Understanding the Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) using Budeshi
Acknowledgements

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CHAPTER 1
OPEN CONTRACTING

HOW DOES PUBLIC PROCUREMENT AFFECT US?

The primary purpose of government in meeting the welfare and security needs of people is achieved through the public procurement process. Public procurement determines the efficiency with which public goods, infrastructure and services are delivered to citizens of the country.

The state of national infrastructure and standards of living which are crucial indicators of development are largely dependent on procurement effectiveness.

Public procurement is the major way in which government spendings are made. A former attorney general was quoted to have said that 80% of corruption is said to occur through the public procurement process [1] this makes public procurement the highest corruption risk any society have to face. Public procurement is the process in which government, office, institution buy/acquire-obtain goods, works and services usually upon agreed terms. In other words it the avenue through which taxpayers money are converted to roads, health care, infrastructure e.t.c.
What is Open Contracting?

Open contracting gives access to contracting to information for both public and private entities that aim to showcase transparency and accountability in their spendings. According to Open Contracting Partnership, Open contracting is about publishing and using open, accessible and timely information on government contracting to engage citizens and businesses in identifying and fixing problems.

It is important to note that publishing contracting information is not the end goal, but scrutiny, analysis and citizen engagement with this information are equally important in open contracting.

“Open contracting is about publishing and using open, accessible and timely information on government contracting to engage citizens and businesses in identifying and fixing problems.”
Benefits of Open Contracting?

It is clear that open contracting can bear of a lot of positive fruits to the citizens and even government. Some of these benefits are listed below:

1. Citizens can participate and help realise the value for every government expenditure.
2. Fairness and competitiveness in the award of public contracts.
3. Better and open government procurement leads to improved quality of works, goods and services.
4. Open procurement processes helps to mitigate against corruption in public sector domain.
5. Procurement information that is free and open for anyone to make use of gives room collaborative work for innovation and problem solving.
Governments around the world spend an estimated US$9.5 trillion through contracts every year. Yet, contracting information is often unavailable for public scrutiny.

The Open Contracting Data Standard (OCDS) is a global non-proprietary standard structured to reflect the complete contracting cycle. The standard enables users and partners around the world to publish shareable, reusable, machine readable data, to join that data with their own information, and to build tools to analyze or share that data.

Open Contract Data Standard sets out a common way and structure for publishers of contracting information to follow. Following a common structure for publishing of contracting information enables the reuse, analyses and development of technology tools for wider analyses and more citizens engagement.
How Does The OCDS Work?

It's clear that open contracting can bear a lot of positive fruits to the citizens and even government. Some of these benefits are listed below:

1. Each contract from conception, to budget, to contract award and execution is given a unique identifier.
2. Pieces of information known as releases are published at each stage in the procurement cycle.
3. Releases can be amended to cater for changes in procurement parameters and fields. This is done in such a way that rationale for changes are provided.
4. Releases are combined into a record that provides holistic information about the entire procurement process.
5. Based on the unique identifier and visualization tools, comparisons can be made between budgets and eventual contract sums, contracts without prior budget allocations can be easily identified, the completion rates of various contractors can be seen etc, the released amount of each project can be easily determined, the pricing of various contracts across public institutions can be compared etc.
6. The OCDS enables a link to various data from the budget, to procurement and ultimately to public services in a timely way.

To get started in publishing contracting Information using the OCDS, it is important to:

- Discuss the key users and use cases for your OCDS project.
- Identify out the data and documents you will publish from your contracting process.
- Map your data against the OCDS building blocks.
- Present the data in JSON releases and records.
- Publish your data on the web using the publication patterns.
- Check the validation of your data.
- Encourage and facilitate stakeholder use of the data.
Users and Use Cases

Open data is a means, not an end in itself. The first stage of any work with OCDS is to consider who will use the data that is produced, and which fields and features of the data are important to them.

Four main groups of user needs are identified below:

- Achieving value for money for government.
- Strengthening the transparency, accountability and integrity of public contracting.
- Enabling the private sector to fairly compete for public contracts.
- Monitoring the effectiveness of service delivery.

Realising Value for Money In Procurement

This group of users are driven by the need to achieve better value for government spending, ensure that government spendings are not outrageous and that they fulfill the purpose of the spending. Open Contracting can help this user group to analyze trends in prices, quality of service and also make comparison in different supplier performance amongst others.
Mitigating Against Fraud and Corruption

It is in the interest of the private sector, donors, civil society and government to identify and combat corruption in public contracting. Open contracting data can help these stakeholders monitor public contracts and look for indicators of misappropriation and fraud. Detecting of fraud in public procurement can be done either by scrutinizing individual procurement processes or looking for patterns in procurement data that indicate corrupt practices or undue process. This usually involves linking datasets to map out networks of funding, beneficial ownership and interests. Having globally unique identifiers makes it possible to track all these.

Level Playing Field in Bidding for Contracts

Open contracting is about publishing timely information so it helps private firms fairly compete and bid for public contracts. Especially for small businesses. Information on past contracts can allow firms to identify upcoming opportunities for re-contracting, and can support a more competitive marketplace, as transparency creates a level playing field with information on pricing, contract dates and key deliverables.

Open contracting by publishing tendering information, contractor and beneficial ownership helps to ensure that contracts are awarded based on the set criteria rather than personal interest or favours.

