



Assessment of citizens' perceptions on open governance in Uganda¹

*Association for Progressive Communications (APC) and The
Collaboration on international ICT policy in East and Southern
Africa (CIPESA)*

[DRAFT]

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1 Introduction

The use of Information and Communication Technologies (ICT) continues to grow in Uganda, with 99 per cent of the country covered by the telephone network, and a tele-density of 45 per cent. Internet use is also growing, with 850,200 mobile and 84,558 fixed internet subscribers, fuelled by greater availability of fibre optics, affordability of internet-enabled mobile phones, and a growth in the number of service providers.

ICT is presenting a number of opportunities and alternatives in the delivery of services both from the public and private sectors. The value delivered over these technologies for service delivery is growing, especially in terms of efficiency and effectiveness. Because of these capabilities, the demand for transparency and accountability through the use of ICT is increasing. In addition, the technological infrastructure in Uganda, as well as the legal and policy framework in place, makes Uganda a ripe state for open governance data.

The Open Government Partnership (OGP) is one of the initiatives tapping into the capabilities of ICT, given that it presents platforms and possibilities to improve government accountability and responsiveness. The OGP, a multilateral initiative led by the U.S. and Brazilian governments, aims “to secure concrete commitments from governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance”.² Whereas Uganda was one of six African countries invited to join the initiative due to the strides it had already made towards becoming an open and democratic society, the Uganda government in September 2011 surprisingly, and for reasons not made public, declined to join the OGP. All the other African countries invited to join - Kenya, Liberia, Ghana, South Africa, and Tanzania – gladly embraced the Partnership.

The prospect for government accountability and the right to information was enhanced when Uganda became one of the first countries in east and southern Africa to formulate a national ICT policy, whose key objectives include to “facilitate the broadest possible access to public domain information; to promote multilingualism and other efforts to provide access to information by disadvantaged groups and communities”. Furthermore, the policy promotes the use of ICT in stimulating the production, storage and dissemination of in-country information and knowledge in both the public and private sectors.

Besides, Uganda has a Freedom of Information Act (1995) and the country’s National Development Plan which emphasises “the need to promote eGovernment services with a view to improve efficiency in the public sector.” Combined with the eGovernment framework which has its stated mission as to “ensure online accessibility of all government services and opportunities for community participation in a friendly, transparent and efficient manner for all sections of the society”, one would be tempted to conclude that Uganda provides a modern day case study of how to promote government openness through improved access to information.

² To see what countries are part of the Open Government Partnership, and what actions they are taking to increase openness, please see www.opengovpartnership.org/

The reality is different. The legislation on government openness remains largely unimplemented and public officials are yet to show an appreciation of the need for citizens' access to public domain information. But there is now an opportunity to ride on the OGP and similar initiatives that promote openness, for Uganda to open up its public information. This report hence looks at the perceptions of citizens on open governance. Given that it is citizens who would be the ultimate beneficiaries of OGD programmes, it was imperative to establish their knowledge on open governance, the benefits of opening up government data, what government information should be made public, the areas in which open government data would create most value, citizens' satisfaction with current openness of government data, and what public bodies should open their data as a priority.

1.1 Objectives of the research

The aim of this study was to capture citizens' perceptions on open governance in Uganda, with a view to making prospective open governance initiatives in the country responsive to the needs and aspirations of citizens.

1.2 Methodology

The survey was administered using a questionnaire, designed using Limesurvey – an online survey tool and was distributed on list-serves across the country and to selected individuals. The questionnaire was divided into two groups with each capturing the knowledge and attitudes of citizens towards government open data in Uganda. The 'knowledge group' consisted questions on citizens' knowledge about the existence of open data; its benefits and uses; level of awareness on open governance in Uganda; and extent of openness among public bodies. On the other hand, the 'attitude group' explored citizens' views on the need for open government data; their satisfaction with currently available data; their information needs; government's willingness to release data; and potential negative consequences of opening up government data.

2 Survey findings and discussions

The survey attracted 68 respondents, with 71 per cent male and 29 per cent female. All respondents were 18 years and above, with the majority (54 per cent) between 25 and 34 years of age.

Sex	Frequency	Percentage
Male	39	71%
Female	16	29%
Total	55	100%

Table 1: The gender distribution (n=55)

Age range (years)	Frequency	Percentage
18 – 24	6	9%
25 – 34	37	54%
35 – 49	17	25%
50 and over	8	12%
Total	68	100%

Table 2: Age distribution of respondents (n=68)

2.1 Knowledge of open Government data

More than 80 per cent of the respondents had some knowledge of open government data. Some 32 per cent said that their knowledge of open government data was moderate, while 26 per cent and 19 per cent stated that they were 'rather knowledgeable' and 'extremely knowledgeable' respectively. Only four respondents had no idea what open government data was.

