

CIARD-GODAN consultation

Report of sessions 4-5

Plenary opening and public event

Welcome remarks: Ajit Maru (GFAR)

Invited Speakers: Catherine Woteki (USDA), Tim Wheeler (DFID)

Respondent: Marcella Villareal (FAO)

Thanks: Johannes Keizer (FAO)

Ajit Maru, Senior Officer at GFAR, welcomed the participants on behalf of the conference organizers, briefly presented the role of GFAR and introduced CIARD and GODAN. He also introduced the main objective of the meeting: understand how CIARD and GODAN can interlink. He remarked that participation was around 70 people from both CIARD and GODAN partner organizations, a good representation of information providers and actors in the open knowledge movement in agriculture.

Mr Maru then gave the floor to the two invited speakers.

Tim Wheeler, Deputy Chief Scientific Advisor at DFID, thanked the hosts and presented the wider context of open data in the UK and the US and the drivers behind GODAN.

He recounted how everything started with the G8 at Camp David in 2012, how USDA contacted DFID in 2013 to follow up on some of the actions agreed at the G8 meeting and how DFID saw in this a fantastic opportunity to lead an open data movement.

Mr Wheeler highlighted the main milestones for open data in the UK - the G8 Open Government Partnership event in October 2013 under the UK leadership of the G8, which was the kickoff of GODAN; the UK action plan for open data in agriculture and nutrition, one of the 7 action plans resulting from the April 2013 G8 meeting in Washington; the 2013 report of the “High Level Panel on post-2015” stating the need for data to be accessible and available to impact the citizens - and gave two practical examples of openness in the UK government: the UK “Development Tracker” website for searching development projects and the main website Data.gov.uk, to which all UK government departments are contributing.

He then moved on to illustrating what is happening in Science policy in the UK, how Open Data is a cross-government priority to the UK chief scientific advisor of the government and how for the Royal Society and the main research council BBSRC data science is a priority.

In order to leverage the potential of open data to be used in unforeseen ways, the UK Ministry of State

in the Business Department, under the theme Agricultural Technology Strategy, asked to set up a new Center for Agricultural Informatics formed by public and private actors, focusing especially on potential commercial applications for agricultural data.

Regarding DFID's role, Mr Wheeler underlined how DFID has a "development" slant on open data, a role in setting technologies to share data, in sharing evidence and in generating evidence in the use of data for development. He illustrated the DFID Open Access policy, whereby they require those who receive funds from DFID to publish in open access journals and also make their datasets available after a period of time.

Research funded by DFID is producing huge amounts of data. However, beyond the provision of data, DFID's focus is more on the use of data in developing countries, requiring for instance capacity building to make sure that national statistical systems are capable of using statistical data.

Mr Wheeler concluded his speech reiterating that he wanted to present the broader context in the UK and that the details regarding GODAN would be illustrated in the next session.

Catherine Woteki, Under Secretary for United States Department of Agriculture (USDA), opened her speech by expressing USDA's interest in the opportunity for a global open data network for agriculture and nutrition. She remarked that the US, as well as the UK, view open data as a fantastic opportunity, and further detailed the meaning of open data as data that can be freely used, re-used, re-distributed, subject only to the requirement of attribution and share-alike.

Ms Woteki's speech covered some specific reasons why open data is important for agriculture and nutrition as well as some examples on how open data have been used in the US.

The main reason why open data is important is that it has the power to revolutionize agriculture, by providing better information for farmers and decision makers as well as for efficient research advancement.

A diagram showing all sources of agriculture-related data within the US government showed what types of data are needed to predict the vulnerability of the food system to climate change on a regional basis: data on plant genetic pathogens, pests, climate, vegetation, soil, statistical data. The objective of combining all these data is to be able to predict net crop yields.