Monitoring Service Delivery

Many groups and CSOs such as The Public and Private Development Centre are interested in monitoring and inspecting the delivery of public services like primary health care centres, basic education infrastructures etc. Open contracting makes information such as the budgetary provision, project specification, location, and contractors available for monitoring groups to carry out inspection and ensure that these services are delivered to the communities that deserve them.
The Contracting Process

The Open Contracting ID

The Open Contracting ID (OCID) is a globally unique identifier used to join up data on all stages of a contracting process.

Over the course of time, collation of public procurement data is usually a bit of a hassle especially when it comes to accessing information pertaining to one particular project. Also, often times the title of an item in a needs assessment list is changed when the budget is approved or before the tender stage begins or even after the contract has been awarded. From our experience in tracking public expenditure related information, keeping track of these changes is difficult due to poor data management systems and also due to the fact that each project or line item are not uniquely identified. The Open Contracting Data Standards combats this issue by assigning a globally unique identifier known as the “OCID”. The OCID uniquely identifies each project from its inception through the various contracting stages and even after the contracting cycle of that project has been completed. So regardless of the changes that may occur, a project can easily be identified at all stages and all changes made can be tracked.

Releases and Records

The Open Contracting Data Standards works majorly with two types of documents namely the Releases and Records.
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Releases

A release document gives update about any event or happenings in the procurement process. These events may be budget documents, invitation for tender, project relocation, contract award, contract amendments and so on. Releases are meant to be unchanged and published for every stage or event of the entire contracting process. Each release must contain an ocid, a unique release id, a release tag, and as much information as can be provided for users to understand the event taking place. Examples of releases are contract release, planning release, tender release, contract amendment release e.tc.

Records

OCDS records are documents that give an overview of the entire contracting process by compiling information from releases that share a common OCID. There should only be one record for each contracting process, created by merging together the releases. An OCDS record provides a snapshot of the contracting process at a given point in time, bringing together all the information from the releases to date into one place. It is updated as new information becomes available. At a minimum, a record should exist for each contracting process to provide a list of all the releases that relate to that contracting process.

However, to allow users to get a snapshot view of the contracting process without individually looking up each release, a record should also contain:

- **a compiledRelease**: this is a section of the record document that collates the most recent values of a field in the releases into the records.

- **a versionedRelease**: this is the section of the record that shows the changes, amendments or history of each field across the releases.
**Sections and Structure**

An OCDS document is made up of a number of sections. These sections are used to represent the stages and the entities involved in the procurement process.

*release metadata* - this is some data about the releases, such as publishers, date, schemes e.t.c  
*parties* - information about the organizations and other participants involved in the contracting process;  
*planning* - information about the goals, budgets and projects a contracting process relates to;  
*tender* - information about how a tender will take place, or has taken place;  
*awards* - information on awards made as part of a contracting process;  
*contract* - information on contracts signed as part of a contracting process;  
*implementation* - information on the progress of each contract towards completion.

**Building Blocks: Fields**

The OCDS schema sets out the fields that should be included in each section, making use of simple reusable building blocks (field structures) to represent data. For example, common building blocks are provided for:

**Parties (organizations):** A group of fields that capture details of any organization that is related to or is a part of the OCDS document.  
**Amounts:** A group of fields that capture the details of the value (amount & currency) of an item(s).  
**Items:** The items block is used to list the line-items associated with a tender, award or contract.  
**Time periods:** A period has a start date, end date, and/or duration. Start and end dates are represented using date-times. Durations are represented as a number of days.  
**Documents:** Documents may be attached at a number of points within the standard: to planning, tenders, awards, contracts and implementation. Each document block can consist of multiple documents.
Milestones: milestone information can be included in the planning, tender, award and implementation blocks. It indicates the progress made at that stage.
Link between Open contracting and the OCDS

It is difficult to talk about the Open Contracting without mentioning the OCDS. Although they are not the same, they both serve the same purpose. Think about it this way, Open contracting is the how and the OCDS is the What. How to solve the problem and what to use to solve the problem.

Open contracting is the act of making contracting data available for the public to view, share and analyse while the OCDS is the structure the data should be put out with.
Using OCDS as a Tool to Improve Service Delivery

Service delivery in Nigeria is not performing optimally and reasons could be attributed to poor management of resources, looting of public funds by officials, bribery and corruption to list a few. Public procurement has been retracted from the public and has now become a personal business for a select few that award contracts not on the basis of merit but by personal affiliation or who they stand to gain the most from.

OCDS provides a structure that opens up contracting information in a way that fosters transparency, citizens engagement and prevents fraud. It is our duty to utilize this tool by either publishing this information or accessing OCDS data and using it to achieve the goals which we want from it. In the next chapter we will be looking into “Budeshi” an open contracting portal that shows the utility of the OCDS.
CHAPTER 4

CASE STUDY: BUDESHI

Budeshi: Making Data Make Sense

Budeshi (which is Hausa for "Open it") is a dedicated site that links budget and procurement data to various public services. It is accessible to the public to interact with and make their own comparisons.

In a bid to make information around public contracts and the procurement process more coherent, Budeshi is an attempt to demonstrate the Open Contracting Data Standards (OCDS) across the public procurement value chain.

Work so Far

Over the years, procurement monitors from the Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC) have been occupied with verifying the performance of contracts awarded for various projects across the country. But the challenge has been to link available budget and procurement data to the expected public service that contracts seeks to deliver.
Data Cycle on Budeshi

Budeshi publishes procurement data of Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDAs) in the OCDS format. Here is a brief explanation of how the transformations procurement data passes through until they are published on budeshi.

