025.
- One participant commented on the difficulty of distinguishing between dual provider/recipients and recipients, noting that it would be important to have objective criteria, as this affects the composition of the Steering Group. The participant proposed three options for further discussion: (i) considering countries that provide more support than they receive, for the dual provider/recipient category; (ii) establishing a threshold for making the distinction; or (iii) using income per capita for making the distinction (a less desirable option). Another participant reacted by noting that, for the time being, the somewhat blurry distinction was acceptable, given the available seats in the Steering Group. However, they highlighted the importance of agreeing on a criterion for the future, when more than 16 Members could be considered as either dual provider/recipients or recipients.

Item 2. Highlights from TOSSD data collection on 2022 activities and using TOSSD data for analyses on financing for sustainable development

Ms Marisa Berbegal-Ibanez and Mr Camilo Gamba Gamba, from the IFT Secretariat, presented the key figures of TOSSD 2022 data and updates to the TOSSD online visualisation tool (www.tossd.online), and commented on how TOSSD data could be used to inform progress on financing the SDGs (Voluntary National Reviews – VNRs), national priorities (Integrated National Development Frameworks – INFFs) and financing for international commitments. Following the presentation from the Secretariat, Mr. Luca De Fraya and Mr. Brian Tomlinson as CSO representatives and Mr. Moustapha Baga from Burkina Faso provided their insights on using TOSSD data. The CSO representatives presented their analyses of TOSSD data and proposed using such analyses as evidence when considering refinements to the TOSSD methodology. Mr. Moustapha Baga shared Burkina Faso’s experience in using TOSSD data for decision-making, such as analysing TOSSD data on external support to better identify SDG financing gaps.

General Assembly participants proposed and commented on actions to foster TOSSD data use:

- The Statistical, Economic and Social Research and Training Centre for Islamic Countries (SESRIC) offered to organise capacity-building seminars on TOSSD data use for recipient countries within their membership. These seminars would be tailored for participants from NSOs. Additionally, SESRIC proposed to introduce TOSSD as a topic for discussion at the meeting of the Statistical Commission of the Organisation of Islamic Countries in 2025 and to host side events on TOSSD at the next UN Statistical Commission.
- Two participants suggested the development of visualisations for the provider perspective (<https://tossd.online/provider-perspective>) to assist data users in understanding and comparing TOSSD data across countries. Another participant flagged challenges they had encountered in explaining (internally) some discrepancies between data collected at the national level and those reported internationally, namely because some of their support is towards non-TOSSD recipient countries).

- One participant signalled that the IFT should address the ‘statistical illusion’ of growing TOSSD figures, i.e., lack of clarity on whether this growth is due to expanded data coverage or increased support.
- One participant stressed the need for outreach on the use of TOSSD data in recipient countries and for the monitoring of international commitments, acknowledging that achieving tangible results would require time.
- One participant proposed that the IFT Secretariat collaborate with PARIS21 on using TOSSD data for the VNRs.
- Finally, another participant proposed that TOSSD data be considered for the measurement of the forthcoming New Quantitative Climate Finance (NQCF) goal.

In their responses, the Co-Chairs noted that the main point of measurement of TOSSD was the recipient perspective and thus the Secretariat had not been tasked to generate visualisations by provider as such. The providers were welcome to publicise on their own data (as the EU was doing for its ‘Global Gateway’), hence not compromising the recipient perspective on www.tossd.online. The Secretariat commented that while the provider perspective files were produced upon demand, they were not particularly user-friendly and could certainly be improved. The Secretariat suggested, nonetheless, that the IFT should first assess the implications of greater emphasis on the provider perspective to TOSSD more generally. The Secretariat also highlighted the recent publication of metadata by TOSSD reporter, which aimed to generate trust and facilitate the use of TOSSD data for analysis and decision-making. Furthermore, the Secretariat noted the potential for using TOSSD data to inform future climate finance indicators but cautioned that the methodology for tracking climate finance in TOSSD might need to be refined. Finally, the Co-Chairs encouraged all participants to further promote TOSSD data use.

