Dissemination and Deliberation Workshop on
Open Government Data (OGD) and energy resources

Summary of Proceedings

Date: 8 July 2014: Time: 9:30 – 13:30

The Energy and Resources Institute (TERI), with support from the World Wide Web Foundation and the International Development Research Centre (IDRC) organized a dissemination workshop on '**Open Government Data and Resources**' on 8th July 2014 at TERI, India Habitat Centre, New Delhi.

The workshop sought to share the findings of TERI's study on 'Open Government Data for Regulation of Energy Resources'. The focus of this yearlong study was on the upstream coal and oil & gas sectors India in India. It identified governance challenges in the two sectors and examined the status of availability and accessibility of data towards improving the working of these sectors. This workshop brought together stakeholders from the government, industry, academia, think tanks and civil society. The stakeholders enriched the study with their views and experience, particularly with respect to the government policy on open data and issues in data collection within the government, the linkages between Right to Information and Open Data, data issues in the upstream energy, particularly on aspects that impact communities, and suggestions on improving data availability and quality.

In the opening session, the importance of open government data as a tool, not only for good governance but also for economic development was discussed. It was emphasised that for data to be meaningful, it needs to be authentic, reliable, updated and relevant. The objective of setting up the 'Open Data Research Network' was discussed as a means to 'connect researchers from across the world to explore the implementation and impact of open data initiatives'. The research network through its various projects is expected to help understand the availability and quality of open data in developing countries and how open data can be strengthened in these countries. The Open Government Partnership was also discussed. This partnership was launched in 2011 to provide an international platform for more open, accountable, and responsive governments to citizens and has grown from 8 countries to 64 participating countries. Under OGP, governments and civil society are actively involved and are working together towards implementing open government reforms and online release of government data.

The first session discussed initiatives for opening up government including the Right to Information Act, 2005 and the recent OGD initiative. The TERI presentation in the first session on **'Road to OGD in India'** introduced the context of open government data, its history and trajectory in India and worldwide. This presentation discussed the Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005 and discussed the similarities and differences between RTI and the OGD initiative. The presentation also delved into how RTI and OGD can complement each other. The open data portal of the government of India and the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy, 2012 was also discussed to understand both the utility and limitations of these initiatives in improving data availability in the country. As an example of international initiatives, the Revenue Watch's Resource Governance Index, 2013 was discussed which examined India's gas sector on parameters of transparency.

To set the context of open government data initiative in India, the Planning Commission informed the participants that open government data was part of India's larger e-governance plan and that 'it aimed at not only dissemination of data but also rendering service related to use and utilization of data at affordable price'. In case of natural resources, amongst other things, the focus of the government is on sharing GIS related information between different government departments and agencies. Towards this, the role of Planning Commission is to facilitate necessary convergence between all the government departments with the National Informatics Centre (NIC) providing front end support. In the Planning Commission's view, open government data is expected to 'enable transparency, accountability and timely delivery of information to public that in turn will contribute in fostering innovation'.

The session focussed on some of the concerns regarding quality and reliability of data in India. For instance, the issue of underestimations of the total gas reserves was discussed. In India, the revised estimates suggest that the gas reserves were significantly higher than the initial estimates. There are issues of inadequate reporting also. For example, countries like USA, Germany and South Africa, have average reported cognizable crimes of 7000 per 100000 populations, while in India, the estimates are less than 200. These examples clearly suggest that

data in India is 'unreliable, often fudged and wrong and there are errors while aggregating data'. Some of the other concerns with data include the issues of multiplicity of data sources and multiplicity of departments with different data sets. For instance, in case of data on sanitation and expenditure on MNREGA, multiple and varying figures are available. There is also a need to improve the capacity of people, especially in data collection and data provision. There are concerns relating to the cumbersome process of data collection and interpretation. The participants opined that

India needs to adopt practices whereby data can be collected automatically without much human intervention. There is a need to set up a better MIS structure at grass root level with improved and transparent methods for collection of data at source. OGD can succeed only if there is an effective and timely MIS system for end-to-end delivery of information. Overall, it was agreed that while India has come a long way in the last ten years in terms of access and availability of information on government activities to general public, there is still a long way to go way.

The session also discussed the Right to Information Act and how it differs from the OGD initiative. It was reiterated that the RTI works as an enabler that can provide a supportive environment to initiatives like OGD to be implemented in India. However, RTI is much wider in scope and it enables people to get access to information which is not available through OGD. OGD on the other hand can help reduce the need for using RTI to get access to data. One of the limitations of OGD, however, is that it is not supported by a statute. Therefore, while disclosure of information under RTI is mandatory, it is not the case in open government data.