1. **Data Gathering (FOI Request):** PPDC Gathers procurement data (Procurement Plans, Contracts Awarded, Tender documents, etc) from MDAs using the provisions of the FOI Act 2011. These documents are usually received in Hard Copy Files.

2. **Conversion and Cleaning:** These Hard Copy files are scanned and converted into Microsoft Excel formats using various tools and techniques. After conversion, the data is then cleaned out by removing inconsistencies, vetting titles and ensuring dates and monetary values are in the right formats.

3. **Data Entry:** Having Cleaned out all the procurement information. The information is then published on Budeshi using the budeshi backend Data entry system.

   a. Data entry process: Budeshi being an OCDS inspired platform, Data entry in budeshi is done in the OCDS way i.e Records and Releases.
   b. Each project is represented by a Record which may have multiple releases tied to it.
   c. Releases pertaining to a particular procurement stage are added to the record and the Budeshi system automatically compiles these releases into records using the Merge Rules as documented in the OCDS Schema.
CHAPTER 5

HOW DATA IS ENTERED ON BUDESHI

Managing Ministries, Departments and Agencies (MDAs)

Budeshi 2.0 keeps a record of all procuring Entities which in this case are the Ministries Departments and Agencies (MDA). Each procuring entity can be managed in terms of:

- Adding a new MDA
- Editing/updating an MDA
- Adding projects under an MDA

Add New MDAs

![List of MDAs](image)

Fig. 1.0
1. At the top right, on the Nav bar, click the “+” button as shown in Fig 1.0 above.
2. Fill the form.
   a. Common Name (Compulsory): The name of the MDA.
   b. Address: Address of the head office.
   c. Sector: Indicate the relevant sector i.e. Education, Health, Works etc.
   d. Short Name (Compulsory): Popular acronym for the MDAs name
   e. Website: Website of MDA.
3. Click save.

Edit MDA

1. On the left of every MDA is an Edit button, click to view the edit form.
2. After filling the form and making desired changes click the save button.
Delete MDA

1. To delete an MDA click on the ‘bin’ icon next to each MDAs name as shown in the Fig above.
2. Click yes on the resulting prompt.

Note: this feature is only available for users with admin access level clearance.

Managing Organizations/Contractors

Budeshi 2.0 keeps the records of all entities, suppliers, contractors and all other parties that may be involved in the procurement process. The system gives each entity/suppliers/organisation an internal unique identifier. This is to enable the system to uniquely identify every entity that may be involved in one or more procurement process.
Points to Note In Managing Entities/Contractors.

- Entities/Contractors/Organizations cannot be entered twice into the system.
- It is important to first check if an organization already exist in the system before going on to add them.

**Add New Organization**

**Step 1:** Click on the database icon to the right of the menu bar

![Fig. 2.0](image)

**Step 2:** Check if the organization is already in the database by typing their name in the search bar.

![Fig. 2.1](image)

**Step 3:** If the organization doesn’t exist in the database click on the plus sign at the top right of the page. Enter the organization’s Common Name, Legal Name and any other available info available in the fields provided on the pop modal box.
Step 4: Click on Save to add the organization to the database. To add more organizations click on the “+” button and enter the organization’s info in the fields of the pop up modal as above in Fig 2.2.

Edit Organization

1. You can edit an organization's information by clicking on the “edit” icon to the left of the organization’s name.
2. Change the desired fields for the organization and click on save to commit your changes.
3. To delete an organization, click on the delete icon to the right of the organization’s name. Confirm the delete by clicking “yes” on the resulting popup.
Delete Organization

1. To delete an Organization from the database, click on the bin icon to right of the organization’s name.
2. Click “yes” on the resulting prompt to verify the delete action.

Note: this feature is only possible for users with admin access level.

Add Projects and Releases

Publishing data in OCDS means that data is published using releases and records.

Notes on Adding Projects/Records

1. Every project is tied to a unique record
2. A single project can have multiple releases making up its records
3. Compilation of each release into record is done automatically by the system.
Data Entry Steps

1. Click on the MDA you want to add projects to.
2. Add the project to the list of projects for that MDA.
3. Add releases pertaining to each project.

![Nigeria Extractive Industries Transparency Initiative Projects](image)

Fig. 3.0

- Search/find MDA you want. Click on the MDA as shown in Fig 3.0 above, the page navigates to the MDA’S page listing all the projects under the MDA.
- At the top right hand corner of the Nav bar, click the ‘+’ button as circled red in Fig 3.0 above.
- Fill in form that appears with details of location, description and title then click “save”.

Create a New Project

Location: select the appropriate state of the project from the dropdown
Description: The "description" field elaborates on the project; it writes the type of project (e.g model 2), the name is written in full (e.g. "Primary Health Care Centre"), it would include the town, the LGA and the state’s name (e.g, Barnawa, Kaduna) so as the name implies, it describes the project.
Title: the title field should include state local government to enable differentiation with other [similar] projects.
Year: the year the project was carried.
Status: current status of the project.
Published: to publish the project on the front-end of Budeshi.
Monitored: if the project has been inspected by us (PPDC).
**Edit Project**

To edit the details of the project that concern the above mentioned items.

On the list of projects table, on the first column as circled in yellow in Fig 3.0, click the edit project button on the left of the project title. Edit details and click the save button.

**Add Release**
• To the right of the project title, there's a column with two icons. A folder icon and a plus icon. Click on the plus icon as circled in black in Fig 3.0 above, a modal come up.
• In the modal, you will see a drop down. Click on the drop down to select the release you want to add then click the “add” button.
• The page will reload to open a release form. When you are done filling the form, click the “add” button.

