BIG NEWS

MAMPU promises loads more data sets in 2018

Some 1,000 data sets of approximately 1,200 that were requested from the public, has been created by the government to propagate the Open Data portal. Dr Suhazimah Dzazali, Deputy Director General of the Malaysian Administrative Modernisation And Management Planning Unit (MAMPU) revealed this during an interview with her to better understand the government's direction in making Malaysia a digital nation, up to par with the world.

"Our plan for the portal is for it to be a facility or platform for agencies to upload their data, for the community at large, to use the data or request the data. The portal as it is will continue to be upgraded to be a dynamic collaboration between the government, industry and academia, the supplier of data and the user of data," she shared.

The KPI set for 2018 is to hit 10,000 data sets. It is a big number and a tremendous jump from the current data sets of about 2,500, but she believes they have the plans in place to make it happen.

"That's a high goal knowing our current data sets, but we have a plan (and) we are making it a KPI. For big ministries, we set the goal at 500 (data sets). We are targeting that for 2018," she said adding that the goal varies between 300 to 500 data sets between the ministries.

However, having quantity is not everything when it comes to data. Quality is the key that makes the data usable. Dr Su believes that while the quality is important, they are taking in as many data sets for now as they get the ball rolling in getting the data sets in.

Dr Suhazimah Dzazali

"Moving forward, we also want to look at the quality of the data. The granularity of the data is important. The analogy is, we don't want bricks, we want sand so that people can make bricks or whatever that they can think of from it."

Government agencies hold a lot of data that are currently still siloed. The move by the government is to bring to surface the data and allow sharing between the ministries as well as the public.

"It should generate some kind of application, web services or mobile apps," suggests Dr Su when relating how the data could be used. "We also want to see that people actually apply research on the data and we learn something from it. Inadvertently, we hope to see some economic activity generated from it. The co-creation eco-system should be vibrant. This is what we see happening in other countries such as the UK and from our consultation with the Open Data Institute (ODI) and World Bank."

The ODI and World Bank have stipulated that by having these types of data sets available, countries demonstrated clear benefits to the economy and improved government services that are directly linked to the open data.

With regards to the workshops being run during the Big Open Wrangle Challenge, Dr Su says transportation is an important aspect to be looked into for new innovations besides food and cost of living.

"Right now, public transport in Malaysia needs to be improved. It's not so holistic yet. The reach out and the availability is not there yet. However, if we can surface a lot of data and people can generate apps related to that, it could be a complimentary service to the infrastructure that's available," she said adding that the apps could be used to help the user reach the destination by linking different transportation modes. An idea she had just thought of.

The proliferation of mobile apps in other countries, together with a more developed open data portal, has given those countries the opportunity to create a holistic transportation system that frees up the traffic congestion. Only by having the data available will this be a possibility in Malaysia too.

"It can only be made available if there's data. An app without data is not useful. That's one way that innovation can be created because of open data. Who knows, some people will see a business opportunity, the gap in services that they can fill that becomes visible, which is what we hope to see happen."

Although the open data is predominantly being populated by the government, there is no reason why the private sector or the general public could not also contribute to the portal. This can be done not just by adding data sets to the portal, but by enhancing the data sets that are already present there. One way of creating better data from what is available, is to combine different data sets to see the correlation between those data and publish it.

Currently there has not been any data sets contributed by the public or corporate sector. Dr Su says perhaps that will be their next project in bringing the nation to contribute to the open data and seeing its benefits. As security is not an issue as protocols are in place to protect the user, she says nothing should prevent them from contributing to the cause.

Through the Big Open Wrangle, Cloudera, NetApp, Techdata and MAMPU together with Big Community, are conducting training sessions and encouraging these sectors to be more proactive in growing the nation's open data portal. Although the big chunk of the work is being done by the government, there's nothing preventing citizens or enterprises from taking advantage of the open data portal and generating their own innovations. The spill-over to the economy has already been shown as an inevitability which can be seen from examples taken from other nations.