Opening the Gates: Will Open Data Initiatives Make Local Governments in the Philippines More Transparent?

Step Up Consulting Services
http://www.steupconsultants.com
Michael Cañares, Marijoe Narca, Joseph de Guia, and Jare Arawiran
Corresponding author: mikocanares@steupconsultants.com

What we were interested in...
In 2011, the Department of Interior and Local Government of the Philippines mandated the implementation of the Full Disclosure Policy (FDP) that requires local government units to post financial and procurement-related information on their websites. Using a case study approach, this research looked at how the sharing of governance information online has impacted on local government systems, and how the information and data has been accessed and used by civil society representatives and intermediary groups.

What we did..
In our case study we focussed on three provinces that were ranked as the best governed in 2011. In each of the provinces, we conducted a secondary data review and content analysis of websites to determine “openness” and compliance with the FDP policy. Focus group discussions were then conducted with government officials and civil society representatives to determine changes brought about by the FDP governance information sharing mechanism and increased access to data and information.

What we found out....

On the Supply Side
• All provinces share timely, easy to use, & useful information but not in machine-readable formats.
• Two of the three provinces provide more information than what is required by FDP.
• Data could be published as open datasets if requirements & standards for this were established.

On the Demand Side
• The majority of citizen groups are not aware that local governance information is available online.
• Most citizen groups are interested in data different from that which the FDP requires.
• There is difficulty for citizen groups to use the data because of skill gaps for data use and analysis.

What the implications of these findings are...
1. In opening up data to the public it is important to consider the intended audience of the open data initiative, and what sorts of information they want to have access to as open data sets.
2. Data owners in government should be educated that publishing data in machine-readable format for re-use does not change or threaten the integrity of the original documents. They need real incentives for open data publication.
3. Conversion of open datasets into forms that are useful for policy, advocacy, or education work needs infomediaries who are capable of converting data to information and making it useful for citizens.
4. Open data initiatives should promote offline citizen use and engagement