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Beyond mere advocacy: CSOs and the role of intermediaries in Nigeria's open data ecosystem

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Introduction

Since 2011, the open data community in Nigeria has developed organically from what was previously a fragmented gathering of activists and enthusiasts to what is now becoming a sophisticated and formidable pool of organised groups advocating for the government's adoption of open mechanisms to de-obfuscate its public processes. So far, the community can lay claim to a number of points scored in the struggle to bring about change in policy, the adoption of open standards and the proactive disclosure of government information for the benefit of citizens. Furthermore, while in previous years the strategies employed by various groups ranged from pure advocacy in the form of protests and strikes, current approaches include the use of online platforms and digital tools which, by way of transcending physical space, offer the community the opportunity to engage with a wider spectrum of citizens.

At the forefront of these engagements in Nigeria have been civil society organisations (CSOs) which, depending on the prevailing political, economic and socio-cultural climes at different epochs in the country's history, have employed an assorted range of strategies to attain their self-assigned goals (Fadakinte 2013, Ikelegbe 2013). Today, one of these strategies includes the use of open data. The aim of this chapter is to examine the roots of their adoption of this strategy by tracing the historical evolution of CSOs in Nigeria from their position as activists to their current status as open data advocates. Understanding this strategy requires an appreciation of the role of CSOs in Nigeria more generally and how they can optimally fulfil their burgeoning role as open data intermediaries. To this end, this chapter aims to provide answers to the following questions: How has the open data ecosystem evolved in Nigeria and what is its current structure? What role do CSOs, as open data

intermediaries, play within it? And how can these roles be optimised to achieve greater citizen participation in the governance of Nigeria?

To answer these questions, I begin by proposing a definition of CSOs, drawing on existing definitions. Thereafter, I trace the history of CSO activity in Nigeria with emphasis on their role as representatives of the rest of society and as intermediaries between citizens and government. I then proceed to discuss how the evolution of CSOs has led to the adoption of open data as a key strategy which, going beyond mere advocacy (the supply side), aims to attain higher levels of citizen participation (the demand side) in government decision-making on the path towards greater accountability, transparency and good governance in Nigeria. Finally, I examine the structure of Nigeria's growing open data ecosystem and, using case studies of three Nigerian organisations, I propose ways by which open data intermediation among CSOs can be optimised.

What are CSOs?

In the literature, academic scholars and policy groups have proffered varied but complementary definitions of civil society organisations based on their understanding of what role they perform in society. For example, adopting a definition that focuses on 'civil society organisations as agents of change and development', CSOs have been defined to include 'all non-market and non-state organisations outside of the family in which people organise themselves to pursue shared interests in the public domain' (OECD 2009: 123). The focus of this definition lies in the notion that the role of CSOs is determined by the common societal goal that they strive for. A more elaborate view by the World Bank (2013: online) states that CSOs are:

> the wide array of non-governmental and not-for-profit organisations that have a presence in public life, expressing the interests and values of their members or others, based on ethical, cultural, political, scientific, religious or philanthropic considerations. Civil society organisations therefore refer to a wide array of organisations: community groups, NGOs, labour unions, indigenous groups, charitable organisations, faith-based organisations, professional associations, and foundations.

In the above, attention is drawn to three key ideas about CSOs: first, that they are non-profit which means that all of the money earned by or donated to them is used to pursue the organisation's objectives; second, that these objectives which are based on 'interests and values of their members and others' constitute the *raison d'être* of the organisation; third, they have a presence in public which implies that their activities involve offering a public service and therefore being known by the public. It also suggests that the interests and values that they share are promoted in the public domain on behalf of the public. This points to a dimension of

'representation' as a characteristic of CSOs. Indeed, CSOs have been understood as those organisations that 'operate on the basis of shared values, beliefs, and objectives with the people *they serve or represent*' (OECD 2009: 26, emphasis added). Thus, there exists an 'extensive diversity of CSOs in terms of values, goals, activities, and structure' (OECD 2009: 26). In this sense, the role of CSOs can be understood as one that goes beyond promoting or advocating for beliefs that are upheld by their members. The representational character of CSOs implies that the values they express are those which they believe to also be held by the wider public.[1]

For CSOs to represent the interests and values of the wider public suggests that they promote values which are relevant to a relatively large segment of people within a society. In many instances, one may argue that such widely-held values necessarily refer to fundamental principles on which sustainable societies are based such as the basic human needs of food, clothing and shelter; but also broader needs like jobs, livelihood and employment as well as food security and safety. As Sen (1999) suggests, the provision of such needs in a society is the hallmark of good governance. Therefore the pursuit of these fundamental human needs in any society can be translated as the pursuit of good governance. There are a plethora of definitions for good governance, but commentators generally agree that it is the manner in which power is exercised in the management of a country's economic and social resources for development in the service of and commitment to the public good (Diamond, cited in Fadakinte 2013). Thus, good governance refers to the exercise of authority in the name of the people in ways that respect their integrity and needs within a state (Odo 2015). It is therefore obvious that good governance is dependent on the establishment of frameworks which ensure that citizens (the public) are well served. According to Odo (2015: 3), it should have 'the basic ingredients that make a system (a state) acceptable to the generality of the people'. For this reason, good governance thrives in democratic settings and must be cultivated for democracy to mature further. Indeed, various scholarly writings and policy documents have linked good governance to the growth of democracy particularly in developing countries (Abdellatif 2003, Ogundiya 2010, Santiso 2001).

