Open Government Partnership

Independent Reporting Mechanism

Sri Lanka
Comments Received on the First
Progress Report

The comments received on Sri Lanka's first progress report can be found on pages 53 and 56 of the below document. No comments were received on the Sinhala or Tamil versions of the report.

THEME 3: INFORMATION AND COMMUNICATION TECHNOLOGY

5. Government Information Centre

Commitment Text:

Enhance the services of Government Information Centre (GIC- 1919) for Inclusive, Transparent, accountable and Efficient Governance, using ICT as enabler

[…]

Main Objective:

Improve services and increase awareness of the Government Information Centre (GIC), and leverage ICT as a key enabler in enhancing access to government information.

Milestones:

- 5.1 Engage the Divisional Secretariats, Nenasala/Telecentre network to make citizens aware of GIC services and assess their key needs (eg.by "IT Yahamaga" of Sarvodaya Fusion and ICTA's "Smart Social Circles"). Produce One Survey report for every 6 months, and will be made publicly available.

- 5.2 Training of the Chief Innovative Officers (CIOs) of government agencies to develop institutional knowledge bases related to public services 5 sessions, 50 CIOs to be trained in each session, covering all key government organisations (Ministries, Departments, District Secretariats, Provincial Councils and Key Statutory bodies. If required, training could be expanded to Divisional Secretariats and Local Authorities too).

- 5.3 Increase the number of institutions covered under the Government Information Centre (GIC – 1919) Call Centre facility from 194 to 250, also diversifying the services offered through the facility – E.g. Tracking status of requests, personalised email feedback, text messages and social media upon subscription (by 2017, at least 2 additional service per institutions to be introduced with the assistance of ICTA.)

- 5.4 Enhance the service platform of the GIC (www.gic.gov.lk) along with updating Citizens' Service Charter Information (produced by each organisation in consultation with their internal and external stakeholders to reflect the changes in standard of services) for 10 key services (identified by ICTA using GIC call registries) and SMS facility for citizens.

49

- 5.5 Stocktaking of the improved project with key partners of the Government (MTDI/ICTA/SLT), Trade Union representatives and civil society organisations.

Responsible institution: Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure (MTDI)

Supporting institutions: Information and Telecommunication Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA); Sarvodaya Fusion

Start date: July 2016   **End date:** December 2017

Editorial Note: The text of the commitment was abridged for formatting reasons. For full text of the commitment, see the Sri Lanka National Action Plan 2016–2018 at http://bit.ly/2wv3jXR.

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance				Potential Impact				On Time?	Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Tech. and Innov. for Transparency and Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative		Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
5. Government Information Centre			✔		✔			✔		✔			No		✔		

Context and Objectives

This commitment seeks to improve the services and increase public awareness of the call centre and website[199] that constitute the Government Information Centre (GIC). In doing so, key stakeholders anticipate that more citizens will have improved access to useful information on a wide range of government activities and services.[200]

The GIC has existed as part of e-government initiatives of successive governments. Launched in 2006, the GIC aims to leverage technology to bring information on government services closer to the general public.[201] The GIC operates primarily as a one-stop government call centre and endeavours to collect and provide citizens with accurate, concise, and trilingual information on, among other things, train schedules, vehicle licencing, passports, and university admissions.[202] Originally under the Presidential Secretariat, the operation of the GIC has now emerged as a public-private partnership involving the Presidential Secretariat, the Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure (MTDI), the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA), and Sri Lanka Telecom PLC.

50

Through this partnership, the GIC has evolved, offering more information and responsive service delivery to an average of 1,500 callers per day.[203] In support of this, the Presidential Secretariat and the ICTA have established a steering committee to oversee the expansion and continued development of the GIC landscape.[204] This committee comprises a cohort of experienced call operators. As a result, government stakeholders have regularly added new information on services to the GIC knowledge base and have been equipping operators with the capacity to respond to related questions.[205] Similarly, the ICTA has introduced guidelines for government department heads to provide information to the GIC. These guidelines include a standard template for providing information[206] to further facilitate smooth operation of the centre.