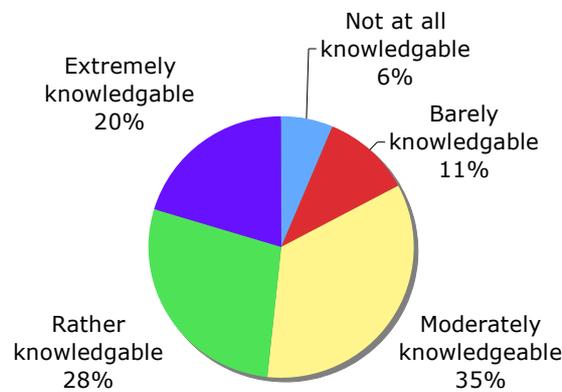


Figure 1: The extent of knowledge about open government data (n=64)

2.2 Benefits of opening up government data

Besides a great majority of respondents having knowledge of open government, it also emerged that 89 per cent of respondents were in agreement that opening up public information had benefits. Conversely, very few respondents could pinpoint any negative consequences that might arise from opening up public data.

"None" echoed numerous respondents with regard to negative consequences of opening up government data. "I would know what my taxes are being used for," said one respondent.

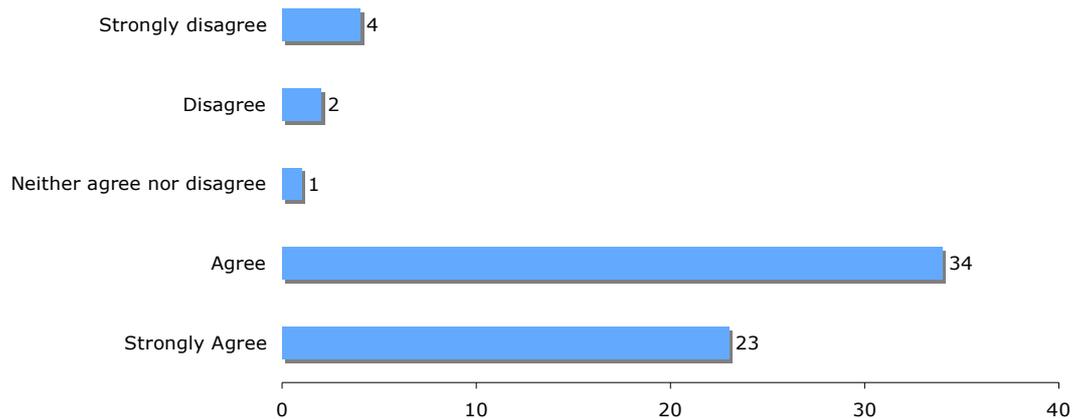


Figure 2: Opening up government data is beneficial... (n=64)

Nonetheless, nine per cent thought opening up government data would not be beneficial. The potential negative consequences of opening up data mentioned, but not elaborated, included: privacy and security concerns, “information overload”, misrepresentations and misinformation, increase in violent demonstrations and strikes by disgruntled citizens, mutiny in the armed forces, as well the increased administration costs associated with preparing data for open access.

Only two per cent of respondents were neutral - neither agreed nor disagreed that opening up government data was beneficial

Respondents were unanimous in the belief that opening up government data silos would help to hold duty bearers accountable, promote transparency, encourage citizens to participate in their governance, monitor service delivery, encourage investments, enable projects monitoring and impact evaluations. They felt that these benefits would aid Uganda’s socio-economic development. “Citizens will get better services because they will know what they are entitled to and the resources available to cater for their needs,” said one respondent.

Another stated: “The advantages of greater transparency will be manifest by a greater sense of civic mindedness, ordinary citizens being able to monitor and evaluate public services, and have a sense of ownership, and concomitant greater sense of responsibility for maintaining a high quality service from the point of view of an end-user whose responsibilities include reporting less than satisfactory service delivery through available networks, including civil society.”

