

Open Data for transparency in governance and consolidation of democracy

Palavras-chave: Dados, estatística, informação pública, governação, transparência.



Credits: DW

Introduction

The availability of and access to particular types of data are determinant for taking correct decisions in solving the problems of society in general. Cyclically, academic organisations public bodies, civil society organisations, diplomatic institutions, private sector bodies etc., collect and process data to produce information which generates knowledge. Based on the knowledge generated from public data, these organi-

sations, including individuals, become more qualified and skilled in contributing to the development and growth of countries in general. Hence in this way society is granted mechanisms which make possible the participation and political impact to draw up new solutions to its problems. Based on this premise, several countries with high levels of democracy are implementing Open Data.

Open Data are, in a generic definition, data which can, freely or without restrictions, be accessed, used, modified and shared by any entity, regar-

dless of the purpose¹. In the Open Data, identities are not revealed. They are relevant for society and, among countless applications, they can help assess the levels of transparency in Governance in countries. Hence one notes a correlation between the indices of democracy and the practice of Open Data².

Mozambique is like most of the countries that are classified as having an authoritarian regime in the Democracy Index and which do not practice Open Data. In the last 4 years, the country was classified in 84th position in the practice of Open Data in the ranking at world level³.

However, more than 20 years ago, the Mozambican government, under Law no. 7/96 of 5 July, set up the National Statistical System (SEN) which, in accordance with its Article 4, should encourage the interest of the public, and of private and public institutions, in national statistical activity; promote the use of official statistical information by public and private institutions and the community in general, for a better understanding of national reality, as a fundamental instrument for decision taking at all levels; to make the best use of material, technical and financial resources in the production of official

statistics and in the development of statistical activity so as to avoid duplication of efforts. The SEN is formed by other bodies, namely the Higher Council of Statistics, (CSE), the body which guides the SEN, the Bank of Mozambique (BM), the Coordinating Council of the General Population Census, (CCR-GP) and the National Statistics Institute (INE), which is the central executive body of the SEN

Looking at the powers, duties and attributes of the SEN mentioned above, compared with the results of the classification of Mozambique in the indices of the practices of Open Data and of Democracy, and the correlation between these, as observed, it may be concluded that the actions this body has undertaken do not produce the results and effects that might have been expected. These actions do not produce an impact on the practice of democracy and transparency in governance. Furthermore, it may also be concluded that Mozambican society lacks mechanisms that favour participation and political impact on matters of public interest, since the availability of and access to public data is practically non-existent, which explains the position of Mozambique in the world ranking of Open Data and Democracy.

Applications of the products of the SEN

The publications of official statistics are the products of the SEN. These products help society, albeit in a very summary fashion, to understand what is happening in the country. In these products, the data are aggregated and tabulated to the liking of the SEN. The INE is the competent body for planning, managing and publishing the official statistical products in line with Article 6 of Decree no. 34/98 of 1 July. However, this Decree also specifies that the INE may delegate its official functions of collecting, notation and dissemination of statistical data to other public services designated as Delegated Bodies of the INE. Naturally, this makes it possible for each ministry, public institute, public company or institution of the administration of justice to collect systematically data concerning their own areas.

These aggregate data produce indicators of va-

rious themes of interest and application in defining Government policies, in supporting the research of the academic community, in defining commercial strategies in the private sector and in the informal sector, as an instrument of monitoring, assessment and support for the implementation of humanitarian initiatives and programmes by civil society organisations and other users of statistical information. The fundamental publication which serves (or should serve) as the basis for planning the governance of the country is the General Population and Housing Census, including its supplements such as the Population Projections. This product is applied, for example, in the planning of elections. It allows better logistical organisation for holding the voter registration which culminates in what is regarded as the highest exercise of democracy, the vote.

¹ <http://opendefinition.org>

² <https://congressionaldata.org/democracy-and-open-data-are-the-two-linked>

³ <https://index.okfn.org/place/>

Limitations of the products of the SEN for democracy

Although the products of the SEN meet some of the needs of the above users in terms of statistical information, for civil society and the academic community, this information is not enough to undertake their research, monitoring and assessment activities, which are essential in the exercise of democracy. Sometimes, even for the institutions of the public administration, these publications have not been sufficient, as happened in Gaza province with the voter registration for the 2019 general elections, where the National Elections Commission (CNE), the national body that administers elections, and the INE diverged, by about 300,000, in the number of individuals of voting age (18 years old and above). The divergence became public, and was the subject of polemics inside and outside the country, since it called into question the elections as a whole, which is a sharp blow to democracy and contributes so that the democracy indices for Mozambique remain in the class of authoritarian regimes.

Due to the limitation that the knowledge generated from statistical information presents, together with the fact that society lacks access to the public data on the population, there was no peaceful resolution of this divergence, and this had serious

consequences for national democracy. For the elections were held in a climate of distrust. However, the scenario could have been different had these data been open so that any entity could have access to them, and with resort to statistical methods and to information and communication technologies (Data Sciences), estimate the size of the electorate for that year. Or for example, if via the data on the military registration, on driving licences, on the membership of the political parties (through the Ministry of Justice) as well as other records inherent to Mozambican individuals over the age of 18, and with resort to Data Science, it would be possible to estimate this population.

The current range of products, as well as other actions of the dissemination services of the SEN, the body which governs and implements activities to collect and process data and the dissemination of information, is far from satisfying the information needs and the desires of society to draw closer to the Government by means of monitoring and assessment mechanisms. To this end, there is an urgent need to reform the component of the dissemination of public information. It is necessary to adopt the practice of Open Data.

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