

Improving the Design and Effectiveness of Investments in Governance Data:

— Lessons Learned and Practical Guidance for Funders



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Introduction

Global funders of transparency and accountability initiatives invest considerable resources in governance data, whether to benchmark governance performance or diagnose governance challenges across countries (for example, the IBP's Open Budget Survey or the Corruption Perceptions Index), or to achieve changes in governance within countries by identifying and contributing to solutions to those problems (for example, local implementation of Open Contracting). Together, these investments have succeeded in calling attention to the importance of transparency and accountability and raising the profile of governance challenges, and have helped to set agendas and influence norms and standards for openness both globally and in many developed and developing countries.

At the same time, these investments have proven less effective at achieving sustainable changes in governance outcomes. While isolated examples of change exist (such as legislators demanding more of the executive on the basis of data and analysis, or civil society campaigns supported by data leading to changes in policy), collective and systematic evidence of data investments contributing to increased transparency, accountability and public participation remains limited,

particularly in developing countries. In part, this may reflect donor assumptions that investments in the production and disclosure of governance data would be sufficient to yield their intended outcomes on transparency and accountability, without first testing and gathering evidence of the role of data in influencing governance reforms within countries and figuring out what the optimal investments in these data might be. On the other hand, this could reflect the challenges of actually attributing impact to the role of data in complex change processes, as well as achieving and sustaining progress on governance reforms more broadly.

This report aims to provide practical insights and guidance on improving the design and outcomes of governance data investments for program officers and other donor staff responsible for making, managing and/or evaluating funding in this space. It takes stock of current funding initiatives and trends, and based on the learning to date, provides an overview of the factors and approaches that tend to influence (or undermine) progress and sustainability of investments in governance data. Based on these insights, guiding questions are provided for program officers and potential grantees to consider and discuss when thinking through new grants and funding proposals. Insights are distilled from interviews with staff from leading transparency and accountability funders as well as the wide-ranging literature on open data, development data, evidence-driven policymaking, change management, and transparency and accountability. Although the focus is specifically on governance data from a funder's perspective, much of the learnings are drawn from, and thus potentially relevant to the broader open data and open government fields as well as the grantees and other agencies involved in the design and implementation of these initiatives.

This document is divided as follows:

- **Section 1** provides an overview of the evolution and trends in governance data investments;
- **Section 2** outlines key findings on the factors or approaches that influence the effectiveness and sustainability of governance data funding. On this basis, guiding questions are provided to support program officers and potential grantees when considering new grants and discussing funding proposals.
- **Sections 3 and 4** conclude by suggesting some future areas of research and highlighting existing guidance and relevant resources for funders and their grantees.



I. Evolution and Trends In Governance Data Investments

■ The past two decades have witnessed a surge of interest and investments from international donors in data on the different dimensions of governance, broadly covering information on fiscal transparency, government performance, corruption, business regulation and freedom of the press (among other areas). Governance data can be broadly divided between data collected at the global level to measure governance across countries (for example, indicators from the Open Budget Survey or the Corruptions Perceptions Index), and data needed to improve governance within countries (for example, data on expenditure), particularly in the developing world. As one interviewee noted, there tend to be important distinctions between the drivers of global versus in-country governance data funding – at the global

Given the diverse array of funding related to governance data, it is challenging to track trends in the volume and allocation of funding in this space.

level, funding is often motivated by donors' own data needs for decision-making (i.e. data to inform how to target their support across and within countries), while at the country level, domestic actors often leverage initiatives to improve their governance data in a bid to fulfill reporting requirements or transparency commitments.

Given the diverse array of funding related to governance data, it is challenging to track trends in the volume and allocation of funding in this space. Investments are made by governments, multilateral donors, private philanthropies, and international NGOs at the global, national and local levels, with goals ranging from informing global decisions and dialogue; diffusing transparency and accountability norms and standards; building partnerships, institutions and coalitions; empowering civil society and supporting advocacy campaigns; improving data production and analysis; creating innovative platforms and tools for data dissemination; building capacity to produce, share and use governance data; and ultimately changing incentives, preferences and behaviors that improve transparency, participation and accountability. They tend to engage a wide range of actors, including international organizations, governments, NGOs, journalists, businesses, civic technologists, legal professionals, researchers and citizens. This diversity has contributed to the challenge of piecing together what approaches and interventions are working and why.

In addition, investments that tackle transparency and accountability challenges may or may not include an explicit focus on data, yet could impact how data is produced, shared and used. Some funders' investment strategies include a core focus on specific types of data as a means of promoting good governance (for example, Omidyar Network, Hewlett Foundation, the World Bank and DFID), while other funders provide significant support for transparency and accountability initiatives for which data may not be a frame of reference or central element of their support (this could include funders such as the Ford Foundation and Open Society Foundations). In addition, significant funding from private foundations is delivered as general support for transparency and accountability organizations, which can encompass a range of activities, objectives and actors, many of which may or may not explicitly involve data. For example, funding to support information campaigns, budget analysis, or Right to Information laws might not support open data directly, although data publication, sharing and use will likely be important to or shaped

by these interventions. While private foundations tend to invest more globally to establish and strengthen transparency and accountability initiatives and support both international and national non-governmental actors, donors such as the World Bank tend to work more closely with governments in strengthening their capacity and systems to produce data and implement transparency commitments and policies.

