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SOCIAL ACCOUNTABILITY

What does the evidence really say?

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Comments welcome

“What counts” as social accountability?

Social accountability (SAcc) is one of many good governance strategies, intended to improve development outcomes...

SAcc overlaps with, but is distinct from other governance strategies

That means:

- ▶ SAcc is not the same as civil society participation or community-driven development, though it certainly involves citizen participation...
- ▶ SAcc is not the same as transparency, though it certainly involves public information access...
- ▶ SAcc is not the same as sanctions for inefficiency or corruption, though it can trigger sanctions...

So what exactly *is* social accountability?

Social accountability strategies try to improve public sector performance by bolstering both citizen engagement and government responsiveness

In practice, SAcc is an evolving umbrella category

SAcc refers to citizen “engagement in monitoring and assessing government performance, particularly in providing feedback on, and voicing demand for, improved service delivery” (GPSA Board Paper, 2012)

- ▶ This includes a wide range of public oversight, information access, voice, grievance redress and shared decision-making reforms
- ▶ These approaches to institutional change are spelled out in operational detail, based on practical experience, in SDV/GAC “How-to Notes”
- ▶ So – there is a menu of options, but how do we know what works?
- ▶ That is the question driving this presentation...

Assessing the evidence to address the “what next?” question...

Preview of the argument

- ▶ **Expectations vary, framing matters**
 - ▶ Extremes range from seeing SAcc as a “magic bullet” to “just hype”
- ▶ **What does mixed evidence of impact mean for the “what works?” question?**
 - ▶ Disentangle broad “SAcc 1.0” assumptions from tighter “SAcc 2.0” propositions
- ▶ **Is SAcc approaching an “early middle” stage?**
 - ▶ Experience with tools is ahead of context-specific strategies that coordinate with other governance reforms and address scale
 - ▶ Evidence of positive impact suggests “proof of concept,” warranting further testing and scaling up of more strategic approaches
- ▶ **Next steps for WB governance strategy:**
 - ▶ SAcc can have more bite if voice is bolstered with teeth
 - ▶ Don't count on an invisible hand to bring “supply” and “demand” together
 - ▶ Invest in governance strategies & coalitions that build state-society synergy

Three influential metaphors frame thinking about how to reach accountability

Pathways – long vs short route

Markets – supply and demand

Directionality – vertical, horizontal and diagonal

METAPHOR 1

Pathways to accountability

- ▶ The 2004 WDR set a very influential, path-breaking agenda, framing service delivery performance problems in terms of accountability gaps and pathways
- ▶ The WDR described direct citizen/client engagement with local 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 did not yet use the term “social accountability”
- ▶ The long-short route metaphor left out the potential role of other public “checks and balance” institutions, such as the judicial system, audit institutions, or 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 emphasizes 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
- ▶ This assumption of an invisible hand is unrealistic, suggesting the need to address “market coordination” problems
- ▶ Analysts have questioned this implied dichotomy, proposing change strategies that bridge state and society

METAPHOR 3

Directionality of accountability

Spatial metaphors frame political accountability relationships as either vertical or horizontal, while social accountability is cross-cutting – vertical

- ▶ **Vertical** accountability refers to a principal-agent relationship between voters and representatives
- ▶ **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 officially-recognized power-sharing and oversight bodies

Dynamic feedback matters here: When accountability efforts actually work, it is often because initiatives in one arena trigger pro-accountability actions in another (as when electoral pressures kick checks and balances into gear)

NOW THAT WE HAVE SUMMED UP THREE RELEVANT CONCEPTUAL FRAMEWORKS...

To address the SAcc impact evaluation findings, first consider how to read the evidence...

- ▶ If the evidence is mixed, what does that mean?
- ▶ Do studies that show lack of impact “disprove” the concept?
- ▶ Do studies that show positive impact “prove” the concept?
- ▶ What would “proof of concept” for SAcc look like?
- ▶ Back up first - what is “proof of concept,” anyway?

What is “proof of concept?” and how does it help to think about “what works?”

The term is widely used in scientific, medical and engineering fields (6 million hits)

What makes an idea convincing?

- ▶ “Proof or concept (or principle)” refers to the demonstration that a proposed idea functions as predicted.
- ▶ Acceptance of such evidence requires a precise definition of the concept, as well as testing under conditions that would suggest possible generalizability.

The path from theory to practice can be long and uneven.

- ▶ For example, the theory of change behind vaccines originated in 1796...
- ▶ Yet even now, vaccines only work for certain diseases, to some degree, with substances and doses that are only found after extensive experimentation
- ▶ Realism requires recognizing partial impacts, only under certain conditions, to address certain problems

The “*proof of concept, followed by experimentation*” approach is an alternative to framing the question as “does SAcc work?” – which assumes the following:

- ▶ A dichotomous, yes-or-no answer
- ▶ The answer can be based on a relatively small number of experiments
- ▶ SAcc is expected to work all by itself, in the absence of other good governance reforms

The evidence of SAcc impact certainly is mixed...

