26/4/2016

His Excellency, President Muhammadu Buhari, GCFR
The President of the Federal Republic of Nigeria,
Aso Rock Presidential Villa,
Abuja.

Dear Sir,

BUDESHI – LINKING BUDGET AND PROCUREMENT DATA TO PUBLIC SERVICES USING THE OPEN CONTRACTING DATA STANDARDS (OCDS)

We write to seek your approval and endorsement for linking budget and procurement data to public services across all public institutions in Nigeria. This is with the aim of preventing and reducing the risk of corruption and inefficiencies within the procurement process. To enable our presentation of this proposal, we have developed a visual tool called Budeshi (meaning "Open It" in Hausa www.budeshi.org) to demonstrate the utility of the intervention sought. Budeshi has a visualization tool with the ability to compare, visualize and geotagg budgeted amounts, contract amounts and link these to contractors.

Background

Over the years, PPDC has been mobilizing and supporting procurement monitors to observe and report on procurement processes and in the last few years, the Freedom of Information Act, 2011, has enabled increased access to procurement related information on request. This improvement in accessing some procurement records has shown some disparity in the way that contracting information is made available; thus making it difficult to link budget and procurement data provided to the eventual public service.

In 2015 for example, PPDC mobilized procurement monitors to track and verify the performance of contracts awarded for projects such as Al Majiri schools and Primary Health Care Centres across the country. This is with the aim of ensuring that public resources have been judiciously utilized in providing public services.

Whilst some progress has been made, there is the challenge of linking available budget and procurement data to the expected public service each of these contracts seeks to deliver.

Procurement monitors have observed that most of the information is available only through FOI requests. Additionally, the data that is being made available at various stages leading to the public service in question, is often provided in different formats; making it difficult to link data from one stage to the other.

In our bid to make information around public contracts and the procurement process more coherent, procurement monitors have adopted the Open Contracting Data Standards (OCDS) to visually enable linkages across the procurement value chain. The OCDS enables budget and procurement data to be linked to public services and using automated analytical tools, it becomes a veritable tool to enable Government and other stakeholders easily discover red flags in the system timeously; and prevent them.

Why is this Important?

According to the Constitution of the Federal Republic of Nigeria, the primary function of Government is the provision of welfare and security. This primary function is realized through the procurement process; through which contracts are awarded and executed; consequently, affecting the standard of living of Nigerians.

The number of public contracts executed in each year is such that no one agency or unit can verify them all. It is therefore, imperative that data standards are integrated into the current practise of keeping records around public resource utilization and that at each stage, the records can be linked to other stages and ultimately, to the resulting public infrastructure/service.

If such a system is deployed, then without having to physically visit every single location that a contract is being executed in, the analyses can point to red flags which indicate projects whose performance needs to be verified because of a questionable record. However, this would require data standards that link each contracting process across various stages. The OCDS has mapped all stages in the contracting process from conception to project delivery and created uniform standards that enable links to be drawn.

How does the OCDS work?

1.   Each contract from conception, to budget, to contract award and execution is given a unique identifier.
2.   Based on the unique identifier and visualization tools, comparison 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.