**View Releases**

To view the releases that have been added to a project click on the folder as circled in purple as shown in Fig 3.0 above: A modal pop ups with list of released that have been added to the project

![Fig. 3.3](image)

**Delete Releases**

You may delete the release by clicking on the delete button next to the releases as shown above.
**Note:** the delete feature is only available for those with admin access level.

**Data Entry at the Planning Stage**

The amount should be written with just numbers. no commas. Decimals however are allowed. Please cross-check to ensure that the right figure is included (exact number of zeros, decimal in the right place, etc).
E.g the number 122334456.00 should be entered instead of 122,334,456.00

**Data Entry at Tender Stage**

The following field should be entered if available
- Tender Status: as provided by OCDS codelist
- Tendered Amount: enter the tendered amounts (without commas) if available

**Data Entry at the Award Stage**

- Enter the Award ID if any is provided by the procuring entity
- Enter the award amount (contract Amount) in the amounts field (without commas)
- Search the supplier(s) or contractor(s) and select them accordingly
- Save the release
Data Entry at Implementation Stage

Most times data is not entered in this stage unless some additional information such as transactions, monitor’s report, monitors images.

Fig. 4.0

To add transactions click on the “+” sign next to transactions on the implementations page. Enter the details of the payer, payee, amount, source and click add to save.

Fig. 4.1
• To add Monitor’s Reports Click on the + sign next to documents, on the resulting pop up (Fig 4.1) Select the document type as “Monitor’s Report”, Enter the title of the report in the title field, and enter the contents of the report on the Description field click “Save” to add it to the document list.

• To add Site Images, Click on the + sign next to documents, on the resulting pop up (Fig 4.1) Select the document type as “Site Images”, enter the title and description of the image you want to upload.. Next click on “select file” and choose the image you wish to upload. Finally click “Save” to add an image to the document list.

**Note:** The document list may contain more than one document of different type, whether it be the monitor’s report, site images or other type of documents associated with the implementation stage.
CHAPTER 6
USING BUDESHI

Budeshi Features

Budeshi was developed as a tool for advocacy to the Nigerian Government for the adoption of the OCDS within public institutions to increase transparency and accountability. To understand how the adoption of the OCDS in public institution can lead to transparency and accountability, you need to understand this simple logic; It all begins from availability of data. At various stages of the procurement process in public institutions, data is being produced and with the help of the OCDS, the data being produced can have a structure that leads to easy accessibility by the end users. By accessing this data, users are able to engage the government and give feedback on service delivery in a way that leads to better value for money for government, higher competition, transparency and accountability within the different sectors of the government.

In summary, user engagement on OCDS platforms are very important. For best user engagement to prevail, OCDS systems need to be designed and built to provide a high level of user interaction and user experience. Over the years of Budeshi’s existence, it continues to undergo constant review and update to
reflect user needs across various user groups. In the next few paragraphs, we will be looking at some of the key features of Budeshi and how users can make the best of them.

1. **Search and filter**
   Different users have different interests in the data published and would require different search criteria. On Budeshi, users can search the entire database using the following criteria:

   - **Procuring Entity**: this is a Ministry, Department or Agency that is responsible for carrying out the project that is on Budeshi.
   - **Project Year**: this is the year a project was initiated from the procuring agency.
   - **Contractor**: this is the supplier or company that is involved in the procurement process of a project at the tendering, award or contract stages.
   - **Monitored**: some projects on Budeshi have been selected for monitoring exercises by procurement monitors and have uploaded reports of their findings on Budeshi.
   - **State**: this enables the user to search based on the location of the project. All projects on Budeshi are scattered in different states across the country so this feature enables the user to find projects within one or more states.
   - **Title**: each project on budeshi has a project title.

   It is also important to note that users can use one or more filters to narrow down their search to enable them easily find projects.

2. **Datasets summary**
   Let's be honest, everyone appreciates a brief summary of reports, essays or stories from friends and Budeshi is no different. On budeshi, users can get a summary of projects on the platform and summary of the search so it gives the user highlights of selected datasets. Summary fields include:

   - Total number of projects
   - Total contract sum
3. **Data tables**
On Budeshi data is presented on a table so that users can view certain details of a project at a glance. Users can sort the data in ascending and descending order on all columns. Data on the table is also affected by the search and filter; Users can export data from the table in open formats such as CSV. The fields that can be seen on the data table include:

- Title
- Location
- Contractor
- Budget amount
- Contract amount
- Year
- MDA

4. **Visualizations**
This is one of the most essential features of the platform because of its high demand by various users. On Budeshi, users have a control panel for the visualizations where they can select what type of chart to view, parameters of the charts and format to export chart.

5. **Comparisons**
Another cool thing about Budeshi is the comparison feature. Users can select one or more projects to look at side by side and compare budget amount and contract amount. For example a user wants to compare the cost of building a classroom carried out in Enugu and cost of building a classroom also in Kaduna, a user can select the projects and then compare. By clicking compare, the platform prepares a chart that shows the budget and contract amounts of each project.
6. **Verified by PPDC**
PPDC as procurement monitors selects some projects from Badeshi for contract implementation monitoring, afterwards monitoring reports are shared highlighting the details of the project at the time of visit and also including site images. Such reports are available on Badeshi in form of monitors reports. Each of the monitored projects is assigned a status which can be one of the following:

- **Active and Complete**: Over time monitors have noticed that there can be projects which are active which means in use and the set out project was completed to the specification of the job contracted for.
- **Active and Incomplete**: This means the project was seen to be in use but not completed based on the specifications of the contract.
- **Inactive and Complete**: The project has been completed but is not is use. There could be different reasons for inactive projects and monitors usually probe and provide the information in their reports.
- **Inactive and Incomplete**: This project is seen to not be in use and work has not been completed as it ought to be.