HERE ARE SOME WAYS TO READ IT:

Information is not enough

SAcc impact evaluations have tested the proposition that local dissemination of service delivery outcome data will activate collective action to improve service provider responsiveness.

- ▶ Several influential studies find no impacts (e.g., Banerjee et al 2010, Lieberman et al 2013, Keefer and Khemani 2012)

Bottom-up monitoring often lacks bite. SAcc impact evaluations have tested the proposition that local oversight of public works, by itself, can limit corruption

- ▶ Community monitoring sometimes has no impact (e.g., 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 found very mixed results (Mansuri and Rao 2013)

Debates over RCT impact evaluation persist...

- ▶ **The scope of most IE evidence is narrow - it focuses on one set of SAcc tools**
(info dissemination/local oversight)
 - ▶ Less evidence on grievance redress mechanisms, citizen report cards, other tools
 - ▶ Field experiments are limited to pilots and do not address already-existing, scaled-up SAcc strategies (e.g., social audits, participatory budgeting)
- ▶ **There can be a tension between research and practice.** RCT methods require that interventions be “unbundled” to isolate their effects, when practitioners may prefer to try many approaches at once.
- ▶ **Rigor and generalizability are not the same.** Evaluation specialists question the external validity of individual field experiments, as well as their capacity to explain causal mechanisms (Basu, 2013, Woolcock 2013). Even in the medical field, many different RCTs are insufficient for generalization.
- ▶ **Discussion of “what works” is constrained by limited information on “what happened” in the first place**
M&E is incorporated very inconsistently in WB local development projects (Mansuri and Rao 2013)

Yes, but the evidence is still mixed...

What does this mean for understanding SAcc?

- ▶ From a “proof-of-concept, followed by experimentation” point of view, do negative findings “disprove” the SAcc concept?
- ▶ The answer depends on ...
 - ▶ What kind of intervention was actually tested
 - ▶ How can negative impact findings inform rethinking of SAcc assumptions?
 - ▶ Is the evidence of positive impacts sufficiently broad and deep to support further, scaled-up experimentation?

Rereading the evidence through fresh eyes helps...

- ▶ It turns out that some very influential studies of SAcc non-impact do not actually show what many think they show...
- ▶ They reveal the weaknesses of 1.0 “conventional wisdom,” and help to inform tighter 2.0 propositions

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 doesn't	Community-based monitoring lacked access to the key info about projects (see Olken 2009). Plus, the central audits do not sanction, only cty responses give them clout to reduce leakage	The central audit works through cty response (social sanctions and village elections). Central audits actually work because of SAcc. Top down and bottom up accountability are synergistic
Banerjee, Banerji, Duflo, Glen-erster, Khemani (2010)	Community oversight doesn't help to improve public service delivery	Village education oversight committees rarely function in practice. Plus, parent reps are chosen by local authorities	Enabling environment was lacking. Actual participation & oversight was minimal, so this is a "false negative"
Mansuri and Rao (2013)	Participatory local development is oversold and often doesn't work	Top-down local development projects are vulnerable to elite capture. Few addressed included SAcc measures.	Local development initiatives likely to work better if they combine central oversight with SAcc measures

This re-reading of the evidence leads from SAcc 1.0 to SAcc 2.0...

The studies with low-impact findings tested a "first-generation" set of SAcc propositions, informing a reframed 2.0 set of SAcc propositions

THIS RE-READING OF THE EVIDENCE LEADS FROM SACC 1.0 TO SACC 2.0

SACC 1.0 Initial propositions	Yet evaluations show...	SACC 2.0 Revised propositions
Information is power	For poor people – don't count on it	Information that is perceived as actionable, in an enabling environment, can motivate collective action – especially if voice can trigger teeth
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

Next steps
towards assessing “proof of concept”

SAcc can help to deliver results, across
a wide range of countries and sectors

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	Ctty 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	Diaz-Cayeros et al (2013)
Local govt	India	Participatory budgeting	Improved targeting	Besley, Rao, Pandey (2005)
Health	Uganda	Participatory monitoring	Improved health outcomes	Bjorkman & Svensson, (2009), Bjorkman, 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	International	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....

