



Exploring the Emerging Impacts of Open Data in Developing Countries: Process Evaluation Report

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Executive summary

The purpose of the process evaluation is to determine the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the ODDC project against the project's original plans and design. The evaluation will focus on providing information about:

- How the organization and management of different elements of the project is progressing;
- Identify and share good practices from the ODDC project and make recommendations on where and how improvements can be made.

For this evaluation input was gathered from an online survey, document analysis and in-depth interviews with sub-grantees, mentors and the Web Foundation (WF). The information gathered through this process has been analyzed according to the evaluation principles of relevance, effectiveness, efficiency, impact and sustainability.

ODDC Network Structure

There is an overwhelmingly positive experience in participating in the ODDC network. For many the added value lies in confidence building through sharing experiences, knowledge sharing and collaborative work. Partners also mention that the network brings a global perspective to their work and has given access to researchers, for whom Open Data is an emerging field in their country, to experienced players in this field. Face-to-face meetings such as the general kick-off meeting and regional meetings are highly valued in the network experience.

The building and strengthening of South-South connections are important parts of the network. However, partners are for the most part not engaging very deeply with other partners – especially not the ones based outside their geographical region. Cross network learning has happened in some cases due to the sharing of examples or methodologies, and there are a few cases of continued (local) collaboration.

Mentor Experience

The perception from the mentors and research partners is that the mentoring relationship significantly improved/benefited the outcome at the research partner level. It can be a rewarding experience when there is regular contact and when mentors feel that they can actually provide something of value to the work. Most often, mentors are providing guidance on not only content and research methodologies, but also in project management issues and networking. Mentors were most active and involved during the proposal writing phase, which is also when people were most happy with the mentor's role. However, there is a general uncertainty about what role the mentor should play during the investigation stage and of how (much) to share with mentors.

Web Foundation

Research partners say the WF has met their expectations, or even exceeded it by providing research and logistical support and good leadership. Beyond the network coordination role, the WF has provided a mentor role to several organizations (e.g. proposing literature, suggestions to collaborate, strategic guidance on questions asked by researchers, etc.).

Network Impacts

As a whole, research partners expressed that they feel better prepared to participate in future international networks as a result of being involved with the ODDC network. There is a general agreement that the participation in this network has provided them confidence to talk about open data issues at a global or national stage. Nevertheless, many research partners believe that much of the network's impact has not been (fully) seen yet.

Sustainability

All participants interviewed would like to continue being part of the network, and specifically would be happy for the mentoring elements to continue. Most partners expect that it is more likely for them to be in contact with regional partners (not necessarily from same thematic group).

Report

1. Introduction/Purpose of the Evaluation

The purpose of the process evaluation is to determine the relevance, effectiveness and efficiency of the ODDC project against the project's original plans and design. The evaluation will focus on:

- Providing information about how the organization and management of different elements of the project is progressing (e.g. case study research, mentoring, network activities);
- Identifying and sharing good practices from the project and make recommendations on where/how improvements can be made to the process to make the implementation of the project even more successful.

2. Sampling and Methodology

For this evaluation input was gathered from:

- An on-line survey sent to all research partners and all mentors. The evaluators received 17 full survey responses to inform about network functioning. Surveys were submitted by 13 different research projects and 4 mentors.
- Document analysis which included review of project proposal document; peer and mentor support document; invoice/expense claim payment dates; reporting logs; full proposal guidance document and Interim report document.
- This report includes in-depth interviews from eight of the sub-grantees, three mentors and Web Foundation coordinator. Individuals interviewed were:
 - Dr. Omenogo Mejabi of University of Ilorin;
 - Zacharia Chiliswa of Jesuit Hakimani Centre;
 - Sandra Elena of Centro de Implementacion de Politicas Publicas para la Equidad y el Crecimiento;
 - Michael Canares of Step Up Consulting;
 - Gisele Craveiro of Research Group on Public Policies for Information Access;
 - Sumandro Chattapadhyay of HasGeek Media;
 - Sherwin Ona of De La Salle University, Philippines;
 - Ilham Cendekia Srimarga of Sinergantara;
 - Mentor David Eaves;
 - Mentor Michael Gurstein;
 - Mentor Maurice McNaughton;
 - Tim Davies (Web Foundation)

The information gathered through this process has been analyzed according to the evaluation principles of:

- Relevance (to determine how the ODDC project is meeting the needs of research partners and mentors);
- Effectiveness (to determine how effectively the WF is managing the ODDC research network);
- Efficiency (to determine how efficiently the network is being managed);
- Impact (to determine what the impact of the network on research partners, mentors and the WF);
- Sustainability (to determine the major factors that influence the sustainability of the network).