Projects that are not completed might be on going or might have been abandoned by the contractors for whatever reason. Monitors usually probe the reasons for the status of each monitored project. The reports are not only published on Badeshi, but also shared with the procuring entities, and members of the community.

7. **Project breakdown**
A user can view the breakdown of each project across the different procurement stages namely:
- Planning
- Initiation (Tender)
- Award
- Contract
- Implementation

Under this breakdown, users can view and export data generated at the
different stages of the procurement.

8. **User Feedback**

Users can provide feedback generally, on the platform or/and all datasets. Users can also give project specific feedback on the state of the project or other related feedback.

When building OCDS platforms, the most important thing to consider is the users of the platform and how the users will be consuming the data be it in chunks or granular form, as long as it serves the purpose and allows them to properly engage.

**Using the OCDS to Identify Red Flags**

When it comes to procurement data especially, most people quickly become uninterested after staring at numbers and terms that don’t make sense to them, but when you put out that same information in a way that is relatable, such as in the form of infographics, analysis and comparisons, then the utility begins to come to life. One thing about pushing out data in a way that is relatable is the fact it makes it easy to spot red flags. So, the question is; What are red flags? Red flags are any abnormality that makes the data to be incorrect or incomplete.

Red Flags are not necessarily an indication of corruption or mismanagement. When a project is red flagged it could be as a result of error during the data entry phase or might just probably need some explanation which could make sense in the end or lead to a major investigation. Regardless, it makes you look twice. Some examples of red flags that could be spotted include:

- Large differences between the Budget sum and contract sum
- Contract Awardee not being on the tenderer/contractors lists.
- Different projects with the same title that have varying contract amounts.
- Similar projects (titles) distributed across a state without clear distinction of exact locations (Local Governments)
- Non-availability of contract/award amount, Etc.
“Red Flags are not necessarily an indication of corruption or mismanagement.”

Because of the nature of these red flags, when they are spotted, the next step would mean to ask questions. On most Open Contracting platforms, there is usually a feedback mechanism where users can ask questions and engage with the data more. Feedback is a very important part of the data disclosure cycle and for most use cases, begins a new cycle. For instance, procurement monitors, when a red flag is spotted, may choose to write to the procuring entity to seek explanations or inform the procuring entity that they will be inspecting the project. After the monitoring exercise, procurement monitors prepare their reports that would be discussed with relevant stakeholders such as the procuring entity, contractor and related law makers.

For other user groups, such as those trying to achieve value for money for government, red flags would enable them to further make comparisons and analysis to find out if cost of carrying out project and the processes used were most resource effective.

The OCDS structures contracting data in a way that enables us to spot red flags and see any inconsistencies in the data. And as we have seen, red flags can mean anything but most importantly it means to double check the data or investigate further.
The Autobiography of Budeshi: How we successfully advocated for the adoption of the OCDS by the Nigerian Government

Written by Seember Nyager, Former CEO PPDC
This article was first published on medium

Part I: The Bold Step

How long does it really take to successfully advocate for a change in public policy and practise? From my observation, it could take a bit of time and requires a level of dedication and fervency of spirit. It took 11 years for Nigeria to enact an FOI legislation, it is taking Ghana 13 years and still counting. In spite of these grim statistics, my colleagues and I managed to advocate for the adoption of the Open Contracting data standards in the space of 9 months. No doubt, it may have been more tedious to get a law passed, it could have been just good luck, great timing, doggedness or a combination of these that enabled us achieve this success in such a short period; it may have nothing to do with these. But here is our story of how we successfully advocated for the adoption of the Open contracting data standards in Nigeria.

I work for an organization that is called Public and Private Development Centre-PPDC (alias Procurement Monitor) and for a significant number of years, we have been supporting people to report and monitor public procurement processes. I started as program officer at the beginning of 2010 and I was promoted to CEO in 2013. In monitoring public procurement.
processes, which is the process through which the Government acquires and disposes of public goods works and services, we always require information. Accessing information is usually a challenge but leaning on the great job done by several CSOs such as the Media Rights Agenda for over a decade, we eventually had an FOI Act in Nigeria. My colleagues and I did not let it cool from printing before we started to use it to access [procurement] information. At first, we faced a lot of resistance and after some litigation, some advocacy and enlightenment through our persistent written requests for information, we have been able to achieve some breakthrough in accessing information, albeit mostly on request.

Although today, we have much more information than we had access to in 2011, there is a recurring challenge of linking budget and procurement data to public services because information at various stages in the contracting process is labelled based on varying formats. This was and still is a big challenge, because it means that for some executed contracts, it is difficult to say with absolute certainty, that a certain budget line is the appropriation from where a particular project is being executed. The fact that the budget line may also lump various projects which are later broken into separate procurement processes also intensifies the challenge. It is also difficult to know the clear specifications for each of such projects because the procurement records accessed may not necessarily list the specifications in a clear way that can be used to track performance. To add to all of this, there is
the issue of various codes being used at various stages without the codes being used to uniquely link and verify each process. All these make it difficult to observe and report on a single contracting process from its conception, to budget appropriation, to bidding process, contract award, contract implementation and ultimately, public service delivery. Finally, the fact that information is mainly accessed through FOI requests and not proactively through a system that links various stages, makes it tedious; and means that only few people can really participate in the process through which public services are delivered.