From the foregoing, it is clear that good governance is vital for achieving the basic human needs in society. It can therefore be said that good governance is one of the goals of CSO activity, especially in developing countries and those with less mature democracies where CSOs involve themselves in the struggle to promote the eradication of poverty and the advancement of human and economic development. As Annan (2001) suggests, attentiveness to these goals by leaders of any state is a distinctive feature of good governance. To ensure

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1   Other roles of CSOs that have been put forward in other writings include: watchdog, service provider, capacity builder, expert, citizenship champion, solidarity supporter (World Economic Forum 2013).

that such attentiveness exists and is sustained, CSOs assume the role of being representative of groups of people when they engage with those who govern *on behalf of* those who are governed. Thus, CSOs occupy the gap between the government and the people. By definition, therefore, CSOs are intermediaries. In line with this reasoning, Fadakinte (2013:136) has defined civil society as the 'space that exists between the national government and the individual', and which 'consists of a variety of different groups and associations, each of which is dedicated to upholding certain values and to achieve particular ends'. Based on the discussion so far, I define CSOs as *those organisations that represent society as intermediaries between the government and citizens in the pursuit of good governance*. In the next section, I discuss how this definition of CSOs applies in the Nigerian context.

CSOs as intermediaries in the Nigerian context

In Nigeria, CSOs have historically served as intermediaries (Fadakinte 2013, Obadare 2015). However, the means and the effectiveness with which they have carried out this role vary according to the context and milieu within which they operated. In general terms, CSOs in Nigeria have been directly involved in the pursuit of good governance through the advocacy for more transparency in government decision-making, greater commitment to the rule of law within government processes, increased accountability in the use and expenditure of public funds, as well as justice, fairness and equity in conflict resolution (Ikelegbe 2013). Among the diverse ingredients of good governance put forward in various commentaries on the topic, I draw on three proposed by Sen (1990) – freedom, accountability and participation – because they align with the methods and strategies historically applied by CSOs in their role as intermediaries, namely, *activism* in the struggle for freedom from repressive rule, *advocacy*[2] in the pursuit of greater accountability from the government and *citizen participation* as a means of eliciting informed reaction from Nigerians. In what follows, I discuss each of these. I argue that, in progressive order, each strategy corresponds to a particular historical stage of CSO activity in Nigeria up to the present period. First, I discuss the activities of CSOs in Nigeria which portrays their activist role in the struggle against military leadership characterised by the suppression of freedom and the infringement of citizens' rights. Second, in the transition from a post-military era to an, albeit immature, democratic one, I discuss how CSO activity has been characterised by the pursuit of good governance through the advocacy for increased government accountability. Finally, I explain how

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2   Here, I use the term activism to refer to the policy of taking direct action or intervention (such as a protest) to achieve a political or social change (Zeitz 2008) while the advocacy should be understood as milder form of action which may involve the act of pleading or arguing for a cause. Advocacy can also be seen as working 'within the system' whereas activism is seen as working 'outside the system' to generate change (Toope 2010).

CSOs are currently taking advantage of internet technology in the development of a burgeoning open data ecosystem as a way to achieve greater participation of citizens in government decision-making. Thereafter, I discuss the rise of open data engagement in the evolving strategy of CSOs amid the obstacles and pitfalls that characterise developing countries like Nigeria. Table 1 shows a summary of CSO activity and strategies in Nigeria.

Table 1 A historical overview of CSO activity in Nigeria

	Period of military and colonial rule (pre-1960; 1966–1979; 1983–1999)	Early democratic period (1979–1983)	Current democratic period (1999–present)
Societal causes	Basic freedoms and citizens' rights	Accountability and transparency in government	Citizen participation in government processes and decision-making
Primary strategy	Activism	Advocacy	Open data
Methods employed	Mass protests, boycotts, riots and strikes	Campaigns, lobby, town hall meetings etc.	Engagement through digital platforms

CSO activism and the pursuit of citizens' basic rights

Fadakinte (2013) periodises the activities of CSOs in Nigeria as follows: a post-independence period (1960–1965); two periods of military rule (1966–1979 and 1983–1999); and two periods of civilian democracy (1979–1983 and 1999 to the present). Of these, he notes that the second period (that is, military rule) was the one which witnessed a substantive rise of civil society activity in Nigeria due to a rapid increase in the number of CSOs. According to him, CSOs during this period acted as 'the main opposition to military (mis)rule and were in staunch defence of the citizens' rights' (Fadakinte (2013: 134). Since military rule was characterised by dictatorship, regardless of which individual assumed the role of head of state, civil society organisations took on the role of resisting repressive systems of governance, fighting against state abuses and curbing the excesses of those at the helm. Their strategies were actualised through the mobilisation of public protests and demonstrations, labour strikes and, when deemed necessary, riots (Ikelegbe 2013). According to Obadare (2005:84), it was not until the early 1990s with increasingly 'popular discontent against military rule and depression in the economic realm' that the concept of *civil society* came to the fore in popular vocabulary. During this time, 'individuals and groupings that were central to this open challenge to the state in Nigeria […] began to refer to themselves as belonging to, and defending the values of, civil society' (Obadare 2005:85).