Early investments in governance data often prioritized the establishment of norms and standards for openness and the production of data, as opposed to understanding and addressing demand for and use of the data and the wider enabling environment needed to advance governance reforms. Similar to the wider open data movement, much of the initial momentum and funding for governance data initiatives have focused on its production, as well as the norms, policies, standards and systems needed to improve the openness, quality and accessibility of the data (referred to broadly as “supply side” factors). According to one program officer, this could reflect the initial thinking that investments in data should be user-agnostic as the potential uses of data are endless and impossible to predict. On one end of this spectrum, there are funders of global transparency and accountability initiatives that have adopted a minimal focus on the role of governance data in advancing their goals, although as indicated by one funder, many of these initiatives do include explicit data components (i.e. the Open Contracting Partnership and the Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency). On the other end, more proactive data funders have tended to more narrowly target resources on the production of data for a specific purpose, without necessarily considering whether and by whom investments in data are needed and their potential applications to addressing the governance challenge in question. For example, the World Bank is one of the leading funders of development data, however only 27 out of 201 of their data projects reviewed by the Independent Evaluation Group (IEG) included activities supporting data use.¹ That being said, another officer pointed out that many investments in global initiatives may ultimately support engagement with and use of data without adopting explicit goals and strategies related to this, adding to the difficulty of assessing the various outcomes of these investments.

1. World Bank, 2017.

There are persistent challenges to producing high quality governance data

Recognizing that transparency norms, standards and data production are often not enough to contribute to changes in decision-making or lasting reforms in developing countries, many funders are now focusing more on the demand side of governance data through supporting the use of data and broader enabling environment for evidence-based decision-making and engagement. This shift has called for new grantees, more resources, longer timeframes and greater flexibility and adaptability of funding given the challenges and complexity inherent in achieving progress on data use and the need to further align support with the specific needs of each context. At the same time, many of the staff interviewed highlighted the persistent challenges to producing high quality governance data in developing countries, which continue to serve as a significant barrier to normalizing and institutionalizing the publication, sharing and use of the data in these countries. As a result, there are continuing calls for investing more in data infrastructure, systems, capacity and the regulatory/legislative environment of data production and use. This further underlines the need to more systematically assess and prioritize data needs and gather evidence of what matters most to the effectiveness and sustainability of governance data funding to ensure these limited resources are put to optimal use.

II. Considerations For Improving the Design and Effectiveness of Governance Data Funding

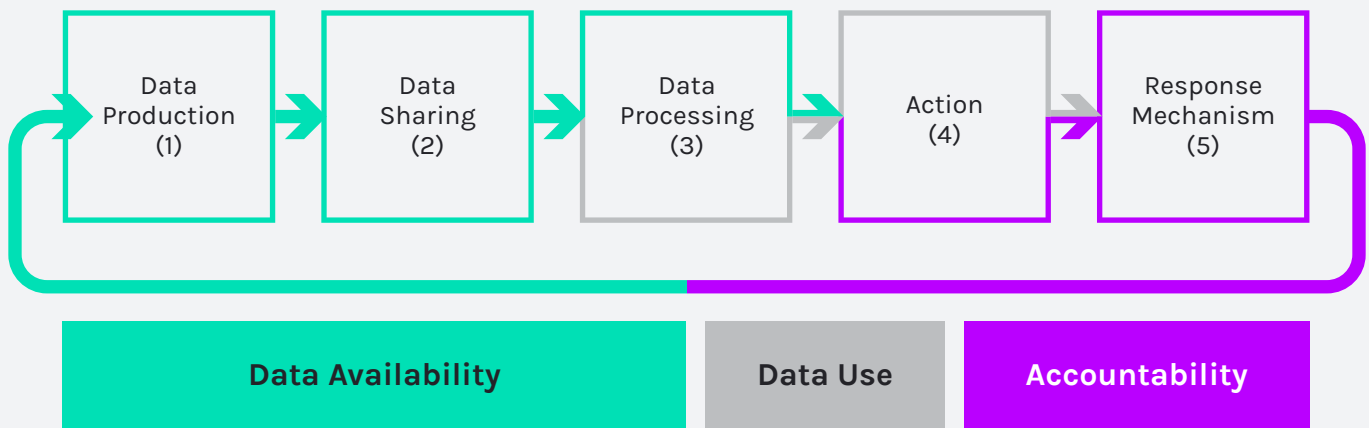
Across the range of governance data investments, this section distills common lessons for funders on the factors or approaches that have tended to work (or not work) to increase the contribution of data to achieving governance outcomes. A common frame of reference for the progress of open data initiatives tracing the process from data production and disclosure to use, change and impact, sometimes referred to as the “data value chain” (see Box below). This is helpful in pointing to potential gaps or weaknesses in governance data funding depending on which parts of the chain are targeted or influenced. It should be noted, however, that this focuses on data as the starting point of analysis, as opposed to determining whether and how data might fit into an intervention’s theory of change and address a given challenge.

Using this framework as a starting point, below are key lessons and guiding questions for funders and grantees to take into account when considering and designing funding proposals related to governance data production, disclosure, use and impact.

A Framework for Data for Accountability

In 2017, Transparency and Accountability Initiative partnered with the Open Data Charter to develop a "data for accountability" framework (see figure below) tracing how investments in governance data can lead to impact. Going beyond standard conceptualizations of data "supply" and "demand", the framework outlines five types of activity needed to result in impact, from governance data production, sharing and processing (needed to ensure data availability), data processing and

action on this basis (needed for data use) and action leading to some sort of response (needed for enhancing accountability). This framework allows organizations investing in governance data to map their activities along the chain and uncover potential gaps in support needed in order to get to impact. This parallels other efforts to map the steps from data production to impact, such as Open Data Watch's "data value chain" and AidData's "four C's" framework.



1. Support governance data activities that are problem-driven, not data-driven.

The data initiatives often highlighted as successful tend to be those designed to shed light on and address a particular underlying problem,² often defined by those closest to it and based on a clear understanding of the role of data in helping to address that problem. In practice, many governance data projects are designed around a pre-defined set of data, why and how the data should be produced or made open and/or the norms and standards for openness. This can be said for some national open data initiatives, which tend to have multiple and diffuse aims and are often designed and launched to fulfill government transparency commitments rather than in service of specific governance reforms. This has arguably led to a prioritization of reporting over meaningful disclosure and use of the data, as an evaluation demonstrated in the case of EITI.³ While increased reporting can be a critical step in governance reform, investments in data production are often based on an untested assumption that data is a prerequisite for reform and that more openness, in whatever form, is intrinsically good.