And so when the Open Contracting Partnership launched and published the open contracting data standards in November 2014, there arose the opportunity to advocate for its adoption in Nigeria as we genuinely believe it responds to the challenges of incoherence we face with using data to verify the performance of public services. To provide some support to this cause, I applied for an OpenGov fellowship being run by Code for Africa and Open Knowledge; where I proposed to seek the adoption of the Open contracting data standards by the Nigerian Government within a period of 6 months. I was very happy to be selected and the fellowship officially kicked off in August, 2015. It was a great opportunity because it was also integral to the work that we have always done at PPDC; it meant that the institutional support required to carry out our advocacy demands was available. And that is the first lesson I would take from our advocacy experience. You need strong institutional support.

**Part II: Setting up Shop and the Kick-off!**

To enable us adequately link procurement and budget data and make sense of it, I also needed people with strong technical skills who could see the benefit of data within a context. So I reached out to Patrick Enaholo of the Pan-Atlantic University in Lagos who is now our lead developer and technologist and introduced him to the OCDS. It was a good bet because although he was new to OCDS (he is now a pro!), it was love at first sight and he studied it from the inside out. I also reached out to Joshua Olufemi, a data analyst who works with the Premium Times Centre for Investigative Journalism.

Within PPDC, my colleague Gift Omoidedia, who for a long time has been in
charge of procurement data management was also called on board the team as was Samuel Offia, who helped us organize the meetings we held, cater to our gastronomical needs and who is now digging into the incorporation status of contractors carrying out public projects. With this core team and with support from my other colleagues at PPDC, we commenced.

On commencement, we looked at the datasets we had gathered from various public institutions over time and tried to convert them using the OCDS schema. Patrick developed code that generated the OCDS records using Google sheets. This was based on spreadsheets provided by the OCP. So we converted and transferred all the data we had on procurement planning, tender and contract awards to this spreadsheet. To keep up the tempo, and to not interfere with people’s weekly work schedules, we had to organize weekend workshops fortnightly in both Abuja and Lagos.

Although I had a fellowship that provided monthly stipends of 1000 dollars, for a period of 6 months, there wasn’t any direct financing for our workshops and travel costs but we reckoned that the project was ours and would need to go on in spite of our budget constraints. So we tried to build some of our meetings around others scheduled in either Lagos or Abuja depending on where the majority of the team would be towards the weekend. Although we held meetings online, we knew that we needed to convene physically and as often as possible to strategize and restrategise. For us, it was what needed to be done and we decided that we couldn’t rely or wait for external funding to make this happen. And that was a second lesson; don’t wait to have all the resources (time, money, people) just start with what you have.
As for the data we had entered on the spreadsheets, although it seemed like labelled figures that did not necessarily make sense by just looking at it, through our eyes, it was really good to look at :) In that feel-good spirit of a beautiful spreadsheet, we started reaching out to public institutions to advocate for the adoption of the OCDS. So we sent a letter to the regulators, Bureau of Public Procurement (BPP) requesting for a meeting to demonstrate to them the utility OCDS. We also sent letters to the Attorney General of the Federation, the Bureau of Public Service Reforms, the Presidential Advisory committee on Anti-corruption amongst others. Later on, after a meeting our colleague, Samuel attended in Seoul on clean construction along with staff from the Ministry of Works and Housing, we also sent out a letter of request to that Ministry. With our laptops and data on google sheets, we set out to make our presentation. My colleagues and I were ushered into a room full of directors and on behalf of the team, I made our case.

**Part III: The Move to Make Data Sensible**

It was not easy to talk in the abstract to Government officials without a great demonstration that showed how the data standards could enable the objectives of our procurement system. For the avoidance of doubt, Nigeria’s reformed procurement system ultimately seeks to achieve value for money in delivery of public services through a transparent, competitive, accountable and professional system. Even though we were seated in a room filled with engineers and data analysts (in other words, people presumably comfortable with figures) our arguments may have made the case, but the presentation of the data wasn’t compelling enough; and for that reason, our submission seemed to be resisted. And so the team sat together and we decided that we needed to roll out our visuals to bring our data to life. Concerned about the instability of Google sheets and the rigour of entering data on them, Patrick also decided to build another data entry platform to house our OCDS data. When the data entry platform was built, Tim Davies who runs the OCDS help desk, provided useful feedback on its structure and provided us with an example to guide our data entry at every stage. Having viewed the visual tools that other countries had deployed to enable people make sense of OCDS data, we were inspired to try our hands on some of the tools out there. Lindsey Marchessault who manages data and user engagement at the OCP referred us to great work being done in several countries including Ukraine, Mexico and
presentations to the Procurement Professionals Association, to the Bureau of Public Service Reforms, and at a meeting PPDC organized for public institutions and the press. Although I think we were a bit convincing, we were told repeatedly that we must get high-level buy-in for our proposal to stand a chance. Usually this was also said with a grim look and sometimes, strong statements such as “it would never fly in Nigeria” were made. At this point, we were running thin on resources but after an unsuccessful effort at receiving a seed fund from the fellowship we decided to lean on our internal support from PPDC and take a break from any fund raising at that stage. So the entire team tried to participate in advocacy visits and my blog posts were critically reviewed by Patrick (in the same way he would review the work of his students!) To be honest, the team was and still is, a blessing. Everyone latched onto the project as if they conceived it and gave more than I could have ever imagined. And that was another lesson; a committed team that fully owns a project is the best resource one can ask for.

