Open data and resource allocation for poverty eradication: Kenya and Uganda

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For several years Development Initiatives (DI) has been working with Development Research and Training (DRT) to develop a conceptual understanding of the link between open development, access to information, governance and poverty eradication. This dialogue ultimately led to the establishment of the civil society-led Uganda Open Development Partnership Platform in September 2012.1

While the open data movement may be relatively new in Eastern Africa, the issues that it seeks to address are age-old. These 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.

Using case studies from Uganda and Kenya, DRT and DI carried out research on the evolution of the open data movement and assessed the role that the movement plays in the equitable allocation of financial resources for the eradication of extreme and chronic poverty.

The study generally aimed to contribute to the understanding of the specific efforts required to ensure ‘effective use’, which is the most important outcome of open data.2

Methodology and approach

In order to assess the role of open data in resource allocation for poverty eradication in Kenya and Uganda, we adopted a holistic ‘ecosystem’ analytical framework. This asserts that in order for open data to yield effective outcomes for citizens it will, on one hand, be interlinked with key nodes in the data-information-analysis-policy value chain and, on the other hand, be conceptualised as part of a complex web of interactions between the different components of data availability, data access, narratives, policy messages, communication, programme design and policy impact.3

The open data landscape

Kenya has a government-run open data initiative, and was the first country in Sub-Saharan Africa to establish an open data portal. The Kenya Open Data Initiative (KODI) is housed in the Ministry of Information, Communications and Technology (ICT), and is managed by the Kenya ICT board. In addition to KODI, there are several other initiatives that make data readily available and accessible. Dr Bitange Ndemo, the permanent secretary at the ministry, championed the establishment of KODI. In spite of a clear constitutional argument for the release of information to the public, Dr Ndemo encountered significant resistance from sector ministries. He was, however, determined to proceed and in doing so found a way to circumvent the challenge of accessing data held by government departments. With the President’s approval secured, Dr Ndemo mounted pressure on his counterparts in other institutions to obtain data and necessary budgetary support.

Uganda does not yet have a national government-led open data portal, but, like Kenya, has several initiatives that contribute to providing free and accessible data and information. Having a number of other initiatives alongside the national open data initiative is healthy as it provides several options for data access and availability that the public can use to suit their needs.

While globally open data has its foundations in technology, in Uganda the study found that open data is about the provision of data and information largely using offline methods. The processes by which citizen voices are expressed, and the methods through which data and information is passed on to citizens to support decision-making and advocacy, have been hinged on methods that do not require the heavy use of ICTs, with which there can be wider participation of the majority of citizenry. Internet use and coverage in Uganda is growing, but it covers less than two per cent of the population and is largely centred in urban areas, where just 11 per cent of the population live. On the other hand, 90 per cent of the population in Uganda have radios in their households and 95 per cent listen to FM radios every week (UBS, 2010). These statistics are key in determining the practices and processes of open data initiatives in Uganda.

At the time the fieldwork was conducted, Uganda did not have a formal government-led open data initiative. However, a study by the Association for Progressive Communications, and the Collaboration on International ICT Policy in East and Southern Africa (2012) found that Uganda was ready to implement open data.

While open data is a relatively new term in Uganda, the idea behind the concept isn’t new. According to one of the respondents, Uganda attempted to promote transparency and accountability by adopting extensive decentralisation in the 1990s.

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and adopting hands-on resource tracking tools, such as public expenditure and tracking surveys (PETS) which were launched in 1996. Other endeavours to promote openness in Uganda have included the establishment of the Auditor General’s Office, the Inspector General of Government (IGG), and the Budget Monitoring and Accountability Unit of the Ministry of Finance, Planning and Economic Development. These have made government accountability information (including tracking and monitoring) available to the public with varying levels of success.

In Uganda, all respondents mentioned that the central data collection agency is the Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS). The bureau is semi-autonomous, and is responsible for coordinating and supervising the national statistical system and the principle data processing, analysing and disseminating agency. It collects periodical national household surveys, carries out censuses and collects other generic data.

Factors that influence open data can be loosely defined as the conditions, influences, activities, systems and people that create, fuel, motivate and support the open data process at various stages. The drivers to open data may influence the initiative as a whole, or may potentially motivate or support different stages or actors of the ecosystem. Figure 1 provides a summary of the drivers to the open data processes in Kenya and Uganda as indicated by the respondents.

### Resource allocation and civic engagement

While there have been several advocacy campaigns for resource allocation to pro-poor sectors, these cannot be directly attributed to availability (or non-availability) of open data. It was found that poverty eradication is a function of not only availability of open data, but a number of other factors such as availability and implementation of inclusive policies and improved social service delivery as a result of allocating resources to those sectors dominated by the poor. It was, however, established that there are indirect links between the impact of open data and poverty eradication. Our interviews uncovered that KODI played a part in promoting citizen engagement, mostly using media as a mechanism for informing citizens.

