

# Open Data Lebanon



**ISOC Lebanon Chapter**

**Interim Report**

**June 27, 2016**

# 1. Project information

- **Project leader (indicate name and email)**

Nabil Bukhalid, [bukhalidn@gmail.com](mailto:bukhalidn@gmail.com)

- **Team members (list the name of your peers – if available insert a team picture at the end of this section)**

Stephan Bazan, [stefan.bazan@gmail.com](mailto:stefan.bazan@gmail.com).

Salam Yamout, [salamyamout@gmail.com](mailto:salamyamout@gmail.com).

Hoda Deek, [hdeek@hotmail.com](mailto:hdeek@hotmail.com)

- **Partner organizations**

RE-AKTIV DOO ([www.reaktiv.com.mk](http://www.reaktiv.com.mk)).

KEEWARD SAL ([www.keeward.com](http://www.keeward.com))

- **Total amount awarded**

USD 30,000.00

- **Period covered by this report**

February to June 2016



## 2. Project Summary

Open data is Government Data that is made available for others to use.

Because most of that government data is public data by law, many governments around the world have been publishing their data on specialized websites free of charge.

There are already examples of how it has been used by individuals and organizations in innovative and useful ways, creating value for society and government themselves. The nature of innovation is that developments often comes from unlikely places, and it is impossible to predict precisely how and where value will be created in the future.

It is already possible to point to a large number of areas where open government data is creating value. The most relevant areas for Lebanon are transparency and accountability.

ISOC Lebanon chapter has started advocating about open data, established many contacts with government institutions, and was able to forge a partnership with Microsoft and one of its partners to donate the platform and translate it to

Arabic. The purpose of this project is to start populating the platform with real data sets originating from government entities.

### 3. Project Background and Justification

In 2014, the Internet Society Lebanon Chapter (ISOC-LB) decided to advocate Open Data in Lebanon and entice Government agencies to publish their datasets.

ISOC-LB Held an open data workshop on May 23, 2014 at École Supérieure des Affaires. The workshop was attended by 39 participants representing governmental organizations. The participants agreed on a pragmatic set of recommendation and a draft action plan aiming at the development of a pilot open data portal to be hosted by ISOC-LB on the cloud and to work with government organization and assist them in the transformation and publishing of their datasets on the portal.

ISOC-LB Held two follow up workshops in partnership with the Prime Minister ICT Office and Microsoft Corporation in order to guide government agencies in classifying the data in their possession to public, restricted, and secret.

ISOC-LB Developed the pilot <http://opendatalebanon.com> portal via a generous donation in kind from Microsoft and RE-AKTIV.

### 4. Project Objectives

The project objectives are:



- a- Identify, transform and publish governmental cumulative common data on the opendatalebanon portal in a systematic, consistent and timely manner.
- b- Promote ISOC via a high visibility project. ISOC-LB will instigate the culture of open data in Lebanon and by proxy the Middle East and the government will supply over the Internet meaningful data that can be used and reused freely by the government agencies, international agencies, researchers, Internet entrepreneurs and the general public alike to build applications for the benefit of the society.
- c- Build a long term partnership between ISOC Lebanon, the technical community, Internet entrepreneurs and the government agencies. Through working together, the partnership will build trust between the parties in a way that will bring value to society.

## 5. Project Activities Completed so far

ISOC-LB initiated this phase of the project by:

- a- Identifying a part time (rather than a full time) project coordinator, Mrs. Hoda Deek. Hoda has long working experience with the government entities on the documentation, cleaning, normalization and linking of cumulative commons datasets.
- b- Introducing Hoda to Open Data concepts, the portal and previous activities thus bringing her up to speed on the project.
- c- Introducing Hoda to the first group of data provider champions at the Ministry of Health, Ministry of Environment and the Financial Institute.

- d- Identifying Keeward as a value partner and negotiated and signed an MOU based on which Keeward will provide technical support in all what relates to the datasets manipulation, transformation and publishing.
- e- Work in-progress with the Ministry of Health. Identified champion, identified 6 datasets that are already published by the Ministry in PDF format, initiated work with the champion on the identification of the source of the data, original format, update frequency, and secured CSV versions of the datasets. Started with the data cataloging and transformation works.
- f- Work in-progress with the Ministry of Environment. Identified champion, identified 8 air quality datasets that are already published by the Ministry in PDF format, initiated work with the champion on the identification of the source of the data, original format, update frequency. We faced a problem in getting the data in CSV format as the Ministry stopped collecting the data due to the lack of maintenance fund to operate the weather control and air quality monitoring stations.
- g- Work in-progress with the Institute of Finance. Identified champion.
- h- Work in-progress with RE-AKTIV to organize a data publishing workshop, originally planned for the second week of July but RE-AKTIV asked for rescheduling and we did not agree on a new date yet.
- i- Work in-progress with Microsoft to benefit from a Microsoft grant to host the open-data portal on Azure.
- j- Work in-progress to join the ODI. Initiated contact and had two conference calls.

