

SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

What does the evidence really say?

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So what exactly *is* social accountability?

Social accountability strategies try to improve institutional performance by bolstering both citizen engagement and the public responsiveness of governments and corporations

- ▶ In practice, social accountability (SAcc) is an evolving **umbrella category**:
 - Citizen monitoring/oversight/feedback on public sector performance
 - User-centered public information access/dissemination
 - Public complaint and grievance redress mechanisms
 - Citizen participation in resource allocation decisions, such as participatory budgeting
- ▶ There is a menu of options, but *how do we know what works?*

What does the evidence of SAcc impact tell us?

- Many excellent literature reviews already exist...
- For many, the evidence so far seems inconclusive - now what?
- Keep in mind widely varying expectations - from “magic bullet” to “just hype”

Let's reframe the question:

How can *rethinking* the evidence help to address the “what next?” question?

The main argument is...

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
- 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
- Encourage enabling environments for collective action
- Coordinate citizen voice initiatives with governmental reforms that bolster institutional responsiveness

Rereading evaluations through this new lens, it turns out that:

- ▶ Evidence of results of tactical approaches is mixed
- ▶ Evidence of results of strategic approaches is much more promising

Evaluations of low impact SAcc interventions suggest broader propositions:

- ▶ **Information is not enough.** Impact evaluations have tested the proposition that local dissemination of service delivery outcome data will activate collective action, which will in turn improve service provider responsiveness.
 - Several influential studies find no impacts (Banerjee et al 2010, Lieberman, Posner and Tsai 2013, Keefer and Khemani 2012)
- ▶ **Bottom-up monitoring often lacks bite.** Impact evaluations have tested the proposition that local oversight of public works, by itself, can limit corruption
 - Community monitoring may have no impact (Olken 2007)
- ▶ **Induced participation in local development is often captured.** Many studies have documented development outcomes of both community-driven and decentralized social investments, which are widely seen as SAcc-related
 - A major meta-analysis of top-down local development found very mixed results (Mansuri and Rao 2013)

INFLUENTIAL EVALUATIONS ARE SOMETIMES MISINTERPRETED

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

EVIDENCE OF CLEAR-CUT POSITIVE DEVELOPMENT IMPACTS (LARGE N STUDIES ONLY)

Sector	Country	Tool	Impact	Key sources
Education	Uganda	Dissem of \$ info	Less leakage	Rienikka & Svensson (2004, 2009)
Education	Uganda	Participatory monitoring	Ed outcomes	Barr et al (2012)
Education	Kenya	Community hiring of teachers	Teacher effort & ed outcomes	Duflo et al (2012)
Education	India	Dissem of \$ info & parent roles	Teacher effort & ed outcomes	Pandey et al (2011)
Education	Indonesia	School co-governance	Ed outcomes	Pardhan et al (2011)
Local govt	Brazil	Participatory budgeting	Lower infant mortality	Gonçalves (2013), Touchton & Wampler (2013)
Local govt	Mexico	Participatory budgeting	Increased basic service coverage	Díaz-Cayeros et al (2013)
Local govt	India	Participatory budgeting	Improved targeting	Besley, Rao, Pandey (2005), Chaudhuri, Harilal, & Heller (2007)
Health	Uganda	Participatory monitoring	Improved health outcomes	Björkman & Svensson, (2009), Björkman, de Walque, Svensson (2013)
Local elections	Brazil	Dissem of audit info	Electoral accountability	Ferraz and Finan (2008)
Public works	India	Social audits	Less wage theft	Shankar (2010)
Public works	Indonesia	Local dissem of audits	Less leakage of road funds	Olken (2007)
Water	Int'l	Co-governance	Econ, social & sustainability impacts	Narayan (1995)
Water	India, Sri Lanka	Co-governance	Econ, social & sustainability impacts	Krishna & Uphoff (2002), Uphoff & Wijayarathna (2000), Isham & Kähkönen (2002)
Targeted food subsidy	India	Access to info	Access to ration cards w/o bribes	Peisakhin & Pinto (2010)

When SAcc works, *how* does it work?

