The potential of open data to impact resource allocation for   poverty eradication in Kenya and Uganda

Policy Brief, May 2014

Introduction

Between January 2013 and May 2014, Development Initiatives and Development Research and Training were part of the Open Data in Developing Countries (ODDC) study, a multi case study initiative funded by the WWF and IDRC that sought to ascertain the impact Open Data is having in transforming developing countries. The Uganda/Kenya case study investigated Impact of Open Data on resource allocation for poverty eradication in Uganda and Kenya.

This case study was premised on the experiences of countries that have been involved in Open Data since the beginning. Open data has its roots in the Open Government Partnership founded in 2009 and launched in 2011, initially with a membership of eight countries[1] but which has since grown to 63 (In East Africa, Kenya and Tanzania are members but Uganda has not yet signed up[2] despite increasing calls to do so[3]). Its aim is providing an international platform for domestic reformers committed to making their governments more open, accountable, and responsive to citizens. There has been increasing enthusiasm by governments since then to publish data online. Many members have since established national data webportals and made avail huge amounts of data that were previously not in the public domain. The impact of this on resource allocation and the broader transparency agenda has been significant. It has created more upward information flow, local, national and international pressures and bottom-up citizen and political pressures[4] on governments to be more open.

While the open data movement may be relatively new in East Africa, the issues that it seeks to address are age-old. They include transparency, accountability, equity, relevance and responsiveness to community needs, and effectiveness and efficiency of governance systems and processes. A key purpose of this increasingly popular approach is to make local, regional and national data, particularly publicly acquired data, available, accessible, and useable for a wide cross-section of development actors.

This study therefore set out to answer two broad questions:
1) How are open data initiatives contributing to poverty eradication through impact on resource allocation, and

2) How could the contribution of open data initiatives to poverty eradications resource allocations be strengthened?

The study also sought to develop knowledge and action that would enhance the potential of open data to foster greater transparency and accountability, better economic efficacy and efficiency and greater inclusion and empowerment of marginalised groups.

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[1] http://www.opengovpartnership.org/

[2] http://www.opengovpartnership.org/blog/bernard-sabiti/2013/03/11/why-uganda-has-not-joined-open-government-partnership

[3] http://www.opengovpartnership.org/es/blog/beatrice-mugambe/2013/06/06/uganda-why-not-join-open-government-partnership

[4] http://www.opendataimpacts.net/2013/01/what-are-the-incentives-for-transparency-in-developing-countries/comment-page-1/

Approach

The study used both secondary and primary sources in collecting data. Using semi structured interviews with key informants, policy dialogues and reviewing existing literature as well as critically reviewing existing open data initiatives in the two countries, the study set out to investigate "How Open Data could impact resource allocation for poverty eradication in uganda and Kenya"

This brief summarises the key findings, Key messages and recommendations desegregated for the different members of the Open Data Ecosystem (Government, Private sector, Data producers and analysts, Tech community, civil society, media and citizens

Key messages

1. Although there was no clear link between open data and resource allocation, largely because of political economy factors, the potential for this link is apparent because of strong drivers of open data processes in both countries.

2. All things remaining equal, the potential for open data (open information) to contribute to resource allocation for poverty eradication is greatly enhanced if data is cleaned, analysed, made into good messages which are translated into good policy and practice; and policy and practice provides a platform for interlocking, interacting and networking of stakeholders.

3. Open data is more than just provision of data online. The off-line methods in which information to support decision making and resource allocation is provided to citizens are still important and should not be excluded from the open data agenda, but rather strengthened to improve citizen participation.

4. There was strong evidence of the need for open data champions in both in both Kenya and Uganda who would help to leverage adequate political support. Open data processes seem to be driven by individuals who are passionate about availability or lack.

5. In Kenya greater focus needs to be on strengthening the political and legal aspects of open data while in Uganda financial investment in the open data process, building multi-stakeholder engagement, the strengthening the legal and political environment and capacity building came out strongly.

6. When the governments play their roles effectively, it creates an enabling environment for the other stakeholders to act accordingly although every stakeholder has to play their role to make the ecosystem work

Main findings

a. In both Kenya and Uganda, there was no clear link between open data and resource allocation as allocation tends to be driven more by political consideration rather than evidence adduced from open data. In Kenya, respondents were of the view that duty bearers are not responding to the existence of open data in any way while in Uganda its role in resource allocation is largely unknown.

b. While in Kenya the progress so far registered on openness is driven by ICT growth, in Uganda it is driven more by low-tech, traditional transparency initiatives. Radio has revolutionalized the information explosion and created huge opportunities for openness in both countries.

c. A digital divide between rural and urban; male and female regarding access to open data drivers is evident in both countries.

d. In both countries, the legal and policy frameworks are robust. Uganda was the first to enact legislation on Access to Information while Kenya was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to set up an Open Data Web Portal and its ICT policy favours open data. However, the very governments that have created these robust frameworks have also found ways around the legislative framework to 'undermine' openness and transparency.

e. There is still a preference within governments for the traditional way of data collection, management and dissemination in form of voluminous books and highly technical terminology.

f. There is need for open development pioneering institutions (individuals, civil society, media, academic) to work closely with government to form and execute the necessary policy on open development that bases on a solid legal basis such as Access Right to Information Act

g. There are different actors within the data ecosystem but they do not always work together to complement each other's roles. While it is good to initiate, it is even better to be aware of and link with the initiatives of others as under. Furthermore, while there is an apparent lack of adequate data in the public domain, the demand for and use of the available data is far less than the ideal.