A potentially more effective approach to designing governance data projects or components is to start by clearly identifying and understanding the specific governance challenge that funding seeks to address and then considering whether and how data (as well as the infrastructure and skills needed to effectively produce and use the data) are a necessary or optimal part of addressing that challenge. According to one donor representative, this should also include a more rigorous assessment of the costs and risks of data disclosure and use in addition to their benefits. As another program officer pointed out, some transparency and accountability initiatives have started to do this by developing a business or economic case for transparency (although these efforts have focused less on developing country contexts). Cost-benefit considerations can help to avoid too great a focus on “form over function” and should be made throughout the course of an investment to ensure grantees and programs are able to course correct and adapt to changing needs and circumstances.

At the same time, as another interviewee noted, funding that does not target a specific governance challenge, but instead supports the broader enabling environment for governance data production and disclosure (for example, funding

2. Verhulst and Young, 2017.

3. Ibid.

for data infrastructure, data literacy and interoperability) may be far removed from the governance reforms they seek to influence, yet are critical to building the foundations for data use and impact. Nevertheless, these investments should still be shaped by a clear understanding of the change process they seek to initiate or influence.

Examples of Problem-Driven Data Initiatives

Development Gateway's Results Data Initiative uses a problem-driven, iterative and adaptive (PDIA) approach to engage senior government officials in partner countries in articulating the policy challenges they aim to solve before focusing on addressing their information needs and the types of data they would need to support decision-making. This helps to ensure a focus beyond reporting processes on data that is relevant, useful and used. This initiative is supporting Malawi's Ministry of Agriculture, Irrigation and Water Development in designing an agriculture management information system based on the challenges government and non-governmental stakeholders aim to solve and the information they need to inform decision-making.

The Open Contracting Partnership also engages with users early on to define context-specific challenges and reforms needed in designing country implementation programs. In the case of Ukraine, one of the main challenges identified by the local project ProZorro was that not enough businesses were participating in the procurement system given its reputation as corrupt and difficult to use. The project engaged with companies directly to understand and articulate this problem before developing a platform to facilitate the use of procurement data and encourage business participation in public tenders. As a result, the average number of bids per tender increased significantly. (Marchessault, 2016).

Strengthening alignment and collaboration between global governance initiatives and local or national reform efforts has the potential to encourage more meaningful disclosure and use of governance data in developing countries. This is not to say that global governance data produced as a global public good (i.e. IBP's Open Budget Survey) are less effective at addressing governance challenges and achieving outcomes than national or sub-national data programs tailored to the specific governance context, particularly given divergent aims and target audiences (i.e. diagnosing governance weaknesses across countries as opposed to shedding light on potential solutions to these weaknesses for in-country reformers).⁴ However, as Custer et al. (2016a) recommend, more could be done by funders to encourage global governance data initiatives to engage with and support in-country actors and ensure the data is used to identify contextually appropriate challenges and solutions. To understand how to address a specific problem through data, Verhulst and Young (2017) recommend bringing data experts together with domain, sector and country specialists with a deep understanding of the nature and context of the problem.

Guiding question for funders and grantees

Are activities to promote data use designed to address a context-specific governance problem?

4. Custer et al. 2016a.

2. Identify and take steps to understand and engage governance data users throughout implementation.

There is a current consensus that investments in data should be user-centered and demand driven, yet many governance data initiatives are designed with limited knowledge of various potential user groups

There is a current consensus that investments in data should be user-centered and demand driven, yet many governance data initiatives are designed with limited knowledge of various potential user groups, their common and distinct demands for information, and whether and how they might actually use the data. As noted above, data users can encompass a broad range of actors depending on the initiative, including funders and implementers, intermediaries such as civic technologists or developers that can reuse, analyze and interpret the data, as well as civil society and citizens. Targeted users can also be distinct from the ultimate beneficiaries of an intervention – for example, the civil society organization BudgIT works to improve public spending transparency and efficiency for the benefit of all Nigerian citizens by mining, analyzing and visualizing budget data in a way that promotes consumption of the information by specific actors, such as the National Assembly. Yet, many transparency and accountability initiatives are designed without taking into consideration the specific preferences or barriers to data use faced by certain groups, particularly women (for instance, the 2017 Open Data Barometer found that women are less likely to be online than men and are less likely to be consulted on the design of data policies). In the case of global governance data produced by international organizations, direct engagement with targeted users (primarily senior public officials, civil society and media groups) is often ad hoc and short-term.⁵ Moreover, funding to raise awareness and promote use of data is often limited at both the national and international levels.⁶

Recognizing this, some governance data funders are investing in more tactical and systematic engagement of various user groups through data use strategies and user-centered design approaches, which are guiding the work of such organizations and initiatives as the Open Contracting Partnership, the International Aid Transparency Initiative, Development Initiatives, Development Gateway, among others. As many donor staff indicated, many of these investments are also consciously working to identify and engage with intermediaries⁷ to bridge the gaps between data production, use

5. Custer et al. 2016a.

6. For example, in the case of national statistics data, developing countries reported a lack of resources to promote user education (OECD, 2017).

7. Intermediaries, or "infomediaries" as they are often referred to, are professional data users and developers that work to make data relevant, accessible and useable for end users.

and impact. To further encourage data use among women, Equal Measures 2030 recommends that transparency and accountability initiatives should engage with girls' and women's movements and advocates at the forefront of change.⁸ Yet, as one program officer noted, identifying the right grantees to fund on the demand side is more easily said than done: there is a dearth of user experience (UX) expertise in developing countries skilled in working with data users, and many of the community organizations doing significant work on the demand side are often not large enough or lack the data literacy skills to fall on funders' radars and receive significant grant funding. Funding may therefore also be needed to strengthen UX capabilities and actors to facilitate user-centered design approaches in developing countries.