Supplementing the call centre, the ICTA led the parallel development of a website offering the same information in a readily accessible, user-friendly, online format.[207] The website serves as a comprehensive knowledge hub and online database of services available to citizens from numerous government organisations. It also has won international recognition in the sphere of e-content.[208]

However, despite such initiative, the MTDI and related stakeholders remain concerned that information on government services still do not reach citizens promptly or effectively.[209] According to an MTDI stakeholder, key limitations to building on past achievements include the lack of a strategic approach and leadership to propagate the existing GIC infrastructure.[210] In this context, key challenges include the translation of information into the three main languages[211] and limited public awareness of the GIC and its website.[212] In addition, the validation of information being provided by call centre operators has also proved to be a significant challenge. Government institutions have appointed chief innovative officers (CIOs) to oversee the process. However, errors and discrepancies persist, as two different individuals are often involved in collecting and validating information. CIOs currently perform a much wider role in organisational digitisation.[213]

If fully implemented as written, this commitment stands to have a minor potential impact on improving citizen's access to information on government services through information and communication technology. According to civil society working to promote information and communication technology, efforts to increase awareness of GIC services through knowledge centres and tele-centre networks will generally improve access to information on government services, particularly for rural and semi-urban populations.[214] An example of such a network is the ICTA's Nenasala project.[215] A representative from civil society noted that not enough has been done to show the public how government services can be proactively engaged via the internet.[216] This observation reaffirms the positive impact this commitment could deliver. The training of CIOs to develop institutional knowledge bases will support the validation of available information. In addition, the introduction of new government institutions and services will not only increase coverage but also enhance the utility of the GIC.

The achievement of the listed milestones will improve public access to information on government services. However, this commitment remains limited in both scale and scope,

51

particularly in the context of open government. These milestones—barring milestone 5.1—involve the publication of standard information on government services, as opposed to previously undisclosed *government-held* information. Thus, most of the commitment is largely of unclear relevance to the values of OGP. In addition, the primary infrastructure for disseminating information is already in place. Therefore, the milestones are largely natural and incremental steps toward improving awareness, scaling services, and enhancing the impact of the existing GIC as an e-government initiative.

Further, a civil society representative conveyed concern that some citizens—poor or senior citizens in particular—remain hesitant, or unable, to use the internet to access information on government services.[217] Although, geographic exposure to 3G internet networks in Sri Lanka hovers at around 80 per cent, civil society estimates that only 30-40 per cent of the total population actively access and use the internet via computers on a regular basis.[218] The representative qualified that mobile phone use and smartphone penetration, on the other hand, are notably over 100 per cent.[219] These avenues—in conjunction with the high levels of internet coverage—present better opportunities for effective intervention.

Certain milestones under this commitment also lack specificity. Milestone 5.1 lists the only element of this commitment that is relevant to the values of OGP. That is, publicly disseminating the government's biannual survey on information requirements of citizens. However, the milestone does not specify clear mechanisms of publication or identify measures to ensure wide access. Similarly, apart from proposing to update citizen charter information, it is not clear what enhancing the online service platform entails (see 5.4). Further, there is also no indication of the mechanism, or the intended outcome, of multistakeholder participation in stocktaking efforts (see 5.5).

Completion

5.1 GIC Awareness: This milestone has achieved limited completion. The Ministry of Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure (MTDI) has initiated the re-establishment of the Government Information Centre (GIC) National Steering Committee. That committee has been tasked with increasing awareness of the system.[220] The tele-centre network Nenasala has also been engaged on a limited basis to raise awareness of the GIC. However, such engagement has not yet reached the level of divisional secretariats.[221] The MTDI has not yet developed a survey report, but a representative stated that plans are afoot to hire a consultant to carry it out.[222] However, as this milestone was scheduled for completion by November 2016, it is not on time.

