

GODAN, a vanguard global partnership

Data Revolution
for Agriculture

In the era of open data, agriculture and nutrition are starting to push forward. Indeed, in this as in so many other sectors, free access to high quality data is of vital importance. The Global Open Data for Agriculture and Nutrition (GODAN) Initiative, which held its first conference in January 2015 in the Netherlands has demonstrated this.

A global momentum for open data
GODAN was officially launched during the World Summit on Open Government Partnership meeting in October 31, 2013. The initiative -- a global partnership of 100 governments, international organisations, research organisations, universities, private sector -- is a follow up process to the G8 meeting in June 2013 on open

data. GODAN project partners subscribe to a set of principles in lieu of a collective statement. The American, British and Dutch governments are helping spearhead the project as it is being set up, but all partners are placed on an equal footing. A secretariat has been established, which is supported by the international NGO CABI. Martin Parr, Programme Head of Knowledge Management for International Development for CABI, who is responsible for GODAN secretariat operations, explains: "the secretariat is not an implementing body for GODAN activities. It is rather there to support GODAN; to help partners to shape their open data approaches in different ways." Specifically, the GODAN Secretariat will organise, with partners, several events, conferences and hackathons to present the project. It also aims to help identify champions and ambassadors of open data in the fields of agriculture and nutrition and give them the information needed to tell success stories of open data."

Agriculture and nutrition, specific issues
Other thematic areas are more advanced in on the road to openness; such as the health sector, where significant progress has been made in exchange and collaboration around the data. Agriculture and nutrition have not been the subject of significant attention from the international community until quite recently, which partly explains the delay. Optimistic about the development of open data in

the field of agriculture and nutrition, Martin Parr says "because of the connexion between openness of data and improved accountability and better management systems, there is now a greater drive to open up data in other areas, this is often seen by governments as a real boost economic development."

The data in question are many and varied. Martin Parr takes as an example data on plant pests and diseases. Although this data might be available, they may not be shared more widely or made open access for fear that disclosure would have a negative impact on business markets and decisions.

A matter of trust
Open data is a sensitive issue. It is not just a technical challenge. One of the main obstacles it faces is fear. Martin Parr says "It is not just about making data sets open. It is about issues of trust. Recognising that although there might be risks in opening data set there is also value in doing so because it allows you to plan for the future; it allows to create new tools, services and applications, which can help address underlying issues".

Another big barrier to opening data is being fearful about the quality of data because opening data without ensuring also its quality would be counterproductive.

Build local capacity to prevent a new technological gap
GODAN aims to promote the value of open data to economic growth and to



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feed a growing world population. These issues concern the entire international community. Southern partners are numerous among GODAN signatories. At a time when GODAN is still in the development stage, Martin Parr draws attention to a possible rift that could open up if the data provided by Southern countries benefit the Northern countries alone. "There is a need to involve developing countries in the open data community to make sure they are the beneficiaries of data that is being provided. I don't think anybody wants a situation where data is being opened up and the beneficiaries of open data are distant from the source of it. For this it is necessary to support capacity building"

Asked about his hopes for the future, Martin Parr wishes, above all, that data be open by default, "unless there is a very good reason to protect them". A change in mentality will be needed to achieve this. GODAN hopes to accomplish this with the help of

governments (including engaging at high level international political meetings including the G20), and the media. So that everyone talks about the need to open data and understand the usefulness of building such a revolution.

A first meeting focuses on impact
GODAN organised its first meeting in Wageningen (The Netherlands) January 19th-20th. The meeting brought together 50 participants drawn from its membership to look at cases of impact of Open Data in Agriculture.

In their keynote at the meeting, CTA shared the findings from a report commissioned from Alterra on open data benefits for smallholder farmers where the authors identified the main potential areas for open data use. The report aimed to answer the following questions: What is the actual impact of the Open Data movement on the food and nutrition security of

smallholders in the developing world? What opportunities does it present, and which remain unfulfilled? This was complemented by the results from their report on a Caribbean study looking at specific open data activities and infrastructure used in agriculture highlighting in particular the role of Jamaica's government in promoting open data use for agriculture.

The meeting then comprised a series of workshops with speakers from around the world in areas ranging from participatory mapping to "Big data" in mobile agriculture. Alongside the meeting, a hackathon was held to build demonstrator applications illustrating the use of Open Data for agriculture. The winner was CROPTIMIZER a proposed application that allowed farmers to see what had been grown previously in a field and hence take a decision on what could be planted, using both government open data on land use together with local knowledge on crops.

Participants during the GODAN workshop in Wageningen, January 2015.