3.   The openly accessible visualization tool enables various stakeholders follow the trail on how public resources are being utilized; thus verification of projects can be carried out by anyone because everyone sees everything. This creates a feedback system where everyone, depending on projects that are of interest to them, has an opportunity to provide feedback on how well resources are being utilized in providing a particular service. For example, Budeshi can compare budgeted and contracted amounts and have this geotagged as follows:
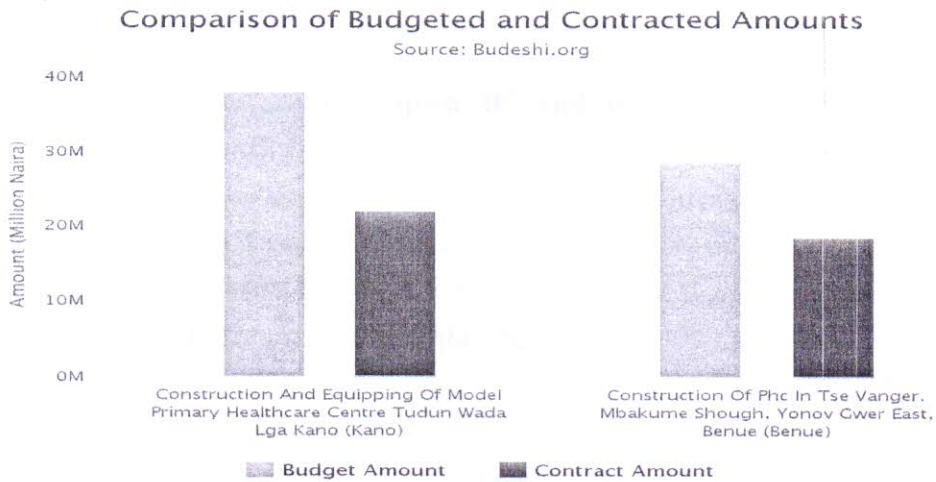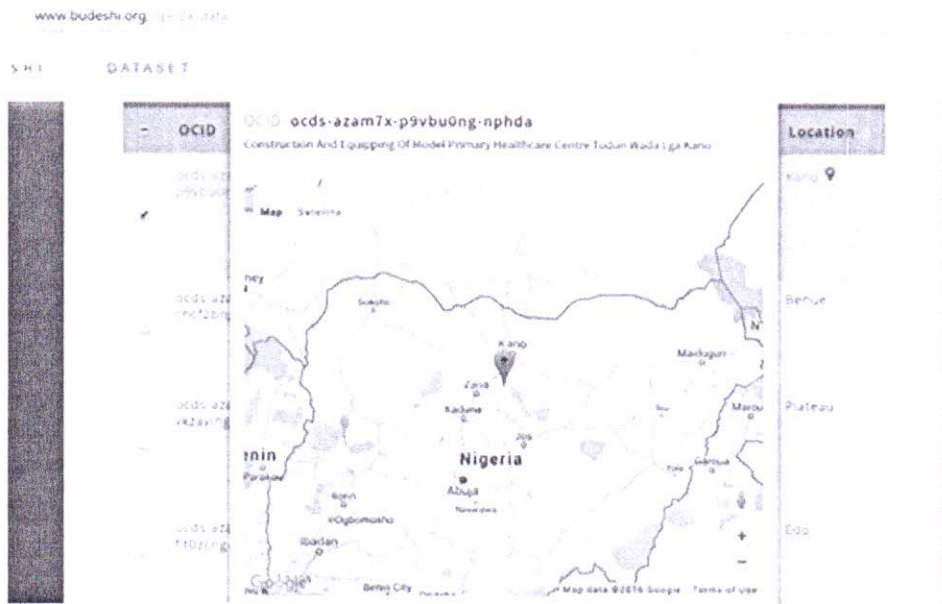

Fig 1

Fig 2 Shows the location of "Construction and Equipping of Model Primary Healthcare Centre, Tundun, Wada, Kano.

Several other comparisons can be made based on the user's selected data sets.

The OCDS is premised on the fact that we can prevent some of the expensive corruption investigations and prosecutions as well as inefficiencies across the procurement value chain by deploying data standards that enable us link various data from the budget, to procurement and ultimately to public services in a timely way.

The Budeshi Project

Budeshi in Hausa means **"open it"** and it is a dedicated platform used to demonstrate the utility of the OCDS across the public procurement value chain. The platform seeks to structure budget and procurement data to the OCDS format; and this structure would enable the automated linking of budget and procurement data. In essence, the platform would make sense of the data by connecting them to the public infrastructure and services they represent.

The Budeshi platform recognizes that no matter how structured data is, it is only brought to life when it is used to foster public engagement around a social issue that is of value to the people in question. Budeshi, therefore has within it a visualization platform that enables individual user-interaction and engagement with the data. The platform is located at http://www.budeshi.org.

Our Proposal

In view of the above, we write to request for the adoption of the Open Contracting Data Standard adopted across all Ministries, Departments and Agencies in Nigeria.

We would also appreciate the opportunity to have the Budeshi team come and showcase how the platform works at your earliest convenience.

We welcome your suggestions and recommendation to further development of this platform and ultimately, we count on your support in having the OCDS adopted across the public service.

About the Public and Private Development Centre (PPDC)

The Public and Private Development Centre is a citizen sector that seeks to promote increased citizen's participation in governance in a way that supports improved integrity in public sector governance through monitoring and reporting on public

finance expenditure. We are also members of the Open Data Working Group (Nigeria) set up by the Ministry of Communication Technology.

For any clarification, kindly contact us on 07066618896 or via email: ppdc@procurementmonitor.org

Please accept our esteemed regards.

Yours Sincerely,

Seember Nyager
Chief Executive Officer
Public and Private Development Centre