Item 3. Experience in TOSSD reporting on 2022 activities

Ms Marisa Berbegal-Ibanez from the IFT Secretariat presented the document on the experience in TOSSD reporting on 2022 activities, which included proposals aimed at refining the Reporting Instructions to better suit the needs of TOSSD reporters.

Participants expressed appreciation for the presentation and were pleased to see improvements over time in data coverage and quality, which they perceived as reflecting a collaborative approach. The following comments were made:

Data coverage and quality

- A participant suggested improving the valuation of South-South co-operation (SSC), noting that in-kind technical co-operation activities might not appear very significant if only measured on financial terms. The Secretariat clarified that this issue was covered in the Reporting Instructions – the Purchasing Power Parity (PPA) factor is applied to the salary cost of the public officials delivering in-kind technical co-operation – but that in practice, most reporters face difficulties in reporting the salary costs. Another participant commented that, in their case, these costs were indeed difficult to calculate as their officials were involved in the implementation of the activities, but the financial support was external. The Secretariat added that qualitative indicators could be reported

in the field 29. *SSC-specific information* and suggested that this topic could be discussed in future meetings.

- Several participants commented on the challenge of reporting to different systems and welcomed the Secretariat's efforts to harmonise codes and map classifications, e.g. those of SEGIB in the case of SSC, and of the CRS, in the case of ODA.
- A few DAC members noted that co-ordination within the OECD on data also included in ODA statistics could be improved. One participant noted that their internal system needed to be better adapted to TOSSD, as it had been designed for ODA and reporting to TOSSD was still largely manual.
- Several participants shared that their reporting to TOSSD had improved over time. One participant in particular highlighted that while they still faced capacity issues and needed to improve their reporting processes and systems, all their line ministries were now reporting to TOSSD. They emphasised that the measure had been streamlined in national policy development and that they had solid political support for TOSSD reporting. In this regard, the narrative on why TOSSD is important was critical. Another participant explained that, in their case, the improvements mainly related to pillar II, for which clear internal eligibility criteria had been established. Another participant found reporting to TOSSD useful for their internal purposes as they could use TOSSD data to answer questions from various parts of their administration. Yet another participant reiterated the suggestion for data visualisation on the provider perspective to ensure further incentives for reporting to TOSSD.
- On the use of Artificial Intelligence (AI) for data quality assurance, one participant proposed that the Secretariat use the AI 'SDG classifier' tool to fill the data gaps for reporters that do not yet report on the SDG focus of their activities. The participant mentioned that they had compared the SDGs assigned manually with suggestions from the AI tool and found roughly the same results, thus concluding that the use of AI does not result in lower data quality but can significantly reduce the reporting burden of desk officers. However, another participant could not agree with the Secretariat on filling the data gap for them, as they had decided not to provide data on specific SDGs for political reasons. The Secretariat confirmed that they were systematically using the AI tool and that any remaining data gaps in the SDG focus field were related to countries and organisations that preferred not to use the tool.

TOSSD fields and classifications

- A CSO representative proposed adding further granularity for the keywords, to inform whether the commitment to the policy area in question was significant or principal. They noted that this additional granularity could be voluntary for reporters able to make such distinctions.
- Participants expressed their support for the proposed keyword #Biodiversity. In response to a question on its definition, the Secretariat clarified that it matched with that of the Convention of Biological Diversity (CBD) and the biodiversity marker in the CRS. While further refinements could be introduced later, it was noted that it would be important to start collecting data to feed into the CBD indicator framework, for which TOSSD is a data source.
- On South-South co-operation, participants favoured the option of creating a specific field text next to the channel of delivery to capture multiple entities involved in the implementation of the

- activities. In the context of triangular or trilateral co-operation, the field could be used for providing information on the co-operation partners. However, there were questions on the reference in the Reporting Instructions to 'pivotal partner' as participants found the concept difficult to apply and incoherent with the horizontality principles of SSC.
- Regarding the applicability of SSC as a framework of collaboration for multilateral institutions, there were mixed views among participants. One participant viewed SSC as a framework of collaboration between governments, noting that multilateral institutions rather participate in triangular arrangements, as outlined in the language of BAPA+40 . Another participant commented that the application of the SSC code to multilaterals would require development of criteria, such as whether over 50% of the institution's financing comes from the South and if the institution's mandate is aligned with SSC principles. A participant representing a multilateral institution explained that they operate in the South and would like the opportunity to report their technical assistance activities as SSC. However, they acknowledged the need for clear criteria for such reporting.