THREE EXAMPLES...

Study	Findings	Causal explanation
<p>Community monitoring of health services in Uganda. Björkman and Svensson (2009) test a report card process designed to encourage voice, avoid elite capture and facilitate periodic dialogue with health workers</p>	<p>Reduction in infant mortality in treatment communities (33%), increased use of outpatient services (20%) and overall improvement of health treatment practices (immunization rates, waiting time, absenteeism)</p>	<p>Community discussion & assessment of service performance, plus facilitated direct negotiation of expected actions with service providers encouraged them to improve performance</p>
<p>Participatory budgeting in Brazil. Both Gonçalves (2013) and Touchton and Wampler (2013) document long-term Brazilian municipal spending priorities, comparing those with and without participatory budgeting (PB)</p>	<p>PB municipalities = 169 of 5,561 (in 2000), with 27% of nat'l pop. They allocated a larger share of funding to sanitation and health services (avg > 3% higher), reducing infant mortality rates (holding per capita budgets constant)</p>	<p>PB encourages authorities to provide services that meet needs of otherwise underrepresented citizens & creates frequent citizen checks on promised actions</p>
<p>Targeted access to information in India. Peisakhin and Pinto (2010) test the Right to Information Act with a field experiment that compares different application strategies for food ration cards.</p>	<p>Bureaucrats ignored most applicants, but those who also filed information requests about the status of their application & district level processing times were consistently successful. Only bribery produced comparable results.</p>	<p>Since India's RTI law very rarely sanctions non-compliance, the proposed explanation is that mid-level administrators fear that RTI non-compliance may slow their professional advancement</p>

"Mixed results" suggest the tactical and strategic distinction

Tactical approach assumes:	Yet evaluations show....	Strategic approach proposes:
Information is power	For poor people – don't count on it	Information that is <i>perceived</i> as actionable, in an enabling environment, can motivate collective action – especially if voice can trigger 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, without accountability measures from above	Centralized accountability measures can reduce "government failure" – especially if bolstered by community oversight & sanctions

This brings us to a set of “next generation” challenges, including:

▶ One-off tools or multi-pronged strategies?

- Experience with individual SAcc tools is ahead of broader strategies that involve multiple, mutually-reinforcing tools

▶ What *kinds* of information access can leverage accountability?

- Open data is not enough
- Targeted transparency focuses on info that is perceived as both relevant & actionable

▶ Can citizen oversight efforts scale up/vertically integrate to monitor the service delivery “supply chain?”

- There are often missing links between local community voice and national citizen policy/oversight
- How can citizen oversight efforts address the problem of “squeezing the balloon?”

▶ How can citizen voice bolster government capacity to respond?

- How to find synergy with pro-accountability governance reforms that can respond with “teeth” (i.e., anti-corruption agencies, information access reforms, ombudsmen, access to courts, etc.)

Next steps:

INVEST IN STATE-SOCIETY SYNERGY

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

Key characteristics:

