

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY KEYWORDS 2.0

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Jonathan Fox
School of International Service
American University
fox@american.edu

Comments welcome

Premises:

- ▶ In the social accountability field, practice is racing ahead of theory
- ▶ The concepts applied a decade ago were not designed to understand SAcc
- ▶ Lessons learned from practice should inform new conceptual frameworks

But before proposing a fresh set of concepts for discussion...

- ▶ Since we know that *context matters* (and that where we stand depends on where we sit...)
- ▶ To provide some context for the “social accountability keywords 2.0...”
- ▶ Here follow five very brief snapshots from field research on SAcc in rural Mexico...

Snapshot 1: *Community Food Councils in low-income rural regions*

- ▶ SAcc strategy (official): **Government supplies staple foods to community-managed village stores, allowing organized rural consumers to monitor delivery process through a deliberate “sandwich strategy”**
- ▶ Reformers recruit non-partisan community organizers to create enabling environments, even under a (then) one-party regime
- ▶ Village committees elect 300 regional oversight councils to monitor warehouse-to-village supply chain
- ▶ Regional councils of rural consumers gain sufficient clout to sustain program for almost three decades, in spite of backlash from rural bosses and attempted elimination from above
- ❖ ***Takeaway: First ever scaled-up freedom of association allows program oversight and advocacy, gaining autonomy in approximately one third of program area***

Field research: 1985-86, 2005-2006

Sources: Fox (1992, 1996, 2007)

Snapshot 2: Rural municipal funds in indigenous southern Mexico

- ▶ SAcc strategy (official): **Participatory budgeting for local social infrastructure projects, with mandated caps on funding shares for municipal centers**
- ▶ Pro-voice and accountability impacts in Oaxaca, where local government was already mostly participatory (though tiny project budgets limit anti-poverty impacts)
- ▶ Same program bolsters boss rule in rural Chiapas, where local government was mainly controlled by non-indigenous elites
- ▶ Further decentralization eliminates pro-poor funding caps for town centers
- ❖ **Takeaway: Ostensibly community-driven development funding through local governments has contradictory impacts, depending on prior citizen freedom and capacity to hold their municipal authorities accountable**

Field research: 1992-1994 (commissioned by the World Bank's Participatory Development Learning Group)
Sources: Fox and Aranda (1996), Fox (1997)

Snapshot 3: *World Bank-funded regional agricultural development councils*

- ▶ SAcc strategy (CSO-led): **Independent monitoring of regional, national and international policy process, plus right-to-know outreach to encourage pluralistic, inclusionary councils for allocating agricultural investment funds**
- ▶ Promotion of rights awareness disseminates World Bank information access and indigenous peoples policies
- ▶ CSO-grassroots partnerships inform participation by autonomous, representative, regional family farm organizations in indigenous regions in Oaxaca and Guerrero
- ▶ Mexican government responds to scaled-up co-governance with regional orgs by downsizing official power-sharing councils from regional to municipal levels, while empowering unaccountable state governments
- ❖ ***Takeaway: Government opponents of co-governance successfully use decentralization to avoid power-sharing and social accountability***

Field research: 1996-2003

Sources: Fox and Gershman (2000), Fox (2007)

Snapshot 4: Use public information access law to “follow the money”

- ▶ SAcc strategy (CSO-led): **To target advocacy to specific policy bottlenecks, independent monitoring of health policy rules and spending tries to identify and expose the sources of illegal user fees and medicine stock-outs**
- ▶ Three-way partnership between rural women’s association (*Oportunidades* participants), grassroots leadership training network and independent researchers uses Mexico’s information law to track health spending from federal to state and local levels
- ▶ National NGO facilitates access to TV news coverage, leading state health agency to roll back illegal user fees (at least locally)
- ▶ Medicine stockout issue remains unresolved
- ❖ **Takeaway: Media strategy limited to localized, one-off policy wins, official opacity at state and regional levels of government blocks “follow the money” strategy**

Field research: 2006-2009

Source: Fox, García-Jimenez and Haight (2009)

Snapshot 5: Use public information access law to document and reveal anti-poor bias in national ag subsidy programs

- ▶ SAcc strategy (CSO-led): **Use information requests to access government data to show that ag subsidies are biased toward large farmers, to promote a pro-poor shift in agricultural policy**
- ▶ National family farm coalition partners with researchers and a national public interest group, turning opaque subsidy recipient data into user-friendly online information
- ▶ Website first launched in 2008 leads to national media coverage and 20 million hits (www.subsidiosalcampo.org.mx)
- ▶ Farm subsidy policy remains sharply biased against small farmers and indigenous, southern regions
- ❖ **Takeaway: Changing terms of policy debate was not enough, advocacy work failed to find government sympathizers or to activate broad base of potential winners from pro-poor policy shift**

Field research: 2008 - present
Source: Cejudo (2013)

Turning from practice to theory...