However, Ikelegbe (2013) suggests that the rise of activism as a means to confronting oppressive or discriminatory rule in Nigeria took its roots from the country's colonial era. According to him, colonialism brought with it 'new

social exchanges, modernism and attendant social dislocations' that 'provided a new platform of consciousness and agitation which catalysed the formation of communal, traditional, cultural and other groups' (Ikelegbe 2013: 33). Here already, the struggle for freedom to self-rule, as a value perceived to be commonly held and accepted by the general populace (the public), led the nascent civil society to begin to fulfil the role of intermediary between the government and governed. In this case, it was between the British colonial masters and the colonised people. This struggle would lead civil society representatives to serve as activists in the campaign for the country to operate as a sovereign nation. Their campaigns, which eventually proved successful when the country gained independence in 1960, were arguably the prelude to subsequent confrontations between the government and civil society, including those that took place during the periods of military rule already discussed above.

CSOs advocacy for government transparency and accountability

Following what appears to have been the definitive end of military rule and the onset of a sustained period of democracy, the focus of civil society in Nigeria inevitably shifted from issues related to liberation from colonial and repressive systems to those centred on increased transparency and accountability within government. Just as previous leadership regimes during colonial and military eras demonstrated little regard for basic citizens' rights in a way that prompted the demand for freedom, self-determination and democracy, the ensuing democratic period also witnessed the mismanagement and embezzlement of public funds which led to calls for greater accountability among elected government officials. Thus, while CSO activity in the former period was characterised by the desire to bring about change through activism, the latter was characterised by the adoption of strategies based on advocacy. The difference is significant. While CSO activism relied primarily on open protests through mass mobilised rallies, riots and strikes (which were prevalent mostly during the colonial and military eras), advocacy serves more as a tool for engaging with the government on behalf of the people through 'milder' forms of action such as the lobbying for change in laws, policies and regulations, equity in resource distribution, and so on.

The inception of democracy in Nigeria ushered in a greater variety of issues advocated for by CSOs. Ikelegbe (2013) notes that civil and primary groups which articulated and expressed diverse interests blossomed during this period. However, the absence of good governance manifested by endemic corruption, infrastructure deficit and high unemployment rates was an abiding concern across the country. To tackle these, a new generation of CSOs began to evolve. Besides their deviation from strictly activist strategies, these CSOs were different from those of the past in their professional commitment and general approach to civil society work. While the activists of earlier years earned their living through diverse professions and engaged in civil society labour mostly on part-time basis,

many of the leading advocates of the later period acquired formal training in professional disciplines closely aligned to civil society work. Among other reasons, it can be argued that the increased professional status of CSO work was to qualify for funding (mostly) from international donor agencies. As Anyanwu (n.d.: online) observes,

> Nigerian CSOs have come to be stymied in the quagmire of 'establishment mentality', whereby it becomes fashionable to merely pass through the motion of gaining recognition and visibility by performing form activities prescribed by donor agencies and 'international best practices' of: 'accountability', 'zero tolerance', 'transparency', 'anti-corruption', 'due process monitoring', 'capacity building', 'empowerment/skills acquisition', 'communiques', etc.

As a result, CSOs became mostly urban in their mentality. And 'being more of professionals and middle-class associations, [they] have been delinked from localities and the grassroots' (Ikelegbe 2013:38). This is in contrast to those CSOs of the military years whose successes depended greatly on their ability to rally masses at the grassroots level and even in rural areas. This is not to suggest that CSOs which focus solely on advocacy are ineffective. While an activist approach may expect to draw instant victories or losses, the desired results expected through strategies based on advocacy may be slower to realise – but, perhaps, more deep-rooted. Also, activist approaches to CSO work typically involve the organisation of public rallies, demonstrations, boycotts and strikes which, arguably, may not require high levels of cognitive activity; while those based on advocacy arguably demand more subtlety and sophistication. Among other instruments, advocacy approaches require the organisation of public meetings, debates, petitions and polls which potentially call for higher proficiencies and skills. Significantly, this level of sophistication has prepared CSOs to join the global trend towards utilising open data as a tool in the advocacy for greater transparency and accountability in government. In this way, moving beyond mere advocacy towards greater citizen participation, the adoption of open data serves as the next strategy for CSOs in the pursuit of good governance. In the following sections, I examine how CSOs are adopting open data and the challenges they encounter in doing so.

CSOs and the adoption of open data

For a few years now, it appears that civil society organisations in Nigeria have been metamorphosing into a community of open data enthusiasts, perhaps in the hope that, through open data, the effectiveness of their role as advocates for good governance would be enhanced. Indeed, as laid out thus far in this chapter, a growing number of CSOs in Nigeria have gradually and organically developed from a fragmented gathering of activists to a sophisticated pool of organised

groups whose approach to civil society work has become closely associated with the uptake of open and publicly accessible data (Mejabi et al. 2014) as an instrument in the promotion of good governance. Indeed, this trend points to the gradual development of an open data ecosystem in which data is being used, re-used and redistributed more frequently and with greater ease among citizens. In Nigeria, this is arguably leading to a higher level of citizen awareness and participation in government processes than in the past, and is driven by the proliferation of CSOs with the skills and knowledge of web-based open data systems and tools.

