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To

Smt. Alarmelmangai D, IAS
Secretary
Department of Finance
Government of Chhattisgarh

—

Respected Ma'am,

Sub: Request to publish budget documents in machine readable format(s)

Greetings from **CivicDataLab**!

We are a research lab working at the intersection of data, tech, design and social science to strengthen the course of civic engagements in India. Together with our partner organizations, we have successfully launched open-data and social good platforms, including Open Budgets India - the largest repository of budget documents in the country with more than 18,000 documents and counting.

We are writing today to formally request the Govt of Chhattisgarh to become only the 3rd state in the country to **publish budget data in machine readable format(s)**. By making them available on https://finance.cg.gov.in/, Chhattisgarh will herald a new era of openness and transparency in governance. Furthermore, the availability of data will spur new and innovative public research that'll have a direct bearing on the state's endeavor to improve its budget every year.

- The Union Government, and the Governments of Assam and Odisha are currently the only institutions to publish budget documents in open formats.

  - Union budget documents have been published in excel format since 2011-12 through their website (https://www.indiabudget.gov.in/). We have been building Union Budget Explorers since 2018-19 using this data. (https://union.openbudgetsindia.org/)

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- ○ Government of Assam's budget data in open format has been published through Open Budgets India platform since 2018. (https://openbudgetsindia.org/organization/about/assam).

- ○ Since 2020-21, Government of Odisha has also been publishing budget documents in open format through their official website. (https://budget.odisha.gov.in/previous-budget). This year, we launched the Odisha Budget Explorer using this data. (https://odisha.openbudgetsindia.org/)

- The Government of India has been encouraging publishing of data in open formats for over a decade through the **National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy.** The policy emphasizes the benefits of the same - avoiding duplication of effort, maximizing use and integration, better decision making, and equity of access.

- On Fiscal Statistics in particular, the **Committee on Fiscal Statistics (2018)** of the National Statistical Commission says "economic health and well-being of a country crucially depends on the quality, availability, and accessibility of fiscal data, which provides valuable information to both governmental and non-governmental entities", and recommends that "fiscal data should be considered as a public good … [that can]… serve as inputs to policymakers, economists and researchers whose work may improve the efficiency of policymaking".

- **Chhattisgarh's Information Technology and ITES Policy** is a forward looking progressive document that correctly identifies that "there are no islands of elitism or isolated conclaves of wisdom." The policy aims to create a knowledge society, and "every citizen must feel comfortable in accessing information through IT – directly or through public - private partnerships". Publishing budget documents in open formats will help the Department achieve one of the policy's key objectives - *"Empower Citizens And Promoting Public Trust In Government".*

We have also prepared a short guidebook *(attached)* that provides an overview of the open publishing standards, including being in compliance with the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy. The recommendations are briefly mentioned below.

1. Publish all budget documents in machine readable formats (CSV, RDF, XML, JSON) via open APIs.
2. Publish documents immediately after presentation of the budget in the State Legislative Assembly.
3. Publish budget documents in English, Chhattisgarhi, and Hindi (trilingual).
4. Publish budget documents for at least the last 10 years.
5. Use open fonts and unicode characters.
6. Provide description (metadata) for budget documents.

We are also attaching the format in which Assam is publishing their budget data. While some of the columns may be different for Chhattisgarh, the overall template makes data analysis easier. The column headers are heads of account, and each row is a separate budget line item. In addition, we are ready to support the Department in the preparation and publication of these datasets.

With just over a month for the presentation of Chhattisgarh's Budget 2023, we at CivicDataLab wish you and the entire Finance Department all the best.

Yours Sincerely

Arun Sudarsan
Economist & Policy Researcher
(For CivicDataLab)

References

1. CivicDataLab's website - https://civicdatalab.in/
2. Open Budgets India - https://openbudgetsindia.org/
3. National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy https://www.meity.gov.in/data-sharing
4. Report of the Committee on Fiscal Statistics - https://tinyurl.com/rcofs2018
5. Chhattisgrh's IT and ITES Policy - https://tinyurl.com/cgitpol
6. State Budget Guidebook - bit.ly/cdlguidebook

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