

Opening Government Data through Mediation:  
Exploring Roles, Practices and Strategies of  
(Potential) Data Intermediary Organisations in India

A Study by **HasGeek Media LLP**

Part of the **Exploring the Emerging Impacts of Open Data  
in Developing Countries (ODDC)** research network

Managed by **World Wide Web Foundation** and

supported by **International Development Research Centre, Canada**

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## Data Intermediary Organisation #1

### What is a 'data intermediary organisation'?

An organisation that shares data for its access, consumption and re-usage (including re-distribution) by other organisations and individuals.

### Why is it important?

It can play two crucial roles in an open data ecosystem:

01. **Facilitate** data **access** for smaller and/or local organisations that may not have the capacity to work with large data sets
02. **Augment** and **amplify** the **circulation** of open data by sanitising and curating data coming from both government and non-government sources

## Data Intermediary Organisation #2

Are there 'Data Intermediary Organisations' in India?

Not really, except a few great exceptions, such as [India Biodiversity Portal](#) and [India Water Portal](#).

However, the **objective** of this study is not to find existing Data Intermediary Organisations in India, but to **understand**:

01. What all prevent them from existing?
02. What are the implications of their absence?
03. How can they be created?

## Research Method

### Method

Semi-structured interviews with (non-government) organisations working with national-scale data and (non-commercially) sharing data and data products, and with the (government) agency that runs Open Government Data Platform of India <[data.gov.in](https://data.gov.in)>.

### Research Questions

Organisation, Accessing Data, Using Data, Collecting Data, Sharing Data, Data Ecology.

### Interviewed Organisations

Accountability Initiative, Akvo Foundation, ASER Centre, Association for Democratic Reforms, Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability, Hyderabad Urban Lab, India Biodiversity Portal (Strand Life Sciences), India Energy Portal (The Energy and Resources Institute), India Environment Portal (Centre for Science and Environment), India Urban Portal (National Institute of Urban Affairs), India Water Portal (Arghyam), Karnataka Learning Partnership, PRS Legislative Research, Transparent Chennai.

## Is there an 'open data community' in India?

Most organisations feel that though the **open data community** is taking shape in India, it is yet to make its presence felt across sectors

'Open Data' or 'Open Government Data' is most often **not a commonly used term**, even for organisations that work with publicly available government data

All organisations see themselves as **natural members / allies** of the open data community

**Main reasons** for **not** seeing the organisation as **part** of the open data community are:

- 01.** Lack of interactions with the existing open data community
- 02.** Interested in collection of data at state and local scales
- 03.** Uncomfortable with or uninitiated to the technological discussions of open data

## How is government data accessed, and what are the challenges in accessing?

01. Downloaded reports and data files from websites of government agencies
02. Physically collected data and reports from government agencies (paper/digital)
03. Right to Information requests
04. Data products sold by government agencies
05. Personal surveys of government departments and officials

The **key challenge** in accessing data is making these data sets **available online**, especially since a great wealth of government data is **not publicly published** (in digital/paper formats) at all

**Closed format** data is **not necessarily** seen as a key **challenge** by many organisations, and this is determined by existing processes of working with data at the organisation

In case of datasets that are **shareable** but **not available publicly**, it becomes absolutely **critical** to develop **working relationships** and build **trust** with the government agency concerned

## How is government data shared (by Data Intermediary Organisations)?

Majority of the organisations **share** various kinds of **data products** but **not** the **sanitised, reorganised** version of the data (done by the organisation) itself

Common reasons for **not sharing** data are:

- 01.** Lack of demand for raw data from researchers, media persons, and other individuals and organisations
- 02.** Lack of confidence in capability of re-users to 'correctly' and 'objectively' interpret and use the data
- 03.** Lack of an organisational history of re-sharing data, and the systemic difficulties in creating that culture.
- 04.** Lack of organisational capacity to turn closed format data to open format data

Even organisations that do not publicly re-share data, are most **likely** to **share** it on a **case-by-case basis** with various academic researchers and policy analysts.

**Unclear license / copyright** is often **not seen** as a critical **barrier** to sharing of data

## What are the key challenges in opening up data in India?

### Open Data Ecosystem

The challenge of building a culture of contributing to open data ecosystem exists both within and outside government.

### Data Collecting Agencies

Government Data cannot be seen by its creators only as things to be shared with others, especially higher order agencies, but as something that informs their internal processes

### Open Government Data Platform

It is critical to make the datasets available at the Platform also browsable and queryable in a structured form, and domain expert organisations must play a coordinating role in generating these structures

### Open Data Community

It is most important to organise user communities of (raw) datasets for both government data and data created and re-shared by non-government organisations

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