Based on these efforts, lessons are emerging on the importance of funding to a) identify specific user groups and use cases; b) understand their capabilities and skills to use the data; c) engage users throughout design and implementation; and d) promote access that suits users' preferences.

a. Identify Data Users and Use Cases

From the start, governance data initiatives should be based on an understanding of various user groups and their demands for accessing and using governance data.⁹ Once the governance challenge and objective have been clearly defined, the stakeholders with the ability and/or motivation to address (or who are already working to address) this challenge can be mapped out and their needs assessed in terms of information, tools and resources. One straightforward way of doing this is by interviewing or surveying stakeholders before a project begins as well as throughout implementation. The Open Contracting Partnership (OCP) has developed a guide outlining how to identify stakeholders and define use cases in designing open contracting projects in implementing countries (see Box below on defining use cases).¹⁰ On a global scale, AidData has undertaken cross-country surveys of policymakers and practitioners in developing countries to understand how and why they might use certain data in their work, and to understand their unmet needs for information.¹¹ Broad user groups are also not homogenous; within government, for example, mid-level administrators might demand data to address efficiency, while high-level leaders might be more interested in promoting visibility or supporting reform efforts.

8. Holder, 2018.

9. Custer and Sethi, 2017.

10. Marchessault, 2016.

11. This includes global surveys of education policymakers as well as Governance Data Alliance snap polls of public, private and civil society leaders.

In some cases, clearly defined demand for data may not exist, and there may be a need to broadly demonstrate the value of data and possible use cases to spark interest and build momentum. For example, some open data initiatives have focused on publishing available “low-hanging fruit” datasets, or those that can be easily published online in open formats in order to generate initial momentum and encourage transparency commitments.¹² In the case of aid

Defining Use Cases

Open Contracting

Local implementation of open contracting initiatives can involve many different and diverse actors motivated by different goals. The Open Contracting Partnership developed a straightforward **use case guide** for procurement data in a given context. This involves four steps: **identifying stakeholder groups** (including users), **figuring out what they want**, **mapping supply of data with demand**, and then **documenting use and impact**. To figure out what stakeholders (and potential users) want or need in terms of information, they engage with them – through questionnaires (which they share online), interviews and workshops. This process can be adapted to work through uses cases of other transparency initiatives and can also help funders and grantees to further define the problem and contextually-appropriate solutions they aim to support.

Beneficial Ownership Transparency

Forstater (2017) demonstrates the need for a more nuanced understanding of governance objectives, user groups, use cases, data and publication channels, and their relative costs and benefits in determining the most effective channels of public financial transparency, as opposed to pushing for across-the-board, maximum transparency requirements. In the case of beneficial ownership data, two primary use cases are explored: 1) enabling those responsible for corruption and crime to be tracked down after the fact, and 2) reducing the risk that companies and public entities will be engaged in fraud, embezzlement or money laundering in advance. The first use case is more relevant for a smaller number of users, such as enforcement agencies, whereas reducing risk and promoting good behavior is relevant to all companies doing business in the country. The assessment also weighs the costs and risks to privacy from different publication approaches.

transparency, a USAID evaluation of IATI country pilots found a need to encourage “latent demand”, as citizens often became interested in aid data only once they were able to see how it related to their lives.¹³ Certain types of governance data may be more effective in building demand: World Bank (2017) highlights the use of comparative data on performance of government programs or jurisdictions as particularly powerful in helping to generate attention and spur action.

b. Understand users’ capabilities, skills and ability to act

Beyond demand, capacities of various users and intermediaries in terms of their data and technological literacy, access to technology, and ability to interpret and act on the data are key factors to consider when designing interventions. Although not all investments will focus on capacity building, it is nonetheless important to understand and acknowledge capacity gaps and their potential to undermine results. In the case of civil society and media organizations, for example, despite their stated demand for information, they may lack the tools and skills to manage, interpret and visualize raw data.

Whether or not users are able to act upon governance data not only depends on capabilities, but also on incentives, access and power – what they are able and willing to do. Mapping out stakeholder groups and assessing their needs and capabilities should therefore consider not only data/technological literacy and infrastructure, but also their motivation and ability to address the governance challenge, including through softer skills such as change management, leadership, advocacy and networking capabilities.¹⁴ Interventions can be designed to either address the gaps or leverage existing capabilities, incentives and influence of stakeholder groups in using and acting upon governance data.

c. Engage users in design, implementation and adaptation

Targeted users should be engaged in projects from the beginning and given channels and opportunities to provide feedback along the way.¹⁵ Given the trial and error involved in aligning supply and demand for data, investments should be flexible enough to allow for iteration based on user feedback. This includes input from any intermediary organizations that analyze, interpret and present the data, the actors in charge of implementing solutions as well as end users. This is particularly important for creating feedback loops

12. Davies, 2014.

13. USAID, 2015.

14. OECD, 2017.

15. World Bank, 2017; Davies, 2014.

Whether or not users are able to act upon governance data not only depends on capabilities, but also on incentives, access, and power – what they are able and willing to do

between data producers and users and ensuring that producers understand the intended and actual uses of the data.¹⁶

This aligns with iterative and adaptive approaches to governance reform that encourage experimentation and adaptation based on tight feedback loops integrated with decision-making – an approach Development Gateway is adopting in its Results Data Initiative to gather continuous feedback and make changes to the data and tools they employ throughout the course of the project. The World Bank (2017) has used surveys as a way to measure user satisfaction with data and platforms that publish the data, although these have often taken the form of a limited exercise at the start or end of a project. Additionally, the World Bank recently announced another round of funding to support the “Collaborative Data Innovations for Sustainable Development” initiative, which calls for collaborative applications for funding that include the user in addition to the project team.

d. Promote access that suits user preferences and capabilities

How governance data is published and promoted influences the extend to which users are motivated and able to access and use the data. While data visualizations and new technology platforms can increase data accessibility and usability, whether this leads to greater uptake and impact will depend on the preferences and capabilities of particular users. In contexts where data and technological literacy is low, traditional media publication channels are still widely used and preferred, yet can be underutilized given trends in technology-enabled initiatives.¹⁷ The implications of a digital divide in developing countries (such as between women and men, or rural and urban populations) should also be considered in assessing various strategies to target end users as equitably and sustainably as possible.

