To Empower Civil Society Organisations to use Open Data to improve people's lives - Our road ahead

I.   Introduction

Today citizens have access to more data from their governments than ever before. Over the past decade Open Knowledge International has played a vital role in **catalyzing global momentum for open data**, through a combination of thought-leadership, community building, skill sharing, and software development. This includes developing the world's most successful open source data portal software, CKAN, as well as flagship projects such as OpenSpending, the School of Data and the Global Open Data Index.
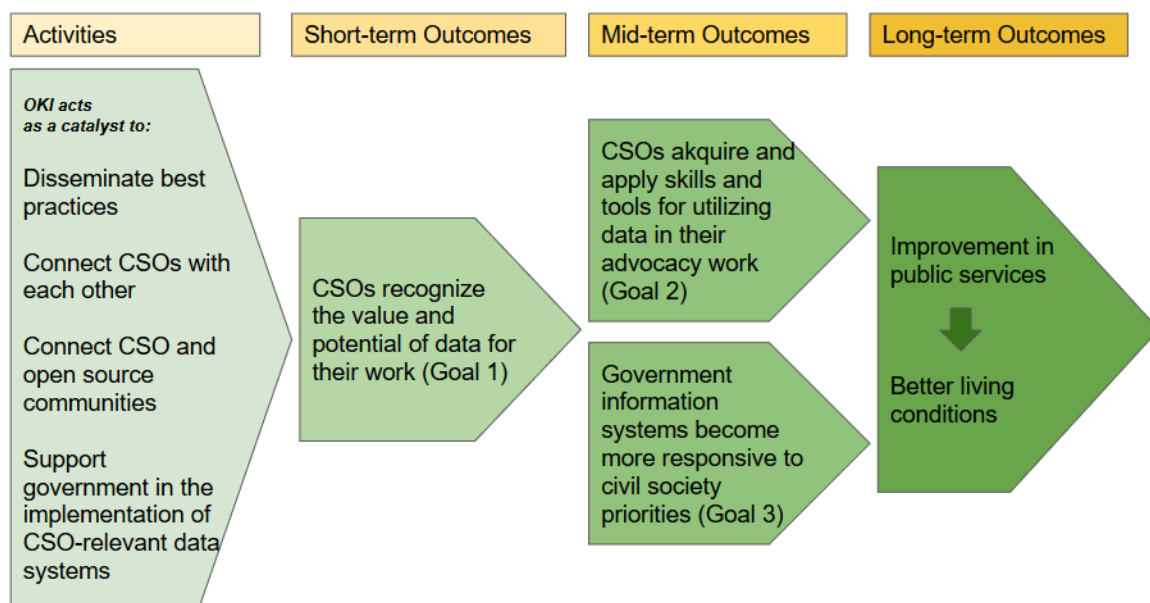
However, **open data is only valuable insofar as it is relevant to the concerns of citizens, and is actually used to improve people's lives**. In the next phase of its work Open Knowledge International will go beyond opening up data in order to focus on realizing data's value to society. Put in one phrase, **Open Knowledge International will empower Civil Society Organisations to use Open Data to improve people's lives.**

We believe that open data can help civil society groups to take action on urgent social problems. Having good data is a vital step to making progress on social goals. However, many civil society actors do not only lack crucial data, but also the capacity to use this data for change. Therefore, Open Knowledge International will focus on **three key goals** in order to address this:

1. *We will show the **value of open data** for the work of civil society organisations*
2. *We will provide organisations with the **tools and skills** to effectively use open data*
3. *We will make government information systems **responsive to civil society***

We want to help create a world in which civil society uses open data to improve the lives of the many. Hence, in the next phase of our work we will focus on supporting and developing

strategic partnerships with organisations on the frontline of tackling the most pressing issues of our times in their regional contexts. These partnerships will combine Open Knowledge International's expertise in open data with the specific knowledge and work of civil society organisations (CSOs). To assure that the impact of our work is maximized, partnerships will focus on regions where using open data has the most significant potential benefits for people's lives.. The likelihood of impact will be assessed based on the agenda of our civil society partners, their capacity, and the environment in which they operate. Thereby we give preference to regions affected by fundamental legal, institutional, public services and infrastructural issues that could be effectively addressed by CSOs empowered by data.