- ▶ Mainstream conceptual tools have not been not very useful for understanding SAcc initiatives in Mexico
- ▶ More broadly, we need frameworks that can unpack the state and account for the inherently *uneven* and *incomplete* impacts of initiatives that attempt to strengthen pro-accountability institutions
- ▶ But first, to recap, what were some of the key concepts behind “social accountability 1.0” a decade or two ago?

The “principal-agent” model dominated early mainstream thinking about SAcc...

- ▶ The P-A model originally described two-way market relationships, such as shareholders-managers, managers-employees, or customers-service providers...
- ▶ Social scientists stretched the concept, applying it to power relations involving multiple “principals” (losing its punchy parsimony in the process)
- ▶ Implicitly, the framework assumes that “principals” are “principled” – that they can and will act against impunity (Persson, Rothstein and Teorell 2013)
- ▶ The P-A framework also implicitly assumes what it needs to demonstrate – that citizens are indeed ultimately in charge - the “principals”

What were some of the other “social accountability keywords 1.0?”

They draw on three influential metaphors for thinking about how to *reach* accountability:

- ▶ **Pathways** – long vs. short route to accountability
- ▶ **Markets** – supply and demand for accountability
- ▶ **Directionality** – vertical, horizontal and diagonal accountability

Metaphor #1: *Pathways to accountability*

- ▶ The 2004 WDR set a very influential, path-breaking agenda, bringing multiple accountability gaps and relationships to the center of the debate over how to improve service delivery
- ▶ The WDR described direct citizen/client engagement with service providers as the “short route” to accountability, in contrast to what seemed to be the longer route, through conventional political/electoral representation
- ▶ A decade later, mixed results suggest that the “short route” may not be so short after all. Plus, it could use a push from the longer route along the way
- ▶ **The 2004 WDR’s proposed solution to service delivery problems left out scale, citizens’ short route led exclusively to local service providers**
- ▶ **Plus, the framework left out the potential role of other key public “checks and balances” institutions, such as the judicial system, audit institutions, and public information access**

Metaphor #2: *Markets* for accountability

- ▶ Social accountability is also described in terms of the society-led “*demand for good governance*,” in contrast to government-led “*supply-side*” reforms
- ▶ In contrast to the 2004 WDR, this approach *does* emphasize the potential contribution of checks and balances-type institutions
- ▶ Yet the market metaphor implies that somehow demand will create its own supply, or vice versa
- ▶ **The implicit assumption of an *invisible hand* is unrealistic, suggesting the need to address “market coordination” problems**
- ▶ **This “supply-demand” dichotomy crowds out change strategies that *bridge* state and society**

Metaphor #3: *Directionality* of accountability

- ▶ Spatial metaphors stress the *relational* nature of accountability
- ▶ **Vertical** accountability refers to a principal-agent relationship between voters and elected representatives (or to civil society demands from below)
- ▶ **Horizontal** accountability refers to the mutual oversight embedded in the institutions of *checks and balances* – relatively co-equal relationships that do not fit easily into principal-agent models
- ▶ **Diagonal** accountability refers to direct citizen engagement with government institutions, through state-society power-sharing and oversight bodies

Fast forward...

.... to social accountability keywords 2.0

1. Tactical vs. strategic approaches to SAcc

2. Synergy between voice and teeth

3. Low accountability traps

4. “Squeezing the balloon”

5. Vertical integration

6. Accountabilities of scale

7. The “sandwich strategy”

1. *Tactical and strategic* approaches to SAcc

- ▶ If one unpacks the impact evaluation evidence, it actually tests two very different approaches under the broad SAcc umbrella: *tactical* and *strategic*

- ▶ **Tactical** SAcc approaches
 - Are bounded interventions (also known as tools)
 - Are limited to society-side efforts
 - Assume that information provision alone will inspire collective action with sufficient power to influence public sector performance

- ▶ **Strategic** SAcc approaches
 - Deploy multiple tactics (mutually reinforcing tools)
 - Encourage enabling environments for collective action
 - Coordinate citizen voice with governmental reforms that bolster public sector responsiveness

The tactical/strategic distinction emerges from rereading the SAcc impact evaluation evidence...

Key findings include:

- ▶ **Information is often not enough.** Local dissemination of service delivery outcome data may not activate collective action (e.g., Banerjee, et al, 2010)
- ▶ **Bottom-up monitoring often lacks bite.** Community monitoring may have little to no impact on corruption (e. g., Olken 2007)
- ▶ **Induced participation in local development is often captured.** Meta-analysis of community-driven and decentralized social investments finds mixed results (Mansuri and Rao 2013)

Rereading the evidence through fresh eyes helps...

