

Common Understanding: Open Dialogue on Open Standards

Regional Conference on Open Standards: the Key to an Open ICT Ecosystem

2-4 May, Sofitel Central Plaza Hotel
Bangkok, Thailand

Chairs

Shahid Akhtar, Programme Coordinator, United Nations Development Programme's Asia-Pacific Development Information Programme (UNDP-APDIP)

Thaweesak Koanantakool, Director, National Electronics and Computer Technology Development Agency (NECTEC) of Thailand.

Co-chairs

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Meeting Room

Vibhavadee Ballroom A

Why are we discussing open standards?

The key to opening Information and Communications Technology (ICT) ecosystems and achieving collaborative innovation is open standards, which create a platform for innovation, opportunities for economic growth and lower barriers to market entry while providing citizens and all users of technology with greater choice and the ability to combine the best technology from the best providers to do the best job.

Open standards enable interoperability and greater data interchange/exchange across diverse systems for any ICT system. Furthermore, open standards policies and implementations decrease the risk of vendor- and technology-specific lock-in. For the private enterprise and public sector, this translates to greater choice and flexibility, and ensures long term data integrity and accessibility.

The Internet and the World Wide Web, based on TCP/IP and HTML & HTTP respectively, exemplifies how open standards ensure universal accessibility, acceptance and benefits. As a result, today, it is possible for one to access the major services offered on the Internet using a multitude of environments and devices. Without this adherence to open standards, the Internet would not be as ubiquitous as it is today.

What do we hope to do?

The purpose of these dialogue sessions is to explore policy issues and openly discuss and share practices, to come to some common understanding and possible future collaboration.

We intend to structure the discussions on the value of open standards in order that we have a clearer understanding of what government, industry and other stakeholders would like to see as an end result. We do not necessarily expect consensus on the

issues but hope to identify issues where we converge, diverge, or seek further examination.

What do we want to discuss?

Open standards attributes

There are many different definitions of open standards. While there is consensus on certain aspects across definitions there is also disagreement on other aspects.

Adopted and modified from the *Roadmap for Open ICT Ecosystem* report released recently by the Berkman Center for Internet & Society at Harvard Law School, the attributes of open standards are that they:

- *cannot be controlled* by any single person or entity with any vested interest;
- *evolve and are managed* in a transparent process open to all interested parties;
- *are platform independent*, vendor neutral and usable for multiple implementations;
- *are openly published* (including availability of specifications and supporting material);
- *are approved through due process* by rough consensus among participants;
- *are without field of use restrictions* which for example could dictate the choice of technology or development model
- *are available under world wide, non-exclusive perpetual royalty free licence OR* reasonable and non-discriminatory (RAND) license; with the following exceptions
 - *defensive suspension* - the license can be suspended if any user of the standard sues the licensor for patent infringement
 - *reciprocity clause* - the license can require reciprocal licensing of the licensors patents that are required to practice the standard

The report points out that adherence to all of these attributes makes a standard open and that a spectrum of openness exists, with some standards more open than others as they have some of these attributes or they adhere to parts of these attributes. We can discuss these attributes in terms of what is needed to be truly open and to be a tool to help government understand where standards fall on the spectrum. We would like to avoid discussing “open” as a marketing term. .

The need for strategic planning and frameworks

From the national view point, the use of open standards by government is even more important. In this information age, governments need IT solutions to ensure adequate and reliable information is available to govern the country effectively. It is vital that these IT implementations make use of standards that are open as far as possible. In cases where open standards are not available, the government may want to consider other *de facto* standards that are implemented by more than one vendor and freely available for usage and implementation. It should also take into consideration how open these standards are and whether they have the possibility of becoming open standards at a later date. In that way, governments can get some of the benefits of openness.

For the development of open ICT ecosystems, strategic analysis, collaborative planning and developing and publishing an interoperability framework for ICT implementation are crucial steps. ICT policies and technical guidelines should

address interoperability across the entire enterprise and ICT architecture typically comprised of diverse systems, as well as addressing data exchange in the most efficient and cost-effective manner, throughout the enterprise. In government, the development of a framework for open standards requires an appropriate champion and buy-in and adherence from all ministries, agencies, and departments. It is recommended that the scope of such a framework be service focused, breaking down unproductive silos, and ensure that government to government and government to citizens are covered ideally in one interoperable, enterprise-wide architecture.

There is a positive trend towards frameworks that promote open standards and avoid standards dictated by a single vendor. These frameworks lead to technical guides specifying how to achieve interoperability among diverse systems and build enterprise architectures. Publishing these guidelines will enable technology suppliers to offer products and build applications that best fit the government's requirements.

