National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP), 2012

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In news: NDSAP policy comes to light as the unsatisfactory state of India's data collection and processing system is among the many systemic deficiencies exposed by the Covid-19 pandemic.

What is the issue?

- The unsatisfactory state of India's data collection and processing system is among the many systemic deficiencies exposed by the pandemic.
- It was highlighted by the recent upward revisions to the COVID-19 death toll in some States.
- Apart from this implicit acknowledgement of the discrepancies in the data-handling process, there are also allegations of under-reporting COVID-19 cases.
- In general, on every issue encountered during the last three months, from the migrants's travails to the inadequate fiscal package, lack of reliable data in the public domain has hampered the search for policy alternatives.
- In the current climate, the OGD initiative could potentially have made a substantial difference to India's COVID-19 response.
- Had the district-wise, demographic-wise case statistics and anonymous contact traces been released in the public domain, reliable model forecasts of disease spread and targeted regional lockdown protocols could have been generated
- Principles of OGD notwithstanding, sufficiently granular infection data are not available.

- Ironically, violating the data format guidelines, OGD portal provides COVID-19 data only as a graphic image unsuitable for any analysis.

Evolution of Data Policy

From 2006 onwards, several open-source software enthusiasts and civil society activists came together in the U.S. and U.K. with a demand to unlock the data gathered by governments for unfettered access and reuse by citizens. After all, the data collected at public expense must belong to the people. This principle is the basis for the Open Data Charter adopted by 22 countries since 2015. It calls upon governments to disseminate public data in open digital formats. In return, the Charter argues, governments can expect "innovative, evidence-based policy solutions".

In India, a step towards making non-sensitive government data accessible online was taken in 2012 with the adoption of the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP)

What is NDSAP policy?

The NDSAP policy is designed to promote data sharing and enable access to Government of India owned data for national planning and development.

The National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP), 2012 requires all non-sensitive information held by public authorities to be made publicly accessible in machine readable formats (subject to conditions).

The government has also set up an Open Government Data Platform to provide open access to data sets held by ministries and other agencies of the government

Objective of the policy

The objective of the policy is to facilitate access to Government of India owned shareable data and information in

both human readable and machine readable forms through a network all over the country in a proactive and periodically updatable manner, within the framework of various related policies, Acts and Rules of the Government, therefore, permitting a wider accessibility and use of public data and information.

Application of the policy

The National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy will apply to all data and information created, generated, collected and achieved using public funds provided by Government of India directly or through authorised agencies by various Ministries / Departments/ Organisations/ Agencies and Autonomous bodies.

Nodal agency:

Department of Science & Technology (DST) is the Nodal Department for all matters connected with overall co-ordination, formulation, implementation and monitoring of the policy. For Geospatial Data, existing National Spatial Data Infrastructure (NSDI) mechanism involving both Department of Space and Department of Science & Technology would be used for any conflict resolution.

Implementation guidelines for NDSAP

- The implementation guidelines for NDSAP include lofty ideals such as "openness, flexibility, transparency, quality" of data, and aim to facilitate "access to Government of India shareable data in machine-readable form".
- The guidelines prescribe open digital formats suitable for analysis and dissemination.
- Opaque formats such as the portable document format and the image format are discouraged.
- As part of the Open Government Data (OGD) initiative, data.gov.in, was launched in 2012.

Non-Shareable data/Negative list under the policy

The negative list is that which includes the data that is not sharable and the same would not be available on the public domain. Sections 8 and 9 of the Right to Information Act, 2005, The Information Technology Act, 2000 and the „right to privacy" upheld by the Hon"ble Supreme Court of India in its various judgements, need to be consulted/taken into consideration while preparing the „negative list".

Shareable data/ Positive list

 As per the policy, the other data sets identified by the ministries / departments which have not been included in the negative list shall be verified and validated by the individual departments and then ported on the website www.data.gov.in