Activities	Short-term Outcomes	Mid-term Outcomes	Long-term Outcomes

OKI acts as a catalyst to:

Disseminate best practices

Connect CSOs with each other

Connect CSO and open source communities

Support government in the implementation of CSO-relevant data systems

CSOs recognize the value and potential of data for their work (Goal 1)

CSOs akquire and apply skills and tools for utilizing data in their advocacy work (Goal 2)

Government information systems become more responsive to civil society priorities (Goal 3)

Improvement in public services

Better living conditions

Goal 1: Showing the value of open data for the work of civil society organisations

Open data is data that can be accessed, used, modified and shared by anyone, for any purpose[1]. It plays a decisive role for civil society groups to gather evidence, to strengthen advocacy, and to make informed decisions - environmental activists campaigning against air pollution, community leaders demanding improved health services, or journalists following the money to identify cases of corruption - in many cases, open data has the potential to add significant impact to their work.

In all cases open data not only serves to gain information, but is a crucial enabler for action: CSOs use data to discover, understand and gain insights into governance and service delivery

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[1] Further details are provided by the Open Definition, accessible at: http://opendefinition.org/

issues, to flag problems for the public, to create public pressure through media coverage, to engage with communities affected by an issue, to allocate resources and start interventions where they are the most needed, or to formulate policy, system change and resource allocation demands.

While there is a growing knowledge base around how data can be used by citizens to affect change, there is still limited awareness of its potential amongst many civil society groups. Open Knowledge International will raise the awareness of CSOs who are issue experts but lack of expertise in using open data, in order to show them to what extent and how open data can make a difference in their work.

This will include supporting the development of **exemplar data projects in collaboration with civil society groups**, and **the dissemination of examples, strategies and best practices for the use of data in civil society**. Open Knowledge International will act as a catalyst for enabling civil society actors to be inspired by and learn from each other.

Goal 2: Providing organisations with the skills and tools to effectively use open data

Given awareness of the potential and possibilities of open data, there are still a number of steps before citizens are able to use data as basis for effective engagement with governments. Data literacy skills and tools help people to navigate datasets and to find the stories and figures that matter to their work, as well as to analyze, articulate and communicate their findings and their demands. Key public service issues become tangible and communicable through open data.

Open Knowledge International therefore collaborates one-on-one with organisations that feature a mature agenda, have issue experts on board, and that have a clear understanding of their specific issue. We work with groups whose advocacy work and skills can be significantly strengthened through data literacy.

Data literacy functions as a channel to engage with governments and helps civil society actors to understand and navigate a government's legal, organisational and institutional systems. Combined with the profound knowledge civil society actors have of an issue, data literacy can provide indispensable evidence for advocacy groups, journalists and other civil society actors. Yet, currently these capacities are patchy at best in civil society at large, with technical skills being most highly developed amongst comparatively small communities of civic technologists and data journalists.

At Open Knowledge International we believe that civil society groups can only tap into the transformational potential of open data when they have strong skills and tools at hand. Therefore our initiatives aim at enhancing these capacities, through **hosting researchers,**

training activities, customized workshops and events, as well as through **targeted technical assistance.** Each type of intervention is catered towards the needs and goals of a specific partner organization, working on a specific issue with a government entity or entities, and that is uniquely positioned to make a difference.

To do so, Open Knowledge International will utilize and build upon proven methods and resources developed by the School of Data network, working through partner organisations, as well as through the technical support team. Furthermore, we will continue to work with the School of Data team and the network members to continue to produce topically relevant training materials and content to enable greater uptake and reuse of available open government data.

Goal 3: Making government information systems responsive to civil society

The information systems of public institutions play a crucial role in how CSOs are enabled to collectively look at, and act upon, social, economic and political challenges in their country. Every information system renders certain aspects of the world visible and lets others recede into the background. Datasets highlight some things and not others. They make the world comprehensible and navigable – whether for the purposes of policy evaluation, public service delivery, administration or governance.

