

Open Government Data in Nepal

“Data are the lifeblood of decision-making and the raw material for accountability” United Nations, A World that Counts

The enhanced ability to share and use data resulting from recent advancements in technology and internet connectivity is an important opportunity for Nepal - economically, socially and environmentally. Data, in particular data generated by the government, provides the evidence needed by government officials, politicians, civil society, media and the private sector to inform decisions, stimulate innovation, enable accountability and ultimately improve Nepal’s development. However in Nepal, despite the technological advancements, data from government is not yet systematically shared in open formats and so it is not yet widely used by the range of people who could be supporting the government’s efforts to grow the economy, reduce poverty and address inequality.

This is a problem the world over, however in recent years a new approach to the sharing of government information has arisen in the form of “Open Government Data”. This is the concept of publicly and systematically sharing data from government in a format that enables it to be downloaded, analysed and used by the country’s citizens. Global momentum for Open Government Data is growing and many governments around the world are now sharing their data in this way, for example, Kenya, Mexico and Thailand.

Open Government Data in Nepal has the potential to make a positive difference for society and people's lives. Open Government Data has enabled citizens to better understand policies that have been enacted, engage with government decision-making, and hold the legislative accountable. Importantly, it holds great potential to improve the effectiveness of development efforts as, with better access to government data, development actors can target their programs more effectively to the issues and communities that need most support.



Fig 1: Different types of Open Government Data that could be released in Nepal

Open Government Data can be an important part of supporting Nepal's progress towards Middle Income Country status by 2030, an aspiration set by the National Planning Commission. A number of areas require exploration to make Open Government Data a reality in Nepal, including the need for systematised processes of data collection, technical platforms for sharing data, and the development of data literacy both inside and outside of government to enable the effective use of data. One important aspect which could provide the backbone of further efforts to improve the sharing of government data would be **the development of a government-wide strategy for open government data, including its inclusion in future revisions of Nepal's existing legal frameworks.**

Improving the production and sharing of government data in Nepal

The 1990 Constitution of Nepal recognised the right of citizens to demand and obtain information held by public agencies on any matter of public importance. This was repeated in the 2015 Constitution of Nepal. The Right to Information Act, enacted in 2007, legislated this right with the aim of making the functions of the state open, transparent, responsible and accountable to citizens in accordance with the democratic system. Nepal therefore already has a legal framework, and an independent oversight body - the National Information Commission, in place to ensure that information sharing by government exists in Nepal and that citizens can obtain information of public importance.

Open Government Data is data produced or commissioned by the government or government controlled entities which can be freely used, reused or redistributed by anyone	Right to Information is considered a fundamental human right that allows access to national government data and information. It includes elements of proactive disclosure and timeliness of data
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Open Government Data is aligned with Right to Information in many ways. They are both mechanisms that facilitate the availability of government information, however under the Right To Information mechanism the government **responds** to individual public requests for **information**, while under the Open Government Data mechanism the government **proactively** discloses **raw data** on a public platform. While Right to Information will always be a critical facilitator of government transparency and accountability, the concept of Open Government Data can augment this process by enabling that transparency to be used for innovation and economic growth.

