Towards Linked Development Data
Practical issues

Introduction

This working paper was originally going to be titled 'Towards Linked Development Data: *Technical* issues'. However, in the course of researching and writing it quickly became clear that the considerations that go into planning, producing, publishing, consuming and working with linked data in a particular domain are not simply issues of technology. Whilst the decision to implement any new technology in an organization or setting always has, seen or unseen, governance, policy and practice implications, in the case of contemporary linked data, governance, policy and practice issues are frequently so intertwined with the technical as to be inseparable.

This working paper draws upon a number of experiments and pilot projects working with the creation and consumption of linked data in the development field, and seeks to map out some of those considerations, technical and organizational, which occur when joining the linked data world. It is a map drawn from our tentative experience, and cannot promise to be definitive in any sense. The level of detail and style of explanation is based upon the authors experience of working with technology and policy specialists exploring open data, and is designed to leave readers with enough of an overview to make informed decisions around linked data, even if further information is required to then implement those decisions. It is offered in the hope it helps others on the journey to understand and make sense of a complex area[1], and, as a creative commons work, is of course, open to others to modify and adapt as a living practical aid to exploration of linked development data as the field develops.

In that spirit, the version you are currently reading is the first draft of this paper. We would welcome comments by the end of August 2011 to help us revise and present a final 'version 1' of this paper in the Autumn. Please send feedback to tim@practicalparticipation.co.uk.

Overview

The first section of this paper introduces key concepts of linked open data – setting out the key social, legal and technical principles involved in linked open data. The second section looks at a number of case studies of generating linked data for development and then turns to explore the current availability of open data in development, identifying the potential and

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[1] And here we use 'complex' in the sense outlined by Harry Jones (2011), where complex problems are distinct from complicated ones. Whilst treatment of linked data often addresses it as 'technically complicated', we note that the linked data web is an inherently socio-technical system, with emergence and dynamic interconnections that can have as much to do with personality, politics and pragmatism as with technical expertise and formal design and implementation.

challenges for introducing linked data in this context. The third section works through the process of publishing linked data with a practical guide, offering shared learning and considerations for both technology and policy people.