However, this does not necessarily imply that the activities of these CSOs demonstrate the workings of an *effective* open data ecosystem. What is required is not simply the isolated use and advocacy for open data by individual groups, but the integrated and collaborative application of systems that facilitate the flow of data for the benefit of both government and citizens. For an ecosystem to work effectively, Heimstädt et al. (2014) propose that there should be the active intervention of three groups within the life cycle of data: suppliers, intermediaries and end users. While governments remain the primary suppliers and citizens the final consumers in the open data value chain, the role of intermediaries is known to be multifaceted and multileveled (Van Schalkwyk et al. 2016). Scholars point out that intermediaries consist of grassroot organisations, researchers (domain experts) and developers (data experts), as well as donors and funders along with other individuals and organisations that facilitate and support the development of data-driven products and services (Chattapadhyay 2014, Davies 2014, Khan & Foti 2015). In sum, intermediaries are those who operate within the open data ecosystem by means of their contribution, in one way or the other, to the supply of open data by governments as well as to the demand for such data by citizens.

A healthy open data ecosystem may therefore be described as one which comprises some or all these actors who actively perform roles that are essential to the effective flow of data among all the stakeholders. It becomes evident therefore that, for this constant flow of data to occur, intermediaries are indispensable (Van Schalkwyk et al. 2015, 2016). In the Nigerian context, I argue that those CSOs with the required skills need to assume a primary role of intermediation within the country's burgeoning open data ecosystem. However, in line with my definition of CSOs as intermediaries in society, I suggest that the effectiveness of the role of CSOs as open data intermediaries should equally be measured by two factors: first, the efficacy of their engagement with the government and, second, the active participation of citizens. On the side of the government (the supply side), the role of CSOs would be to ensure that there is disclosure of government data which can be accessed through online or offline means created by the CSOs themselves, or the government. This data which will be made available in open formats would allow citizens to engage with them and elicit reactions from citizens through official channels such as elections (the demand side). These reactions would in turn lead the government towards greater accountability and transparency and,

among other things, sustain the desired culture of data disclosure by government – thus closing the loop. This cycle from government disclosure through citizen engagement and citizen reaction and back to government disclosure is illustrated in Figure 1. In the next section I discuss this cycle with focus on citizen participation and its challenges for CSOs in the Nigerian context.

Figure 1 A diagrammatic representation of the open data ecosystem in Nigeria
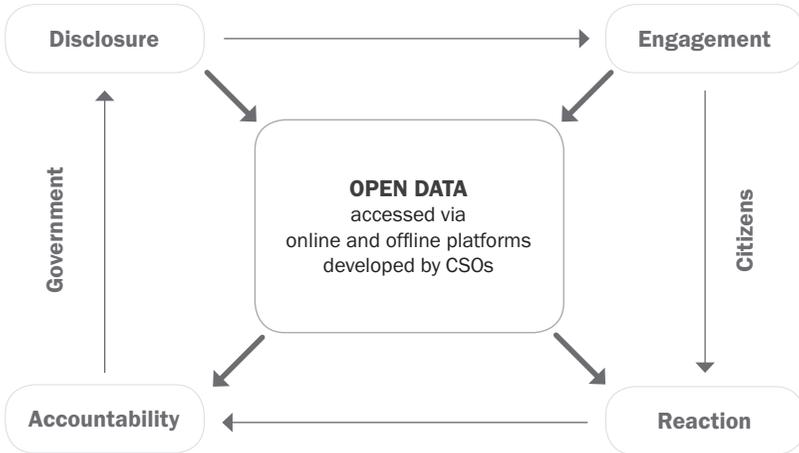
CSOs, open data and the challenges of citizen participation

Citizen participation is a key component of an open data ecosystem (Zuiderwijk et al. 2014). It is one end of the open data value chain which has government disclosure at its other end. Between these two are the intermediaries who try to ensure that data successfully passes from the latter to the former. Since not all data supplied by the government can be utilised in their raw formats by citizens, intermediaries help to fill the breach by translating the data into structures that can be more easily understood. In most cases, this translation is done through the use of web applications and digital tools deployed by the intermediaries. Thus, the internet plays a significant and increasingly indispensable role globally as an enabler in the open data value chain. In developing countries like Nigeria with limited internet penetration,[3] the reliance on web technology for the transmission of open data from its suppliers to potential users is likely to be fraught with challenges. It leads to an imbalance in the open data ecosystem whereby citizens without access to internet technology are excluded and marginalised. Gurstein

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3   According to the Internet World Stats, internet penetration as at June 2015 was 51.1% which means that just over half of the population have access to the internet.

