

# **RSOG SEMINAR**

## **Open Data – The Way Forward in Malaysia**

with  
**Tricia Yeoh**

**When** : 7 December 2016  
**Where** : Razak School of Government  
**Speakers** : Tricia Yeoh

### **About the Seminar**

Live, open government data collated on third-party platforms can change peoples' lives profoundly in a variety of ways. New technology tools, combined with raised expectations among voters and stakeholders for government hyper-transparency, have sparked a movement toward "open government" to promote democratisation of information. Advancement of ICT and digitalisation initiatives have the power to revolutionise and disrupt the way societies are governed. None more so than open data, which is free to access, free to use, and can be shared by anyone. Open data creates a growing cache of opportunities as well as potential concerns of large datasets of public information now available openly. Therefore, the choices we make with data are extremely important. How should government, business and, people embrace the environment of open data? Can open data help to improve governance? These are some of the key issues that this seminar intends to explore and discuss.

### **Summary**

Open government data has had a significant impact on the lives of many people and will continue to do so in the future. In this session, the speaker gave a detailed explanation on the importance of open data in Malaysia and the challenges that the government needed to overcome. Open data is defined as information that is proactively published and available free of charge. It is machine-readable and is published in file format and structure that allows computers to extract and process the data for easy sorting, filtering and content searching. The data is available for reuse, sharing, and redistribution with minimal restrictions on how the data may be used. The principles of good governance is what each government aspires to adhere to. However, in reality, the constraints and challenges of today's world has made it impossible for an ideal government to exist. Nevertheless, there are measures that can be undertaken to increase a government's transparency and accountability. One such initiative is the open government concept which has expanded to include expectations for increased citizen participation and collaboration in government proceedings through the use of modern and open technologies.

Among the principles of good governance is being transparent, accountable, participatory, inclusive, responsive, effective and efficient and obey the rule of law. Open government is a practice that is a part of and that leads to good governance. One of the initiative to improve government performance, encourage civic participation and enhance government responsiveness to people is by being a member of the Open Government Partnership. It is an international and voluntary effort to ensure commitment from the governments to promote transparency, empower citizens, fight corruption and harness new technologies to strengthen governance. To become a member of this initiative, a government must exhibit commitment to open government in 4 key areas:

**Fiscal transparency**-Timely publication of essential budget documents forms the basis of budget accountability, and open budget system.

**Access to information**- Law that guarantees public's rights to information, and access to government.

**Public Officials Asset Disclosure**- Rules that require public disclosure of income and assets for elected and senior public officials.

**Citizen engagement**- Open government requires openness to citizen involvement in policymaking and governance, including basic protection for civil liberties.

The Open Government Data has a far reaching impact and influence on various interest groups including the government, civil society and the general public. For the government, it will help in terms of formulating better policies, more efficient government, listening and restoring trust and participation. The public, as the main stakeholders can expect improved public services, availability of open data for independent monitoring and analysis as well as advancement in innovation and economy which is good for business, generally. The civil society will benefit especially in the context of building networks and partnership with other organisations to champion their respective causes.

It is important for the Malaysian government to legislate for openness by requiring open and proactive disclosure of certain data or incorporating open data provisions in the long overdue FOI Law or the current law (state). In addition, it is imperative to incorporate into its programming the building of capacity of users to access, understand, analyse and use public sector data. The government should also practice a culture of promoting and using open data standards across government. In conclusion, the speaker stressed that the ultimate goal of open data government is to ensure higher level of good governance, increase accountability and reduce potential of corruption in order to improve citizen's lives.

### **Key Issues Raised**

- Many countries have adopted the open data system and the primary user is the government itself because it is important for departments and ministries to obtain the relevant information as a guideline to formulate programmes and policies.

- There are some resistance to fully embrace the open data system because of the general perception that the government will be vulnerable to criticism which could lead to a damaged reputation and under constant scrutiny from the public and media.
- One of the challenges of the open data system is the accuracy of the information available. However, it can be addressed by identifying the problem of management culture and through collaboration and communication between various agencies especially in checking the facts and figures before making the information publically available.
- The benefits of being a member of the Open Government Partnership is that it will increase the credibility and reputation of a government especially in the context of transparency and accountability. In addition, a member country will also be able to learn about the best practices of other countries in implementing the open data system and share knowledge among member countries.
- In rural areas, the awareness on open data is low because of the lack of accessibility to the internet. Hence, it is important to engage the local communities to create awareness on the open data system, to know their rights and ensure that their interests are taken care of.
- The open data government system is a platform for the government, public and civil society to work together to resolve issues of mutual benefit and interest. It is a systematic way of improving the existing processes and systems to enhance public service delivery and governance.

### **About the Speaker**

Tricia Yeoh is presently the Chief Operating Officer of IDEAS Malaysia (Institute for Democracy and Economic Affairs). Previously, she was with Institut Rakyat, the Office of Menteri Besar of Selangor, and ASLI Centre for Public Policy Studies where she led substantial research and development work. She is also a regular columnist in The Sun, Penang Monthly as well as Selangor Times. Apart from writing, she is active in delivering

presentations relating to national socio-economic policy at home and abroad. She is qualified in Econometrics and Marketing from Monash University, and holds a MSc. in Research Methods in Psychology from the University of Warwick. She sits on the Monash University Business School Advisory Board and Centre for Public Policy Studies' Advisory Panel. She is a Pingat Jasa Kebaktian recipient from the Sultan of Selangor.

## **Contact**

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