Procurement policies

Procurement policies that insist products be based on open standards make eminent sense. A good practice is to focus on services, not technology; needs should be defined independent of hardware platform, operating system, programming language and rather focus on the intended outcome, application-functionalities, integration with existing systems, and services the solution should provide to its users.

It is important to base procurement decisions on objective and measurable criteria such as degree of interoperability, functionality, security, innovation, and support for open standards and adaptability to future technologies. A solid business rationale and cost-effectiveness analysis is also helpful. Good procurement policies can only be executed through transparent and open processes of the government (as the buyer) – open standards are important in meeting these goals.

ICT innovation and industry development

Many technology vendors have deep skills and considerable experience in deploying open standard and open source solutions under various development and deployment models. While governments can benefit from adoption and use of open technologies, the benefits of economic growth can be accelerated when industry actively participates in the larger community that informs the development of technology. Governments can look to ways to appropriately engage as partners in the process of open standards development by advocating for constituent requirements, forging partnerships within and across industries, and funding collaborations to help extract the maximum value of open standards.

Open standards make it easier for local companies to participate as major players in supplying services and solutions to the government. Local companies usually lack the strength and resources of multinationals and may be strong only in certain areas. The government can leverage on open standards to mix and match solutions from different suppliers in order to give local suppliers a more equal opportunity to participate. This can lead to lower cost of ownership without compromising on quality and service level.

Where intellectual property and open standards intersect

Today's innovative society requires governments to re-examine previous notions of proprietary intellectual property. While many inventions in the past were created by individuals and single corporations, the scale and expense of solving some monumental problems frequently requires collaborative efforts. This collaborative innovation does not replace proprietary innovation; both are effective and important innovation models. Furthermore, laws and policies relating to intellectual property require careful management to encourage collaborative and incremental innovation, while preventing over-protection that would work against the public interest.

Where Free/Open Source Software and open standards intersect

Widespread usage of standards, and especially open standards, is very important to Free/Open Source Software (FOSS). It makes it easier for FOSS to be compatible with proprietary software. FOSS and proprietary software need to co-exist and compatibility is facilitated if standards are adhered to by all. While both proprietary and open standards may allow this to happen, open standards are preferred by the FOSS community as they facilitate true interoperability with fidelity, free access, open development and participation.

FOSS, based on a collaborative, peer-reviewed approach, is a popular tool for the research community. FOSS development is accelerated by the deployment of open standards and vice versa. With low barriers to participation in open technology solutions, governments can look to support communities of researchers who can engage the global technology community and build platforms of innovation for local ICT skills that can lead to economic growth and prosperity.

Taking the dialogue forward

Given the range, complexity and nuances of the issues, we do not expect two sessions to be adequate for exploring matters fully. These sessions may be a starting point for us. If so, what are the ways and means for us to carry the discussion further? Are there areas of research or collaboration that need to be explored? How can this be done? And, can we make a statement at the end of this event that discusses the issues surrounding open standards and the way forward that can be shared with governments and others in the region and elsewhere?

How we are organizing the discussion: the dialogue sessions

As mentioned, we intend to structure the discussions on the value of open standards and to flag issues where we converge, diverge, or seek further examination. We do not necessarily expect consensus on all issues.

Documentation for the policy dialogue includes this background note, attached agenda and list of participants, and discussion summaries (to be produced after each session). We are not planning to distribute any other documentation. If you would like to share links to resources, please email the URL and a two sentence description to Phet Sayo (phet@apdip.net) and we will compile these in one list.

Also, we do not encourage any slide presentations. Rather, we wish to place the emphasis on the discussion itself - and move the dialogue forward, topic-by-topic. Indeed, we are looking forward to a free-flowing discussion carried out much in the manner of a 'brainstorming'. Therefore, we hope that all participants will make only

brief and to the point interventions and not take opportunities to spell out already well carved out institutional and other position statements.

Two sessions are planned for select participants from government, industry, civil society, and development agencies, who will be in attendance at the *Regional Conference on Open Standards*.

Session I: 2 May, 13:30 - 17:00

Meeting room: Vibhavadee Ballroom A

The first session will be used to focus on clarifying the spectrum of openness and the defining elements of truly open standards. Items for discussion will be tabled. Participants will be invited to contribute additional items, and then (time permitting), each item will be explored in a logical sequence.

Session II: 4 May, 15:15 - 16:15

Meeting room: Ladprao Suite on Mezzanine

With the benefit of the Conference presentations and discussions, the select participants are expected to convene again in a final policy dialogue session to i) continue discussions, ii) summarize points, and iii) brainstorm on some ways forward.

A summary of the Session I will be circulated prior to Session II.

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