

# Who is doing what when it comes to technology for transparency, accountability and anti-corruption

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Fighting corruption is a responsibility that all global institutions, funders and NGOs have to take seriously. Institutions are engaged with the fight against corruption on a number of fronts. Firstly, for those institutions such as the World Bank that distribute funds or loans, there is a responsibility to address potential corruption in their own project portfolios through accessible and well-equipped review and inspection mechanisms. Secondly, institutions with a regulatory role need to ensure that the markets they regulate are free of corruption, and that regulations minimise the potential space for corrupt activity. And thirdly, recognising the potential of corruption to undermine development, institutions may choose to actively support local, national and international anti-corruption activities and initiatives. This report provides a critical survey of some of the areas where multilateral, intergovernmental and multi-stakeholder institutions, NGOs and community groups have engaged with the internet as a tool for driving transparency and accountability.

Although transparency is an often-cited element of the anti-corruption toolbox, technology-enabled transparency remains a relatively small part of the mainstream discourse around anti-corruption efforts in formal international institutional processes. The UN Convention against Corruption (UNCAC),<sup>1</sup> adopted in 2003 and ratified by 160 countries, and the OECD Anti-Bribery Convention,<sup>2</sup> adopted in 1997, provide a backbone of international cooperation against corruption and focus heavily on legal harmonisation, improved law enforcement, criminalisation of cross-border bribery and better mechanisms for asset recovery, addressing many of the preconditions for being able to act on corruption when it is identified. Continued cooperation on UNCAC takes place through the UN Office on Drugs and Crime,<sup>3</sup> with input and advocacy from the UNCAC Civil Society Coalition. In international development, the outcomes document of

the Fourth High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness,<sup>4</sup> held in Korea in November 2011, notes these foundations and highlights “fiscal transparency” as a key element of the fight against corruption. However, the document more often discusses transparency as part of the aid-effectiveness agenda, rather than as part of anti-corruption. This illustrates an important point: transparency is just one element of the fight against corruption, and reduced corruption is just one of the outcomes that might be sought from transparency projects. Transparency might also be used as a tool to get policy making better aligned with the demands of citizens, or to support cooperation between different agencies.

The review below starts by looking at technology for transparency in this broader context, before briefly assessing how far efforts are contributing towards anti-corruption goals.

## Transparency and open data

The last three years have seen significant interest in online open data initiatives as a tool for transparency, with over 100 now existing worldwide. Open data can be defined as the online publication of datasets in machine-readable, standardised formats that can be reused without intellectual property or other legal restrictions.<sup>5</sup> A core justification put forward for opening up government or institutional data is that it leads to increased transparency as new data is being made available, and existing data on governments, institutions and companies becomes easier to search, visualise and explore.

Following high-profile Open Government Data (OGD) initiatives in the US (data.gov) and UK (data.gov.uk), in April 2012 the World Bank launched its own open data portal (data.worldbank.org), providing open access to hundreds of statistical indicators. Here is how the World Bank describes the data portals mission:

The World Bank recognises that transparency and accountability are essential to the development process and central to achieving the Bank’s mission to alleviate poverty. The Bank’s commitment to openness is also driven by a desire to foster public ownership, partnership and participation in development from a wide range of stakeholders.<sup>6</sup>

1 [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/index.html](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/treaties/CAC/index.html)

2 [www.oecd.org/department/0,3355,en\\_2649\\_34859\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1\\_1,00.html](http://www.oecd.org/department/0,3355,en_2649_34859_1_1_1_1_1_1,00.html)

3 [www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption](http://www.unodc.org/unodc/en/corruption)

4 [www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4](http://www.aideffectiveness.org/busanhlf4)

5 [opendefinition.org](http://opendefinition.org)

6 [data.worldbank.org/about](http://data.worldbank.org/about)

The World Bank has also sponsored the development of Open Government Data initiatives in Kenya ([opendata.go.ke](http://opendata.go.ke)) and Moldova ([data.gov.md](http://data.gov.md)), as well as funding policy research and outreach to promote open data through the Open Development Technology Alliance (ODTA).<sup>7</sup>

Central to many narratives about open data is the idea that it can provide a platform on which a wide range of intermediaries can build tools and interfaces that take information closer to people who can use it. The focus is often on web and mobile application developers as the intermediaries. Many of the applications that have been built on open data are convenience tools, providing access to public transport times or weather information, but others have a transparency focus. For example, some apps visualise financial or political information from a government, seeking to give citizens the information they need to hold the state to account.