The conclusions drawn from this analysis are bound by several limitations. While most of the researcher partners (14) were surveyed, and about half (8) interviewed, fewer mentors (4,3) were involved. While surveys were used to collect both qualitative and quantitative data, the interpretation of (subjective) qualitative interview data is of less use when trying to extrapolate these findings across the whole network.

3. Evaluation Findings and Analysis

Relevance, effectiveness and efficiency

ODDC Network Structure

It is clear from the input given by research partners and mentors that there is an overwhelmingly positive experience in participating in the ODDC network. While most people feel they are engaging with the network, contact moments happen primarily through the web meetings and mailing list messages. Research partners also see the general kickoff meeting and regional meetings as part of the main or core 'network' building activities. One researcher expressed not being very active in network because one of the main contact points - the mailing list - can be more like an announcement board than a place for discussion. There may be a need in the future to split communications across several online platforms – email for announcements, website and LinkedIn for public announcements and discussion, specialized social media or team communication (e.g. Yammer or Slack) for internal network discussions.

Many people have mentioned the importance of regional face-to-face meetings. One interviewee stated they are a “powerful tool for taking advantage of the network”. Another interviewee believes that face-to-face is important early in the process to get off on right foot. Research partners appreciated the chance to connect on a personal level and felt they were able to get a lot done in a short time frame during these meetings. One partner who was not present in the London meeting felt they had missed out, and as consequence lagged behind other projects (in terms of their experience and connectedness to the network). Although all highly value the face-to-face meetings, most also emphasize at the same time that they do recognize the limited resources the network has for traveling expenses.

Added Value of Network

The exact added value of the network structure is not clear to all participants. Interviewees recognize there is one, but they have different visions on what the added value is – suggesting that the network meets different needs for various partners. Most have the notion that the added value lies in sharing experiences, knowledge sharing and collaborative work. Partners also mention that the network brings a global perspective to their work; being part of an international research network allows them easily see the global context (not just local view) and creates a feeling that their research work contributes to a larger effort. The flexible make-up of the network provides connections between academic and action-research, and has given access to researchers for whom Open Data is an emerging field in their country to experienced players in this particular field.

At the same time, it builds the confidence of research partners to learn about other projects and compare their problems and situations to their own. Exchanges of experiences gives them confidence that they are going in right direction. Especially when the researchers need to analyze their impact and disseminate results, there is an opinion among the network members that more time should be spent on sharing and discussing these approaches to

encourage more horizontal learning. For example, some researchers have expressed the need to think more about how to have an impact in the design of public policy in the future. These framing questions will be common to all projects, so there is a possibility for mutual learning.

Working with Other Research Partners

All research partners have expressed being satisfied or very satisfied with their interaction with other research partners in the network. The building and strengthening of South-South connections are mentioned by a few organizations as an important aspect of the network. However, partners are for the most part not engaging very deeply with other partners, and especially not the ones based outside their geographical region. The WF has been keen to push regional activities and has been successful in establishing some strong regional linkages. Philippines and Brazil can be used as examples of countries where close working connections have been made between national organizations through the ODDC project. That said, most feel this was a short period to build a network – more time is needed for the network to mature.

Cross Network Learning and Knowledge Sharing

There is a desire for more learning across and between projects in the network, but no clear strategy for how this would happen (ex. sharing common tools, sharing experiences, cross project resources, etc.). Several interviewees mentioned guidance on/examples of stakeholder maps and survey tools, as easy tools to be shared proactively among the network.

While researchers express a desire to learn more from the examples of others, the WF is the main driver of the learning/knowledge sharing process and it seems few researchers are spending the time to proactively learn from other projects. For example a shared drive was made available, but it is used to different levels by different research partners and many valuable resources are being missed. For projects that had a delayed start, they actually did benefit from some of the earlier projects having already developed questionnaires that they could work from. Projects borrowed ideas from materials that had been put in the shared folder. In this way, the knowledge sharing and learning didn't happen in a direct fashion, but happened organically.

