



Open Data Intermediaries for Non-State Actors in Cambodia

Summary Report

Dr. Pak Kimchoeun





Disclaimer

This study was supported by the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade through The Asia Foundation's Ponlok Chomnes: Data and Dialogue for Development in Cambodia program. The views expressed in this study are the author's alone and are not necessarily the views of the Australian Government or The Asia Foundation.

Copyright © The Asia Foundation 2023

Executive Summary

As Cambodia becomes more developed, policy interventions need to be based on reliable data to be effective. Promoting open government data is one part of the effort to improve data governance for policy purposes. Open data will not only help promote transparency within the Government but also empower non-state actors to engage, provide feedbacks and hold the Government accountable. In Cambodia, non-state actors have made only slow progress regarding data access and data use for policy purposes. One solution suggested by international examples for improving data sharing and use is to have data intermediaries.

This study seeks to assess the feasibility of setting up open data intermediaries for non-state actors in Cambodia and to provide key strategic considerations. The study builds on recent studies on public policy and the research sector in Cambodia. In addition, international literature was reviewed and interviews and focus group discussions (FGDs) conducted with international experts, key policymakers, NGOs, young researchers, and university students. A verification workshop was conducted on the preliminary findings of the study.

An open data intermediary is defined as an agent (i) positioned at some point in a data supply chain that incorporates an open dataset, (ii) positioned between two agents in the supply chain, and (iii) facilitates the use of the open data that may otherwise not have been the case. It is important that prospective data intermediaries define and justify their roles especially in terms of how they can help address data sharing and use.

Experiences in other countries and in Cambodia suggest similar sets of challenges when it comes to data sharing and use. Those include lack of incentives to share data, commercial, ethical, risks associated with data sharing, and cost of data access and sharing. Risks associated with data sharing include legal and regulatory risks, ethical risks, reputational risks, and commercial risks. Several possible solutions can be considered to prevent and mitigate these risks, including anonymization, synthetic data, sharing under contract, engaging third-party data stewards, engaging the community, and describing and documenting the data.

Reflecting to the case of Cambodia, the study found that it is feasible to have open data intermediaries for non-state actors in Cambodia. This is because there are: 1) many opportunities in terms of a conducive policy environment, 2) areas for non-state actors to contribute, 3) willingness to collaborate from different stakeholders, 4) existing capacities (although with some limitations) and 5) the many low-hanging fruits that can be focused on in the short and medium-terms. However, the feasibility also depends on how the prospective intermediaries manage to: 1) address their weaknesses, especially in terms of technical and human resources, 2) mitigate any risks associated with data sharing, and 3) gradually build trust among key stakeholders, especially with relevant Government agencies.

There are two possible types of open data intermediaries to be considered. Based on the interviews, those are 1) Issue-focus open data intermediaries: These refer to those organizations that focus on specific issues such as public budget transparency, local governance, social protection, education, health, agriculture, etc. The institutions best suited in these categories are the existing umbrella NGOs who work to assist their members and jointly advocate for policy changes in their areas of focus, and 2) Research-focus institutions: This category refers to academic institutions, think tanks, and universities whose main focus is not advocacy in specific areas but promoting research and the knowledge sector in general. Their beneficiaries are not limited but include researchers, media, and the general public.

To build and operate effective and sustainable data intermediaries, long term commitment and strategy together with specific critical details are needed. Long term commitment and contributions are expected from the prospective open data intermediaries themselves, development partners whose financial and technical support are critical at least in the short

and medium terms, and relevant government agencies whose collaboration is essential throughout the whole process. At the more operational level, the prospective data intermediaries need to pay more attention on getting the basics right from the starting phase, implementation phase, and sustaining and expanding phase.

References

- CDEI. (2021). *Unlocking the value of data: Exploring the role of data intermediaries*. London.
- Francois, S., Canares, M., Chattapadhyay, S., & Andrason, A. (2016). *Open data intermediaries in developing countries*. *The Journal of Community Informatics*, 1721-4441.
- IDB. (2018). *Toward an open data demand assessment and segmentation methodology*. Washington DC.
- Janssen Heleen, Singh Jatinder. (2022). *Data intermediary*. *Internet Policy Review*.
- NIS. (2021). *Draft Data User Engagement Strategy*. Phnom Penh.
- NIS. (Upcoming). *User Engagement Strategy (Draft)*. Phnom Penh.
- ODI. (2022). *Assessing risk when sharing data: A guide*. London.
- OECD. (2013). *Open government data: Towards empirical analysis of open government data initiatives*. OECD.
- RGC. (2018). *National Strategy for the Development of Statistics (2019-2023)*.
- RGC. (2021). *Cambodia Digital Economy and Society Policy Framework 2021-2035*. Phnom Penh.
- RGC. (2021). *Strategic Framework and Program for Cambodia's Economic Recovery (2021-2023)*.
- RGC. (2022). *Digital Government Policy*. Phnom Penh.
- The Foundation. (2022). *A Diagnostic Study on the Policy Process and Use of Data: The Case of Cambodia and Insights from ASEAN*, Phnom Penh. Phnom Penh.
- UNDESA. (2020). *E-Government survey for 2020*. New York.
- UNDESA. (2022). *E-Government survey 2022: The future of digital government*. New York.
- World Bank. (2021). *World Development Report 2021: Data for Better Lives*. Washington, DC.
- WTO. (2022). *Trade impacts of LDC graduation - Cambodia*.

Ponlok Chomnes is a four-year initiative (2019-2023) to strengthen the capacity of the knowledge sector and inform public policy analysis and dialogue in Cambodia. In partnership with the Australian Department of Foreign Affairs and Trade, The Asia Foundation is strengthening organizational and technical capacity among Cambodian research institutions and creating an enabling environment for policy dialogue.

CONTACT US

THE ASIA FOUNDATION | CAMBODIA OFFICE

#59, Oknha Peich (Street 242) Phnom Penh, Cambodia

ponlokchomnes@asiafoundation.org

+855 (0)23 210 431

<https://policypulse.org/>