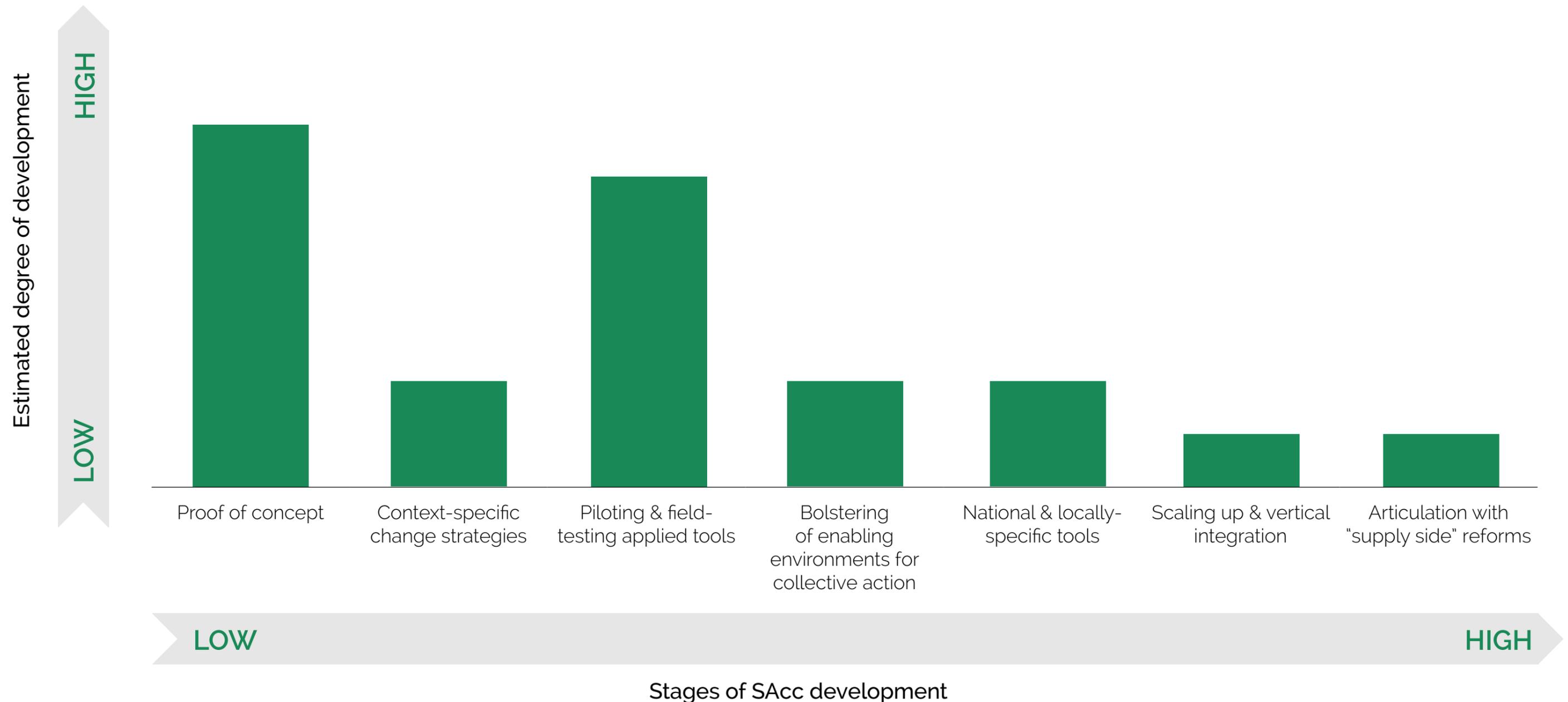
Study	Findings	Causal explanation
Community monitoring of health services in Uganda. Bjorkman and Svensson (2009) test a report card process designed to encourage voice, avoid elite capture and facilitate periodic dialogue with health workers	Reduction in infant mortality in treatment communities (33%), increased use of outpatient services (20%) and overall improvement of health treatment practices (immunization rates, waiting time, absenteeism)	Community discussion & assessment of service performance, plus facilitated direct negotiation of expected actions with service providers encouraged them to improve performance
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)	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)	PB encourages authorities to provide services that meet needs of otherwise underrepresented citizens & creates frequent citizen checks on promised actions
Targeted access to information in India. Peisakhin and Pinto (2010) test the Right to Information Act with a field experiment that compared different application strategies for food ration cards.	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.	Since India's RTI very rarely sanctions non-compliance, the proposed explanation is that mid-level administrators fear that RTI non-compliance may slow their professional advancement

To recap

- ▶ Reassessing both evals with positive and negative impact findings helps to reframe SAcc propositions from 1.0 to 2.0
- ▶ This involves taking a harder look at the nature of the SAcc actions, taking into account the enabling environment and government response incentives/capacity
- ▶ Here is one way to boil it down:

Which SAcc version?	SAcc action	Tangible impacts	Broader implications
SAcc 1.0	Local dissemination of info on service delivery outcomes & resource allocation	Mixed	Exclusively demand-side interventions may be based on unrealistic assumptions
SAcc 2.0	Dissemination of info in coordination with measures that actively enable collective action, influence service provider incentives and/or share power over resource allocation	Positive	Governance reforms that coordinate demand and supply side efforts are more promising

Taking stock: Is SAcc is approaching an "early middle" stage?



