

Open Legislative Data

OD4DAsia

Project fact sheet information

Project title	Open Legislative Data
Grant recipient	Sinar Project
Grant Reference	Grant # 1604-19-100-7201-2
Project Start Date	February 1
Project End Date	October 31
Country where project was implemented	Myanmar
Project leader name	Htin Kyaw Aye
Team members (list)	
Partner organizations	Ananda Data, Myanmar Fifth Estate
Total budget approved	USD 25,000
Project summary	Development, outreach, and reflective studies of their work in opening the space for and using legislative open data

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Project Summary

In this collaborative initiative, we would develop a web tool specific for Myanmar parliament (Union parliament, with possible extension of subnational parliaments). The tool (initially named “Your Champions in Hluttaw”) will enable users to find MPs with discussions on specific topics and keywords. It would provide the researchers with open data on the trends of parliamentary discussions: topics it covered and it didn’t in its tenure.

The project’s outputs will be disseminated through workshop with parliamentarians and workshop with civil society who are two major beneficiaries.

Background and Justification

With the rapid growth in Internet access in Southeast Asia comprising over 160 million users¹, online and mobile services could be one of the primary channels for access to elected representatives and their work in legislatures. This requires provision of digital parliamentary services and open data by the government and its subsequent use and development by civil society for a more transparent participatory process. Availability and quality of legislative open data by governments as of the 2016 Open Data Barometer survey was either non-existent or very poor in quality for most Southeast Asian countries.

Indonesia	15
Malaysia	15
Myanmar	15
Thailand	15

Source: Open Data Barometer 2016

Despite this, collaboration between Myanmar, Malaysia using CSO developed tools for provision of open data legislative standards has resulted in legislative data being published along with innovations in elected representative websites.² In spite of well developed Parliamentary websites in Malaysia and Indonesia and even legislative openness legislation (in the case of Indonesia) these countries do not have any clear government action or policy towards implementing parliamentary digital services that provide open data for the needs of parliamentary monitoring by CSOs and researchers. Advocacy and clear policy guides on implementing such services in this region is needed.

¹ <http://www.itu.int/net4/itu-d/icteye/>

² Collaborating for Open Data <http://webfoundation.org/docs/2017/08/RP-Collaboration-For-Open-Data-082017.pdf>

In Myanmar, the parliament published its Hansards (meeting minutes) initially between 2011 and 2015 and improved its official websites to publish them online in PDF which still are not machine readable. Media and researchers rely on open data produced by parliamentary monitoring organizations. Being a young democracy, the parliamentary performances are widely overlooked in election periods. Civil society organizations are also not given the space to engage actively with the parliament and MPs to advocate for legislations.³

Project objectives

This project aims to connect the dots in disintegrated political environment in Myanmar by helping civil society find their alliances in the parliament and promoting the notion of social accountability from the parliament side.

The project will seek to identify MPs who championed for different topics and promote their accessibility to the public members. That would open up the opportunity for civil society and public members who care about different issues the society is facing to communicate easily with the MPs who are focused on the same issue.

The project will build the new culture of political engagement between the public members and the parliamentarians which based on issues and interests. Currently, the communication between the public members and the parliament is based widely on geographical representation.⁴

Project implementation: understanding the chain that leads to results

Implementation

Inputs

- Project Manager - Ananda Data - 6 months

Method

The primary goal is to try to identify and promote access to parliamentary data and digital documents, that would support the engagement between the parliament and, civil society and the public members. We would employ machine learning topic modelling techniques to build a website which enables users to search parliamentarians by topics.

³ <https://www.boell.de/en/2017/07/05/eclipse-myanmars-civil-society>

⁴ Open Myanmar Initiative, Parliamentary Monitoring Report No. 4 - Quantitative study of motions submitted by MPs in Pyithu Hluttaw, Amyotha Hluttaw and Pyidaungsu Hluttaw in tenth regular session. <http://www.mediafire.com/file/pagx1aojuhj85xx/PDF-Parliamentary-Monitoring-Report-4.pdf>

Digitalization of Myanmar Legislative Data

Digitizing parliamentary documents would contribute to the better understanding of the parliament by civil society and public members and help them to engage with MPs who can likely become partners inside the parliament in raising specific issues.

Building a link between the already available parliamentary documents and a tool that helps the users make sense of them would promote the use of these documents and data and facilitate better engagement among different stakeholders.

Civil Society and Empowerment and Better Governance

- The tool which we initially named “Your Champions in Hluttaw” will allow civil society search MPs by topics, modelled from parliamentary documents through machine learning process. The link between MPs and topics they discussed most in the parliament would help civil society better understand their MPs in the parliament.
- Parliamentarians have to spend nearly eight months a year in the remote capital Nay Pyi Taw. They need to better understand their concerns of their constituents as well as the direction the parliamentary debates are heading. They would be able to review issues the parliament have helped address and issues they have not.

