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SUSTAINABLE WORLD, GLOBAL

Training and advice for accessing open data for development

To deliver a game-changing development project aid agencies and support organisations need a thorough grasp of the country, region or issue they seek to support. Local knowledge is essential, but alongside that there needs to be access to a raft of data which forms the foundation to the design or sustainability of interventions and support activities.

The amount of detail required in preparing project proposals or compiling project reports is onerous. Funders want to see context and understand conditions before engaging in new projects or committing to continuing action.

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There is a website which provides important help, offering aid and development planners and operational staff a way into national-level open data, mainly produced or curated by international organisations. The service provides guidance and practical tutorials on using open source data. It deals with the realities of discovering and extracting relevant information and pays particular attention to difficulties accessing data or facing the problem of bugs and errors both in the source of the data and the data itself.

Sustainable World.com is the brainchild of Canadian, John Gordon. He has more than 45 years' experience working in and with developing countries, and he has worked at all levels of international technical assistance as a consultant, resident adviser, project manager and head of a non-governmental organisation. In the introduction to Sustainable World.com it says of Gordon, "Since 1984 he has concentrated on the practical application of information technology in developing countries in the field of agriculture, concentrating on food security and

safety, health, cleaner production, water and sanitation, WTO transparency and education."

He has turned his considerable operational experience to helping others design and implement projects for themselves. The site, which first appeared in 1998, is designed to provide access to a selected number of important and free international data-rich sites. It has developed over the subsequent years, but deliberately maintains a simple format that is easily accessible to those working in areas of the world where internet speed is slow and reliability intermittent. The service helps visitors understand and access open data, combined with training on open-source or free software, which can be used to connect to and analyse data. "The site has been developed to be of general interest, but particularly useful to governments, businesses and students in low-bandwidth areas in developing countries," the website states.

Gordon explains that most recently his site has supported, "UN Volunteers who have more than 350,000 registered online volunteers to try to link them effectively to data collecting activities with CGIAR organizations and Humanitarian Open Street Maps." Working with a diverse range of groups and supporting people who have little or no previous experience accessing open data does throw up problems, but the latest activity has effectively established a test project which can help improve analytical skills.

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systems and applications which are used to extract and analyse open data. The ability to link free operating systems to free information opens up a world of opportunity for many communities and development organisations around the world.

The service points users to other sources and gives confidence to seek out other free on-line data available from international sources.

There are limitations, as Sustainable World.com warns, "It is not possible on this website to track all databases. But information on a number of key databases will be updated regularly. The databases selected will be of particular interest to people working in demographics, agriculture, health and education."

The service points users to other sources and gives confidence to seek out other free on-line data available from international sources. These resources have increased since 2010 when large organisations implemented a policy making more of their data available. For instance, the World Bank which used to charge for its World Development Indicators and other data, now makes them available for downloading free.

Sustainable World.com estimates there are at least 46 free data bases on the World Bank's main data site alone, all available to download free of charge. Similar services are provided by many other international and national organisations, such as the United Nations, the Food and Agriculture Organisation, the European Union and the US Census Bureau.

Sustainable World.com has a specific interest, "Preference will be given to databases which provide data at the country level and have time series data. For population databases, at least three will be included which provide population projections to 2050 or longer." The databases it focuses on are updated regularly.

Naturally, it is not possible for one free website to track all databases. But the objective of Sustainable World.com is to help those learning about open data to discover how to search out and explore authoritative information for themselves.

Source:
<http://www.sustainableworld.com>
<http://www.sustainableworld.com/data/index.html>