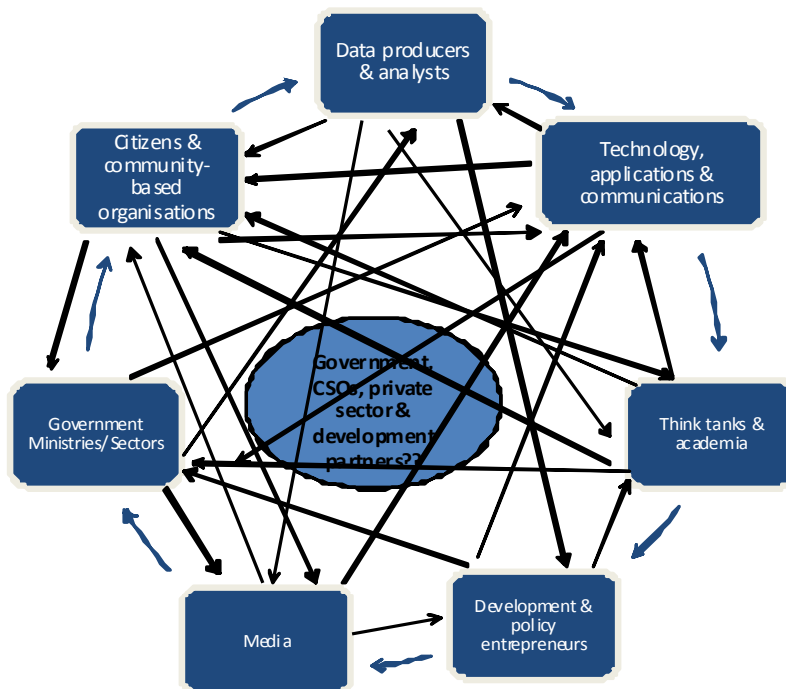**Figure 1: A stakeholder-based open data ecosystem**

Figure 1 above is what the ideal ecosystem looks like. However, in reality often the different actors in the ecosystem function in isolation, duplicating efforts and not capitalising on core competencies and capabilities that each possesses regarding open data the actors do not interact as they should. Despite the efficacy of the ecosystem, the interactions among the different nodes of the open data ecosystem are not necessarily evident.

The drivers of the open data process in Kenya and Uganda

Drivers to open data may influence the initiative as a whole, or may potentially motivate, fuel or support different stages or actors of the ecosystem, that individually would contribute to the overall drive of the ecosystem. The respondents in both countries identified four categories of drivers summarized in table 1 below.

Table 1: Drivers of the open data process in Kenya and Uganda

Category	Description of drivers
Legislative	Legislative drivers provide a legal framework within which open data can exist and operate. They are the institutional structures or operating environments that make conditions conducive for operationalization and implementation of open data. Legal frameworks make non-compliance a criminal offence that is punishable by law. The presence of legal frameworks is a key factor in the open data process and can be used to demand for data from government ministries, departments and agencies.

	Uganda has legal frameworks in place to drive the open data initiatives, the most important of which is the Freedom of Information Act, 2005.

In Kenya, the Freedom of Information law is still a Bill. This however did not deter the establishment of Kenya Open Data Initiative. |
| **Political** | Political enablers compliment on the legislative framework for open data. These include the political will, political commitment backed with resources and championship to drive the open data agenda and influence government and non-government stakeholders in playing crucial parts in institutionalising and enabling operationalization of the legal prerequisites for open data. According to the respondents, willingness of government political leaders to open up:
-Facilitates the release of public information, making it easily accessible and usable
-Responds to information requests from various stakeholders for transparency and accountability
-Supports the allocation of financial resources to the ICT sector including open data

In Kenya, much of the success of KODI is attributed to the open data "champion", a political figure who rallied support for the initiative. With support from the highest political office, sector ministries were then obligated to make information available. |
| **Technical and capacity drivers** | For open data to gain momentum there has to be an increase in innovation in ICT technologies. Some of these innovations include computer use, database management, software design, etc. In addition, there should be an increase in the scope and coverage of ICTs, even to the rural and underserved areas.

Open data is driven by the capacity (ability) to use computers, especially if one is to use and analyse data. Use and analysis of data for resource allocation requires special training in data analysis (which is costly), and requires to a certain extent high level of education. Therefore, capacity to use, analyse and interpret data is a driver to open data |
| **Demand and Supply drivers** | Open data exists because of supply and demand of data. Absence of either distorts the open data ecosystem. Data providers must be willing and able to supply data freely and accessibly, while at the same time, users must be willing and able to demand for data and use it. Demand for data is also hinged on awareness of the availability of data (as well as awareness of the presence of the Access to Information Act).