Mentor Experience

There is an overwhelming agreement that the mentoring structure brings more value to the research. The perception from the mentors and research partners is that the mentoring relationship significantly improved/benefited the outcome at the research partner level.

Partner perspective

Most partners believe their mentor is knowledgeable about the topic of their project. A number of research partners were new to the Open Data topic and were expecting input mostly on content and research methodology from mentors. In many cases mentors have also provided guidance in project management issues and networking. People were most happy with mentor's role during the proposal writing phase, and this was also when mentors were most active and involved. However, many researchers are unclear about what support they should have gotten from their mentor after the full proposals were accepted. This has led a few organizations to feel frustration, confusion and disengagement with the mentor process and in a couple of cases researchers were dissatisfied. However, overall most are

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still satisfied or very satisfied with the relationship with mentors and believe they provide timely input. In one case where partners knew their mentor from before, it made early communication and collaboration even easier. Satisfaction with the frequency of communication between researchers and mentors varies drastically and the actual frequency also varies.

Mentor perspective

Most mentors were happy to be involved in the reviewing and evaluation of the case study proposals. The process made them feel involved in the construction of the network although they did not have well defined expectations of their participation after the selection and proposal phase.

Currently, mentors seem to feel disconnected from the overall network. This may be because some have chosen not to participate/follow mailing lists and webinars which are major contact points for the network. A couple of mentors have also expressed that they would appreciate more cross mentor sharing of information and experience.

The individual relationships that mentors have with researchers are very different experiences, and some mentors are having markedly different experiences across the (multiple) different partners they mentor. Mentoring can be a rewarding experience when there is regular contact and when mentors feel that they can actually provide something of value to the work. When contact is more irregular and the input that can be provided is less (because researchers are more experienced for example) it makes for a less rewarding experience (still good in one case, and in another the mentor feels expectations have not been met). Face-to-face is also an important relationship builder for the mentors – without it both mentors and mentees feel less satisfied with the experience.

Role of the Mentor

Most of the input provided by the mentors is on the content side and on research methodologies. The guidance given by mentors is usually 'on demand' and a few researchers found this to be not systematic enough (for example no systematic process and output schedule to show when input was needed/expected from mentors).

In some cases, mentors played a role in helping researchers to bridge their work with the ODDC project output requirements. One mentor interviewed noted that while some of the projects were concepts 'created from scratch' by organizations to meet the call for proposals from the WF, others were 'layered' on top of existing activities (that predate ODDC project). In the first case, mentors appear to have been needed for more hands-on, direct intervention in developing the projects. In the latter, the ODDC project was able to benefit from organizational synergies as the partners were more prepared and had a clearer focus from the start of the project.

In some cases mentors have also played the role of connectors/network enablers. In at least one instance mentors provided a key role in connecting two ODDC organizations, which allowed them to do joint research. Mentors have also facilitated/promoted connections of ODDC research partners with relevant external stakeholders and events. In one case a mentor provided key contacts in government that were instrumental for the research project.

Expectations About the Mentor Relationship

While researchers were happy with the role of the mentors, interviews showed that it is unclear if mentors are performing the role expected of them, because a number of researchers were not clear on what to expect to begin with. Early on the WF distributed a document (full proposal guidance) detailing what the mentor is/is not, but it is the opinion of this evaluator, that not all research partners were fully aware of its contents and their implications.

Some researchers were not sure if they should ask mentors to comment on their midterm report or research projects, to include them in internal processes, discussions and events, or to help them with project management issues. In some cases there has been perceived suspicion that the mentor was a monitor/evaluator to check their work, which is clearly explained in documentation from the WF. Researchers also have different expectations about how frequently mentors should be involved, and to what level they should be involved with the projects. One researcher would have liked more mentor support not just during the methodology phase, but also during analysis and writing. For some researchers, a more detailed understanding with mentors about planned out feedback moments (aligned with the project plans) may help to clarify expectations.

At the same time, mentors were generally unsure of what to expect of the mentoring experience. A couple of mentors were not fully clear on the nature of the relationship with their mentee over the project's lifespan, and what concrete support they were expected to offer after the research proposal phase. At times this was also because research partners were asking for support which went beyond the role originally outlined for mentors. For example, some mentors were surprised that their mentees wanted project management support. This needs to be clear in communication to researchers and mentors, but also during selection process, so that mentors have necessary project management skills (if necessary).