Iconic study	“Pop” version of message	Behind that message – what do the findings actually show?	Reframed takeaway
Olken (2007)	Top down and bottom up approaches are dichotomous. Top down central audits work, community monitoring can’t reduce corruption	Community-based monitoring lacked access to the key info about projects (Olken 2009). Plus, central audits don’t sanction, only the threat of cty responses gives them the clout to reduce corruption	The central audit works <i>through</i> community response (social sanctions and village elections). So central audits actually work <i>because</i> of SAcc. Top down and bottom up accountability are synergistic
Banerjee, Banerji, Duflo, Glenester & Khemani (2010)	Community oversight doesn’t help to improve public service delivery	The village education oversight committees rarely function in practice. Plus, parent reps are chosen by local authorities	Enabling environment for collective action was lacking. Actual participation & oversight were minimal. This looks like a “false negative”
Mansuri & Rao (2013)	Participatory local development often doesn’t work - it’s oversold	<i>Top-down</i> local development projects are vulnerable to elite capture. Few included SAcc measures. Bottom-up, organic participation was not addressed	Local development initiatives likely to work better if they combine central oversight with SAcc measures

This re-reading of the evidence leads from tactical to strategic approaches to SAcc...

Tactical approach: Initial propositions	Yet evaluations show....	Strategic approach: Revised propositions
Information is power	For poor people – don't count on it	Information that is perceived as <i>actionable</i> , in an enabling environment, can motivate collective action – especially if voice can trigger “teeth” (state responsiveness)
Decentralization brings government closer to the people	Not so much	Only democratic decentralization brings government closer to the people
Community participation is democratic	Social bias and elite capture are common. Allocating public funds to local elites strengthens them	Community participation processes with enabling environments, involving specific measures to include underrepresented members can be more democratic
Community oversight can reduce “government failure” by itself	Not much, in the absence of pro-accountability measures from above	Centralized accountability measures can reduce “government failure” – especially if bolstered by community oversight & sanctions

2. Strategic SAcc approaches bring together *voice* and *teeth*

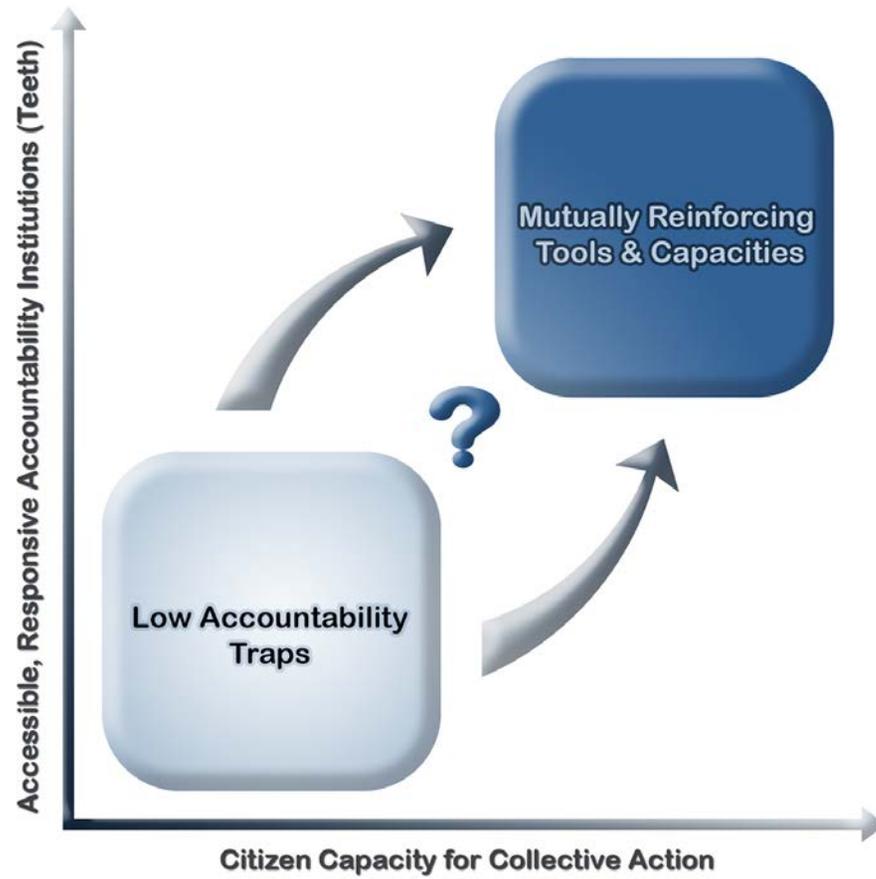
- ▶ “Voice” here is shorthand for both the aggregation and the representation of the view of under-represented citizens
 - Social media can spread and project voice, but scaled-up membership organizations *represent...* and can negotiate on behalf of the excluded
- ▶ “Teeth” here is shorthand for government capacity for responsiveness
 - Including both negative sanctions and positive incentives to reform the public sector
- ▶ Effective teeth can create incentives for voice, while voice may activate teeth
- ▶ How can enabling environments embolden citizens to exercise voice, to in turn trigger and empower reforms, which can then encourage more voice?