Among the examples of how open data have been used in the US, Ms Woteki chose two:

- 1) the seven regional climate hubs, with the responsibility to analyse data and provide regional adaptation and mitigation tools: data are derived from both federal and non-federal partners (universities, companies, NGOs) and through technology transfer providers (cooperative extension, USDA services) reach their ultimate users: farmers, rangers, tribes;
- 2) the Germplasm Resource Information Network (GRIN Global), giving access to data (seeds collection, traits, growing requirements) from 21 germplasm sites where thousands of samples are stored: the common information systems of the 21 sites evolved into GRIN Global thanks to a grant of the Global Crop Diversity Trust to USDA and Bioversity International aimed at expanding the system. GRIN can enable other germplasm collectors: the CG system has agreed to put their germplasm data there and also some countries have agreed to do so.

Ms Woteki then went on summarizing the main open data initiatives in the US, from the Open Data

policy of President Obama to the G8 International Conference on Open Data for Agriculture in April 2013. Following this Conference, seven countries and the EU made public their open data policies and in the US several hundreds of datasets were made available through data.gov.

The US also started providing capacity building to countries for agricultural statistics and having conversations with the G20 countries. Closer conversations with the UK led to the launch of GODAN.

Ms Woteki finally summarized the mission of GODAN stating that GODAN wishes to support global efforts to make agricultural and nutrition data available and accessible for unrestricted use worldwide and brings together a wide variety of open data stakeholders to advocate at a high level for the adoption of default open data policies globally.

She concluded thanking the hosts and expressing interest in opening up a discussion in the next days of the GODAN-IARD consultation.

Marcela Villareal, Director of Office for Partnerships, Advocacy and Capacity Development at FAO, spoke on behalf of the host organization. She began by highlighting that FAO is a partner of GODAN and strongly believes that innovation goes through access to open data, in order to provide food and livelihoods in a sustainable way.

Ms Villareal remarked that open data is in the DNA of FAO, since FAO has a global role in producing data and making it available worldwide. FAO is both a collector and a producer of data; examples of data managed by FAO are statistics, geographic information systems, plant genetics, fisheries, forestry, natural resources.

Ms Villareal explained how only recently has it been recognized that agriculture is an engine of growth: FAO contributed to the 2008 report from the World Bank that finally acknowledged this. However, it can only be an engine of growth if it's nurtured with data and information, which is often the bottleneck in developing countries.

She underlined that FAO is interested in GODAN especially with respect to access to the data: they want to make sure that people who need the data can really have access to it and that there is no divide among those who have access to it and those who don't; they are therefore interested in outreach and capacity development. A question the Ms Villareal posed to this initiative is how do we know who is using the data.

She then went on stressing two other aspects that are important to FAO: the nutrition aspect, mentioning which she invited the GRIN initiative to be present at the upcoming International Conference on Nutrition 2 to be held in FAO at the end of November, and the need to capture different knowledge systems, including indigenous knowledge systems.

She concluded by saying that open data is essential for open governance and she therefore hopes that other governments beyond US and UK will join this initiative. FAO joins the effort of advocating for open data.

A session of questions and answers followed.

Federico Sancho (Inter-American Institute for Cooperation in Agriculture), asked if this community / this initiative should be concerned by the possible misuse of open data and the tendency to develop a demand for sensitive or "gossip" data like salaries or similar instead of scientific data. He asked whether

we should warn countries and organizations about this risk.

Wheeler replied saying that in their case they could see such an aspect as an opportunity: the G8 open government event would normally have focused on the use of data for business and tax purposes, but UK and US got the agricultural open data on the agenda.

Woteki recounted an episode illustrating how data can be misused by newspapers for hype (the case of a database of medical procedures released by the Department of Health). While there is always the possibility of hype, she affirmed that if we look at the applications that are being developed and at the potential she would not be dissuaded by the occasional misuse.

Michael Hailu (Center for Technical Cooperation, CTA) argued that the challenge for open data is the capacity of developing countries in terms of policy and technical support and asked how we can take up this issue, for instance leveraging the regional partnerships.

Woteki briefly suggested that the first step to capacity development is to get the buy-in and make the data open and public.