Part IV: The Birth of Budeshi
In spite of prospects for adoption of the OCDS that seemed grim, somehow, we were all burning with passion to move the project forward. Encouraged by Kathrin Frauscher and the team from the OCP, we examined all the advocacy meetings we had attended; one of the criticisms was that the visuals were difficult to understand. On our part, we were also concerned with the restrictive nature of some of the platforms, particularly the need to sign in before accessing some of the visualization platforms and the limited features available for people to select what to be visualized. We also wanted a system we could build on based on feedback received, one that we could integrate into other functionalities we develop as we increase public engagement. We decided to draw up a small criteria with features of the kind of tool we would like so that the criteria and identified features within the platform would guide our search and selection of a tool. The team agreed that we would like visuals that enable data interactivity, user engagement and that is self deployable (requiring little or no sign in, downloading etc). Based on various visual tools and sites we were referred to by Katelyn Rogers from the Open Knowledge International, Stephen Abbot Pugh from Code for Africa, Lindsey Marchessault, Mihaly Fazekas from the University of Cambridge, our data analyst, Joshua, tried to select what tools best met our criteria. In the end, Tableau and Qliq seemed most feasible but they still did not fully meet our needs. And so, on one of those long saturday meetings, we decided that rather than spend 10,000 USD to deploy tableau, we should probably build ours based on the features we had identified. We also decided that the project needed a name people could remember and in the middle of the night, after trying to name the project in different Nigerian languages, we came up with the name “Budeshi” which means “Open It” in Hausa language and everyone of us loved it. To our delight, the world loved it too and remembered it. And in that space of time, we learnt that a project needs a name that is memorable to people :)

**Part V: Our Unexpected Advocate Emerges!**

Just before the end of the year, we received a response from the Attorney General of the Federation to come in and make our presentation. The meeting was scheduled for 2pm and we were there by 1:30pm. We were ushered into a waiting room where many other people were waiting to see him. The adjacent waiting rooms were also filled up nevertheless, we didn’t think we would wait
for as long as we did. An hour passed, then two hours and no one called for us. In fact, other visitors had come and had been called into the inner chamber and we were still waiting to be called. As 4pm approached, we became restless and my colleague Nkemdilim Ilo, who joined the team for the advocacy had to leave us in order to pick up her children from school. Having skipped lunch to get to the Attorney General in good time, we became impatient and so I went to ask the secretary why we hadn’t been called. We were told to be patient; as it would soon be our turn to meet with the Attorney General. When it was 6:30pm, no one had called us. At this time, everyone in our waiting room had been attended to. Again, I went to the Attorney General’s reception to make sure our names hadn’t been struck out from the appointment list. And then the lady ushering people in and out of the Attorney General’s office announced that only one more group will meet with the Attorney General and all the others would have to take a further date. Fortunately, the last group to meet the Attorney General turned out to be ours ;) and so we matched into the office of the Attorney General. As soon as we got in, the Attorney General informed us that he would not be able to watch any demonstration, we should just make our case. And so on behalf of the group, I made our case. We told the Attorney General that the OCDS would help prevent corruption and inefficiencies across the procurement value chain because it linked budget and procurement data to public services; thus providing a trail that can be followed by anyone. As a result, I said, we would like him to support our cause to have the OCDS adopted by the Nigerian Government. The Attorney General informed us that the system we are proposing is much needed in the country and he would ensure that a committee is set up to look at the standards and think of ways to mainstream into the country’s affairs. He asked us to formalize our collaboration with a proposal to them detailing how the OCDS works and our request. We were all very excited at how well he seemed
to understand the OCDS adoption we were proposing; what we did not know was how much of a commitment the Attorney General would make to ensuring it is adopted by the Federal Government. After a meeting of about 15 minutes, the Attorney General became the champion we never expected. And that for us was another lesson; in our minds, we knew those we considered reformists, we knew those who were the most relevant because they played regulatory roles and we thought our champions would arise from those places. Alas, our champion is the Attorney General and for us, he pushed the right buttons to make our voices heard.

Part VI: A dedicated Visual Platform for Bodeshi

As we continued engagement with the Attorney General and the Presidential Advisory committee on anti-corruption, I continued to write about Bodeshi and the articles were constantly circulated by external colleagues including Stephen Abbot Pugh and Goerg Neuman of the OCP. This gave our work a lot of international visibility which several others picked up on. While the engagement was ongoing, Patrick and Joshua were working on our dedicated visual platform. At the end of December, we estimated that our visual platform would be ready in April but by our next meeting in early February, the visuals were ready. We were full of joy.
And so we wrote to everyone again, including the BPP to re-demonstrate the utility of the OCDS using our newly deployed tool. Thereafter, we were invited over by the BPP. This time, PPDC and our locally built platform, Budeshi, was well received; partly because the new visualization platform on Budeshi was a great illustration of the utility of the OCDS. The other reason was because the Attorney General had reached out to the BPP on the OCDS. At the meeting the BPP suggested that the platform include a geo-mapping feature and we left the meeting with the understanding that BPP would be granted access to study the back end of Budeshi and thereafter a roadmap for adoption can be discussed.

