



## A missed opportunity

### Context:

- The draft report of the **Gopalakrishnan Committee** has been issued for public consultation.

### What is significance of government data openness?



The government data sets should be open to the citizens of the country based on the following arguments:

1. This will result in **greater transparency** in governmental actions and hence bring in **greater accountability**.
2. Given that these data sets result from taxpayer funding the citizens should be able to enjoy the benefits accruing from such data sets.
3. Government data sets, curated according to publicly verified standards, can lead to increased **confidence in data quality and increased usage**.
4. The free flow of information can have **beneficial effects on society in the socio-economic domain**.

### What are the measures taken to promote openness?

1. **The Right to Information (RTI) Act, 2005** mandates the disclosure of government data on a suo moto basis.
2. “Information for all” is an important pillar of the Digital India Policy.
3. 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 certain conditions.
4. **The Open Government Data Platform** provides open access to data sets held by ministries and other agencies of the government.



## What are major concerns?

India has **failed to create an open data society** due to the following reasons.

- *Poor implementation of existing guidelines:* Despite the well-intended provisions of the National Data Sharing and Accessibility Policy (NDSAP), 2012, its implementation has been far from satisfactory.
- The **quality and quantity of data sets published by the government have not been satisfactory**. The data sets released by governments are often inconsistent, incomplete, outdated, published in non-machine readable or inconsistent formats, include duplicates, and lack quality metadata, thereby reducing re-usability.
- *Reluctance to provide information:* The administration has been reluctant to make valuable information sets available to the public on grounds of sensitivity of the information and has been **using provisions like the exceptions provided under the RTI act and the official secrets act provisions**.
- The **Gopalakrishnan Committee** has recommended among other things, making non-personal data “open”.
- **Non-personal data:** Non-personal data are data that do not identify an individual.
- Non-personal data sets can be useful in either framing public policy or creating and providing new services. Non-personal data are viewed as critical for the development of the AI ecosystem.

## Lacunae in the recommendations:

The article discusses some of the shortcomings in the Gopalakrishnan Committee recommendations.

- **Government data sets:** The Gopalakrishnan Committee report **does not adequately address governance frameworks around government data sets**. Instead, the report largely focuses on the dangers posed by data collection by private sector entities.
- The Gopalakrishnan Committee does not evaluate the challenges with existing policies and practices pertaining to government data, and does not offer solutions on this front.

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- Notably, some of the most important non-personal data sets are held by the government, or result from taxpayer funding.
- **Conditions for data transfer:** Though the Committee has taken a good step forward in recommending the making of non-personal data “open”, the committee **does not lay down conditions for such data transfers**. This has raised concerns about **state interference in the private data ecosystem**.
- The Justice B.N. Srikrishna Committee report of 2018 highlighted the need to restrict the growing power of the state to carry out **surveillance**.

### Unaddressed issues:

- **India's cybersecurity framework** continues to be woefully inadequate and this issue has not been addressed in the report.

### Way forward:

- Data governance being a relatively new concept in India, the government must take an incremental approach to reforms.
- Before trying to reform private sector data governance structure, the reforms should begin with reforming how the government itself deals with citizens' data. This would result in **greater trust in data governance practices** and also allow the development of state capacity to govern the data ecosystem.