Sarvodaya Fusion has successfully deployed the IT Yahamaga programme at the village level to educate citizens on accessing information on government services through the GIC.[223] A social enterprise, Sarvodaya Fusion focuses on improving access to information and communication technology for rural students. Through a series of awareness programmes across over 100 centres, Sarvodaya Fusion has trained more than 2,000 rural citizens to effectively engage the GIC. Sarvodaya Fusion verified this by sharing a list of participants with the IRM researcher. Similarly, representatives from the Information and Communication

52

Technology Agency (ICTA) confirmed that the ICTA's Smart Social Circles initiative[224] has also been engaged to generate awareness of the GIC.[225] This initiative brings together representatives from community organisations, small- and medium-scale enterprises, and social activist groups at the local level.

5.2 CIO Training: This milestone has achieved limited completion. According to the Ministry of Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure (MTDI), one training workshop has been conducted for chief innovative officers (CIOs) at 30 key government institutions.[226] Five trainings had been proposed. The completed training workshop focused on promoting the leadership of the CIOs in ensuring both the availability and accuracy of information relevant to their particular institutions.

Although the MTDI confirmed that similar workshops have been planned through 2017 and 2018,[227] the action plan scheduled completion of this milestone for December 2017. This milestone is, therefore, not on time.

5.3 GIC Coverage and Services: This milestone has been substantially completed. As of July 2017, the Government Information Centre (GIC) covered information from 320 government institutions.[228] The full list of institutions can be found on the GIC website.[229] This is 70 more institutions than the 250 targeted in the action plan. According to the Ministry of Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure (MTDI), the re-established steering committee helped achieve this increase in coverage.[230]

The MTDI reported that the MTDI, ICTA and related stakeholders disseminated new information on a number of government services to increase information available through the GIC. This included, for instance, new information on passport applications at overseas diplomatic missions and public pension payment dates. However, while information on around 3,000 government services was currently available, the MTDI could not confirm that a minimum of two additional services were introduced per institution by June 2017.[231] The MTDI attributed the delay to the lack of a centralised process to update the knowledge base and, therefore, the service-related information that is available.[232]

MTDI and Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) confirmed that the GIC website received minor service upgrades since the introduction of this commitment.[233] These upgrades, driven by ICTA, included linking the website to social media (Facebook, Twitter, LinkedIn, and YouTube).[234] However, the ICTA did not introduce a request-tracking mechanism or personalised email feedback facilities.[235] The MTDI did note that discussions were underway to introduce a trilingual messenger "ChatBot" to respond to frequently asked questions on the GIC website.[236]

5.4 Service Platform and Charter: This milestone saw limited completion. A representative from the Ministry of Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure (MTDI) mentioned that the ministry and the Information and Communication Technology Agency solicited tenders to revamp the Government Information Centre (GIC) website. The

53

#001

Posted by **Bandara** on **06/25/2018** at **11:57pm**
Agree: 0, Disagree: 0
There is still no Government Social Media policy or guideline enacted.

proposed changes and improvements included introducing a trilingual ChatBot (see 5.3) and updating the knowledge bases with more information on government services.[237]

The government did not update Citizens' Service Charter information. The MTDI has commenced discussions with the Ministry of Public of Administration and Management (MPA) to help facilitate completion. Citizens' Charter is an initiative of the MPA that endeavours to standardise citizen-centred public service delivery across government institutions. By displaying internal and external stakeholders' perceived improvements in service delivery over time, Citizens' Service Charters intended to reflect institutional performance. However, many government institutions have either not introduced or updated their Citizens' Charter information. Thus, progress under this initiative has fallen behind.

Despite this, the MTDI confirmed that the GIC is ready to accommodate institution-specific Citizens' Charters in all three languages.[238] As it stands, however, this milestone was scheduled for completion by December 2016 and has not been completed on time.

5.5 Stocktaking: As most milestones under this commitment are still underway, steps toward stocktaking of the improved project have not started. This milestone was scheduled for completion by December 2017 and is, therefore, not on time.

Early Results

As most of the milestones under this commitment have achieved only limited completion, there are no significant, observable early results.

However, government representatives recognised the re-establishment of the GIC steering committee as an important achievement. That success has provided impetus toward the completion of concomitant milestones.