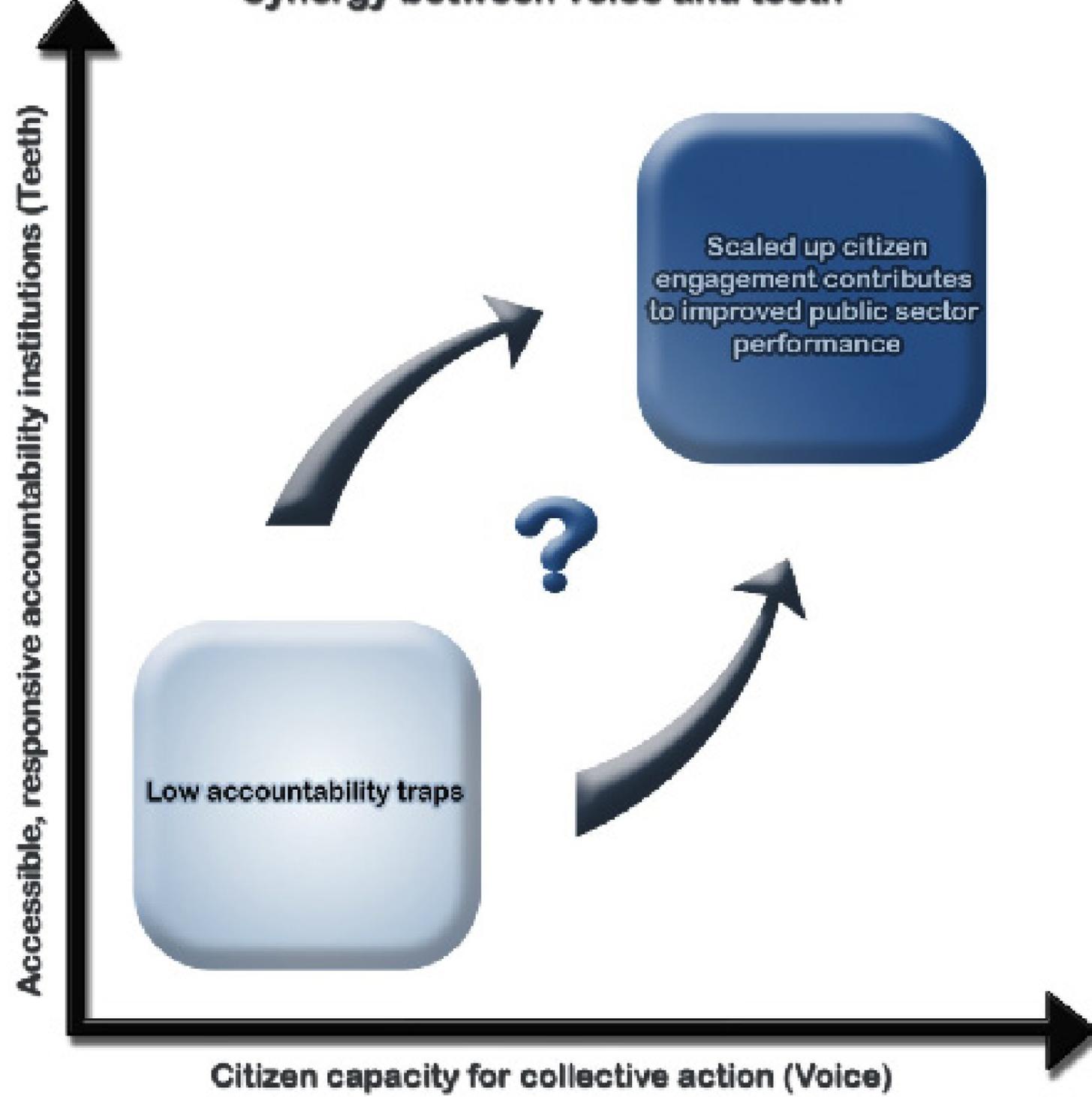
- ▶ **Point of departure:** Anti-accountability forces in both state and society are often stronger than pro-accountability forces
- ▶ This imbalance of power leads to self-reinforcing “low-accountability traps”
- ▶ **Entry point:** Can government reformers change the environment for collective action?
- ▶ If so, then civil society collective action and oversight can in turn empower government reformers
- ▶ Invest in interlocutors: Bridging social capital 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”

Sandwich strategy: Shorthand for coordinated coalitions among pro-accountability actors embedded in both state and society

Unpacking the shorthand: What are “voice” and “teeth?”

- ▶ “Voice” refers here to both the aggregation and representation of the views of under-represented citizens
 - Many need to exercise voice (aggregation) and they also need to have the capacity to dialogue & negotiate with authorities (representation).
- ▶ “Teeth” refers to government capacity to respond to voice - which includes both positive incentives and negative sanctions to reform the public sector.
 - That is: Can authorities deliver?
- ▶ Challenge: How to trigger virtuous circles, in which enabling environments embolden citizens to exercise voice, which in turn can trigger and empower reforms, which can then encourage more voice?

Pathways out of low accountability traps: Synergy between voice and teeth



Summing up: What works in the SAcc field?

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