Apps alone may not be enough for transparency though. In an early case study of the Kenya open data initiative, Rahemtulla et al., writing for the ODTA, note that “the release of public sector information to promote transparency represents only the first step to a more informed citizenry...” and that initiatives should also address digital inclusion and information literacy. This involves ensuring ICT access, and the presence of an “info-structure” of intermediaries who can take data and turn it into useful information that actively supports transparency and accountability.<sup>8</sup> World Bank investments in Kenya linked to the open data project go some way to addressing this, seeking to stimulate and develop the skills of both journalists and technology developers to access and work with open data. However, much of the focus here is on e-government efficiency, or stimulating economic growth through the creation of commercial apps with open data, rather than on transparency and accountability goals.

Open data was also a common theme in the first plenary meeting of the Open Government Partnership (OGP)<sup>9</sup> in Brazil in April 2012. The OGP is a new multi-lateral initiative run by a joint steering committee of governments and civil society. Launched in 2011 by eight governments, it now has over 55 member states. Members commit to create concrete National Action Plans that will “promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption, and harness new technologies to strengthen governance.”<sup>10</sup> The OGP has the potential to play an influential role over the next few years in networking civil

society technology-for-transparency groups with each other, and with governments, and placing the internet at the centre of the open government debate.

The rapid move of open data from the fringes of policy into the mainstream for many institutions has undoubtedly been influenced by the activities of a number of emerging online networks and organisations. The Open Knowledge Foundation (OKF)<sup>11</sup> has played a particularly notable role through their email lists, working groups and conferences in connecting up different groups pushing for access to open data. OKF was founded in 2004 as a community-based non-profit organisation in the UK and now has 15 chapters across the world. OKF explain that they “build tools, projects and communities” that support anyone to “create, use and share open knowledge.”<sup>12</sup> The OKF paid staff and volunteer team are behind the CKAN software used to power many open data portals, and the OpenSpending.org platform that has the ambition to “track every government financial transaction across the world and present it in useful and engaging forms for everyone from a school-child to a data geek.”<sup>13</sup> This sort of “infrastructure work” – building online platforms that bring government data into the open and seek to make it accessible for a wide range of uses – is characteristic of a number of groups, both private firms and civil society, emerging in the open data space.

Another open data actor gaining attention on the global stage has been the small company OpenCorporates.com.<sup>14</sup> OpenCorporates founder Chris Taggart describes how their goal is to gather data on every registered company in the world, providing unique identifiers that can be used to tie together information on corporations, from financial reporting to licensing and pollution reports. Although sometimes working with open data from company registrars, much of the OpenCorporates database of over 40 million company records has been created through “screen scraping” data off official government websites. In early 2012 OpenCorporates were invited to the advisory panel of the Financial Stability Board’s<sup>15</sup> Global Legal Entity Identifier (LEI) project, being conducted on behalf of the G20. The LEI project aims to give a unique identifier to all financial institutions and counterparties, supporting better tracking of information and transactions. Importantly the recommendations, which have been accepted by the G20, will operate “according to the principles of open access and the nature of the LEI system as a public good (...) without limit on use or redistribution.”<sup>16</sup>

7 [www.opendta.org](http://www.opendta.org)

8 Rahemtulla, H., Kaplan, J., Gigler, B.-S., Cluster, S., Kiess, J. and Brigham, C. (2011) *Open Data Kenya: Case study of the Underlying Drivers, Principle Objectives and Evolution of one of the first Open Data Initiatives in Africa*. [www.scribd.com/doc/75642393/Open-Data-Kenya-Long-Version](http://www.scribd.com/doc/75642393/Open-Data-Kenya-Long-Version)

9 [www.opengovpartnership.org](http://www.opengovpartnership.org)

10 [www.opengovpartnership.org/about](http://www.opengovpartnership.org/about)

11 [okfn.org](http://okfn.org)

12 [www.okfn.org/about/faq](http://www.okfn.org/about/faq)

13 [www.openspending.org](http://www.openspending.org)

14 [opencorporates.com](http://opencorporates.com)

15 [www.financialstabilityboard.org](http://www.financialstabilityboard.org)

16 [www.financialstabilityboard.org/publications/r\\_120608.pdf](http://www.financialstabilityboard.org/publications/r_120608.pdf)

## International transparency initiatives and standards

A number of sector-specific international transparency initiatives have developed in recent years, with a greater or lesser reliance on the internet within their processes.

Online sharing of data is at the heart of the International Aid Transparency Initiative (IATI)<sup>17</sup> which was launched at the third High Level Forum on Aid Effectiveness in Accra, Ghana in 2008, and now has over 19 international aid donors as signatories. The initiative's political secretariat is hosted by the UK Department for International Development (DfID),<sup>18</sup> and a technical secretariat, which maintains a data standard for publishing data on aid flows, is hosted by the AidInfo programme.<sup>19</sup> IATI sets out the sorts of information on each of their aid activities that donors should publish, and provides an XML standard for representing this as open data.<sup>20</sup> A catalogue of available data is then maintained at [www.iatiregistry.org](http://www.iatiregistry.org), and a number of tools have been developed to visualise and make this data more accessible. Through IATI, countries and institutions, from the Asian Development Bank (ADB) to the UN Office of Project Services (UNOPS), have made information on their aid spending or management more accessible.