Numerous respondents stated that the availability of open data would enable citizens to better understand government undertakings. Cost savings in terms of transport to government agencies, and avoiding paying bribes to public officials in order to receive a service, would be the other benefits. As explained by one respondent, “A friend in Lira went to his district headquarters for passport [application] forms and one official told him to pay 50,000/= (US\$20) for them yet these forms are free of charge from the Ministry of Internal Affairs. So, I had to send him the forms by post to save his money”. Others mentioned that opening data would enable citizens to access information online, get to

analyse and draw out information in their own perspective, other than simply following analysis by the government. They pointed out that open data would give citizens a chance to manipulate the data the way you would like to, and this would be beneficial to researchers and to applications developers.

“Information is power ... having this information easily accessible to media, businesses and investors will go a long way in helping them understand how government works and where it is lacking.”

2.3 What government information should be made public?

Some of the data that respondents felt should be open to the public included the following:

- Government income and expenditure;
- Departmental audit reports;
- Population demographics/ census information;
- Individual sector performance by Ministries and statutory bodies
- Policies and regulations – drafts, reviews, and final documents;
- Data and statistics (education, health, security, infrastructure...);
- Government research reports by statutory bodies such as the National Planning Authority (NPA), Uganda Bureau of Statistics (UBOS), and Uganda Revenue Authority (URA)
- Project implementations documents such as updates, objectives, impact and evaluation reports;
- Tenders and procurement schedules;
- Judicial and parliamentary proceedings;
- Public servants' declarations of wealth and academic qualifications.

“All, no exceptions,” said one respondent. “With a Freedom of Information Act, ideally full transparency,” said another. A few individuals stated that exemptions should apply to data that could compromise national security and personal information although they did not make any suggestions on where to draw the line.

2.4 Where would open government data create most value?

Respondents were asked to choose a maximum of five areas in which they felt OGD would create most value. The list contained nine possible areas.³ Transparency and democratic control, and civic participation, were the top areas in which majority of respondents felt open government data would create the most value in Uganda (57 per cent and 66 per

³ This criteria was borrowed from the Open Data handbook developed by the Open Knowledge Foundation project. Please see: opendatahandbook.org/en/

cent respectively). The civic participation would be encouraged through informed public debates and mobilisation. Improved efficiency of government services (46 per cent), impact measurement of policies (44 per cent) and improved effectiveness of government services (41 per cent) followed in respondents' perception of the value of open government data.

Where respondents felt less value would arise were improved or new private products and services; innovation; and new knowledge from combined data sources. One quarter of respondents indicated that self-empowerment was an area in which open government data would contribute positively.

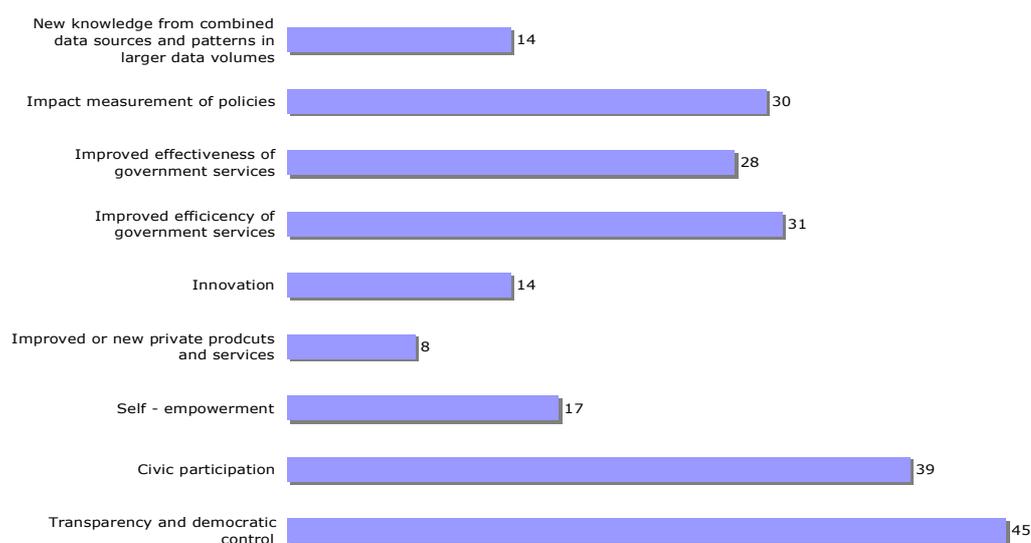


Figure 3: Frequency distribution of value created by open government data in different areas (n=68)