Next Steps

As this commitment is largely defined as an e-government initiative, it bears limited relevance to the values of OGP or open government. Thus, the IRM researcher recommends not including an extension of this commitment in the next action plan. However, if related stakeholders refine milestone 5.1 within the remaining period of this action plan, that could better ensure widespread publication of the survey report, detailing government-held information on citizen needs vis-à-vis the GIC.

Beyond this, the researcher recognises that through enhancing services and increasing public awareness of the Government Information Centre (GIC), this commitment does stand to improve public access to information on government services, even though it does not promote open government. The researcher also acknowledges the positive intent of relevant stakeholders, led by the Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure (MTDI), as they seek to ensure that the milestones contained within this commitment are followed through to completion.

54

Cognizant of the challenges in achieving significant positive impact in this regard, the IRM researcher volunteers the following recommendations:

- Develop a dynamic mobile phone application linked to the GIC website, call centre, and/or database and containing mobile-optimised information on essential government services. Once installed, this application should be able to function offline. The availability of regular updates to the software, including enhanced coverage of institutions and services, could be announced via standard SMS facility.

    This will allow the MTDI, Information and Communication Technology Agency, and related stakeholders to effectively leverage the high levels of mobile phone penetration. Thus, they would be able to disseminate information on government services across a wider pool of potential recipients.

- Refine existing milestones pertaining to the development of the GIC website and/or service platform to specify clear objectives and intended outcomes. For example, the overarching effort to enhance the service platform (see 5.4) may be accompanied by a list of specific desired improvements. The milestone could also list how these improvements will advance citizen access to government information.

- Ensure that consistent information is available through the GIC call centre and the GIC website. This could be done by introducing a single format for chief innovation officers (CIOs) to provide information to the GIC.

    Concurrently, proposed efforts to revamp the GIC website should include clear measures to cross-check and consolidate existing information from government institutions with information available at the GIC call centre.

55

6. Promote Open Data

Commitment Text:

Promote the Open Data Concept and delivering the benefits to Citizens through ICT

The necessity of Open Data for both Government and citizens has been well defined under OGP. However, the Concept of Open Data is yet to be conveyed to a wide range of stakeholders by the strategic usage of ICT. Further, there is a need to define the boundaries of government's openness, hence a standard mechanism for data classification, which must be mandatorily backed by a government policy directive. The benefits of OGP, in return should reach citizens through innovative ICT tools, as successfully demonstrated by other countries of this partnership.

Main Objective:

Promote Open Data using ICT platforms and ensure citizens get its benefits using similar technologies.

Milestones:

- 6.1 Revamp website www.data.gov.lk with already available data sets of different government agencies (by ICTA Project #24).

- 6.2 Survey on citizens' demand on government data sets (through Nenasala / Smart Social Circles).

- 6.3 Open consultation on Data and Services Classification (with Open Data/Data Sharing Policy) based on the draft prepared by ICTA.

- 6.4 Enhance the current 89 data sets of various government institutes and increase it to 200 by end of 2016 and 500 by July 2018 (by ICTA).

Responsible institution: Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure

Supporting institution: Information and Telecommunication Agency of Sri Lanka (ICTA)

Start date: July 2016   **End date:** July 2018

Editorial Note: The text of the commitment was abridged for formatting reasons. For full text of the commitment, see the Sri Lanka National Action Plan 2016–2018 at http://bit.ly/2wv3jXR.

#002

Posted by **Bandara** on **06/25/2018** at **11:59pm**
Agree: 0, Disagree: 0
But there are very less useful Data sets. Data sets need to cover more areas.

