

Increasing the Value in Use of Open Government Data in Small Island Developing Economies

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There can be great opportunity and economic value that can be derived from recognising and treating Government Data as a valuable economic asset. The data generated by governments is one of the few resources that is characterized by abundance rather than scarcity. It is increasing every day through the normal day to day business of governments doing what they do, and has the unique characteristic, unlike natural raw materials, of not being diminished when consumed¹. Indeed, the value of data as an economic resource, increases with use and re-use. According to Nigel Shadbolt of the ODI “Making the best possible use of an existing and increasing resource is not just common sense, it is the closest we can get to generating economic winners without losers.”

Given the social, political and economic benefits that can be gained through the sharing of Government data, the question becomes why Governments of the Caribbean, small island developing states with limited economic resource endowments and persistent growth challenges, not enthusiastically embracing these opportunities?

One of the important critical success factors in treating data as an economic asset is to ensure senior management buy in and one way to achieve this is through the demonstration of impact. The focus must therefore be in domains and areas the Government sees as priority areas for development and economic growth. Many of the well-documented examples of economic estimates of open data value (e.g. the transportation sector) may not be applicable to Governments of Caribbean Small Island Developing States. Therefore, to demonstrate the economic value of data the focus should be on relevant sectors e.g. Tourism, Agriculture. Tourism as a target sector is rarely mentioned in the global data discourse, although it represents for most Caribbean countries the most important contributor to their economy, in some cases in excess of 50% GDP. Given that effective access to information provides the primary basis for awareness, choice, and improved service delivery between the prospective tourist and local operators, tourism presents genuinely interesting and relevant opportunities for impactful Government Data Sharing application. As an example, approximately 30% of the total food purchases in the Tourism sector in Jamaica come from domestic Agriculture, with the rest being imported. Effective use of Open Data about the demand and supply of agricultural produce can be used to facilitate increased linkages and economic multiplier effects between Tourism and Agriculture.

¹ <http://www.msbmreview.biz/blog/making-sense-us3-trillion-%E2%80%93-estimating-value-open-data-small-economies>

A previous study² was conducted in Jamaica to understand the open data economic potential for three critical sectors of the Jamaican economy – Agriculture, Tourism and Education. A combination of analytically derived scaling and discount factors were used to project the open data estimates from global studies to the size of the Jamaican economy. Overall, it was estimated (conservatively) that Open Data initiatives in these 3 sectors could add over J\$15 billion in aggregate, annually to the domestic economy, approximately 1% contribution to GDP. For a country that has rarely seen better than 1.5 to 2% GDP growth in the last several decades, and negative growth in many instances, this is a significant impact. This demonstrates the need for identifying data value opportunities that could be derived from focusing on sectors that are often overlooked as they are considered region specific and the findings warrant further investigation in terms of realising this value.

The Data Value Chain provides an extremely useful lens for identifying opportunities for improving the impact and ultimately the value of Government Data. It describes the process of data creation and use from first identifying a need for data to its final use and possible reuse. The data value chain has four major stages: collection, publication, uptake, and impact, where uptake/impact ultimately leads to value (see figure below). This contrasts with the popular narrative in many regional open data initiatives that put the emphasis on the collection and publishing of data with the assumption that whatever is published will be used.

However, the literature suggests that collecting and publishing data alone does not ensure³ they will be used or lead to positive impacts. While Data dissemination is important, given data are inherently a public good, once they have been produced they can be used and reused at little cost, generating value each time. Therefore, more attention should be to use and reuse data to their maximum effect. More attention is needed on the uptake and use of data. The Data Value Chain demonstrates the steps and activities that can be used to achieve this. *Uptake* involves three main activities, *connecting* data to users; *incentivizing* users to incorporate data into the decision-making process; and *influencing* them to value data. *Impact* also involves three main activities, *using* the data to understand a problem or make a decision; *changing* the outcome of a project or improving a situation; and *reusing* the data by combining them with other data and sharing them freely.

In a region where small island developing economies struggle to cope with the lingering effects of the economic recession, tight fiscal space, limited economic policy discretion, and fiercely competitive political democracies, investment in Government Open Data initiatives contends with a range of other socio-economic policy demands for scarce resources and political attention. In such circumstances, the considerations for data initiatives and its potential economic

² <https://capricaribbean.org/documents/open-government-data-catalyst-jamaicas-growth-and-innovation-agenda>

³ <https://opendatawatch.com/publications/the-data-value-chain-moving-from-production-to-impact/>

impact requires greater specificity, more targeted focus and contextual relevance. Our goal for this study is to increase the value-in-use of large, specific, focused, contextual government data sets of the Caribbean by proposing and evaluating specific initiatives that lead to greater impact in this region. Given that the data, in many cases, already exists, the focus will be on the Uptake and Impact phases of the value-chain. More specifically, in this study we will explore the Data Value opportunities for the Caribbean using Tourism data, a sector critical to the region.