What are the Structural Gaps?

Confusion or differences in satisfaction with the quality and frequency of communication likely has to do with individual expectations about roles and responsibilities. A number of people are unsure of how much to share with mentors (some share everything, some choose to err on the side of sharing insufficiently). They feel they don't know "specifically" what they can ask for. Not all (researchers or mentors) are taking initiative to reach out to the other side – they often see it as the role of the other when it doesn't happen.

What are the Practical Gaps?

At least one research partner finds that their mentors do not seem to have enough time in their agendas for the mentoring process. It has also been pointed out that when mentor and mentee are based in very different time zones it makes it hard to maintain contact because of scheduling issues.

Web Foundation

Is the WF Meeting the Needs of Research Partners?

All research partners have indicated that they are satisfied or very satisfied with the frequency and type interaction they have with the WF. Research partners say the WF has met their expectations, or even exceeded it by providing research and logistical support and

good leadership. It has also helped provide a global perspective on issues as the WF sometimes know about events or organizations in a researcher's own region and provide that connection.

Some research partners also see Davies as playing the role of mentor and place significant value on this role (more than just a project manager/coordinator). However, running a network is time intensive to keep the network going, very few run autonomously as a self-driven network. The WF spends considerable time on the day to day on network administrative duties, and given limited resources, it reduces their ability to play the (valued) mentor/principle investigator role.

Finance

Most research partners are satisfied or feel neutral with timeliness of invoice and expense claim payment. Most of the difficulties that have been reported center around:

- bureaucracy at the receiving organization
- delays to initial grant installment
- currency fluctuations

From a sample of ten invoices sent to the evaluators, there was an average of 26.3 days between the date of invoice and the actual day of payment. Considering that most research partners are satisfied with this result it can be considered satisfactory (however it is unknown if the WF has internal service level agreements regarding payment times).

Web Foundation's Role In Capacity building

The WF has mostly focused on building knowledge on open data concepts, on research methodologies, research proposals and project development. The WF has provided a mentor role to several organizations (e.g. proposing literature, suggestions to collaborate, strategic guidance on questions asked by researchers, etc.). Some research partners feel that the WF could be more active in building project management experience although this is not currently within the scope of the WF's role in the ODDC network. Likewise, researchers have not reported capacity building on analytical skills (but it is unknown whether this is needed or if it is within the WF's scope). One partner would like to see more capacity building on practical skills like analysis and report writing, to improve the output standard.

Network Impacts

Impact on Researchers

As a whole, research partners expressed that they feel better prepared to participate in future international networks as a result of being involved with the ODDC network. There is a general agreement that the participation in this network has provided them confidence to talk about open data issues at a global or national stage: "we have now more confidence to talk to government and private sector about open data". Some organizations have been invited to participate in other events (e.g. one Philippine research partner presenting findings in South Africa) as a result of participating in this network, a direct result of an open call which Davies circulated in the ODDC mailing list. Further example of the network's impact is one organization becoming a member of another network due to the fact they were a part of the ODDC project. "this project opened a lot of doors for us in the open data field and also helped identify partners and the main players in the field".

Nevertheless, many research partners believe that much of the network's impact has not been (fully) seen yet. More than one research partner mentioned how they thought this was a short period to build a network – more time is needed for everyone to be able to use their research for some sort of sustained impact. It seems that depending on the nature of the organizations involved (eg. universities vs CSOs), they have a different plans for follow-up to the research. There is a perceived tendency from the CSOs to want to develop advocacy and communications plans to leverage their research and have an impact (on public policy etc.). The more pure research institutes seem to be happy to build on the first year with more research.

Sustainability

All participants interviewed would like to continue being part of the network, and specifically would be happy for the mentoring elements to continue. Most think they will continue to engage with other research partners in one way or another once the project finished. Most partners expect that it is more likely for them to be in contact with regional partners (not necessarily from the same thematic group).

Collaborative Work

Where research partners have had discussions with other researchers about future work, it has mostly been informal conversations about what sort of collaboration may be possible. There appear to be a few research projects that other researchers are more interested in collaborating with in the future than others. This tendency appears to happen mostly within the same regional group. Some partners have also started thinking about working as a cluster to identify funding, based on the relationships they have already established in their region (there is an idea to do this around themes, but current suggestion is more focused on region). However it will be some time still until any results can be seen from this.