Commitment Overview	Specificity				OGP Value Relevance				Potential Impact				On Time?	Completion			
	None	Low	Medium	High	Access to Information	Civic Participation	Public Accountability	Tech. and Innov. for Transparency and Accountability	None	Minor	Moderate	Transformative		Not Started	Limited	Substantial	Complete
6. Promote Open Data			✔		✔	✔		✔		✔			Yes		✔		

Context and Objectives

This commitment seeks to promote the concept of Open Data and, thereby, facilitate public access to data and datasets on topics and areas of public importance. Such data are often held by government institutions. Stakeholders propose that unrestricted access to such data will support and enable citizens to access, and act upon, information on government policies. They also envision that this access will enable civil society to pursue rational debate and advocacy, and allow decision makers to engage in evidence-informed policy making.[239]

Open data is broadly characterized as content that can be "freely used, modified, and shared by anyone for any purpose".[240] Further, government data is generally considered open if it complies with a set of fundamental principles that require data to be complete, primary, accessible, timely, machine-processable, nonproprietary, nondiscriminatory, and licence-free.[241] Government and civil society stakeholders agreed[242] that citizens in Sri Lanka lacked open and unrestricted access to government-held data and were, therefore, denied the opportunity to reap the concomitant benefits.

The Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) has led the introduction and development of the open data concept in Sri Lanka. The ICTA recognises that data is an important national resource and aims to make an array of development, demographic, statistical, and expenditure data available in digital form for researchers, policy makers, software solution developers, and the general public.[243] To do this, the ICTA has developed an online portal. The portal currently contains an inventory of over 80 datasets on topics ranging from agriculture and livelihood to transport, national security, and employment.[244]

57

Despite such positive initiative, the experiences of Sri Lanka in fostering the idea of open data are largely embryonic. Specifically, key stakeholders, including the ICTA, acknowledge that public engagement with data remains limited and citizens have, therefore, insufficiently leveraged the potential benefits of open access to data.[245] According to the general manager of Sarvodaya Fusion, anecdotal evidence suggests that limited public engagement with data may be attributed to citizen perceptions that the availability of data matters little in the decision-making process.[246] This citizen perception is both a symptom of ad hoc policy making and a failure on the part of public authorities to demonstrate the pursuit of evidence-informed governance. In this environment, the wider public remains unaware about the availability of data and/or the potential to access it.[247] In addition, from the supply side, the government has not yet formally defined boundaries for data sharing. This challenge is compounded by the lack of a standard mechanism for data classification.

If fully implemented as written, this commitment stands to have a minor potential impact on access to, and use of, open data. The commitment, in general, seeks to improve the status quo and address shortcomings typically associated with a nascent open data regime. For instance, although the ICTA has not identified specific improvements, the commitment will revamp the website serving as the online data portal and, in turn, enhance the primary interface between data holders and data users. Through a survey of citizen demand, the commitment also proposes to identify which datasets are likely to be most useful to citizens. This will help government to ascertain key priorities and, thereby, proactively work to ensure that citizens and related stakeholders have access to useful data.

Further, recognising the importance of data classification in defining boundaries of openness, the commitment endeavours to conduct a consultation based on a draft data-sharing policy prepared by the ICTA. While the composition of this consultation is unclear, civil society confirms that this presents a good opportunity for civic participation in key decision-making processes.[248] In addition, the commitment proposes to address the quality and quantity of the datasets available on the online portal. In particular, the government commits to enhancing the quality of the 89 existing datasets. The government also hopes to increase the number of datasets available to 200 by the end of 2016, and 500 by July 2018. According to Sarvodaya Fusion, these complementary activities are likely to represent significant, albeit preliminary, steps in promoting the concept of open data and open governance in general.[249] These activities are also fundamentally linked to improved access to information.

However, in assessing potential impact, the IRM researcher recognises that much of the requisite infrastructure to foster open data —such as the open data portal—is already in place. Thus, this commitment largely involves generating positive impetus and scaling up existing initiatives. Similarly, the commitment makes no reference to linking the results of a survey of citizen demand on government datasets with the generation of new datasets identified under milestone 6.4. In addition, wide access to the internet is central to the success of this commitment. Therefore, it is concerning that steadily improving internet coverage (i.e., 3G coverage of around 80 per cent) is compromised by the fact that only 30-40 per cent of the total population actively access and use the internet via computers on a regular basis.[250] Unlike other initiatives which may subvert this concern by leveraging

58

increasing levels of mobile and mobile broadband penetration, the effective use of datasets may necessitate more direct and user-friendly engagement.