The Open Aid Partnership,<sup>21</sup> working closely with IATI and hosted by the World Bank Institute, is focusing specifically on geodata standards for aid information, using the "Mapping for Results" methodology developed with AidData<sup>22</sup> to geocode the location of aid projects and make this information available online. Geocoded data is seen as important to "promote ICT-enabled citizen feedback loops for reporting on development assistance."<sup>23</sup>

A number of other high-profile sector transparency initiatives, such as the Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative (EITI)<sup>24</sup> and the Construction Sector Transparency Initiative (CoST),<sup>25</sup> are less open data or ICT-centred, opting instead for processes based on disclosure and audit of documents through local multi-stakeholder processes. However, the Global Initiative on Fiscal Transparency (GIFT),<sup>26</sup> which aims to "advance and institutionalise global norms and continuous improvement on fiscal transparency,

participation and accountability in countries around the world," has a Harnessing New Technologies Working Group led by the OKF, which has outlined a number of ways technology can be used for transparent and accountable finance.<sup>27</sup> The "lead steward" organisations for GIFT are the International Monetary Fund, the World Bank Group, the Brazilian Ministry of Planning, Budget and Management, the Department of Budget and Management of the Philippines, and the Washington-based CSO project, the International Budget Partnership.<sup>28</sup>

## Crowd sourcing

Transparency and accountability isn't just about information and data from governments, companies or multilateral institutions. Input from citizens is crucial too. Crowd-sourcing projects such as Ushahidi,<sup>29</sup> first developed to monitor post-election violence in Kenya, have been deployed or replicated in a number of anti-corruption settings. Accepting submissions by SMS or online, these tools allow citizens to report problems with public services that might point to misappropriation of funds, or to directly report cases of corruption. Reports are generally geocoded and the resulting maps are presented publicly online. With UN Development Programme (UNDP)<sup>30</sup> support, an Ushahidi-based corruption monitoring platform was established in Kosovo.<sup>31</sup> In India, the IPaidABribe.com platform, which was launched in 2010 by Bangalore-based non-profit Janaagraha,<sup>32</sup> has collected over 20,000 reports of bribery requests or payments.

UNDP analysis suggests that the success of social media and use of crowd sourcing in transparency and accountability projects relies upon transparent mechanisms for verifying reports, and the backing of institutions or systems that can convert information into action – such as ensuring corrupt tenders are cancelled.<sup>33</sup> In a global mapping of technology for transparency and accountability, the Transparency & Accountability Initiative<sup>34</sup> (a donor collaboration chaired by DfID and the Open Society Foundation)<sup>35</sup> found that many of the 100 projects they reviewed

17 [www.aidtransparency.net](http://www.aidtransparency.net)

18 [www.dfid.gov.uk](http://www.dfid.gov.uk)

19 [www.aidinfo.org](http://www.aidinfo.org)

20 [www.iatistandard.org](http://www.iatistandard.org)

21 [www.openaidmap.org](http://www.openaidmap.org)

22 [www.aiddata.org](http://www.aiddata.org)

23 [www.openaidmap.org/about.html](http://www.openaidmap.org/about.html)

24 [eiti.org](http://eiti.org)

25 [www.constructiontransparency.org](http://www.constructiontransparency.org)

26 [fiscaltransparency.net](http://fiscaltransparency.net)

27 [openspending.org/resources/gift/index.html](http://openspending.org/resources/gift/index.html)

28 [internationalbudget.org](http://internationalbudget.org)

29 [ushahidi.com/about-us](http://ushahidi.com/about-us)

30 [www.undp.org](http://www.undp.org)

31 [www.kallxo.com](http://www.kallxo.com)

32 [www.janaagraha.org](http://www.janaagraha.org)

33 Lemma, T. (2012), Corruption Prevention and ICT: UNDP's Experience from the field, presented at the Joint Experts Group Meeting and Capacity Development Workshop on Preventing Corruption in Public Administration, UN DESA, New York, USA, 26-28 June. [unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un-dpadm/unpano49778.pdf](http://unpan1.un.org/intradoc/groups/public/documents/un-dpadm/unpano49778.pdf)

34 [www.transparency-initiative.org](http://www.transparency-initiative.org)

35 [www.soros.org](http://www.soros.org)

were started by technology-savvy activists.<sup>36</sup> Where these were tailored to local context, and able to adopt a collaborative approach, involving governments and/or service providers, they were more likely to be sustainable and successful. Global Voices Online maintain a directory of over 60 case studies as part of their “technology for transparency network”.<sup>37</sup>

The internet is also being used actively by global advocacy networks such as the Land Matrix Partnership, which launched an online database of land deals at the World Bank Land and Poverty Conference in April 2012, seeking to highlight the growing issue of large-scale land acquisitions across the world, particularly in Africa. This database, initially created through online collaboration of researchers, also accepts submissions through its website at [landportal.info/landmatrix](http://landportal.info/landmatrix), where reported data can also be visualised and explored.