CSOs may use government information to advance improvements around social, political and environmental issues - however, only if the quality, accuracy, structure and content of publicly available information is aligned with their needs. Hence, government information systems can only support the work of CSOs and advance societal progress in the long-term, if they are responsive to the changing needs of civil society - that is, if they are able to create and represent data relevant to address societal issues.[2]

Open Knowledge International will make public information systems more responsive to the priorities of civil society and align public data with the needs of civil society groups to strengthen their work. We will do this by **gathering input on priority data that civil society groups require,** by **connecting the knowledge and demands of CSOs about enabling factors to change government data measurement and publication**, by **showcasing participatory design methods** for public information systems, and by **supporting databases run by CSOs and by governments providing priority data**. For each collaborative project, partnering local organisations will provide knowledge about an issue and lead the advocacy agenda, while Open

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[2] For more on this topic, see: http://blog.okfn.org/2015/07/09/democratising-the-data-revolution/ and http://blog.okfn.org/2016/03/03/changing-what-counts/

Knowledge International will lead the design and creation of new open databases, as well as the improvement of already existing data bases of governments.

Specifically, Open Knowledge International will 1) identify priority data that correspond with the needs of civil society in a given country or region, 2) develop avenues for CSOs to engage with governments and public information systems (including participatory design methods to gather input from CSOs about institutional, legal and organisational factors enabling information systems to adapt what data are measured and published, and the technical development of exemplary open databases that our partners may use to flag issues and advocate for changes of current public information systems), 3) support the technical adoption of open databases with government entities in accordance with the work and demands of our partners, 4) create knowledge network for CSOs and their allies such as media partners to monitor the implementation of new data measurements.

How we work: The Portfolio approach, and funding our work

Going forward, we will plan and execute our projects in three distinctive phases, called portfolios:

Planting the Seeds (also known as Phase I): We do not know what really changes people's live, and what role Open Data can play in this process. Therefore, we need to experiment, be open for new solutions, find really new ways to use Open Data, to make it applicable to the lives of real people, to help Civil Society Organisations to make good use of it. Many of these experiments will fail. So we need to start many, in order to find the ones that work. This is an approach often found in incubators, startup accelerators, and within very innovative companies. We will focus these very early stages in the Planting the Seeds-Portfolio, because we will plant many seeds, of which only a few will ever grow into something bigger.

Growing the Trees (also known as Phase II): From time to time, a new approach, a new project that we tried out in Phase I will get traction, will make a real impact on real people's lives. These projects we want to nourish, help them grow in terms of reach and depth. In this phase, we will focus on scaling up, on widening the approach and the goals of a project, on building a sustainable structure, on securing mid-term funding.

Harvesting the Fruits (also known as Phase III): While Phase I and II are standard approaches for all non-profit organisations, Phase III is really new: Within this phase, Open Knowledge International actively works towards removing itself from its most successful projects. We need to build governance and funding structures that allow successful projects to live outside of OKI as an organisation. We need to build a partnership network that supports these

projects. All this happens in Phase III. Because this is so crucial to our overall approach, you will find some more details on this Portfolio further down.

The portfolio approach to projects is based on the premise that Open Knowledge International lends its expertise and leadership for the development, testing and limited scaling of Open Data projects, until these projects have reached a level of maturity, a scope and a size that justifies independence - in terms of project administration and governance, as well as in terms of revenue. If the project makes it to this stage, it is then spun off, and frees up OKI resources for the next projects to move through the stages. Each project will have an evolving funding mix as it moves through the stages, from OKI development funds out of the core budget at the early seed stage, to standard, issue based project grants in the growth phase, and finally gradually leading to financial independence in phase III. In this manner, OKI will not become a large organization with myriad of projects competing for external and internal resources, requiring immense organizational overheads and multi-level program staff hierarchies.

Open Knowledge International has a very clear and focused understanding of what it can bring into a particular project: Inserting know-how around Open Data, developing new tools and approaches to use it, and enabling CSOs to understand and use Open Data within their mission context.

This theory of change is based on empowerment and capacity building. It implies that at a certain point in time, OKI will no longer substantially contribute anything new to a project, since the principals have been enabled to use open data to achieve their mission. Successful projects will simply have moved beyond where our expertise is needed. OKI's expertise or resources are not to run large-scale projects on a global scale for an indefinite time. Other organisations are much better suited to do so.