The experience and challenges in implementation of Right to Information Act, 2005 was discussed in detailed. These challenges, it was felt, are likely to affect the open government data initiative too. For instance, implementing agencies are not well versed with rules and guidelines that should be followed in dissemination of information. While NIC has formulated elaborate guidelines on uploading data on internet, in practice these guidelines are seldom understood or followed.   Although RTI supports proactive dissemination of information, government departments are not clear on the relevant sections of the RTI Act. [Section 4 (1) (a) and Section 4(1) (b)] It is essential that the government departments classify available information into 'positive' and 'negative' class, whereby information in positive class should be disclosed to public by the concerned department. A major challenge in developing OGD platform in India would be the multiplicity of information and data sources. This is exacerbated by a lack of coordination, with different departments working in isolation from each other. For users it is often difficult to understand which data is more accurate or relevant.

The second session focussed on open government data with respect to the identified sectors –

coal and oil & gas. The TERI presentation on 'Open Government Data and Energy Resources' discussed in detail the study finding on actors and agents involved in data in the coal and oil & gas sector, the state of data in these sectors (classified as economic, physical, environment and social), and the gaps in data including issues of quality, timeliness, accuracy, etc. The presentation discussed stakeholder views on issues in use of data and also views on challenges in opening up government data. The study recommended

emphasised the need for greater transparency in the working of government, and suggested steps to improve the quality of data in the energy sector. Further, the study also recommended some steps to improve the open data portal of India.

It was agreed that a lot of data in the natural resource sector does not exist. Mapping of several basins has not been done. Even where such data exists, it is not easily accessible. The situation is gradually changing, as informed by the Geological Survey of India (GSI), with more geospatial data being made available to public. Giving effect to the proactive disclosure requirement of RTI Act, GSI came out with its dissemination policy for published/ unpublished reports/maps data in 2009.

Participants also felt that coal sector faces several governance challenges which also impact the availability of quality data on this sector. Significant amount of data has to be provided by public sector and private sector companies. However, companies are often reluctant to share certain kinds of data. This finally affects the quality and reliability of the aggregate numbers shared openly through the coal statistics or through the data portal. There are no standard formats for putting out data. There is therefore a need for standardization of formats for any data sharing by these companies. Within the government, there are concerns as to what data should be shared in the public domain and what should not be shared.

Some challenges of the of the research community in engaging with energy related data was also discussed. There are many public and private agencies that are providing firm specific data. However, there are significant variations across these sources and consequently, reliability of data becomes a key issue. Further, data on certain variables are provided at much aggregated levels making research using data at disaggregated level difficult. Due to unavailability of relevant data, researchers often take the route of filling RTI. However, experience of researchers shows that often there are several impediments in receiving data through RTI.

This session also discussed the specific data needs for community's perspective. Where significant population will be impacted, it is necessary to take community interests and impacts into consideration and more importantly the rationale behind the various mitigation decisions outlined in the environmental impact assessment reports need to be made public. Mine plan, mine restoration/ rehabilitation plan, progress and compliance therein must be reported publicly and in a regular manner. It was reiterated that if the above concerns are addressed properly through open data, then OGD will be useful in better conservation and management of natural resources, with lesser environmental and social externalities.

While data can be a useful tool for improving governance in energy sector, it is not sufficient. It was felt that unless norms and networks of social engagement change; Open Government Data is not likely to make a big impact. Thus, improved governance and better data go hand in hand.

Open Government Data (OGD) and energy resources

Agenda

09:30 – 10:00	*Registration*

10:00 – 10:15   Opening session

Welcome remarks

Dr Anindya Chatterjee, IDRC

Mr P K Agarwal, TERI

10:15 – 11:30   Session I: The road to OGD in India

The session would introduce the context of open government data in India, its history and trajectory. This would include insights into relevance of and relationship with RTI. While discussing the significance of data and information for improved governance, this session would delve into the opportunities provided by existing and new instruments, such as the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy in furthering transparency in governance

Chair: **Mr B N Satpathy,** Planning Commission

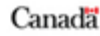**Theme Presentation: Ms Veena Aggarwal,** TERI

Panel Discussion

Dr Neeta Verma, NIC*

Mr Shailesh Gandhi, Former Information Commissioner, CIC

Mr Pankaj Shreyaskar, CIC

Ms Avani Kapur, Accountability Initiative

11:30 – 11:45	*Coffee break*

| 11:45 – 13:15 | Session II: **Open Government Data in energy resources** |

This session would provide an overview of the state of data in energy resources (coal and oil & gas). It would also discuss the main gaps that exist in data and information in the identified sectors. Challenges faced by users in accessing data and the government in providing data would also be discussed.

Chair: Mr **S Vijay Kumar,** TERI; Former secretary, Ministry of Mines

Theme Presentation: Ms Nidhi Srivastava, TERI

Panel Discussion

Dr P K Parui, Geological Survey of India

Dr M R Anand, Ministry of Coal

Mr R Sreedhar, Environics

Ms Lydia Powell, Observer Research Foundation

Dr Surender Kumar, University of Delhi

| 13:15 | Lunch |