Some examples were given of how making government information public had led to the unearthing of corruption, or to improvements in service delivery. When government released expenditures for the Commonwealth Heads of Government Meeting (CHOGM) held in Kampala, Uganda in 2007, parliament investigated it and found massive irregularities. Three implicated ministers stepped aside as their trials went on, while some senior civil servants were jailed. A number of agricultural workers have been charged and sacked after the National Agricultural Advisory Services (NAADS), a government programme aimed to modernize the agricultural sector, started publishing information on funds releases for each district. Similarly, in the northern district of Amolatar, funds allocated to road construction under the Peace, Recovery and Development Programme (PRDP) had been misused but when government made public how much had been spent, whistleblowers raised the flag and the misappropriated funds were recovered. On-going court cases and investigations by police and parliament over inflated compensation to local businessmen⁴, lack of transparency in oil exploration licensing and revenue sharing,⁵ and misappropriation of funds by public officials⁶ were the examples given.

⁴Museveni in U-turn on Basajjabalaba Shs142b; www.monitor.co.ug/News/National/-/688334/1320880/-/b0vglhz/-/index.html

⁵ Oil bribery scandal www.independent.co.ug/cover-story/4750-oil-bribery-scandal

⁶ Special Audit Report of the Auditor General on The CHOGM, www.accu.or.ug/index.php?Option=com_docman&task ; Farmers to be arrested over NAADS inputs,

Other uses of open government data

About half of respondents thought that opening up government data would improve government service delivery. Three per cent did not know what effect opening up government data would have on service delivery (n=46).

Research advancements as a result of opening up data would contribute to improvements in service delivery and the decision making process in different sectors of the economy. For instance, a respondent said that research on performance levels and drop-out rates for boys and girls in private and government-owned schools would aid with reviews and improvements of social services in the most deserving regions.

In the health sector, one respondent said that government information he had become aware of had prompted him to take action in supporting agencies and programmes that worked to positively affect services in that sector. For instance, what drugs were available that treated what ailment was information stakeholders in the health sector always needed to know? In agriculture, concerned citizens would get to know what crops are in high demand at a particular time of year. In education, they would be able to know which Institutes offered what courses and the opportunities available for who and where. Also by making government data available, it would be easier for non-state actors to help set up early warning systems for disaster preparedness.

Also, through open data, awareness and advocacy campaigns of civil society organisations would be based on better facts and figures and would have a positive impact on service delivery and eventually on human development. Besides, entrepreneurship in developing innovative products and services for manipulating open data would also increase.

2.5 Satisfaction with current openness of government data

Respondents were asked to rate their satisfaction with the current state of openness of government data. Over 50 per cent of respondents were not satisfied with the current openness of government data in Uganda (n=46). Only five per cent of those surveyed said they were fully satisfied with the government's current data openness.

	Don't know	Worse	Same	Better	Total
Not satisfied	2	0	1	21	24
A little satisfied	0	0	0	11	11
Moderately satisfied	0	0	0	6	6
Very satisfied	0	1	0	1	2
Total	2	1	1	39	43

Table 3: Contingency table showing the paired distribution of responses on current satisfaction with government data openness and the effect on service delivery of further opening up government data (n=43)

Of the respondents who reported not being satisfied with the level of government data openness, 88 per cent believed that further opening up government data would positively impact on service delivery (see table 3 above). One respondent who was fully satisfied with the current level of open data indicated that service delivery would deteriorate if government data were opened up further. He asserted that even judges and the Attorney General could be corrupted and that any cases brought before them as a result of open data would not translate into improved service delivery.

According to one respondent, the relationship between opening up more government data than is currently available and service delivery is that, "the link between spending and performance would become clearer - it would be easier to establish the performing and non-performing regions or administrative units." Also mentioned was calling to book moonlighting and 'ghost workers', that is, civil servants who draw salaries without delivering services either through absenteeism or committing most of their time to more lucrative work in the private sector.

2.6 Government's willingness to open up data

In order to determine citizens' perceptions on the willingness of government to open up data, respondents were requested to reply by indicating Yes, No, or Don't know. Half of the respondents did not feel that the Uganda government had the goodwill to make public data open.