For some users, the value of intermediaries as channels to raise awareness and promote access can be critical to ensuring data can be translated into meaningful information. In Nigeria, newspapers, social media and online visualizations created by intermediaries like BudgIT have been key to stimulating public interest and engagement around national budget allocation.¹⁸ In the case of Kenya’s Open Data Initiative, surveyed users stated they preferred the data visualizations and applications created by Code4Kenya, a civic data and tech organization, to the raw datasets provided on the Kenya Open Data platform; although due to limited resources for promotion and

16. Development Gateway, 2017.

17. Tamaki et al. 2016.

18. Mejabi, O. et al., 2014.

advocacy, there was low awareness and usage of Code4Kenya's applications.¹⁹ Intermediaries can also be critical to articulating user demand for information and shaping implementation of data initiatives more in line with user preferences.²⁰ This includes identifying appropriate channels and formats in which to publish data, particularly in contexts where digital access to information is limited. In some cases, intermediaries can serve to bring together online and offline forms of data collection and publication methods in line with different preferences among users.

Guiding question for funders and grantees

*Have governance data users and use cases been clearly identified and would users be engaged during the course of the project?
Have barriers to data use been considered for marginalized groups (including women)?*

3. Prioritize efforts to produce or leverage actionable governance data (relevant/aligned with demand, timely, credible, feasible and accessible).

Demand for data and the use cases identified should be aligned with supply to determine whether the right data exists or can be produced to meet identified needs. The capacity and resources needed to produce relevant and timely data at the level of quality demanded are easy to underestimate, given that much of the governance data published is often not what potential users want or need. At the global level, data produced from

¹⁹. Mutuku and Mahihu, 2014.

²⁰. Davies, 2014.

Demand for data and the use cases identified should be aligned with supply to determine whether the right data exists or can be produced to meet identified needs

cross-country governance assessments may or may not yield context-specific or actionable insights for policymakers, which can limit relevance and influence on country-level governance reforms.²¹ As one program officer noted, a distinction should be made between global governance data that is prescriptive as opposed to descriptive, or data that goes beyond benchmarking governance to providing insights into possible solutions, which tend to be considered more useful and actionable by in-country reformers. For example, the Open Budget Index not only provides a ranking of countries based on their level of budget transparency (descriptive), but also provides recommendations for concrete reforms to improve different dimensions of budget transparency (prescriptive).

In developing countries, the capacity of governments and other data producers to publish data in machine-readable formats is typically very limited, and therefore governance data quality tends to be lacking on multiple dimensions (accuracy, completeness, timeliness, machine readability, disaggregation, interoperability, etc.), hindering the utility of much of the data that is made available. Even in cases where governments are committed to producing data on a regular basis, this often requires existing data infrastructure, internet connectivity, digitized records, and adequate staff resources and capacity, many of which are missing in developing country contexts.

Poor data quality might also be a reason for why country-level data is not published in the first place. According to the 2017 Open Data Barometer, critical data on public resources are some of the least open, although there could be various reasons for this, including the politically sensitive nature of the data or limited capacity to manage and digitize the data. Similarly, the 2017 Open Budget Survey found that many governments are backsliding on budget transparency by making less budget information available than in previous years.

Whether and how governance data is used also depends on trust in the data and who produces it. While governance data produced by international organizations are often viewed as more credible and influential overall than data produced by governments or NGOs, these data can be less contextually relevant and at times less valuable to informing local solutions, although as noted above, they can still lead to actionable recommendations.²² When it comes to governance data produced by developing country governments, additional steps might be needed to build confidence in the data they disclose to encourage use.²³ In the case of budget data, Dener and Min (2013) recommend a number of technical steps to improving reliability and integrity of the

21. Custer et al., 2016a. Although indices such as the Open Budget Survey do suggest concrete actions and reforms for each country to consider in improving budget transparency.

22. Custer et al., 2016a.

23. Dener and Min, 2013.

data, including displaying the system name, date and time stamp on official reports, and implementing safeguards to protect data from unauthorized modification. To ensure continuity and timeliness in the release and update of data, procedures should be in place for updating and publishing the data on a regular basis – for example, budget data should be released in time to inform and assess budget plans and execution reports as they become available.

Input and participation of independent experts outside of government can also be an effective way of building trust in data and encouraging use. In the case of a World Bank project to improve official poverty estimates in Peru, rather than providing traditional technical assistance to support the National Statistical Office in releasing new poverty data, the Bank set up an external advisory committee of poverty experts from diverse sectors (including the public sector, academia and international organizations) to agree on the way to produce comparable data. This helped to restore the public’s trust in the data released by the NSO.²⁴

In practice, aligning supply and demand for governance data is challenging across different user groups. While citizens tend to want access to information that is easily digestible and locally relevant, technologists and other more advanced data users may prefer raw, machine-readable datasets for them to reuse, emphasizing again the need to clearly define the target users and use cases of these investments.²⁵ Many users are interested in insights derived from more than one type of data (for example, comparing information on government transfers to their communities, payments made for services, and results achieved, i.e. data to “follow the money”);²⁶ however, funders tend to support the production of single-issue data streams that, on their own, may have limited relevance for users. One approach would be to focus on common data needs identified across relevant user groups, based on existing capacities to produce the data. The costs, benefits and sustainability of providing highly relevant data for various users should be assessed against available resources to identify feasible solutions.