### Further activity and institutions

For reasons of space this report can only make passing mention of initiatives aimed at increasing parliamentary transparency through developing and implementing online tools for tracking legislative processes and parliamentary debates. These have been established by civil society networks in a number of countries following models developed by the independent GovTrack in the US,<sup>38</sup> and the charity MySociety<sup>39</sup> with their TheyWorkForYou.com platform in the UK. MySociety, with support from the Open Society Foundation and Omidyar Network,<sup>40</sup> have been focusing in 2012 on making their transparency and civic action tools easier to implement in other jurisdictions, opening up the Alaveteli code that powers the public right-to-information services WriteToThem.com and AskTheEu.org, amongst others.

The funding for this work from the Omidyar Network, established by eBay founder Pierre Omidyar, draws attention to another set of important institutions and actors in the tech-for-transparency space: donors from the technology industry. Google, Omidyar Network, Cisco Foundation and Mozilla Foundation amongst others have all been involved in sponsoring technology-for-transparency open-source projects like Ushahidi, the work of MySociety, or data-journalism projects across the world. It is likely that without access to funding derived from internet industry profits, many of the current technology-for-transparency projects would be far less advanced.

This report has also not explored how institutions have responded to online leaking of information as part of transparency and accountability efforts. However, one project deserves a brief mention: the WCITLeaks website,<sup>41</sup> established to accept leaked documents relating to the revision of the International Telecommunications Regulations (ITRs) in response to the secrecy surrounding International Telecommunication Union (ITU) processes, and the lack of a civil society voice at the forthcoming World Conference on International Telecommunication (WCIT).

### Exploring impact

Technology for transparency is a rapidly growing field. The innovations may be emerging from civil society and internet experts (with much of the funding to scale up projects often coming ultimately from internet firms), but governments and international institutions are opting in to open data-based transparency initiatives, and a number of institutions, from the World Bank to the newly formed OGP, are active in spreading the technology for transparency message to their clients and members. However, there is little hard evidence yet of the internet becoming an integrated and core part of the global anti-corruption architecture, and many tools and platforms remain experimental, hosting just tens or hundreds of reported issues, and offering only limited stories of where crowd-sourced SMS reports, or irregularities spotted in open data, have led to corruption being challenged, and offenders being held to account.

McGee and Gaventa in a review of general transparency and accountability initiatives funded by Dfid explain that the evidence base on their impact is limited across the field.<sup>42</sup> Limited evidence of the anti-corruption impacts of technology for transparency should therefore be taken as a challenge to improve the evidence base and focus on impact, rather than to step back from developing new internet-based approaches for transparency and accountability. Working out the impact of those projects that provide online information infrastructures as foundations for accountability efforts, from general open government data projects to targeted transparency initiatives, will need particular attention if these efforts are to continue to receive institutional backing, and if the new loose-knit networks that provide many of these platforms are to continue to thrive. ■

36 Avila, R., Feigenblatt, H., Heacock, R. and Heller, N. (2011) *Global mapping of technology for transparency and accountability: New technologies*. [www.transparency-initiative.org/reports/global-mapping-of-technology-for-transparency-and-accountability](http://www.transparency-initiative.org/reports/global-mapping-of-technology-for-transparency-and-accountability)

37 [transparency.globalvoicesonline.org](http://transparency.globalvoicesonline.org)

38 [www.govtrack.us](http://www.govtrack.us)

39 [www.mysociety.org](http://www.mysociety.org)

40 [www.omidyar.com](http://www.omidyar.com)

41 [wcitleaks.org](http://wcitleaks.org)

42 McGee, R. and Gaventa, J. (2010) *Review of the Impact and Effectiveness of Transparency and Accountability Initiatives: Synthesis Report*. [www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/Output/187208/Default.aspx](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/Output/187208/Default.aspx). See also [www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/Search/SearchResults.aspx?ProjectID=60827](http://www.dfid.gov.uk/R4D/Search/SearchResults.aspx?ProjectID=60827) for other outputs of the research programme this report is taken from.