Anti-Corruption

- In reporting parliament and government, the local journalists need better understanding of parliamentary reports, government budget data and visualizations, parliamentary debates that relate to the topic.
- The government could provide the government budget data and budget reports throughout the whole financial year to promote its transparency. The parliament could do better by producing its minutes and committee reports in more timely manners and machine readable formats. Although committee minutes and voting records are regarded by the parliament as confidential and sensitive, they should look at the international practices and standards and make them available to help the citizens engage the parliament better.
- Myanmar’s anti-corruption commission only act on complaints, but if they are to be more proactive, they would need contracts between the government agencies and private companies, and weigh comparability of these contracts across different agencies, different regions and companies.

Technical questions

- **What parliamentary international open data standards would be applicable for Myanmar? How applicable are they, and what gaps or issues in their application for Myanmar?**

We endorse Declaration of Parliamentary Openness and advocate the parliament to

follow the benchmarks of Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, NDI Standards and AFP Criteria in terms of parliamentary information availability. These standards would be employed in the research and we would explore the possibility of the parliament using parliamentary open data standards such as Akoma Ntoso in publishing its minutes, documents and legislations.

- **How can document publishing and open data standards help in ensuring sustainability and accessibility of parliamentary information?**

There is a wide gap between publishing big PDF files and publishing in HTML/XML. The issue is that the parliamentary websites are developed by contractual winning private web development companies, who previously have no parliamentary experiences. These are not much sustainable and tied to the lifespan of the contract and we have seen two totally different versions of parliamentary websites in past seven years. These IT services are also not centralized, meaning each house adopts their own standards.

Regional Parliamentary Open Data Workshop

Workshop to held in Myanmar to bring together local and international representatives from civil society, parliamentarians, government and journalists working with Parliaments and Legislatures to share and discuss experiences in digital provision or use of parliamentary data and documents

Budget

- *Salaries - 7800 USD (The Ananda)*
- *Professional Services - 6800 USD (The Ananda)*
- *Support Services - 730 USD (The Ananda)*
- *Travel and Conferences - 9320 USD (The Ananda)*
- *Others - 350 USD*

Outputs

Website

Through the research, we will produce a website for searching MPs based on the topics they discussed in the plenary session of the parliament. We will try to explore topics discussed in the parliament through parliamentary documents (especially Hansards) and map it to individual MPs who raised the topics. We will employ machine learning techniques to model these documents into topics. These data would be used in two different use cases, one for identifying MPs by topics (“Your Champions in Hluttaw”, a tool on theananda.org) and one for individual MP’s topic preferences (As a feature on openhluttaw.info)

Research Notes

Research notes are 3-5 page notes on research findings during development of the website and tools. It covers issues such as identification and digitisation of data, user needs and priorities or technical approaches such as application of Machine Learning, NLP and open parliamentary data standards.

Proposed topics:

- Identifying Parliamentary Data to Explore Topics Raised by MPs
- Machine Learning Techniques to Model Myanmar Parliamentary Documents into Topics
- Open Data Standards for Publication of Myanmar Parliamentary Documents.

MP Workshop

Workshop in Nay Pyi Taw with MPs to inform them about tools, approaches and challenges. The workshop will bring together potential MPs interested in transparency initiatives and explore more possibilities to collaborate more closely among themselves and other stakeholders. The workshop is aimed at presenting current initiatives and services available already and collecting their feedback on them. It will also be helpful in addressing current issues and identifying new initiatives.

Civil Society Workshop

Workshop in Yangon with civil society leaders to inform them about tools, approaches and challenges. The workshop will invite advocacy organizations and civil society organizations dealing with and has the intention to advocate the parliament. Presenting with available parliamentary data and their possible use cases, the workshop will explore the possibilities to use these information to facilitate their advocacy and identify more services required to engage in informed advocacy.

Milestones and Timeline

Ongoing detailed tasks against milestones is tracked online on [Teamwork Project site](#).

Website

March 29 - Digitizing and splitting all meeting minutes up to 2018

March/April - Designing the website

June 28- Website Beta Launch

Workshop

July - Workshop in Nay Pyi Taw with MPs

August - Workshop in Yangon with CSOs

Research Notes

- February 28 - Documentation
- August 30 - Second Research Note

Development Impact and Outcomes

External factors and actors that have a long term effect/impact on the project's results

- Parliament in Myanmar to release data and documents more timely fashion and in a way that is machine readable and accessible by citizens.
- Myanmar Parliament to build a sustainable plan to manage its digital and data services, including adoption of international open data standards.
- Civil society focused on specific issues to actively communicate and collaborate with MPs who are working on the same issues, particularly on women and girls.

Milestones/Timeline

Risks: SWOT, Challenges and other risks and how you plan to overcome them

Strength

The strength of the project is that Ananda Data has a strong team that have worked on parliamentary data for nearly five years and a strong link with local organizations such as Myanmar Fifth Estate, Phandeeyar and so on.

