International Support for Data Openness and Transparency

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Abstract

Data openness is an important issue for statistical systems in many countries, particular in the developing world. Data do not become "open" overnight, even if governments so desire. Openness has several components. First one has to deal with legal issues of openness. Then there are organizational and technical issues, having to do with compiling and presenting data in open formats. In addition, underlying data quality issues surface when data become more open. Furthermore, there are often conflicting interests advocating for or trying to limit data openness, within the government, in civil society, and in the private sector. Therefore, opening databases cannot be accomplished by a simple act of "good will" on the part of government; it entails a lot of preparation and the balancing of many interests. While large, multilateral organizations have recently become notable advocates of open data and, more broadly, "open government," their interests and practical capacities are often limited by their mandate: some may be interested only in economic statistics, or national-level health statistics, for example. And large international agencies are often unable or unwilling to engage with civil society organizations or other interest groups, who are potential users and producers of data. Still there is a need for their financial support for complex reforms. In some cases, this advice may come from international agencies. But these agencies may themselves be limited in their authority or capacity. Furthermore large multilateral organizations may not be able to engage civil society in some countries due to political antagonisms or other circumstances. Therefore there is a niche for non-governmental organizations, bringing international experience adaptable to local conditions to serve as technical resources and trusted advisers to governments and to act as go-betweens with foundations and international agencies that are prepared to support open data reforms.

Key Words: Open data, transparency, non-Governmental organizations