

Access of Civic Records without Filing RTI

Citizens must always check that they aren't getting incomplete or biased data. Open Data are almost always data that should surely be open, and that almost never contain any personal information.

Right now, India is considered one of the most active Asian countries in the Open Data arena, which also signed an Open Government partnership with the USA in November 2010. In 2011 the Indian Government announced plans for a new law to fight corruption among public servants and politicians. Anti-corruption websites (including ones in local dialects) like Indiaagainstcorruption.org, already existed, including one, Ipaidabribe.com.

Following the same pattern of openness, the Mumbai civic body plans to upload most of its 80 crore documents on its website to counter charges of lack of transparency levelled against it by campaigners that citizens and civic activists complain about. Soon, Mumbai citizens and activists won't need to file a right to information (RTI) request to access civic data.

According to BMC officials, the digitization of documents will be useful for people to have free and quick access to them."All data will be uploaded on to a server. A link will be made available on the website to view all uploaded documents. Hence, there will be no need to file an RTI request for any records," said deputy municipal commissioner VasantPrabhu.

However, there are still too few public departments and procedures that use digital documents and procedures on a scale large enough to generate meaningful volumes of digital data that could be then published online.

So far, the main interest about Open Data in Asian countries seems limited, so to speak, to its effects on transparency in politics.

Challenges

In practice, public data can be opened at affordable costs, in a useful and easily usable way, only if it is in digital format. As a consequence of this fact, demand for Open Data exposes a problem that already existed and must be fixed anyway, regardless (again) of openness. Any substantial increase of efficiency and reduction of the costs of Public Administrations can only happen when data and procedures are digitized. The problem is that such digitization (which, obviously, must happen anyway sooner or later) can be very expensive and we are only now starting to really realize how much.

Land ownership in India is a perfect example of the problems carried by digitization that requests for Open Data only expose, without creating them. Digitization can certainly increase efficiency, transparency and economic activities. Typically, digitization of land records would

mean either scanning the record as it is, or inputting all the data on the record as it is, without changing any fields.

Mobile Phones as a Tool of Open Data movement

In India, mobile phones are much more available, and more essential than computer with Internet access, often bypassing the need for real desktop PCs with many applications. Therefore, from a purely technical point of view, transparency, accountability and efficiency in government can be quickly becoming accessible to most India citizens through mobile networks rather than through the "traditional" Internet.