Key to the success of this spin-out approach is incorporating the Phase III scenario into project planning from a very early stage on. All stakeholders involved in an open data project will know about this approach from the onset and will prepare for Phase III. Our partner organisations will know that OKI will leave space for their own needs and developments, and OKI will not enter into a role of supporting partner for an unlimited time.

Advantages

- OKI will be able to maintain a structure as an organisation that is not dependent on funding of its biggest and most recognized projects. This minimizes the incentive to continue involvement in projects beyond our actual usefulness, in order to keep the funding alive.

- The projects get fresh governance structures that change according to the development stages of the projects, not according to OKI as the "host" organisation.

Risks

- Successful projects are attractive. They generate money, recognition, brand value, etc. OKI will need to be able to adapt to this by developing new forms of marketing and recognition, that focus our our contributions to these projects, and on sustainability through community buy-in.

How Phase III of the portfolio model will be determined and be constructed will vary from project to project, depending on the characteristics of the assets we develop with partners. In the case of School of Data, the basis for independence is a network of organisations with expertise in data training. Rather than developing a spin-out company like Viderum for the case of CKAN, for School of Data we are developing a collaborative and cooperative model, where benefitting organisations take an active stake in the new entity at their local or regional level. Alternative revenue models are being explored here to aid in the sustainability of the network. For example, we trial a system of training dispatch, where incoming requests to School of Data for training are being dispatched to network partners, with a share of the revenue covering the network.

It is important for us to stay true to our open approach, so we do not expect to be generating proprietary technology or content, and our work can be carried on, localized and improved without our further involvement. The portfolio model is based on the realistic assumption that new projects will replace the ones we phase out or 'spin off' into independence.

Due to the global applicability of the solutions we develop, we think it is entirely appropriate that once our expertise has born fruit, local and regional funders, CSOs and governments take over the maintenance at local, regional and national levels.

To share our rationale behind the Three Phase Portfolio model, we need to show how it applies to current projects. In most cases, this is not a linear process, but occurs at multiple levels and at diverse speeds.

For this, we are using a matrix to reflect major project components areas, and how these change over the course of the three phases. We are tracking 5 key components for this:

1. **Programmatic maturity:** Reflects how the scope, the depth and the reach of a project develops over the three stages. This develops along a continuum of innovation, testing

as a minimum viable product, adjustments and improvement, limited replication, and readiness for deployment, adaptation and scaling.

2. **Governance**: While all projects start out under the Open Knowledge International umbrella, designing and implementing a governance structure is critical for our approach: a structure that includes important stakeholders, assures community ownership, and also maintains open source principles. This ultimately OKI-independent governance should be completed towards the end of Phase III.

3. **Funding**: Initially, projects will be funded through small project grants, seed funding or through small amounts of core funding. Raising dedicated project funding for scaling of the project will be an important indicator of how our projects are perceived by funders in Phase II. In Phase III OKI will work with partner organizations on a strategy that gradually increases financial support from local, regional and thematic sources, private and public, or earned income from fees. Funding at the end of Phase III then becomes independent from the fundraising and grant management activities of OKI.

4. **Impact**: Ultimately, we aim for CSOs to use Open Data to improve people's lives. So while the effect of our projects can be indirect, we need to be able to prove that what we do has a positive impact on social, environmental, health or other indicators that our CSO partners are trying to affect. These indicators need to be measured from the start. And while "impact" in phase I can be limited to particular circumstances or small scopes, we need to show that our partners are able to deepen and widen this impact over time, in order to reach Phase III.

5. **Partnerships**: Building partnerships and a network is crucial to our success as an organisation. By investing here, we ensure that each project is supported by the broadest possible coalition of partners; we also widen our reach into new issue areas, adding and improving projects, exploring new funding opportunities. The strength, quality and collective impact of each partnership should grow across the three Phases, and by the end should support the project without OKI leadership and backbone functions. OKI may remain involved in an advisory capacity throughout Phase III.

Below see a blank version of our Matrix tool:

Project:			
Criteria	**Phase 1 - Planting the Seeds**	**Phase 2 - Growing the Trees**	**Phase 3 - Harvesting the Fruits**
Programmatic maturity			
Metrics			
Governance			
Metrics			
Funding			
Metrics			
Impact			
Metrics			
Partnerships			
Metrics			
Status			