Challenges to this commitment, therefore, include limitations in scope and limited specificity. There is no clarity in defining the proposed improvements to the open data web portal and in defining the composition of the open consultation on data classification. Thus, this important commitment is considered of minor potential impact and medium specificity.

Completion

6.1 Revamp Website: This milestone has been completed. In May 2017, the Information and Communication Technology Agency revamped the online web portal, which contains over 80 datasets.[251] As part of the revamp, new features were introduced. These included a user option to suggest new datasets;[252] tags attributed to datasets for easier navigation; and linkage of the web portal to social media such as Facebook, Twitter, and LinkedIn.[253]

6.2 Citizen Demand Survey: This milestone was not started. However, as it is scheduled for completion by July 2018, it can still be completed on time.

The Senior Assistant Secretary of the Ministry of Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure confirmed that the ministry had commenced the process to procure a consultant to carry out the survey.[254] Once the consultant has been selected, the survey will seek to document user satisfaction with the online data portal.[255]

6.3 Consultation on Data and Service Classification: This milestone has also achieved limited completion. The stakeholders confirmed that the Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure (MTDI) had not yet organised a consultation on data classification. However, the MTDI and Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) noted that the ICTA had developed a draft data-sharing policy and published it in English on the online data portal.[256]

According to the MTDI, it will soon publish the draft policy in the government gazette[257] in consultation with the interministerial committee, constituted under the ICT Act.[258] However, this milestone was scheduled for completion by December 2016. Thus, this milestone is not on time.

6.4 Enhance and Increase Datasets: This milestone has achieved limited completion. According to the stated phased targets of 200 datasets by December 2016 and 500 by July 2018, the commitment is also not on time.

As of December 2017, the online portal contained 89 multiform datasets under nine broad thematic areas. However, the Ministry of Telecommunication and Digital Infrastructure noted that many government institutions had nominated officers responsible for generating datasets. The ministry also stated that new datasets were being identified for publication on the portal.[259] These include datasets on disaster-prone land and land parcels under the

59

National Spatial Data Infrastructure and new data and information on agriculture and tourism.[260]

Early Results

Although the online portal has been successfully revamped with new features, all other milestones under this commitment have achieved only limited completion. As a result, there are no significant, observable results.

However, it is worth noting that during the implementation of this commitment, Sri Lanka introduced legislation on the right to information (see Commitment 22). This important development has raised the pertinence of this commitment. Public institutions are now legally required to respond to requests for data and information. In response, the Ministry of Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure indicated that government institutions have been invited to develop new datasets. These datasets can help them better respond to frequent right to information requests.[261]

Therefore, the introduction of legislation on the right to information has provided an additional dimension to this commitment. The legislation further incentivised government institutions to proactively disclose data, such as geographic coverage or asset profiles.

Next Steps

The successful achievement of the milestones proposed under this commitment is expected to significantly improve the status quo pertaining to open data. A dynamic, accessible data portal; a comprehensive collection of datasets that meet citizen demand; and clear, formal classification and delineation of shareable data constitute the foundation of a robust and effective open data regime.

However, to further strengthen the potential impact of this commitment, the IRM researcher proposes the following recommendations. These may be included by modifying the milestones under the existing commitment or by introducing them as part of the next action plan:

- Facilitate meaningful civic participation in open data policy making, particularly in relation to the data-sharing policy and associated decisions. For instance, the ICT Act provides for the appointment of a multistakeholder task force.[262] The Ministry of Telecommunications and Digital Infrastructure and/or the Information and Communication Technology Agency (ICTA) may arrange consultations with this representative task force to review and discuss potential policies and decisions about open data.

- Encourage wider and deeper public engagement with government data and the online data portal. Such engagement can be promoted by conducting a series of awareness workshops at multiple locations across the country. These workshops may introduce, for example, the idea and concept of open data and how to use data to effect or inform policy change. The workshops could also feature national and

60

international best practice and case studies on the use of data, and practical guidance on how to navigate the online data portal.

These awareness workshops may be a collaborative effort of local civil society organisations and the ICTA.