(2011) identifies access to internet and technology as the first stage in what he referred to as a three-step process towards the effective use of open data. He highlights the importance of access to telecommunications and internet services and infrastructure in making open data available to all users. According to Gurstein, this includes the affordability of internet access (which is a major issue for many, particularly in the developing world), the availability of sufficient bandwidth and the accessibility of the underlying networks on which internet technologies depend. Even more fundamental are the hardware and software required to access and process the data, along with tools that have the capacity to carry out various kinds of analyses with it.

This is not to suggest that the internet (and accompanying technologies) is the only channel through which citizens can gain access to open data. In order not to rely solely on the internet, a multi-faceted strategy can be employed by suppliers and intermediaries to reach users who are disadvantaged by the lack of access. The value and effectiveness of an open data strategy in countries where a significant percentage of potential users are without access to the internet would therefore be partly determined by the variety of methods intermediaries adopt to keep citizens in the loop. Still, beyond issues related to the lack of internet access and the availability of related technologies is the challenge of the availability of computer and software skills by potential users of open data. According to Gurstein, 'techies know how to do visualisation, university trained persons and professionals know how to use the analytical software but ordinary community people might not know how to do either and getting that expertise/support might be either difficult or expensive or both'. Related to this, Gurstein (2011) also highlights the challenge of data interpretation which can be the result of low levels of data literacy in some countries. For Nigeria, the current literacy rate is 59%[4] which is well below the world's average of 86.1%. For low percentage countries like Nigeria, it may be safely inferred that a reasonable number of citizens in the country lack sufficient knowledge required to make sense of open data due to a potential inability to identify the information that would be worthwhile to them and that could change their lives for the better – as is the expected goal of open data strategies.

A final step in Gurstein's process refers to the 'use' of open data. This step is based on the presumption that problems of access and interpretation have been resolved. Effective use of data points to the ability of users to combine datasets in such a way as to apply them in their engagement with the government and its processes. The ability to utilise open data effectively suggests that users are empowered to take action within their rights as citizens. Therefore, one indication that data is used effectively by citizens is when it helps them to make informed choices during democratic exercises such as plebiscites and general elections.

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4 According to the *CIA World FactBook*, this refers to the number of people who can read and write at the age of 15 and above (2015 est.).

For effective CSO intermediation in the Nigerian open data ecosystem, I suggest that open data strategies should be developed in such a way as to attain balance between the provision of data by the government (supply side) and the implicit or explicit demand for data by users (demand side). This requires that, as open data intermediaries, CSOs may advocate for the disclosure of data by the government while also ensuring that such data is made available to ordinary citizens in formats that are accessible, interpretable and can be utilised effectively. For this to occur, it is clear they need to find solutions to the challenges of access and literacy prevalent among a significant cross-section of Nigerian citizens. In my view, this necessarily requires that CSOs *themselves* possess the means to access data and the literacy levels needed to interpret them in order to make it utilisable by the public, therefore warranting higher levels of commitment, knowledge and skills among those in their ranks. As I argue in this chapter, this appears to be the path taken by CSOs operating as in the open data ecosystem. However, since the reality is that individual CSOs typically operate along specific areas of the open data spectrum (that is, either the supply side or the demand side), I suggest, as argued by Van Schalkwyk et al. (2016), that effective open data intermediation in Nigeria necessarily involves a consolidated effort among various CSOs. In this way, the strengths and weaknesses of different agents in the open data value chain can be combined, complemented and compensated for. In the next section, I propose how this synergy may take place among selected CSOs.

CSOs in Nigeria: Three case studies

CSO activity in Nigeria has gradually become less reliant on activism and more on advocacy directed at the government. I also argued that there is currently a greater drive towards citizen participation by CSOs due in great part to the adoption of open data. I also suggested that, among other reasons, this uptake of open data appears to be leading CSOs in the present dispensation to become more skillful in the ability to interpret and analyse data (through the acquisition of higher levels of education and development of skills) and more sophisticated in the strategies they employ (through greater professionalisation of CSO work) – more than those in the past who adopted activism or simple advocacy as their primary approach. As further suggested, this sophistication is reflected in their full-time commitment to CSO work, their educational status and their adoption of arguably more cognitive ways of engaging with the government. Another reason for this recent trend is that, for CSOs, such a profile arguably improves their chances of obtaining funding from international donors (Anyanwu n.d.). In summary, these changes imply that, to serve more effectively as intermediaries within Nigeria's open data ecosystem, CSOs have to enhance their cultural capital in order to gain more economic capital (see Van Schalkwyk et al. 2016).

In their study of intermediaries in developing countries, Van Schalkwyk et al. (2016) adopted Bourdieu's theory of social fields and capital to investigate

the role of multiple intermediaries within open data ecosystems. Acknowledging that 'intermediation does not only consist of a single agent facilitating the flow of data in an open data supply chain' (Van Schalkwyk et al. 2016: 19), they noted that the existence of diverse intermediaries has the potential effect of increasing the use and impact of open data since, according to them, 'no single intermediary is likely to possess all the types of capital required to unlock the full value of the transaction between the provider and the user' (Van Schalkwyk et al. 2016: 20). In their empirical analysis, they expanded Bourdieu's four species of capital (economic, social, cultural and symbolic) by including a 'technical' component. While technical competences can be grouped within individuals' cultural capital, the distinction is useful because, as they argue, technical skills often come after those of cultural or social capital in the order of acquisition by intermediaries. For the purpose of my study, the distinction helpfully buttresses my argument that technical skills are increasingly being acquired by CSOs in order to adequately fulfil their role as intermediaries of open data. While these skills were not a requirement for entry into CSO work, they are now becoming essential as CSOs gradually adopt open data strategies for their advocacy.