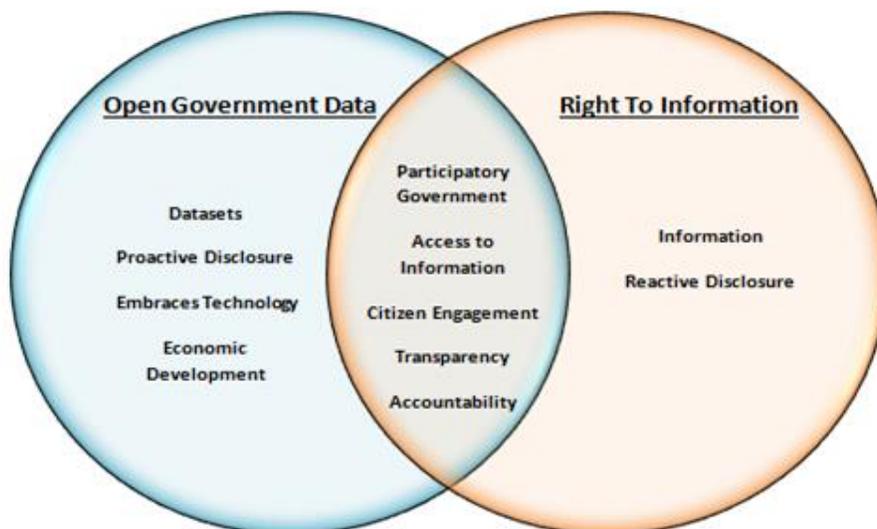


Fig 2: Open Government Data and Right to Information - Overlaps and Distinctions

Open Government Data embraces 21st century advancements in technology to go a step further in facilitating transparency, accountability and good governance. Proactive open government data releases can reduce the burden on public bodies of information requests and enable public bodies to efficiently access each other's data, improving information flow between government bodies as well as from the government to citizens. In addition to enabling participatory government, by opening up their data governments can help drive the creation of innovative businesses and services that deliver both social and commercial value. When coupled with the benefits arising from the reactive disclosure of information through Right to Information, Open Government Data could facilitate both economic and social gains for Nepal. **Amending the Right to Information Act to include provisions related to Open Government Data could formalise the implementation of more effective sharing of government information in Nepal.**

10 key principles to guide a government-wide strategy for Open Government Data

In future developments of the Right To Information legal framework and other relevant laws and regulations (such as the Statistical Act and ICT Policy etc) and in the development of a wider open data strategy by the government, the following principles are important to consider (these have been adapted from the [8 Principles of Open Government Data](#) - please see the Further Reading box for more info):

1. **Data released should be of high value to the public** - Data prioritised for initial release should be selected through public consultation. Figure 1 shows data typically considered to be of high value, e.g. spending data, crime data etc.
2. **Data released should follow consistent reporting standards** - To enable comparability across datasets the data releases from different public bodies need to follow uniform standards, for example they should use the same categories of time and location, and the same names for departments etc.
3. **Data released should be complete** - All public data that is not subject to valid privacy, security or privilege limitations, should be made available.
4. **Data released should be primary and disaggregated** - The data released should be as collected at the source, with the highest possible level of granularity, not in aggregate or modified form. Where

possible data should be disaggregated by geography, income, age, disability, gender, etc. to the level necessary for better decision making to occur.

5. **Data released should be timely** - Data should be made available as quickly as necessary to preserve the value of the data.
6. **Data released should be accessible and online** - Data should be made available to the widest range of users for the widest range of purposes
7. **Data released should be machine processable** - Data should be released in formats that allow automated processing and analysis, for example, CSV format.
8. **Data released should be non-discriminatory** - Data should be available to anyone, with no requirement of registration
9. **Data released should be non-proprietary, licence free, and cost free** - Data should be made available in a format over which no entity has exclusive control. Data should not be subject to any copyright, patent or trademark.
10. **Data released should adhere to privacy considerations** - Data released should not include any personally identifiable information. Sensitive information should be appropriately safeguarded.

Further Reading:

- Open Nepal - <http://opennepal.net/>
- Nepali Open Data Handbook, by Open Nepal - <http://bit.ly/2aKPB85>
- 8 Principles of Open Government Data - <https://opengovdata.org/>
- Open Government Data, by Open Knowledge <http://opengovernmentdata.org/>
- Open Data Guide - <http://opendata.guide>
- Open Data Policy Guidelines, by Sunlight Foundation - <http://bit.ly/1g1ql7C>

Open Nepal is a knowledge hub and a learning space for organisations and people that produce, share and use data for development. By bringing together a community of practice in Nepal around topics such as the Data Revolution, open data, and access to information, Open Nepal forms a platform for people to share their experiences of using and sharing data and information, take collective action and generate solutions to common problems.