Wheeler confirmed that broadening the partnership is clearly a part of the solution, working through local political structures, and added that this would be an important item on the consultation agenda in the next days.

Piers Bockock (CGIAR Consortium) illustrated another type of challenge that the Consortium faces: they deal with thousands of scientists that do not see open data as part of their business or as a recognition criterion. The CGIAR is working on this and has put in place a very aggressive open access policy, whose timeframe is considered unfeasible by their scientists. He asked the speakers how we can tackle this gap between what the donors and leaders are asking for and those who provide the data.

Woteki provided the example of what they are doing in the US: they are working on a policy, still under construction, requiring scientists working in the public and in Universities to publish open access.

Wheeler suggested that it's all about incentives: since funding is provided in view of an impact, if you achieve impact through open access, this can be considered an incentive.

Johannes Keizer (FAO) had a question about the engagement of the private sector: they are interested in open data but how do we engage them to also contribute data? Acknowledging of course that certain very business-critical data cannot be shared.

Woteki related how the engagement of the private sector is something that is happening in the US: public open data stimulate the private sector to produce applications and companies using public data are creating jobs and providing new products. An incentive for the private sector is that the intellectual activity to develop new products based on public open data has to be protected.

Wheeler identified two potential cases in which the private sector could be engaged to provide data: when data after a certain period is of no commercial value anymore or when making data anonymous takes the value out of it.

Florence Buchholzer (EU Delegation in Rome) posed a question about the post-2015 agenda and indicators: the Rome based agencies just met and proposed their indicators for nutrition, food security and sustainable agriculture and countries had questions on the data required for these indicators. What is the possible contribution of CIARD and GODAN to the post-2015 indicators?

Wheeler hinted that the direct input will come from other statistical agencies and experts, but CIARD and GODAN can contribute by the broadening of the partnership, covering the continuum between small scale organizations and big scale organizations, thus bringing in a broader perspective and working inevitably with simpler indicators.

Richard Mugata (KARI) asked how we can implement a policy that ensures sustainability: he observed how so much information is lost when the funding finishes.

Wheeler observed that while they don't see GODAN as an implementing agency (GODAN's role is at a much higher level, enabling policy-level organizations), liaising with a broader partnership will ensure more sustainability.

Woteki confirmed that they are also really aware of the problem of projects finishing and knowledge disappearing: however, the advantage of open data is that data that are machine readable and use common vocabularies will less easily be lost.

Kim Mallalieu (Caribbean Open Institute) expressed their willingness to align with CIARD and GODAN and their keen interest in the establishment of policies protecting data generators, particularly the weakest actors. She asked if CIARD and GODAN have developed data-use policies at individual level and for institutions.

Wheeler replied that indeed GODAN hasn't so far. This is the sort of discussion that we will be having in the next days. GODAN is going to act as a catalyst.

Barbara Hutchinson (University of Arizona) had a question about changes in data management. In the US, data management plans are required to ensure that data are preserved and are not lost after projects; she wondered if this is also happening in the UK and if anybody is working on standards that can be incorporated in these plans.

Wheeler replied saying that UK public research funders require data to be released after a certain period after the contract ends: you can start from publicly funded research and you have to provide incentives. When we start seeing success stories on open data in research and showcasing them, then scientists will want to do it.

Karl Gutbrod (Meteoblue) observed that while in the US private companies could tap into public weather open data, in Europe public weather data are still quite closed and he suggested to use existing real life examples of weather data applications by private companies to push for opening up weather data: it has worked in other sectors, it will also work in agriculture.

At the end of the questions and answers session, **Marcela Villareal** briefly summarized the main issues emerged from the discussion. First of all, the whole area of open data needs a cultural change and there is a need for incentives. It has been observed that we have to move from the stick to the carrot: we have

to understand what the carrot is, for the private sector as well as for other actors. Secondly, we have to look at the existing policy frameworks and see how to modify them and what kind of capacity development is going to be needed.

Johannes Keizer concluded the event by thanking the speakers and the participants for their presence and especially for the spirit of participation and collaboration.