In both countries, an open data portal was identified as a platform for interface between government and citizens, with the latter's

### Figure 1: Drivers of open data

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<th>Category</th>
<th>Description</th>
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<td>Legislative</td>
<td>Legislative drivers provide a legal framework within which open data can exist and operate. They are the institutional structures or institutional operating environments that make conditions conducive for operationalisation and implementation of open data. Legal frameworks make non-compliance a criminal offence that is punishable by law.</td>
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<td>Uganda has legal frameworks in place that would drive open data initiatives. The most important of these is the Freedom of Information Act 2005.</td>
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<td>In Kenya, the Freedom of Information law is still a bill. This, however, did not deter the establishment of KODI.</td>
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<td>Political</td>
<td>Political enablers complement the legislative framework for open data. Political will and political commitment backed with resources are key drivers in pushing forward the open data agenda and influencing government and non-government stakeholders to institutionalise and enable operationalisation of the legal prerequisites for open data.</td>
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<td>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, the champion ensured that sector ministries were obligated to make information available.</td>
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<td>Technical and capacity drivers</td>
<td>For open data to gain momentum there has to be an increase in innovation in ICTs. Some of these innovations include computer use, database management and software design. In addition, there should be an increase in the scope and coverage of ICTs, including to the rural and underserved areas. Open data is driven by the capacity to use computers, especially if one is to use and analyse data. The use and analysis of data for resource allocation requires special training in data analysis (which is costly) and, to a certain extent, high level of education.</td>
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<td>Supply and demand drivers</td>
<td>Open data exists because of supply and demand of data. Absence of either distorts the open-data ecosystem. 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).</td>
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<td>Increased awareness of the availability and accessibility of data would increase the demand and use of data at various levels – such as academia, media, advocacy groups and community groups. 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.</td>
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need to know being served by the datasets. In Kenya, KODI included a mechanism for citizens to make requests for datasets that were not yet available on the portal. In Uganda, the Baraza programme led by the Office of the Prime Minister (OPM) provides an opportunity for interaction between local communities and their leaders on the sharing of public information, with a focus on effective monitoring of public service provision (on the part of the leaders) and demand for accountability and transparency (on the part of the local population). However, in both countries, the present role of open data in citizen engagement is unclear.

We identified that a limiting factor in undertaking this study was in securing duty bearers’ resources (contact time) to take part. We were unable to ascertain whether open data was being used to affect resource allocation decisions by duty bearers or whether the presence of data would necessarily guarantee its use in decision-making.

Many of those interviewed were of the opinion that duty bearers in public office are not responding to the existence of open data in any way. Respondents in both Kenya and Uganda asserted that the allocation of resources is not scientific, but relies heavily on experience and conversations between a very limited set of policymakers. Furthermore, the majority of the respondents suggested the need for increased awareness, as well as better tools and ways to communicate information that the common wananchi (citizen) can easily consume.

**Recommendations**

**Partnership/collaboration.** The open data initiative should be approached by its promoters through an ecosystem mechanism in which all actors should come together to avoid duplication and support each other. For example, in one of the discussions held by the UBOS, an official suggested that university students should be ushered into UBOS geo-coding work to begin mapping, studying and supporting the open data processes. Partnership/collaboration should include government ministries, departments and agencies; selected individuals; civil society; and public–private partnerships among others.

**Open data champion.** Emphasis was put on the role that an open data ‘champion’ – a political figure responsible for rallying support for the initiative with support from the highest political office – would play in promoting open data in both countries.

**Capacity-building and raising awareness.** The capacity of actors to use data effectively needs to be built on in a number of ways, including the capacity to effectively access, analyse and use data, and to present data as information that can be used for decision-making and change.

**Data standards and quality.** For effective open data initiatives, there is need for the promoters to embrace both international and national data collection and analysis standards. Data standards refer to guidelines through which interacting parties can confidently exchange information. The standards may include procedures, implementation guidelines and usage directives.

**Conclusions**

As Charles Lwanga-Ntale (2014), regional director of the Development Initiatives Africa Hub, said: ‘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, supported by an enabling policy and political environment, provides an interaction for all these actors.

In an open data ecosystem, there are vertical and horizontal linkages and relationships. Policies flow from the top to the bottom, but...
The availability of funds through a development partner played a role in the early success of KODI in Kenya. The absence of this kind of funding in Uganda may be one of the limiting factors in the launch of a national open data initiative. So, whereas there is some political will in both countries, lack of funding is the main barrier to the initiation and operation of open data initiatives in Kenya and Uganda. It is worth noting that having an access to information act, as is the case of Uganda, does not necessarily imply citizens’ access to information. This suggests that open data is politically driven and requires, among others, political drivers such as an open data champion in order to become a reality.

**Endnotes**

1. See www.opengovpartnership.org.
2. According to the Open Definition (http://opendefinition.org): ‘A piece of data or content is open if anyone is free to use, reuse, and redistribute it – subject only, at most, to the requirement to attribute and/or share-alike.’
3. In this study we used data from both secondary and primary sources. Secondary data collection involved a review of relevant literature, published and grey, on the evolution and functioning of open data programmes in Uganda and Kenya. Other information was gathered from key institutions involved in the generation of data and information including government ministries; local governments; civil society organisations; research and academic institutions; private enterprises; and agencies that are implementing pilot programmes (such as the United Nations Children’s Fund/DEVTRAC in the Uganda and Kenya Open Data Initiative). Semi-structured interviews with key informants were also used. Using the study objectives, the research team developed a semi-structured interview guide that was used for key informant discussions with the stakeholders. Finally, during the course of the study, a series of meetings and workshops were held within which discussions centred on open data and its role in transparency. Proceedings from these meetings contributed to the overall study.

**References**


**Development Initiatives (DI)** is an independent organisation which focuses on the analysis and use of data for the elimination of extreme poverty. The organisation has, since 1993, increased transparency in all development resources, including aid, government (domestic) and humanitarian resources, for more effective poverty eradication initiatives. The DI Africa Hub based in Nairobi, Kenya, provides a regional perspective to DI’s work on eradicating poverty.

**Development Research and Training (DRT)** is involved in carrying out policy-oriented research and analysis focusing on eradication of poverty and, more specifically, chronic poverty. DRT has, since 1997, worked with governments, multilateral organisations and NGOs to undertake specific policy-oriented research and analysis aimed at informing and influencing a wide range of issues, including poverty reduction, in Uganda and other East African Countries.