Open Data in Brazil: budget transparency and people's rights

Nathalie Beghin (Inesc), Carmela Zigoni (Inesc), Gisele Craveiro (Usp), Marcelo Tavares (Usp)
(nathalie@inesc.org.br; carmela@inesc.org.br; gisele.craveiro@gmail.com, tavaresdesantana@gmail.com)

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Introduction & method

In Brazil, steps towards open government data have been happening since the launch of a National Transparency Portal in 2004. The availability of data regarding public management has increased since the Access to Information Act was passed in 2011, which dictates procedures to be followed by federated entities to ensure society access to information, and additional regulations apply to disclosure of financial data. This project asked:

- **Are governments – at national and sub-national level - actually opening their data in accordance with the law, and with open data principles?**
- **How can open budget data contribute to promoting the human rights of Brazilian citizens?**

To answer these questions, the research carried out a **quantitative evaluation** of official budget websites at national and sub-national level (27 state capitals, the federal government and the senate) based on **eight principles of open government data**, operationalised against Brazilian law and regulation on budget disclosure. The study also carried include a **qualitative phase** investigating the role of open data intermediaries and their perceptions regarding the uses and impacts of open data in securing human rights. This used a 'follow the data' interviewing method.

Table 1 summarizes explanations about our framework

Principle	Framework and ranking
1. Data Must be Complete	Availability of information on income and spending for the year 2013 (0 or 1 score).
2. Data Must Be Primary	Observation of the categories and stages of revenues and spending (0 or 1 score; for the latter, the 15 information fields for revenues and spending provided for in the Decree 7,185/2010 must be published).
3. Data Must Be Timely	The date of the last update for 2013 should be 24 hours. (0 or 1 score)
4. Data Must be Accessible	There should be no P1 type bugs, which are those that prevent access to information, score 1; according to the e-MAG standards evaluated by the ASES automatic validation program for e-government (0 or 1 score).
5. Data Must Be Machine-processable	No score for PDF, score 1 for XLS, score 2 for CSV or XML. Score 3 if CSV and other more sophisticated alternatives are available, equivalent to 4 and 5 stars of the Tim Berners-Lee model.
6. Access Must Be Non-Discriminatory	It was checked whether any special access or registration was required (0 or 1 score).
7. Data Formats Must Be Non-Proprietary	PDF and XLS (no score) and CSV (score 1).
8. Data Must Be License-Free	It was checked whether there were licenses for using the data and whether they provide for any restriction (0 or 1 score).

Table 8. Ranking of Transparency Portals

Position	Federative entity	Score	Complete	Primary	Timely	Accessible	Machine-processable	Non-discriminatory	Non-proprietary	License-free
1st	City Hall of Rio de Janeiro	6	1	-	-	-	3	1	1	-
	City Hall of Sao Luis	6	1	-	-	1	2	1	1	-
	City Hall of Joao Pessoa	6	1	-	-	-	3	1	1	-
2nd	Office of the Comptroller General – Federal Executive	5	1	-	-	-	2	1	1	-
	City Hall of Teresina	5	1	-	-	-	2	1	1	-
	Federal Senate	5	1	-	-	-	2	1	1	-
3rd	City Hall of Palmas	4	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	-
	City Hall of Maceio	4	1	-	1	-	1	1	-	-
	City Hall of Curitiba	4	1	-	-	1	1	1	-	-
4th	City Hall of Salvador	3	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
	City Hall of Sao Paulo	3	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
	City Hall of Boa Vista	3	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Recife	3	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
	City Hall of Belem	3	1	-	-	-	1	1	-	-
	City Hall of Florianopolis	3	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Macapa	3	1	-	1	-	-	1	-	-
5th	City Hall of Fortaleza	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Porto Alegre	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Cuiaba	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	Government of the Federal District	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Vitoria	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Goiania	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Porto Velho	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Belo Horizonte	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Natal	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Aracaju	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Campo Grande	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
	City Hall of Rio Branco	2	1	-	-	-	-	1	-	-
6th	City Hall of Manaus	1	-	-	-	-	-	1	-	-

Source and Prepared by: Gpopai/Usp, 2014.

Evidence and findings

The **quantitative survey** showed that there is still a long way to go. Whilst the information provided is mostly complete (meeting requirements for what should be published), in general the data available are not primary, and most of the governments assessed do not provide timely information. Accessibility of the information is not guaranteed for all, and although progress has been made in relation to machine-readable data, only a minority of websites offer machine-readable data in non-proprietary formats.