One manifestation of the growing reliance of technical skills can be seen in the adoption of online platforms and digital tools by CSOs as spaces for more effective open data engagement. These tools, since they transcend physical space and time, potentially offer CSOs the opportunity of reaching a wider spectrum of citizenry. The tools also facilitate the transmission of data and information from government to citizens, and vice versa, which greatly enhances their intermediatory role as CSOs but, more importantly, as intermediaries of open data. Some of these online tools have attained varying level of acclaim. However, since they remain restricted to those with access (as discussed above), they must be complemented by offline strategies for engagement with citizens without access. As I discuss below, this combination of online and offline methods (often through synergising efforts with other actors) offers some level of completeness to the role of CSOs as open data intermediaries.

In the next section, I explore the roles of three CSOs in Nigeria which serve as case studies to demonstrate how open data intermediation is taking place in the open data ecosystem. I then propose ways by which these CSOs, based on their individual competencies (whether technical, cultural or social), can form synergies with each other in the open data ecosystem. The CSOs are BudgIT, Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC) and Connected Development (CODE). One reason for the choice of these organisations for the study lay in the fact that they were easier to access within the timeframe available for the research. However, and more importantly, these CSOs were selected on the basis of their high level of activity and presence in civil society spheres in Nigeria, and by their having featured in other related open data studies (such as Mejabi et al. 2014 and Van Schalkwyk et al. 2015, 2015). The research methods adopted varied with each organisation. Information from PPDC was acquired through semi-structured

interviews with key officials and complemented by participant observation. For BudgIT, data was obtained by means of semi-structured interviews with relevant personnel while CODE was unavailable for interviews. However, secondary data was obtained through textual analysis of information available on the websites of the three organisations. Admittedly, a more rigorous methodological and consistent approach may have been adopted for the research, but these were deemed sufficient for the purpose of giving support to the ideas presented in this chapter. Thus, the case studies are aimed at demonstrating what currently exists in Nigeria and at proposing a framework for optimising the effectiveness of open data intermediation within the Nigerian ecosystem.

BudgIT

Founded in 2011, BudgIT identifies itself as a civic organisation and a 'pioneer in the field of social advocacy melded with technology'. It thrives on using 'technology to intersect citizen engagement with institutional improvement' through a methodology that deploys 'data mining skill sets to creatively represent data and empower citizens to use the resulting information in demanding improved service delivery' (BudgIT 2011). BudgIT claims to use an array of technological and creative tools (such as infographics) to simplify Nigeria's budget in order to make it more comprehensible for citizens. It also claims to employ a specific methodology based on data mining skill sets to represent data in ways that can empower citizens to use the resulting information to demand improved service delivery from the government. According to them, this is done 'with the primary aim of raising [the] standard of transparency and accountability in government'. BudgIT's most notable tool is called *Tracka*[5] which 'allows Nigerians [to] post pictures of developmental projects in their communities […] and demand completion of the government projects in their neighbourhoods' (Budgit 2014). According to the 2015 report on the Tracka tool, it is highlighted that:

> Tracka was created to assist active interested citizens in efficiently tracking budgets and public projects in their respective communities. The reoccurrence of capital projects listed and not executed in successive budget dampens the spirit of people whose sense of belonging comes from an inclusion in the State and Federal budgets. The platform is therefore layered on Open Data, bringing people aware of their civic duties together to share photos, videos, documents and also post comments on existing projects, and alert government and civil society to the non-implementation of any capital projects as well. (BudgIT 2015)

Based on the above, BudgIT is evidently aware of its position as a civil society

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5   http://www.tracka.ng

organisations which serves as a bridge between the Nigerian government and its citizens. Therefore, within the open data ecosystem, it operates as an intermediary. BudgIT does not claim to carry out advocacy for the disclosure of open government data. Rather, it relies on data which is already made publicly available by government's budget office, a department of the Ministry of Finance (Mejabi et al. 2014).[6] Therefore it focuses less on the supply side of the open data ecosystem. Moreover, due to the unavailability of the contact details (emails and telephone numbers) of government representatives, they have encountered challenges in their attempts to reach the government using their open data platforms such as Tracka. In its various documentations, BudgIT positions itself as an advocate for greater citizen engagement. At the centre of their strategy is the Tracka platform which has covered over 450 projects in 15 local communities across the country. Furthermore, BudgIT claims to have reached more than 750 000 Nigerians through digital channels and physical spaces with 'over 2 000 unique data requests monthly from private, corporate and development entities/individuals' (BudgIT 2015). However, they have also met with challenges caused by the lack of access to the internet on which their Tracka platform is based; and also the apparent reluctance of users to engage with it as a result of the costs associated with using the internet. To deal with these issues, BudgIT organises town hall meetings as a means to educate local communities who cannot access the data available on their digital platforms. During these meetings, they work with the local communities by means of letter-writing sessions. In this way, they give them the opportunity to react to the data that BudgIT makes available.

