

Half-Day Seminar
on
‘Public Finance Data, Construction of Geo-Files and Policy Research’

In today’s era of data-driven governance, limited availability of relevant and accessible information on budgets in India, at different tiers of government, constrains an effective participation of various stakeholders in the policy making process. Centre for Budget and Governance Accountability (CBGA), an independent policy research think tank based in Delhi, carries out research on public policies and budgets in India.

To further our attempts in enhancing fiscal transparency, strengthening budget accountability ecosystem, and facilitating public engagement in the fiscal governance discourse, we have developed an open budget portal-openbudgetsindia (OBI). This portal is India’s first ‘open data’ portal on budgets, which facilitates free, easy and timely access to the relevant data on government budgets in India. This portal contains over 18,000 datasets and documents on government budgets. This portal provides comprehensive fiscal information through various dashboards and data visualizations, which can be downloaded and shared to facilitate research on fiscal policies in the country.

The generation and monitoring of data on various aspects of policy and development is usually organised according to the administrative units at different levels which do not neatly match with the electoral boundaries (i.e., the boundaries of Assembly Constituencies - ACs and Parliamentary Constituencies - PCs). As a result, there has been a dearth of AC-wise and PC-wise data, which has constrained the ability of elected representatives to assess how well their Constituencies are being served.

We strongly believe that making fiscal information available to the citizens and their elected representatives, which are locally relevant, will strengthen their oversight and participation in various stages of a budget cycle. Based on this premise, in recent years, we have added Constituency Dashboard onto OBI, which maps fiscal information of select development schemes across all the Assembly Constituencies (ACs) and Parliamentary Constituencies (PCs) of six states of India. These are: Bihar, Chhattisgarh, Jharkhand, Maharashtra, Odisha, and Uttar Pradesh.

It is well-acknowledged that access to Constituency-wise data can enable the elected representatives to engage a lot more effectively with the processes of policy design, expenditure priority setting and monitoring of scheme implementation. However, the absence of a comprehensive and up-to-date database, which maps the administrative units into the electoral boundaries (Constituencies) severely restricts the efforts in this direction. The constituency dashboard in OBI intends to fill this gap and the process entailed the preparation of geography files or ‘Geo-files’, which essentially involved listing and aligning of the

administrative units across ACs and PCs of the states. Multiple sources of information have been referred for the steps that are followed in finalizing these Constituency-wise Geofiles.

Against such a backdrop, CBGA, in collaboration with its technology partner CivicDataLab, has carried out an in-depth analytical exercise over the last three years to map fiscal data for several development schemes to the Acs and PCs in six selected States. The overarching objective of this initiative is to explore how fiscal information available to the citizens and their elected representatives can be made more relevant locally in order to strengthen their oversight and participation in public financial management.

As a part of this initiative, we have:

- Mapped the administrative boundaries (Gram Panchayats and Urban Local Bodies) to the boundaries of the ACs and PCs (covering all the ACs and PCs) in six States;
- Collected, organised and mapped disaggregated fiscal information on major development schemes into ACs and PCs in the selected States, covering 12 central schemes for three to four years; and
- Developed analytics and visualizations with the AC-wise and PC-wise fiscal data to facilitate its uptake by different actors in the governance landscape.

As noted, through this initiative we have developed and added a dashboard onto Open Budgets India, called ‘Constituency Dashboard’ which provides data visualizations and analytics for further policy research upto Assembly Constituency-wise in these states. Along with this, we have developed notes which documented the methodology used for mapping administrative boundaries (Rural Local Bodies, Urban Local Bodies and Districts) into the electoral boundaries (Assembly and Parliamentary Constituencies) in these selected States. These notes highlight the challenges faced in the mapping exercise as well as the steps taken to overcome those.

We are keenly looking forward to share the methodology and steps we have followed in preparing Geo-files, sample analysis of data and visualizations presented in the Constituency Dashboard and findings from other dashboards of Open Budgets India portal. We will seek inputs / suggestions from your vast experience and expertise in this domain. We would also be keen to explore the possibilities of the application / use of these Geo-files and sample analysis and data visualizations that we have developed in furthering your research interest in this domain. We are hopeful that through the cross-learning sessions, we can strengthen our ongoing efforts of bringing people into the fiscal governance discussion for a better development outcome.
