Opening Government Data through Mediation: Exploring the Roles, Practices and Strategies of Data Intermediary Organisations in India

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Executive Summary
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Open Government Data Policy in India

The National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP) was approved by the Government of India in early 2012 to encourage and govern publication of government created and owned datasets, from various agencies of the central government of India, in open digital formats and through a single national data portal. The Policy extended the mandate of the Right to Information Act of 2005 by establishing the principles and procedures of proactive disclosure of government data in India. The Open Government Data Platform of India <http://data.gov.in/> was launched later in 2012 to collect and publish open government data. The study explores the existing practices of accessing and using government data in India to understand what challenges this Policy and its implementation measures must overcome to actualise the open data agenda.

A Study of Data Practices of "Data Intermediary Organisations"

The study surveyed selected non-governmental and non-commercial "data intermediary organisations," across sectors, that enable other organisations to better work with (access, use, and share) government and non-government data. Interviewing representatives of these organisations and understanding their actual data practices, the study foregrounded three key thematic topics: (1) the nature of "open data community" in India, (2) the many challenges of effectively opening up government data in India, and (3) the applications of and communities around Right to Information Act and National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy. The study analysed the first two issues, but a detailed discussion of the last one remains pending.

"Open Data Community" in India

Majority of respondents recognised the DataMeet network <http://datameet.org/>, or specific persons associated with the network, as the people who are driving the open data conversations in India. The same respondents also noted that their organisations are on the "sidelines" of this "open data community" because they do not depend on *opened up* government data for their regular activities. These organisations often function in the context of an emerging data/evidence-based transparency research and advocacy efforts in India, which, however, not necessarily promotes an open data culture among non-government organisations. Several organisations mentioned that since they undertake substantial efforts to liberate the data in the first place, they think of the sanitised data as a resource for *exclusive* internal use.

Accessing, Using and Sharing Government Data in India

The study foregrounds three critical features of open data practices in India. Firstly, the term "open government data" (or "open data" in general) is not commonly used among most of the organisations in India that work with national-scale government data. Meaning of the term is generally understood as data that is publicly available, either from government websites or from government publications, without a very strict notion of legal status (such as, open license) or technical qualities (such as, machine-readability) of the data concerned. Secondly, same kind of challenges exist within government and non-government agencies when it comes to re-sharing government data. The key problem faced by both these types of agencies is that they treat data as a product and not as a process. Thirdly, another crucial barrier is the lack of organised and publicly articulated demand for open (disaggregated, updated, and anonymised) government and non-government data. The critical responsibility for the open data community, hence, is to organise forums for interactions between data producers and data users – where both sides may include government and non-government agencies.