

Chapter 1

Open Government and Bureaucratic Secrecy in the Developing Democracies: Africa in Perspective

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ABSTRACT

Despite the widespread assumption that open government (OG) has emerged as a critical apparatus of governance, its institutionalization in the developing democracies remains contestable. Studies in open government suggest transparency and accountability in public office. This typically depends on the development of OG data and use of the same for effective and efficient governance choices and decision making. Although open government initiatives have recently proliferated to remedy transparency and accountability deficiency in governance in various ways, while it succeeds in fostering the culture of governance accountability in the developed societies, it has failed to fully resolve the difficulties associated with bureaucratic secrecy in the developing democracies, particularly in Africa. This chapter builds on content analysis to review and analyze salient issues raised on bureaucratic secrecy in Africa and in particular provides evidence of the effects of bureaucratic secrecy on the advancement of OG initiatives.

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INTRODUCTION

Transparency in government remains central to inclusive and participatory development. It exposes hidden agenda in government which could run counter to development as it largely promotes accountability. Since the end of the Cold War a key issue has been how to make governance more transparent, inclusive, participatory and open. This has resulted in recent proliferation of the term 'Open Government'.

The 'phrase Open Government (OG) was first used in the United States in the 1950s in the debates leading up to passage of the Freedom of Information Act' (Yu & Robinson, 2012). Open Government (OG) had re-emerged in most advanced societies since the triumph of liberal democracy. The term however had a novel turn particularly in the 2000s. This was largely influenced by the emergence of the Obama administration in the United States. This includes the pattern and dynamics of inclusive government in which transparency and accountability could be an integral component of government and decision making. A central supposition of OG includes openness which encompasses availability of official data or OG data.

As one of the most commonly deployed terms in the neo liberal governance (Lathrop & Ruma, 2010). Open Government (OG) has become a major term within divergent spheres of governance. Recent decades suggest terminological shifts in the use of the term as it becomes increasingly linked to open technology. As the latter suggests, the sharing of data through the internet networks involving relevant stakeholders. There is "Open Government Data" (OGD) which implies making government data available to the public who may have need for them.

Thus, the term "open government data" might refer to data accessibility of government information or public accountability including official disclosures (Yu & Robinson, 2012).

Policy initiatives that promote or reinforce this trend have been described as "open government" projects. Such initiatives often encompass provision of data, increase overall governmental transparency (Yu & Robinson, 2012). The basis for data availability in OG initiative is primarily for improved and informed decision making of both the government and the governed.

Beyond this, both the private and public sector individuals, agencies and related institutions who are stakeholders are expected access to government data to make informed choices and decisions for the overall development of the society. Information is key to development administration such as technology based government including e-governance, use of mobile apps, e-administration, visibility and accessibility of key government decisions suggesting a sense of evidence based administration.

In development contexts OG forms part of the function of modern government and provides useful insights including recent trends and changes aimed at overall economic growth. For instance, in the ongoing globalization there is proliferation

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