## 6. Project outcomes

Access to cumulative common data and information in a usable and reusable format over the Internet is the main product of the project. The meaning of that is that ISOC will instigate a culture of transparency and openness in Lebanon. Ultimately, the government and citizens will realize the value of openness for better governance and its positive impact on the economy and competitiveness of Lebanon.

## 7. Any changes in the design of the project

The original plan was to retain the services of a full time technical staff (computer sciences or engineering, to assist in the development of the IDE interfaces and data conversion) and a full time business staff (business or political sciences, to identify datasets and work with the government entities on the publication of the sets under the open data initiative). But as we failed until now to complement the ISOC grant with local grants we kick started this phase of the project by retaining the services of a part time project coordinator and by subcontracting the technical works to Keeward based on a cooperation agreements. Keeward will donate in kind the technical support efforts as long as the requirements are within its team's competencies and availability.

The changes should not affect the project outcome as by design and as explained in the grant request narrative, the project is modular:

*"ISOC-LB is looking for 2 (or more) strategic partners who will donate \$30K per year each over three years each to support the Lebanese Open Data initiative. Their names and logos will appear in connection with all activities of the Lebanese Open Data for a full year. We are currently in discussion with private donors, more specifically local bank.*

*The requested donation from ISOC is to kick start the process and create some momentum around open data in Lebanon. We believe that if the published*

*data is of interest to the community then the portal will attract apps developers and generate significant use and reuse instances of data. The visibility and momentum will attract more Ministries and agencies to publish their data and more developers and users to add value via their creative ideas. The portal will become a valuable service and the prospect to funding will increase.*

*We have no specific contingency plans to compensate variables in the budget except by covering the additional costs from ISOC-LB budget or reduce the number of deliverable such as publishing 10 datasets instead of 15 or organizing 5 training sessions instead of 6.*

*In a similar manner if we secure more donors then we will increase the deliverable and publish more datasets. Phase-3 was developed as a repetition of the same modular process (encapsulation of a series of processes that are self-contained from identifying a datasets to their publication), we can run one modular process and after completion if we have enough resources initiate a new module, or we can run multiple modules simultaneously if have the needed resources to do that.*

*The only expenses that we need to secure systematically are the costs of the hosting and management of the portal."*

Even though the Lebanese constitution stipulate that public government data should be open and published, over the years many ministries developed internal regulations restricting such access. Our plan was (and still is) to work in close partnership with the Lebanese Bar Association to build a legal framework to enforce this constitutional right and organize the deployment of open data. The access to information law is pending in parliament and the parliamentary work in Lebanon is in complete freeze due to the dire political situation. We do not anticipate any improvements to political situation as long as there is no solution for the war in Syria. So, in the mean time we rely on open data champions within the ministries who understand that they are protected by the constitution and are willing to publish datasets that are under their custodianship. We anticipated in the project proposal that due to such risks the access to government datasets might be constrained, slower, requires extensive efforts and might involve future disruptions.



We believe that by providing access to open data, evangelization, lobbying, awareness campaigns, training and media coverage we will be able to build momentum and as more and more people understand the value of open data it will be more and more difficult to block access to the cumulative common datasets.

ISOC Lebanon will held its General Assembly meeting on Thursday February 25, 2016 and elected a new Administrative Board. The new Board reported the changes to the Ministry of Interior and received the attestation naming the signing authority on behalf of ISOC Lebanon in Late June 2016. During that period ISOC Lebanon could not issue payments. The problem is resolved now.

## 8. Dissemination and Chapter presence

This project provides a good indication on how the Internet can ease the access to information and ISOC-LB is the focal point behind the project and all activities are conducted under ISOC-LB logo starting with the tools (the portal), the awareness campaigns, workshops and training sessions, lobbying, advertising and press releases to the round-table discussions with the Internet entrepreneurs and government officials to discuss the progress and results of the project.

The project is a high visibility projects with wide contextual aspects benefiting various governmental, commercial, entrepreneurial, and academic sectors including general public use.

Open Data Lebanon Website <http://www.isoc.org.lb/opendata>

Open Data Lebanon Portal (Pilot) <http://opendatalebanon.com>

**9. Any additional information that would be useful to the Internet Society community for purposes of an interim report.**