Weakness

The project's weakness stems from its reliance on parliamentary documents and application of sophisticated machine learning techniques on political data.

Opportunities

Parliament in Myanmar is now moving towards openness and there is a strong political willingness from the ruling party's side to move towards transparency. Civil society organizations are now adopting engagement policies towards the parliament more and more.

Threats

The risks run from accusation of manipulation of parliamentary data by incumbent MPs to unavailability of MPs to be present at the workshops due to either the restrictions from the parliament or the adjournment of session.

Ways to overcome

We would publish both codes and datasets as open source and open data as a way to overcome the concerns of manipulation of parliamentary data. We'll present the techniques and methodologies in the workshops so that they understand how the solution works.

If we couldn't hold the workshop in Nay Pyi Taw for any reasons, we will try to invite some interested MPs to Yangon and make the workshop less connected to the parliament, inviting interested MPs from other subnational parliaments.

Indicators

Baseline	Indicators	Progress	Assessment	Course of action
<i>Refers to the initial situation when the projects haven't started yet, and the results and effects are not visible over the beneficiary population.</i>	<i>How do you measure project progress, linked to the your objectives and the information reported on the Implementation and Dissemination sections of this report.</i>	<i>Refer to how the project has been advancing in achieving the indicator at the moment the report is presented.</i>	<i>Descriptions should be clear and ideally contain operational terms where needed. Please describe the quality dimensions.</i>	<i>What is the project team planning to do next is very important to document, specially if changes to the original plan have to be implemented for the success of the project.</i>
Civil society not informed about issues interested/focused on by members of parliament	Website of topics discussed in parliament and openly available datasets - Number of documents/Q&A and Motions digitized - Number of website visits - Number of citations/uses of resources	Currently digitizing and researching on most relevant techniques to categorize topics	Some documents are available. The quality of data is nowhere near the international standards and far from reaching the point that serves the interests of the people. We will use Google Analytics data and monitoring of media, social media mentions about the parliament	-Conduct research on possible solutions hhh-Digitizing parliamentary documents -Scrapping news articles on parliament -Topic modelling -Web development -Dataset publishing
Members of parliament are not informed about civil society approaches and challenges in communicating with them.	20 MPs informed about tools, approaches such as open data and challenges faced by civil society	-	We will do post-workshop survey to measure their understanding of the projects and collect feedback.	Workshop in Nay Pyi Taw with MPs to inform them about tools, approaches and challenges. -Identify potential MPs interested in transparency initiatives -Organize workshop inviting them -Collect feedback and resolve issues raised
Civil society are not well informed about the parliamentarian's stance on different topics Report submission date	50% of attendees will be better informed about parliamentary data available for them to inform their advocacy works.		We will do post-workshop survey to measure their understanding of the projects and collect feedback.	Workshop in Yangon with civil society leaders to inform them about tools, approaches and challenges. -Identify partner organizations -Organize workshop -Collect feedback and resolve issues raised
Parliamentary documents on topics discussed are in large PDFs which are not very accessible for civil society or MPs	Number of parliamentary answers/discussions searchable and available online		Some documents are available. The quality of data is nowhere near the international standards and far from reaching the	

			point that serves the interests of the people.	
Parliamentary services are also not centralized, meaning each House adopts their own standard	Contributions to development of international data standard (suggestions, extensions, issues) International Open Data Standards Implemented and adopted requests			

Communication plan

Channel & Output	Key Message	Audience	Person in Charge	Budget (when required)	Actions needed	When to release/do
Research Notes Website, Social Media, Mailing Lists	Identifying Parliamentary Data to Explore Topics Raised by MPs Machine Learning Techniques to Model Myanmar Parliamentary Documents into Topics Open Data Standards for Publication of Myanmar Parliamentary Documents.	Open Data Standards and Civic Tech Developers e-Parliament Practitioners Members of Parliament	Htin Kyaw Aye, The Ananda Data		Document processes and lessons learned on key messages / topics Format to provided template Publish online	February 2019 April 2019 July 2019
Workshops MP Civil Society	Presenting current initiatives and services available already and collecting their feedback on them. Inform civil society of using open parliamentary data and documents to support their advocacy needs	Parliamentarians Civil Society	Htin Kyaw Aye, The Ananda Data		Organize workshop and materials	July 2019 August 2019

Bibliography

1. Open Myanmar Initiative (May 2015), THE QUANTITATIVE STUDY ON MYANMAR PARLIAMENT (10TH REGULAR SESSION). Retrieved from <http://www.mediafire.com/file/pagx1aojuhj85xx/PDF-Parliamentary-Monitoring-Report-4.pdf>.
2. Dr Stefan Bachtold (5 July, 2017), An eclipse of Myanmar civil society?. Retrieved from <https://www.boell.de/en/2017/07/05/eclipse-myanmars-civil-society>.