This brings us to...

3. *Low accountability traps* reproduce impunity through vicious circles

- ▶ In theory, the short and long routes to accountability are separate, but the key public institutions are often intertwined in practice
- ▶ Specifically, unrepresentative executive authorities are often capable of constraining the public oversight agencies whose actions are crucial to give teeth to SAcc initiatives
- ▶ While the short route attempts to use citizen voice to seek public sector responsiveness, if the long route to representation is blocked, institutional capacity to *respond* to voice is likely to be limited
- ▶ The concept of “low accountability traps” captures the self-reinforcing nature of weak vertical and horizontal accountability institutions
- ▶ How can vicious circles be turned into virtuous circles?

Synergy between tools and capacity for social accountability



4. The problem of “*squeezing the balloon*”

- ▶ The targets of citizen oversight often manage to elude monitoring by reconfiguring their corruption or pointing the finger at other agencies or levels of government
- ▶ For example, in some large-scale community oversight programs, like social audits in India or KDP in Indonesia, it appears that corrupt officials respond by inventing new and less visible forms of leakage (e.g., Shankar, 2010, Olken 2007)
- ▶ If citizens only oversee local, front-line service providers, this leaves out the rest of the “supply chain” of governance
- ▶ Exclusively local program monitoring may change the *shape* of the “corruption market,” but not necessarily its *size* (the amount of leakage)

5. *Vertical integration* of civil society oversight and advocacy

- ▶ Premise: Corruption and social exclusion are produced by vertically integrated power structures
- ▶ Multiple links in the chain of governance facilitate deflection of oversight and advocacy
- ▶ In response, effective monitoring and voice processes require parallel processes of vertical integration (Fox, 2001)
- ▶ Vertical integration of local, regional and national civil society oversight can begin to mitigate the “squeezing the balloon” problem – as attempted in the Mexican SAcc snapshots

6. *Accountabilities of scale* matter

- ▶ The 2004 WDR focused exclusively on local accountability gaps
- ▶ The vertical and horizontal metaphors do not address scale either (how do multiple *levels* of government fit in?)
- ▶ The concept of “accountabilities of scale” suggests two relevant insights:
 1. It evokes the economic concept of *increasing returns to scale*, in which the cost of each additional unit of X goes down as more X is produced and/or distributed.
 - a. In other words, the more accountability one has, the more one can get
 - b. Conversely, the less accountability one has, the more difficult it is to get each additional degree of accountability (as in the “low accountability traps”)
 2. Local accountability reforms do not necessarily ‘scale up’ to influence higher levels, while national accountability reforms do not automatically ‘scale down’ to subnational and local levels.

7. The *sandwich strategy* can shift power with state-society synergy

- ▶ **Theory of change:** Construction of accountability is driven by coalitions of pro-accountability forces that cross the state-society divide, acting to offset anti-accountability forces – which are also linked across the state-society divide

- ▶ **Key characteristics:**
 - Point of departure: Anti-accountability forces in both state and society are often stronger than pro-accountability forces
 - *Entry point:* Can government reformers change the environment for citizen-led collective action?
 - If so, then civil society collective action and oversight can in turn empower government reformers
 - The bridging social capital of interlocutors can encourage coalition-building between pro-accountability actors in both state and society
 - Accessible negotiation and adjudication processes can mitigate conflict
 - Assume that both subnational variation and discontinuous change are likely
 - This process of mutual empowerment is also called “co-production” or “co-governance”

In brief... when openings from above meet collective action from below...

Sandwich strategies can weaken low-accountability traps through mutually-reinforcing action by coalitions of pro-accountability actors in both state and society

For the original formulation, see Fox (1992). Relevant additional sources include: Ostrom (1996), Evans (1996), Fox (1996, 2004, 2007), Heller (2001), Borras (2001), Fung and Wright (2003), Houtzager and Moore (2003), Ackerman (2004), Peruzzotti and Smulovitz (2006), Fung, Graham and Weil (2007), Baiocchi, Heller and Silva (2008), Abers and Keck (2009), Gaventa and McGee (2010, 2013), DRC (2011), Tembo (2013), O'Meally (2013)

Summing up, if we had to tweet the main takeaway here...

**Voice needs teeth to have bite – but
teeth may not bite without voice...**

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