Through several letter exchanges, we continued our engagement with the Attorney General and with the Presidential Advisory Committee on Anti-corruption. On the advice of Prof Bolaji Owasanoye of the Presidential Advisory Committee on Anti-corruption, we started a conversation with the Institute of Quantity surveyors and they also expressed interest in working with us. Having moved the Budeshi platform from Alpha to beta, we all decided that it was time to seriously focus on using data to tell human stories of why the OCDS is a necessary next step for improving procurement efficiency and service delivery. To do this, we needed resources and so based
on agreed activities, I developed a budget for the year and shared with the team. Based on the needs identified in the budget, we reached out to the Mc Arthur Foundation, and to the Open Society Initiative of West Africa to support our efforts. Work on Budeshi continued with Gift and Joshua leading on data entry into the system whilst Patrick went ahead to add a geo-mapping functionality to Budeshi. He also developed an app to enable us capture photos and location data while on the field. I focused on strategy coordination, writing about Budeshi and fundraising. Therein lies the other lesson. In all of this, we realised the importance of team members knowing their roles and running with it. The Budeshi team is blessed to have that level of collaboration.

Using the new Budeshi app, Joshua, Gift and I set out to demonstrate how the Budeshi platform could be used enable public accountability by following up on the construction of a primary health care centre in a community on the outskirts of Abuja.
As all these activities were ongoing in Nigeria, members of the African Freedom of Information Centre, based in Kenya, Malawi and Uganda indicated their interest in deploying Budeshi and had some support to do so. We were very glad and we have started to engage with them.

**Part VII: The Breakthrough**

The primary reason why we built Budeshi was to demonstrate to the Nigerian Government, the utility of adopting the OCDS. We feel that the adoption of the OCDS is a necessary next step in ensuring that disclosure of procurement information is open, coherent, and can be easily linked to public services that emerge from the expenditure. Of course we did not know how long it would take for the Government to deploy but we also figured out that whether or not the government adopts the OCDS in a day or in two years, the Budeshi platform can always run independently to enable the verification of procurement performance. But we never forgot the primary purpose for which it was set up. As the team continued working through all the possibilities for Budeshi’s existence, the Open Contracting Partnership invited me to participate in the conference by the Commonwealth secretariat, titled “Tackling Corruption Together”, which held a day before the anti-corruption summit and where our President, Muhammadu Buhari, delivered the keynote address. With Gavin Hayman, the Executive Director of the Open Contracting Partnership nudging me on, I tried my best to have a word with my President Buhari about the OCDS after his keynote speech. Unfortunately, I did not have the opportunity to speak with my President but I had the opportunity to once
again, speak with the Attorney General of the Federation who assured me that as he had indicated to us, the Nigerian Government is taking the case for adopting the OCDS seriously and we would soon hear word about it. The Senior Special Assistant to the Attorney General, Juliet Ibekaku also assured me that the OCDS is firmly on their agenda.

While I was encouraged by the interest and commitment demonstrated by the Attorney General and his officials, nothing prepared my colleagues and I for its adoption by the Nigerian Government on the day of the Anti-corruption summit. I woke up early to a mail from Gavin Hayman, with an attached document of what seemed to be Nigeria’s commitments that would be announced at the summit. And there written boldly, almost identical to our advocacy pitches, was the commitment to adopt the Open Contracting Data Standards. That was music to my ears and I was happy. Very happy.

In that moment, I remembered a slide I always attached to presentations by Margret Mead and it made perfect sense although I concede that we haven’t “changed” the world (yet) :).
Part VIII: The Task Ahead

As we roll up our sleeves to support our Government’s efforts in implementing the OCDS, we salute the courage of the Attorney General of the Federation and the Presidential Advisory Committee on Anti-corruption. Most of all, I am personally indebted to the wonderful team who just ran with this idea even though there was very little compensation for weekend meetings. We cannot forget the procurement monitors who for years, sourced for the data that enabled our demonstrations; to OSIWA who did not relent in providing support to procurement monitoring, and for the in-house team at PPDC led by Gift and later by Nkem, who rolled up their sleeves to present Budeshi to various groups whenever the need arose. We look forward to learning from countries including Ukraine that have taken the bold step in implementing the OCDS across the public sector. We continue to rely on great inspiration from our friends at the OCP and now, we look to the entire country to ensure that we put our best foot forward to ensure that we prevent corruption in our procurement system using the OCDS.

Let the action begin!
References

1. Speech of the Attorney General of the Federation at the National Procurement Forum in Abuja; text available through


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Codelists: These are defined values for particular fields in the OCDS schema. A codelist can either be close or open.

Close Codelists: These are predefined values for fields that are set in the core of the schema and do not allow publishers to use their custom values except those set in the core of the schema.

Extensions: Extensions provided ways for publishers to customise the OCDS by publishing building blocks or fields that are not defined in the core of the schema.

JSON: Javascript Object Notation (JSON) is a popular structured machine readable format of storing data. Its is understood by most or all modern computer systems.

Merging: This is a compilation of multiple releases into a record or packages as specified in the Merging Rules defined by the schema.

OCDS: Acronym for Open Contracting Data Standards.

OC Id: This is a unique identifier given to each contracting process that enables projects to be tracked from planning stage to the implementation stage.

OCP: Open Contracting Partnership is a community of policy experts, leaders and campaigners with the ideology that open data and public engagement can transform public delivery of goods and services.

Open Codelists: These are the values which the schema recommends but also allow for publishers to add custom values to the recommended schema list of values.
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