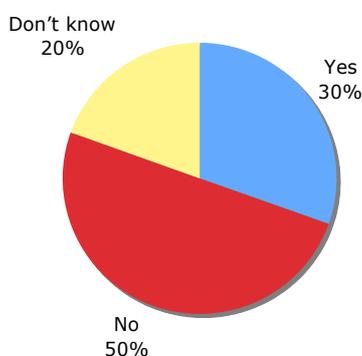


Figure 4: Perception of government will to make public data open (n=46)

One respondent argued that "the fact that they have not implemented the Freedom of Information Act and also harass journalists who investigate government shows government is not keen to promote openness ... it is just fooling around." Continuing reports of corruption among senior officials in the public service were blamed for the apparent unwillingness by government to open up data. The government's failure to join the Extractive Industries Transparency initiative (EITI) was cited as an indication that the Uganda government was reluctant to become more open.⁷

⁷ The Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative: A Necessity For Uganda; www.acode-u.org/documents/oildocs/infosheet_12.pdf

A third of the respondents felt that the government had the goodwill to open data to the public. "They seem to be doing it [opening data] in some areas," said one. This respondent further asserted that government seemed to want citizens to know certain things but not others that might be more important. "This is only a suspicion that is an outcome of not opening government data in the very beginning. Maybe the government just needs to also understand what open data is and come up with policy on open data," concluded the respondent. The existing government policies and legislations on openness and accountability were applauded.

2.7 What public bodies should open their data as a priority?

Respondents listed most government ministries, the central bank, inspectorate of government and regulatory authorities, the judiciary, parliament, government parastatals, the police, the army, and local governments as agencies that should be a priority for making public their data and information. Those listed as "critical" to make open data were the health, education, transport, water, and energy ministries.

One respondent was of the view that it was not necessary to prioritise opening up of data by public offices. "I would not think in terms of prioritising government offices. Lest we forget, the eye cannot say to the foot 'I have no need of thee'; all are in fact equally important," she said. This respondent added that opening up the data in itself was just as crucial as the respective agencies making their work/programmes a success by meeting targets and performance levels.

The means through which government was encouraged to promote open governance data was through the implementation of robust e-government initiatives (among them interactive websites and offering e-Services), facilitating and extending the reach and affordability of ICT services, including through rural electrification, and training of officials in appropriate conduct whilst holding public office. Furthermore, noting the ICT limitations of the country, one respondent stated that data and information should not only be availed online; newspapers, radio, and television should all be used to promote open governance.

3 Recommendations for opening up data

- A policy, law, and regulations governing the opening up of government data should be formulated, and a specific department should be charged with ensuring government departments make their data public.
- Train key personnel in all government departments on what useful information to make public and select one point of reference in each department. This training would include procedures for categorising information as open or secret/confidential.
- There is need to develop a countrywide information system for all government organs and offices.
- Government should forthwith implement the Access to Information Act (2005).
- Use of the internet as a tool of government communication should be encouraged at all levels of government, including at local government level. But there should be clear guidelines to guide this.
- Besides new media, newspapers, radio, and television should also be used to promote open governance.

4 Conclusions

This study revealed that there is a high level of knowledge about open governance in Uganda, as well as great expectations of the benefits which OGD would bring to Uganda. More than 80 per cent of the respondents had some knowledge of open government data. The benefits pinpointed were clear, and the respondents indicated that these benefits would easily accrue once Uganda rolled out an open governance programme. From raising accountability by duty bearers, minimising corruption, promoting transparency, encouraging citizen participation in governance, monitoring service delivery, and aiding private sector innovation – numerous such benefits were mentioned. But, like the state is likely to argue, there were fears about opening up government data, such as misrepresentations and misinformation, increase in violent demonstrations and strikes as backlash from disgruntled citizens, mutiny in the armed forces, as well the increased administration costs associated with preparing data for open access. These fears need to be managed by both the state and by civil actors advocating open governance, in order to convince both citizens and government that OGD is for the good of the country.

This study has made clear indications of what departments/ ministries should open up their data as a priority, and also identified various forms of data that citizens need to have greater access to. Moreover, the study has shown that the level of openness in government departments is severely low, even though there are laws that call for openness, and despite having clear examples of how increased openness results into public

good. Government therefore needs to show greater political will to become more open, and this will needs to be manifested in bold actions rather than simple declarations.

The results of this study are not representative of Ugandans' perceptions on open governance. But they show there is a critical mass to drive demand and usage of open government data, and to conduct awareness-raising on the need for increased openness by government, and for citizens to use this data. But a bigger study targeting a wider portion of Ugandans, including those who are less knowledgeable about ICT, those with lower income and education levels, is needed to get a more complete picture. Indeed, it would serve much good if the perceptions on open government data across communities (private sector, academic, government departments, etcetera) were established. The current study only sets a baseline which other, wider, studies need to build on. But, crucially, this study establishes what we believe is a key reference point which government should build on to roll out OGD, and which civil society can use in advocating and raising awareness about open governance in Uganda.