Across both the quantitative and qualitative components of the study, data licensing was an area lacking clarity: none of the sites surveyed had explicit information providing an open license, and although intermediaries were aware of the concept of open licenses, few saw this as a relevant factor in their use of data.

The results of the **qualitative investigation** confirm the findings of the quantitative one in relation to the need to improve the process of opening up data in Brazil. However, despite these limitations, the interviewed believed that progress has been made in the field of human rights as a result of opening up data in the country.

The qualitative research explored five categories of "intermediary", or potential users of open budget data: NGOs, journalists, universities, hackers and government itself. These divided into direct users, and 're-users' who rework and republish data in new forms. Selected intermediary profiles are shown below:

Box 5. Use of open data (Extracts – see report for full cases)

Organization	Category	Main area of work with open data	Collection, reading, processing.	Products Use and reuse	Information Dissemination	Measurable impacts
CFEMEA	NGO	Analysis of the federal budget for policies for women.	• Hiring of consultants specializing in public budgeting; • Extracting data about public budgeting and policies; • Analysis and Production of Report.	• Report; • Academic articles; • Technical Note; • Methodology for the Siga Brasil website; • Letters to MPs; • Semáforo da Execução Orçamentária.	• Meetings with public managers; • Hearings in Congress; • Workshops with social movements; social media (facebook, twitter); • Contents for media.	• Women's movements established; • Parliamentary amendments incorporated into the budget; • Public policies improved.
OKF Brazil	NGO	"Data School"; Development of Reuse Tools.	• Collection and technical interpretation, Development of applications and digital tools, Establishment of hacker community, NGOs and social movements.	• Reuse Tools (Budget at Your Fingertips - Inesc); • Online courses; • Tutorial videos.	• OKF Brazil website, interactive website (data school); • Distance and classroom learning; • Knowledge sharing networks on the Internet; • Social media (facebook, twitter, youtube channel).	• NGOs and movements established around the open data topic capable of managing digital tools; • Hackers capable of developing programming.
O Estado de São Paulo newspaper	Journalist	Basometro	• Data collection and reading, feeding of the tool; • Political analysis of data and production of news content; • Dialogue with academia.	• Basometro; • Newspaper articles; • Book.	• Digital newspaper; • Social media (facebook, twitter).	• Academics wrote a book using data generated by the application; • Access to the tool and sharing of stories.
IPEA	Research Institute	Research into the effectiveness of the Access to Information Act.	• Development of softwares for automatic breaking of PDF files; • Organization of the data in a new database; • Analysis and production of technical notes and reports; • Dialogues with government sectors; development of evaluative research.	• Research Projects; • Research Reports; • Technical Notes;	• Meetings with public managers; • Interviews for journalists.	Improved public policies
General Secretariat of the Presidency of the Republic.	Government	Platforms focused on social participation, social control and citizen interactivity (Consocial, Web Cidadania Xingu, Social Participation System of the Federal Government; Digital Public Consultations, among others); Linking of policies designed to promote open data in Brazil (2nd Action Plan of the Open Government Partnership, National Data Infrastructure, Internet Civil Landmark, among others).	• Establishment of partnerships for building websites (UNB, social movements, NGOs); • Meetings with managers of several Ministries for transferring knowledge; • Meetings with information technicians of various Ministries with the aim of developing expertise	• Online websites; • Social networks of government bodies active (visitors, shares, comments, accesses).	• Website; • Social media (facebook, twitter); • Analog spaces (meetings, public conferences); • News media.	• Number of accesses to participation platforms (websites, social media); • Number of suggestions recorded on digital queries.

Conclusions & recommendations

A change is under way in Brazil in the debate on open data and, consequently, on different and related fields: the field of public transparency, especially budget transparency; the field of digital technologies and new media; and the field of rights, which crosscuts the previous two. Paradigms are being broken and elements of governance are being reconfigured and built, with consequence tensions and (re-)negotiations - civil society and governments are key actors in these new processes, each taking on their responsibilities and playing their respective roles in society. **In the policy domain**, the public sector, at all levels, needs to improve the open data process, fulfilling the Law on Access to Information and delivering more friendly formats for citizens. In the **domain of practice** more investment is needed to support reuse tools and to promote interdisciplinary networks that can analyze open budget data. **Future research** needs to monitor the evolution of open data in Brazil, as well as to track access by citizens and its ultimate impact on human rights.

Exploring the Emerging Impacts of Open Data in Developing Countries

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