The General Assembly agreed to present, as proposals for approval by the Steering Group, the following changes to the Reporting Instructions:

- Inclusion of the keyword #Biodiversity.
- Addition of a new field "Other partner entities/organisations".

It was also agreed that, for a subsequent meeting of the Steering Group, the Secretariat would:

- Prepare a presentation on the use of AI.
- Explore revising the language on the 'pivotal partner' of triangular co-operation.
- Further analyse the use of the SSC code by multilateral institutions and propose an alternative for them.
- Assess the pros and cons of a data visualisation tool for the provider perspective, noting that the aim should not be to compare or rank providers and that the main point of measurement of TOSSD is the recipient perspective.

Item 4. Peer learning – an incremental approach towards reporting in TOSSD

The Secretariat facilitated a peer learning session for TOSSD data reporters. During the session, Qatar, Mexico and the World Health Organisation (WHO) shared their experiences in reporting pillar II activities, South-South co-operation and multilateral activities, respectively.

- Ms AlDaina Al-Semaitt from Qatar shared their experience in enhancing pillar II reporting. They had begun by mapping activities related to peace and security, as well as initiatives addressing climate change. Qatar had organised seminars and bilateral meetings to explain the TOSSD methodology and solicit data before receiving the official request from the Secretariat, thereby giving extra time to entities to look for additional eligible activities. The mandate given by the Qatari Prime Minister had been crucial in giving political anchorage to TOSSD reporting and had encouraged more public entities and corporations to participate in the process. In response to a question about their work with public corporations, Qatar noted the importance of acquainting the national focal points with TOSSD classifications, including the sustainability criteria.

- Mr Rafael Rovaletti, from the World Health Organisation (WHO), shared their experience in reporting the full array of the organisation’s work in support of the SDGs, including international norm-setting, thus better reflecting the reality of support to global public health. In their view, TOSSD fosters greater accountability as it allows for the reporting of all activities of the WHO Programme of Work and Budget, including in-kind services and the work of hosted partnerships (e.g. Framework Convention on Tobacco Control). For WHO, the biggest challenge in TOSSD reporting had been the alignment of their results structure with TOSSD sector codes (and would continue to be so as the WHO results structure undergoes changes every five or six years). They emphasised the crucial support from Secretariat in the reporting process and for the expansion of their dataset. In response to questions from participants, the WHO explained that the data on the activities of the hosted partnerships were included in their Enterprise Resource Planning (ERP) system. As regards their comment on TOSSD being considered as a ‘testing environment’, WHO clarified that this referred to institutionalising the reporting, which requires close collaboration with the Secretariat because of the need to manage the different reporting dimensions, e.g., new keywords and metadata.
- Mr Gerardo Bracho, from Mexico, shared their experience in reporting South-South co-operation to TOSSD. Mexico’s internal data collection is greatly facilitated by a national law that requires entities to report to AMEXCID. However, this law does not cover subnational entities, which undertake co-operation activities on their own. In response to a question about possible additional legislative power to enhance AMEXCID’s mandate to collect data from subnational entities, Mexico added that such an expansion might be premature as public awareness of their international co-operation was just beginning. Mexico appreciated the work of the Secretariat to support its TOSSD reporting but the existence of several systems (e.g., SEGIB, TOSSD, UNCTAD pilot) and the need for co-ordination between them was considered as an additional burden by some Latin American countries. On this latter point, another SSC provider from the LAC region shared their experience in merging the above-mentioned reporting formats, which had decreased the reporting burden for national and sub-national entities.

Closing remarks

The Co-Chairs summarised the main outcomes of the first meeting of the General Assembly as reflected in these action points.

Mr Bård Vegar Solhjell, Director General of Norad, provided closing remarks, expressing gratitude to all participants for their attendance, and reaffirming Norway’s commitment to TOSSD.