Continued Research/Impacts of the Research

Some organizations have expressed that they have intentions to continue the ODDC work, even without WF funding. Research partners are unclear about the ODDC Phase 2 and so, are considering looking for internal, local and international funding sources. This may be easier for academic institutions which have to produce publications, more so than CSOs which may have less access to research or non-earmarked funding.

4. Key Learnings and Recommendations

Key Learnings

- Processes internal to the organizations the WF contracts with, can affect the perceived efficiency of the ODDC project, but are external to it. (e.g. University does not make funding available soon enough to the researcher after receiving the installment from the WF. In one case communication problems within the researcher's organization also reflected negatively on how the ODDC project functioning is perceived.
- For the mentor/mentee relationship, geographically close time zones make a difference. It is easier to maintain contact in close time zones than those with radically different work hours.
- Mentors need enough time, and to prioritize the time to connect into the network early so that they feel buy-in or a connection to the work; this makes them more likely to engage more deeply as the project goes on.

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- If connection isn't made right away between mentors and researchers, follow-up is less likely. Face-to-face meetings are an efficient way to (re)invigorate network connections.
- Mentors' roles vary depending on the type of organization they work with. There is often a key role for mentors beyond research and content advice, extending to networking and at times project management support.
- Projects that are layered on top of existing activities (that predate ODDC project) benefit the ODDC project by creating synergies (research partners were more prepared and had a clearer focus at the get go).
- Where projects are created from scratch to meet the call for proposals there is a need for a more hands on and direct intervention on the part of mentors.
- Projects that are focused on advocacy and policy change (rather than pure academic research) need more (support for) follow up activities in advocacy or capacity building (ie. with government).
- Projects that started later, made use of tools and ideas already developed within the network, demonstrating that organic learning and knowledge sharing is working.

Recommendations

Network Recommendations

- The WF should ensure that mentors are given the opportunity to be more involved in general network activities (eg. in the webinars), where they could potentially contribute to the wider network as a whole ("elder statesman perspective").
- The WF should experiment with hosting (or encouraging researchers to plan) smaller (thematic) meetings or webinars to discuss and share experience on the research analysis phase.
- The WF should play a larger role in capacity strengthening of the research beyond questions of methodology. This can be done through more webinars on topics like case writing, analyzing and increasing impact, or providing more examples, templates and protocols that related to different research phases and outputs.
- The WF should continue to administer the network, at a minimum through maintenance of the mailing list, to maintain network contacts. Over time there may be a plan to spin-off administration, however for now at least one dedicated supervisor is essential.

Recommendations for the Web Foundation

- Learnings internal to the WF about how they coordinate and fund this project should be formally shared with similar sub-granting projects at the WF.
- The WF should play the role of project oversight, technical and content support to research partners and administrative tasks. Because urgent administrative tasks and technical responses to partners can easily eclipse the other roles, it is important for the WF to ensure that the principle investigator has time dedicated to larger and strategic issues in the project (either by separating the two functions, or designating specific time for each).
- The coordinator should be doing administration, and providing non-content related responses to partners so it does not have to go through the principal investigator. Principal investigator needs to tackle larger and strategic issues in the research.
- The WF should clearly communicate to all research partners and mentors about expected trajectory of the project in future phases.

Mentorship recommendations

- The WF and mentors should discuss the formal role of the mentors in Phase II of the network, to determine a structure based on need. This should include a discussion on the scope of the mentors as a body not just for one-to-one researcher support, but also for network oversight (e.g. a formal advisory board).
- The WF and mentors should create a clearer definition of mentor's role both to mentor and to mentee. The role has been perceived by research partners as a monitor, a research supervisor, or hands off, on demand support. Roles and responsibilities should be included in contracts between different stakeholders, and the mentors and mentees should have an initial (kick-off) discussion about their expectations.
- Mentors should give research partners a general idea of how much time they have per week or month to support them. This would significantly help set expectations, and clarify what to approach the mentors with.
- Research partners seeking more structure in the mentoring process should develop (in their project proposals) clear phases, with indications of what points, feedback or advice will be needed from the mentors. This also provides a framework to assess the progress of the mentoring (e.g. is the plan going to plan).
- Mentors could benefit from their own kick off/reflection session, which starts with reflecting on learnings from the previous period, and provides tools, guidelines and expectations on how to guide your mentees.