Increased awareness of the availability and accessibility of data would increase the demand and use of data at various levels. This would in turn increase the demand for accountability and transparency from the government, which would have a positive effect on resource allocation for poverty eradication. |

Barriers to open data initiative in Kenya and Uganda

The establishment and operationalization of open data initiatives in Kenya and Uganda has faced a range of challenges. Analysis of stakeholder interviews indicate that although open data is viewed as a potential benefit to the development of both countries, there are several reasons why open data initiatives have not necessarily established themselves firmly in the

country. These can be categorised as supply and demand side barriers as summarised in the table below:

Table 2: Summary of responses to barriers of open data in Kenya and Uganda

Barriers to the supply of data	Barriers to the demand and use of data
➢ Political barriers – political reluctance stifles the release of data and delay in open data initiatives ➢ Financial barriers – Dedicated resources are vital for the implementation of open data initiatives ➢ Legislative and institutional – lack of an legal environment, or weak legislative implementation will not provide a conducive environment for operation ➢ Technological – technology is important for making data available and usable	➢ Lack of adequate quality data – This discourages usage of data if it cannot be relied on ➢ Lack of interest and capacity to access data – data is important for as long as people have interest in making useful information out of it, and have the capacity to do so ➢ Limited technology – users may sometimes lack the appropriate technology use the data, data maybe in a format that is not user friendly, or the technology to host data may be lacking

Recommendations

Specific recommendations to the various stakeholders were suggested as follows:

For governments
The government is the key player in the full operationalization of the open data movement in Uganda and Kenya. Therefore the study makes the following recommendations for the governments:
1) Promote sector and cross sector specific initiatives that enable collaboration and transparency through different e-transformation strategies across government sectors and agencies.
2) Develop and champion the capacity to drive transformation across government and to advance skills in its institutions and civil service.
3) Formulate policies, regulations and laws to support use of ICT to transform service delivery.
4) Formulate common standards for transformation to:
   a. Enable an environment that allows an open government and a civil society that participates in content and service creation in both countries.
   b. Ensure that interoperability and efficiency exist among the data, documents and services between organisations, sectors, agencies, and the like.
   c. To support private sector engagement in service delivery. For example the current rate of failure of governments ICT projects makes for a clear case for better procurement practices.
   d. Promote a reasonable level of trust in ICT systems' usage to secure information and data that all the stakeholders of the open development share particularly in light of the intensity of ICT use in open development.

For Civil Society organisations

- There is need for open development pioneering institutions (civil society, media, academic) to work closely with government to form and execute the necessary policy on open development that bases on the Access Right to Information Act as in Uganda.
- The pioneering institutions in this work should focus on creating awareness and a culture of open data in Kenya and Uganda by explaining what it is, who it serves and why the country needs an open development approach at this level of national development.
- CSOs need to work in partnership to strengthen their voice in advocacy for transparency and accountability through availability and access to public data. Strengthening the linkages would provide a firm basis upon which open data can function effectively to achieve its goals.
- Inform citizens of their rights to access data and the importance of data driven decision making.

For Private sector and 'techies':

a. To work with government, CSOs and other actors to increase investments in technologies and services that promotes access to data and information.
b. Contribute to the bridging of the rural-urban digital divide that exists by ensuring penetration into rural areas, cost effectiveness and affordability of information technologies
c. Push for demand for open contracting and better conditions of doing business by requesting for positive incentives for ICT and data related entrepreneurs and enterprises. This will encourage diffusion of people-friendly innovations

Data Producers and analysts (government, CSOs, donors, etc)

- Always endeavour to avail data in easy to use, machine readable formats, in addition to the existing traditional formats (such as big books, newspaper pullouts, notice boards and PDFs).
- Work with governments and service providers to reduce the financial and procedural burden for the user to access data
- Regularly Inform users and potential users of data what is available, how to access it

Citizens and their institutions:

- Demand for update, regular, simplified and digestible data from government on resource allocation and other development matters. This will create an upward urgency and necessity for government and duty bearers to avail and make use of data

For media

- Adopt and embrace the growing culture of data journalism
- Provide free or affordable space for dissemination of critical data aimed for the public good. Data on the state or investments in water, education, agriculture and other poverty related sectors
- Take advantage of the increasingly popularity of new media to reach a greater number of followers on issues of transparency and accountability and the role of open data in them

Conclusion

Open data (which largely manifested as open information in our case study) has the potential to contribute to Poverty Eradication; Resource allocation for poverty eradication, if, data eventually it translates into policy and practice change. As Charles Lwanga-Ntale[5] regularly says, "data is good but it becomes better when it is analysed; analysis is good but it becomes better when it makes good messages; messages are good but they become better when they can be translated into good policy and practice; policy and practice is good but only useful when it provides a platform for interlocking, interacting and networking of stakeholders."

There is no individual programme that can efficiently address data, data analysis, information, policy and interaction. The open data ecosystem needs to be supported by an enabling policy and political environment and a commitment of all stakeholders to work together and compliment each other's work.

Future research could focus on the functioning of the ecosystem linkages and how they can be leveraged for better results in terms of linking open data to resource allocation for poverty reduction.

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[5] Regional Director, Development Initiatives Africa Hub