Guiding question for funders and grantees

Would the grant be able to produce or leverage governance data that is actionable (relevant/aligned with demand, timely, credible, and accessible)?

²⁴. World Bank, 2017.

²⁵. Custer et al., 2016b.

²⁶. Development Gateway, 2017.

4. Align country support for governance data with governance reforms and moments.

In order for investments in governance data to lead to sustainable outcomes, this calls for an understanding not only of the governance challenge in question, but also how change happens in specific contexts, who to engage and how

The outcomes of most governance data investments – regardless of whether the focus is on influencing government or changes outside of government – rely in no small part on the enabling environment in which data is introduced, including the culture, institutions, and policy and legal frameworks that shape incentives and capabilities for data production, sharing and use. In contrast to the rapid pace of the data revolution, the contribution of governance data to improvements in transparency, participation and accountability generally requires culture and institutional shifts that take time and generally cannot be addressed by changes in data production and analytics alone. In some contexts, for example, decisions tend to be based more on consensus than driven by evidence, and changes in data disclosure alone are not likely to change that.²⁷ In order for investments in governance data to lead to sustainable outcomes, this calls for an understanding not only of the governance challenge in question, but also how change happens in specific contexts, who to engage and how.

In many countries, the publication of governance data allows for unprecedented visibility into the operations and resources of government and can require a shift in mindset towards seeing data as a public, non-excludable good.²⁸ This can be particularly difficult in the context of “politically inconvenient” data or data of low quality, which is often the case for public spending data in developing countries. As one program officer emphasized, the data released are often not the data that the publishers themselves use in decision-making (a process referred to as “dogfooding” in the tech field), limiting the quality of what’s made available. This shift in mindset requires sufficient buy-in of data producers (often governments) to ensure they go beyond commitments to openness to delivering data that is relevant, complete and accessible, as well as maintaining the data and responding to feedback beyond the timeframe of donor support. Political will is identified by the Open Data Barometer as the “key factor that makes or breaks the success of {an open data initiative}”.²⁹

²⁷. Rustad et al., 2017.

²⁸. Dem and Min, 2013.

²⁹. World Wide Web Foundation, 2017.

Investments in governance data tend to be more effective when they are aligned with the current political discourse and ongoing efforts to promote openness and accountability in developing countries. Donor funding for evidence-driven policy-making has been noted to increase responsiveness of domestic policymakers to donor agendas rather than supporting national policymaking and reform.³⁰ By contrast, technology and transparency initiatives in the Philippines were shown to have a greater likelihood of success when they were integrated in reform efforts at the national or international level that already have traction, high-level commitment and dedicated resources.³¹ For example, integrating transparency commitments into OGP National Action Plans or linking data disclosure with right to information laws can lead to greater visibility, priority and scrutiny of proposed reforms. A study of an open budget data initiative in Indonesia similarly found that success is more likely when the data supported existing discourses related to budget transparency.³²

The timing of data interventions can also be key to their effectiveness. Certain triggers leading to advances in fiscal transparency and participation within countries include political transitions that give voice to opposition parties, fiscal and economic crises that force governments to introduce greater fiscal oversight, and publicized cases of corruption that put pressure on governments to improve access to fiscal information.³³ With the right flexibility and responsiveness, governance data initiatives can better anticipate, adapt and respond to data needs during these “critical junctures” for governance reform, such as before, during or in the immediate aftermaths of elections or at the outset of a political or economic crisis.³⁴

In order to institutionalize commitments to openness and the roles and responsibilities for capturing, publishing and using governance data, funding can enhance sustainability and effectiveness by helping to address or advocate for legal and regulatory frameworks that define the data to be published and prioritized and their disclosure requirements. This includes policies to secure the commitment of governments to making information open, such as Right to Information (RTI) Laws, as well as policies specifically related to the proactive disclosure and timely reporting of fiscal and performance data. Specific guidance is offered by initiatives such as the Open Contracting Partnership and International Budget Partnership, as well as the open data community. According to the Open Data Charter, open data policies should articulate the “processes; responsibilities; timelines; resources; appropriate privacy and data protection safeguards; and the national institutions

30. Shaxson et al., 2016.

31. Custer et al., 2016b.

32. Srimarga et al., 2014.

33. Khagram, Fung and de Renzio, 2013.

34. Green, 2017.

or authorities in charge of its execution to establish a general right to reuse by means of an explicit ‘**open by default**’ mandate” and a data management strategy and practice should be put in place.³⁵ As one program officer noted, RTI legislation can also help to prioritize certain types of data for proactive disclosure based on feasibility and need (i.e. budget-related data), particularly when data provisions and publication requirements are embedded in the law. In practice, however, legal and policy frameworks for disclosing governance data often face many challenges to implementation, although there are isolated examples on the use of RTI leading to increased transparency and exposing corruption.

Guiding question for funders and grantees

Would data activities at the country level leverage existing governance/open data reforms, institutional frameworks and “moments”?

There is often significant use of governance data, but the stories and evidence are not being captured rigorously

5. Measure governance data uptake and impact.

There is currently a misconception that the governance data produced is not being used; when in fact, there is often significant use of the data, but the stories and evidence are not yet being captured rigorously or systematically. Many assessments of governance data initiatives to date rely on measuring outputs (commitments made, data released, reports produced, visualizations created, etc.) or on anecdotes that attempt to plausibly link the contributions of data to changes in decision-making and governance outcomes. Some initiatives have resisted measuring progress more on the basis of intermediate outcomes (such as data use) and impacts (changes in governance), given

³⁵. World Wide Web Foundation, 2017.

the number of confounding variables and the challenges in attributing changes in governance specifically to data and information.³⁶ There also may be a lack of clarity on the link between data and impact, particularly given the unintended outcomes may come from these investments – as one grantee noted, simply the practice of collecting governance data can spark interest, encourage engagement and lead to changes in behavior without the data necessarily being used.