Connected Development (CODE)

Connected Development is a civil society group founded in 2012 with the aim of improving access to information in order to empower local communities. It claims to support local communities by 'creating platforms for dialogue, enabling informed debate, and building capacities of marginalised communities'. According to them, a key strategy to achieve their aims is the development of platforms that help to 'close the feedback loop between citizens and the government'. Their flagship platform is called *Follow the Money*[7] which is built for the promotion of 'transparency and accountability in the implementation of funds intended for local communities' (CODE 2013). Follow the Money serves as a digital space to showcase results of the investigations carried out by in-house and external researchers and journalists and presented in formats that include narratives, infographics, video and audio. They also organise training sessions

6   However, BudgIT has previously collaborated with other CSOs directly involved in the advocacy for the disclosure of government data in order to obtain specific contract information for capital projects that it monitors using its Tracka tool. I discuss this collaboration in the next section.

7   http://www.followthemoneyng.org

and workshops for journalists and individuals on diverse aspects of using and engaging with publicly available data.

As a CSO, CODE situates itself within the open data ecosystem as an intermediary since they claim to operate in the space between citizens and the government. However, their primary strategy is to source open and publicly available data for advocacy directed at the government. They also claim to provide access to information related to key development areas that affect the lives of citizens, such as health and education. They do this by reinterpreting complex budget data for citizens. The main strategy of CODE is to utilise this data in the process of conducting research and investigations aimed at unearthing and drawing attention to issues that raise questions about transparency and accountability within government processes. The results of these investigations are then published on their website, Follow the Money. Although the intention is for the platform to reach a wider audience, it is not clear whether this strategy achieves its purpose. On one hand, the website does not proactively elicit user feedback (beyond the basic comment feature that is emblematic of blogs); therefore, one could argue that the platform does not promote citizen participation effectively enough. On the other hand, there is no clear indication that alternative means are adopted to reach users who are without internet access. However, CODE can be described as a CSO that fulfils its role of representing the rest of society. This is achieved specifically through their own use of open data for advocacy to government for improved transparency, accountability and, ultimately, good governance.

Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC)

PPDC is a CSO which does not consider itself as an organisation that works directly with open data. This is based on their own unique understanding of what makes data open. However, one of their primary goals is 'to increase citizens' participation in governance processes' by enabling access to public contracting information as well as 'empowering and mobilising more citizens to participate in government processes' through radio programmes in which they share their data and experiences of project monitoring. Like BudgIT, they carry out monitoring and evaluation of capital projects initiated by the government. However, unlike BudgIT, they do not rely on crowdsourcing to report on these projects. Rather, they hire the services of project monitors who observe the progress of projects and send in reports which are then disseminated to the public through various media channels. Their online strategy is centred around *Budeshi*,[8] a web platform 'that seeks to link budget and procurement data to public services' (PPDC 2015). The data made available on the platform is derived from government sources that are publicly available or directly requested for by

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8   http://www.budeshi.ng

PPDC. Thus, a key strategy for them is advocacy for the sustained and proactive disclosure of government data.

Although PPDC has existed longer than both BudgIT and CODE, it is a relatively newer entrant in the open data ecosystem. However, PPDC can be considered as an intermediary because of its role in the dissemination of public data from government to citizens. While PPDC does not interface directly with the latter (which therefore, in my view, limits their claims as promoters of citizen participation), it is specialised in advocacy for the proactive disclosure of data by the government and its agencies. One of PPDC's key strategies in this regard has been to develop and publish rankings of government institutions based on the proactive disclosure of data to the public.

In Table 2, I summarise the findings on the activities of these three CSOs within the Nigerian open data ecosystem. On the basis of their advocacy for disclosure of data, fostering citizen engagement and facilitating citizen reaction to openly accessible data, I classify the CSOs as either *very active*, *mildly active* or *not active*.

In a bid to consolidate their reputations as key actors within the open data ecosystem, along with the desire to gain further ground in their advocacy work, the above CSOs (along with others) have established an alliance that includes those civil society organisations at the forefront of the campaign for the provision and utilisation of government data in open formats. Having worked individually to promote open government, the aim of the alliance is to join forces in a coalition to engage government further on issues of openness and transparency. The overall objective of the alliance is to develop strategies that would enable member groups to synergise and, whenever possible, form a single frontier in negotiations with the government. However, since each group organises its own events and builds its own digital platforms, the alliance's strategy for consolidating the open data digital platforms of its members as a way to enhance their effectiveness as intermediaries in the ecosystem, remains, at best, fragmented and therefore less effective than its advocacy programme. I suggest that in order to grow the ecosystem and achieve the broader aims of open data in Nigeria, there is a need for CSOs to base their alliance on strategies that focus on their weaknesses and deficits in the promotion of greater citizen participation. Table 2 offers some direction on how this may be achieved.