Next generation challenges include:

One-off tools or multi-pronged strategies?

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

Local citizen oversight needs to scale up to address problems throughout the “supply chain”

- ▶ There is a missing link between local voice and national budget monitoring: vertical integration to offset the “squeezing the balloon” problem

SAcc will have more bite if voice is bolstered with teeth

- ▶ Few voice-led initiatives are coordinated with relevant governance reforms to encourage government responsiveness (i.e., audit/anti-corruption investigative bodies, information access reforms, ombudsman, access to courts, positive incentives, etc.)

This means considering SAcc in broader context, which involves recognizing that...

SAcc is one of many good governance approaches, and each needs the others to work best

THOUGHT EXPERIMENT

Think of governance reform strategies as a multi-pronged “due diligence” package for poverty reduction

Governance reform approaches	Acceptance: Proof of concept & methods	Capacity: Limits to application in WB context	Reach: Scope of national coverage	Spillover potential beyond scope of WB loan
Fiduciary safeguards	Strong consensus/professional accounting conventions	Often limited to large financial inputs/spending side	Intensive scrutiny applied to small but growing share of loans	?
Safeguard policies	Explicit policies/first do no harm/strong consensus on best practices	Inconsistent impact of consultation on WB project design, supervision of compliance is uneven	Limited to projects with foreseeable potential negative impacts	Low
Monitoring and evaluation	Strong consensus on methods & rationale/limited uptake	Uneven embedding of M&E in WB projects	Field-based monitoring usually covers small fraction of activities	?
National "right-to-information" (RTI) laws/agencies	Strong consensus on best practices, yet many national RTI laws fall short	WB technical asst for national RTI beginning, incorporation into country systems ltd	Scope of many national RTI laws is limited to nat'l executive branch, & recourse often limited	High
Support for national independent accountability institutions (IAIs)	Intermediate consensus on how to bolster IAIs, experimentation ongoing	Limited and uneven incorporation into WB country systems	Few IAIs have effective countrywide reach and may not be accessible to most citizens	High
Social accountability strategies & tools	Low-intermediate consensus, widespread experimentation ongoing	Incipient application to WB portfolio, currently learning by doing	Potential coverage of projects, broader multiplier/policy effects unclear	?

Note: "Due diligence" refers here to strategies for maximizing both problem prevention and the capacity to detect and address implementation problems

Caveat: These initial rough assessments are informal and will benefit from stakeholder feedback

From silos to synergies...

This “back-of-the-envelope” overview of different governance reform approach suggests:

- ▶ No single approach is “complete” in its capacity and reach. Therefore, none are sufficient by themselves
- ▶ Pro-accountability institutions in low-accountability environments are likely to remain weak if isolated from each other
- ▶ Yet experience with coordinated synergy across these reform approaches is still incipient
- ▶ WB Country Strategy and Country Systems approaches to mainstreaming both top down and bottom up governance reforms could bolster “voice plus teeth”

The Governance Global Practice could enable:

- ▶ Analytical work to understand how different governance reforms can be mutually reinforcing
- ▶ Incentives for collaboration across WB sectors and “business lines”

Next steps for governance strategy: 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

- ▶ **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

Relevant sources include:

Ostrom (1996), Evans (1996), Fox (1992, 1996, 2004, 2007), Putnam (2000), Heller (2001), Borrás (2001), Ackerman (2004), Houtzager and Moore (2005), Gaventa and McGee (2010), Neara Abers and Keck (2009), Tembo (2013), O’Meally (2013)

CONCLUSION

Key issues for both research and learning by doing

How to bolster state-society synergy?

- ▶ How does the political economy of cross-sectoral coalition-building work?
- ▶ What investments in bridging social capital/ interlocutors pay off?

What kinds of transparency leverage accountability?

- ▶ What kinds of information are most relevant and actionable for pro-accountability stakeholders?
- ▶ What channels for dissemination motivate collective action, empower allies and weaken vested interests?

How can public oversight strategies take scale into account?

- ▶ "Government failure" is often treated as a strictly local, "end-of-the-pipe" problem
- ▶ Can vertical integration of civil society monitoring and action get past "squeezing the balloon" of inefficiency and corruption?

Voice needs teeth to have bite

- ▶ SAcc 1.0 experience shows that information and voice are necessary but not sufficient
- ▶ SAcc 2.0 brings government responsiveness in
- ▶ "Teeth" here is shorthand for government capacity for responsiveness
- ▶ Responsiveness includes both positive incentives and negative sanctions

Capacity-building counts, but how long does it take?

- ▶ What are realistic timeframes for building "accountability capacity" long-term?

Don't count on an invisible hand to bring "supply" and "demand" together

- ▶ How can the Governance Global Practice incentivize coordination between "demand" and "supply-side" reform strategies?