Although the impact of governance data projects relies on some factors beyond their control, this nevertheless calls for improvements in measurement, learning and evaluation of these initiatives to better diagnose, analyze and evaluate progress more objectively. One program officer noted that this should not be limited to evaluating particular investments, but include field research into how data are used to influence governance reforms more broadly. Particularly as strategies of funders are shifting to focus more on the demand side of governance data, this is important not only for improving outcomes of individual investments, but also advancing learning and evidence of what works for the field.

Funders can incentivize better evaluation practices along the entire data value chain, while also recognizing that longer-term outcomes and impact may take longer to realize than the project timeframe. Given the challenges of predicting and measuring governance outcomes, some funders, such as Hewlett Foundation and Omidyar Network, are encouraging grantees to document qualitative evidence of data use and stories of what they have found to be truly impactful in their projects. This provides them with the flexibility to define and capture outcomes and impacts that are context-specific and that they might not have otherwise predicted. Some governance initiatives are also adopting flexible, multi-stakeholder approaches to monitoring, evaluation and learning. The Open Contracting Partnership's new learning framework combines a number of quantitative and qualitative approaches to measuring progress on multiple fronts, and engages internal and external stakeholders in assessing implementation, advocacy tactics, and their overall strategy.³⁷

Guiding question for funders and grantees

Does the grant plan to measure and monitor governance data-related outcomes, including data use and impact on decision-making, engagement and accountability?

³⁶ Rustad et al., 2017.

³⁷ Open Contracting Partnership, 2016.

6. Explore coordinated funding arrangements to better link governance data supply and demand.

Investments in governance data grapple with some of the same development effectiveness challenges as in other sectors

Investments in governance data grapple with some of the same development effectiveness challenges as in other sectors, including short-term perspectives, limited coordination, duplication and lack of alignment with national development plans. Often, longer-term costs of governance data initiatives are underestimated or not estimated at all beyond the project's timeframe. This includes the recurring costs of analyzing and updating data; building and maintaining systems and infrastructure; continuing to engage with users to meet their needs; and ongoing dissemination, advocacy and capacity building. In order to achieve lasting progress, the greatest funding needs of governance data initiatives are likely not in data or technology, but in skills, incentives and systems – including the costs of training on data literacy and analytics; developing systems to support publication, access and use; strengthening leadership, political will and capacity, particularly within government; and building coalitions of support.³⁸ Regarding funding for development data more broadly, evaluations conducted by the World Bank Trust Fund for Statistical Capacity Building highlighted “the small size of stand-alone grants and resulting loss of cost-effectiveness”.³⁹

Funders could do more to encourage multi-stakeholder collaboration and better link efforts on data supply and demand. While some funding for governance data is channeled through trust funds and global partnerships to streamline cooperation (including support provided to EITI, IATI, Open Contracting Partnership, OGP, IBP, etc.), there are missed opportunities to better link stand-alone efforts and collaborate across funders, particularly those that invest in different stakeholder groups or parts of the data value chain where synergies are evident. As one program officer noted, private foundations that tend to invest more in the “demand side”, often focused on supporting and empowering non-governmental actors, often run up against limited capacity of governments to provide the data these actors need, which is typically not a challenge they are focused on addressing.

There have been some efforts to partner with funders and initiatives that are focused on the “supply side”, such as efforts by the World Bank and Canada to build statistical capacity of governments to produce data. Some funding

³⁸. World Bank, 2017.

³⁹. OECD, 2017.

approaches suggested by the OECD's Data for Development Report (2017) to bring in more financing for development data and improve coordination and alignment include the use of "data compacts," or country-led approaches to establishing holistic programs and action plans for development data, as well as donor alliances to share strategic plans and information across countries. Lessons can also be taken from the World Bank's "Collaborative Data Innovations for Sustainable Development" initiative that provides funding to a consortium of different types of organizations (two at the minimum) that must include end users as part of the project team's applications. Governance data funders could explore possible entry points and opportunities to collaborate with and learn from these emerging funding efforts.

Guiding questions for funders

Does the grant plan to leverage or partner with other funders/ initiatives/governments to better link the supply side and demand side of the data in question?

Recap of Guiding Questions for Funders:

1. Are activities to promote data use designed to address a context-specific governance problem?
2. Have governance data users and use cases been clearly identified and would users be engaged during the course of the project? Have barriers to data use been considered for marginalized groups (including women)?
3. Would the grant be able to produce or leverage governance data that is actionable (relevant/aligned with demand, timely, credible, and accessible)?
4. Would data activities at the country level leverage existing governance/open data reforms, institutional frameworks and “moments”?
5. Does the grant plan to measure and monitor governance data-related outcomes, including data use and impact on decision-making, engagement and accountability?
6. Does the grant plan to leverage or partner with other funders/initiatives/governments to better link the supply side and demand side of the data in question?

III. Future Areas of Research

- 1. Demand for governance data at the sub-national level.** Thus far, assessments of in-country need for governance data have largely focused on users at the national-level, and have not yet explored potential divergences with sub-national entities and how to make investments more relevant for their needs. As Development Gateway found through their Results Data Initiative, there is often a gap between national and sub-national data needs – local actors tend to require highly context specific information that can be difficult and costly to provide. Sub-national use of data is currently an area AidData is keen to explore in terms of how the requirements, challenges and use cases differ depending on geography.
- 2. Factors influencing the decision to participate and take action.** Going beyond understanding and responding to demands for information, there is a need to better understand specific factors that might influence the motivations and incentives to engage and

There is often a gap between national and sub-national data needs – local actors tend to require highly context specific information that can be difficult and costly to provide

take action on the basis of information. For example, a survey conducted in Germany of citizens' willingness to participate in open government projects found that citizens were less willing to participate if they found the project was too complex, and were more willing if they considered the project to be fun.⁴⁰ While findings are likely to be highly context specific, this could represent the next frontier in research on data use and impact.