As the table shows, BudgIT's appears to be the most active of the three CSOs that have been researched. However, its advocacy for the disclosure of open data from the government (the supply side) is limited or non-existent. To overcome this deficit, BudgIT could collaborate with PPDC which is reputed for its role as an advocate for the release of government data. Conversely, BudgIT could assist PPDC in tackling its deficit in the task of facilitating public reaction to the data it makes available. Similarly, CODE may choose to cooperate with PPDC in the dissemination of findings from its investigative work through the radio

Table 2 Classification of CSOs according to the level of their activity as intermediaries in the open data ecosystem

Civil Society Organisation (CSO)	Advocacy for the disclosure of government data in open formats	Fostering citizen engagement with open data made available on digital platforms	Eliciting and facilitating citizen reaction to open data
BudgIT	Not active	Very active Through its Tracka tool, digital infographics and other platforms, BudgIT actively tries to engage citizens using open data	Very active BudgIT adopts other means outside the internet and digital technology to ensure the effective use of open data among citizens.
Connected Development (CODE)	Not active	Mildly active On its Follow the Money platform, CODE publishes the results of its engage with open data; however, the platform does not offer enough opportunities for active citizen engagement	Mildly active By organising workshops and training sessions for journalists and other individuals in the use of open data; however, these sessions are directed at specialised groups
Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC)	Very active PPDC's specialises in advocating for government agencies to proactively disclose procurement data	Mildly active Through its engagement with citizens by means of radio programmes; however, at the time of writing, its new digital platform, Budeshi, was not fully utilised by citizens	Not active

programmes that the former organises. In the same vein, PPDC could benefit from the rigour of CODE's research in order to make better use of the data it publishes on its digital platforms. Also, BudgIT can support CODE in its outreach to citizens at the grassroots level in order to better disseminate results of the investigative research carried out by the latter.

Conclusion

Over the years, civil society in Nigeria has evolved alongside the economic, political and social milieu of the country. For a fledgling democracy like Nigeria's, the effort exerted to attain some of the basic needs of society (that is, basic rights of citizens; accountability and transparency in government; participation of citizens in government processes and decision-making) can be summarised as the pursuit of good governance. Civil society organisations have historically been identified as institutions at the forefront of this quest by serving as intermediaries between the

Fig. 2: A framework for open data synergy among selected CSOs in Nigeria
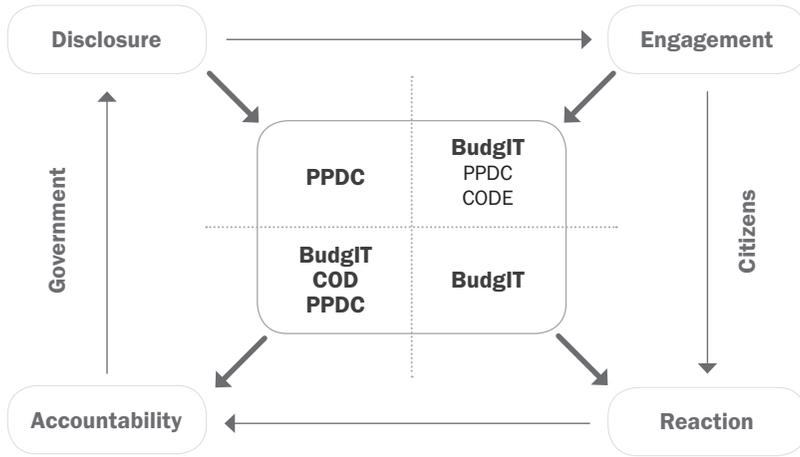
government and the rest of society through activism, advocacy and, more recently, through the engagement of citizens using open data.

In this chapter, I have attempted to trace the history of CSO activity in Nigeria and how their evolution is growthing the open data ecosystem in the country. I also discussed the structure of this ecosystem which is based on the primary role of CSOs within it, namely: as intermediaries between citizens and government. While the new generation of CSOs are equipping themselves with the knowledge and tools required to effectively utilise open data (and, thus, fulfil their role as open data intermediaries), they are also developing strategies that go beyond activism and mere advocacy (which were characteristic of previous eras in Nigerian history) towards higher citizen participation through open data. For most of them, formulating open data strategies translates to the deployment of online digital platforms and tools to reach a wider range of citizenry. However, I also discussed how strategies that rely on online platforms are accompanied by challenges (such as lack of access to technology and the low levels of literacy required to interpret open data) which are characteristic of less developed countries like Nigeria. For this reason, CSOs such as BudgIT have adopted both online and offline strategies to achieve greater citizen participation. Others like CODE and PPDC are also active at various levels of the open data ecosystem. However, since each one is deficient in one or more areas of the ecosystem, I have argued for a more cohesive alliance of CSOs which takes these deficits into account. By clearly identifying their points of weakness and inactivity within the open data ecosystem, it becomes possible to determine the most suitable ways by which CSOs can synergise their pursuit of a more active and vibrant participation of citizens on the path towards good governance in Nigeria. Finally, although the usefulness of my findings are

limited by the scope of the study, they offer a helpful route to further research on civil society organisations and their role as intermediaries within open data ecosystems in Nigeria and elsewhere.

About the author

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