- 3. New methods to measure outcomes of information/evidence campaigns.** Are there innovative ways to try and overcome some of the challenge of measuring outcomes and impact in the transparency and accountability space? For example, could the use of key words and concepts be injected into high-profile data projects and then tracked and monitored over time as a way of attributing influence and impact?
- 4. Effective sequencing of investments.** There is some debate over the right sequencing of reforms in the open data/governance fields. Some argue that a strong legal framework and right to access information should precede efforts to broadly release data, while others stress the need to build demand for data and demonstrate its value in addressing specific challenges before tackling broader policy or institutional change. While there are many different routes to transparency and accountability, which differ significantly across contexts, more research is needed to inform how best

⁴⁰ Attard et al., 2015.

to coordinate and link these efforts at different stages of implementation to promote greater efficiency and sustainability of investments.

- 5. Evaluating different funding instruments and arrangements for governance data.** It would be useful to assess the different financing arrangements and pooling mechanisms for governance data (i.e. trust funds, partnerships, individual grants and projects) and their relative effectiveness in delivering governance outcomes. A recent paper from Open Data Watch explores the potential of establishing a global fund for development data, drawing from lessons of previous global fund arrangements.
- 6. Measuring the costs and return on investment of governance data initiatives.** There have been limited efforts to quantify the costs and benefits of investing in governance data in developing countries, which could be helpful in making case to donors and recipient governments for continued funding and in determining which types of investments are most cost-effective. This could draw from R4D's Open Government costing framework and methodology for estimating the costs of open government reforms, as one of the only studies in the Open Government field to have done this.⁴¹

41. Vissapragada and Joswiak, 2017.



Are there innovative ways to try and overcome some of the challenge of measuring outcomes and impact in the transparency and accountability space?

IV. Existing guidance and resources for improving the effectiveness and impact of governance data initiatives

OPEN DATA FOR DEVELOPMENT

- ODI has provided [12 recommendations](#) to governments on sustaining open data change and realizing its impact.
- Sunlight Foundation's "[A Guide to Tactical Data Engagement](#)" (2017) provides guidance specifically at the city level to improving the social impact of open government data.
- OECD's Development Cooperation Report "[Data for Development](#)" (2017) outlines six actions to make the most of data for sustainable development.
- GovLab's "[Open Data in Developing Economies](#)" (2017) offers

strategies to maximize the contributions of open data to development. Previously, they summarized their recommendations from several country case studies as part of a [Next Generation Open Data Roadmap](#) in 2016.

- Open Data Barometer assesses not only readiness but also use and impact of open data. The [2017 Global Report](#) provides recommendations based on their findings.
- The UN's Open Government Data and Services provides [guidelines](#) on how to design, implement and sustain open government data initiatives (2013).
- AidData's "From Pork to Performance: Open Government and Program Performance Tracking in the Philippines" (2016) outlines five operating principles critical to sustaining progress.
- AidData's "[Decoding Data Use](#)" report (2017) provides recommendations on improving the impact of data on the basis of feedback from leaders in developing countries on the types of data and analysis they use.
- Development Initiatives' [Development Data Assessment](#) (2017) provides a methodology to support governments in identifying quality data for decision-making.
- World Bank's Independent Evaluation Group (IEG)'s [evaluation](#) of Bank support for development data provides recommendations for how the World Bank can improve its support, which is likely relevant for other funders.
- Open Data Watch and Data2X unpack the [Data Value Chain](#) and how it can be used to track progress and evaluate the processes of data production and use.
- More broadly, Shaxson et. al. (2016) outlines a checklist of questions for government departments to assess their strengths and weaknesses of scoping, assembling, procuring, interpreting and applying evidence (not necessarily related to development).



GOVERNANCE DATA

- Open Contracting's guide to [defining the use case](#) (2016) .
- International Budget Partnership's "[How Does Civil Society Use Budget Information? Mapping Fiscal Transparency Gaps and Needs in Developing Countries](#)" (2016) includes a survey questionnaire structure and design for identifying the uses of budget data
- OECD [Budget Transparency Toolkit](#) (2017) identifies topics of importance to budget transparency and identifies key areas for action.
- The Global Initiative for Fiscal Transparency [provides recommendations](#) to better understanding the open budget data landscape.
- The World Bank provides [recommendations](#) on how to improve EITI data reporting (2016).
- EITI Impact Assessments (conducted by [GIZ](#) and by [Norway Peace Research Institute](#)) measure contributions to outcomes and impact and provide recommendations
- AidData's "[Governance Data: Who Uses It and Why](#)" (2016) and "In the Eye of the Beholder: When is governance data good enough?" (2016) evaluate the use of global governance data among policymakers and practitioners in developing countries and offer recommendations for improving data uptake.

ASSESSING OPEN DATA FOR ACCOUNTABILITY INITIATIVES

- Open Data Institute outlines the [various tools and approaches available](#) for assessing aspects of an open data initiative, from capacity to implement an open data initiative (such as the World Bank's Open Data Readiness Assessment), implementation (such as Open Data Inventory, Open Data Index, Open Data Barometer) and impact.



- OECD's "[Towards an Empirical Analysis of Open Government Data Initiative](#)" (2013) offers a methodology and analytical framework for the empirical analysis of OGD initiatives.
- World Wide Web Foundation and GovLab's [common methods for assessment framework](#) (2014)
- Mexico's [Open Government Metric](#) (2017) measures progress on adopting open government across public agencies.
- Open Contracting Partnership's [learning framework](#) (2016) outlines their approach for evaluating progress on implementation, advocacy and strategy.



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